

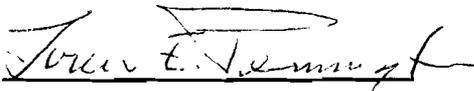
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: The Teams In 'Nam: U.S. Navy UDT/SEAL Operations of the Vietnam War

Abstract approved:



The Vietnam Conflict involved a large and diverse joint effort from American military forces. Within the U.S. Navy, a very small component was the use of frogmen. The history of the Underwater Demolition Teams, (UDTs), during Vietnam is not unlike that of their traditional amphibious support role in other wars. Additionally, they branched out into other land warfare roles not normally characterized by the term frogmen. A derivative of the UDTs, the SEA, Air, Land Teams, (SEALs), were conceived, born, and forged in their combat role during this era. Throughout the conflict, they played a small, but important part in a wide spectrum of operations. The purpose of this thesis is to describe the role of the UDT/SEAL Teams during the war and present a chronology of their involvement.

THE TEAMS IN 'NAM  
U.S. NAVY UDT/SEAL OPERATIONS OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

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A Thesis

Presented to  
the Division of Social Sciences  
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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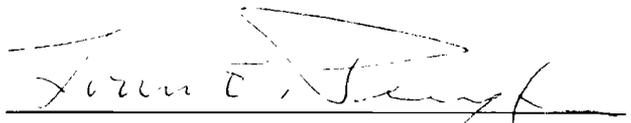
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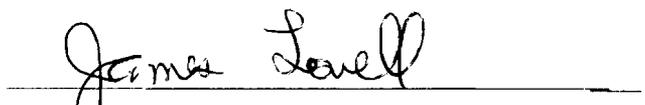
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by

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December 1987

  
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## Glossary

### AO

Area of Operation. The normal boundry within which a military unit is assigned to operate.

### ARG

Amphibious Ready Group. Small force of naval vessels and units designed as the forward deployed amphibious arm of the various fleets to which they are attached.

### ARVN

Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The South Vietnamese Army.

### BUD/S

Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL school. The initial training of all Navy combat swimmers.

### CHIEU HOI

Literally "Open Arms". Amnesty program which accepted Viet Cong who surrendered.

### FROGMAN

UDT or SEAL member. Distinguished from other Navy divers for their combat role in amphibious operations; formally called a "combat swimmer".

### HELO

Common military slang for helicopter.

### HOI CHANH

One who Chieu Hoi'ed.

### IBS

Inflateable Boat, Small. A seven-man, black rubber boat commonly

used by Navy Special Warfare throughout the Vietnam Conflict. The boats were used for a variety of operations and could be paddled or employed with a small outboard engine.

LCM

Landing Craft, Medium. One of many sized amphibious craft of the intermediate size, used for beach assaults and riverine operations; called a "Mike Boat".

LDNN

Lien Doc Nguoi Nhia, The "Soldiers Who Fight Under The Sea".  
South Vietnamese frogmen.

LSSC

Light SEAL Support Craft.

MACV

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

MACV-SOG

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observation  
Group.

McQUIRE RIG

System used early in the war to extract a small team using a line suspended underneath a helicopter when a landing zone could not be found.

MSSC

Medium SEAL Support Craft.

NAD

Naval Advisory Detachment. SEALs assigned to MACV-SOG out of Danang worked in the NAD as a cover unit. Their mission included advising LDNN in the conduct of maritime special operations.

NASTY BOAT

High speed Norwegian "Nasty" class patrol/torpedo boat purchased by the United States and used against coastal targets in North Vietnam.

NAVSPECWAR

Naval Special Warfare.

NCDU

Navy Combat Demolition Unit. Early frogmen of World War II.

NVA

North Vietnamese Army.

OIC

Officer In Charge. Term used by frogmen to describe the officer in charge of an operational platoon or patrol.

2IC

Second In Charge. Term used by frogmen to describe the second in command of an operational platoon or patrol.

PBR

River Patrol Boat.

PRU

Provincial Reconnaissance Unit. Indigenous mercenaries.

RANGER

Graduate of U.S. Army School which teaches small unit dismounted patrolling. Also, a member of a Ranger unit.

RECON

Slang for Reconnaissance.

RSSZ

Rung Sat Special Zone. Large swamp area located southeast of

Saigon within easy striking distance of the city. A long-term Viet Cong sanctuary, SEAL direct-action platoons conducted their first operations of the war in this area.

#### SDV

Swimmer Delivery Vehicle, also known as SEAL Delivery Vehicle. Free-flooding submersibles used to transport UDT/SEALs to a target area.

#### SEAL

Frogman assigned to a SEA, Air, Land Team. During the Vietnam Conflict, two SEAL Teams were in existence. SEAL Team One was located in San Diego, California. The Team One platoons sent to Vietnam held letter designations. SEAL Team Two was located in Norfolk, Virginia. The platoons from Team Two were numbered to avoid confusion in message traffic and discussions. The platoons were assigned to one of the existing SEAL Detachments once in-country. Det Alfa consisted of all the SEAL Team Two direct action platoons. Det Bravo were individual SEALs from both Teams assigned to advise Provincial Reconnaissance Units. Det Echo advised LDNN under MACV-SOG. Det Golf consisted of all the SEAL Team One direct action platoons. Det Sierra was formed in the latter stages of the war to advise LDNN under the Vietnamization program.

#### SLICK

A helicopter with minimal armament used for transporting personnel.

#### SOP

Standard Operating Procedure. Those procedures specifically

designed and practiced by a unit to meet their needs in certain training and combat circumstances.

#### SPECWAR

Special Warfare.

#### SPECIAL FORCES

U.S. Army units utilized mainly in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla operations. These versatile units can also conduct a wide variety of special operations. Commonly known as the "Green Berets".

#### STAB

SEAL Team Assault Boat.

#### SWIFT BOAT

High speed boat smaller in size than the Nasty boat. Used for a variety of riverine and coastal operations during the Vietnam War.

#### UDT

Underwater Demolition Team. During the Vietnam Conflict, UDTs 11, 12, and 13, all located in San Diego, California, served in the Southeast Asian war. Additionally, an element of UDT 21 supplemented UDT 13 during its first WESTPAC cruise. The UDTs deployed on a basic six-month WESTPAC cruise as an entire command. Once in the Far East, the men were split into Detachments to support fleet operations. Since only one UDT served in WESTPAC at a time, all the commands lettered their detachments the same. Det Alfa served at Subic Bay in the Philippines as the command headquarters. Det Bravo supported the Far East Phibron (Amphibious Squadron) as the beach reconnaissance group. Det Charlie conducted submarine operations from the available conventional WESTPAC submarine asset. Det Delta conducted operations from a small camp outside Danang.

Dets Echo and Foxtrot were embarked as part of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). Dets Golf and Hotel were formed during the course of the war in support of riverine operations in the Mekong Delta.

VC

Viet Cong. South Vietnamese Communist Guerrillas.

## Introduction

The concepts expressed in this work are the views and opinions of the author alone. These ideas do not reflect the official views of any branch of the United States government, including the Defense Department and the U. S. Navy, nor any individual who serves in an official capacity.

During the Vietnam War, the United States Navy Special Warfare community, (NAVSPECWAR, or, more commonly, SPECWAR), was composed mainly of SEA, Air, Land Teams (SEAL Teams), Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT), and supporting units. The purpose of this thesis is to detail the unclassified operations of the SPECWAR units, concentrating mostly on UDT and SEAL operations and accomplishments. The distinction between the UDT and SEAL units will be defined later in this introduction.

Prior to the Invasion of North Africa in November, 1942, the U.S. Navy had organized a 17-man detachment to cope with the problem of maritime and beach obstacles faced by amphibious landing forces. In July, 1943, an additional 21-man detachment was established and became known as Naval Combat Demolition Unit One (NCDU 1). Their mission was to assist in the Invasion of Sicily. The future need for these units was recognized by planners, and in the summer of 1943, a formal training program was established at Fort Pierce, Florida to raise 6-man NCDUs. During November 1943, United States Marines secured the Tarawa atoll in the Pacific following a very bloody and costly three-day battle. The initial amphibious landing became an unexpected bloodbath when landing craft became stranded hundreds of yards offshore on a submerged coral reef. The reef,

which was known to exist, forced the Marines to wade ashore from many of their trapped landing craft. Intense enemy small arms fire cut down a large number of Leathernecks as they struggled through deep water laden with full combat gear. Under such loads, other men drowned after falling into underwater holes. The casualties were heavy even before the Marines were able to make it ashore to press their attack.

These difficulties greatly troubled planners of future amphibious operations. Already, tactical planning for the Normandy Invasion was in high gear while the planning for the attack on Kwajalein in the Pacific was in its final stages. The Navy decided to place additional emphasis on the new group of NCDUs who would be totally devoted to scouting and marking beach approaches, demolishing landing obstacles whether manmade or natural, and providing initial tactical cover to the first wave of landing forces. The new units would hopefully provide the opening in an enemy beach for Allied forces to rapidly establish a beachhead. The idea was to send these men ashore on the very first landing craft. Under fire, they would be called upon to clear a path for the invading forces.

Initial volunteers were taken from the Navy Seabees, the famous combat engineers, and the Marine Raiders, the rugged Marine assault unit of World War II. The first cadre at Fort Pierce approached training with the concept that the human body could perform ten times more work than normally believed possible. In addition to an extremely rigorous physical training regimen, the men were subjected to long hours of exposure to the worst physical environment such as mud, cold water, rain, swamp, and pounding surf. Selection criteria

emphasized those who were strong swimmers, while the training concentrated on the use of explosives to demolish targets and obstacles and small boat handling.

Those who survived the initial training composed the early NCDUs which were employed during the Normandy Invasion. For the Invasion, the NCDUs were expanded to 13-man teams. Casualties ran 70% at Omaha Beach while those at Utah were 30%. Despite their losses, the Navy men were able to accomplish their mission and greatly assisted the invasion force. The survivors from Omaha Beach were returned to Fort Pierce, while those from Utah Beach took part in the Invasion of Southern France. The NCDUs who took part in that Invasion were the last of the demolitioneers who did not swim to their objectives. Many NCDUs became the nucleus of even newer units and were shipped to the Pacific Theater for further operations being planned. These new 100-man units were christened Underwater Demolition Teams, (UDTs), and remained under the Navy's operational control. The more colorful and common name earned by these early amphibians was "Frogmen". Their insignia consisted of a stalky-looking frog with a dixie cup sailor cap cocked to one side of his head. His face registered a Popeye snarl with a cigar stub poking out of the corner of his mouth. The insignia caught the frog in the middle of a bold stride with a stick of lighted dynamite in one hand. It seemed to be an appropriate symbol of the bold, professional UDT attitude in the face of a demanding mission.

Throughout the Pacific Theater, UDTs proved their worth during numerous island operations. Eight days after the Normandy Invasion in Europe, Saipan was invaded in the Pacific. UDTs were the vanguard of that amphibious assault and participated in every major

amphibious action for the remainder of the war. As their experience grew, they modified their tactics and techniques to take advantage of the lessons they learned against the Japanese. Specifically, their mission was defined as the reconnaissance and clearance of the area from the 6 1/2 fathom curve, (21 feet of depth), to the high water mark on a prospective landing beach. A basic pre-assault operation in World War II was much the same as it is today. A day or two prior to launching a Marine amphibious landing, frogmen would be transported to the vicinity of the prospective beachhead in fast-moving boats. Once in the area of operations, the UDT would exit the craft in pairs as the boats paralleled the shoreline. These pairs would form a long line several meters apart and swim toward the beach. Soundings and other hydrographic data were recorded as were any obstacles which could hinder a landing. If at all possible, the frogmen would attempt to remain undetected so as not to give away their intention. In other instances, they were sent in under Allied covering fire from offshore Naval ships and aircraft as the enemy fired at them from the beach. Sometimes many groups were sent forward not only to reconnoiter all possible avenues of approach, but also to deceive the enemy as to the exact location of a future landing so that he might spread his defenses much thinner. The combat surveys would often terminate at the beach or above the high water line. Commanders would be most interested in a sample of beach sand to determine if the beach could support the heavy amphibious vehicles without engineer support. Enemy defenses and natural obstacles and routes leading from the beach and into the hinterland would also be of great interest.

Once their job was completed, the frogmen would slip away from the beach and swim to sea to await pickup by small craft. Not only did they have to successfully elude the enemy forces, but in all instances, they had to battle the elements such as heavy surf and strong currents. A particularly alert enemy might cause them to tow a wounded buddy to the pickup point far out to sea.

Their compiled data, along with aerial photography and other information, would provide planners with an excellent idea of the target area. Their job half done, the UDT would be reintroduced back into the area of operations just prior to the main assault. As they again jumped from high speed boats, the frogmen now swam toward shore towing haversacks of explosives. These charges would be secured to all obstacles within the assault lanes whether they were underwater or exposed. Sometimes, assault lanes would be marked by buoys or lights. All the explosives would then be connected together by means of an explosive cord. The UDTs would detonate the entire explosive field using a time fuse or electrical means ("command detonation"). As often as possible, the demolitions were rigged to the seaward side of the obstacles. When detonated, much of the debris would be sent toward the enemy on shore. The effect on the barriers would be devastating while the psychological effect on the enemy was no less substantial. In most situations, before the smoke could clear and as the debris rained from the sky, the Marine force would be speeding toward the shoreline for the main assault under cover of airstrikes and naval gunfire.

By the end of World War II, there were approximately 34 Underwater Demolition Teams holding about 3500 frogmen. Their post-World War II training added the conduct of limpet mine attacks

where combat swimmers would attach specially prepared charges to the hull of an enemy ship moored or anchored in a harbor. Additionally, as explosives specialists, they trained to conduct demolition raids on harbor facilities or targets near maritime approaches. They were also called upon to perform civil or administrative functions such as demolition of obstacles to improve harbor facilities and channels.

After World War II, most of the Underwater Demolition Teams were decommissioned, but a handful remained on active roles. The outbreak of the Korean War put the frogmen back into the reconnaissance and raiding business. UDTs were called upon to demolish tunnels, railroads, bridges, and other inland targets. Within a matter of years, frogmen were also training to parachute and honed patrolling skills for inland raids. During World War II, their most common weapon was a mere knife.<sup>(1)</sup> They now became experts with a variety of small arms.

By 1961, President Kennedy became highly impressed with the abilities of the U. S. Army's Special Forces. In numerous brush-fire wars around the globe, they had proved invaluable in projecting United States foreign policy while remaining diplomatically low-key. With the advent and build up of large nuclear forces, it was reassuring to have such small units to bridge the gap in foreign policy. Particularly successful in Laos in stemming insurgency up until that time, the Green Berets, as they became to be known, were expanded with presidential blessing and publicly praised. The Air Force and Navy were pressured to form special warfare units of their own to be used in counter-insurgency, counter-guerilla, and unconventional operations. The Southeast

Asian arena appeared to warrant this expansion with the escalation of American advisors to countries there. The Air Force responded by creating the "Air Commandos" (now known as Air Force "Special Operations"). These men carried out a variety of operations involving specially-equipped aircraft and navigational control equipment for counter-guerrilla operations and special missions.(2)

The Navy decided to commission their own special warfare unit. In January 1962, two SEA, Air, Land Teams were formed. Called "SEALs" for short after the well known maritime mammal, they drew their name from the elements by which they infiltrate, operate, and melt away. Formed from UDT volunteers, these men were assigned a different mission. UDT normally operated up to the high water mark. SEALs were tasked to operate beyond the high waterline and into the enemy's hinterland, (normally defined as up to 20 miles inland). There they would act as Naval Commandos whose functions were to gather intelligence, raid, ambush, capture prisoners, and create havoc in the enemies rear areas. They could be used to instruct other nation's forces in these same techniques, much like the Army Special Forces. A normal SEAL Team was composed of numerous platoons, the basic operating SEAL element. The fourteen-man platoons consisted of two officers, (an Officer-In-Charge or OIC, and a Second-In-Charge or 2IC), and twelve enlisted men. Each platoon could be deployed and operate independently, and could further be split to patrol as half a platoon, called a squad, or less.

The initial training of frogmen varied slightly over the years, but the basics remained the same. UDT members and SEALs both underwent the same basic training in order to qualify as frogmen.

Upon graduation, they were assigned to an Underwater Demolition Team or SEAL Team depending upon the needs of the Special Warfare community. The present Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training Course, (BUD/S), is now 25 weeks in length. The officers and men who comprise the classes are given identical treatment. The initial two weeks involves an Indoctrination Phase in which volunteer candidates must qualify under set standards to be formally accepted into the course. Physical training is stressed utilizing running, swimming, and extensive exercise. Hair is shaved to a stubble and discipline is demanded. The students find that a high degree of both discipline and motivation is required to continue. Classes are also given in first aid and water survival. During the course, which is both rugged and dangerous, such knowledge in basic skills proves quite valuable.

Those who successfully complete the Indoctrination Phase are fully accepted into training. Now called "Tadpoles" by the cadre, they find they must continually run and swim further and are pressed to their physical breaking points. Instant reaction to orders is expected. On a UDT or SEAL combat operation, a man who hesitates an instant could be killed or cause the death of others as well as failure of the mission. Although the instructors apply intense pressure to the students, they attempt to produce a positive training environment. Accomplishment of training tasks are left to the individual's will and his ability to work with his comrades as a team. These seven weeks are called Phase One.

In the middle of the First Phase is a five-day physical marathon called Motivation Week. The term most commonly used in describing the ordeal is "Hell Week". The class is launched into a

whirlwind test of their abilities and will. From around midnight on Sunday night, the instructors take the men from one cycle to another. To complete each evolution, the men must call upon every reserve of strength and stamina and, above all, teamwork. About eight hours of sleep are allowed for the entire week if the student crews make no mistakes along the way. Chances are that the students will get considerably less, and even then only in periods of about fifteen minutes most of the time. Up until this week, an average class may have swam up to twenty miles and run 150 more. During Hell Week, the days and nights blur together as well as the additional miles they traverse. The stress and fatigue cause many aspiring frogmen to quit. The final day is spent crawling among exploding charges detonated by the cadre. In reference to the first Pacific missions carried out by frogmen under enemy fire, the instructors holler, "so sorry!" as the charges blow. The exhausted students are reminded that, just as UDT men discovered during World War II against the Japanese, to quit is to fail and possibly die. No matter how exhausted, they must remain alert and push forward. The alternative in combat could cost your life. Hell Week has remained a frogman institution since those earliest days at Fort Pierce. The men who survive Hell Week are lucky. They finish First Phase by learning how to conduct beach reconnaissance utilizing several different techniques. Then they are allowed to move on to Phase Two.

The Second Phase of BUD/S concentrates on land warfare. It is in this phase that the students learn the tactics of raiding and ambushing from the sea, as well as target reconnaissance. Field skills are also taught, such as patrolling, and insertion methods

like sliding down a rope from a helicopter (rapelling). Emphasis is placed on the characteristics and employment of explosives and demolitions. The entire phase comes to a climax during a 21-day exercise on San Clemente Island where students put all their skills to the test. Many of the operations they conduct utilize live ammunition and explosives for realism.

The Third Phase of BUD/S concentrates mainly on the use of various scuba rigs in the application of Special Warfare diving. More instruction is provided on various maritime operations the men will be called upon to accomplish. Physical requirements increase. Runs stretch out until the students can negotiate fourteen miles in the last phase. The longest open ocean swim is about 5.5 miles. Academics in diving physics and diving medicine also provide challenges. In the end, the finished product is of high quality. Attrition rates of 50% to 80% within a class are not uncommon, but one further evolution awaits them.(3) Upon graduation from BUD/S, the entire class is shipped off to U. S. Army Airborne School at Ft. Benning, Georgia. It is there that the future frogmen are taught the insertion method of static line parachuting. Although rigorous physical training is involved, the BUD/S graduates normally are over-qualified at this point. They run circles around the rest of their Airborne classmates. Still, there is something unnatural about hurling yourself from a perfectly good aircraft while in flight. The stress can be substantial, but the Navymen rarely wash out. As a general rule, they normally receive a considerable amount of additional attention for their over-zealous, non-conformist motivation.

Following this intensive initial training program, the graduates of past training were then assigned to a UDT or SEAL Team for a six-month probationary period. Any man who failed to meet the standards of his unit during that period was reassigned to the fleet. At the end of the six months, the men were all officially accepted as frogmen; however, their training never ceased. UDT men furthered their skills with specially designed equipment and on extended operations worldwide while deployed on surface fleet assets and submarines. SEALs also operated worldwide in various exercises and were sent to various land warfare schools such as Ranger, Pathfinder, and HALO.(4) When considering the scope of their qualifications, it becomes clear that these men often performed well beyond all expectations. Simply to gain acceptance into a UDT or SEAL unit required uncommon ability. Those who made the grade were further trained to an exceptionally high standard.

The ability of these men to drive their wills and unharness physical endurance unknown to most men has become, at times, legendary. They have done amazing things, and are infamous for perpetuating outrageous tales about their own feats. In actuality, many of the outrageous tales are based on fact. One author who wrote about these Navymen included such a remark in part of his title; "Some of what you heard may even be true!"(5)

While sightseeing on a glacier in Greenland with other Navymen and several Airmen, one UDT member was injured with his group as a portion of the glacier collapsed. Several men were hurt seriously. The frogman rendered first aid to the injured, then ran as hard as he could for help. He covered seven miles in rugged terrain, but

never would have been able to make it had he not been in top condition. Because of his ability, all the men survived and were evacuated.(6)

Another group of UDTs were abandoned on an arctic ice field while their ship fought to escape from a sudden closing ice flow. Without food, shelter, or other equipment, they reported back to their base in Virginia two weeks later. How they made it back remains a UDT secret.(7) Other frogmen accompanied Admiral Richard Byrd on Antarctic expeditions.

During the early days of the U. S. Manned Space Program, NASA scientists were shocked when astronauts broke down under gravity simulation in giant centrifuges. Assuming they had miscalculated what limits a man could endure, they called upon several SEALs to undertake the same tests. Over voice communications, the scientists asked one SEAL if he'd had enough. Under the force of all those Gs his face was contorted, but through clenched teeth he barely managed to say, "More! Screw it on!"(8) Incidentally, it was UDT who assisted in the recovery of all the manned Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo spacecraft directly after splashdown in the 1960s and 70s.

Special equipment was also developed for these men to be utilized in a wide range of missions. Left many times to their own initiatives to complete an assignment, these men were given wide latitude when selecting weaponry and equipment. Small, submersible vehicles, (Swimmer Delivery Vehicles, called SDVs), were developed to extend their underwater range in scuba operations and provided a medium to haul heavier loads. With such an extensive repertoire of skills, training, and equipment, the UDTs and SEAL Teams could perform a very wide variety of operations anytime, anywhere. They

were routinely assigned to the numbered fleets of the U.S. Navy and cruised the world above and below the ocean surface. During times of international crisis which required the attention of the U.S. Navy, frogmen were always close at hand. When Southeast Asia flared up, it was not surprising that frogmen were among the first Navymen to go into action.

## Introduction

- (1) The type of knife used by UDT is termed a "K-Bar" and is sought after by some as a status symbol. One SEAL said of this, "Other people can get 'em; we get to use 'em!" Richard Hill, "Mean Mothers With Dirty Faces," Esquire (May, 1974), p. 148.
- (2) Such men were involved in the unsuccessful attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1980. They were again called to serve during the Grenada crisis in 1983.
- (3) One class graduated no one!
- (4) Ranger school teaches small unit leadership and field tactics such as raids, ambushes, and reconnaissance. Pathfinder school teaches terminal guidance of Army aircraft in isolated field environments. HALO, (High Altitude, Low Open), is the military freefall school where men train to freefall parachute with full combat equipment in order to clandestinely infiltrate an operational area. They exit the aircraft at extreme altitudes and must breath oxygen while falling.
- (5) Fred Reed, "Gutting It Out," The Times Magazine (September 4, 1978), magazine cover.
- (6) Erick Berry, Underwater Warriors (New York, 1967), p. 88.
- (7) Berry, Underwater Warriors, pp. 88-89.
- (8) Hill, "Mean Mothers," p. 91.

## I. The Early Years (1954-1964)

Following their defeat in the French Indochina War, French forces began a withdrawal from their former Asian colony. At the same time, thousands of Vietnamese refugees fled to the South as the North came under Communist rule. Dubbed "The Passage To Freedom," the United States moved to assist the French forces and the Vietnamese civilian refugees in hopes of easing the transition of the newly-formed nations in any way possible. The Geneva Accords ending hostilities with the French divided North and South Vietnam at roughly the 17th parallel. Laos and Cambodia were also formed as separate nations. United States Naval Amphibious Forces were ordered to relocate into the Gulf of Tonkin in this early year of 1954 to provide transport and security. The majority of the amphibious task force arrived from Korea on 14 and 15 August. Under the direction of Commander A. E. Teal, the head of the control unit for the Amphibious Control Division, a detachment from Underwater Demolition Team 12 conducted surveys of potential landing sites for Naval amphibious vessels. Of primary interest was a beach landing area on the Do Son Peninsula located about 25 miles below the North Vietnamese port of Haiphong.(1) (See map 1.) With this small activity, Naval Special Warfare first began direct involvement in the United States effort in Indochina. That effort would eventually escalate into a major conflict and would not end for nearly twenty more years.

The United States efforts in the years directly following French disengagement concentrated mostly on replacing the French presence. At that time, the United States saw the rising tide of

Communist expansion and chose to attempt to contain the threat in many areas of the world. Korea was an unpleasant study in warfare on the Asian continent for the United States; it was apparent that limited warfare would prove costly indeed against Communism in Asia. United States conventional forces were trained to fight in an unrestrained orthodox manner where front lines were definitively drawn. But now guerrilla warfare became the new order of the day, and Communist support of brushfire wars around the world became commonplace. Against a backdrop of the McCarthy hearings, Communism, in a monolithic form and directed by Moscow, seemed to have permeated the American conscience. In September 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed. Its function was to serve as a NATO-type collective of nations in the region against Communism. The same month, the Nationalist Chinese gained the full support of the United States in defending the islands of Quemoy and Matsu against the Red Chinese. This was followed in February 1955, with the evacuation of the Tachen Islands, which were also threatened by the Chinese Communist mainland. In July 1958, Marines were landed in Lebanon to stifle a Communist-inspired rebellion. Around the world, the United States maneuvered to counter the Communist threat of expansion. In Indochina, The United States moved to draw the line and succeed where the French had failed. But to do so in the nuclear age would take a different approach. There had to be an increase in unconventional warfare capability.

The first major effort in Indochina came in Laos, rather than in South Vietnam. In 1959, the North Vietnamese Central Executive Committee issued its Resolution 15, calling for a change in strategy

In the South. The political struggle now became an armed struggle. In order to support the insurgency in the South, North Vietnam realized that control of at least certain areas of Laos would be essential. This would not only provide a more comfortable buffer to the Communist state, but more importantly would serve as a medium for a line of communication and resupply to the Communists fighting in the South; thus the establishment of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. United States Army Special Forces moved into both Laos and South Vietnam to advise and assist the young forces of those countries during the late 1950s. In Laos, the fighting grew in scale by the day, and control of terrain changed by the season.

One small piece of support provided by the United States Navy at the time was to give the Royal Lao government five LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel) and five LCM (Landing Craft, Medium; commonly called "Mike" boat) to bolster their riverine forces. For a landlocked country, the Lao needed little in the way of Naval assets, but once delivered, these few would serve to help their security forces patrol the large Mekong River. The small flotilla assembled in Saigon in early June, 1960, to begin the trip up the Mekong for the delivery. Commander C. W. Westergaard was assigned to command the team. He was joined by Detachment Mike of UDT 12, then located out of Yokosuka, Japan. Lieutenant David Del Giudice was the Officer-In-Charge, (OIC), for the ten-man group of frogmen. They would serve to help guide the craft through the river during the tremendous snow runoff from the Tibetan Mountains in July, and provide a minimal security force. The men reported aboard USS Okanogan (APA 220) for the transit to Saigon. By mid-June, the flotilla began its riverine voyage. The 430-mile journey was

successfully completed on the afternoon of 4 July. Their mission complete, the UDT and Navy men boarded an aircraft in Pakse and returned to Saigon as the first stop in their trip back.(2)

In Vietnam, a senior Vietnamese Naval officer, Ho Tan Quyen, proposed the formation of a Vietnamese frogman unit to remove underwater obstacles, protect harbor and port facilities, and conduct special operations in a maritime environment. Conventional U.S. Naval advisors did not support the idea initially, believing that the Vietnamese Marines were responsible for such missions. But, in late 1960, the Vietnamese turned to another source and requested assistance from Taiwan in training and establishing the unit. One officer and seven enlisted men completed this initial training and formed the first Vietnamese frogman unit, later to be known as the Lien Doc Ngoai Nhia (LDNN): the "Soldiers Who Fight Under the Sea". The Vietnamese UDT unit was formally established in July, 1961, with an authorized strength of 48 officers and enlisted men.(3)

The guerrilla war in Laos proved to be another diplomatic dilemma, but the U.S. Army's Special Forces detachments proved invaluable in the fight. The new Kennedy Administration saw the handwriting on the wall for Southeast Asia. They also saw the value in such men as the Green Berets. Kennedy moved to expand their numbers and their active role throughout the world to bridge the American response between nuclear and conventional warfare and diplomatic measures. April 1961 was a dark moment for the Kennedy Administration. Having just assumed office, the Bay of Pigs defeat only accentuated the need for unconventional forces and an ability to fight insurgencies and guerrillas. In March 1961, the Plans and

Policy Office under the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) supported a proposal put forth by their Strategic Plans Division. With the Administration's affection for the Army's Green Berets, the other services felt pressure to respond by establishing their own units for similar tasks. In March, the proposal to the CNO recommended establishing SEA, Air, and Land Teams within the Navy, to be known by the acronym "SEAL". Their responsibility would be to develop a naval guerrilla/counterguerrilla capability, develop elements of a tactical doctrine, and help to develop special equipment to support those roles. At the time, emphasis was on direct action raids and missions on targets in close proximity to bodies of water. The name SEAL was to indicate an all-around environmental capability.(4) Before being formally established, their role was expanded to include advisory assignments to friendly nations in the conduct of maritime special operations. Additionally, the SEALs were to be drawn from experienced frogmen of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams.(5)

Late in 1961 it was recognized by CINCPAC that the conflict in Southeast Asia could flare without warning. Very little hydrographic information had been collected on various areas along the South Vietnamese coastline of interest to U.S. Naval forces. CINCPACFLT was authorized to conduct an administrative data collection operation at the beginning of 1962. On 4 January, USS Cook (APD 130) began the hydrographic Reconnaissance mission utilizing a small west coast UDT detachment. The frogmen charted beaches in the vicinity of Quang Tri, Danang, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh Bay, Vung Tau, and Qui Nhon. Such information as beach gradients, obstacles, accesses, and tides were was collected for future

ference. At this early time in the conflict, the frogmen were fortunate. They met no resistance and completed their work successfully on 27 January.

Vice President Lyndon Johnson visited South Vietnam in May to further demonstrate U.S. resolve in the area. In the wake of the Berlin Crisis, President Kennedy requested an additional \$3.25 billion dollars for the defense budget and called for an increase in defense manning. At the beginning of 1962, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was formed, and the advisory role of United States forces continued to increase. Almost immediately after the establishment of SEAL Teams One and Two on 1 January 1962, their active role in Vietnam began. SEAL Team One, assigned to the Pacific Fleet, drew most of its sixty-man force from Underwater Demolition Teams 11 and 12. The first assigned commanding officer was David Del Guidince, the young naval officer who had escorted the Mekong River Flotilla into Laos two years earlier while assigned to UDT 12. Two officers from Team One were dispatched in January 1962 to survey the support the unit could potentially provide to the Vietnamese and other U.S. forces advising the country. Through that month and part of February, they determined that they could best help advise Mobile Training Team 7, which was scheduled for Riverine Advisory Duty in the near future.(6) Back in the States, the Navy's first SEALs dispersed to a wide variety of military schools to train for their immediate missions. The SEALs of Team One, anticipating deployment to Vietnam, would be part of the Navy's immediate future Vietnam involvement.

On 10 March 1962, two SEALs arrived in-country to begin a six-month tour instructing the Vietnamese in clandestine maritime

operations. After the completion of this mission, another was initiated from January to December 1963. At the same time, Mobile Training Team (MTT) 10-62, began training Biet Hai Commandos, (Junk Force Commando Platoons), of the South Vietnamese Navy in April 1962. The MTT was composed of one officer and nine other men from both SEAL Teams One and Two. In their six month assignment, they conducted a frogman-style course of rugged training for their allies. Sixty-two Vietnamese graduated from the course in October 1962. One more six-month cycle was conducted by MTT 4-63 which worked from 20 September 1962 to 30 January 1963, and those indigenous cadre assumed the responsibility of instructing other Vietnamese. The American advisory team consisted of men from both U.S. Navy SEAL Teams.(7)

The Kennedy Administration had nearly intervened with direct military force in Laos in May 1962. A task force including 5,000 Marines and 50 jet fighters sat on naval vessels in the Gulf of Thailand during the crisis. The Marines did not land, but political tensions continued to strain throughout the year between the Americans and Communists. In October, Kennedy faced the Soviets in a direct confrontation over installation of medium range ballistic missiles in Cuba. A naval blockade of the island was established and the Soviets backed down. It seemed as if nuclear war could erupt overnight, and the ability of the United States to use restraint increased in significance. The value of unconventional capabilities doubled overnight. By January 1963, the U.S. had nearly 12,000 military personnel in Vietnam. Unrest against the American-backed Diem regime in Saigon grew until Diem was removed from power and murdered in a coup in November 1963. Following the

group, the new South Vietnamese leadership seemed more open to U.S. advice. It was also in November that President Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson stepped into the White House. Just prior to his assassination in 1963, President Kennedy wrote the Chief of Naval Operations, "When I was in Norfolk in 1962, I noted particularly the members of the SEAL Teams. I was impressed by them as individuals and with the capability they possess as a group. As missiles assume more and more of the nuclear deterrent role and as your limited war mission grows, the need for Special Forces in the Navy and the Marine Corps will increase." He ended the note by directly asking about the present state of Naval Special Warfare forces.(8)

The transition of both the U.S. and Vietnamese governments now created new leadership which was even more conducive to further American involvement in Vietnam. From January to December 1963, another SEAL detachment of two officers and ten enlisted men continued to train Vietnamese in the conduct of maritime commando operations from a base in Danang. This team of men followed the first two SEAL officer advisors which had departed South Vietnam in the fall.(9)

During the Kennedy Administration, the United States conducted a wide variety of operations to further national policy. Most of these operations were covert military assistance while a small portion were covert operations. The results of these actions, and especially the Communist response to them, were definitely related. In 1961, President Kennedy had authorized the operating arm of the CIA, known as the Combined Studies Group, to assist the South Vietnamese in running covert operations against the North. This

ction was taken in response to North Vietnamese support of the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam. In support of this policy, the Navy and other services submitted potential responses or courses of action from which the Administration could choose. The responses could be selected to fit political intentions and thereby provide a specific degree of proportionate counter-action. One particular course recommended by the Navy included UDT and/or SEAL personnel conducting commando raids into North Vietnam. It was proposed that the Teams would attack the vulnerable rail and highway lines that ran south through the North Vietnamese panhandle and connected to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Preparations were also made to use Vietnamese frogmen to destroy the "Swatow" class gunboats used by the North Vietnamese Navy. The operations would be launched from Vietnamese motorized sampans. Senior American naval officers hardly felt that missions of this magnitude could be successfully accomplished utilizing such modest assets. Although they fully supported the CIA-directed campaign, the Navy felt a drastic improvement was in order. Finally, on 27 September 1962, an Administration Special Advisory Group formally recommended the use of high speed PT boats and SEALs to conduct covert operations against the North Vietnamese.(10)

The high speed patrol craft proposal was accepted, but was only to be used with indigenous personnel. Two old mothballed American boats originally built in 1950, Fast Patrol and Torpedo or PTFs, were refurbished and prepared on the east coast of the United States. Two other PTFs were purchased from a Norwegian shipbuilding company and arrived in the U.S. in early 1963. Dubbed a "Nasty" boat from the Norwegian "Nasty" class PT boats, these

Norwegian-built, aluminum-hulled boats were more modern than the two American boats taken out of mothballs. Their original two Napier Celtic engines could reach speeds over 40 knots. Their armament included machineguns and, later, mortars. In August, the PTFs were shipped to San Diego. During their stay on the west coast, the boats were tested in two days of exercises with UDT and SEAL personnel in a variety of raid and insertion/recovery operation profiles.(11) They left San Diego for Hawaii in the middle of September in preparation for operations in Vietnam.(12)

UDT had been active during this period also. It was recognized that commando and survey teams would need clandestine transport to forward areas to conduct operations. Such missions had seen success during the Korean War using British Royal Marine Commandos and American UDT frogmen from submarines.(13) One of these subs, Perch (APSS 313), and a sister vessel, Sealion (APSS 315), were recommissioned in the fall of 1961. Training in the Pacific arena followed using UDT/SEAL units as well as Marine Reconnaissance forces. After March of 1963, Perch was homeported in Subic Bay in the Philippines to directly support UDT and unconventional operations.(14) Perch would remain available for potential missions in Southeast Asia.

During early 1963 the Saigon government decided to disband the Viet Hai Commandos and dissolve funding. Forty-two of the remaining South Vietnamese raiders, trained by American SEALs, were transferred to the regular Navy's LDNN frogmen.(15) Late in 1962, the Pacific Fleet had again wanted to gain more intelligence on areas in Vietnam in the event of contingency operations. It had been a year since the last hydrographic reconnaissance operations

re conducted along the coast and current data was again required to provide planners with up to date intelligence. USS Weiss (APD 55) was called upon this time to conduct surveys of the South Vietnamese beaches at Danang, Qui Nhon, Cape Vung Tau, and Bac Lieu. (See maps 2 & 4.) Coordination was conducted in January 1963 for the upcoming operations. Although risks were considered minimal, the UDT men would carry small arms ashore for self-defense. It was determined that UDT would not recon beyond the high water mark, allowing the U.S. Marine Corps' 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion to support in that respect. The operations began on 21 February 1963, near Danang utilizing the five officers and 29 enlisted frogmen from UDT 12's Detachment Bravo (Det Bravo). Sniper fire was encountered by the beach party on several occasions. It became obvious to the frogmen that the guerrilla forces were more active in their resistance than the previous. Weiss proceeded with its operations and moved south along the coast. At midday on 12 March, the survey party came under light attack from about a dozen insurgents five miles east of Vinh Chau on the coastline of the Mekong Delta. No casualties were sustained, but withdrawal from the beach was tricky. Naval commanders determined that sufficient data had been obtained during the operations, and no further risks were necessary to complete the work. Weiss returned to Subic Bay.(16)

In January 1964, an American survey team was established to study the depth of the Communist insurgency in the Mekong Delta and the effectiveness of the Saigon government to fight it. The original head of the commission fell gravely ill and Captain Phillip H. Bucklew was appointed in his place. Bucklew was highly respected for his insight into unconventional warfare. A very senior and

experienced frogman, he had been very highly decorated for his UDT exploits in World War II.(17) Following the Korean War, he was again called upon to assist the ROK Naval Intelligence in monitoring North Korean naval activity and assist in the infiltration of agents into North Korea. Captain Bucklew's knowledge and experience in Naval Special Warfare operations was recognized as considerable. Included in his nine-man Delta Infiltration Survey Team was a representative from SEAL Team One along with other Naval officers. The group traveled to Southeast Asia in January 1964. The findings and recommendations of the Bucklew Report were seriously examined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and acted upon throughout the following years. Included in the recommendations was the suggestion to deploy SEALs in an active combat role to Vietnam.(18)

Meanwhile, the SEAL advisory role continued. The LDNN strength by early 1964 stood at one officer and 41 enlisted. On 4 January 1964, a small Vietnamese raiding operation was conducted in the Mekong Delta. The LDNN utilized on the mission were responsible for destroying six Viet Cong junks.(19) On 20 March, the LDNN officer and most of the enlisted men were transferred to Danang to support special operations. (See map 2.) The few men remaining were called upon at times for only minor support. USS Card, a small, old American aircraft carrier anchored on the Saigon waterfront, was mined on 2 May 1964 by guerrilla maritime sappers. The vessel had just delivered a number of tactical aircraft to the South Vietnamese military. It now took on water and settled the few feet to the muddy bottom of the waterway. An LDNN survey team sent to examine the damage determined that the V.C. had used several small electrically detonated mines to blow a gaping hole in the ship.(20)

During the Spring, political and military leaders from both Vietnam and the United States agreed to establishing a small naval facility along the coast. Extensive surveys were conducted in several areas by various naval forces to determine the most suitable area. Cam Ranh Bay was finally selected as the best site and construction began during the summer. Instrumental in the survey process was a detachment of UDT men who provided valuable hydrographic information to superiors.

It was during the Spring that the North Vietnamese first began to introduce some of their regular Army units into the fighting in the South. A SEAL advisor who arrived in-country in July found only eleven men remaining in the South's LDNN unit. This did not include the Vietnamese running special operations missions from their base in Danang. A three-month intensive screening process augmented the depleted LDNN unit with an additional sixty Vietnamese. A sixteen-week training course was established in Nha Trang for these men. Patterned after the UDT/SEAL course, training began on 25 September and ended in January 1965. On the average, each graduating student paddled 115 miles, ran 75 miles, carried a rubber boat 21 miles, and swam 10 miles during the single period called "Hell Week", much the same as their American counterparts. Even prior to graduation, the students participated in a handful of operational missions. The 33 men who completed the course were stationed at Vung Tau and began operations. (21) (See map 4.)

By April 1964, the U.S. military took control of covert military operations under the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observations Group (called MACV-SOG) under operation "Switchback". At the same time, the South Vietnamese

Established an organization known as the Special Exploitation Service (SES). This unit took control of all Vietnamese covert military operations from the Vietnamese Special Forces Command which had been established in 1963. Prior to that time, the Vietnamese Secret Special Service had conducted such programs. Up until 1964, the CIA was responsible for supporting the Vietnamese covert effort. It was hoped that open military hostilities could be avoided, but Communist infiltration of Laos and Cambodia, and the continued assistance by the North Vietnamese of the Communist forces throughout the region forced the U.S. to raise support efforts. Overt aid was provided by U.S. military forces under MACV. Under SOG, MACV assumed responsibility for covert actions as well. It was hoped that MACV could efficiently organize and coordinate the American effort if it controlled the entire spectrum of the American support, both overt and covert.

SOG stood for "Studies and Observation Group" as a cover. Established on 24 January 1964 as a joint force, it drew men from all the services in the U.S. military.(22) Additionally, it employed indigenous personnel from many areas of Southeast Asia. Finally, a number of employees of the Central Intelligence Agency worked on the staff. The organization became divided into several specialty areas. OPS 31 ran all Maritime Operations, OPS 32 the Air Operations, OPS 33 provided Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), OPS 34 penetration of North Vietnam by trained agents and other means, and OPS 35 Direct Action and Strategic Reconnaissance into North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.(23)

Navy Special Warfare personnel were involved throughout the history of SOG. The maritime element was located at Danang in the

northernmost portion of South Vietnam. (See map 2.) The South Vietnamese attached to the unit utilized the cover of a coastal survey service while the Americans were known as a part of the Naval Advisory Detachment (NAD). The NAD included SEAL officers and enlisted whose role was similar to the advisors sent previously to Danang in 1962 and 1963 who prepared indigenous frogmen for their forays into the North. Also assigned were one officer and three enlisted Leathernecks from Marine Reconnaissance Units.(24) SOG had been erroneously informed that Marine Force Recon Units were comprised of one officer and three enlisted. This number fit their desired proposal for Marine augmentation, and from that time in early 1964, Marine Recon involvement in SOG remained at one and three. While the SEAL and Recon officers mainly worked the operational planning, the SEAL and Recon enlisted men trained numerous six-man teams to be utilized as the commando forces.

It was from the harbor in Danang that the Nasty boats were scheduled to operate in 1964. Additionally, a second, smaller-class gunboat was at times utilized for operations. In early 1964, there were only three fifty-foot, aluminum-hulled "Swift" boats which were armed with an 81 mm mortar and light machineguns. These high performance PCF boats would drop and recover commando teams at sea as well as conduct coastal raids.

Logistical support was established at Danang in the early months of 1964, and by March, the facility was ready to receive the PTFs from Subic Bay. The first two Nastys arrived in Danang in late February, followed by several others in about a month. Throughout the spring, the vessels were tested and modified by dropping their 40 mm guns and adding larger fuel tanks to give the craft better

range. Captain Bucklew, now the Commander of Naval Operations Support Group in the Pacific, and others felt more armament was necessary, and thus the addition of 81 mm mortars was advanced. On the American political side, the program was felt to be progressing much too slowly.(25)

As hostilities grew in South Vietnam, the United States moved to raise the price of the Communist insurgency. Operations were mounted in retaliation for guerrilla bombings and attacks by the Communists in the South. In January 1964, President Johnson finally approved the "34 Alpha" raids under the codename "Timberlake". As a variation of the OPS 34 penetrations, 34A was designed as Swift and Nasty boat strikes into the North. The first operations were executed on 16 February 1964. LDNN were sent into the North Vietnamese Naval Base at Quang Khe to destroy the Swatow Patrol Craft and the ferry on Cape Ron. That and a subsequent second attempt were unsuccessful. Two other missions to blow up bridges along the Route One Highway in the North Vietnamese panhandle, thereby cutting the road, were aborted.(26) (See map 1.)

The slow pace of 34A operations and the lack of real mission success up to this point frustrated political and military leaders. Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, and other officials also had reservations about the LDNN capabilities under their own leadership at this point, after the initial poor results. Finally in June and July, success was achieved. On 12 June, a storage facility was demolished and about two weeks later, the Route One bridge near Hao Mon Dong was destroyed. (See map 1.) Another operation on the night of 30 June dropped a team from two Nastys at the mouth of the Kien River. (See

map 1.) The men boarded rubber boats and moved toward shore. The group was spotted by North Vietnamese fishermen, but continued their mission. Two scout swimmers reconned the beach and the force moved in. A five-man security element was left to hold the beach landing site, and the commandos moved inland. At the objective, they illuminated the area with mortar flares and destroyed a reservoir pump house with eighteen 57 mm recoilless rifle rounds just after 0215 in the morning. The North Vietnamese, reacting to the report by the fishermen, found the beach security team and attacked it. The Nasty boats moved in toward shore and provided fire support, holding the North Vietnamese at bay. The raiding party fought a running gun battle to the beach, at times engaging in hand-to-hand combat. They were able to launch their rubber boats and link up with the Nastys to return to Danang. Two men were missing and believed killed in the action, while the North Vietnamese lost 22 killed and the pump station.(27)

Missions were now normally successful, with several operations conducted in July. Additionally, numerous North Vietnamese fishermen were captured and detained for short periods to gain intelligence. The men were released after a few days. The only aborted mission since May occurred on 15 July on a security post on Cape Ron. (See map 1.) Two men were lost in the attempt.(28) At the end of July, other plans and targets were finalized. CINCPAC recognized that the raiding parties were encountering ever-stronger defenses in the North. With the number of Communist insurgents in the South at over 30,000, they also realized that the SOG base at Danang was almost certainly under observation. The Nastys' and Swifts' departures and arrivals could easily be viewed, and the

North Vietnamese almost certainly remained vigilant. It was even thought that some of the LDNN and indigenous boat crews might be agents of the North.(29) In late July, North Vietnamese gunboats made their first unsuccessful attack against two Nastys and two shifts that were operating off their coast.(30) The North Vietnamese were undoubtedly stiffening at the hit-and-run strikes. On 31 July, four Nasty boats struck a radar site on Hon Me Island and a radio transmitter on Hon Nieu located Near Vinh about 115 miles North of the DMZ. (See map 1.) Encountering North Vietnamese gunboats in the area, the landing of raiding parties was aborted and standoff weaponry was used to bombard the targets. The Communist boats unsuccessfully attempted to interdict the faster Allied vessels.(31)

This was followed on the night of 3 August by the shelling of another radar site at Cape Vinh Son south of Vinh and a security post on the south bank of the Ron River. (See map 1.) The Nastys successfully completed their mission and arrived back in Danang around dawn on the 4th.(32) Apparently convinced that the craft were operating from or related to larger U.S. Naval vessels offshore, the North Vietnamese attacked an intelligence ship which was on an unrelated operation. The mission of USS Maddox was to steam along the North Vietnamese coastline and intercept Communist radio transmissions and collect data on the North Vietnamese coastal defense network. Indeed Maddox had even sighted the Nastys as they were returning to Danang after their attack on the 31st. The attack on Maddox was initiated by North Vietnamese gunboats in broad daylight. Following the attack, Maddox was ordered back into the area along with USS Turner Joy. On 4 August, both reported a second

attack at night under poor weather conditions. The initial afteraction assessment left the assault in question. It appeared as if it may have been a series of mistaken readings under poor conditions by nervous sailors, yet official evidence today supports the finding that an attack did indeed occur.(33) There is little doubt, however, that the Nasty and Swift commando attacks precipitated a dramatic escalation of hostilities. This Gulf of Tonkin Incident, as it came to be called, decidedly brought Congress to enact the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, thus deepening involvement of American forces in Vietnam considerably.

The raiding continued using trained Vietnamese as frogmen. On 31 August, one proposal by the Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (COMUSMACV) suggested another approach. Using submarine assets, the plan recommended infiltrating a team of eighty frogmen onto the islands in the Fai Tsi Long Archipelago. (See map 1.) Located at the northern end of the Gulf of Tonkin, this target was outside the range of the Swifts and Nastys. CINCPAC disapproved the plan believing it to be too drastic an escalation of overt American participation at that point in time.(34) In early August, authorization for eight more Nasty boats was given. Negotiations with the Norwegians were concluded late in the month. The new boats would be quieter, have a greater range, and incorporate important design changes recommended from lessons learned as a result of the previous raids. The first new boats were due to arrive at Subic Bay in late Spring, 1965.(35)

In September 1964, one commando team reportedly was inserted by rubber boat to destroy a section of the Hanoi-Vinh railroad. Guards were eliminated by South Vietnamese using silenced weapons.(36) Two

er bridge destruction missions were scheduled to be carried out on Route One during the same month.(37) A variety of the other raids were scheduled to be executed by American-trained frogmen, such as the destruction of the Phuc Loi Pier, before the end of the year.(38) Later in October, two more intelligence destroyers were preparing to conduct operations off North Vietnam. As part of their exercises, mock day and night assaults were staged by small, high speed boats to prevent a repeat of any possible blunders as on 4 August. The boats utilized for the mock attacks were the Nastys which staged out of Danang.(39)

On 30 October, the Viet Cong struck the American airbase at Dien Hoa, killing five servicemen and destroying six bombers. The Johnson Administration responded with more raids along the North Vietnamese coast and escalation continued, especially in unconventional warfare. The Fifth Special Forces Group was sent into Vietnam during the same month. Raiding during the latter part of the year switched mainly to standoff bombardment by the high speed vessels. This more successful tactic was a very quick form of hit-and-run raid that lessened the threat of casualties among the commandos. On 3 October, the boats probed Vinh Son. (See map 1.) Rough seas forced the action to be aborted, but the mission was completed a few nights later. Another mission on the 25th was cancelled due to weather. On the 28th, installations near Vinh Son and Cape Dao were hit. (See map 1.)

The next month, Lyndon Johnson defeated Barry Goldwater in the presidential election, assuring a continuance of the policy then in action. Bad weather cancelled most of the operations for most of the month, but on the 25th of November, targets on Gio Island just

North of the DMZ were bombarded. (See map 1.) Installations on Cape Ron were hit on the 27th. (See map 1.) The last operation of the year was conducted on 8 December. That night, four boats attacked the radar facility at Mach Nuoc.(40) (See map 1.)

The seaborne raids did not significantly alter North Vietnam's military capability. It did, however, create a disruption along the coastline, but rather than just creating a national fear, it helped strengthen the North's resolve and defensive readiness. On 24 December, the North Vietnamese-backed Viet Cong struck the U.S. billets in Saigon, killing two servicemen. Following further guerrilla attacks in the South, the White House ordered "tit-for-tat" raiding against the North. Between 19 January and 2 February 1965, numerous raids were conducted against the North to include nine maritime operations. Five targets were hit on the attacks, one of them twice.(41) But the White House was now ready to move into a new dimension beyond the Nasty boat raids. Operation "Flaming Dart", aerial bombing against the North, was initiated in February 1965, utilizing U.S. tactical air assets against targets in the North Vietnamese panhandle in reprisal for the attacks. The United States was now increasing the pressure against the North Vietnamese in a major way. Regardless of the political rhetoric, the Americans were now unquestionably in a war. By 1965, America had launched into a strong commitment in Southeast Asia. The fight for South Vietnam was on.

## I. The Early Years (1954-1964)

- 6) Edwin B. Hooper et al, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, vol I (Washington, D.C., 1976), pp. 274-276.
- 7) Edward J. Marolda et al, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict vol II (Washington, D.C., 1986), pp. 43-45.
- 8) Ibid., p. 148.
- 9) Ibid., pp. 103, 112.
- 10) Ibid., pp. 115, 121.
- 11) Ibid., pp. 189.
- 12) Ibid., pp. 190; Unclassified Command History for SEAL Team Two for the Year 1966, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- 13) Marolda, The United States and The Vietnam Conflict vol II, p. 17.
- 14) Ibid., p. 190.
- 15) Ibid., pp. 202-203.
- 16) Ibid., pp. 204-205.
- 17) Ibid., p. 206; for details of the development and performance of the Nasty Class PTFs see Norman Friedman, U.S. Combatants (Annapolis, Maryland, 1987), pp. 243-277.
- 18) Burke Wilkinson, Cry Sabotage! (New York, 1972), pp. 215-223; Francis D. Fane et al, The Naked Warriors (New York, 1956), pp. 236-269; John B. Dwyer, "UDTs In Korea," Soldier of Fortune (September, 1986), pp. 70-73, 86-93.
- 19) Marolda, The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict vol II, pp. 216-217.
- 20) Ibid., p. 238.
- 21) Ibid., pp. 182-183.
- 22) Marc Huet, "SEALs Are Navy's Elite," Pacific Stars and Stripes, June 25, 1967, p. A-7; Blaine Taylor, "Before Invasions Commence," Military History (October, 1987), pp. 43-49; David Masci and Michael McKinley, "Behind Enemy Lines-The Life of a 'True Warrior'," All Hands (December, 1987), pp. 32-34. Captain Bucklew was an ex-professional football player who began his Naval career as an instructor in the Navy and Marine Corps' rugged Scout/Raider Course in Florida during the early World War II years. He moved up through the conventional Naval officer ranks the hard way, mostly as a result of his vast combat experience. He slipped ashore alone into North Africa to gather intelligence and survey possible beach landing sites for Operation Torch, the Allied

invasion of North Africa, returning with a bucket of sand for engineers to study to determine if the beaches could support Allied landing craft. In July 1943, he won the Navy Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor, when he led a team of frogmen from a submarine to the beaches in Sicily. Although discovered and attacked, he and his men completed their mission to guide the first waves of the invading Allied forces ashore. Two months later, he conducted a similar mission during the Invasion of Italy which earned him the Silver Star. He performed another beach reconnaissance in France six months before the Normandy Invasion, at one point hiding in a camp from German soldiers who had surrounded him. On D-Day, he returned to support the Invasion, earning a second Navy Cross for valor. Finally, he completed an extremely long reconnaissance on the Chinese mainland north of Hong Kong against Japanese forces. The Americans had anticipated invading the Chinese mainland during the period prior to the atomic bombing of Japan. At well over six feet tall, Bucklew traveled 400 miles with a small guerrilla band while disguised as a coolie. He evaded the Japanese at one point by hiding in a haystack, and was again recommended for a Navy Cross. Bucklew's reputation lives strongly today within SpecWar. In January 1987, the Naval Special Warfare Center in Coronado, California was dedicated to this senior frogman for his pursuit of excellence in Naval Special Warfare throughout his career. The Center houses BUD/S and several advanced SEAL training schools.

(18) Marolda, The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict, vol II, pp. 303-305.

(19) Ibid., p. 327.

(20) Ibid., p. 355.

(21) Ibid., p. 310.

(22) Ibid., pp. 338-339.

(23) Shelby L. Stanton, Vietnam Order Of Battle (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 251-253.

(24) Marolda, The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict, vol II, p. 339. It is interesting to note that U.S. Navy frogmen were also training Cuban exiles in seaborne raiding tactics about this same time period, according to one author. The instruction was provided to the exiles in the Florida Keys from where the raids were launched under CIA direction. For details see Bradley E. Ayers, The War That Never Was (New York, 1976), pp. 98-137.

(25) Marolda, The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict, vol II, pp. 335-338.

(26) Ibid., p. 341.

(27) Ibid., p. 343.

(28) Ibid., p. 343.

- 30) Ibid., p. 406.
- 31) Ibid., pp. 406-407.
- 32) Ibid., pp. 408-410.
- 33) Ibid., pp. 423-424.
- 34) Ibid., pp. 426, 436.
- 35) Ibid., p. 467.
- 36) Ibid., p. 467.
- 37) J. David Truby, The Quiet Killers (Boulder, Colorado 1972), p. 4.
- 38) Neil Sheehan et al, The Pentagon Papers (New York, 1971), pp. 301-302.
- 39) Ibid, p. 303.
- 40) John Prados, Presidents' Secret Wars (New York, 1986), p. 250.
- 41) Marolda, The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict, vol I, p. 468.
- 42) Prados, Presidents' Secret Wars, p. 257.

## II. The American Buildup (1965-1966)

On 26 January 1965, ten PTFs were released to the South Vietnamese for use in seaborne raids against the North Vietnamese coastline. The vessels continued to launch and recover out of the base at Danang. While at Danang, the boats fell under the control of the American advisors. Once launched on a mission, the vessels were manned and controlled by the South Vietnamese commandos. As the North continued to support the insurgency in the South, the South continued to ensure the Communists paid for their actions through the maritime raids.

The North Vietnamese made a dramatic increase in arms shipments and personnel infiltrations into South Vietnam during 1964, but large scale evidence of the Communist support was not available to the Americans. Early in 1965, the proof was captured. On 16 February, a U.S. Army helicopter discovered a Communist trawler at Vung Ro Bay, a small bay on the central South Vietnamese coast south of Qui Nhon, and Allied forces were called into action. The trawler was attacked by air assets and finally capsized. Followup forces met stiff resistance from guerrillas over the next few days as they surrounded the bay and closed on the trawler, but finally secured the area. They discovered a huge shipment of Russian and Chinese-made arms and ordnance which was to be delivered to the Viet Cong forces in the area, even though the V.C. were able to spirit much of the shipment away during the fighting. Fifteen LDNN, accompanied by an American SEAL advisor, were some of the men called upon to salvage and recover this evidence, which played a large part

substantiating American intelligence reports regarding the North's active support of the insurgency.(1)

On 8 March 1965, the first American combat units were committed to Vietnam. On that date, U.S. Marines of the Third Marine Regiment, Third Marine Division, were sent ashore near Danang. (See map 2.) Their mission was to provide protection to the U.S. airbase at Danang from Viet Cong attack. In their traditional manner, the Marines stormed ashore in full combat gear from amphibious landing craft. On the beach, they were met by newsmen who recorded the dramatic U.S. commitment. Additionally, a group of American frogmen from UDT 12 stood by. They had come ashore well in advance of the main forces to provide reconnaissance and secure the beach for the Marines. In the tradition of their World War II fathers, they implanted two rubber boat paddles blade down into the sand with a frogman greeting stretched between them. The sign read, "Welcome U.S. Marines -UDT 12-."(2)

The role of American ground forces did not remain defensive for long. In April, the Marines and other ground units began to conduct offensive operations to interdict enemy guerrillas. With the introduction of Marines and their operations, UDT detachments began charting much of the South Vietnamese coastline for future reference. Such hydrographic surveys, even at this early stage in the war, often encountered armed resistance. On 23 April 1965, a group of Force Recon Marines was attempting to execute such a survey at Song Tra Bong on the coast between Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces some 370 miles north of Saigon. (See map 2.) The group came under fire from an estimated 25 Viet Cong who were well-entrenched. The Americans were forced to evacuate the area

while trying to break contact with the enemy. A rescue team was dispatched from USS Cook (APD 130) to help the besieged men. One Marine, Lowell Merrell, and two sailors who were manning an evacuation boat, EN2 Richard Langford and TM3 William Fuhrman, were all mortally wounded in the action. Merrell thus became the first Vietnam fatality of the Marine's elite Force Recon units.(3)

By the nature of hydrographic reconnaissance operations, frogmen remained lightly armed. These first casualties reinforced to conventional planners the inherent danger of the UDT mission and the consequent importance of providing internal security. In May, the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in-country to begin operations, and the combat role of American forces continued to expand. As hostilities grew in Southeast Asia, the west coast UDTs began deploying as entire commands to the Philippines. Each UDT would spend a six-month tour in the western Pacific (WESTPAC) supporting fleet operations before rotating back to the west coast for further training and re-manning. Utilizing Subic Bay as a base of operations, UDT detachments were dispersed to various positions in WESTPAC to cover their commitments. The headquarters in Subic Bay supported the deployed elements and was designated Detachment Alfa (Det Alfa). They assisted by providing administrative support, training other detachments, and providing maintenance for operational equipment. Det Bravo was deployed on an APD, a high-speed transport ship, as part of the Far East Amphibious Squadron (Phibron) for Seventh Fleet Operations. This group of frogmen provided beach recons and surveys where necessary. Det Charlie operated from USS Perch and later USS Tunny and USS Grayback, conventional fleet submarines which were refitted to

carry small teams of combat swimmers for a variety of combat operations. Their primary mission of beach recon was accomplished using two basic methods. In the first method, the swimmers were "locked out" of the submarine by means of a swimmer escape trunk as it lay on the ocean floor (termed "bottomed out") or at a specific depth. The frogmen would surface from a 36-foot depth by means of free buoyant ascent to conduct their hydrographic survey. They would return to the submarine by reversing the process. In the second method, the UDT men would sit in small rubber boats on the deck of the submarine as the vessel lay on the surface. The submarine would then submerge and literally fall away from the rubber boats, allowing the frogmen to paddle to their operational area and complete their mission. They would recover by intercepting the submerged submarine and snagging the periscope with a line. In this manner they could be towed to an area deemed safe for boarding, or reverse the "locking out" process by diving down and "locking in". Det Delta was stationed at Camp Tien Sha near Danang along the northern shore of South Vietnam. (See map 2.) The men of Delta were called upon to demolish hundreds of captured enemy bunkers throughout the war. The camp also served as a rest and recuperation (R & R) center for other deployed UDT detachments. Dets Echo and Foxtrot were embarked as part of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and served in the classical UDT hydrographic recon missions. Dets Golf, Hotel, and India served with the riverine forces in the southernmost areas of the Ca Mau Peninsula of South Vietnam later in the war. (See map 4.) Their operations consisted not only of bunker destruction, but also as a supplemental commando and recon force throughout the canals, rivers, and swamps of the peninsula.(4)

UDT 11 was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for operations they conducted between 28 January 1964, and 5 September 1966. The station stated that elements of the Team had participated in eight major amphibious assaults in Vietnam. They also conducted overt and clandestine hydrographic reconnaissance of over 110 miles of coastline, rivers, and harbors.(5) Other UDT operations covered the entire scope of reconnaissance along the South Vietnamese coast. UDT 12's Det Bravo participated in every major amphibious operation of the year, including Operation "Piranha" in August, Operation "Starlight" in September, Operation "Dagger Thrust" in October, and Operation "Blue Marlin" in November.(6) Each of these operations projected the Marine Corps and its amphibious capability deeper into the Vietnam conflict. As more American conventional forces were fielded, the United States also welcomed support from other SEATO allies in the war. Before the end of the year, armed forces from Australia, New Zealand, and Korea had joined U.S. military forces against the Communists in Vietnam. The largest military presence by far remained from the United States armed forces.

By late 1965, USS Perch (APSS 313) was being utilized as a platform to launch UDT men on clandestine coastal reconnaissance. The first official action took place on the coast of South Vietnam. Amphibious assaults under the codename Operation "Dagger Thrust" were being coordinated by the Seventh Fleet's amphibious commander, Rear Admiral D.L. Wulzen. The clandestine predawn recon fell upon Perch and the men of Det Charlie from UDT 12 who were embarked aboard.

The team of frogmen along with the deck crew inflated their rubber boats on the afterdeck of the submarine as it lay on the

surface. Lines were connected to the periscope, and when all was ready, the frogmen boarded the boats, and the submarine dove just below the surface. Still attached, the boats were slowly towed toward the target beach, then released. The UDT men paddled quietly and carefully ashore to complete their mission. Perch, meanwhile, stood by in the area to assist in vectoring the craft and to provide any support necessary. The required hydrographic data and valuable intelligence was collected and transmitted back to Navy assets. The frogmen remained ashore to provide security for the Marine assault at dawn, which was accomplished successfully.(7) Clandestine surveys such as this were a key reason Marine amphibious units were able to successfully conduct seaborne assaults, and these operations were the primary role of the frogmen. UDT 12's Det Alfa was commended for similar overt and clandestine hydrographic reconnaissance work between 1 December 1964 and 29 May 1965. Det Bravo from the same team was commended for similar actions between 21 May and 3 July 1965.(8)

Besides their combat operations, UDT members were also utilized for other important work. The initial shortage of trained divers in Vietnam caused frogmen to become a hot commodity. As a result, they were sometimes called upon to conduct salvage and recovery work. Two UDT men were used in late 1965 to assist in repairing a 4,200 foot underwater fuel line at Chu Lai. (See map 2.) Diving conditions were extremely poor with rough surface conditions and very murky water, but the repair to the valuable fuel line was completed with the divers' expert assistance.(9)

In December 1965, the White House was continuing to apply military pressure while attempting with an offer of aid to induce

North Vietnamese into peace negotiations. The North flatly rejected the offer. As a result, the limited aerial bombing of North Vietnam by the United States resumed in January 1966. Operations by conventional forces continued to expand in the South. Additionally, raiding parties continued to strike the North Vietnamese coast. On 1 December 1965, the first Nasty gunboat fell victim to the combat operations and was lost. Together with the special operations units of all the service branches, the total American commitment grew daily.

By the beginning of 1966, Vietnam duty was a definite goal for many of the men who completed BUD/S back in the States. Among the graduates, it would have been difficult to describe an average frogman. They came in all shapes and sizes, but many endured the hardships in order to get into the Southeast Asian conflict. One young Naval officer who graduated from training on 3 December 1965, Ensign Theodore Roosevelt IV, was the great grandson of President Teddy Roosevelt. The 23-year-old Harvard graduate did not plan to make the Navy a career, but indicated that Vietnam was definitely in his assignment requests. His instructors were noted for exploiting any small personality characteristic while he and others were in the initial UDT/SEAL training. In remembrance of his great grandfather's foreign policy, (Walk Softly, But Carry A Big Stick), he was ordered to shoulder a large, three-foot tree branch everywhere he went during the course.(10)

UDT 11's Det Charlie conducted surveys of some of the major coastal areas near Phan Thiet, Cam Ranh, Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon from 3-21 January 1966.(11) (See map 2.) In late January 1966, from the 21st to the 28th, another large amphibious operation was

undertaken. On the beaches near Quang Ngai and Tam Ky in I Corps of South Vietnam, the Navy planned to send the largest force ashore to combat since the Inchon during Operation "Double Eagle." (See App 2.) USS Perch again received the call to conduct a clandestine beach recon, this time using Det Charlie from UDT 11.

Employing a different technique, the submarine bottomed out about 1000 yards off the shore. Support divers then locked out of the vessel by exiting the forward escape trunk. Utilizing scuba tanks, the men prepared lines and equipment outside the sub. When all was ready, the crew inside the sub was signalled. The UDT men then exited the sub in a similar manner, and breathed from equipment rigged underwater by the support divers. Rubber boats were sent to the surface and inflated. The frogmen ascended and boarded the craft, then broke out weaponry, radios, and equipment which had been specially protected for the lock out process. Once on the surface, the frogmen proceeded toward the target beachline while the lead boat hung an acoustic pinger device in the water. Perch picked up the pinger signals and thus vectored the craft to the exact beach landing site, where their clandestine recon began. Such a locking out process required considerable expertise and long hours of rehearsal. The teamwork displayed by both the crew of Perch and the UDT men began to pay off at this early juncture in the war.

Following the successful recon, the frogmen paddled back out to sea, then attached a line between the boats and signalled the sub. Perch homed in on the signal and used the periscope of the submerged vessel to snag the line and take the boats in tow. Further out to sea, in an area safe from a shoreline observer, the submarine surfaced and recovered the frogmen and their equipment.(12)

In February, the First Marine Regiment of the First Marine Division deployed to Vietnam. Their operations would include numerous amphibious missions supported by frogmen from UDT. Also in February 1966, a small group of American SEALs from SEAL Team One in San Diego consisting of three officers and fifteen enlisted were sent to South Vietnam for direct action operations under the control of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam (COMUSNAVFORV). Most Naval planners were not sure what to do with the group and did not have any immediate employment plan for them. It had taken all of two years for the recommendation of the Bucklew Report to employ SEALs in the Delta to finally materialize. They were targeted against Viet Cong guerrillas operating in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) near Saigon. (See map 4.) This muddy mangrove swamp was some 400 square miles, and a swift four-knot current ran four feet deep. Alive with wildlife, the V.C. had long used it as an operational haven within easy striking distance of Saigon. The South Vietnamese capital's shipping channels ran directly through the V.C. haven, allowing frequent shelling and ambush of merchant vessels. The small group of SEALs worked from the naval facility at Nha Be and was identified initially as Detachment Delta. Employing the ambush as their main tactic, initial results accumulated by these SEALs warranted deployment of other platoons to Vietnam. Their introduction disrupted the local Viet Cong forces, which had been virtually unchallenged to date. The V.C. could no longer fire at shipping freely and escape. The locations of the SEAL ambushes were determined many times by current intelligence on enemy movements gained through infrared detection devices located on spotter aircraft, codenamed "Red Haze". The Viet Cong soon realized that

new and different threat had been turned loose in their backyard, but they were unable to counter until the threat was fully revealed. In the meantime, the V.C. effectiveness in the RSSZ was diminished.

For the moment, the exact operational role of the SEALs remained ill-defined, thereby allowing them a great deal of flexibility in the interpretation of their general instructions. One SEAL described an example of their early operation's orders: "Hold position until contact is made. Kill as many enemy as possible. Extract after mission is complete."<sup>(13)</sup> Problems were encountered in establishing Areas of Operation (AOs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) within the platoons, but the SEALs did their best to work these out on their own. Naval planners later put together what was termed a "SEAL Package". This group consisted of other elements such as Boat Support Units (BSUs), Mobile Support Teams (MSTs), and Navy "SEAWOLF" helicopter gunships. On a typical mission, SEALs would be inserted by these support units, who would pull back and wait. After enemy contact was made, these forces would add fire support to the SEAL contact, oftentimes extracting them under fire from a largely superior force.<sup>(14)</sup>

An example of such a mission can be seen in an operation where seven men were inserted onto an island which contained a V.C. encampment. The SEALs were carried to the location by a riverine boat in the predawn hours, but the boat ran aground approximately 500 meters offshore. The SEALs simply hopped out to wade ashore, but encountered deep mud under foot. It took over four and a half hours for them to make it ashore, where they established security and quietly cleaned their weapons. The men then set out and

rolled the muddy island for eight hours, but found nothing. As they were returning to their rendezvous with the hidden riverine boat, they found a fresh trail which paralleled a canal to a dry portion of the island. The SEALs slipped into a rapidly moving canal current and quietly moved with the water, keeping concealed in the bank foliage.

The pointman halted the team and moved ahead where he encountered two huts and six Vietnamese gathered in a small group. Packed nearby were six weapons, some of which were of Communist make and design. Returning undetected to report his findings, the SEAL commander split his force in two in order to cut off any V.C. who attempted to escape. As one group flanked the huts, the other lined up among the sampans in the canal opposite the Viet Cong. Suddenly, one of the Vietnamese spotted the group in the canal. Before he could sound the alarm, the SEALs opened fire. Five V.C. were killed immediately while one dove into the hut, only to be followed by a frogman's grenade.

While securing the area, the SEALs discovered a large pile of documents. The papers were waterproofed in plastic bags and placed aboard the V.C. sampans. Since the boats were too small to hold the large Americans, they were used solely to float the documents down the canal while the SEALs swam and guide them in the water. Before they could link up with their patrol craft, they came under attack by a large V.C. force. The riverine boats arrived just in time to add fire support and extract the team. Captured documents were almost always an important bonanza to intelligence personnel, and SEAL patrols such as this one provided a steady flow of current raw information.(15)

On such a typical mission, the SEAWOLF helicopter gunships were also used to provide fire support, as were fixed wing aircraft, artillery, and naval gunfire from ships offshore. The SEALs attempted to fight the guerrillas in their own environment and take the battle to them in their own back yard. Small unit commando tactics proved to be an effective means to nullify the Communist effort. Ambushes at unexpected locations created hardships and psychological stress for the guerrillas. The SEALs capitalized on any innovative method or technique to make the war costly for the insurgents. On one mission, SEALs reportedly killed a high-ranking Communist officer. Shortly after, intelligence was able to pinpoint the exact location, date, and time of the cadre's funeral. The SEALs returned in force with helicopter gunships, killing several other high-ranking Communist officers who were on hand to attend their comrade's funeral.(16)

From 26 March to 7 April 1966, Both UDT 11 and SEAL Team One elements were involved in Operation "Jackstay". The operation included the landing of U.S. Marines at the mouth of the Saigon River. UDT 11 personnel from both Det Charlie and Delta slipped ashore at 0300 on the dark, rainy morning of the landing and emplaced beacons to guide landing craft through dangerous and shallow portions of the river. They then conducted surveillance operations and swept the area for mines. UDT also set up four-man blocking positions about 500-800 meters apart to prevent the escape of fleeing enemy forces while SEALs and Marines combed the area and set up ambushes. Some of these blocking positions stayed in place for up to eighteen hours. One UDT position ambushed a V.C. junk and became engaged in a fierce firefight with the six occupants. The

et Cong suffered five killed and one wounded in the fight. Later, the frogmen were called upon to demolish a Viet Cong rest camp which had been captured. Jackstay marked the first Vietnam operation in which elements from UDT, SEALs, Marine Recon Teams, and regular Marine and Naval forces were joined for a large scale combat operation. Additionally, the Vietnamese LDNN and their American advisor were sent to the RSSZ during the operation to assist the Vietnamese Marines. Their participation included three river reconnaissance missions. The operation was considered successful due to the superb teamwork of the diverse units and the interdiction of a considerable number of guerrillas.(17)

Up until this time, SEAL ambush teams staging out of Nha Be were forced to depart on their missions using riverine craft in full view of the local populace. Launching operations in this manner allowed the Viet Cong to receive word of impending operations, and many of these early ambushes failed to make contact. One method used to counter V.C. intelligence was to load mission equipment into the boats at Nha Be, yet have the team members driven to Saigon where they would embark on the craft. When this technique was first used on 18-19 April breaking the normal routine, a SEAL patrol killed three Viet Cong soldiers in a sampan in the RSSZ. But early problems still continued. The South Vietnamese closely guarded their intelligence sources, and on 13 April, a SEAL squad killed a Vietnamese intelligence agent in an ambush in the RSSZ as the man moved alone in an unlighted sampan in the RSSZ at night. The U.S. Navy similarly held the SEAL ambush operations closely and better coordination between the two Allies was thereafter identified as necessary to prevent such mistakes.(18)

UDT 11 augmented Det Charlie with Det Delta on 25 March, making the first time all elements of a full Underwater Demolition Team were employed in Vietnam at the same time. UDT 11's Det Delta conducted a recon of the Phu Loc area twenty miles north of Danang in support of Operation "Osage" on 27 April. (See map 2.) Osage was one of many Marine amphibious thrusts into guerrilla territory designed to catch the enemy forces by surprise. This was followed by the first of a series of "Deckhouse" operations beginning in the summer. During Deckhouse I from 16 to 18 June, UDT 11 conducted clandestine surveys operating from USS Cook on beaches in the Song Hoa and Song Cai river areas. The frogmen also worked as a blocking force from Vietnamese junks from Junk Force 21 to stop escaping Viet Cong. A month later, from 16 to 18 July as part of Deckhouse II, UDT 11 participated in missions designed to support Operation "Hastings". This operation was executed to stem the flow of infiltration across the DMZ, but the North Vietnamese were not willing to cease their support of the insurgency in the South.(19) As a result, during June, President Johnson ordered the bombing of oil installations in both Hanoi and Haiphong to increase political pressures once again. American fighting continued to escalate and the North Vietnamese continued to resist proposals for peace talks.

A SEAL patrol ambushed three V.C. in a sampan on the Co Gia river on the eastern edge of the RSSZ early on the morning of 15 June. (See map 6.) One Communist soldier was killed and one wounded, while the third escaped.(20) During July, the SEAL Team One commitment in Vietnam expanded to include a total of five officers and twenty enlisted for the RSSZ detachment. On 27 July, three SEAL Team One six-man squads were inserted by river boat west

Can Gio village at mid-day. (See map 6.) As the three units silently patrolled the area, one group followed a well-concealed trail with fresh prints. Just before 1530 in the afternoon, the pointman came face-to-face with three enemy soldiers and fired his M79 grenade launcher, killing one Viet Cong. While sweeping the area, the frogmen discovered a base camp which had housed an enemy platoon. The messhall alone was capable of housing eighty men. Over 500 rounds of ammunition were captured along with weapons, equipment, 200 pounds of rice, sampans, and documents. The camp and material were all destroyed by the Americans. The captured documents indicated the camp had based a 24-man platoon. They also revealed defensive and mine positions emplaced by the V.C. in the Long Thanh Peninsula.(21) (See map 6.)

With the increase in manpower, the SEAL Detachment for the RSSZ, operating from Nha Be, was now identified as Det Golf. The patrols of Det Golf continued to sting the V.C. throughout the entire RSSZ. Three sampans, two of which were motorized, were captured at dawn, on 5 August, along with 6,000 pounds of rice, sixteen miles southeast of Nha Be. An enemy soldier in the lead sampan sensed the danger and fired a warning shot. Three enemy soldiers then leaped into the water and fled toward the mangrove swamp. The SEALs pursued, but the Communists managed to escape the patrol. A six-man SEAL Team One squad ambushed a junk and two sampans on 7 August, killing seven Viet Cong. On the morning of the 18th, a patrol discovered two huge, well-concealed silos containing over 306,000 pounds of rice. An airstrike and naval gunfire were called in on the area to destroy the cache. The SEALs later reinserted to evaluate the damage and finish the job.(22)

On 19 August 1966, SEAL Team One suffered its first combat casualty in Vietnam. A patrol had discovered a series of bunkers and weapons positions along the Dinh Ba River thirteen miles southeast of Nha Be while on a recon mission. They were extracted and reinserted further upriver to pinpoint two reported camouflaged sampans which had been spotted by a helicopter. Fresh tracks were discovered and then the sampans were sighted about 500 meters from the SEALs' position. Petty Officer Billy W. Machen was acting as pointman. Coming to a clearing in the jungle growth, he halted the platoon and moved ahead into the opening to reconnoiter. As he paused and searched the surrounding area, he suddenly realized the V.C. were lying in ambush and he was in the middle of the kill zone. Rather than make a futile attempt to seek cover or retrace his steps and thereby pinpoint the patrol's exact location, Machen initiated fire and attacked the enemy unit, forcing them to trigger their ambush prematurely. Immediately after, automatic weapons fire from both banks of the river erupted. The SEAL patrol was alerted to the danger and was able to gain cover, return fire, and engage to suppress the V.C. attack. Machen was killed in the initial fusillade. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, the nation's third highest medal for valor.(23)

UDT 11 frogmen played another important role in Deckhouse III from 15 to 21 August in Binh Thuy Province. (See map 3.) One group, operating from USS Cook, conducted two clandestine recons, marking approaches and finally leading forces ashore. On 20 August 1966, USS Perch was again called into action. The objective of operation Deckhouse III was to attack a Viet Cong stronghold north of Qui Nhon in II Corps. (See map 2.) UDT 11's fourteen-man Det

lie, aboard Perch, was given the mission to conduct other  
destine beach surveys. As was true of many operations during  
war, the enemy gained advanced warning of the operation.  
Although Communist forces might be laying in ambush on the beach,  
mission was not cancelled. On the night of the 20th, three  
rubber boats filled with frogmen were able to slip ashore and  
conduct their work unopposed. The following night, another UDT  
recon group was launched. This time the V.C. were waiting. They  
saw the team was ashore conducting a survey, yet the V.C. could not  
 pinpoint the frogmen's position in the darkness. Enemy fire was  
ineffective to the small team of commandos. The two-man scout  
swimmer team became separated in the confusion of the gunfire, and  
soon a search party from Perch was launched to look for them.  
Before long, the entire UDT recon group, including the scout  
swimmers, was recovered by the sub, which now lay on the surface  
about 2000 yards offshore. The original search party, however, had  
failed to return. The UDT commander took two men and launched yet  
another rubber boat to attempt to find the missing men. About  
halfway to shore, the UDT officer took a chance and ignited a signal  
flare. The action was intended to assist the lost men by orienting  
them and help in their recovery. The lost men were immediately  
located, and the Viet Cong force on shore fired small arms toward  
the flare. Perch immediately closed on the the boats and the deck  
crews manned .50 caliber machineguns and a 40 mm cannon to engage  
the enemy. Fortunately, all hands were recovered.

The first two recons for Deckhouse III had an 85-man South  
Vietnamese Army force (ARVN) further inland off the beach for  
protection. The battle on the night of the 21st significantly

harbed the small ARVN element. They could not return to a  
eady base before dark, and therefore requested permission to  
p aboard Perch. The commanding officer of the vessel, already  
ped for space, could not grant permission. He did, however,  
the force that he would ferry them to the site for the third  
on the following day. He also anchored the vessel 500 yards  
shore to provide protection for the ARVN as they camped on the  
ch. As darkness fell, the V.C. were observed moving into  
itions around the beach force. Perch opened fire on the enemy,  
sing several secondary explosions as V.C. ordnance was ignited.  
following morning, the sub evacuated the force along with some  
tal villagers who were threatened by the Viet Cong. These  
vilians were transferred to U.S. Navy Swift boats for evacuation.  
Meanwhile, Perch approached the beach on the surface and called  
fire support. The V.C. were forced from their positions, and  
sing rubber boats, the UDT commander led a group of ARVN and  
ogmen on a small assault of the beach. After securing the area  
and capturing two prisoners, they completed a survey of the site, as  
planned.(24) This is believed to have been the last surface combat  
action fought by a U.S. submarine.

A converted Regulus I Missile submarine replaced Perch as the  
special operations's Pacific Fleet subsurface asset in September  
1966. It arrived in the Philippines and transferred 80% of Perch's  
crew aboard. The small missile hanger on her afterdeck was  
converted to transport up to seventy frogmen with all their combat  
equipment to include six IBSs (Inflateable Boat, Small). USS Tunny  
(APSS 282) had several of her crew trained to accomplish deck  
rigging, thereby freeing all the UDT men to perform only the combat

ons. Also, some of the crew were trained as a ready reaction  
to assist an endangered frogman team under fire on a beach or  
to repel an enemy vessel.(25)

But before Perch left the coast of Vietnam, she again worked in  
support of Operation Deckhouse IV. In the first two weeks in  
November, two UDT 12 platoons operated from her decks. One other  
platoon operated from USS Diachenko, a surface vessel. The three  
platoons conducted two separate clandestine recons in support of  
subversive operations.(26) In late 1966 and early 1967, Tunny and  
other groups from Teams 11 and 12 rehearsed for operations along the  
Vietnamese coastline. Most of those missions were clandestine  
surveys providing information to the National Intelligence Survey.  
The classified data it produced was utilized by the Special  
Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) for  
the Joint Chiefs of Staff.(27)

South Vietnamese frogmen, trained by American SEAL advisors in  
Da Nang, continued their Nasty boat raids into the North. During  
1966, five of the fast attack vessels became combat losses in the  
raids. In the United States, Sewart Seacraft was contracted to  
produce a newer PTF for SEAL-type operations. Called the "Osprey",  
the boats were slightly larger with a 95-foot aluminum hull. They  
utilized the same Deltic engines as the Nastys and could achieve  
around 40 knots speed. The first Osprey were later delivered for  
action in 1968.

SEALs continued their small commando operations in the RSSZ.  
Two SEAL ambushes on the 1st and 13th of September made contact on  
the Tac Ba and Bai Tien rivers respectively, killing two Viet Cong.  
An enemy rest camp, previously discovered and destroyed in July, was

to be reactivated. A SEAL patrol again destroyed the base on September.(28) A squad-size SEAL ambushed a sampan between the and Nga Bay Rivers on 3 October. The SEALs, in two-man positions, waited until the V.C. were eight yards from the ambush at nearly point-blank range, then opened fire. The three soldiers riding in the boat were killed.(29) On 6 October, a Vietnamese minesweeper came under attack six miles from Nha Be. A support team including a SEAL force was dispatched to the area to drive the enemy from the site. On 7 October 1966, two SEAL Team squads of about seven men each were moving to be inserted into the RSSZ via a Medium Landing Craft (LCM). An enemy battalion lay waiting for riverine traffic, and as the boat entered the ambush, the V.C. opened fire. One mortar round made a direct hit on the boat. The men aboard sustained heavy casualties; sixteen of the nineteen were wounded from the initial fire. The SEALs jumped into action and began returning a devastating hail of ordnance. Two particular SEALs manning a .50 caliber machinegun were returning such a heavy volume of fire that the barrel turned white hot and shipmates afterwards swore they could see projectiles moving down the barrel. So aggressive was the return fire that the V.C. battalion broke and ran after losing over forty men killed (not to mention wounded). The V.C. battalion had been making a clandestine night movement; it had taken on the SEALs and suffered heavily for the action, causing the Communists to retreat and lay low in the RSSZ for the next two weeks. Although no SEALs were killed, three were medically discharged from the Navy due to the extensive wounds they sustained in the ambush.(30) The U.S. Navy noted the continued positive results of the operations of the small group of men from

SEAL Team One. Their forces were increased to seven officers and twenty-five enlisted during the month of October.(31) Overall, the White House continued its strong backing of the American fight against the Communist insurgency. In late October, President Johnson visited American forces in Vietnam as a show of support. The American buildup would continue.

UDT 12 conducted surveys in the Mekong Delta during November, from the Rung Sat Special Zone all the way to the Cambodian border. The commander of UDT 12, Lieutenant Commander Robert E. Condon, and eight men flew into Vietnam in November for riverine surveys. They located channels into the Co Chien and Ham Luong rivers for the Operation Deckhouse V landings. (See map 5.) In addition, the Team conducted reconnaissance in the Thanh Phong Secret Zone to collect intelligence on enemy forces. The Deckhouse V amphibious landing was later executed on 6 January 1967.(32)

On the east coast of the United States, SEAL Team Two had been alerted in September for a commitment of five officers and twenty-five enlisted for duty in Vietnam.(33) Meanwhile, continuation of intelligence collection during operations by SEAL Team One men proved most valuable. A SEAL ambush team killed the V.C. paymaster for the RSSZ on one mission and netted "wallets, diaries, pay records, and a small fortune in North Vietnamese money" in the process.(34) SEAL advisors also produced results. Seven SEAL-trained LDNN were selected as bodyguards for the South Vietnamese Prime Minister during the National Day celebrations.(35) Typical of other captures was a large weapons cache found on 3 December 1966, eleven miles south-southeast of Nha Be which included 57 mm recoilless rifles, German and American automatic weapons, and

1000 rounds of ammunition. The men on this operation had been conducting a recon patrol in the RSSZ in support of Operation "Charleston" when they captured the arms. The SEALs also destroyed several enemy facilities on the 13th and 21st and hundreds of thousands of pounds of rice caches which had been used by the U.C. during 1966.(36) The SEAL squads used helos for both insertion and extraction on these missions, which was generally uncharacteristic operations at that point in the war. On most of these early operations, riverine craft were mainly utilized.

The final statistics for SEAL Team One operations during 1966 resulted from 153 combat operations in the RSSZ:

* U.C. Killed (confirmed)	86
* U.C. Killed (probable)	15
* Sampans destroyed	21
Junks destroyed	2
Huts/Bunkers destroyed	33
Rice captured/destroyed	521,600 lbs. (37)

These statistics were compiled by a force of SEALs from Team One which had not exceeded more than forty men in-country at any time up until the end of 1966. Detachment Delta from both UDTs 11 and 12, meanwhile, received the Navy Unit Commendation for operations between 16 August 1966 and 15 December the following year.(38)

The war for control of South Vietnam was just beginning and the men of Naval Special Warfare had already learned valuable lessons in fighting the guerrillas in their environment. The amphibious recons of UDT would continue at a steady pace and prove invaluable to the successful execution of Marine amphibious operations. The results

the freestyle SEAL ambushes in these early years earned the  
attention of conventional planners at this stage in the war. The  
soon realized that to employ the SEALs in the Delta region was  
a valuable if modest method of projecting offensive naval power  
in an unconventional war that seemed not to require the full  
potential of a huge, powerful open-ocean fleet. With such huge  
potential, it may have been difficult for Naval planners to watch  
large Army and Marine units employed into the thick of the war,  
while the Navy's biggest contributions seemed to be through its air  
components and riverine and coastal patrols. The UDT and SEAL Teams  
had been bloodied and had stung back in kind. More importantly,  
they had produced concrete results. But like the larger  
conventional commitment of American forces, the operational buildup  
had only begun.

## II. The American Buildup (1965-1966)

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### III. Specwar Support

UDTs and SEALs characteristically worked in the enemy's rearward, normally beyond large scale support. The Teams did, however, receive a tremendous amount of forward support from other Special and Allied units, as well as several special and developmental activities. The independent small squads, operating out front in canals and mangrove swamps, owed a tremendous amount of their success, and many of their lives, to the support that was provided to them by others.

The U.S. Navy's riverine forces were commonly referred to as the "Brown Water" Navy in contrast to the Blue Water forces of the open ocean such as aircraft carriers, submarines, and battleships. The riverine forces centered around a fleet of diverse, small craft which could navigate and operate along the near coast and into the narrow inland waterways of South Vietnam. Particularly in the areas southwest of Saigon, the boats were highly effective among the vast network of rivers and canals. The vessels were also used to insert, extract, and support UDT and SEALs during their forays ashore. Boat Support Unit 1 was established on 1 February 1964 to specifically lend support to and work with Navy Special Warfare units. Their skill provided tremendous assistance to SEAL operations throughout the war. They not only worked in the Mekong Delta after December 1966 but also assisted in supporting the 34 Alpha missions as early as February 1964 out of Danang.

A few of the most commonly utilized boats included:

-River Patrol Boats (PBRs); 31 feet long with a jacuzzi jet propulsion system, this craft could reach speeds of up to 28 knots.

ment included several .50 caliber and M-60 machineguns and 40 mm grenade launchers.

-Fast Patrol Craft (PCF); commonly called "Swift" boats, these larger boats also carried .50 caliber machineguns as well as mortars.

-Medium Landing Craft (LCM); the "Mike" boat was utilized for numerous operations by SEALs and UDT.

-Light SEAL Support Craft (LSSC); 26 feet long, powered by two 100 HP gasoline engines that gave this craft a top speed of about 26 knots with a full combat load. It could carry a fully equipped SEAL squad (seven men) and its shallow draft of 18 inches allowed it good maneuverability on the inland waterways of the Delta.(1) There were two big complaints about the LSSC continually addressed by SEALs during the war. The first was that the pumps on the craft would clog too frequently in the dirty riverine waters of the Delta. The second was that many of the replacement parts for the craft were of substandard quality and caused further breakdowns. Overall, the LSSC was a highly used boat, considering that most SEAL direct action patrols were of squad size.

-The Boston Whaler and STAB (SEAL Team Assault Boat) initially dubbed the "Bismark"; both were small, high speed craft used in riverine ambushes.(2) The STAB was 26 feet in length and could carry a squad-sized element. It had a speed of between 30 and 45 knots.

-Medium SEAL Support Craft (MSSC); 36 feet in length, these craft were capable of carrying a full SEAL platoon (fourteen men) while pulling a shallow four-foot draft. Numerous weapons systems were tested and used on these craft, including 7.62 mm miniguns.(3)

MSSCs were generally reliable, but had a failure rate in very shallow water because the cooling systems could not fully cool the muddy raw water of the Delta waterways. The .50 caliber machineguns also sometimes cracked the gunnels due to their heavy stress when fired. Overall, the MSSC proved to be another valuable boat for SEAL river operations. It had a speed of between 25 and 30 knots.(4)

Without the assistance and support of the Brown Water fleet, SEAL and UDT patrols would have found it impossible to move into the enemy's rear areas. More importantly, they would never have been able to leave those areas following a patrol.

Many operations were also launched from a series of specially-altered submarines. Each transition throughout the period increased the operational capabilities of the frogmen. USS Perch (APSS 313), USS Tunny (APSS 282), and USS Grayback (LPSS 574), all strongly supported Navy Special Warfare missions throughout the war.(5)

The Naval air components most frequently used in support of SEAL and riverine forces were helicopters and fixed-wing close air support aircraft of HAL-3 and VAL-4. HAL-3 (Helicopter Attack, Light) contained the UH-1 gunships, dubbed "SEAWOLVES", used for armed transport and close air support. Armament included .50 caliber machineguns, miniguns, rockets, and a variety of ordnance. Officially commissioned in April 1967, the helos came into play more and more as the war progressed. The utilization of helos meant greatly increased mobility, and close scrutiny of operations revealed a heavier reliance on such assets in 1968 and the years following. The night operations of the mid-60s from riverine craft

passed to include daylight heliborne raids in the late 60s and early 70s.(6) Almost every SEAL post tour report praised the SEAWOLVES above all other air assets. Countless examples of their aggressiveness and skill were given in these reports. On many occasions, the SEAWOLVES would jettison their remaining ordnance when the SEALs primary extraction helos were damaged by small arms fire. The Navy helicopters would then swoop in and extract a beleaguered team. It was also noted that the SEAWOLVES inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy throughout the war. The fixed wing OV-10 "BLACK PONIES" of VAL-4, (Light Attack Squadron), carried 5 inch HVAR rockets, a 2.75 inch rocket launcher, and a minigun pod. They also came into being in early 1967, and were a highly valued air asset according to countless SEAL platoon post tour reports. The BLACK PONIES were normally an asset which could be called upon when required; it was considered "on call". The increased armament allowed the light aircraft to act not only as spotters, but to bridge the gap between their observation role and jet fighter-bomber support. Their slower speed and longer loiter time made them invaluable to the men on the ground.(7) One other point about the close air support role of the SEAWOLVES and BLACK PONIES bears mentioning. Whenever a small team of men on the ground required their assistance, the presence of the gunships helped draw the attention of the enemy forces toward the sky. Close air support and the distraction it created for the enemy often allowed the frogmen to escape or extract.

Navy Special Warfare patrols in Vietnam carried and employed a wide variety of equipment and weaponry, many of the items being specially designed for them by supporting activities. Some of these

Units included simple uniforms. For camouflaged fatigues, the green and black pattern was developed for all forces to use in Vietnam. Also worn by SEALs and UDT were the "Tiger Stripe" pattern. These gave the units an even more aggressive and offensive appearance. Combined with camouflaged face paint, the men struck a tremendous amount of fear into many Viet Cong by appearance alone. Following an operation such as an abduction or raid, intelligence would receive reports that word had quickly passed that the "Green Faces" had once again been in the enemy's rear areas, causing psychological anxiety in the extreme. Many SEALs also preferred to wear blue jeans on missions. They felt that the material held up better when wet and could better withstand the assaults of Mekong mosquitos when soaked. To prevent being rubbed raw from lengthy soakings and from leeches attaching themselves, some wore women's large pantyhose. It must be remembered that UDTs and SEALs operated in water on every mission, and if unchecked, such abrasions and leech bites over a six-month tour could take a heavy toll by passing disease and causing open wounds to become infected.(8)

A specific set of camouflaged fatigue jackets was developed especially for SEALs. Three different variations were established. The first allowed a radioman to carry a patrol radio on his back with a cover to protect it. A second was designed for a 40 mm grenadier. The third was made for a basic rifleman. All had pockets to carry magazines and ordnance high on the body in order to keep them dry and out of mud. All had an internal bladder to provide 29 pounds flotation in water. The jackets were accepted favorably by the Teams by the middle of the war.(9)

When trapped and about to be overwhelmed in the field, the

Men were taught during training to put their backs to water for escape. To avoid capture, the men were trained to seek the safety of water and trust it as a natural avenue of evasion. With a full combat load, this was not always a natural act. The UDT lifejacket was the main item used for normal flotation. The grey safety device was always worn by Naval Special Warfare forces to cross waterways for insertions and extractions. Men with heavier loads, such as radiomen and machinegunners, oftentimes utilized two. If they could no longer hold a position, frogmen were instructed to swim to safety off an enemy beach or down a river moving with the current. All men wore the lifejacket for safety while on beach reconnaissance. Heavy seas or an unusual ocean current or rip tide could sweep the men from support boats during hydrographic recon operations. The lifejacket could be inflated orally or by means of a CO2 cartridge. It saved numerous lives in Vietnam and is still used regularly by SEALs today.

For footgear, SEALs and UDTs wore what fit their mission best. The jungle boot, developed during Vietnam, was a favorite. Tennis shoes and their UDT cousin, the coral bootie, were also worn. Finally, many SEALs very often went barefoot to sneak quietly into an enemy camp and to leave no American-looking marks on a trail or in the mud.(10) Berets were in vogue during the early years in response to the Army's Green Beret popularity. Some early SEALs unofficially sported black and camouflaged berets. More commonly in the field, the floppy bush hat or olive drab medical cravat, worn like a pirate's bandana or as a sweatband, was utilized.(11)

The "K-Bar" was used as the common frogman knife with a plastic sheath that would not fall apart like leather after constant water

ing. Normally attached to the sheath was a Mark 13 day/night  
which would produce smoke at one end and a flare at the other  
emergency signalling.(12)

Weaponry spanned a wide spectrum. The Ithica model 37 was a 12  
favorite. Combined with a magazine extension to carry shotgun  
ammunition and a "Duckbill" attachment on the end of the barrel, the  
shot could be spread in a horizontal pattern.(13) The 7.62 mm

Kler and Koch G-3 assault rifle saw limited testing by

men.(14) A maritime variation of the M-16, dubbed the Mark 4,

was produced for UDTs and SEALs. Almost identical to the normal  
service rifle, no storage space was provided in the stock of the

weapon. Later in the war, a shortened version of the M-16,

although there were different models, all were most commonly

referred to as the "CAR-15"), was widely used by UDTs and

SEALs.(15) Mud plugs were developed to protect the muzzle of the

weapons from the thick Mekong Delta mud during insertions and

movement. These small plugs would allow the frogmen to fire without

fear of the barrel exploding from clogging with mud or water. The

plug would be blown clear of the weapon when it was first fired.

The .45 caliber M3A1 "Greasegun" was used in the early part of the

war, having been kept in the inventory since World War II and

Korea.(16) Eugene Stoner, the famous weapons designer, produced the

M-63 weapons system widely popularized by the SEALs and commonly

called the "Stoner". This weapon could be converted into several

models to include an assault rifle and light machinegun with long or

short barrel. Its high cyclic rate of fire and ability to feed from

either side for left or right handed carriers made it valuable.

Additionally, it could carry a box or drum with a hundred or more

ected rounds ready to fire. It was received with mixed opinions, but used to great effect by SEALs. The men who hated it, discarded it. Those who loved it babied it because it required a great deal of maintenance.(17)

The 40 mm grenade launcher also saw considerable use. For controlling operations and ambushes, the single-shot M-79 was later replaced by the XM-148 and M-203 launchers, which could be fitted beneath an M-16 barrel.(18) Honeywell produced an automatic 40 mm grenade launcher dubbed the "Mark 18" which was used from riverine craft, and used by SEALs. The weapon was hand-cranked, much like the first Gatling guns of years past. Also fired from riverine craft were 7.62 mm miniguns. With an ultra-high cyclic rate of fire at 6,000 rounds per minute, they could provide a massive burst of fire support during extractions under pressure and on those occasions when the river boats ran into Viet Cong ambushes. Later in the war, these weapons were also mounted for protection at several SEAL bases and the riverine post known as Seafloat.(19)

For close-quarters fighting, submachineguns and handguns were employed. Smith and Wesson produced the 9 mm M-39, an automatic handgun. Several models were designed with threaded barrels to accommodate suppressors, commonly known as silencers. This series was dubbed the Mark 22 "Hush Puppy".(20) Both it and a silenced version of Smith and Wesson's M-76 submachinegun were used to eliminate barking dogs and other animals which would alert V.C. as SEALs quietly approached their encampments. They were also used against human sentries. Specially developed subsonic 9 mm ammunition helped quiet the weapon's signature. The 9 mm M-76 was also widely used in the unsilenced version. Additionally, some

als carried the 9 mm Carl Gustav "Swedish K" and Sterling machineguns.(21)

A napalm grenade was tested in 1968 by men of SEAL Team One. The device weighed 3/4 of a pound with a bursting radius of ten feet.(22) The V-40 mini grenade, much smaller than conventional grenades commonly in use at the time, was employed in small numbers by SEALs starting in 1969.(23) Also tested was a prototype .50 caliber sniper rifle for long range heavy punch.(24) Other equipment developed included a telescoping VHF antenna for easy use in the bush, a hand held Doppler radar, and small squad UHF radios.(25) A waterproof tape recorder was specially designed for the SEALs in 1969 to be used during intelligence gathering patrols. With the device, a recon patrol member could record information of value without having to write notes. Many of the patrols were conducted during the hours of darkness, and this allowed the units to stop and take notes for only brief periods without using a light and notebook. The device saw only limited use and was only designed for short, shallow emersions, such as stream crossings. The AN-PVS 2 "Starlight" scope allowed the men to see in the night like a cat. During riverine ambushes and on raids, this allowed frogmen to positively identify armed insurgents. A bullet-trapped grappling hook was invented to allow SEALs on riverine ambushes to recover targeted sampans more easily following contact. Fired directly from the muzzle of an M-16, the hook would snag small boats before they could sink or be swept away by a river current.

With such a wide variety of weapons and equipment at their disposal, the successes of Special Warfare units is not surprising. Beyond this, other tactics and techniques were attempted.

ization of specially trained scout dogs to hunt down enemy  
installations and boobytraps was popular in the late 60s.(26) An  
trimaran was modified by members of SEAL Team Two for small  
riverine operations in 1967. It later developed into the SEAL  
Assault Boat, or "STAB".(27) A fifty round M-16 magazine was  
tested with only a fair appraisal.(28) An M-16 front sight for use  
at night was developed using a beta emission element.(29) UDT  
tested the "Aqua Dart" recon system, a one-man craft that could be  
run up a waterway and provide 360 degree panoramic  
photography.(30)

Throughout the war, the Teams utilized and tested a wide range  
of mission equipment. In the end, it was this and other support  
which helped carry the frogmen of UDT and SEAL units to mission  
accomplishment. The specialized equipment and weaponry complimented  
the operational personality of the men who employed it.

### III. Specwar Support

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- (10) Ibid., Enclosure 1, pp. 6.
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- (12) Ibid., Enclosure 1, p. 17.
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#### IV. Backwater War (1967)

By the beginning of 1967, nearly 400,000 American servicemen were involved in Vietnam. The war continued to build on all fronts, and the United States continued to pressure the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to find an end to the conflict. Navy Special Warfare involvement also expanded during the year. To date, only one SEAL had been killed in UDT/SEAL operations in-country. The success of SEAL Team One platoons produced a wider role in the conflict for both SEAL Teams. The west coast-based SEAL Team One expanded in manpower to put more operational platoons into the Mekong Delta. Meanwhile, SEAL Team Two, for the first time, began to deploy platoons into the war zone at the beginning of the year. This year would mark a great increase in the Delta fighting. The war in the backwaters of the canals and rivers would no longer be limited to the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ).

The Viet Cong increased their attacks on Saigon shipping in the RSSZ during January 1967. Out of a dozen incidents, three involved mineings, while the majority of the others involved ambushes. Two SEAL squads inserted by Mike boat to patrol the RSSZ on 6 January. While conducting their reconnaissance mission along the Rach Muoi Creek, the SEALs discovered a small base camp and subsequently destroyed it.(1) (See map 6.) Another patrol on the 9th was detected by enemy forces as they searched a small complex fourteen miles south of Nha Be. While at least four U.C. attempted to surround the SEALs, the frogmen slipped into the Rach Cat Lai Be Creek and swam quietly down current. (See map 6.) They silently passed a large enemy base camp, but escaped to their helicopter

reaction point. Once out of the area, airstrikes were called in  
the Communist forces with unknown results.(2)

Documents captured in December, 1966 during Operation  
"Charleston" revealed that the V.C. were using several fresh water  
wells in the RSSZ for resupply. Subsequent aerial photography  
confirmed that the V.C. were using numerous trails leading to the  
wells. SEALs were immediately ordered to destroy them. In January  
1967, two six-man teams were inserted by helo on the 12th and using  
explosives, demolished eight wells near Thanh Thoi Hamlet in the  
lower RSSZ.(3) Intelligence reports from a U.S. Army advisor in Can  
two months later indicated that this action caused great  
hardship among the Communist units in the vicinity, forcing them to  
carry water from a much greater distance.(4) (See map 6.) Four  
days later, SEALs destroyed a large rice cache they discovered in a  
camp twelve miles south of Nha Be. While moving to insert for one  
of the demolition operations, another V.C. ambush of an LCM river  
boat occurred on 20 January. Many of the SEALs and Navy crewmen  
onboard were wounded and one Vietnamese officer was killed, but they  
fought back aggressively and ended their mission by killing four  
enemy soldiers and capturing nearly 360 V.C. suspects, along with  
numerous documents and a large quantity of supplies. Most of the  
detainees later turned out to be active Viet Cong. The SEALs had  
been operating in conjunction with a U.S. Army unit which was  
sweeping the area. The SEALs mission had been to patrol the river  
and prevent enemy forces from evading the Army sweep.(5)

Other patrols reconned the mangroves for V.C. activity, many  
times finding their movement hampered by thick vegetation. One  
patrol on 9 January was forced to extract by McQuire Rig (see

(6) via a helicopter wench after they were unable to make  
off way to a riverine extraction site.(6) A small, deserted V.C.  
and rice cache were found and destroyed by men from SEAL Team  
on the 16th. The cache, which held an estimated 17.5 tons of  
, was scattered by 160 pounds of explosives which the frogmen  
requested via helicopter.(7) Although missions were run almost  
ly, only a handful of enemy contacts resulted. On countless  
trips, the SEALs heard the Viet Cong use small arms fire in  
patterns, as signalling and warning from one enemy unit to another.  
It was easy for the Communists to hear the approach of the river  
vessels used for insertion and extraction by the SEALs. The V.C.  
noticed the presence of the new, deadly Navy units and gave them a  
wide berth.(8)

Also during January, Operation "Deckhouse V" utilized men from  
UDT 12 to find and mark safe channels in the Co Chien and Ham Luong  
rivers. (See map 5.) The success of the operation in the Than Phu  
Secret Zone was due in a large part to the fact that the UDT  
missions included channel searches, surf observations (SUROBS), mine  
searches, and salvage work.(9)

On 2 and 3 February, four SEAL Team One squads conducted a  
series of patrolling sweeps in the RSSZ. Several V.C. bunkers and a  
concrete cistern were demolished and four enemy sampans fired upon.  
Additionally, a small quantity of ordnance and equipment was  
captured.(10) Patrols all throughout the spring consisted of  
intelligence recons, listening posts, and ambushes, and there was a  
marked improvement in the objectives of the missions compared to the  
earlier, freestyle ambushes of a year before. A few of the  
operations were designed to abduct Viet Cong for the purpose of

gaining intelligence through interrogation. Many saw fresh evidence of enemy forces in certain areas, but few actually made contact.

Almost immediately after arriving in-country on 31 January, SEAL Team Two patrols commenced operations. Prior to leaving the Continental United States (Conus), The two SEAL Team Two platoons, consisting of two officers and ten enlisted each, stopped over for two weeks in San Diego to train and confer with SEAL Team One elements.(11) During their stop on the west coast, the men trained in weapons and tactics in the desert east of the city, received intelligence updates and briefs, and prepared their equipment for deployment. The group, to include a specially trained scout dog named Prince, arrived at Binh Thuy airfield outside Can Tho at the end of the month. From there they moved to Nha Be, where some initial orientation missions were run with elements from Team One before the east coast units struck out into their own designated areas of operation in the Mekong Delta along the Bassac River and its tributaries.(12) (See map 5.) On 7 February, one platoon advised the 32nd Vietnamese Ranger Battalion and called in air and artillery support for the unit.(13) Yet this type of initial mission was of little consequence. It took a few weeks to iron out problems concerning exactly how the SEALs were to be employed in the Delta. Many of the same questions which faced SEAL Team One elements in the RSSZ a year before were now echoed in the Delta regions where other platoons were hoping to work. By the second week in March, these issues had been resolved. The Team Two SEALs were to perform the majority of their missions within five kilometers of the major rivers in the Delta, but could penetrate further inland with special approval.

At times, the elements became the gravest enemy of all. Well before dawn on 13 February, men from UDT 12's Det Charlie launched from the deck of Tunny in motorized IBSs off Sa Huynh in II Corps. The swells met the men as they anchored the command boat just inside the surf zone and sent two swimmer scouts ashore. In the darkness of the squall, the command boat capsized as it was hit by an estimated twenty-foot breaker. The three men onboard were ceremoniously dumped into the water. They struggled to the beach as the other boat was rocked by the high surf and fought to remain upright. UDT men in the second boat activated an emergency flare to notify the sub of the situation. Tunny began to respond to the call for assistance and launched a third IBS.

The frogmen from the command boat were barely able to make their way ashore and link up with the scout swimmers stranded on the beach. After burying their radio and the remains of their boat, they began several attempts to swim through the surf. Three of the men made it to the second boat just before 0600. Tunny, meanwhile, had moved to within 1300 yards of the beach and anchored. She called on a nearby LST (Landing Ship, Tank), USS Westchester County, for further help. The LST launched an amphibious landing craft to join in the search. Just after it had launched, another swimmer was reported recovered by the second IBS. The last swimmer was recovered by the landing craft about an hour later, and the vessel linked up with the sub to transfer all hands. Luckily, the frogmen were uninjured, although exhausted by the ordeal. The necessary hydrographic data was finally obtained, and Operation Deckhouse VI, designed as another Marine assault to throw the Communists in I Corps off balance, was launched on 16 February as a result.(14)

New methods and tactics were developed by the frogmen, mostly as a result of trial and error. The SEALs were beginning to discover that wearing boots into enemy territory was a dead give away. Enemy forces went barefoot in most areas and would easily pick up the tracks of the Americans' footwear. Many SEAL platoons began to go barefoot themselves and carried a pair of light-weight rubber booties or tennis shoes to be used only in certain terrain. In the mud and on the hard-packed trails, bare feet additionally proved more sensitive and made careful movement along boobytrapped trails more positive. A low-strung boobytrap tripwire was more easily sensed on bare skin. Stalking without boots also proved to be an absolutely silent method to penetrate an enemy camp.(15)

Quadrant radios were used in the Spring without impressive results. They seemed too noisy for the small units attempting to remain as ghosts in the brush.(16)

American ground troop involvement in Vietnam continued to expand steadily. In the third week of February, Operation "Junction City" was conducted in III Corps near the Cambodian border. The largest military operation to date, it involved twenty-two U.S. battalions in a sweep and destroy operation targeting guerrilla base camps in the South. On 3 March, UDT 11 relieved UDT 12 as the forward deployed Underwater Demolition Team in WESTPAC. UDT 12 later received the Navy Unit Commendation for its 1966-67 WESTPAC cruise. The citation noted that the frogmen reconned over 120 miles of beaches, rivers, and harbors in the combat zone and provided other valuable services to the Seventh Fleet's amphibious forces. Also in March, UDT 11 received the same award for operations between January 1964 and September 1966. Their effort included the

naissance of over 110 miles of beaches and rivers and countless  
missions in support of the Pacific Fleet's operations.(17)

Six LDNN were assigned to conduct training operations with U.S.  
SEALs out of Nha Be beginning on 9 March. In the initial  
reaction reports, the Americans felt that LDNN accompanying the  
missions would be of greater value given a little more time and  
experience.(18) On the 11th, a 2nd Platoon ambush, (their first  
contact of their tour), interdicted an enemy resupply attempt  
fifteen miles southeast of Can Tho. (See map 4.) Four V.C. were  
killed while the SEALs were extracted by riverine craft under  
cover.(19) On 12 March, twenty sensors were emplaced by a SEAL Team  
platoon in Vam Sat.(20) On 15 March, Admirals Sharp and Ward,  
and General Westmoreland visited Seal Team One's Detachment Golf to  
express their personal admiration for the job the SEALs were  
backlogging all over the Delta.(21) The same day, a small SEAL Team  
ambush netted three V.C. killed and several weapons and a small  
amount of operational equipment from an enemy sampan.(22)

The mud, tidal flows, and nippa palms were not always the only  
environmental hazard. On a riverine abduction/ambush mission on 17  
March, a SEAL Team One frogman encountered an obnoxious crocodile.  
The amphibian finally forced the frogman to flee his position and  
shoot in self defense. "At the bank, in about three feet of water,  
I saw what looked like a stump. The stump started moving closer to  
me. I stopped. It came closer and closer, and when it was about six  
feet away, I saw that the stump had two eyes and was pointing its  
snout at me...I moved back about three or four feet, pointed my M-16  
at him and fired," he later related. The noise compromised the  
ambush location and caused the men to extract.(23)

Always with a markedly unique sense of humor, frogmen throughout Vietnam faced their physical adversities with wit and good naturedness. A sign composed and posted by the SEALs at Nha Be read, "Welcome to the Nha Be summer resort. For your pleasure we provide the following facilities:-"

Fishing Facilities-

"Delightful frolics under the ships in the harbor."

Sailing Excursions-

"Try one of our famous moonlight cruises down the river."

Camping Trips-

"Enjoy a night out in the open air as you sit comfortably and companionably beside a trail or a stream."<sup>(24)</sup>

On the 19 March, a SEAL Team One patrol carried a sniper rifle on an ambush/abduction mission with poor results. It seemed to be more trouble than benefit to lug the precision weapon through the mud and thick vegetation only to find fields of fire which could be easily covered by a weapon with regular iron sights. The biggest problem was that the sniper weapon was not an effective tool at night for SEAL operations at that stage in the war, as they reported.<sup>(25)</sup> The SEALs also attempted to pioneer other new techniques in order to gain the upper hand against the sly and elusive enemy. While most squads inserted by riverine craft into their patrol areas, some swam from their boats to shore. A SEAL Team One group on 19 March jumped from the stern of their PBR as it continued to move up a river. In this way, the engine noise continued at the same pitch and would not indicate to V.C. close at hand that men had been placed ashore. The team on the 19th inserted with minimal equipment. No radios were carried. Each man had his weapon, two magazines of ammunition, a flare, and a red lens

flight.(26) Many platoons and squads used this method during  
to insert. It was found in the early years that the engine  
at about 1500 to 1800 RPM from a PBR created enough ambient  
to cover the technique. Another method was to coordinate an  
flight of helicopters. Their noise and distraction would often  
the noise of a team inserting or closing on a target. Other  
patrols utilized false insertions and extractions to try to catch  
enemy. The riverine craft would feint putting men ashore at  
various points to make the V.C. nervous and force them to move,  
similar to hunters flushing a rabbit or quail from the bush. The  
SEALs would then try to catch them in an ambush. During "false  
extractions", half the team would depart the patrol area as others  
remained in place to lure the enemy into a sense of security as they  
saw and heard the partial patrol depart. A variation of the false  
extraction, the "double-back ambush", had the entire patrol fake a  
withdrawal to the water as if they were extracting. They would then  
look around onto their own trail and lay an ambush for anyone  
ailing or tracking them.(27) The men of SEAL Team Two were shifted  
slightly once again to take advantage of these unorthodox tactics  
they and other SEALs were mastering. On 31 March, 2nd platoon was  
moved to the PBR base at My Tho to begin operations in that part of  
the Delta.(28) (See map 5.)

In April, more emphasis was placed on intelligence collection  
to determine V.C. patterns, locations, and lines of communication  
and supply. SEALs were sent out to occupy observation and listening  
posts concealed in dense undergrowth for up to seven days at a  
time.(29) On one such operation, a SEAL officer who had won an  
Olympic Gold Medal in swimming in 1960 lay silently along a river

three of his men. The enemy force spotted them and surrounded the entire area. For the next nineteen hours, the numerically superior V.C. searched for the squad, which hid in dense vegetation chest deep mud. At one point, one particular Vietnamese nearly stepped on the SEAL officer. The frogmen remained undetected and slipped away.(30)

On 4 April, SEAL Team One's Kilo platoon arrived in-country, followed on the 7th by Lima platoon.(31) On 7 April, the newly-arrived Kilo platoon from Team One was transiting to an operational area near the mouth of the Vam Sat river within the RSSZ when their riverine craft entered a Viet Cong ambush. (See map 6.) This time the SEALs' luck ran out. The vessel took heavy fire, and was only able to limp out of the area to escape the hail of enemy ordnance. In addition to small arms fire, the boat was also struck by several enemy rockets. It was one of these B-40 rockets which killed three SEALs onboard, Lieutenant Daniel Mann, Interior Communications Electrician Third Class Donald Boston, and Radioman Third Class Robert Neal. After removing itself from the area to the Soinap river, the riverine craft evacuated the dead and wounded by helo.(32) (See map 6.) In the afteraction report, the SEALs indicated that the LCM had been used for a recon by fire on this operation. As the craft traveled upriver, its organic weapons were fired ashore into the brush to try to get an equal response from the enemy. By doing so, the enemy would reveal his location, and the SEALs, along with close air support, could overwhelm them. On the 7 April operation, the recon by fire had created an aggressive response from the Viet Cong. The SEALs did not agree with being a part of this technique and felt the craft should be used to quietly

... and extract them and for communications relay and support. Another hard lesson had been learned.(33) On the 18th, a three-man listening post killed three Viet Cong communications-liaison personnel as they attempted a route crossing near Giai Island.(34) At the end of the month, two SEAL squads conducted a daylight raid five miles southeast of Can Tho. Six V.C. were killed and one captured in the action.(35)

On the evening of the first day of May, USS Tunny bottomed out on the coast of Phouc Tien Province in the southern part of I Corps. A team from UDT 11's Det Charlie locked out of the sub with their equipment and boats. After ascending to the surface, the boat was inflated and the men climbed aboard with their gear. Using an underwater acoustic pinger, the submarine vectored the frogmen toward the target beach. A heavy number of small indigenous craft were sighted, but the group slipped ashore undetected. Using a new communications device, the men remained in contact with the sub via a length of wire taken from a MK 37-1 wire-guided torpedo.

Following the reconnaissance, the team paddled back to Tunny, which snagged their towing line with the periscope. Tunny then towed the boats into deeper waters and surfaced for recovery. Another beach recon had been successfully completed.(36) Later in May, Det Bravo from UDT 11 came under heavy mortar attack while supporting Operation "Hickory" in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Their teamwork and organization in the face of enemy fire helped expedite the evacuation and recovery of wounded.(37)

On several operations later in the spring, teams laid sensors deep in enemy controlled territory.(38) The McQuire Rig was used further for extraction when patrols were unable to find a landing

large enough for a helo to touch down.(39) Other teams found U.S. Army artillery spotting rounds could be fired within the hearing range of the patrols as an aid to navigation when their operational areas lacked noteworthy navigational terrain features in the swamps.(40) At times, when laying in ambush, SEALs would use hand grenades rather than weapons fire for small contacts, so as not to give away their exact position in case the small contact turned out to be part of a much larger enemy element.(41) On 17 May, one SEAL Team One platoon even tried to use a PBR as bait. As the craft pulled up beached along a river bank, the team set ambush positions to its rear, hoping that a few V.C. would attempt to get close enough to take a shot at the naval craft. One enemy soldier was seen creeping through the bush and was engaged, but slipped away cleanly.(42) The cat and mouse game continued.

The first two SEAL Team Two platoons were now nearing the end of their tours. They prepared to return to the States where they would instruct other east coast frogmen on the methods of this new backwater war. 4th platoon from Team Two relieved 2nd platoon in-country on May 30.(43) The debriefings of 2nd platoon members helped prepare other SEALs for their first encounter with the Vietnam Delta war. (Annex I provides an excerpt from 2nd platoon's debriefing concerning lessons learned on weapons and equipment as an example of the type of information made available by the combat-experienced SEALs during this time frame.) The west coasters continued to rotate men into the war and became ever more experienced. Echo platoon from Team One arrived at Nha Be on 16 June and immediately began running operations.(44)

The month before, SEAL Detachment Bravo was established to

use Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) in the  
area. Half of SEAL Team Two's 4th platoon was assigned advisory  
roles as well as men from SEAL Team One. The mission of the  
attachment was to lead and advise the PRUs in their operations  
against the cadre of the Communist guerrillas within the various  
provinces. Field units would react to intelligence reports and  
attempt to capture or kill known guerrilla leaders.(45) The  
indigenous PRUs were a hardened lot of warriors. Many were  
prisoners who chose to fight for the South rather than waste away in  
Vietnamese jail. Some were former Viet Cong. In all, it took the  
strong leadership of the Army's Green Berets and the Navy's SEALs to  
control these fighters in combat. Contrary to the popular  
impression, the PRUs did not specialize in covert assassination, but  
did target specific V.C. leaders for abduction and capture. By  
obtaining and questioning the captives, the Allies were able to  
ferret out more of the enemy infrastructure. If the PRUs could not  
net their targets, they often killed them in open combat.

On 7 June, a SEAL patrol was conducting a demolition strike  
against a Viet Cong rest area near the northern tip of Tan Dinh  
Island. Several enemy soldiers were seen moving to set an ambush  
against the Americans and the patrol leader engaged and killed one  
of the enemy soldiers. An estimated twelve to fifteen other V.C.  
then opened fire on the frogmen, and the SEALs pulled back under  
fire. Two other Viet Cong were subsequently killed in the  
engagement, while the Americans escaped unharmed.(46) Two squads  
attacked an enemy hamlet in a daylight raid two miles southwest of  
My Tho on the 18th. (See map 5.) Three V.C. were killed, three  
wounded, and four others captured.(47)

Naval planners met at the end of June under Admiral Veth in a symposium to decide the future employment of SEALs in order to increase their already substantial effectiveness.(48) At the same time, frogmen continued to rotate into the combat zone. 5th platoon SEAL Team Two relieved 3rd platoon in-country on June 1st.(49) UDT 11's Det Bravo conducted river surveys and assisted reconnaissance operations in the Mekong Delta during June and July.(50)

Other operations continued. Three Viet Cong leaders, two men and a woman, were kidnapped from their base in II Corps, twenty miles northeast of Phan Thiet in the Le Hong Phong Secret Zone, by Team One SEALs from Juliett and Kilo platoons who launched their commando raid on 4 July 1967 from an offshore destroyer, USS Brush. The other V.C. was killed as she attempted to flee the raiding party. The SEALs launched their mission in small rubber boats and used swimmer scouts to recon their beach landing site prior to coming ashore. The dark moon and clear weather allowed them to move quietly in the sand dunes and steep hills of the region. Important documents concerning enemy political actions were also captured. Naval gunfire support played only a small supporting role throughout the war to ground units, but 164 rounds of naval gunfire were expended by Brush in strong support of this SEAL raid.(51) Brush and other naval vessels proved to be much more than passive insertion craft for SEALs on many operations.

Several other contacts involving numerous V.C. killed in action were made by SEALs while patrolling throughout July, mostly as a result of a refinement of tactics and techniques.(52) On 9 July, one of the operations by a squad from Team Two's 4th platoon

aptured important documents concerning the V.C. infrastructure in Binh Dai Special Zone. (See map 5.) The ambush patrol fired on several V.C. along the Bong Ca Creek on the final day of their mission twenty-eight miles southeast of Ben Tre. Included in the information were two map overlays and a list of V.C. personnel from the districts. Four enemy soldiers were killed in the raid. The captured data resulted in a larger operation conducted by the ARVN Amphibious Division on 17 July.(53) Two SEAL squads were landed in Binh Hoa Province near the suspected headquarters of the Viet Cong commander of the RSSZ on 20 July. (See map 3.) Four V.C. were killed by the teams as they attempted to slip the area using two different sampans. Numerous supplies and weapons were captured, but the V.C. commander was not located.(54) A SEAL Team One group was compromised on a mission on the 21st after having to shoot an aggressive wild pig and was extracted shortly thereafter.(55) At the end of the month, a SEAL patrol contacted an enemy force of unknown size while conducting a daylight raid on a base camp on Ilo Ilo Island. (See map 5.) After a brief fight, the enemy broke and ran. The SEALs destroyed fourteen structures in the camp.(56)

UDT 11's Det Delta was based at Danang with smaller teams "farmed out" to locations at Chu Lai and Cua Viet. (See map 2.) On 15 July, Det Delta was forced to move unexpectedly from Camp Tien Sha to the Tien Sha Annex. The men of the unit did all they could to improve their physical circumstance, and built a center for all the UDT detachments to enjoy as they rotated off the ARG and other vessels for rest and recuperation. Other detachments from UDT 12 and 13 worked out of the Danang base in their rotations through Vietnam later in the war. The facility was affectionately dubbed

"ville" by men in the Teams.(57) Besides their explosives  
ment in the I Corps area, the men also took advantage of other  
tunities which presented themselves. From 16-22 August, one  
er and two enlisted men from the detachment attended U.S. Army  
orne School located at Phan Rang in South Vietnam. The  
ensed course lasted eight days.(58) By this time in the late  
s, it was becoming more common for all frogmen to be qualified  
chutists. Dets Echo and Foxtrot from UDT 11 were located aboard  
different amphibious ready groups. The Teams participated in  
e different amphibious operations in Vietnam during the cruise.  
ing one operation, "Beau Charger", the beach party came under  
avy mortar attack near Cam Pao. The officer in charge received  
Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for his actions which organized  
e force and evacuated wounded and non-essential personnel from the  
ach.(59)

Two SEAL squads landed in an area near the mouth of the My Tho  
river on the night of 1 August and conducted a three-hour patrol.  
Three V.C. were killed and one captured in the fighting while  
numerous documents and weaponry were also discovered.(60) Forty 82  
MM mortar rounds were recovered from two sampans which were ambushed  
by a SEAL Team Two squad on 2 August, along with a number of  
intelligence documents.(61) In early August, the Army's 199th  
Infantry Brigade requested recon assistance from Det Golf in the  
Delta.(62) A combined SEAL/LDNN ambush team from Nha Be killed five  
Viet Cong nineteen miles south of Saigon on 7 August. Two sampans  
had entered their kill zone, but only one was successful in  
escaping.(63) Also in August, one SEAL ambush by Echo platoon led  
to the capture of ten pounds of valuable enemy documents carried by

U.C. courier in the RSSZ.(64) Five U.C. were killed by Team One  
fishers on the 6th. It seemed that the combined efforts of all  
SEAL squads was beginning to gel for Naval planners. The Navy  
could never hope to stop the flow of men and arms into the Delta  
using riverine craft, but their defensive patrols made a large  
impact. With the addition of several SEAL platoons, the Navy had a  
significant offensive reaction force. The enemy forces seemed  
unable to predict where the SEALs would strike next. One thing they  
could predict, however; when they met the SEALs, the U.C. almost  
always took casualties. Most were lucky to escape with a wound.  
Although they continued to run a variety of patrols, the riverine  
ambush remained the simplest and most effective operation for the  
frogmen. On the 11th, an ambush patrol from Team One was forced to  
extract when one member was bitten by a spider and had a severe  
reaction. Only a quick medivac saved his life. The man had been  
clearing a field of fire in preparation for occupying an ambush  
site.(65) The Delta environment alone was sometimes the worst enemy  
of all.

In a large operation on 16 August, twenty frogmen and six  
Vietnamese swept the island of Culaodung. (See map 5.) Located in  
the mouth of the Bassac River, the island had long been a U.C.  
stronghold. A defector provided reports placing the number of enemy  
troops on the island at about 200 men. The assault run began after  
dawn, and at 0900, the river craft were turned toward the bank.  
Overhead, three SEAWOLF helos provided fire support. For five  
hours, the SEALs fought brief skirmishes and destroyed bunkers and  
hootches used by the Viet Cong. Fourteen tons of rice were  
destroyed along with fifty-three huts, fourteen bunkers, and six

ans. Only three V.C. stood to face the frogmen. All three were  
ed in the fighting.(66) "The Viet Cong are really shook when we  
into their backyard and hit them," one SEAL officer said. "Well  
hit them today and they'll know they're no longer safe in the  
as they control."(67)

A Viet Cong defector led another group of SEALs from 5th  
atoon into a V.C. camp on 18 August where three enemy leaders were  
lled along with the destruction of an armory and printing  
ility.(68) Alfa platoon from SEAL Team One arrived in-country in  
August and began operations.(69) It was during August that a third  
irect action platoon from SEAL Team One was committed to operations  
a Vietnam, joining the four others already conducting missions (two  
from each coast). The expansion was further evidence that Naval  
anners were now much more comfortable with the SEALs' operations  
and welcomed their proliferation throughout the IV Corps region.

One particular SEAL ambush in 1967 in Kien Giang Province  
provided a surprise to a frogman force. (See map 3.) On a remote  
canal, a V.C. sampan floated into the kill zone. Besides the two  
indigenous guerrillas onboard, a tall, heavy Caucasian with a beard  
rode in the bow. Just as the craft pulled into the area, the  
Communists became leery as if they sensed the danger nearby.  
Although initially startled at seeing the white man, the SEALs  
immediately let the law of the bar room prevail. When a fight is  
unavoidable, strike first and strike hard. The frogmen unleashed a  
hail of fire into the enemy force. The Caucasian was hit in the  
chest in the initial burst of fire and went overboard. The V.C.  
attempted to jump in and assist him. Just then, a superior Viet  
Cong force appeared and counter-attacked. Outnumbered and

gunned, the SEALs fought a running gun battle to an area where they could extract. Later, they were debriefed about the incident by an intelligence officer. They were told to remain silent about the action. South Vietnamese intelligence had reported that the white man had been a Russian. It would remain a little known fact that the guerrillas and North Vietnamese were assisted in their "Third World" brushfire war by a host of foreign advisors and technicians, including Soviets, Chinese, Eastern Bloc, Cuban, Korean, and other Communist nationals.(70)

Rotations for all the Teams continued. On 25 August, Det Charlie from UDT 11 moved to Okinawa to conduct readiness training while USS Tunny underwent maintenance in Yokosuka, Japan.(71) On the 28th, 6th platoon from the east coast's SEAL Team Two relieved a west coast platoon from SEAL Team One in-country.(72) While the war was of primary concern to the men in the field, the political front proved just as unstable. On 3 September, Nguyen Van Thieu was elected President of South Vietnam, ending a series of power struggles between top leaders of the South which had occurred since the assassination of Diem in 1963. Besides the Communist insurgency, the South Vietnamese fought many internal struggles for control.

During September and October, small, high-speed, fiberglass boats, called "Boston Whalers", were first tested by riverine forces. One application used by the SEALs was to recover ambushed sampans before they had a chance to sink or slip further down current. These craft accounted for a higher confirmation of enemy KIA and the capture of even more documents and equipment as a result of higher recovery rates.(73) On 16 September, three SEAL platoons

and swept Tan Dinh Island as part of Operation "Crimson  
Three V.C. were killed, a number captured, and a large V.C.  
area destroyed.(74) On 21 September, a SEAL Team One Alfa  
ambush decimated a V.C. sapper squad which was enroute to  
the Long Tau River. Seven V.C. were killed in the action, and  
equipment captured.(75) Another ambush on the 28th along the  
Mai River seventeen miles east of Nha Be killed four V.C. and  
ed one. One sampan and numerous documents were recovered.(76)  
SEAL/LDNN missions on 13 and 28 September resulted in  
on Viet Cong killed.(77)

On 6 October, Signalman Third Class Leslie Funk, a member of  
Team One, drowned while training for operations in the RSSZ.  
was initially pronounced as missing, but his status was changed  
ctly after when his body was found.(78) With the heavier  
operational commitment, the Teams were beginning to sustain further  
ualties. On occasion, the V.C. now chose to stand against the  
men. During an operation on 13 October, one particular SEAL  
opped a V.C. attempt to over-run his unit with a heavy and  
urate volume of 40 mm grenade fire. Six enemy soldiers were  
lled by his defense.(79) At times, the SEALs scored heavily by  
pturing documents or a key V.C. leader. Further "Crimson Tide"  
eeps of Tan Dinh Island on the 19th, 21st, and 23rd saw light  
ation for the SEALs; seven enemy soldiers were killed and several  
aptured. One of the captives was identified as the man who had  
urdered the National Police Chief in 1962. South Vietnamese  
oldiers working with the SEALs had to be restrained from killing  
he prisoner on the spot following the identification.(80) SEAL  
riverine ambushes on the 21st and 23rd killed four Viet Cong.(81)

As the weather cleared toward the end of the year, more emphasis was placed on ambushes, since this tactic yielded the largest volume of captured enemy documents. Enemy documents continued to hold a tremendous intelligence resource. The east coast SEAL platoons were now becoming manned by combat experienced men, much the same as SEAL Team One platoons. 7th platoon from Virginia relieved 4th platoon on 24 October.(82) On 31 October, a SEAL ambush twenty-six miles southeast of My Tho killed two enemy soldiers. As the frogmen swept the area, they received weapons fire from a bunker complex and immediately went into the attack. Two more V.C. were killed, and the SEALs demolished fourteen bunkers and twenty structures, capturing several hundred rounds of ammunition.(83) Eight ambushes during November and December were successful in making contact. An ambush team on 12 November along the Ba Gioi river twelve miles east-southeast of Nha Be listened to a Viet Cong unit training with weapons and grenades throughout the day. Before withdrawing by riverine craft, the SEALs finally killed three enemy soldiers in a sampan as the V.C. transited the area.(84) On 15 November, a SEAL Team Two squad killed a V.C. district security chief in a riverine ambush. The man had long eluded South Vietnamese forces and was notorious for atrocities he had participated in and supervised.(85) The Viet Cong continued to employ innovative munitions against the Allies. One SEAL received severe injuries to his left hand when he attempted to disarm a simple grenade boobytrap. It was then determined that the device was specially rigged to detonate when the grenade spoon was depressed toward the grenade body. The surprise caused a serious

...bury, but resulted in dissemination of the intelligence to other  
...ts who began watching for similar devices around V.C. base  
...ps.(86)

On the 25th, another SEAL Team Two platoon patrolled to several  
...atches and placed them under observation in the predawn hours.  
...er light, two Vietnamese attempted to escape the area, and were  
...red upon by the Americans. The shouting of fifteen to twenty men  
...s then heard from three sides, and the SEALs called for a riverine  
...raft to extract. During exfiltration, heavy fire was received from  
...e three sides, and the SEALs fought their way to the river, at one  
...me over-running a bunker directly in the path of their escape  
...oute and occupied by four Viet Cong. Six V.C. in all were killed  
...n the action.(87) Other methods were developed to increase SEAL  
...ffectiveness. Late in the year, one SEAL Team One squad found that  
...sing low-flying helos over their area covered the noise of a  
...riverine craft used to insert the team. On three consecutive  
...patrols they were able to make contact by using the ruse.(88)

7th platoon elements operated in Giao Duc District during  
...Operation "Cuu Long" from 16 to 24 November. They killed fifteen  
...V.C. and captured eleven along with one B-40 rocket, an AK-47, and  
...sixteen Chicom rifles besides destroying eighty bunkers, and seven  
...sampans.(89) The same platoon killed three enemy soldiers and  
...captured one other in a sweep operation ten miles southwest of My  
...Tho.(90) UDT 12 officially relieved UDT 11 of its WESTPAC duties as  
...of 4 December.(91) On 9 December, SEAL Team One's Bravo Platoon  
...relieved Echo platoon in-country. 8th platoon from the east coast  
...relieved 5th platoon.(92) The 7th platoon killed six V.C. and  
...captured one other while attempting to insert and move to a planned

ash site on 20 December.(93) On 23 December, the newly arrived  
platoon inserted six miles east of Nha Be for a 36-hour  
ambush patrol. The team began to patrol toward the southeast  
east and had moved only a short distance before being contacted  
heavy weapons fire. While acting as pointman for the operation  
the RSSZ, Seaman Frank Antone was hit by small arms fire from the  
Viet Cong burst and killed. The team had been patrolling  
inside enemy territory and had penetrated a V.C. regimental  
headquarters. The men fought their way to an extraction point and  
called for helo support. Antone, a Vietnamese LDNN also killed in  
the fight, and several other wounded men were extracted by McQuire  
helo. The rest of the team was pulled out by Army helos.(94)

At the end of 1967, nearly 500,000 American servicemen were  
serving in Vietnam. The American ground role continued to grow and  
had yet to peak. For the men of Naval Special Warfare, the war was  
now becoming an everyday reality. 1967 became the first year that  
almost all the Teams were deeply committed to the conflict. The  
beaches of every Corps area were becoming quite familiar to UDT  
surveyors. By the end of the year, a majority of UDT and SEAL Team  
members were combat veterans, unlike the year before. As the year  
began, the SEALs were only gaining strong recognition for their  
abilities in the RSSZ. As the year ended, the frogmen were  
developing into an effective offensive Naval instrument throughout  
the Mekong Delta. Their independent squad-size operations were  
netting significant results, when appraised as a whole. But like  
the overall conventional capability, the men of Naval Special  
Warfare had yet to peak in size and effectiveness.

#### IV. Backwater War (1967)

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- 5) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Combat Operations Report Summaries.
- 6) Ibid.
- 7) Ibid., Combat Operations Report Summaries.
- 8) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1967, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- 9) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Combat Operations Report Summaries.
- 10) Ibid., Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- 11) Ibid., Enclosure 1, pp. 1, 2.
- 12) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team One, Dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 1.
- 13) John B. Dwyer, "Surface Action," Soldier of Fortune (May, 1967), p. 87.
- 14) Interview with Capt. Thomas E. Murphy by author, NAB Little Creek, Virginia, 10 August 1987.
- 15) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Combat Operations Report Summaries.
- 16) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1967; Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1967.
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- (11) Ibid.; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary April, 1967, pp. 2-3.
- (12) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Combat Operations Report Summaries.
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- (8) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Basic Narrative, p. 3 and Combat Operations Report Summaries; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1967, pp. 31-32.
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- (11) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1967, p. 23.
- (12) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1967, Combat Operations Report Summaries.
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- (14) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1967, p. 6; UDT 11 Cruisebook 1967.
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- (20) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary August, 1967, p. 79.
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- 88) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1967, pp. 21-23.
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- 8) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1967, p. 28.
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## U. Tet (1968)

As the year 1968 opened, American involvement in Vietnam had escalated to an enormous size since Navy Special Warfare units had not yet been introduced. American military leadership was certain that victory was only a matter of time. The actual Viet Cong guerrilla forces were being interdicted with greater success and North Vietnam was finding it necessary to throw more and more of their own regular armed forces into the struggle against the South. It was an election year back in the United States, and although opposition to the prolonged war increased, the political leadership was equally certain that a win in Vietnam was in the not too distant future. But of the events of the year, those during the upcoming Tet celebration were to eclipse all others in 1968.

On 2 January, a group of SEALs, guided by a Viet Cong defector, located a small enemy camp twelve miles southeast of Can Tho on May Island in the middle of the Bassac River. (See map 5.) Six enemy soldiers were killed in a brief firefight, and two structures and 800 pounds of rice were destroyed. Late the same day, the same defector helped the SEALs capture a communications courier, but the enemy soldier was killed when he attempted to escape as the team moved for their extraction.(1) On 7 January, 7th platoon and two LDNN killed four V.C. traveling in three motorized sampans along a small river.(2) Bravo platoon from Team One discovered a deserted base camp on the same day. They moved through the area destroying 21 hootches, 25 bunkers, a sampan with motor, 40 grenades, 5 boobytraps, and 3,000 pounds of rice. Additionally, a kilo of documents was captured.(3)

The year 1968 was to be a costly one for SEAL Teams One and Six. Six men from Team One had already been killed in fighting during 1966 and 1967. For such a small community of men, the losses were a hard reality of war. On 11 January 1968, a SEAL Team One man became the first fatality of the new year. Seaman Roy Keith was killed by small arms fire while operating in Ba Xuyen province in North Vietnam. His Bravo platoon squad came upon a V.C. bunker containing a five-man enemy rocket crew. One V.C. burst from the structure firing an AK-47 and mortally wounded Keith. The rest of the SEALs attacked and killed four of the five men and captured the rocket launcher, three rockets, and three assault rifles. SN Keith would be the first of many SEALs KIA in the heavy fighting of 1968.(4)

On 12 January, UDT 12's Det Golf was established in the Mekong Delta at Dong Tam outside My Tho. (See map 5.) The group was originally assigned to test a new "Aqua Dart" river reconnaissance system under the operational control of CTF 117 (Mobile Riverine Force). The original detachment of frogmen was composed of three officers and eight enlisted men. One of four Aqua Dart systems came with the group while the other three were to arrive in-country at a later date.(5)

Also on 12 January 1968, Time published a small article on SEALs and their exploits in Vietnam. The article followed a popular cartoon series carried in the Pacific Stars and Stripes daily, commonly read by American forces throughout the theater. As part of the "Buzz Sawyer" comic strip series, the Navy had suggested adding a segment on SEALs to help introduce the secret maritime units to the world. In the cartoon, Sawyer accompanied a SEAL raiding party

commando strike into North Vietnam to capture a Soviet-made control van from a surface-to-air missile site. The Navy made comment on the fictitious mission, but Time did detail some of the statistics racked up by the Teams up to that time. According to Time account, "In some 600 missions, nearly all of them furtive days into Communist-held areas, they have laid waste Communist installations (including 70 rivercraft, more than 200 bridges, storerooms and other structures, and at least 200 fortified positions), thrown the Communists off balance and killed more than 5 Communist soldiers and captured 60 while losing only six dead of their own and none at all to capture." Time reporter Glenn Troelstrup became the first newsman allowed to accompany a SEAL patrol on a combat operation. The riverine ambush saw a brief, violent firefight, accounting for two V.C. killed. Troelstrup noted that the frogmen were highly successful in turning the Viet Cong from the hunters into the hunted.(6)

Another SEAL ambush occurred on 12 January along the Cat Co stream six miles southeast of Nha Be in the RSSZ. Warning and signalling shots between V.C. units were heard by the men for several hours, but the enemy did not escape the patrol. Their ambush netted four V.C. killed and two sampans with outboard motors destroyed. While withdrawing from the position, the SEALs came under fire from a position across the stream. The position was silenced by a return volley of 40 mm grenade fire. The SEALs attempted to make further contact by reinserting upstream. No other enemy forces were encountered, however, and after patrolling for some time, the team withdrew.(7)

Gunner's Mate First Class Arthur Williams was mortally wounded

January as his platoon was making an emergency extraction  
fire. The SEAL Team Two 6th platoon member received a gunshot  
under his arm and the round lodged in his spine. He died  
shortly after, becoming the first SEAL Team Two fatality of the  
(8) On the same day, death dealt a tragic blow to UDT 12. The  
commanding officer of the Team, Lieutenant Commander Robert Condon,  
was killed when a B-40 rocket slammed into the LCM he had been  
marked upon. He had been in-country observing the evaluation of  
son gear "Aqua Dart" which his men were testing.(9)

Combined SEAL/LDNN actions accounted for a handful of enemy KIA  
and the capture of enemy munitions around the My Tho area during  
mid-month. Two LDNN detachments operated with SEAL units out of  
anh Thuy and Nha Be at this point in the war.(10) Three days  
later, another SEAL Team Two member from 7th platoon was killed.  
aviation Machinist's Mate Second Class Eugene Fraley had been  
preparing a boobytrapped demolition charge. The device was to be  
used on an upcoming patrol. As he removed it from the sandbag  
enclosure in which it had been assembled, the device detonated.(11)  
The Teams were sustaining increased casualties as their employment  
grew. At the same time, the men became bolder as they gained  
confidence through their experience and familiarity with their  
specific operational areas.

On 22 January, Two small SEAL squads lay in ambush along a  
canal on the Tien Giang River, 77 miles southwest of Saigon. While  
patrolling along one side of the waterway, one SEAL squad opened up  
on a sampan moving without lights around 0200 on the morning of the  
23rd, killing four Viet Cong. As the squad moved to the southeast,  
they killed two more enemy soldiers in a second unlighted sampan.

At that time, a small force of V.C. located on the canal bank, reacting to the American fire, opened up on the opposite bank in the general direction of the American fire. A larger enemy force located on the receiving end of the Viet Cong fire initiated a return volley on their comrades. The SEALs laid low and watched as the two Communist forces battled each other. The second SEAL squad moved up from their ambush position on the V.C. forces along the canal banks and additionally caught a sampan with a lone enemy soldier on board. During the movement to extraction, a final enemy soldier was killed by the SEAL force. After the free-for-all engagement, the frogmen found eight V.C. bodies. The squads then linked up and withdrew.(12) On the same day, Bravo platoon worked with elements of SEAL Team Two to clear a portion of a canal blocked by a man-made dam. Three hundred pounds of explosives proved to be the standard frogmen solution. The canal was easily cleared for transit by rivercraft.(13) The frogmen were utilized at times for this type of administrative support which enhanced civic action projects.

Also on the night of 22 January, a squad from Team One's Alfa platoon conducted an ambush with five members of the Australian Special Air Service (SAS). The elite SAS of both Australia and New Zealand conducted recon, abduction, and ambush operations throughout the war as the primary special operations forces of their respective countries. They, like the SEALs, characteristically patrolled in small teams of five men as the eyes and ears of the regular forces. SEALs teamed up with the Australians on several occasions and maintained an excellent working relationship with the Allied unit. On the January mission, the combined team inserted from a helo using a rope ladder and extracted by river craft. Several V.C. were fired

in three sampans, killing two. Uniforms captured in one craft indicated North Vietnamese regulars were operating with the Viet Cong in the area.(14) Although seen mostly in the other provinces, this intelligence indicator was an ominous warning of the upcoming events.

The following day, on 23 January, the intelligence ship USS Pueblo was attacked and seized by the North Koreans. The vessel's highly classified electronic intelligence equipment was now in Communist hands, much to the frustration of American political and military leaders. The damage done to the U.S. intelligence community was significant. Plans were submitted to destroy the vessel before the equipment could be dismantled on the captured ship. Utilizing USS Tunny, one such proposal called for a team of U.S. Navy frogmen to conduct a raid inside Wonson Harbor, where the North Koreans had secured the captured ship. The plan was disapproved. Consideration had to be given to the captive crew and how the action might effect their treatment and possible release.(15)

Operation "Wind Song I" was conducted in Kien Hoa province on 25 January against a Viet Cong controlled area along the Thom and Mo Cay Canals. (See map 5.) 6th and 7th platoons were placed ashore by riverine forces and conducted a sweep. Five enemy soldiers were killed in the sporadic fighting and fifty-one V.C. suspects captured, one of whom turned out to be a local Viet Cong tax collector. Additionally, 30 bunkers, 25 sampans, and 5 tons of rice were destroyed.(16) SEALs continued to rotate by platoon and on 28 January, Delta platoon relieved Foxtrot platoon at Nha Be.(17)

At this point in the war, the Communists decided to risk an

out offensive in hopes that the general South Vietnamese population would join them in open revolt. This miscalculation cost the Communists dearly. Already, they had begun a 77-day siege of a northern Marine base at Khe Sanh in I Corps near the Laotian border. The battle would not develop into the American Dien Bien Phu that some had predicted.(18) The Vietnamese holiday of Tet was chosen as the target date for the national offensive. The idea was to catch the Americans and ARVN troops in a relaxed state. On this account, the enemy was significantly successful.

The Communist forces struck heavily beginning on 31 January. Their objectives lay in the large cities and province capitals throughout the country. The coordinated assaults caught many Allied forces at rest, but the ARVN and Americans bounced back for a hard fight. In most towns, ferocious fighting became house-to-house as the enemy refused to be easily routed. The North Vietnamese forces used the Viet Cong guerrillas as their vanguard. After the initial shock, the Allies were almost relieved to finally have enemy forces surface en masse so they could be heavily engaged. The problem was that the battles of Tet were to be fought among the populated centers of the South.

The small SEAL detachments throughout the country swung into action to protect the bases and towns they staged from. In My Tho, SEALs and PBR crews helped defend the American billeting facilities.(19) (See map 5.) Three enemy battalions attacked the urban area and attempted to seize all the bridges used to enter and leave the city. During one point in the fighting, the V.C. used an armored sampan cruising up and down the river to fire at government forces. Two SEALs counter-attacked the vessel with 66 mm Light

Armor Weapons (LAAWs) and put the craft out of action. At the  
Vietnamese SEAL course (LDNN) at Vung Tau, school was temporarily  
suspended. The students and cadre were sent into action in Saigon  
to defend the naval headquarters. (20) (See map 4.)

SEAL Team Two's 8th platoon was inserted by river patrol boat  
(PBR) outside Chau Doc before dawn on the 31st on a combined  
operation with a local PRU force. (See map 5.) While on a recon  
patrol near the Cambodian border at about 0200, the platoon was  
alerted to detect the massing of enemy forces near the city.  
Slightly outnumbered, the SEALs and PRUs withdrew to report their  
intelligence as quickly as possible. The initial Viet Cong attack  
on Chau Doc with an estimated 1,400 men began at about 0310 in the  
morning. The enemy's aim was to systematically cut off the town and  
take it piece by piece. Resistance was split into small pockets  
which could be more easily overwhelmed.

The SEALs linked up with a few U.S. Army advisors and tried to  
determine what exactly they could do. Their element was too small  
to even consider stopping the large Communist forces. The command  
post where the advisors were located had little in the way of  
armament, and the order of the day was to get some bigger weapons  
into action. The SEAL OIC was told that the American CORDS compound  
(a U.S. AID program) about a mile down river contained some larger  
ordnance. Half the SEAL platoon was sent back to the PBR to move to  
the location and attempt to retrieve the weapons. The small team of  
men found two jeeps and mounted a .50 caliber machinegun on one.  
They then drove at breakneck speed up the road to smash through to  
the command post once again. Enroute, they passed the hospital,  
which had been turned into a V.C. fortress. Heavy fire was

changed and the jeeps received damage, but the SEALs made it to command post unharmed.

The 2IC told the SEAL platoon DIC that ten American civilians were missing from the CORDS compound. One of the American Army advisors, Drew Dix, volunteered to lead a team to two likely locations where the civilians might be hiding, if they were still alive. No time could be lost. Six SEALs and the advisor raced through the streets, exchanging fire with the Communists along the route. They screeched to a halt in front of the house of a 40-year-old USAID nurse.

The V.C. had already penetrated the house and were tearing it apart looking for anything of value. The nurse remained hidden in a dresser bureau in the living room. As the V.C. descended from the top floor, she panicked and bolted for the back door. As she swung it open, she was met by startled V.C. in the backyard. Just then, two SEALs kicked in the front door. The nurse turned to run to the frogmen, but tripped and fell. With a clear field of fire, the SEALs opened up, and as the bullets hit the back door, it swung shut. The SEALs and the Army advisor scooped up the nurse and sprinted for the jeep. As they sped away, the V.C. reached the front windows of the house and threw a volley of fire down the empty road behind them. The rest of the Americans were rescued in less dramatic fashion at a second location, but the SEALs were not through yet.

The Americans continued to fight the enemy forces for two more days. As South Vietnamese forces reentered the town from the north, they were slowed by heavy fighting. They had reached the marketplace, only to become bogged down. The 8th platoon split into

squads and attacked the V.C. from the rear. Before long, they reached the vicinity of the market. The house-to-house fighting was fierce at times, but the SEALs used every weapon at their disposal, including a 57 mm recoilless rifle. The V.C. had utilized a theater for a command post. The SEALs settled on a three story building nearby for a better firing vantage point.

It was at this point that Petty Officer Third Class Ted Risher was hit by a single bullet. The V.C. were attempting to escape through the back of the square. A SEAL LDNN advisor returned suppressive fire. He stood in a doorframe waiting until Risher had been evacuated. A bullet splintered the frame and sent a fragment into his eyelid. He wiped the blood from his eyes and continued to return fire until all of the rest of the SEALs were safe.

The frogmen found an old station wagon and hurried Risher back to the PBR. The river craft had sustained 28 bullet holes from its share of the fighting. While the SEALs fought from inside the town, the river force had been moving up and down the waterway firing at every target of opportunity available. The SEALs along with the nurse who was rescued earlier tried to render emergency medical care, but Risher died.(21) The Army Special Forces advisor who had led the SEALs on the rescue of the American civilians earlier had also been heavily involved in the street fighting. As an advisor to local PRU forces, he helped dislodge the enemy from the town. For his actions, he was later awarded the nation's highest medal for valor, the Medal of Honor.(22)

The Tet fighting was a military disaster for the Communist forces. In a bloody counter-attack, U.S. Marines dislodged V.C. and NVA from the Citadel in Hue in savage house-to-house fighting.(23)

(See map 2.) The V.C. guerrilla forces were decimated and would not fully recover as a result. This caused the North Vietnamese to throw even more of their own conventional forces into the fighting, but at the same time, it removed the V.C. as a major obstacle to total Northern domination of the South if the Communists were eventually victorious.

Politically, Tet proved to be a major disaster for the Americans. Although they defeated the Communists in all fighting, the press reports made it appear as if the enemy was unchecked and could strike at will. The dramatic reports from the besieged American Embassy in Saigon only accentuated the problem. Just when America seemed to be making headway in the war, Tet exploded on the headlines of newspapers in the United States. The final fact seemed to remain; the war was far from over, and 1968 was another presidential election year. When the entire impact of Tet had finally been felt in the States, President Johnson announced a de-escalation on the last day of March. He also announced he would not seek reelection.

As the final shots of Tet echoed across the battlefields, American forces resumed their activities. For the SEALs, it was time to gain the offensive back and push the war into the Communist base camps once again. Two men from the 8th platoon were part of a recon mission along the Cambodian border in the Seven Mountains region from 14-18 February. (See map 5.) The SEALs dressed in black pajamas and carried sterile equipment and weapons, equipment which could not readily identify them as Americans, and passed themselves off to local inhabitants of the region as Russian advisors. During their mission, they verified the presence of over

enemy soldiers in camps around the region.(24) Beginning 16 February, six SEALs from 8th platoon and two from the 7th platoon were utilized in a two-week experimental program in conjunction with PRU elements in Phong Dinh, Vinh Binh, Chau Doc, and Kien Giang provinces. (See map 3.) The men operated in two-man groups in each of the provinces. The program was employed to exploit intelligence gathered by the units in a timely manner.(25) Also on the 16th, Bravo platoon from Team One failed to make contact on a night ambush and subsequently boarded a riverine craft for extraction. Having used a red lens flashlight to signal the boat to their position, the SEALs noted a similar signal from the far bank. The V.C. appeared to be attempting to lure the craft into an enemy ambush. The SEALs answered the signal with a volley of fire which extinguished the flashlight for good. It was noted in the afteraction report that the signals for extraction should be changed on each patrol to avoid a potentially fatal pattern.(26)

A sixty-man PRU force led by an American SEAL officer captured twenty-three Viet Cong in fighting during a mission in Ba Xuyen province on 17 February. (See map 3.) Twenty other V.C. were killed in the fighting while the PRUs suffered one KIA.(27)

platoons again rotated and carried home the stories of the Tet fighting to those in the States. On 21 February, Mike platoon relieved Alfa platoon at Nha Be.(28) SEAL Team Two's 9th platoon relieved the 6th platoon in Vinh Long on 24 February.(29) (See map 5.)

On the morning of 6 March, Team Two's 7th platoon combined with a PRU element to engage a superior enemy force of at least company-size strength. The seven-hour encounter, which relied

...vily on fire support from river craft and helo gunships, produced  
...V.C. killed, including the enemy company commander, and netted a  
...ll group of weapons. Intelligence later identified the enemy as  
...V.C 531st Company and elements of the 509th Company.(30) On the  
...a, a SEAL Team Two squad, operating with a large group of PRUs and  
...gional forces, killed six Viet Cong and captured one other. In  
...eir afteraction report, the SEALs noted they felt most  
...omfortable working with such a large force, and SEAL operations  
...ained characteristically small throughout the war, normally no  
...re than six to seven-man squads. Such highly-trained small teams  
...o worked smoothly with each other due to almost daily patrols or  
...raining, moved quietly and effectively throughout IV Corps.(31)

Led by a Vietnamese civilian whose father had been killed by  
...he V.C., a SEAL platoon killed a Viet Cong hamlet security chief  
...nd two cadre on 10 March. They were then led to a hut which  
...ontained a female V.C. communications officer. Assaulting the  
...tructure silently, the SEALs captured the enemy officer alive and  
...then withdrew from the area.(32) The same night, a squad from Mike  
...platoon initiated a riverine ambush on three sampans with an  
...estimated six Viet Cong passengers. Three of the enemy were  
...confirmed killed, and two of the craft were captured with 300 pounds  
...of rice and an American-made M3A1 submachinegun.(33)

On 13 March 1968, 7th platoon from SEAL Team Two landed  
...thirteen miles east of My Tho, deep in enemy territory off the Cua  
...Tien River. (See map 5.) After their insertion, the group  
...patrolled silently to the north for about a mile. They then split  
...into two small squads, one moving off into the northeast, the other  
...to the northwest. The first squad, Alfa, moving toward the

east; engaged two V.C., then suddenly heard an estimated fifty  
s off to their east. They evaded further to the north, calling  
support from gunships and troop carriers. The guerrillas  
and before they were picked up, the squad fought off twenty  
approaching from the east. The small group had been very  
fortunate while fighting the largely superior enemy forces. During  
melee, the patrol leader himself had killed one V.C. with small  
fire and another in hand-to-hand combat.

The other squad, Bravo, had originally split off and patrolled  
the northwest. Before long, they had infiltrated 5,000 meters,  
where they discovered an enemy battalion basecamp. The team found  
large barracks building and halted. The group was split, with  
three SEALs moving forward stealthfully to investigate the  
structure. At about 0300 in the early morning hours, Interior  
Communications Electrician Senior Chief Bob Gallagher quietly led  
two others into the complex. Inside were approximately thirty Viet  
Cong asleep with all their personal weapons and equipment close at  
hand. A startled sentry discovered the group, and a vicious  
firefight at point-blank range broke out. Although half of the  
guerrillas were killed in the ferocious initial exchange, the SEALs  
suffered five men wounded. The officer in charge was hit so badly  
he could no longer walk. The SEALs regrouped and began to evade as  
a large number of V.C. attempted to pursue. The less seriously  
wounded of the team carried their more seriously wounded comrades.  
Gallagher, wounded in both legs, had downed five enemy soldiers  
himself in the initial fight. Now he led the squad on a desperate  
and treacherous retrograde action 1,000 meters to the south. The  
V.C. combed the area with all available forces, passing at one time

in thirty meters of the SEALs. Helo support was called and as they neared, the SEALs marked their position with tracer fire by shooting into the air. The V.C. knew the group was in the area, but could not distinguish the American fire from their own. The helos spotted the frogmen and swooped in to recover them. As the helos were loaded, Gallagher assisted in holding off the attacking V.C. forces. He was again wounded, but managed to get himself and the rest of the squad out alive. Subsequent artillery fire and air strikes were called in to demolish the camp.(34) Speaking about Gallagher later, one SEAL commented, "They said he'd never walk again after his third tour in 'Nam. He walked and went back for a fourth tour."(35) For his actions on 13 March, ICCS Gallagher was awarded the nation's second highest medal for valor, the Navy Cross.

The following night, 8th platoon from Team Two established a riverine ambush 3,000 meters out from an ARVN outpost. After about an hour, a lone V.C. in a sampan moved into the kill zone. Two SEALs hurled themselves from their ambush positions on the bank and landed on the craft, capturing the enemy soldier after a brief struggle. It was discovered through questioning that he was a member of a local V.C. battalion. The SEALs once again settled into their positions, and about a half hour later, six armed V.C. who entered the area were engaged and killed. The SEALs then used the previously captured sampan to recover the damaged craft. It was later discovered that the dead included the deputy battalion commander with three of his cadre, a company commander, and a reporter from Hanoi. A significant amount of communications equipment was also captured. As a result of the operation, the battalion was out of action temporarily and was unable to launch an

back they had scheduled on Binh Thuy airfield.(36)

On 20 March, SEAL Team One's Delta platoon was teamed with US Navy helicopters in Operation "Quick-Kill", seven miles southeast of Can Tho. (See map 5.) After enemy forces had fired on a riverine patrol, the reaction force was launched into the area and engaged the enemy in a three-hour firefight on May Island in the middle of the Bassac River. The river boats, helo gunships, and SEALs accounted for 27 V.C. killed.(37) During the month, LDNN worked with SEALs on 26 different operations accounting for 34 Viet Cong killed, 2 captured, and 28 V.C. suspects detained. The combined actions of SEAL/LDNN units were beginning to reach a level of respectable results by the Spring of 1968. Additionally, LDNN continued hull searches in the port of Saigon to thwart enemy sapper attacks.(38)

Before the month was out, on the 29th, 7th platoon from Team One combined with a squad from SEAL Team One's Delta platoon for a small raid ten miles south of Ben Tre. (See map 5.) Guided by a former V.C. (Hoi Chanh), the group inserted and patrolled silently to a target area around four indigenous huts. They surrounded the structures and prepared to sweep through the objective. Before they could begin, two armed V.C. walked into the security element of the unit. The enemy soldiers were engaged in hand-to-hand combat and killed before they could warn their comrades. The SEALs then attacked and held the site, killing two more Viet Cong as they attempted to escape. The Hoi Chanh located a well-camouflaged arms cache for the Americans hidden in one of the huts. This particular cache included a complete grenade factory. A villager then led the team to a second cache in another nearby hut. The captured

ment and weaponry was quickly loaded into a PBR, but a receding  
forced the SEALs to destroy most of the ordnance in place. It  
ad out that the cache was the largest to be captured to date in  
entire Mekong Delta and included:

- 28 Claymore mines
- 30 water mines
- 2 German machineguns
- 2 M-1 carbines
- 2 75 mm recoilless rifles
- 5 120 mm homemade rockets and launchers
- 25 Chinese Communist (CHICOM) grenades
- 19 C/S (combat teargas) grenades
- 50 electrical blasting caps
- 7 boxes Viet Cong grenades
- 8 cases CHICOM ammunition
- 1 CHICOM carbine
- 1 box medical supplies
- 20 pounds ordnance documents

Additionally, numerous fuses, primers, and blasting caps were  
discovered along with the grenade factory. General Westmoreland  
sent a personal well done to the unit for the operation.(39)

The SEALs were now finding regular success in their patrols and  
oftentimes teamed up with PRUs, LDNN, and other SEAL platoons on  
their missions. On 7 April, Team Two's 7th platoon and Team One's  
Delta platoon engaged an estimated V.C. platoon in a heavy firefight  
four miles northeast of Vinh Long. (See map 5.) The two units had  
set up separate sites about a mile away from each other. After  
first light, the 7th fired on the forward element of the V.C. force

received heavy counterfire. The SEALs beat a hasty retreat to a landing zone where helos picked them up. Delta platoon first moved for their assistance, then finally made it back to the river for extraction by boat. Five V.C. were killed before both units were contacted.(40) The next day, LDNN Training Class III from Vung Tau captured five suspected V.C. members and returned them for questioning. Attrition rates for the Vietnamese trainees were comparable to those of the Americans in BUD/S training. LDNN Training Class III retained 38 LDNN trainees by the end of April.(41)

Team Two's 10th platoon relieved the 7th on 22 April at My Tho.(42) In one of their first operations in country, the 10th platoon was guided to a Viet Cong meeting by a V.C. defector. After the SEALs secured the area, the defector pointed out six cadre who were then detained and turned over to the National Police. Once interrogated, the V.C. gave information leading to the arrest of over 100 other guerrillas in the My Tho area. These Viet Cong had infiltrated every U.S. and Allied agency and military unit in My Tho. Their arrests denied the enemy vital intelligence utilized in hit and run guerrilla attacks. It was also a frightening indicator of how deeply the V.C. and North Vietnamese had penetrated the government.(43) On 26 April, Bravo platoon listened to deceptive Viet Cong radio calls during their extraction. Local enemy forces were attempting to lure the Navy riverine craft into a trap by making the boat believe the SEALs needed an emergency pick up. The Boat Support Units (BSUs) were always ready to press into a firefight to extract a SEAL patrol in trouble. Such a deceptive call could easily have made an inexperienced crew fall into a V.C.

The Viet Cong proved once again the depth of their resourcefulness.(44)

On 25 April, one of the three SEAL Team One platoons which had been working in the RSSZ was transferred into the IV Corps region to conduct operations in the Mekong Delta. It was during the next three weeks that SEAL Team One detachments suffered five fatalities. On 27 April, Boatswain's Mate First Class Walter Pope was killed accidentally by non-hostile machinegun fire while enroute to an operational area.(45) On 6 May, Petty Officer Second Class David Wine was killed in action when he drowned during a beach insertion along the Ham Loung River.(46) Both deaths occurred in Kien Hoa Province. (See map 3.) Storekeeper Second Class Donald Zillgitt was killed by small arms fire on 12 May while leading a team of 53 PRUs in Vinh Binh Province. The team was sent to counter-attack a Viet Cong force which had overrun the hamlet of Giang Lon, three miles northwest of Phu Vinh. (See map 5.) After landing by helicopter about mid-day just south of the hamlet, the PRUs came in heavy contact and were pinned down in a rice paddy. Before long, they were about to be overwhelmed. Zillgitt deployed the men, then led two fierce assaults against the Communists. On the second attack, he fell mortally wounded. His PRUs continued the assault, driving the Communists out of the hamlet and killing seventeen of their number.(47) Three days later, Petty Officer First Class Donnie Patrick from Mike platoon was killed by an explosion, believed to have been a mine, in Vinh Long Province. The explosion occurred as the platoon was inserting from a riverine craft four miles southeast of Cho Loch. (See map 5.) Mike platoon stood down until the end of the month due to the injuries sustained by seven

for SEALs in the same incident.(48) Finally, On 19 May, Chief  
Patrician's Mate Gordon Brown was killed by a boobytrap while  
leading a PRU patrol in Kien Giang Province. (See map 3.) He was  
trying to investigate a wooden box discovered by his patrol when the  
mine detonated. Six of his PRU force were seriously wounded.(49)  
These fatalities were a grim reminder of the hazardous daily missions  
the frogmen conducted, almost always deep within territory  
controlled by the Communists.

In the early hours of the morning of 11 May, Team Two's 3rd  
platoon initiated an ambush on a large guerrilla force. The enemy  
soldiers countered and pinned the Americans down, wounding the SEAL  
platoon leader. Although wounded, the officer called in close air  
support on the superior V.C. unit and led a stiff attack on the  
Communists. As a result, the frogmen were able to extract  
themselves successfully. On 14 May, 8th platoon became engaged with an 82-man  
well-trained and equipped enemy force near the Cambodian border,  
twelve miles south of Chau Doc. (See map 5.) The SEALs had set an  
ambush along a reported V.C. infiltration route, and soon discovered  
that their intelligence was quite accurate. The V.C. had the SEALs  
pinned down inside a graveyard for four hours, while the frogmen  
moved from tombstone to tombstone returning a heavy volume of fire.  
The Communist force had come from across the border and each time  
they attempted to overwhelm the SEALs, they were beaten back. Just  
as it seemed the Americans were finished, Navy SEAWOLF helo gunships  
arrived overhead and, with artillery support to add punch, drove the  
enemy back across the border. The OIC of the SEALs, who led his  
team back to base without a single casualty, later declared he  
thought the fight was the end of the road for his platoon until

port arrived. Twenty-four enemy soldiers were killed and an additional forty wounded.(50)

On 16 May, a combined SEAL/PRU element struck out into enemy territory to search for a Viet Cong unit which had mortared Chau. The team came under heavy attack from mortars, RPGs, and automatic weapons and utilized helo assets for fire support. They travelled nearly 1500 meters to a small pagoda where a large firefight erupted. The unit moved to a clearing and extracted at about 2100. The next day, an ARVN sweep located thirty-six guerrillas killed by the fighting.(51) Before the end of the month, Delta platoon worked with several men of EOD to destroy a 750 pound bomb in a recently-vacated V.C. base camp.(52)

In the Spring, 200,000 anti-war protestors had joined in New York to demonstrate against the war. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. The summer brought urban riots in black communities on a huge scale. Unrest at home seemed to be a trademark for the year 1968, but in Vietnam, the war continued.

The larger successes enjoyed by the SEAL platoons in the Spring of 1968 surpassed the previous gains of earlier years. Although SEAL casualties had occurred, especially in Team One units, the general attitude of the men was bold and aggressive. It was not uncommon for SEAL platoons to attack a much larger group of enemy troops. On one mission, while embarked on river boats, a patrol struck a group which turned out to be the rear security element for two V.C. battalions. Rather than breaking contact, the SEALs initiated a heavy volume of fire, then struck ashore to press the attack. After a fierce, fifteen-minute firefight, the Communist forces broke and ran.(53) On yet another operation, on a dark,

any night, six SEALs discovered three huts in enemy territory. Breaking into one and returning, a SEAL scout reported seeing six to eight weapons inside next to a number of sleeping men. The patrol leader multiplied this by three, (for the number of hootches), to estimate a force of about 18-24 men. Considering the SEALs still had the element of surprise, he felt the odds were about even. The team split up and set directional claymore mines facing the huts. They were able to kill nineteen guerrillas without firing a gunshot.(54)

UDT, meanwhile, continued to survey hundreds of miles of coastline. In May, Det Bravo from UDT 12 surveyed the Hon Heo Peninsula ten miles north of Nha Trang. (See map 2.) Many of the surveys were routine. Many were not. The lightly armed frogmen came under frequent attack, particularly from sniper fire, on a large number of operations.(55) Mostly exposed and with little cover, they conducted their work in the open surf and on beaches, sustaining several casualties. When they were not fighting the enemy, they were braving the elements. They were also instrumental in many salvage, rescue, and body recovery operations.(56) On 25 May, UDT 12's Det Foxtrot, located onboard USS Thomaston (LSD 28), assisted in the recovery of fourteen men who had been aboard a CH-46 helicopter that went into the ocean astern of USS Valley Forge. All hands were saved without serious injury.(57)

Late the following month, Team Two's 9th platoon killed a Communist propaganda team which traveled from hamlet to hamlet attempting to coerce the populace into supporting the guerrilla struggle. Eight V.C. were captured and three other suspects who were detained turned out later to be Cambodians brought into the

region by the Communists to assist the V.C. agricultural effort.

They had been undergoing political indoctrination when captured.(58)

On 6 June, Juliett platoon relieved Bravo platoon at Nha

Be.(59) On the 21st, Mike platoon killed nine V.C. on a patrol

while searching for a reported arms factory during a seven-hour

operation on the west bank of the Co Chien River four miles

north-northwest of Phu Vinh.(60) (See map 5.) Delta platoon was

called upon to dive on the wreckage of a helicopter which crashed

into the Long Tau River just a few hundred meters from the Nha Be

helo pad. (See map 6.) Four bodies of American servicemen were

recovered.(61) Juliett platoon killed eight Viet Cong in two

sampans in a riverine ambush on the 26th five miles north of Phu

Vinh and three days later, a squad from Juliett ran down eight more

enemy soldiers who attempted to evade their patrol. The enemy

forces were encountered on an island in the Co Chien River seven

miles northwest of Phu Vinh during the three-hour patrol. All the

V.C. were dispatched in the fighting.(62) Mike platoon captured two

enemy troops and killed four others in two separate ambushes on 29

and 30 June.(63)

Det Bravo from UDT 12 had been working from USS Diachenko (APD 123). Around this time, they attempted a survey of a beach where V.C. activity had been reported. Two prior attempts to recon the beach had resulted in the frogmen coming under fire and being forced from the shore. This time, flank security was again established as the men worked with minimal weaponry. Again, the UDT men came under attack. Weapons fire erupted from the nearby jungle and three V.C. soldiers charged the group. One of the young frogmen on security hit the middle guerrilla with a 40 mm grenade. It exploded and

...ped all three Viet Cong. The rest of the frogmen retreated into the water, firing as they went. Offshore, supporting vessels added fire to help the team extract. This time, all the men were recovered safely. It had been another close call.(64)

Another Detachment of UDT 12, Det Delta, continued to assist the U.S. Naval Support Activity at Danang. (See map 2.) When the Communists blocked modes of transportation by demolishing bridges or sinking boats in narrow channels and rivers, Delta was often called upon to demolish the obstructions. At other times they assisted the Danang harbor security when suspicious underwater activity was detected in the vital harbor. The V.C. and NVA sappers were good at their work, and many were trained in surface swimmer attacks. A few were even trained in scuba attacks.(65) UDT 11 was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for similar operations from August, 1968 to March, 1969, which involved ordnance disposal and search and salvage operations. Especially noted was their assistance in two major amphibious assaults, "Bold Mariner" and "Valient Hunt".(66) During many of their clearance operations, their waterborne explosions produced a number of large sea bass and other fish. Dubbed "DuPont Fishing," their lures often supplied local Vietnamese with another meal following the blasts.(67)

In the Mekong Delta, UDT's Det Golf patrolled with the riverine forces. When Viet Cong bunkers and complexes were discovered, the frogmen would be sent into enemy territory to demolish the facilities. Sometimes they were called upon to search for the bodies of Americans lost among the inland and coastal waterways. In one instance during July, UDT 12's Det Golf recovered the body of an important U.S. Army colonel. He was lost when the helicopter he was

marked upon crashed into a river. Authorities feared he had been captured when he could not be located. The recovery was conducted under enemy fire.(68) The activities of the UDT men in the Mekong Delta region allowed SEALs to concentrate on only combat patrols. Earlier in the war, SEALs were often called upon to conduct demolition and recovery operations. By mid-1968, these duties were generally a UDT mission, although SEALs were still involved from time to time. The UDT men were engaged frequently by enemy forces with small arms and constantly ran the gauntlet of V.C. river ambushes. Their toughest assignment was to disable Viet Cong boobytraps by blowing them in place. Large air-dropped ordnance was oftentimes secured by the guerrillas after it would fail to detonate. The V.C. would utilize every item they could get their hands on to boobytrap their facilities against the American and ARVN patrols. Finally in July, a second UDT Det in the Mekong Delta was established to support CTF 117, the Mobile Riverine Forces. Detachment Hotel operated originally from USS Windham County (LST 1171).(69) The increased work load on the west coast UDT Teams resulted in the formation of a third Team out of San Diego, UDT 13. The command was recommissioned (after having served earlier in World War II) on 1 July 1968.(70)

The SEALs attached to PRU units continued to contribute against selected V.C. infrastructure targets. In July, Frank Bomar, who stood 6 feet 4 inches and weighed 240 pounds, led a Vietnamese raiding party on a mission to capture a known Viet Cong village chief. The unit was ambushed and attacked from three sides. Bomar directed close air support and raced 250 yards through gunfire to carry a wounded South Vietnamese to safety. He then led the

...namese on a fierce attack of the village, leaving the V.C. chief  
...eight other Communist soldiers dead. He later received the  
...lon's third highest award for valor during the operation, the  
...ver Star. Up until December of 1969, Bomar had spent five combat  
...rs as a SEAL in Vietnam, more than most frogmen. He would return  
... more.(71)

In July, a new 24-foot, aluminum hull Light SEAL Support Craft  
(LSSC) arrived in country. Designed to insert and extract the  
...aritime commandos, the boat had a "V" hull and was powered by two  
...27 cubic inch gasoline engines which drove water jet pumps.(72)  
...efore long, the craft was used to launch SEAL squads on a variety  
...f operations. Luck still played a part in the interdiction of  
...guerrillas. Squads of men, at the right place and time, scored  
...significant successes against the Communists. A SEAL ambush on 2  
...July killed three V.C. with two other probable kills nine miles east  
...of Saigon. One of the dead was identified as an enemy artillery  
...battalion commander. Another was thought to be an artillery staff  
...officer who had been involved in numerous 122 mm rocket attacks on  
...Saigon. Indications were that he was enroute for another such  
...mission on the night the SEALs interdicted.(73) Another ambush on  
...the 16th, six miles east of Saigon, killed two Viet Cong. Divers  
...the following day recovered several assault rifles and over 400  
...rounds of ammunition from the ambush site.(74)

On the 20th, a SEAL patrol inserted 28 miles west of My Tho to  
...ambush a known V.C. tax extortionist operating in the area. The  
...enemy cadre was spotted several hundred meters away from the ambush  
...position in the early hours of the morning, along with three armed  
...Viet Cong. Across a canal and too far to be reliably engaged with

fl arms fire, the frogmen called in helo gunships on the enemy position, but were unable to confirm any casualties.(75) Another full action on the same day by five SEALs and seven PRUs netted one V.C. killed twelve miles southeast of My Tho in the hours before dawn.(76)

A Vietnamese LDNN Replacement Class III (Vietnamese SEALs) was graduated 22 June from their training. The class was composed of two officers and thirty-eight enlisted. Immediately following graduation, they were given four weeks of advanced training at Vung Tau. Already combat veterans from their actions during the Tet offensive, the class was put out on a large ambush as their first official combat operation. The mission took place in Phuoc Tuy Province, thirty miles southeast of Saigon on 19-20 July. U.S. SEAL advisors accompanied the force as it lay on a river. Just after midnight, one of the three LDNN squads fired on four unlighted sampans as they traveled into their ambush. Two of the craft were sunk and two V.C. killed. In short order, two more sampans entered the kill zone and were destroyed with three more Viet Cong killed. Yet two more entered another LDNN squad's area and were fired upon, killing three more V.C. and capturing two others. Two more enemy soldiers were seen wading in water near the original LDNN squad position and were killed. The third LDNN squad used two claymore mines to destroy yet two other sampans and kill an additional five Viet Cong. The unit extracted at 0345 after a very successful night of hit-and-run against the Communist insurgents.(77)

Hotel platoon relieved Delta platoon as part of Det Golf on 30 July.(78) SEAL patrols continued to sting the enemy in the Delta, but paid the price in return. On 2 August, Machinist's Mate First

Joseph Albrecht from Team Two's 9th platoon was killed by a boobytrapped grenade while on a three-day operation with a PRU force in the Seven Mountains region near the Cambodian border. (See map 4.) The platoon was on its last mission of the deployment; they withdrew after it became obvious that the mission could not be completed against the well-entrenched enemy forces. Boobytraps were laid throughout the entire area. One other SEAL was wounded in the incident.(79) A SEAL Team Two squad laid an ambush along a known communications route on 11 August. Just before midnight, an estimated fifteen V.C. approached from the west and entered the kill zone. The SEALs immediately initiated, killing five of the enemy, but were then taken under fire from four different positions. The frogmen called in mortar fire from a riverine boat and proceeded to wade south where they were extracted about an hour later.(80) On 13 August, a combined SEAL Team Two platoon and PRU force hit a V.C. political school seven miles southeast of Go Cong. (See map 5.) In a brief firefight, six enemy soldiers were killed and one captured. An agent later confirmed that seventeen enemy troops had been killed.(81) On the same day, StoreKeeper First Class Robert Wagner of SEAL Team One was killed twelve miles southeast of Ben Tre in Vinh Binh Province. (See map 5.) He, too, had been killed by a boobytrap during a recon patrol as a PRU advisor when a scout element attempted to pursue two fleeing Vietnamese. He had sustained fatal shrapnel wounds to the head and body from the incident and had been medivaced to Dong Tam.(82)

Five days later, Warrant Officer Eugene Tinnin of Juliett platoon was killed in a tragic accident on a patrol in Vinh Long Province nine miles northwest of Mo Cay. After inserting by PBR,

A unit patrolled to investigate a reported Viet Cong squad base. Encountering a pagoda, four SEALs were left in ambush to keep the area secured and under observation in the early morning hours before dawn. Tinnin and five others patrolled further to try to locate a second reported structure. In the darkness, the men mistakenly circled back into the ambushing element's kill zone. Just prior to striking, both units were in radio contact with each other and believed they were some distance apart. Believing that a V.C. unit had entered their ambush, the first SEAL squad initiated fire. Tinnin was killed and four other SEALs were injured in the affair. (See map 5.) One of two LDNN accompanying the patrol was also wounded.(83) Tinnin was later buried at sea.

On another raid on the 17th, a SEAL Team Two patrol made contact with a local V.C. company. Although the frogmen managed to kill only one of the enemy, the man turned out to be the company commander.(84) On the 24th, an east coast patrol combined with a PRU element to destroy a hospital complex and capture another grenade factory eight miles southeast of Go Cong near the mouth of the My Tho River. (See map 5.) While moving toward their initial objective, they ran head-long into a forty-man Viet Cong force which broke from the contact. Forty hootches were destroyed at the hospital site. Twenty-five V.C. were engaged at the factory, but they, too, chose to break and run. Also captured were the following:

- 6 82 mm mortar rounds
- 9 61 mm mortar rounds
- 25 105 mm recoilless rifle rounds
- 21 grenades

3 kilos of documents

Additionally, numerous grenade molds and tools were captured.

Forty-two Viet Cong total were killed in the operation. During their extraction, the team came under indirect enemy weapons fire and had to call in support of their own from helo gunships and an AM on a nearby river.(85)

On 28 August, the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) received word from Can Tho in the Delta that two Vietnamese had escaped a V.C. POW camp the night before. (See map 5.) Responsible for the coordination of prisoner recovery efforts, the JPRC sent a representative to the town to debrief the escapees. The former prisoners stated that the camp contained about thirty-five Vietnamese and eight American prisoners. A raiding party was immediately called for and a local PRU force, led by an American SEAL, was assigned the mission.

It was reported that the camp was guarded by only eight Viet Cong. JPRC provided the raiders with special equipment including radios, infrared strobelights, a liferaft, explosive boltcutters, and "Starlight" night vision scopes, which allowed a man to see in the night. The American frogman led a team of nine PRUs on an infiltration of the area on the night of 30 August. The group launched the operation after staging at an ARVN outpost. A sixty-man PRU force stood ready to assault the camp in helos once called by the small ground force. The infiltration group was guided across a river by an orbiting aircraft and began a stealthy target approach under darkness. At dawn, they were prematurely discovered while penetrating the target, but immediately pressed the attack. The sixty-man PRU force landed around the area from the helos and

empted to seal off the camp. Two of the guards were killed while others fled the site. Forty-nine Vietnamese were freed, but the eight U.S. POWs reported at the complex had been previously moved on August.(86) This was the type of operation that SEALs were assigned to execute. Although this operation was conducted skillfully, the American planners were to find that precise and especially timely intelligence were absolute keys to full mission success. Throughout the Vietnam War and into the following decades, the United States would find that they would consistently fail to react quickly enough to employ special operations forces effectively.

The following night, a SEAL Team One platoon combined with an eighteen-man PRU force led by an American SEAL to hit a reported meeting of district level V.C. cadre and three village chiefs. The SEALs set up security as the PRU force began to close for the attack. Suddenly, a V.C. squad initiated fire on the SEAL rear security element, who in turn opened fire. The PRU force struck the objective immediately, having lost the element of surprise. Four enemy soldiers were killed in the encounter.(87) In the last week of August, 4th platoon from Team Two traveled to the Delta to relieve 9th platoon.(88) By this time in 1968, it was rare to find a SEAL who did not have a tour in Vietnam.

Another Team Two squad made contact during an ambush on 9 September and killed two enemy soldiers.(89) SEAL Team Two's Lieutenant Fredrick Trani was killed on the 14th by a boobytrap while leading an LDNN patrol.(90) The 3rd platoon received word that a PRU agent, who had been captured by the Communists but later escaped, was hiding out in a V.C.-controlled hamlet disguised as a

at Cong. The agent was awaiting rescue. The SEALs penetrated the area on 15 September and successfully rescued the agent, killing three enemy soldiers and capturing three V.C. cadre. The cadre led the frogmen and a PRU force to several arms caches in the next few days. The capture included the following:

- 1 82 mm mortar
- 2 60 mm mortars
- 2 rocket launchers
- 3 machineguns
- 4 rifles
- 40 anti-armor grenades
- 5,800 small arms rounds (91)

Two nights later, one squad from 3rd platoon reacted to a V.C. rocket attack on a merchant vessel the same day in the Long Tau shipping channel. The SEALs conducted a night ambush in the RSSZ and killed all six of the V.C. rocket team, capturing their weapons.(92) A team of SEALs also operated in the Qui Nhon Peninsula in II Corps for a profitable two-week period. (See map 2.) On the 19th, a SEAL unit ambushed a V.C. mortar crew enroute to Qui Nhon, where they had intended to mortar the city. The ambush effectively thwarted the enemy operation.(93) Ten pounds of valuable documents describing future V.C. plans to attack the area and listing some of the local infrastructure were captured. On 3 October, five SEALs and two LDNN led a 35-man PRU force against a small enemy complex which had fired on their patrol six miles southwest of My Tho. (See map 5.) Seven V.C. were killed and one captured, along with a small amount of weapons and documents.(94) These various operations illustrate the continued operational

gress of the SEAL squads. Much of their value was just beginning to be realized. From intelligence nets the SEALs themselves were establishing in their own areas of operation. In most areas, the strength of the frogmen gained the confidence of the local inhabitants, who sometimes provided important and critical information.

In early October, a Vietnamese woman provided intelligence on a POW camp in which her husband was being held. A combined SEAL/PRU force inserted on Con Coc Island 77 miles southwest of Saigon at the mouth of the Bassac River from six PBRs before dawn on 6 October to conduct a raid on the facility. (See map 5.) They overran the camp, capturing two V.C. guards and a large amount of documents and money. The camp was destroyed along with a tax collection station. Also secured in the raid were 24 Vietnamese prisoners, some of them held since the Tet Offensive earlier in the year. Twelve miles north of My Tho on the same day, another squad of SEALs and a SEAL-led PRU force broke into yet another V.C. POW camp after being led to the facility by two wives of inmates. (See map 5.) The rescue team traveled three hours up the Bassac River to insert by riverine craft. The SEAL squad led the final assault in order to quickly cut off the guards from the prisoners. In this manner they could protect the POWs during the firefight by preventing the Viet Cong from firing into the prisoner cages as they fled the camp. The SEALs fired their weapons slightly high initially so as not to accidentally hit the POWs. Seven V.C. were killed and two more guards were captured along with numerous documents. Twenty-six Vietnamese prisoners were also liberated.(95) One SEAL who was on the operation later described a highly emotional scene as the frogmen

secured the camp and helped the liberated prisoners back to the extraction boats.

During October and November, a series of maritime operations under the codename "Bold Dragon" was executed. This series marked the first coordinated operations of that size under the direct control of the Chief of Naval Operations, Vietnam. The force included two SEAL platoons operating from U.S. Naval vessels off the coast and supported by Army and Navy helo gunships. Phase I was conducted off Long Tau and Ba Xuyen while Phase II was off Phu Quoc Island.(96) (See map 2.) Also throughout October and November, numerous small ambushes made contact, stinging the V.C. forces and keeping them off balance. SEAL Det Bravo, the PRU advisors, was expanded from one officer and twelve enlisted to include thirteen officers and twenty-one enlisted on 4 October.(97)

During an operation on 10 and 11 October, Yeoman Third Class Gary Gallagher was serving as one of those PRU advisors in the Mekong Delta. The mission of his unit was to capture prisoners for intelligence purposes. As they patrolled, several enemy troops were captured and detained. The force split into two different groups and advanced along two different banks of a canal. Viet Cong were believed to be in the immediate vicinity, and it was at this point that one of the prisoners let out a loud warning to his comrades in the field. The half of the patrol on the opposite bank from Gallagher immediately began to receive a heavy volume of small arms fire from a numerically superior force. Gallagher realized that he had to link up the entire unit to extract safely from the area. He took control of the prisoners and led his half of the team across the canal. On the other side, he rallied his men and directed their

... Their heavy and accurate return volley temporarily suppressed the enemy, and he was able to immediately lead his men in a hasty controlled withdrawal. Before completing the extraction, he rescued a seriously wounded companion and physically carried the man over eight kilometers to safety. For his actions, he was later awarded the Navy Cross.(98)

Three separate actions on 21 October netted four U.C. killed and four sampans destroyed ten miles south of Saigon.(99) The month ended on a fatal note as Petty Officer Second Class Roberto Ramos from SEAL Team Two's 4th platoon was killed on the 29th during a combined SEAL/PRU operation. Ramos was one of three U.S. SEALs leading a 100-man PRU force when they contacted a Viet Cong battalion. He was hit by small arms fire 29 miles south of Long Myen. Fixed wing and Cobra gunships were called to help the unit break contact.(100) (See map 3.)

SEAL Team Two's 5th platoon relieved the 10th at My Tho in late October. In the six months to come, the 5th platoon would find that squad-size operations would still yield the greatest results for the average SEAL unit. They also would find that the use of indigenous sampans for insertions and movements would be very helpful as well as more clandestine for patrols, so long as the external appearances were changed regularly. Finally, they like other platoons, would find that the use of indigenous personnel dressed similarly to enemy forces, such as in black pajamas and carrying Soviet weaponry, would almost always be readily taken in by villagers and provided with information on enemy activity in the area.

A SEAL ambush on 15 November four miles southwest of My Tho engaged ten Viet Cong as they moved about the area. A sharp

fight followed, killing five of the enemy. As the SEALs moved  
extract by helo, mortar fire was placed into the area.(101) On  
November, Electronics Technician Third Class James Sanders from  
AL Team One died while in Saigon, though not as a result of  
hostilities. Two days later, Alfa squad from SEAL Team Two's 4th  
battalion, made a night insertion close to the Cambodian border.  
Their mission was to locate an enemy base camp and place it under  
observation to gather intelligence. While moving to their planned  
observation point, a lone V.C. soldier was sighted in an open field just  
after first light. Two of the SEALs were sent to stalk the soldier  
and attempt to capture him. The V.C. soldier detected their  
approach, and a brief firefight ensued resulting in the enemy's  
death. Immediately after, the nearby base camp on Da Dung mountain,  
now fully alerted, used its firepower against the SEALs. The  
incoming fire included .50 caliber machineguns, mortars, 40 mm  
grenades, and a heavy volume of small arms. The main body of SEALs  
returned fire to cover the stalking pair, allowing them to seek  
cover. The patrol fell back and a large V.C. force began pursuit.  
Helos were called in for support. While they provided covering  
fire, the SEAL patrol leader and one other member broke from the  
main group, located the two separated stalkers, and returned all  
hands to the security perimeter of men. The team then  
extracted.(102)

The heavy contact only convinced the SEALs that the camp was a  
lucrative target. On 7 December, the frogmen returned once again to  
the base camp and set up their observation post undetected. Helo  
gunships were called in to engage the camp. About an hour later,  
the helos were called in once more, while the SEALs assisted with

Automatic weapons and mortar fire. The enemy returned a heavy volume of fire, and the SEALs fell back to avoid encirclement. Shortly after, they extracted. Fifteen U.C. were confirmed killed and twenty-nine wounded.(103)

From 16 to 23 December, UDT 11's DETs Bravo, Golf, and India combined to assist riverine forces on operation "Silver Mace". The forces conducted the first UDT inland waterborne demolition raid of the war and cleared over fourteen miles of enemy dominated waterways.(104) Det Delta, from the same team, recovered the first jet 10 reconnaissance drone on 11 December.(105) At the end of the year, Team Two's 6th platoon relieved 3rd platoon at Binh Thuy.(106)

Throughout the year 1968, Naval Special Warfare Units had been at the peak of their operating proficiency. The random hit and miss contact patrols and ambushes from the early years now gave way to operations which reacted on intelligence. Much of the intelligence was gleaned from nets being developed by the SEAL platoons in their respective areas. Although the ambush was still used heavily, more raids were now conducted to strike specific point targets. The U.C. lost numerous important arms and ordnance caches as well as medical supplies and facilities during the year. Other operations teamed SEAL-advised PRU and LDNN units with SEAL platoons in more sophisticated combined missions. Their small unit actions carried the war deep into the enemies' denied areas and extracted a heavy price from them. The increase in the combat experience level within the SEAL squads by the end of 1968 produced highly effective small units. After the heavy U.C. losses during Tet, the Communists could ill-afford to tangle with the frogmen. When they did, they oftentimes lost heavily. But the frogmen paid a heavy price in

turn. Nine men from Team One were killed and six from Team Two,  
well as the commanding officer of UDT 12. Countless others from  
th UDT and SEALs were wounded. Sacrifices were counted in many  
ys.

V. Tet (1968)

- (5) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1968, p. 43.
- (6) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 4(b).
- (7) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 384B (Post Operation Report).
- (8) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 1.
- (9) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1968, p. 1.
- (10) Time (January 12, 1968), pp. 18-19.
- (11) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 383 (Post Operation Report).
- (12) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 2.
- (13) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1968, pp. 1, 20; Bernard Waddell, I Am Somebody (Boston, Massachusetts, 1986), pp. 231-232.
- (14) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1968, pp. 109-110.
- (15) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 2.
- (16) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1968, pp. 33-34.
- (17) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 386C (Post Operation Report).
- (18) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 390 (Post Operation Report). The bond between SEAL Team One and the Australian SAS continued to grow throughout the war. By the early 1970s, both units agreed to begin a Personnel Exchange Program (PEP). One officer and one enlisted from SEAL Team One were posted to Perth, the home of the Australian Special Air Service, for a two-year period. Likewise, the SAS sent a similar contingent to San Diego. The program continued until 1984, when the Australian Army determined that one of their PEP billets should by all rights be involved in an exchange with the U.S. Army's Special Forces at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. A PEP exchange between the Australians and SEALs continues today in the form of one enlisted.
- (19) John B. Dwyer, "Surface Action," Soldier of Fortune (May, 1987), p. 47.
- (20) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 217 (Post Operation Report).
- (21) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 1.

- (8) For details of the Battle of Khe Sahn, see Robert Pisor, The  
End of The Line (New York, 1982).
- (9) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1968, p. 23.
- (10) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary February, 1968, p. 139; Pacific  
Stars and Stripes, September 22, 1968, p. 9.
- (11) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year  
1968, Enclosure 1, p. 2; Pacific Stars and Stripes, September 22,  
1968, p. 9; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1968, pp. 23-24;  
John B. Dwyer, "Swamp Warrior," Soldier of Fortune (December, 1986),  
p. 71-72.
- (12) Alexander Jason, Heroes (Pinole, California, 1979), p. 54.
- (13) For details of the Battle for Hue, see Keith William Nolan, The  
Battle For Hue Tet 1968 (Novato, California, 1983).
- (14) SEAL Team Two Barndance Card 228 (Post Operation Report).
- (15) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary February, 1968, p. 55.
- (16) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 402 (Post Operation Report).
- (17) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary February, 1968, p. 54.
- (18) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year  
1968, Enclosure 2, p. 1.
- (19) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year  
1968, Enclosure 1, p. 2.
- (20) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1968, pp. 39-41.
- (21) SEAL Team Two Barndance Card 241 (Post Operation Report).
- (22) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1968, pp. 30-31.
- (23) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 433 (Post Operation Report).
- (24) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1968, pp. 31-32; The Navy  
Cross, Vietnam (Forest Ranch, California, 1987), pp. 124-125.
- (25) Richard Hill, "Mean Mothers With Dirty Faces," Esquire (May,  
1974), p. 150.
- (26) SEAL Team Two Barndance Card 243 (Post Operation Report).
- (27) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1968, pp. 46-47.
- (28) Ibid., p. 121.
- (29) Ibid., pp. 35-37; Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team  
One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 2; SEAL Team One Barndance

- ard 442E (Post Operation Report); Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, pp. 3.
- (40) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary April, 1968, pp. 29-31.
- (41) Ibid., p. 105.
- (42) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 3.
- (43) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 5.
- (44) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 495 (Post Operation Report).
- (45) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 2.
- (46) Ibid., pp. 2-3.
- (47) Ibid., p. 3; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary May, 1968, pp. 38-39.
- (48) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary May, 1968, pp. 39-41.
- (49) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3.
- (50) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary May, 1968, pp. 25-26.
- (51) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 5.
- (52) SEAL Team One Barndance Card 480 (Post Operation Report).
- (53) John G. Hubbell, "Supercommandos of The Wetlands," Reader's Digest (June, 1967), pp. 53-54.
- (54) Dana Drenkowski, "America's Underwater Elite: The U.S. Navy SEALs," Soldier of Fortune (April, 1979), pp. 49-50.
- (55) Pacific Stars and Stripes, June, 1968.
- (56) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1968, Chronology of Events.
- (57) Ibid., p. 15.
- (58) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 6.
- (59) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3.

- (60) Ibid.; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1968, pp. 35-37.
- (61) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3.
- (62) Ibid., p. 4; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1968, pp. 35-39.
- (63) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3.
- (64) Pacific Stars and Stripes, August 1, 1968 p. 7.
- (65) Ibid., August 29, 1968.
- (66) Navy Unit Commendation for UDT 11, August 28, 1968 to March 4, 1969.
- (67) UDT 11 Cruisebook 1968-1969, "Delta's View of Danang."
- (68) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1968, p. 21.
- (69) Ibid., p. 18.
- (70) UDT 13 Cruisebook 1969, Recommissioning Page.
- (71) Pacific Stars and Stripes, December 2, 1969, p. 7.
- (72) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1968, p. 27.
- (73) Ibid., p. 31.
- (74) Ibid., pp. 33-34.
- (75) Ibid., pp. 39-40.
- (76) Ibid., p. 40.
- (77) Ibid, p. 134; Pacific Stars and Stripes, August 3, 1968; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1968, p. 105.
- (78) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1968, p. 57.
- (79) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary August, 1968, p. 2; Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 4.
- (80) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 7.
- (81) Ibid.
- (82) COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon 161500Z Aug 68; COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon 180341Z Aug 68.

- (83) CTU 116.6.2 2011502 Aug 68; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary August, 1968, p. 3.
- (84) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 7.
- (85) Ibid., pp. 7, 8.
- (86) CINCPAC 052130Z Sep 68.
- (87) CTU 116.6.6 310400Z Aug 68.
- (88) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 1.
- (89) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 8.
- (90) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 5.
- (91) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 8.
- (92) Ibid.
- (93) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary September, 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 2.
- (94) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary October, 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 1; Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 9.
- (95) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary October, 1968, Enclosure 2, pp. 2-3; Pacific Stars and Stripes, October 8, 1968; Matthew Fleck, "Don't Run a Perfect Op," Gung Ho (May, 1984), pp. 20-25.
- (96) Interview with Capt. Robert Gormly by author, 23 August 1987, Virginia Beach, Virginia.
- (97) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1968, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.
- (98) The Navy Cross, Vietnam, pp. 123-124.
- (99) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary October, 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 4.
- (100) Ibid., 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 4; Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1968, Enclosure 1, p. 5.
- (101) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1968, Enclosure 2, p. 3.
- (102) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 9.

103) Ibid.

104) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1968,  
Enclosure 1, p. 8.

105) Ibid., p. 7.

106) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year  
1968, Enclosure 1, p. 5.

## VI. Unending War (1969)

The Inauguration year began with the Nixon Administration assuming the political reins in the White House. At the end of October, President Johnson had ordered a bombing halt of North Vietnam in a political effort to support Hubert Humphrey's Democratic bid for the Presidency, and in hopes that the North Vietnamese would enter into serious peace negotiations. In return, the Communists utilized every stall and political tactic to prolong the discussions. The more time the peace talks consumed, the more time was bought for the goals of the revolution. The escalation of the Vietnam conflict, and especially the Tet Offensive of 1968, had created a very vocal sector of American opinion against the war, and especially against the Democratic administration. In Vietnam, the battlefield held the same face. For the men in the war, it was becoming a conflict with no end in sight. As 1969 began, the SEAL and UDT platoons and detachments continued to carry the war into enemy-controlled territory.

On 10 January, a seven-man squad from Team Two's 6th platoon made an early morning insertion along the Vam Co River. (See map 6.) As part of Operation "Giant Slingshot," the group patrolled inland for about a kilometer. At that point, they discovered a huge arms cache. It took them the next three hours to carry out the entire net. Included were the following:

320 mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle rounds

25 hand grenades

27,000 rounds of small arms ammunition(1)

On the 11th, a SEAL Team Two patrol was moving to a night

tion in the RSSZ. Moving in the Long Tau Shipping Channel, the  
was towing a smaller Light SEAL Support Craft (LSSC) alongside.  
LSSC suddenly capsized throwing the now unconscious Navy  
man, who was wearing a heavy flak jacket, under the Mike boat.  
SEAL immediately dove into the eight-knot current and went  
beneath the vessel. With no visibility, the SEAL located the  
man and brought him to the surface.(2)

Three days later on the 14th, Signalman First Class David  
Wilson from Team One's Charlie platoon activated a boobytrapped 105  
howitzer round and was killed five miles southeast of Vinh Long  
during a river insertion from a LSSC. (See map 5.) Wilson was the  
fourth man to exit the riverine craft when he stepped on the  
pressure activated device. Another wounded SEAL was also evacuated  
to the hospital at Binh Thuy.(3) That same day, 14 January,  
President Johnson awarded SEAL Team One its first Presidential Unit  
Citation as one of his final acts in office. The commanding officer  
and seventeen men of the unit attended the ceremony at the White  
House. All had served in the Team in Vietnam during the period  
between 16 July 1966 and 31 August 1967.(4) Two days later, on 16  
January, Team Two's Gunner's Mate First Class Harry Mattingly was  
killed while leading a PRU operation in Vietnam.(5) This year began  
with success, recognition, and fatalities. The only clear  
difference from the previous year's end was a mark on a calendar.

On the 19th, a squad from Team One's Alfa platoon set a hasty  
ambush along a river after discovering a bunker and hearing voices  
in the area. Three sampans were fired upon, killing five V.C. and  
causing a large secondary explosion in one of the craft. The team  
caught small arms fire from both banks as they withdrew and

ected.(6) On 21 January, Delta platoon from Team One was assigned to CTF 115 (Coastal Surveillance Group).(7) The headquarters for this group was at Cam Ranh Bay in II Corps, along the Vietnamese coast. (See map 2.) CTF 115 was assigned the duty of stemming the flow of seaborne infiltration of arms and forces. Their assets included up to 84 Swift boats which assisted in interdiction missions. Also on the 21st, Swimmer Delivery Vehicles (UDVs) were first successfully utilized from USS Tunny to conduct hydrographic surveys. Some initial mechanical problems then occurred with Tunny, and the detachment returned to Subic Bay for repairs.(8)

By the end of the month, the Four-Party Paris Peace Talks resumed. It did not appear that meaningful discussions toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict were about to emerge. During the same month, from 2 to 25 February, senior SEAL officers and commanders toured their forces in the Pacific. The commanding officers of SEAL Teams One and Two accompanied the Commander of Naval Special Warfare Group, Pacific, in an inspection of deployed UDT and SEAL detachments and platoons in Vietnam and throughout the Western Pacific.(9) Also in mid-February, Team Two's 7th platoon relieved the 4th platoon in Vietnam.(10) UDT 11's Det Delta, working out of Frogsville in Danang, continued operations, including the recovery of numerous valuable Det 10 pilotless reconnaissance drones.(11) (See map 2.)

On 5 February, a seven-man squad from Team Two conducted a patrol in reaction to information supplied by a friendly agent. Their early morning foray led them to a hut along the My Tho River where several armed men were observed. They crept closer and

contacted the small enemy force, killing five. It was discovered that they had hit an enemy postal station. Their haul included sixteen pounds of valuable documents and V.C. mail.(12) Another Two squad from the 5th platoon operating out of My Tho conducted an ambush along the same river ten days later, killing five high-ranking V.C. officials, wounding two others, and capturing several small arms as well as two pounds of documents.(13) On 4 March, UDT 13, the newest west coast Underwater Demolition Team, relieved UDT 11 in WESTPAC.(14) Included within their ranks was the 5th platoon from UDT 21, whose home station was Norfolk, Virginia. The east coast frogmen, (two officers and twenty enlisted), were assigned to supplement the four platoons of the undermanned UDT 13 for the deployment.

On 2 March, a 5th platoon squad struck once again along the My Tho River. After insertion, the unit patrolled for about an hour before discovering two huts. The squad's indigenous interpreter was sent into one hut to mingle with its occupants, as if he were a Viet Cong guerrilla. He returned to report the presence of several V.C. in the second hut. While the SEALs moved to surround the structure, a V.C. guard took them under fire and alerted his comrades nearby. A number of enemy soldiers were seen fleeing the area and were engaged by the squad. Ten were killed, one wounded, and a number of small arms and rockets were captured.(15)

About this time, it was discovered from an enemy defector that the Communists had an important intelligence unit operating from an island in Nha Trang Bay in II Corps. (See map 2.) The unit had a large network of agents which had infiltrated important areas inside the city to gain important data critical to their operations. At

At the same time, these people were also used to disrupt American and South Vietnamese operations. In such close proximity to this important central coastal city, the unit had operated under the noses of allied forces for some time. Now the location of their base of operations was known. But a large attack on the island would only result in the destruction of the unit. They had to be taken alive in order to ferret out the entire network of Communist agents. It would take a special approach to try to capture them.

A SEAL squad under the command of Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Joseph Kerrey was tasked with the mission. On 14 March, Kerrey and six other SEALs clandestinely inserted on the island with the defector who had provided the information. They were racing against the clock. The defector was from the Communist unit on the island. He had grown weary of the long struggle and separation from his home, and had thus surrendered. He had told the SEALs to expect about five lightly armed enemy cadre at the locations he would guide them to. His comrades would soon discover his absence and would surely vacate the island. Time was of the utmost importance.

Kerrey and his men stealthfully slipped ashore undetected under a dark and moonless night. The SEAL Lieutenant led his group about 350 feet up a rock cliff in order to get above the enemy force undetected. The free-climbing was done without the safety of ropes. After descending a short distance on the other side, the first group of Communists was located. Still undetected, Kerrey split his men in order to keep the enemy covered. He moved out with the rest of the team to locate the remaining enemy cadre. For maximum stealth, Kerrey and his men removed their boots and continued their search while barefoot. But their luck had run out.

the Communists had seen them first and engaged them with weapons fire. Kerrey himself was severely injured when a grenade exploded near his feet and hurled him into some rocks. The lower half of his right leg was destroyed and he began bleeding profusely. The group that attacked the frogmen was more than five in number and much more heavily armed than the defector had indicated. The SEALs immediately countered under Kerrey's direction, and a sharp firefight ensued. The second element's fire was called in, catching the V.C. force off guard in a hail of crossfire. The SEALs suppressed the enemy force and secured the area. A tourniquet was applied to Kerrey's leg to stop the bleeding. The team moved to an area where evacuation could be conducted. Helicopters were called in for the prisoners and wounded.

The SEALs had captured several extremely important Communist members who would later provide information critical to the Allied forces. Additionally, a large amount of material including documents, weaponry, and personal equipment was captured. Some of the documents contained lists of the Communist subversives within the city. Kerrey himself sustained significant injuries from the encounter, but remained in control until nearly unconscious during the evacuation. One other man on the patrol, the Corpsman, lost an eye in the encounter. For his actions, Kerrey would become the first frogman in U.S. Navy history to receive the nation's highest award for gallantry, the Medal of Honor, in May 1970.<sup>(16)</sup> This operation, again, was a classic example of utilizing the full potential of highly trained SEALs in a true maritime special operation. Coupled with precise and timely intelligence, the probability of mission success was greatly enhanced.

The next day, North Korea shot down an American reconnaissance plane, killing 31 aboard. It was incidents such as this which called for potential retaliatory strikes against the perpetrators. The Joint Chiefs of Staff normally would produce a large list of potential targets and actions which could be taken against each. With such vast territory adjacent to the sea as in North Korea, retaliatory options utilizing frogmen were always strongly considered. Although the Pueblo incident was fresh in the American conscience, the new Nixon Administration, deeply involved in Vietnam, only threatened action if another provocation occurred.

On the 20th of March, a PRU force, led by a SEAL from Team Two, made a helo assault into enemy territory in the Mekong Delta. The V.C. force they had targeted was well-entrenched, and returned a heavy volume of small arms fire. Two of the indigenous PRUs were wounded. The SEAL advisor moved through fire to provide first aid to the two. He then directed the assault team's fire and called for helo medical evacuation. Braving enemy fire once more, he carried the more seriously wounded trooper to a helicopter. He returned to lead the group in an attack of the enemy positions, resulting in four V.C. killed, and one other captured along with two rocket launchers.(17)

Late in the same month on the 23rd, 7th platoon was serving as part of Det Alfa from SEAL Team Two. Some of the platoon were flying aboard two Navy SEAWOLF helicopters on a visual recon and strike mission in Kien Giang Province along the Cambodian border near Da Dung Mountain. (See map 5.) The helos came under enemy fire and proceeded to make strafing runs on the V.C. positions. One helo was hit and damaged on its second pass and crashed in an open

the field. Radioman Second Class Robert J. Thomas (Known as "J.") was thrown from the aircraft on impact, receiving several injuries. Stunned by the crash, he struggled to his feet as the wreckage began to burn. He rushed to aid crewmen still trapped inside. Enemy forces began to fire at the downed helo from the mountain and a nearby treeline. Thomas succeeded in removing one crewman from the wreckage and putting him in a covered position. Meanwhile, an accompanying helo, under intense fire, had dropped a second man into the site. He, too, became wounded as he and Thomas broke into the flaming wreckage and recovered the trapped pilot. Thomas continued to try to remove the other two crewmen trapped underneath the helo, but was finally driven away by intense heat and exploding ordnance onboard. Thomas and the other Navyman then removed the injured crewmen to a safer distance. The V.C. were now closing in on the four men. While armed with only a handgun, Thomas shielded one of the injured and engaged the approaching V.C., killing at least one man. His fire helped thwart the enemy's advance as an Army helo swooped into the site. Two Army crewmen raced over to the men to assist and all six men succeeded in getting aboard. The helo then flew the men to safety. As fighting continued in the area, two additional SEALs rappelled into the crashsite from yet another helo and recovered the bodies of the two dead crewmen from the wreckage. For his actions, RM2 Thomas was later awarded the Navy Cross.(18)

Also during March, a PRU force, led by an American SEAL, hit a Viet Cong provincial committee meeting after inserting directly onto the site by helo. The intense fighting resulted in forty V.C. killed, including two regional and one provincial level political

ere. No friendly forces received injuries.(19) On the 25th, another seven-man squad from the 5th platoon embarked on a sampan up the My Tho River. They were searching for a V.C. unit of unknown strength which was reported in the area. While nearing Thoi Son Island in the middle of the river, the squad observed a large number of armed men in an open area on the island. The SEALs immediately disembarked onto the canal bank and began to engage the force. Their initial fire killed eight of the enemy, but sent an alarm throughout the area. The SEALs began to receive a heavy volume of fire from three different locations from an enemy force estimated at over 200 men. They called for helicopter gunship support and were able to extract under fire without casualties.(20)

On 3 April, two SEALs and an LDNN lifted off the helo pad at the MACV compound at Ha Tien near the Cambodian border. (See map 4.) The U.S. Army UH-1D immediately experienced problems and crashed into the Gulf of Thailand directly offshore. One SEAL was thrown into the cockpit when the helicopter hit the water. The other was knocked unconscious. Both recovered from the initial shock and went into action. After escaping the cockpit, one SEAL pushed the LDNN and a door gunner out the side of the aircraft, allowing them to escape. The other SEAL released the other door gunner from his safety harness, swam him to the surface, and then to a nearby sampan. He then returned to the sinking helicopter to assist his friend. Both dove down to help the trapped copilot. They located the copilot's door to the cockpit and pried it open. While one SEAL held the door, the other entered the cockpit and freed the flier. They swam him to the surface and to the safety of rescue craft.(21)

With the establishment of better intelligence nets, SEAL squads and SEAL-led PRU elements continued to have greater success in conducting or killing Communist cadre. A SEAL abduction patrol on 15 April ambushed two sampans at the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula, killing five Viet Cong.(22) SEAL Team Two's 8th platoon relieved the 5th platoon on 18 April.(23) Frogmen were now gaining multiple tour experience in the war, which increased their effectiveness. Another SEAL element conducted an operation near the Bay Hap River in An Xuyen Province on 11 May. (See map 3.) The frogmen flushed out several V.C. while searching some structures they had found, and engaged them with small arms fire. Six of the V.C. were killed.(24) Three SEALs from Team One's Charlie platoon were killed on 18 May in Kien Giang Province. Two of the men were attempting to remove explosives from a Chicom 82 mm mortar round in the MACV compound at Rach Gia when the ordnance exploded. (See map 5.) Killed were Aviation Electronics Technician First Class Kenneth Van Hoy, Machinist's Mate Second Class Lowell Meyer, and Quartermaster Second Class Ronald Pace. A week later on the 25th, Hospital Corpsman Lin Mahner from the same team died of wounds sustained during the incident.(25)

Throughout the Spring, the Underwater Demolition detachments were by no means idle. At the beginning of April, Det Delta in Danang was dissolved. This made a few more UDT men available to be assigned to SEAL Team One. Team One had a tremendous tasking for missions by this time and required additional manning to fill their platoon assignments. UDT Dets Echo and Foxtrot were moved into the Frogsville facility and spent a majority of their time thereafter ashore. On 12 April, UDT 13 suffered its first combat fatality of

war. Chief Hospital Corpsman Robert Worthington, a member of the 1st Amphibious Marine Battalion working in the Mekong Delta, was part of a sweep and destroy operation on the Duong Keo River. His riverine craft entered a V.C. ambush and was hit by heavy small arms and rocket fire. An entire convoy of PCFs had moved up the river, and Worthington's was at the end of the column. As the others succeeded in exiting the kill zone of the ambush, more and more V.C. gunners were able to concentrate their fire at the trail craft. The boat became disabled and turned into the bank and beached, isolating the crewmen. The UDT men manned all available weapons and kept the Communists at bay for 45 minutes. The intense fighting at one point came down to a close-quarters hand grenade battle within twenty meters of the two enemies. One strong-armed frogman hurled a hand grenade into a V.C. spider hole, knocking one enemy sniper out of the fight. Unable to overrun the position, the V.C. finally withdrew. In the end, the vessel was totally destroyed. It was determined that a B-40 rocket explosion had killed Worthington.(26)

On 5 May, another ambush in the same spot by V.C. firing B-40 rockets from the north bank of the river destroyed another PCF, wounding four UDT men.(27)

A combined UDT/Vietnamese force moved up the Cua Lon River on 25 April. (See map 4.) They had entered the river from the Gulf of Thailand aboard four Navy Swifts. They then turned into the Cai Ngay River and searched the banks in the area. A V.C. encampment was discovered and one fleeing enemy soldier was shot while another was captured. The UDT men destroyed 104 Communist structures, 21 bunkers, and 39 watercraft. This was but one of a number of raids into the Nam Can Forest at the southern tip of the country to

fragment the long-term V.C. stronghold. The raids had begun in earnest in October 1968. By the end of May 1969, 126 V.C. soldiers had been killed and several thousand Communist structures, bunkers, and watercraft destroyed. UDT men were at the heart of it all, applying their expertise in explosives and demolitions.(28) Six other Vietnamese from their elite frogman core had been working with men from UDT 11 earlier in the year south of Danang learning how to clear riverine areas of mines and boobytraps. The UDT detachment was teaching the Vietnamese how to conduct the demolition work without American assistance. By this time, the United States was beginning to try to turn the conduct of the war over to the South Vietnamese.

UDT 13 had begun its first WESTPAC deployment in March. By the beginning of May, a new submarine asset was ready to join the Seventh Fleet in support of UDT and other combat swimmer operations. USS Grayback, LPSS 574, was originally launched from Mare Island Shipyard in Vallejo, California, on 2 July 1957. By the spring of 1960, she joined the fleet as a Regulus II Missile launch platform. Up until about 1960, she had completed nine successful patrols. Soon after, the Pacific Fleet began receiving Polaris submarines. By the mid-1960s, her original role was no longer needed, and she was de-commissioned on 25 May 1964. In late 1967, Grayback went back into the Mare Island Shipyards to begin a complete overhaul of her systems. This time she was being refitted to serve in the role as a launch platform for combat swimmer operations. The two large Regulus Missile hangers on her bow were now converted. Each bay was fitted with a pressure hull. Forward of the pressure hull would be berthing and equipment inside the sub

... a large complement of frogmen. Aft of the hull, each bay could be flooded to lock out, launch, and recover swimmers while the sub was submerged. Grayback was also the only U.S. submarine at that time designed to be able to bottom out on the ocean floor while conducting operations.(29)

By now, the UDT Teams had trained with and utilized small craft known as a Swimmer Delivery Vehicles or SDVs. These small, free-flooding submersibles were first developed during World War II. The earliest models were nothing more than slow-moving, steerable craft resembling torpedoes. The frogmen would sit astride the vessels and guide them underwater into enemy harbors to attack naval vessels which lay moored or at anchor. Over the years, the craft had become much more sophisticated. The frogmen would now guide the craft from inside while breathing on scuba systems. This would extend the range of SEALs and UDTs on their missions and allow them to work against gentle currents which would not allow a swimmer penetration. On Grayback, an SDV could launch, conduct its mission, and recover without the submarine ever surfacing.

Grayback was recommissioned on 9 May 1969, and joined the Seventh Fleet. The conventional submarine, powered by diesel-electric propulsion, was the only sub in the Navy homeported outside the United States. From Subic Bay in the Philippines, she took UDT 12 men onboard to train as a crew for deployment to Vietnam. The sub could handle sixty frogmen, eight IBSs, and four SDVs in its compartments. Before long, USS Tunny departed WESTPAC, and Grayback prepared to take her place.(30) The normal UDT mission of hydrographic reconnaissance continued to be carried out by frogmen from surface vessels also. Det Bravo, while conducting a

son in I Corps, came under heavy fire on 27 June. Several UDT men were temporarily pinned down on the beach as others swam to safety. The enemy fire was finally suppressed and the mission continued. The frogman was wounded.(31)

In June, President Nixon announced the first troop withdrawals of the war. 25,000 soldiers were slated to return to the United States by the end of August. In a program labeled "Vietnamization", the United States was now determined to prove to both North and South Vietnam that they were willing to turn over the conduct of the war to the South Vietnamese. This was the beginning of a policy change that would take considerable time to affect the direct action SEAL platoons in IV Corps. For the time being, the SEALs continued their war. Golf platoon from SEAL Team One relieved Charlie platoon in-country on 20 May.(32) On 16 June, Team Two's 9th platoon relieved the 6th platoon in Vietnam.(33) On 8 June, the 8th platoon set a three-element ambush in Dinh Tuong Province. They inserted and patrolled 1500 meters into the site in hopes of catching part of what was believed to be a fifty-man V.C. group. Just before dawn, a large firefight was initiated. Helos and OV-10 spotter planes had to be called in for fire support and extraction. Twenty-six enemy soldiers were killed. The SEALs got away clean.(34) On the 26th, three SEAL ambushes killed twelve Communist soldiers.(35) On the 27th, three additional SEAL actions accounted for another dozen enemy soldiers killed.(36)

On 1 July, one squad from the 5th platoon of Team Two attempted to infiltrate a V.C. base camp in the Cai Lai District of Dinh Thoug Province. The group set up a trail guardpost and laid low. At about 0400 hours, voices were heard north of their position. The

quad quietly patrolled about 75 meters to the north on the trail, where they discovered the camp. They took an undetermined number of Viet Cong under fire, killing four. The SEALs then searched the camp to find several small arms with ammunition, grenades, clothing and equipment, and four kilos of documents. One of the enemy killed was an NVA engineer who had graduated from a Russian engineering university in 1967. Another of the dead was the engineer's bodyguard, who had failed in his duties.(37)

The same day, a squad of the 8th platoon had set up a trail guardpost when they heard weapons firing to the north. They broke their position and moved to the area from where the gunshots had come. Questioning an old man, they were directed toward a small enemy unit. While approaching down a trail, one armed V.C. was taken under fire and killed. Four other Communist soldiers fled the area.(38) Three days later, a squad of the 9th platoon captured one V.C. in the Can Gio district. The enemy soldier was armed and provided a couple of bags of documents.(39)

Team One's Golf platoon killed four enemy soldiers and captured ten kilos of documents during a contact on 3 July. The river ambush utilized Boston Whalers in support. Initial readout of the documents revealed that the dead included two V.C. intelligence officers for Long An Province and a provincial-level communications liaison officer.(40) On the 10th of the same month, a squad from the 8th platoon from Team Two conducted a heliborne raid with a 24-man PRU unit into a suspected V.C. POW camp. The team landed and swept north, killing three enemy soldiers in the encounter and capturing thirteen others. One additional V.C. was captured as he attempted to evade by swimming underwater. An Army helicopter used for

vacuation was badly damaged by groundfire, so the SEALs called in Navy gunships to support. Four additional soldiers were killed by enemy fire. No prisoners were found.(41)

Two days later, 8th platoon sent a squad on another heliborne attack with a PRU element. Local intelligence had identified another suspected POW camp holding ARVN troops in Kien Hoa Province. (See map 3.) The SEALs and PRUs hit the ground and swept into the area, capturing thirteen V.C. after a brief firefight. As they waited for extraction, one additional Viet Cong was captured, and two kilos of documents were found. As helicopters flew in to pull the team out, the unit received heavy fire from a nearby treeline, but escaped without injury. Five ARVN soldiers, captured during the 1968 Tet Offensive over a year before, were liberated.(42) On the 14th, SEALs were inserted into an area to direct air strikes and naval gunfire on a concentration of Viet Cong reported by a recently liberated Vietnamese POW. Several sampans and bunkers were destroyed and a large secondary explosion was observed along with two V.C. killed.(43) The 9th platoon searched a small tunnel complex on 21 July after receiving intelligence from a PRU unit. One V.C. was captured and revealed the location of a small weapons cache as a result.(44) Golf platoon attacked a V.C. finance and propaganda center on 28 July in Long An Province. Ten V.C. and NVA soldiers were killed in the action.(45) Golf platoon from Team One struck on the 26th of July and the 6th of August on operations which netted fourteen V.C. killed and numerous weapons captured along with thirty kilos of documents. Four additional enemy soldiers were captured in the actions.(46) Kilo platoon from Team One relieved Delta platoon in-country on 20 July.(47)

A squad from the 9th platoon established a night guardpost on 2 August when a sampan with three armed Viet Cong slipped quietly through the kill zone. The small craft was allowed to pass without incident; the SEALs were hoping to catch a bigger unit in the trap. Three sampans with over a dozen enemy soldiers entered their area from the south a short time later. A sharp firefight was initiated, and the SEALs called helo fire into the enemy force. Ten Communist troops were killed and several small arms captured.(48) Nine days later, the 8th platoon again hit a suspected POW camp in reaction to intelligence provided by a surrendering enemy soldier. The camp was found recently deserted, but had also contained a grenade workshop. The entire facility was burned to mark it as a target for helo gunships. In addition to the factory tooling, a large number of hand grenades were destroyed.(49)

On 19 August, seven V.C. were killed by a SEAL patrol when they conducted a raid on an enemy stronghold fifteen miles south of Saigon. (See map 5.) The SEALs from the 9th platoon and several PRUs had inserted quietly into a target area to cover a small cluster of hootches. An hour later, the six PRUs extracted as a ruse while the SEALs remained hidden. At about 1800 hours, several armed Viet Cong entered one of the huts. At the same time, several more were approaching in a sampan. The platoon took both targets under fire and one squad was sent to search the river craft. Besides killing several enemy soldiers, one was captured along with several small arms.(50)

Team Two's 10th platoon relieved the 7th platoon on 17 August.(51) Mike platoon from Team One relieved Echo platoon in-country on 20 August.(52) The continued six-month tours allowed

ALS to rotate into the war to gain experience more quickly. The idea behind the six-month tours originated with the Navy concept of a ship's cruise, which was normally about half a year. It also allowed the men to remain relatively fresh. They operated in the worst possible swamp environments, and were nearly always wet on every patrol with leech bites covering their bodies. The rotations kept the frogmen from becoming too debilitated. A SEAL Team Two patrol on the 20th captured an NVA battalion commander.(53) On the 24th, a 9th platoon guardpost in Bien Hoa Province killed a single V.C. after ambushing a sampan and capturing two assault rifles.(54) Finally, on 30 August, a combined 9th and 10th platoon patrol initiated an ambush which killed three V.C. and captured one weapon.(55)

At the end of August and through the first part of September, UDT 12 relieved UDT 13 as the WESTPAC unit. By this time, a few more changes had been made in the UDT detachments. Det Bravo was deactivated because the need for their services no longer existed. Dets Echo and Foxtrot remained with the ARG, but staged from Frogsville in Danang. Golf staged from Seafloat, a cluster of barges anchored in the middle of a river at the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula in the South, and Hotel out of Danang in the north. In July, half of Det Hotel had been moved to Danang while the other half conducted special Research, Development, Training, and Evaluation (RDT&E) in Saigon. The entire Det was finally reunited at the Frogsville base in I Corps. Tunny was not available for submarine operations and its replacement, Grayback, would not be ready for WESTPAC operations until February 1970. As a result, Det Charlie was temporarily dissolved. Although amphibious operations

were deemphasized due to the Vietnamization program, the Dets remained active in other areas. Canal blasting in the Plain of Reeds was one long-term project that received UDT attention. (See map 5.) Another was the Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP). In this program, UDT men would carry and administer medical support to local Vietnamese villagers, oftentimes in enemy-controlled territory. For these and other inland operations, the patrols were assigned LDNN as pointmen, interpreters, and as guides.(56)

A combined SEAL/PRU operation on 12 September hit Tan Tap Village in Long An Province. (See map 3.) The group captured a small arms cache to include:

- 2 60 mm mortars

- 2 M-60 light machineguns

- 1 RPD light machinegun

- 1 AR-15 assault rifle

- 1 carbine

- 11 SKS carbines

- 30 B-40 rockets

- Numerous pieces of enemy equipment

On the 14th, Golf platoon set an ambush four miles south southeast of Ben Luc. A large sampan containing twelve V.C. entered the site and was taken under fire, killing six enemy soldiers.(57)

A squad of the 9th platoon acted on information provided by a friendly agent on the 21st of September. They patrolled to the vicinity of a small V.C. camp, where they heard voices and identified armed guerrillas. Helo gunships were called in as the SEALs attacked the camp, resulting in five V.C. killed and a number of weapons captured. The next day, the other squad of the 9th

platoon returned fire from a cluster of hootches they found while patrolling. No enemy killed could be confirmed, but one enemy soldier was captured along with two weapons.(58)

An ambush by a squad from 10th platoon netted one V.C. killed on 4 October after a sampan wandered into the site at about 2030 hours. The team had inserted by PBR in mid-afternoon to set up the guardpost. Following their initiation, they came under fire and extracted by helo with weapons and documents.(59) The same day, two SEALs from the 9th platoon led a PRU operation resulting in more captured documents as well as two V.C. killed and one captured.(60)

SEAL Team One sent Alfa platoon in-country as an augmentation platoon on 6 October.(61) On the 9th, a squad from 10th platoon operating with a platoon of PRUs inserted by helo and set up a guardpost on a trail in mid-afternoon in an area where V.C. activity had been previously reported. An hour later, a helo returned to extract some of the PRUs and was taken under fire. Helo gunships were called in on the suspected enemy location. Just before dark, two V.C. were shot as they entered the guardpost area. The unit moved to extract and was fired on as helos picked them up.(62) The next day, one squad from 9th platoon chased three V.C. suspects who avoided the guardpost they had established. The SEALs were suddenly taken under fire from a nearby treeline, and called in helo gunships on the position. A search of the area found one V.C. body and several weapons.(63) Also on the 11th, a SEAL-led PRU operation abducted the commanding officer of four V.C. battalions from his headquarters in Long An Province. The men fought a small guerrilla security team as they extracted by helicopter with their prize.

A small ambush on 13 October by 9th platoon SEALs killed two

Viet Cong in a sampan and captured several small arms including two RPG-2 launchers and four B-40 rockets.(64) A combined unit of PRUs and a SEAL Team Two squad swept a target area on the 15th with negative results. The PRUs extracted, leaving the SEALs in a stay behind ambush. Later, the SEALs initiated fire on four V.C. moving across a rice field, then called in helo support. Before extracting, they found one V.C. body.(65)

The Teams continued to field squads who were effective in their small-unit combat patrols, but fatalities were still sustained. On 17 October, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) David Nicholas from SEAL Team One was killed by friendly fire from a blocking force during an operation three miles southeast of old Nam Can. (See map 4.) As Nicholas lead a sweep of the area, a second element in a blocking position took the sweeping unit under fire. The SEAL officer was hit in the upper left side of the chest and died within minutes.(66) The next day, 3rd platoon relieved 8th platoon in-country.(67) Another Team Two platoon inserted before midnight on the 26th in search of several V.C. and infrastructure cadre on the south bank of Dong Cung Lake. Guided by a defector, the SEALs found several abandoned huts. After questioning an old woman, the unit patrolled further and captured two V.C. in the area. One later turned out to be a hamlet and propaganda chief.(68) On 31 October, the Commander of Naval Special Warfare Group One and the Commanding Officer of SEAL Team One toured units of Group One and Two as well as UDT Dets deployed in Vietnam on 31 October.(69)

In November, the U.S. Army announced the beginning of an investigation into an alleged massacre of Vietnamese civilians by U.S. Army soldiers in the hamlet of My Lai the previous year. The

Investigation and conviction of First Lieutenant William Calley, the officer in charge of the platoon who conducted the operation, gained world-wide attention and added yet another ugly scar to an increasingly unpopular war. As the war became more unpopular by the month, the peace talks continued in their halting manner. Through it all, the White House continued to follow the policy of Vietnamization. For some, it seemed as if Vietnamization could not come soon enough.

On 2 November, a SEAL Team Two squad captured three V.C. and a number of weapons and ammunition after inserting from a PBR after dark.(70) On the 10th, a squad from the 9th platoon was forced to call in Air Force close air support on a bunker complex after receiving small arms fire from the site. Four secondary explosions were seen and one V.C. body was found during the search which followed.(71) Two actions occurred on 14 November. The first took place on the Ba Kher Canal. Six SEALs from Team Two along with two LDNN and their American SEAL advisor and a Vietnamese agent departed their base in an LCM. At about 0240 hours, the unit switched to smaller craft and proceeded up the canal in search of a large enemy force reported in the area. Around dawn, the agent hailed one V.C. on the trail. As the man attempted to flee, the SEALs killed him. Two others approached from the east and were also killed in a brief fight. Interrogation of local inhabitants revealed the 200-man force traversed the area regularly.(72)

The second action that day involved a squad from Team Two's 10th platoon. After inserting by helo, the team patrolled west and set up a guardpost on a trail. The uneventful overwatch position was broken at noon, and the unit patrolled north. Suddenly, voices

and coughing were heard to the patrol's front. Helos were called in to overfly the area. Under cover of their noise and distraction, the SEALs penetrated the camp, discovered several V.C., and engaged them in a firefight. Four enemy soldiers were killed and several small arms captured.(73) A squad from the 9th platoon ambushed three V.C. on a trail the following day. One enemy was killed and one CHICOM submachinegun captured.(74)

During a mission by SEAL Team Two members on 24 November in the SSZ, a patrol spotted a camouflaged sampan in a canal and attempted to quietly approach the scene. Several V.C. were encountered, and a fierce firefight broke out. Although outnumbered, the unit continued to fight. The machinegunner had been moving directly behind the pointman in the event that immediate fire suppression was needed. In this instance, the tactic, commonly used by SEALs, proved invaluable once again. A strong volume of fire was leveled at the V.C. almost instantly. Even after receiving a wound to his left leg, the machinegunner continued to fire until he was shot in both hands and his ammunition box destroyed. Despite his wounds, the SEAL continued to attempt to pull hand grenades from his web gear to use in the fight until he fell unconscious.(75) On the same day, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) John Brewton from Team Two was critically wounded in action. He died of those wounds in January.(76) Another small SEAL ambush from the 10th platoon on the 26th destroyed a lone Viet Cong sampan, killing all its occupants.(77) Bravo platoon from Team One relieved Charlie platoon in-country on 28 November.(78)

Hospital Corpsman First Class Richard Wolfe from Team One Mike platoon was killed in action seven miles northeast of Seafloat on 30

November. (See map 4.) While inserting on an operation to capture a reported V.C. finance chief, the helicopter he was embarked in landed on top of a Vietnamese hootch. The men began to jump out of the helo and slide off the roof of the hut when the roof gave way. The helo went out of control and crashed, injuring several men. The combined force pulled the crewmen and injured from the wreckage and moved to the extraction site. At that time it was noted that Wolfe was missing, and the patrol leader returned to the crash with other SEALs to search for the missing man. He was found dead in the wreckage, along with two V.C. who had been in the hut. The team carried his body to the extraction site and was pulled out by helo.(79)

One squad from the 9th platoon conducted an operation on 3 December in Hai Yen District. After inserting by sampan, the unit heard voices in the area. Several V.C. were encountered and the ensuing firefight resulted in four enemy troops killed and several small arms captured. The team then patrolled to the west and established a guardpost on a river. Two Communist sampans entered the kill zone around dawn, and were fired upon. One Viet Cong was killed. While several members searched the area, another sampan was taken under fire with the result that one more V.C. was killed and two weapons captured.(80)

The 10th platoon took eight V.C. under fire along a heavily traveled trail after dark on the same night. In return, they received heavy weapons fire from the area. Two SEALs were wounded and the patrol had to extract by river craft under cover of helo gunships. Two V.C. were confirmed killed.(81) On the 6th, men from the 3rd platoon captured a hamlet-level propaganda member along a

anal. The man was detained after being caught in violation of curfew.(82) Four V.C. were killed by a SEAL patrol 187 miles south of Saigon during the second week in December.(83) Immediately after inserting by sampan on a mission on 11 December, a SEAL patrol made contact with a sizeable V.C. force. Nine enemy soldiers were killed in the fight and fifteen kilos of documents captured, along with a small supply of ordnance.(84) On the 19th, Team Two's 4th platoon relieved the 9th platoon in-country.(85) In their post-tour report, the 9th platoon, which had worked out of Nha Be, felt that it was now necessary to employ their ambushes further up the small streams and tributaries of the large rivers in the RSSZ in order to meet regular success. The V.C. in the area had been effectively challenged by riverine patrols and ambushes which were on the larger rivers and had moved their base camps further into the swamp. It was apparent that the SEALs were continuing to bring the war to the enemy. Seal Team One's Charlie platoon deployed as an augmentation force in-country on 27 December.(86) Aviation Electrician's Mate First Class Curtis Ashton from SEAL Team Two was killed while leading a PRU patrol on the 27th in Long An Province, eight miles southeast of Nha Be. (See map 6.) Ashton's PRU team had been laying in a riverine ambush along with some members of 4th platoon. While occupying a position, one of Ashton's concussion grenades accidentally detonated, killing him instantly.(87)

The year ended in death, as it had begun. The SEALs in IV Corps were operating in high gear throughout 1969 and reacting well to intelligence provided by indigenous sources. The almost exclusive night combat actions of the early war years now gave way to both day and night operations. SEALs increased in effectiveness

with their now multiple-tour experience. Their operations covered a wider spectrum than in the early years. Helicopters were utilized for more of the insertion and extraction profiles, giving the frogmen more range and speed for reaction. The UDT detachments continued to branch out into the land warfare role of bunker-destruction, combat salvage, and mine neutralization missions. Their use as only a hydrographic recon element was changing by the year. With the addition of Grayback and SDVs, the UDT men became an important clandestine force. As for the United States, the policy of Vietnamization had been initiated. It was now a time of disengagement, but not yet so for the men of Special Warfare.

## VI. Unending War (1969)

- (1) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated August 15, 1969, Enclosure 5, p. 10.
- (2) Navy and Marine Corps Medal Citation For SF1 Joseph M. Silva, SEAL Team Two.
- (3) COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon 141738Z Jan 69.
- (4) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- (5) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 7 and Enclosure 2, p. 1.
- (6) COMNAVSPECWARGRUPAC 230540Z Jan 69.
- (7) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- (8) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 2.
- (9) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- (10) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 7.
- (11) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 2.
- (12) CTE 116.3 050630Z Feb 69.
- (13) CTE 116.3 150215Z Feb 69.
- (14) UDT 13 Cruisebook 1969, "A Word From The Skipper."
- (15) CTE 116.3 020635Z Mar 69.
- (16) Alexander Jason, Heroes (Pinole, California, 1979), p. 125; The Omaha World Herald, "The Medal of Honor," (Midlands Magazine), November 9, 1980, p. 20.
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- (18) The Navy Cross, Vietnam (Forest Ranch, California, 1987), p. 320; Pacific Stars and Stripes, March 26, 1969, p. 6.
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- (21) Navy and Marine Corps Medal Citation For BM1 Alfred J. Ashton, SEAL Team Two.
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- (26) Unclassified Command History For UDT 13 For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 5; UDT 13 Cruisebook 1969, "Death of the 43."
- (27) Ibid., "Death of the 43."
- (28) Pacific Stars and Stripes, April 29, 1969 and May 29, 1969.
- (29) Ibid., April 23, 1969 and May 11, 1969; Navy Times, October 31, 1973 and June 15, 1981.
- (30) John B. Dwyer, "Surface Action," Soldier of Fortune (May, 1987), pp. 47, 111.
- (31) UDT 13 Cruisebook 1969, "Ambushed Near Danang."
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- (34) CTU 116.6.3 080155Z Jun 69.
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- (36) Pacific Stars and Stripes, July 1, 1969.
- (37) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, pp. 3-4.
- (38) CTU 116.6.3 020310Z Jul 69.
- (39) CTU 116.9.6 060758Z Jul 69.
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- (41) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, pp. 3-4.
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- (43) CTU 116.6.3 150615Z Jul 69.
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- (46) CTF 116 081116Z Aug 69.
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- (62) CTU 116.9.6 101510Z Oct 69.
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- (72) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, p. 5.
- (73) Ibid.
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- (75) Bronze Star Medal Citation For EN2 Robert D. Christopher, SEAL Team Two.
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- (77) CTU 116.9.6 270148Z Nov 69.
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- (79) NAVSUPACT Det Binh Thuy 010950Z Dec 69; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1969, pp. 63-64.
- (80) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, p. 6.
- (81) CTU 116.9.5 040231Z Dec 69.
- (82) CTU 194.2.6 070600Z Dec 69.
- (83) Pacific Stars and Stripes, December, 1969.
- (84) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1969, p. 65.
- (85) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 7.
- (86) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1969, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.
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## VII. Vietnamization (1970)

By the beginning of 1970, the United States was determined to disengage its forces in Vietnam. The American pullout was to be complimented by the gradual move to turn the course of the fighting over to the South Vietnamese. In February, Henry Kissinger entered into secret peace negotiations with the Communist Vietnamese. The stalled Paris Peace Talks were obviously only a world-stage for the Communists. The serious work would have to be enacted in private. In Cambodia, where the V.C. and NVA kept their staging bases politically outside the range of conventional American military forces, Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in a coup by pro-U.S. Lon Nol. The Spring again brought huge anti-war protests in the eastern United States, including Washington, D.C. itself. But as the American conventional forces began withdrawing from South Vietnam under Vietnamization, the special force units continued their activities to help the Allies maintain security. 1970 was to be a very busy year in the mangrove swamps and along the rivers and canals as Navy Special Warfare Units throughout the South continued heavy operations.

Three V.C. soldiers were captured by a combined SEAL/LDNN ambush squad on 2 January, three miles northeast of Song Ong Doc.(1) Eight other Viet Cong were killed in a SEAL sweep operation sixteen miles west of Seafloat on 8 January.(2) (See map 4.) On 11 January, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) John Brewton died from wounds sustained in November during a SEAL operation.(3) Three enemy sampans were ambushed by frogmen on the morning of 15 January about eight miles southwest of Seafloat, resulting in seven V.C.

killed.(4) A SEAL Team One squad killed six Communist soldiers in a riverine ambush 20 kilometers northeast of Old Nam Can on the 21st, capturing a small quantity of weapons and ordnance and numerous documents including 25 enemy maps.(5) January was also an active month for UDT frogmen. Chief Hospital Corpsman Donel C. Kinnard was serving with UDT 12's Detachment Golf in the Mekong Delta during the first of the year. The Det was utilized during a sweep and clear operation supporting the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Mobile Forces Command, on 20-21 January. Kinnard became the central target of V.C. gunners as he tried to beach a damaged sampan previously occupied by three enemy soldiers. With great effort, he was able to capture the craft and several small arms. Another time, his team was subjected to intense small arms and rocket fire. Kinnard himself was wounded in the arms and legs by shrapnel. He then hurled a few grenades of his own across a canal toward the enemy gunners. As the battle progressed, a lone North Vietnamese officer crept up behind the frogman and attacked him. Kinnard engaged him in fierce hand-to-hand combat and succeeded in overpowering the Communist officer after several minutes of fighting at close quarters. For his actions, he was later awarded the Navy Cross.(6)

A week later on the 27th, Chief Shipfitter Guy E. Stone, another UDT 12 frogman, was accompanying a UDT element on a bunker destruction mission. Their sweep had taken them to a graveyard along the Vinh Dien River. While probing the area, Stone encountered eight V.C. laying in ambush for his teammates. Stone screamed a warning and the enemy opened up with automatic weapons and grenades. Stone sought cover, then helped direct the fire from his men. He charged to within fifteen feet of the enemy position

and hurled three grenades. Two of the Viet Cong attempting to escape were spotted by him, and he grabbed a teammate's weapon to shoot them. Six V.C. were killed in the action, and two captured. His early warning had saved the lives of four Allied personnel. For his actions, he was later awarded with the Navy Cross.(7)

By this time in the war, UDT and SEAL elements found their own way to operate deep in V.C. territory at the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula. Surrounded by swamps and mud flats and aware of the need for security of their own bases, the frogmen developed their own answer to the isolated Green Beret camps which lay deep in the jungles along the Laotian and Cambodian borders. Earlier in the fighting, detachments would sometimes stage from large Naval support ships, such as USS Benewah (APB 35), the flagship for the riverine assault force CTF 117, which could anchor out from shore and move when necessary. Both riverine craft and helicopters could operate from alongside and from the decks. Now the Navy used a little different approach. A series of fourteen barges were welded together and anchored up the mouth of the Song Cua Lon River near Old Nam Can. (See map 4.) Large support vessels could reach the base for resupply and riverine craft could launch and recover for their operations. A helicopter landing pad also allowed SEAWOLVES and Army helos freedom to be utilized. The base was given the codename "Seafloat", and that became the name most often used. The frogmen had other affectionate names for the anchorage, including the "Pontoon Palace".

Moored in the middle of the river, it was difficult for Communist forces to attack the complex. Local South Vietnamese forces provided security ashore on either side. Biet Hai Rangers

occupied one bank while Kit Carson Scouts (KCS; former V.C. who had defected and worked on missions against their former comrades), lived on the other bank. There were occasional attacks, however. In 1970 alone, four V.C. sappers were caught as they attempted to attach explosives to the barges.(8)

River patrols continued throughout IV Corps. On the Kinh LaGrange and Kinh Gay Canal in the Plain of Reeds, small riverine boats were unable to turn around on their patrols due to the narrow straights of the waterway. Eight large clearings were blown in the canal by UDT men, enabling the craft to negotiate the area.(9) Det Delta from UDT 11, which had previously staged from Frogsville in Danang, now became a wandering band in the Mekong Delta. There they conducted whatever missions needed to be accomplished, including the Kinh LaGrange and Kinh Gay Canal project. Det Golf and Hotel personnel were also involved with emplanting certain riverine and inland areas with sensors to detect enemy movements under project "Dufflebag". At the end of February, UDT 11 relieved UDT 12 in WESTPAC as the deployed Underwater Demolition Team.(10) During this month, USS Grayback (LPSS 574) first deployed to support UDT WESTPAC operations, including Vietnam.(11)

SEAL squads continued to invent newer tactics and techniques and refine the ones passed down by others. On 12 February, 5th platoon relieved 10th platoon at Nha Be. In their post-tour report, the 10th stated that they felt their best results were achieved on riverine ambushes during the hours just before dawn and at high tide. To take full advantage of that pattern, they remained in ambush positions for only three to four hour periods on the average, rather than all night or longer. The short ambushes kept all hands

fresh and alert. Additionally, the platoon used the LSSC as their ambush platform, pulling it next to river banks under foliage. This technique also kept the SEALs fresher and provided a solid base from which to attack and recover a target sampan.

A SEAL advisor led seven LDNN on a raid on Dung Island at the mouth of the Bassac River on the night of 17 March. After stealthfully approaching a reported V.C. camp, the men moved to enter a specific hootch. A firefight at point-blank range immediately broke out, wounding one LDNN. Under a steady stream of enemy fire, the American carried the LDNN to a nearby canal and paddled him in a small sampan to riverine craft standing by. He then returned through the firefight to rejoin his team and complete their operation.(12) On 20 March, a SEAL Team One raiding party struck a Viet Cong camp twenty miles southwest of Tra Vinh. Four enemy soldiers were killed and the facility destroyed.(13) The next day, one LDNN was killed by small arms fire while on an operation with SEAL Team One's Delta platoon northeast of Rach Gia.(14) On the 27th, ten SEALs and a guide inserted seventeen miles northeast of Seafloat on a mission to capture a district security chief. Light contact was made with a small enemy force; four V.C. were killed and two others captured, although the target subject escaped the patrol.(15) Detachment Bravo, consisting of SEALs who trained, advised, and led PRUs on combat forays into the enemy's hinterland for many years, was disestablished during March 1970 as part of the Vietnamization process.(16)

On 2 April, Echo platoon from SEAL Team One was inserted on a raid operation twelve miles northeast of Seafloat. Before they could move in on their target, they received a report that a

helicopter had crashed nearby. The patrol immediately moved to the location and secured the area. The uninjured crewmen were rescued and before long, the downed aircraft was lifted out by a larger helo. Five Viet Cong were killed as they attempted to move in on the crashsite.(17) On the 6th, two SEALs and two Vietnamese discovered and destroyed a thirty-five ton Viet Cong rice cache eight miles northwest of Seafloat. 1500 pounds were saved and airlifted to the Pontoon Palace for use by the frogmen.(18)

Chief Gunner's Mate Barry W. Enoch from SEAL Team One was serving as the senior advisor to a combined U.S./Vietnamese SEAL patrol in the Mekong Delta on 9 April. The Americans were from SEAL Team One's Charlie platoon while the Vietnamese included a platoon of LDNN. The unit was targeting V.C. infrastructure cadre in Long Phu District, An Xuyen Province about twenty miles southwest of Tra Vinh. (See map 3.) The team inserted by riverine craft and patrolled toward their target area. Enoch, who was carrying a radio and a grenade launcher, observed six V.C. attempting to evade the Allied force. He immediately charged forward and engaged them, hitting three of the six. Two others were wounded, and one of these wounded bumped into the team shortly after and was killed. The unit then came under intense small arms and rocket fire from all quarters. Enoch realized the group was surrounded and deployed the men in a defensive perimeter. He continually shifted his position to encourage and direct his team and employ his own weaponry. His radio was damaged in the attack, but he continued to direct close air support to within twenty meters of his position. Under heavy fire, a wounded LDNN was medivaced, but the rest of the team could not be pulled out by helo. Low on ammunition, Enoch finally

utilized the aircraft ordnance to cut a hole in the encirclement. Immediately he led a charge through the path in the enemy encirclement and to a nearby river where the team was extracted by boat. Intelligence later revealed eighteen V.C. killed by the frogmen and gunships. One LDNN was killed in the engagement. For his leadership and decisive action, Enoch was later awarded the Navy Cross.(19)

At the end of April, President Nixon authorized a large-scale penetration into Cambodia of up to nineteen miles. The operation was designed to clear out the Communist sanctuaries long utilized by the North Vietnamese as well as the headquarters for the Viet Cong high command. The Cambodian incursion succeeded in throwing the enemy off balance for months, and they seemed unable to mount any major offensive the remainder of the year. But at the same time, it also caused a tremendous uproar in the United States from those who believed the Administration was trying to spread the war to surrounding nations. The death of four students at Kent State University in Ohio on 4 May, in a clash with National Guardsmen, only added to the anti-war cry.

Most of the SEAL operations during the month of April made little contact with the enemy, but several small caches of rice, demolitions, and equipment were discovered and captured.(20) Photographic Intelligenceman Second Class Douglas Hobbs was attached to SEAL Detachment Golf during May 1970. He had been assigned to the detachment on temporary duty from the Naval Special Warfare Group, Pacific. On 16 May, while transiting in a riverine craft on a combined SEAL/KCS operation deep within enemy controlled territory, the boat he was riding in encountered a Communist

bush. Small arms and rocket fire struck the boat, and he was killed while attempting to man a .50 caliber machinegun.(21)

During many of their operations, SEALs utilized scout dogs to assist in ferreting out enemy forces and bunkers. "Silver", one of the several German shepards used, even earned his jump qualification after completing five parachute jumps with his SEAL Team Two handler. The scout dog exited the aircraft while attached to his master's specially rigged harness. Another dog, "Prince", departed Little Creek for his fourth tour of duty in Vietnam with 7th platoon on 12 June. Prince had earned two Purple Hearts up to that time for wounds sustained during combat operations.(22) On 9 June, a SEAL Team Two patrol found and destroyed 3600 kilos of rice in a facility along the Song Dong Dung River.(23) From time to time, the frogmen would try applying their maritime raiding skills in drier territory. On the 17th, two SEAL advisors and nine LDNN occupied a road ambush. A wire was strung across the trail in order to capture any suspect utilizing a bicycle utilizing the infamous "clothesline technique." Although one startled subject was victimized by the device, he was found to have no weapon or documents and was released. Afterward, the unit decided to stick closer to water.(24) Delta platoon discovered and destroyed a large enemy weapons and ordnance cache on 18 June, just north of Soc Son.(25)

The Teams, especially SEAL Team One, continued to be plagued by fatal incidents both on and off the battlefield. The 23rd of June brought the largest and most tragic loss of SEALs in a single incident. Five SEALs from two different SEAL Team One platoons, (two from Golf and three from Echo), died near Can Tho when the helicopter in which they were embarked crashed for unknown reasons

while on an administrative move. (See map 5.) The Army Huey, call sign "Vulture 27", had taken off from Seafloat enroute to Can Tho. Killed were Machinist's Mate Second Class Richard Solano, Boatswain's Mate Third Class James Gore, Signalman Third Class John Burlin, Seaman Radioman John Donnelly, and Fireman Toby Thomas.(26) Hotel platoon captured seven Viet Cong after inserting by MSSC into an area on 25 June. Their intelligence had indicated the presence of the enemy soldiers who chose to surrender to the frogmen when they were challenged at a riverine ambush site.(27)

On 9 July, a SEAL advisor led fifteen Kit Carson Scouts (KCS) into a base camp twelve miles southwest of Seafloat. A large cache of supplies and foodstuffs was found and captured.(28) Kilo platoon relieved Delta platoon in-country on 13 July.(29) Vietnamization had not slowed the tempo of SEAL operations nor the pace of platoon tour rotations. On the 15th, Juliett platoon inserted in the early morning on a mission to raid a V.C. POW camp in the Can Tho area. As USCG WPB Point Cypress and several riverine craft stood by, the team penetrated the target area. Intelligence reports indicated the POWs included two Americans and about thirty ARVN soldiers. As they approached the target, a boobytrapped grenade was tripped, and the explosion alerted the enemy guards who escaped into the swamp with the prisoners. As the SEALs hit the camp, three of the V.C. were killed in fighting. While one ARVN prisoner was reportedly saved, the SEALs were unable to find the enemy trail, and the rest of the prisoners remained in Viet Cong hands.(30) A Seal Team Two squad inserted off a riverine craft the morning of 21 July on a mission to raid a V.C. base camp and way station in Cai Lai District of Dinh Tuong Province. (See map 18.) Not long after inserting, the squad

as silently patrolling up a small trail when they surprised an armed Viet Cong guerrilla who was picking up a boobytrap. After firing at the guerrilla, the SEALs received a heavy volume of fire from their left flank. The SEALs suppressed the fire, then followed the trail into the base. Supplies and documents were located and secured. As the men prepared to depart the location, they came under heavy V.C. counterattack. Pinned down, the SEALs were unable to shift their formation to properly engage the enemy. The platoon commander signaled the last man in the group, the rear security, to lead the team out of the area to an extraction point. Under a running firefight, the rear security SEAL led the frogmen skillfully through a minefield to safety. There were no friendly casualties.(31)

6th platoon made a unique discovery at a V.C. supply point eight miles southwest of Ca Mau on 24 July. Hidden under heavy camouflage was a French tractor with a wheel diameter of 4.5 feet. Nearby was a weapons factory which held a portion of a downed aircraft being used to make rocket motors and parts. The entire area was subsequently destroyed by an air strike.(32) Hotel platoon from Team One conducted a POW camp raid on 30-31 July with negative results.(33) A 24-man LDNN team, led by four American SEAL advisors, was used as a blocking force in the operation. Up until this point in the war, Five LDNN training classes had been graduated. The LDNN fielded one fourteen-man platoon with two advisors out of Ben Luc and one twelve-man platoon with two advisors out of Danang.(34)

On the 4th of August, SEAL Team Two was awarded its first Presidential Unit Citation for combat operations in Vietnam. The

stated that the Team's tremendous operational performance from 1 July 1967 to 30 June 1969. Several of the Team's more successful operations were noted in the award, and the unit shared in the distinguished combat record of their combined efforts.

During this period, the plight of American prisoners of war came into greater focus around the world. Known at that time was the fact that many of the Americans in captivity endured tremendous hardships. Many were tortured, beaten, and starved. Men like Army Green Beret First Lieutenant Nick Rowe had been held under savage conditions in the U Minh Forest, the "Forest of Darkness", a long-time V.C. stronghold in IV Corps. Rowe managed to survive five years in captivity before escaping his captors in December, 1968. Some of the prisoners' conditions had improved following the death of Ho Chi Minh the previous year, and as a result of the public awareness campaign launched by the United States about the same time. But the conditions of the men in captivity remained primitive and cruel, especially for those held in the jungle camps in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. Added to that was the fact that hundreds of other American servicemen remained unaccounted for, and the fear was that many of them were also languishing in Communist hands. U.S. forces placed a high priority on the attempts to locate and secure the release of POWs. Many of the SEAL units in the South remained active in the early 1970s largely due to possible POW camp raids to locate and free men like Rowe from the swamps of IV Corps. Intelligence reports pertaining to POWs received by Allied forces were codenamed "Brightlight", and SEALs often launched operations in reaction to these reports. At times the Naval Commandos were specifically requested by local commanders. As an example, in the

On the Tre region, two unsuccessful POW camp raids were launched into the Thanh Phu mangrove in June and July. (See map 5.) As a result, the local Navy Intelligence Liason Officer (NILO) requested and received a SEAL platoon presence beginning in July in his area. SEAL Team One's Hotel platoon from Det Golf fulfilled the role. (35) When the 6th platoon departed Vietnam in October 1970, they voiced a proposal which had been considered at various times by the men in the field. The platoon proposed the establishment of three 4-man SEAL Brightlight teams, each to cover one of the three southernmost provinces of South Vietnam. Each unit would contain one officer and three enlisted SEALs to be located within the province capital. Most SEALs realized that it was the timely use of good intelligence which bolstered many successful special operations. In the major cities, they would have the latest and best intelligence and react immediately to Brightlight reports. They would plan and lead any available local forces in attempts to free captive Americans and Vietnamese. The men would serve a six-month tour and devote their full energies to nothing but prisoner recoveries. With Vietnamization and the troop withdrawal, the program was never adapted.

An escaped POW provided information about one such camp to planners in late August, 1970. At 0910 on the morning of the 22nd, Lieutenant Louis H. Boink of SEAL Team Two led the 6th platoon of Det Alfa and a regional Vietnamese company on an insertion into V.C. territory. The team inserted six kilometers north of the suspected POW camp by air while Australian B-57s began pounding the canal near the facility to cut off the enemy. The SEALs shot one V.C. as he attempted to enter a bunker. Army helo gunships then rocketed the

areas north and west of the camp as a further blocking force. The escaped POW led the unit into the recently vacated camp, but the SEALs immediately picked up the trail of the Communists heading south and began to pursue. The SEALs called in more close air support to include SEAWOLF gunships and naval gunfire support from the USS Sutherland (DD 743) 500 meters south of the camp to cut off the Viet Cong. For two hours, the SEALs remained in hot pursuit through the swamp following a trail of clothing and abandoned equipment. At 1245, they discovered 28 Vietnamese prisoners whose guards had just fled for their lives. Army helos evacuated the POWs, seven of whom were former V.C. caught while trying to defect to the government forces. No Americans were discovered in the camp.(36)

After almost a year of Vietnamization, the Special Warfare units had still not felt a significant slowdown in operational deployments. On 1 September, UDT 13 relieved UDT 11 in WESTPAC.(37) SEAL Team One Zulu platoon relieved Echo platoon in-country on 28 August.(38) In 1964, the Viet Cong had built three dams across the Tong Doc Luc Canal in the area around My Tho. (See map 5.) The Vietnamese were unable to utilize the waterway for trafficking. A detachment of UDT 13 men was called into action to assist the local villagers. While the Vietnamization of the fighting was in its initial stages, civic projects such as this were always considered important. The Navy men blew the structures on 20 August, 9 October, and 20 October using large amounts of explosives. The success of the operation opened the waterway once again.(39)

On the 13th of September, a SEAL Team One patrol killed five enemy soldiers and shortly after was attacked by a forty-man force.

The team was able to escape and reported six V.C. killed in the action.(40) The next day, another raid by SEALs was conducted on a V.C. POW camp in the Delta with negative results.(41) On 23 September, a squad from Zulu platoon from SEAL Team One along with two Australian Special Air Service (SAS) advisors and a five-man UDT element uncovered a large enemy arms factory complete with operational machinery in the Nam Can Forest. (See map 4.) A defector gave the information about the location of the installation to the SEALs who assaulted the complex. A large cache was located, as well as a complete assembly line for rockets and rocket launchers. Over 350 assault rifles were discovered, along with numerous machineguns and mines, grenades, and mortar rounds. Three V.C. were killed in the attack.(42) The close relationship between the Australian SAS and SEALs continued to flourish. During September, two members of 7th platoon were assigned to conduct missions with the SAS in Phuoc Tuy Province. On 25 September, Kilo platoon captured a Viet Cong tax extortionist ten miles south of Rach Gia.(43) Nearly every member of both the 6th and Juliett platoons was wounded in two separate incidents at the end of the month. While on patrol, each team had directional V.C. "Claymore" mines initiated on them. The entire 6th platoon had been on a mission to destroy a Viet Cong munitions facility. During their target penetration, the command detonated mine had wounded the last seven members of the group. A firefight ensued during which the enemy munitions hootch exploded. During the chaos, the patrol leader sprinted to the rear of the team to assist in the recovery of his men. He then led the unit to a helo landing zone. Rapid response by air assets lifted the patrol to safety.(44)

SEAL Team One was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation on the 11th September for actions between 1 September 1967 and 21 January 1968. While only a small mention of their operations was given in the citation, it was noted that the Team's Detachments had worked a number of missions in I, II, and IV Corps.

UDT 13 suffered the only combat fatalities of their 1970 WESTPAC cruise in September. While on a bunker demolition operation near Hoi An about twenty miles south of Danang in I Corps, several Det Hotel members were injured in a blast that killed Seaman Luco W. Palma and Hospital Corpsman Third Class L. C. Williams.(45) (See map 2.)

Yankee platoon from Team One relieved Foxtrot platoon in-country on 28 September.(46) On 12 October, SEAL Team One's Xray platoon relieved Hotel platoon in Kien Hoa as part of Det Golf. Most of their operations were launched into the Thanh Phu Mangrove Region. (see map 5.) Golf had run 32 total operations during their short tour including one unsuccessful POW camp raid. Xray platoon conducted most of their forays into the Binh Dai Mangrove during their tour. Their numerous successes were marred by four deaths within the platoon during their six months in-country, including their DIC.(47)

On 5 October, Team Two's 7th platoon was reassigned from Nha Be outside of Saigon to Frogsville in I Corps near Danang. (See map 2.) The platoon was called into the area due to the large number of mining incidents on the Cua Viet River. It was hoped that patrols by the SEALs could capture or kill the Communist troops of the 126th NVA Sapper Regiment (known as the "Q-80 Sappers") who were responsible for the minings. The group also staged out of Cua Viet

and the MACV compound in Quang Tri for a time, but in the end, were sent back south to Nha Be when the mining incidents in the north seemed to come to an end. The day after they left I Corps, their former staging base was hit by a rocket attack.(48)

On 16 October, a series of Special Warfare insignia were authorized for wear on the uniforms of UDT/SEALs. The UDT design consisted of a Naval anchor at the center running vertically, with a Neptune's trident behind the anchor running horizontally. A Revolutionary War era flintlock pistol stood before the anchor at an angle. These symbols stood for the ability of UDT to work and strike from sea or land in battle. Before Vietnam, not all UDT members attended the Army's Airborne School to become static line parachute qualified. By the end of the war, parachuting was added as a requirement for all frogmen who completed BUD/S. The SEAL insignia included all the elements of the UDT design and added an American eagle set astride of the trident with wings spread to symbolize the ability of SEALs to strike from the sky also. (See Appendix 1.) Officers wore gold insignia while the enlisted wore silver. Before long, changes were made due to the controversy caused by the many different types. By the early 1970s, since all frogmen were parachute qualified, the UDT and SEAL symbols were merged as one. The design which remained was the original SEAL design. Additionally, all insignia were gold.

The breast insignia could only be worn by those men who graduated from BUD/S and had additionally served a six month minimum probationary period within an active SEAL or UDT unit. It was a symbol similar to a Green Beret for the Army's Special Forces or a Ranger tab for graduates of Ranger School. To the regular Navy, who

held great pride in its Naval Aviators' Wings, the Surface Warfare Insignia, and the Dolphins of the submarine fleet, the UDT/SEAL breast insignia was too large and stood out too loudly, just like the men who wore it. Encountering such an attitude, frogmen wore it much more proudly. It was formally called a "Trident", but since it closely resembled the symbol of a world famous beer manufacturer, a commodity consumed frequently by Navy Special Warfare men, the insignia became known within the Teams as "The Budweiser".(49)

During October, Two Vietnamese civilians posing as LDNN in Rach Soi stole a sampan and motor from the local populace. Several SEALs and LDNN, determined to retain their reputation, tracked the pair down, captured them, and turned them over to local authorities.(50)

On 5 November, 9th platoon captured two V.C. four kilometers south of Ca Mau. After extracting to their base, they were able to persuade the captives to divulge the whereabouts of their cadre leader. Within three hours, they had also captured him.(51) On 10 November, Whiskey platoon from Team One relieved Golf platoon in country.(52) Also on that date, a SEAL patrol fought an enemy platoon in a bunker complex 15 miles east southeast of Soc Trang and 95 miles southwest of Saigon. (See map 5.) Six V.C. soldiers were killed and nearly a ton of rice destroyed.(53) A large ordnance cache was discovered and destroyed by a combined SEAL/KCS team in the Thanh Phu Secret Zone on 12 November. (See map 5.) The ordnance dump included:

15,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition

9 landmines

30 60 mm mortar rounds

10 100 mm rockets

10 Claymore mines

100 40 mm grenades

200 cluster bombs

4,000 rounds of carbine ammunition (54)

A second cache found the same day by two SEALs and a team of KCS 24 miles southeast of Ben Tre included:

12 57 mm recoilless rifle rounds

2 cases of cluster bombs

5 155 mm rounds

10 105 mm rounds

30 60 mm rounds

4 cases of .30 caliber rounds

100 50 caliber rounds

100 20 mm rounds

5 5 kilo landmines

2 10 kilo landmines (55)

On the 19th, an eight-man SEAL squad and one KCS struck the same general area 15 miles east of Soc Trang and 120 miles southwest of Saigon. After engaging three fleeing Viet Cong, they came under heavy attack from a bunker complex. Seven V.C. were killed in the fight as the SEALs extracted. Fixed wing air support was called in and the complex was destroyed. Eight other enemy soldiers were killed by the air strikes.(56)

Early on the morning of 21 November, a hand-picked team of Army Special Forces and Air Force Special Operations men struck deep into North Vietnam to raid a prisoner of war camp at Son Tay. Located twenty-three miles west of Hanoi, the Green Berets met and suppressed heavy resistance in the operation. Unfortunately, no

prisoners were at that time present in the camp. No SEALs were present in the strike force since a sufficient number of highly qualified Green Berets were available; however one SEAL officer had served on the Feasibility Study Group in July when the concept of the raid was in its infancy. Although the raiders were able to withdraw with only minimal casualties, the raid sparked a strong controversy in the United States and focused more anxiety on the plight of the prisoners.(57) This operation marked the most publicized special operation undertaken by American forces in modern times, but was tainted in press reports as a huge failure. It had obviously not succeeded in its objective to free American POWs, but otherwise it displayed all the elements of a highly successful mission. Executed with precision, the raiders struck with the element of surprise deep into denied territory. Their fight was brief and fierce, and in the end, they suffered only very minor casualties. The intelligence they utilized was detailed and exact, yet not timely enough. Finally, the one factor which could not be controlled went against them; their luck did not hold. As with the many SEAL POW camp raids in the Delta, reaction by American planners was often fast enough to compose a comfortable plan, but not fast enough to take full advantage of timely intelligence.

The next day, SEAL Team One's Lieutenant Couch led ten SEALs from Whiskey platoon, Det Golf, along with nineteen Vietnamese troops on a mission to raid a suspected POW camp in the Mekong Delta. The SEALs had launched on a riverine patrol and captured a V.C. sentry who was quickly persuaded to reveal the location of the camp. About eight miles east southeast of New Nam Can, the force went into the attack and conducted a running firefight with eighteen

V.C. guards. (See map 4.) The Viet Cong fled the area, and the SEALs located and freed nineteen Vietnamese POWs. Two V.C. were captured, as well as several small arms and thirty pounds of documents. This was the newly arrived Whiskey platoon's first operation in-country. It would not be the last, and although no Americans were ever found in the Delta, it would not be the last SEAL attempt to find and release Allied prisoners of war. Men from UDT 13's Det Golf assisted in the extraction of the rescued prisoners by clearing a landing zone for Army helicopters.(58)

On 4 December, 9th platoon killed six V.C. and captured one other in a series of small ambushes twelve miles southwest of Hai Yen.(59) Two days later, a SEAL unit attempted to aid a Kit Carson Scout whose brother and mother had been abducted by the Viet Cong. Although they swept the reported target area, they were only able to locate the man's son, who had hidden himself from the Viet Cong.(60) During a raid on the 13th, a lone V.C. in a suicide attack attempted to detonate a grenade among a small group of SEALs in Binh Thuy District. The Communist soldier was killed, but managed to wound four of the frogmen.(61) Victor platoon from Team One relieved Juliett platoon in-country on 20 December.(62) On the same day, a squad from Team One's Zulu platoon inserted at the mouth of the Trai Cheo Canal. After seeing a lone V.C. soldier, they stalked the man until eleven more Communist soldiers appeared. The SEALs hailed the group, but the men scrambled to draw their weapons. The frogmen engaged them in a brief firefight, killing eight of the V.C. while the others escaped.(63) Also during a night patrol on 20 December, a five-man SEAL patrol from Team One's Xray platoon inserted sixteen kilometers east of Ben Tre to interdict a

communications liason route. (See map 5.) They stepped directly into an enemy ambush awaiting them. Heavy fire by an estimated fifteen-man enemy force mortally wounded the patrol leader and automatic weapons man. The radioman and Vietnamese guide were also hit. Radioman Second Class Harold Baker, the rear security man, was in charge of watching the patrol's back. He went into the river during the initial fire, barely able to swim with the heavy load of his equipment. He struggled ashore dragging the body of a patrol member with him. On the bank, he began a fierce counter-barrage, keeping the enemy force from overrunning the position. He then administered first aid to his team and helped evacuate them. Six other SEALs was scrambled to the area to provide security. Two Xray SEALs, Electrician's Mate Third Class James Ritter and Chief Electrician's Mate Frank Bomar, the former PRU advisor with a half dozen SEAL Vietnam tours to his credit, died in the attack. Baker was later awarded the Navy Cross for his actions.(64) On the 27th, 9th platoon raided a V.C. POW camp six miles southeast of Hai Yen. Six guards were killed in the fighting, but the Vietnamese prisoners of war had been recently moved.(65)

Vietnamization and disengagement was now beginning to catch up the direct action SEAL platoons. Some SEALs remained as advisors, but 1970 was the last heavy year of Special Warfare involvement in Vietnam. Captures of large arms cache and POW rescues still indicated the success of the frogmen. Additionally, intelligence from NILDs was more effective than in previous years. The heavy mission tempo again took a serious toll in Special Warfare lives. For the frogmen who remained, the lethal dangers of the battlefield would not diminish.

VII. Vietnamization (1970)

- (1) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1970, p. 36.
- (2) Ibid., 1970, p. 71.
- (3) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1969, Enclosure 1, p. 10.
- (4) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1970, p. 72.
- (5) Ibid., 1970, p. 73.
- (6) The Navy Cross, Vietnam (Forest Ranch, California, 1987), p. 184.
- (7) Ibid., p. 314.
- (8) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1969, Picture of Seafloat; UDT 11 Cruisebook 1970, "Det Golf; Seafloat."
- (9) UDT 11 Cruisebook 1970, "Wanderers of the Delta."
- (10) Unclassified Command History For UDT 11 For the Year 1970, Enclosure 1, p. 1.
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Silver Star Medal Citation For BMI Ronald J. Rodger, SEAL Team Two.
- (13) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1970, p. 39.
- (14) Ibid., 1970, pp. 28-29.
- (15) Ibid., p. 82.
- (16) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 2.
- (17) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary April, 1970, pp. 51-52.
- (18) Ibid., 1970, p. 52.
- (19) The Navy Cross, Vietnam, pp. 108-109; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary April, 1970, pp. 23-24.
- (20) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary May, 1970.
- (21) SEAL Team One Operational Summary Report For the Period April 21, 1970 Through May 25, 1970.
- (22) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1970, Enclosure 1, p. 8.
- (23) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1970, pp. 20-21.

- (24) Ibid., p. 13.
- (25) Ibid., pp. 23-24.
- (26) NAVSUPACT Det Binh Thuy 250713Z Jun 70; NAVSUPACT Det Binh Thuy 250722Z Jun 70; NAVSUPACT Det Binh Thuy 250724Z Jun 70; NAVSUPACT Det Binh Thuy 270856Z Jun 70; CTE 115.7.6.7 241105Z Jun 70.
- (27) COMNAVSPECWARGRUPAC 260808Z Jun 70.
- (28) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1970, p. 6.
- (29) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.
- (30) COMNAVFORV 221543Z Sep 70; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1970, p. 18.
- (31) Bronze Star Medal Citation For Eugenio D. Crescini, SEAL Team Two.
- (32) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1970, p. 11.
- (33) NAVSPECWARGRUV 050210Z Aug 70.
- (34) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1970, p. 58.
- (35) Naval Intelligence Liason Officer (NILO) Ben Tre End of Tour Report, March 1970 to March 1971.
- (36) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, p. 6; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary August, 1970, pp. 19-20.
- (37) Unclassified Command History For UDT 13 For the Year 1970, Enclosure 1.
- (38) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.
- (39) Pacific Stars and Stripes, December 3, 1970.
- (40) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary September, 1970, p. 8.
- (41) COMNAVFORV 221543Z Sep 70.
- (42) CTE 116.1.3.1 240624Z Sep 70.
- (43) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary September, 1970, pp. 14-15.
- (44) Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- (45) Pacific Stars and Stripes, November 8, 1970. At the time, no one was certain if it had been a command-detonated mine or one that

is activated when a patrol member stepped off the trail. Earlier in the year, Palma was a member of the team which helped recover the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission when the spacecraft encountered problems en route to the moon and was forced to return to earth without a lunar landing. The diverse and adventurous life of UDT missions many times appealed to young sailors who volunteered for the Teams. Leading such a career, Palma had been part of a rescue team for lunar astronauts and faced an enemy of a U.S. ally all within a matter of months. Every single loss in the small SpecWar community was strongly felt by the whole.

(46) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.

(47) Naval Intelligence Liason Officer (NILO) Ben Tre End of Tour Report, March 1970 to March 1971.

(48) Interview with Intelligence Specialist Master Chief Dennis Johnson by author, 19 August 1987, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

(49) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 1, p. 1; All Hands, March, 1970, p. 57.

(50) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary October, 1970, pp. 23-24.

(51) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1970, p. 11.

(52) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.

(53) Pacific Stars and Stripes, November 16, 1970.

(54) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1970, p. 15.

(55) Ibid., p. 36.

(56) Pacific Stars and Stripes, November 23, 1970; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1970, pp. 36-37.

(57) For Details of the Son Tay Raid, See Benjamin Schemmer, The Raid (New York, 1976).

(58) Pacific Stars and Stripes, December 2, 1970; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1970, p. 3.

(59) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1970, p. 13.

(60) Ibid., pp. 13-14.

(61) Ibid., pp. 38-39.

(62) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1970, Enclosure 2(b), p. 1.

(63) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1970, p. 9.

(64) The Navy Cross, Vietnam, pp. 21-22; COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon 220318Z Dec 70; COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon 220546Z Dec 70.

(65) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary December, 1970, p. 14.

## VIII. America Pulls Out (1971)

As the United States turned more of the actual fighting over to the Vietnamese, conventional forces packed up and returned to the States. Special force units were still very active, but it was during 1971 that they would wind down considerably. Navy Special Warfare elements were spread throughout South Vietnam advising, assisting, and continuing some of their hit-and-run tactics. A new detachment, SEAL Det Sierra, consisting of LDNN advisors was broken into five small units throughout the Delta. Alpha was located at Rach Soi on the Gulf of Thailand. Charlie was at Long Phu while Delta was at Nam Can at the replacement base for "Seafloat". Located ashore, this new facility was codenamed "Solid Anchor". Hotel was in the north at Hoi An in I Corps. The final group was utilized as training cadre for the LDNN course at Cam Ranh Bay. Additionally, the few remaining SEAL direct action platoons served as a ready reaction force in the event that a Viet Cong POW camp could be located.

At the beginning of the year, efforts were also underway closer to home to prepare the South Vietnamese to take over the conduct of the war. A SEAL Team Two platoon deployed to Puerto Rico for four months to train Vietnamese Naval Officers in Special Warfare techniques and tactics.(1) In Vietnam, Victor platoon killed three V.C. in a small ambush on 9 January.(2) On 12 January, Whiskey platoon killed two V.C. as the Communist soldiers attempted to ambush the frogmen. The SEALs had been assisting in the demolition of log and mud barricades in a canal seven miles northeast of Nam Can.(3) Lieutenant J.F. Thames from SEAL Team One became the first

SEAL fatality in the year 1971 during an operation on 19 January in the deep south near Nam Can. (See map 4.) The combined twelve-man SEAL/LDNN team came under heavy fire from small arms during their extraction following an operation thirty-three miles south southeast of Ca Mau. The Light SEAL Support Craft (LSSC) in which he was embarked was hit by two Communist B-40 rockets. The explosion damaged the craft badly, knocked several personnel overboard, and killed both Thames and two LDNN. A second SEAL advisor and another LDNN were wounded. One other LDNN was lost and could not be located after the action. The uninjured LDNNs returned a heavy volume of fire, keeping the Viet Cong at bay. Hearing of the fight while monitoring radio traffic from their base at Nam Can, Team One's Zulu platoon boarded helos and raced to the site to assist in a rescue of the unit. Under enemy fire, several SEALs jumped thirty feet from their helicopter to link up with the shaken SEAL/LDNN force and push the the V.C. back from the besieged team. As Zulu platoon swept the area and drove the enemy forces from cover, helicopter gunships added firepower. Medivac helos then lifted the wounded from the site.(4) Fireman Harold Birky from the same Team was killed four miles north of Ben Tre on the 30th. (See map 5.) His platoon was engaged in a sweep and destroy operation when they encountered a Viet Cong band as they patrolled west of a hootch complex. A firefight ensued, killing Birky and wounding two other SEALs. The young SEAL was shot in the hip and evacuated, but died enroute to a medical facility. The rest of his team extracted under heavy fire and called in air strikes once out of the area.(5) Six Viet Cong were killed when a SEAL patrol hit a bunker complex in An Xuyen Province on the 31st.(6)

At the beginning of February, Operation Lam Son 719 was launched by South Vietnamese forces into the panhandle of Laos. This massive undertaking, supported heavily by U.S. air assets, was designed to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail around the town of Tchepone. The initial phases of the operation caught the Communist forces by surprise, and the ARVN fared well. But before long, the North Vietnamese countered with massive troop attacks supported by Communist artillery and armor. Overwhelmed, the South Vietnamese withdrew after a short and very costly occupation. Casualties were very heavy on both sides. Lam Son 719 was watched closely by those who designed Vietnamization. The operation was a bold thrust by the South to take the initiative in the war. In the end, questions arose in political arenas as to just how ready the South was to assume the sole responsibility for their own defense.(7) Lam Son 719 could not be termed a victory in that respect.

During February, UDT 12 relieved UDT 13 as the WESTPAC deployed Underwater Demolition Team.(8) 9th platoon raided a V.C. financial meeting on 9 February, killing four guerrillas and capturing four others.(9) On 13 February, Romeo platoon conducted a daylight helo raid on a suspected fourteen-man V.C. mortar team eight miles south of Rach Sio. Following air strikes in the vicinity, the SEALs engaged and killed three Viet Cong, then discovered and destroyed a twenty-man rest area.(10) Another group of SEALs attacked a reported NVA encampment on 20 February with fire support from Cobra helicopters and USCGC Rush (WHEC 733). An agent report later stated that one Chinese propaganda cadre was killed and two NVA and three Chinese proselytizing cadre were wounded.(11) 10th platoon from Team Two inserted by helo into an enemy area on 24 February. They

had targeted a hootch complex on intelligence from an informant. As soon as they hit the ground, they came under fire, but pressed the attack and suppressed the enemy force. Eight Viet Cong were killed and numerous weapons and ammunition were captured. Two kilos of important documents were also captured. Information received later revealed that the SEALs had killed a Communist hamlet leader and enemy hamlet chief. Three other V.C. were captured, including a district leader.(12) While transiting the Ham Luong Canal on 28 February, a SEAL squad received heavy injuries when a B-40 rocket slammed into their river craft. Although no one was killed, all hands were wounded but returned fire long enough to exit the area.(13) It was also in February that the final three SEAL Team Two direct action platoons, 8th, 9th, and 10th, began their pullout. 8th platoon, located at the Navy base at Dong Tam, had conducted most of its missions in Dinh Tuong Province. They left the country without relief in February. Their operational area was turned over to SEAL Team One's Det Golf, Victor platoon, which began operations from the Navy base at Dong Tam.(14)

On 4 March, Xray platoon from Team One's Det Golf concluded their operational tour and departed Kien Hoa without relief. Although they sustained a higher than normal percentage of personnel casualties, their operational results were fairly typical of many platoons about this time. After 56 combat missions, they accounted for 36 V.C. KIA, another 12 captured, and numerous small arms and ammunition captured, including 340 mines slated for use against American forces, and 46 kilos of Communist documents. They lost four men killed and all the other men in the platoon were wounded, three so seriously they required evacuation to the States.(15) It

as on the 4th of March that Lieutenant Michael Collins was killed in Kien Hoa Province after suffering multiple fragmentation wounds from a V.C. riverine ambush.(16) (See map 3.)

In a sweep with local forces on 7 March, 9th platoon killed five V.C. and captured five others with weaponry.(17) Another SEAL Team Two squad was silently inserting into a canal bank on the 13th when a Viet Cong ambush erupted. The sampan immediately turned into the bank and the SEALs counter-attacked. They repelled the enemy fire and set up a defensive posture to extract. Helo gunfire was called in on the suspected enemy position and the squad made a safe extraction via riverine craft.(18) On the 15th, a 9th platoon squad conducted a heliborne raid into the midst of a Viet Cong wedding. The helo landed just outside the ceremonial hootch, and the fight was brief. Two enemy soldiers were killed and three others captured in the operation. The team spirited the captives away, along with a kilo of documents and a Viet Cong flag.(19) Five days later, the same 9th platoon squad inserted by helo into an area to find a small weapons cache. A guide led the team to discover ten German mausers, a Chicom carbine, and a French 7.5 automatic rifle.(20) It was clear that the SEAL platoons remaining in-country did not intend to decrease their small unit actions during the Spring, although the groups were being phased out of the action slowly. Until the last one left, they continued to sting the enemy at will.

Torpedoman's Mate First Class Lester Moe from SEAL Team One died during an operation in Kien Giang Province on 29 March. While serving as the pointman for his patrol, he reportedly activated a "Bouncing Betty" mine and was killed.(21) A 10th platoon mission on the 30th killed four V.C., including a proselytizing section chief,

postal communications chief, and a commo-liason messenger. Four kilos of documents were also captured.(22)

SEAL Team One's Whiskey platoon hit a V.C. camp southwest of Nam Can on 5 April, and became heavily engaged with a superior force. Under cover of helo gunships, they were able to extract without serious injury.(23) Four SEALs from Team One along with two Australian SAS and four South Vietnamese captured a Viet Cong leader in An Xuyen Province on the 7th.(24) Whiskey platoon killed three and wounded two Viet Cong on 11 April, twelve kilometers north of Nam Can. After searching the hootch where the enemy soldiers were located, two radio receivers were discovered as well as a pistol and a grenade.(25) The 10th platoon made another helo assault into a V.C. area on 30 April capturing six V.C., killing one, and discovering seven kilos of documents.(26)

SEAL Team One was presented its second Presidential Unit Citation for combat operations in Vietnam on 26 April. The award was presented for missions completed between 22 January 1968 to 20 May 1969. The combined detachments carried out more than 350 patrols during that time, always in a harsh environment and almost as often in small groups deep within enemy controlled territory.(27)

It was also in April that Team Two's 9th platoon was relieved by Team One's Papa platoon and returned to the States. Up until the end of their tour, the 9th platoon had split their two squads to double their efforts. One squad had operated out of the MACV District Compound in Ca Mau running missions into An Xuyen at the southern tip of the country. (See map 3.) The other squad operated in the same southernmost province from the MACV District Compound in Hai Yen. The SEAL Team Two Det Alfa OIC billet was dissolved on 8

April, and the final platoon in-country, the 10th, was assigned to the control of Team One's Det Golf DIC.(28)

These changes in platoon tours were not the only mark of Vietnamization that could be seen in SpecWar. It was clear by this time that the remaining squads were still successful in small-unit tactics, but the big results of years past were now seldom seen. The pace of the patrols had also slowed to a degree. On 12 May, a small SEAL ambush team, based out of Ca Mau, killed three V.C. in a riverine ambush of four sampans.(29) The following day, a SEAL squad raided a Viet Cong training site, killing two enemy soldiers, capturing 2,000 pounds of rice, and leveling the camp.(30) On the 17th, a squad from Victor platoon, in conjunction with South Vietnamese ground troops, discovered a huge enemy arms cache buried in fifty-five gallon drums.(31) While inserting for an ambush patrol on the 29th, a SEAL squad came under fire from a sampan, and immediately returned fire. Four armed V.C. were killed in the brief action.(32)

A SEAL patrol located an ordnance cache containing fifty-three B-40 rockets five miles northwest of Ben Luc on 4 June.(33) Two days later, a combined SEAL/Australian SAS team destroyed a V.C. supply cache using air strikes. The cache included 20,000 pounds of rice.(34) Quebec platoon interdicted a V.C. meeting twelve miles southeast of Ben Luc on 21 June, killing five Viet Cong.(35) In mid-June, the final SEAL Team Two operational platoon left the warzone without relief. The 10th had operated out of Vi Thanh since mid-January after the construction of two sea huts there. Most of their operations had been conducted in Choung Thien Province.(36)

(See map 3.)

At the beginning of July, Team One's Romeo platoon stood down and returned to the States without relief.(37) On 7 July, a SEAL squad and four Australian SAS inserted six miles northwest of Dong Tam to conduct an ambush. Discovering hootches in the area, they moved to search them when they flushed out five V.C. who fled the area. Helo gunship strikes were called in and the SEALs conducted a false extraction by having only a few men lifted out of the site. Shortly after, two armed Viet Cong returned to the area and were engaged and killed.(38)

On 2 August, four men from SEAL Team Two departed Conus to replace four SEALs serving as the LDNN advisory group. These men were the last SEALs from Team Two serving in-country as part of Det Sierra.(39) On 23 August, a six-man group from Team One's Oscar platoon, along with three Australian SAS, conducted an intelligence collection mission. After inserting from riverine craft, the group quietly patrolled to a hootch. Two SEALs and the interpreter entered the hut and came face-to-face with ten Viet Cong soldiers. Hand-to-hand combat immediately broke out as both sides fought to disengage. The Allied unit broke contact and moved to extract as other enemy forces in the vicinity combed the area in search of the combined team. Covered by air strikes, the group escaped by helo after having killed eight enemy troops.(40) On the 28th, two SEAL squads uncovered a small ordnance cache in a graveyard twelve miles northwest of Dong Tam. Two Viet Cong soldiers guarding the site were killed.(41)

A detachment of one officer and three enlisted men from the SEAL Team One SDV department spent 8 August to 22 September with UDT 12 aboard USS Grayback to assist in training. In a more bitter

event, four men, two of them active members of SEAL Team One, were arrested in August when they attempted to smuggle heroin into the United States inside a night vision scope.(42) This was to be one of the very few distasteful events that marred the strong combat record of the Special Warfare Teams.

Twenty-seven LDNN and two American SEAL advisors came under heavy attack from B-40 rockets and small arms in the Delta on 15 October. Casualties were slight and the unit was able to suppress fire and move to clear a bunker complex.(43) The Vietnamese government awarded SEAL Team One the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry on 21 October for their years of operations in Vietnam.(44) In mid-November, President Nixon announced that American ground forces were now in a strictly defensive role. The few men who remained in-country now felt the full weight of rules of engagement.

A SEAL Team Two man helped capture two V.C. on a patrol deep in enemy held territory on 13 November. The unit then split into two elements to try to capture three other soldiers still at large. As they moved into position, the teams came under enemy fire. Realizing the two small groups were in a bad position, the SEAL climbed a tree to effect radio communications. Helos were called and directed fire into the enemy forces. The Team broke contact and extracted with their prisoners.(45) Six LDNN operations were run in November, advised by U.S. Navy SEALs.(46) On the 29th of November, the New York Times ran an article on the role of the remaining SEALs in Vietnam. It noted that while the majority of the platoons were now being pulled out of the country in accordance with the American political policy, a handful remained for possible prisoner recovery efforts. It also noted that the majority of SEAL combat operations

had ended in October, and most of the thirty or so SEALs left in-country would depart in December. A few of the men who spoke to the reporter complained about the evolution of "Rules of Engagement" over the years. By the end of 1971, one man pointed out, the units had to announce they were coming into an operational area and then only fire when fired upon. To complete their missions under such conditions was virtually impossible. Many of the detachments decreased their operations for fear of being accused of atrocities. My Lai was fresh in the minds of the American conscience.(47)

SEAL Team One's Mike platoon from Det Golf, the last Team One direct action platoon in Vietnam, departed the country on 7 December without relief.(48) The large-scale direct SEAL involvement had now ended, just as many conventional forces had departed. The platoons which patrolled during the year, although scoring no overwhelming results, continued to hurt the Communists throughout IV Corps. UDT operations were also effectively cut, although UDT men were still available on fleet assets. What remained at the end of the year were a handful of advisors, including frogmen, to help the South hold their government. As Communist forces took advantage of the lull in fighting and the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the South waited for the storm to come. In December, the bombing resumed as the Communists continued to stall at the peace talks. Deep in Laos and Cambodia, the Communists were preparing for yet another large offensive. They continued to buy time.

### VIII. America Pulls Out (1971)

- (1) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1, p. 13.
- (2) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1971, p. 70.
- (3) Ibid., p. 6.
- (4) Pacific Stars and Stripes, January 23, 1971; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1971, pp. 8-10.
- (5) Pacific Stars and Stripes, February 1, 1971; COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary January, 1971, pp. 37-38.
- (6) Pacific Stars and Stripes, February 2, 1971.
- (7) For details of Lam Son 719, see Keith William Nolan, Into Laos (Novato, California, 1986).
- (8) Unclassified Command History For UDT 12 For the Year 1971.
- (9) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary February, 1971, pp. 29-30.
- (10) Ibid., p. 21.
- (11) Ibid., p. 31.
- (12) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, pp.7-8.
- (13) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary February, 1971, p. 49.
- (14) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1, p. 18.
- (15) Naval Intelligence Liason Officer (NILO) Ben Tre End of Tour Report, March, 1970 to March, 1971.
- (16) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1971.
- (17) CTU 116.2.3 071610Z Mar 71.
- (18) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1971.
- (19) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, p. 8.
- (20) Ibid.
- (21) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary March, 1971.
- (22) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, p. 8.
- (23) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary April, 1971, p. 15.

- (24) Ibid., pp. 15-16.
- (25) Ibid., p. 16.
- (26) Recommendation For Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team Two, dated November 14, 1972, Enclosure 1, pp. 8-9.
- (27) Presidential Unit Citation For SEAL Team One, second award.
- (28) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1, p. 21.
- (29) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary May, 1971, pp. 18-19.
- (30) Ibid., p. 19.
- (31) Ibid., p. 36.
- (32) Ibid., p. 20.
- (33) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary June, 1971, p. 4.
- (34) Ibid., p. 13.
- (35) Ibid., p. 8.
- (36) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1, p. 25.
- (37) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary July, 1971, p. 30.
- (38) Ibid., pp. 37-38.
- (39) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1, p. 3.
- (40) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary August, 1971, pp. 8-9.
- (41) Ibid., p. 19.
- (42) Pacific Stars and Stripes, August 21, 1971.
- (43) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary October, 1971, p. 6.
- (44) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1971, Enclosure 1(b)1.
- (45) Bronze Star Medal Citation For HM3 John K. Myers, SEAL Team Two.
- (46) COMUSNAVFORV Monthly Summary November, 1971, p. 38.
- (47) New York Times, November 29, 1971, p. 2.

(48) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year  
1971, Enclosure 1(b)1.

## IX. End of a War (1972)

1972 was another presidential election year, and although the United States was attempting to finally disengage from the war, the fighting was far from over. Vietnamization was in full swing, and American conventional forces were either home or on their way. The United States had traversed a full circle. The largest presence by Americans seemed to be, as it was at the beginning of the conflict, in the advisory and support roles.

No direct action SEAL platoons remained in Vietnam, but a number of individual SEALs remained as advisors or attached for special operations purposes to MACV-SOG. The last SEAL Team Two members in-country were four men comprising an LDNN advisory group. One of these American advisors was critically wounded when he was shot in the abdomen during an LDNN combat operation on 15 January.(1) SEAL Team One continued to keep a regular SEAL platoon on deployed status in WESTPAC for possible contingencies. On 10 January, Alfa platoon with Lieutenant Melvin Dry as the OIC, departed for that duty, staging on the island of Okinawa.(2) On 5 February, the last SEAL Team Two advisors departed Vietnam without relief. The two officers and two enlisted men had been part of the LDNN advisory group under Detachment Sierra. This action completed SEAL Team Two's in-country participation in the war.(3)

With the American combat troop level at an all time low, and a Presidential election around the corner in late 1972, the Communists prepared for another large-scale offensive. Frustrated American negotiators had suspended the Paris Peace Talks in March until the Communists decided to return for serious discussions. Second only

to Tet in 1968, the new attack was launched at the end of March, 1972 using mass troops as well as conventional armor and surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) never seen so far south to date. The offensive was not a guerrilla struggle against the Saigon regime. It was clearly nothing short of an actual conventional invasion by Northern troops into South Vietnam, having all the elements of a Nazi Blitzkrieg minus air superiority. It was called the Easter Offensive.(4)

On 2 April, three days after the offensive began, a specially-equipped United States Air Force EB-66 electronic warfare jet received a direct hit from a SAM. The aircraft and a sister EB-66 had been escorting three B-52 bombers on a mission near the DMZ. One man was known to have escaped the aircraft as it went down. Lieutenant Colonel Icaal Hambleton was an Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) aboard the stricken craft. Under parachute canopy, he was able to contact an OV-10 spotter plane which assisted in pinpointing his location once he landed on the ground. Hambleton had landed deep inside enemy held territory along the Song Mieu Giang River in I Corps. The NVA wasted no time in surrounding his position, but were unable to grab him immediately. Air Force A1E Skyriders began dropping ordnance in support of a large rescue effort. A group of four Army UH-1H helos entered the area to attempt a pickup, but received heavy fire. One crashed, killing all onboard. Another made an emergency landing on a beach south of Quang Tri.

Hambleton was in a very tight position. The Air Force dropped a mine field around his location, and the NVA could not touch him. But the NVA were also interested in using him for bait. Whenever

rescue aircraft entered the area, they received extremely heavy anti-aircraft fire. Two OV-10 spotter planes were shot down as well as a large HH-53 rescue helo while attempting a pickup. There were now several crewmen dead and others unaccounted for on the ground. Between 2 and 13 April, while the Easter Offensive raged in the surrounding province, the Air Force launched a massive effort to get Hambleton and others out. It was soon learned that Hambleton had spent time working in the Air Forces Strategic Air Command. The knowledge he retained on the United States ballistic missile system was considerable. If the NVA and their Russian allies had ever hoped to get their hands on a prize captive, it was one such as he. U.S. military leaders were just as determined to get him out. While plans were being made in the rear, the 53-year-old Hambleton hung on for dear life. There was considerable concern that he couldn't survive on minimal water for so long. The batteries to his survival radio had to be nursed with care as he maintained contact with spotter planes overhead.

It was at this point that Lieutenant Thomas Norris, detached from SEAL Team One, entered the scene. The young SEAL officer was part of a detachment assigned to advise the Vietnamese called the Strategic Technical Directorate Assistance Team (STDAT) 158. It was during the month of April 1972 that MACV-SOG was disestablished and STDAT was commissioned to replace it, and it was for just such a rescue mission, when all the technology and heavy machinery of war could not complete the job, that a small team of highly-trained men could provide useful alternatives.

On the night of the 10th, Norris led a five-man team 2,000 meters into NVA controlled territory and rescued one of the missing

OV-10 crewmen just before dawn. The team was able to evade to a forward operating base (FOB) and safety. After the FOB came under heavy attack, Norris led a three-man team into the bush twice on the 11th to try to get to Hambleton, but was unsuccessful. (See map 2.) A new approach was needed. Norris and a Vietnamese LDNN, Nguyen Van Kiet, dressed as peasants and paddled up river to a pickup point on the night of the 12th. Hambleton had been vectored to that point over a period of several days by aircraft laden with special electronics. Norris and Kiet located Hambleton and helped him into their small sampan, covering him with banana leaves for concealment. The linkup was quiet and uneventful, but the ride home was not. Carefully picking their way with frequent stops to evade NVA patrols, the three men traveled down river hugging the bank. Several times, the SEAL called in air strikes on positions directly in their path. After over three hours, they neared their objective. Just before returning to the FOB, they came under heavy automatic weapons fire. The Air Force was standing by and delivered an equally heavy lot of ordnance. The team was covered long enough to reach the FOB.(5)

The rescue mission, the most intensive of the Vietnam War, was a success, but had been very costly. It would remain a fact of the mentality of American military planners that small units like the SEALs were oftentimes forgotten or called upon only as a last resort when the large military machine could not do the job. Under such conditions, special operations units often meet the worst possible mission circumstances. Consideration for employment and possible prepositioning very early in a crisis situation almost always places special operations units in a better position if called upon. For

his daring action and relentless efforts in the rescue, LT Norris became the second SEAL in the history of Naval Special Warfare to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Nguyen Van Kiet, who volunteered to guide Norris deep into enemy controlled territory, became the only Vietnamese of the war to be awarded the Navy Cross.(6)

The South Vietnamese, with heavy U.S. air support, counter-attacked the Communist offensive and were victorious. As the Easter Offensive ground to a halt, the pull out of American forces continued. On 21 April, the last two advisors in Detachment Echo in Danang were called home without relief.(7) But while MACV-SOG was dissolved and its advisors sent home, others remained under STADT performing similar functions.

The Nixon Administration responded to the Easter Offensive with a heavy bombing campaign in North Vietnam. Called "Linebacker 1", the operation also included the mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese harbors, effectively cutting the supply of military equipment from Communist bloc countries. The North Vietnamese would now begin to feel the serious pressure of a nation who wished to disengage. Their Easter Offensive would not only be stopped, it would be answered. At the same time, United States political overtures to Communist China would make the Hanoi leadership sweat.

In late May and early June, preparations were made to conduct a classified maritime operation in Vietnam. Grayback was once again called into action and Lieutenant Melvin Dry's Alfa platoon from Okinawa was required for the mission. Before the operation could be fully conducted, LT Dry and others had to link-up with the forces at hand. It was during the link up process in the Gulf of Tonkin that a tragic accident occurred, killing the young SEAL Team One officer

and injuring others. On 6 June, LT Dry, known as "Spence" to his colleagues, became the final Special Warfare fatality of the war. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.(8)

The war overseas was never forgotten by those who had been there. Although the vast majority of frogmen in the Teams were no longer active participants, there were always reminders that the war was still being fought. On 6 July, SEAL Team One boxed and sent a shipment of old combat uniforms and jungle boots to their Vietnamese brothers in the LDNN.(9) At the end of the month, the Commanding Officer of SEAL Team One served as the official escort to Brigadier General Lon Nol of the Khmer Republic during his visit in the San Diego area.

During the latter part of the year, Danang continued to be plagued by rocket attacks. Intelligence had plotted an actual belt from where the missiles always seemed to originate. Two American SEAL advisors, one officer and one enlisted, led a Vietnamese team in an operation to locate the rocket crews on 18 October. The SEALs were part of the STDAT 158 advisors who remained actively assisting the Vietnamese in special operations in I Corps. The men established an observation point along a river which intelligence believed the enemy forces were using to transport the rockets. Taken under fire, they were able to complete their operation, the results of which helped neutralize the effects of the Communist rocket crews.(10) By the end of October, Henry Kissinger had announced that peace was at hand. The presidential election was around the corner and the war seemed all but over. Yet every day in the field held the same danger for the SEALs left in the country.

On 31 October, a five-man team was working deep within I Corps. Two of the men were American SEALs; Lieutenant Tom Norris, the man who rescued two American airmen during the Easter Offensive earlier in the year, and Engineman Second Class Michael Thornton, his assistant, from SEAL Team One. With them were three Vietnamese LDNN. The group was based out of Cat Lai. Their mission on that day was to capture an NVA prisoner and gather intelligence on the Cua Viet Naval River Base. (See map 2.) The base had been previously owned by the South Vietnamese, but that had been before the Easter Offensive had disrupted Quang Tri Province.

The small team set out in an IBS from a Vietnamese Navy junk in the predawn hours. They landed on the beach at about 0400 hours and hid the craft. All was quiet; their landing had not been detected. They patrolled inland through the sand dunes for the next two hours to close on their target. Things seemed to be going well until just after dawn. They were notified at that time that they had been inserted too far to the north of their intended landing point. Among the nondescript dunes, it was hard to find a known reference point to pin down their exact location. Without an accurate position, they would not be able to receive gunfire support if they ran into trouble. Since they were deep in enemy territory, they could waste no time. They turned back toward the beach to contact the junk and get a better fix.

As they reached the last few dunes, their luck ran out. Two NVA soldiers spotted them and a skirmish broke out. Ten other enemy soldiers immediately appeared and joined the firefight. The frogmen set up a defensive perimeter while Norris attempted to make radio contact with supporting forces and call in naval gunfire. After

several minutes of fighting, the enemy soldiers were all killed or wounded, but the fight had just begun. An estimated forty to sixty NVA were seen just beyond the dunes making a fast approach to encircle the team.

The next 45 minutes saw a fierce firefight, including grenade attacks and naval gunfire from offshore. Despite the ferocious fighting, the NVA moved to within 25 yards of the SEALs. One of the LDNN was hit in the hip and Thornton had shrapnel wounds in both legs. There was no place to run. Badly outnumbered and low on ammunition, Norris ordered the men to the last cover before the open beach and the ocean. He and one LDNN stayed behind to cover the "Leap Frog" maneuver. Thornton and the other two LDNN sprinted through gunfire 125 yards back to the last dune. Before long, the final LDNN made it to their position and told Thornton that Norris was dead. He had sustained a head wound while trying to fire his final Light Anti-Armor Weapon. Thornton believed the words of the LDNN, but he refused to leave the officer's body to the enemy. He immediately sprinted back through a hail of small arms fire to Norris' position. As he came upon the area, two NVA soldiers were overrunning the site. Thornton immediately attacked and quickly killed them both. He found the Lieutenant critically wounded and unconscious, but still alive. Wasting no time, he picked him up and slung him over his shoulder, sprinting back to the LDNNs at the last duneline, once more through heavy weapons fire. The NVA now believed they had the men trapped. They pressed forward to storm the position.

Thornton and the LDNN relied on their training and experience and took the only way out. They turned for the water and fought

their way to the surf. It was 250 meters across the open beach, and the exhausted Thornton ran and crawled with Norris on his back. Laden with his combat gear, he swam the team leader out through a four-foot surf and inflated his UDT lifejacket. They swam hard until they were outside of small arms range. Thornton then gave the wounded officer first aid treatment and tied Norris' hands together. Draping the officers hands around his neck, Thornton continued to tow him seaward for the next two hours. The Vietnamese junk that had dropped them off at the beginning of the mission now picked them up at about 1130. Shortly after, they were transferred to USS Newport News for medical treatment.(11) Norris survived the mission and after extensive medical treatment recovered remarkably well from the critical wound. For his nearly superhuman display, EN2 Thornton became the third frogman in Naval Special Warfare history to win the Medal of Honor.

The year had been one of little engagement for the few SEAL advisors who remained in the South, but it was during the operations of 1972 that the quality of the individual frogmen became clearly evident. Through all the offensives and counter-offensives and the massive use of the technological war machine, there were still those moments when the skill and daring of a few individuals made the difference. No longer in the direct action mode, the Special Warfare men proved their high value as advisors once again, as they had at the beginning of the war. In December, the Nixon Administration, who had won reelection in November, had finally had enough. With Presidential approval, Operation "Linebacker II" was launched before Christmas. The heavy day and night bombing of military and industrial targets in the north finally brought the

Communists to the negotiating table with a serious attitude. After only a few days, the American bombers were meeting little resistance over the north. Because of the mining of their harbors the previous Spring, the Communists were unable to resupply their missile and anti-aircraft forces. They chose to sign a ceasefire in order to buy time and regroup. One way or another, the world sensed that the end of the long struggle was near.

IX. End Of A War (1972)

- (1) SA LDNN 180010Z Jan 72.
- (2) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1972, Enclosure 1(b), p. 1.
- (3) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team Two For the Year 1972, Enclosure 1(b), p. 3.
- (4) For details of the Easter Offensive, see COL G.H. Turley, The Easter Offensive (Novato, California, 1985).
- (5) William C. Anderson, BAT-21 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1980); Alexander Jason, Heroes (Pinpole, California, 1979), p. 174; All Hands, (April, 1976), p. 17.
- (6) The Navy Cross, Vietnam, (Forest Ranch, California, 1987), pp. 332-333.
- (7) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1972, Enclosure 1(b), p. 1.
- (8) Ibid., p. 2; ADMIN COMNAVFORV 171320Z Jun 72.
- (9) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1972, Enclosure 1(b), p. 2.
- (10) Letter of Commendation from COL William W. Hoover, USAF, to STDAT 158 dated October 27, 1972.
- (11) Jason, Heroes, p. 233; All Hands, (January, 1974), pp. 19-21.

## X. The Years After (1973-1975)

In the years following the Ceasefire signed in January 1973, the war became a memory. For some in the Teams, it was a nightmare to be forgotten, but which always remained. For others, it had been some of the best years of their lives when the outside world didn't exist and friendships were unshakeable. It was the Vietnam war years that really built the foundation of the modern Special Warfare reputation, a reputation that would not soon be forgotten. But the end of the Vietnam involvement had not come yet, and there would always be the reminders.

The Naval Advisory Group and Marine Corps Advisory Unit received a Navy Unit Commendation following the ceasefire for their action from 10 May 1965 to 28 March 1973. As a small but important part of that advisory effort, SEALs and UDTs had advised, assisted, and even led South Vietnamese forces on countless combat operations to help stem the flow of the insurgency. Although their many successes in enemy-held territory could be readily counted, it was on the political side that the final outcome of the war was being decided. On 11 January 1973, the entire LDNN team from Dong Tam was ambushed on the Bo De River. Two LDNN were killed and eight wounded. Without their American SEAL advisors' support, the Vietnamese frogmen would find the Communist forces taking the offensive.(1)

On 12 March 1973, STDAT 158 was disestablished and the final American advisors, including a handful of SEALs, were sent home to Conus.(2) As part of the Ceasefire agreement, the United States swept and disarmed mines that had been dropped into North Vietnamese

waters to isolate Haiphong and other harbors in the 1972

"Linebacker" campaigns. One particular SEAL, trained extensively in explosive ordnance disposal, was assigned to the EOD detachment which helped in the mine clearance. He had volunteered for the duty in hopes of winning an informal bet with another SEAL. Both men wished to be the last active duty SEAL assigned to Vietnam. After so many years of considering Haiphong and other waters in North Vietnam deeply denied areas, it was strange to stay in a Haiphong hotel during the work. He had never guessed he would see the North from that perspective.(3)

During the early part of 1974, SEAL Team Two was awarded its second and final Presidential Unit Citation. Their exemplary performance on numerous operations, including prisoner rescues, was clearly evident.(4) Nearly a year later, on 9 January 1975, SEAL Team One received its third and final Presidential Unit Citation. Their operations amply demonstrated the quality of the many men who comprised the various Team One detachments from 1 January 1970 to 7 December 1971.(5)

In the desert east of San Diego, the SEALs of Team One constructed an isolated training base near the Salton Sea. Named at that time for the young SEAL officer who first won the Medal of Honor, Camp Kerrey became the site for all SEAL platoons conducting live demolition and weapons training. Much later it would be renamed for the first SEAL killed in Vietnam, Billy Machen. On 4 April 1974, Alfa platoon from Team One concluded the first phase of a training program at the site for twelve Cambodian Naval officers. The men would return to their country to assist in stemming the Communist insurgency, supported by the North Vietnamese, still alive

in the Khmer Republic.(6) From 5-11 May, Alfa platoon continued the training at the Naval station in Vallejo, California, where harbor defense and port security techniques were taught as part of "Hardefex 1-74".(7)

Later in the year, SEAL training of Cambodian Naval personnel continued. From 1 July to 6 September 1974, SEAL Team One's Charlie platoon conducted tactics and diving training for the foreign frogmen in Subic Bay.(8) Team One's Golf platoon took over the training role from 26 November to 5 December.(9) Alfa platoon finished the training during the final week of 5-11 December.(10) One report, meanwhile, stated that five SEAL officers served as Naval Attaches between 1973 and 1975 to the American Embassy in Phenom Phen.(11) It was obvious that the Special Warfare men were highly respected for their abilities to prepare others to fight insurgency, and although the United States was disengaging from the Vietnamese war, the government continued to try to assist the pro-U.S. forces against the Communists.

The North Vietnamese launched their final offensive on the South after the first of the year in 1975. By the end of April, the Communist forces succeeded in conquering the South when the United States Congress refused to intervene. Elements of UDT 11 and Delta platoon from SEAL Team One, like Marines and other U.S. forces, stood by for possible contingencies, but were not used in combat. Only days before the fall of Saigon, the capital of Cambodia was captured by the Communist Khmer Rouge.

On 12 May 1975, SS Mayaquez, a U.S. cargo container vessel, was captured by Communist Cambodian forces. The Khmer Rouge were just then attempting to consolidate their power in the provinces around

the country. Cities were being emptied and people were driven into the countryside in an attempt to bring the country back to the year zero. On the islands along the coast, the Khmer Rouge were fortifying every small possession in the event of anticipated future border clashes with their Vietnamese Communist neighbors. Several ships under various flags had been attacked in early May off the coast of Kampuchea, as Cambodia was now called, as they transited the Gulf of Thailand.(12)

During the next four days, the United States prepared to retake Mayaguez and rescue the crew after all diplomatic initiatives had proven unsuccessful. The ship had been relocated off the island of Koh Tang by the Communists, while the crew was believed to be located at an enemy encampment at the northern end of the island. (See map 2.) Delta platoon from SEAL Team One was available in Subic Bay for contingency operations. They were initially alerted and moved to Naval Air Station Cubi Point with ammunition and weaponry. Soon after, they were ordered to stand down. U.S. Marines were used without Special Warfare support and struck the island using a small armada of CH-53 and HH-53 helicopters on the morning of 15 May. Even as they attempted to land, the Leathernecks immediately became heavily engaged. A full day of fierce fighting erupted on the island. The crew was released early in the day by the Communists, having been set free on a boat coming from the mainland, and the rest of the operation was spent attempting to disengage and recover the Marines on Koh Tang. Recovery of the ship, abandoned by the Communists, was easily accomplished during the early phase of the mission and it was towed to sea while the island fighting raged.

On the island, the Cambodians were much more heavily armed and entrenched than originally believed. In the end, the Marines suffered fifteen killed, three missing, and a large number wounded. Almost all of the fourteen helicopters utilized were literally shot to pieces. Delta platoon was brought forward and a plan was then proposed in the aftermath by conventional staffers for the SEALs to go ashore unarmed and recover some of the American bodies and equipment left behind in the fighting. A leaflet drop would indicate to the Communists that the frogmen were there on a humanitarian mission and a request would be made to allow them to work freely. In light of the attitude of the Communists during the previous days, the plan was scrapped as unsound.(13)

No SEAL or UDT element was used for a clandestine reconnaissance of the island prior to the assault, as is characteristic of most amphibious operations. Such a mission is completely within the design and charter of UDT/SEAL teams. A small reconnaissance party of combat swimmers might well have been able to discover that the captured crew was not on the island. At the very least, they would most likely have been able to notify planners of the heavily fortified bunkers and weaponry the Khmer Rouge had on line. At times it seems hard for the United States to temper its conventional military response through special operations. Small teams of highly trained men, at the right place, at the right time, can oftentimes make the critical difference, whether they are the main assaulting force or in support of others.

In the final analysis, the small role played by UDT/SEAL units in the Vietnam War was just as typical. Although they were highly successful in their own districts and provinces throughout the

Delta, their full potential was never really fully understood nor tapped. Most of their operations, especially early in the war, were nothing more than small-unit infantry tactics in a swamp environment. During the early years of the war and into early 1967, they were not only unknown in most military arenas, but seldom understood. They were posted throughout the Ca Mau Peninsula and only gained attention as a product of their operational results. The early squads generally sat in all-night riverine ambushes or blindly stalked the swamps in hopes of running into a large enemy force. Their daring and aggressiveness gained more attention from most conventional planners than their true skills and capabilities. By the middle of 1967, they were able to develop their own intelligence nets in their assigned areas, which were successfully cultivated and produced significant dividends. Each platoon passed on their experience and intelligence nets to newly arriving Teammates who would carry on the fight for another tour. While the United States had a tremendous potential with the UDT/SEAL submarines, they were never really fully employed to assist in striking heavily into North Vietnam. Although the SEAL squads matured in their operations in the Delta over the years using helicopter, fixed wing, and naval support, they were rarely used in more than small raids and ambushes. As advisors they proved invaluable, from the early years of the conflict until the very end. Their leadership and training ability carried the LDNN program a long way. Their parachuting capabilities were never really employed, as was typical of U.S. Army Airborne forces also. Their scuba diving skills were only utilized on a small level and then mostly for administrative rather than operational missions. Most of

all, their full potential in special operations was never fully integrated in the overall military strategy and goals of the war. They were never really viewed as anything more than a local tactical asset.

Fourteen men from the United States Navy won the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War. Three were SEALs, all from SEAL Team One. Seven frogmen won The Navy Cross, three from Team One, two from Team Two, and two from UDT 12. One South Vietnamese was also awarded that honor. Over fifty Silver Stars and several hundred Bronze Stars were also awarded to frogmen who served in Vietnam.

For both SEAL Teams, what remained was a distinguished combat record. They also lost a lot of men. At the time of the Ceasefire, there were over 2,500 Americans missing or otherwise unaccounted for. Some had been seen alive in Communist hands, yet never came home. Some were lost in combat operations. Others were lost through the accidents inherent in a war zone. Yet none of the missing were from the ranks of UDT/SEALs. In all the deep penetration strikes, the operations in enemy controlled territory, no UDT frogman or SEAL ever failed to return. For those who died, their Teammates carried their remains back every time. It was a feat unmatched by any special operations unit of similar involvement. Of the forty-eight men who died in Vietnam assigned to Naval Special Warfare units, thirty-four were from SEAL Team One, nine from SEAL Team Two, three from UDT 13, one from UDT 12, and one detached from NAVSPECWARGRUPAC and assigned to SEAL Team One Det Golf.

A more important statistic involved prisoner rescues. Throughout the war, and especially toward the end, SEALs stood ready

to strike any suspected prisoner of war camp in the hopes of saving others. These were the type of special operations which truly employed the talents of SEALs. Ninety-eight total rescue operations were mounted by U.S. forces throughout the war, the most famous being the Son Tay raid. Only twenty of those missions succeeded in recovering prisoners. 318 South Vietnamese were freed in those 20 operations.(14) Of the half-dozen major successful rescues in which SEALs participated, 152 Vietnamese captives were freed, accounting for 48% of POWs freed during the war. Unfortunately, and much to the frustration of the maritime raiders, no Americans were ever found in the Mekong Delta, although numerous hot leads were followed; yet that never deterred further attempts by the frogmen. The most important lesson identified by this example is that true special operations are extremely intelligence dependent. The information to plan and conduct a successful mission must be detailed and, above all, timely. This lesson is as valid today as it has been in any previous conflict. For men such as the SEALs, target data is never sufficient enough. Planners must also be provided with an accurate picture of environmental and maritime intelligence. As was seen in Vietnam, the Teams must always fight two enemies, as they did then, to succeed; the enemy force and Mother Nature.

The number of enemy casualties caused by U.S. Naval frogmen during the conflict will never be officially detailed; the records remain too complex to attempt the arithmetic. Officially, the Navy claims the Teams had a confirmed kill numbering 580 with over 300 probable. The figure is inaccurate and very low. Official records show that the SEAL direct-action platoons alone held the following

statistics:

Killed in Action:	Confirmed	Probable
SEAL Team One	1000	370
SEAL Team Two	1026	419 (15)

The number of enemy captured by these units nearly equalled the number killed. Additionally, it must be remembered that these statistics are for the direct action platoons alone, which ran over four thousand of missions. They do not consider the numbers accounted for through SEAL-led LDNN and PRU operations, nor do they account for those from MACV-SOG missions. At the same time, none of the numbers involve enemy forces caught by close air support or naval gunfire directed by frogmen. And lastly, none of the statistics include the forces killed or captured by UDT operations. The data to compile these additional points is either lost, scattered, inaccessible, or incomplete. But the point made by the known statistics can be readily digested. Men trained such as this can produce results far beyond expectations for their numbers. Death in war is the frightening reality. It is only through violent struggle that political goals can be met. But one SEAL said it best. When asked about the numbers of enemy killed officially disclosed by the Navy, he stated that the Navy probably figured the Teams could only receive the type of attention that would taint their image if the full results were ever compiled. Their job was to capture and kill the enemy and destroy his areas of basing. The Teams did just that with tremendous effect; perhaps too well for some. Body counts, all important recordings at one point in the war of attrition, at the end seemed almost a repugnant statistic following so many years of combat on both sides.

Of the men from the Teams who served in Vietnam, enough has not been written. Many were discharged after their time elapsed in the service. Others remained and continue to serve even today. Many of those who remained lived to teach younger frogmen the meaning of lessons learned in combat. Of those awarded the Medal of Honor, EN2 Thornton was such a man. He became an instructor at the BUD/S course and later became an officer. LT Tom Norris was retired from the Navy in the mid-70s and went on to lead a distinguished career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. LT(JG) Joseph Kerrey had a difficult return. Pulled from the SEALs' war on that night in March, 1969, he was put into the medical evacuation system. The lower part of his right leg was destroyed and lost from the grenade which exploded at his feet. It took a lot of long, hard months of rehabilitation to come home. In many ways, he felt the bitterness of many Vietnam veterans once back in the States. A year after the combat operation which wounded him, he was awarded The Medal, but it didn't end at that. To fully adjust took time--a lot of time. Joseph Kerry went on with his life as best he could. The movies and media stereotype of the half-crazed veterans did not help him or others. He eventually rose to become the Governor of Nebraska, a tremendous tribute to both his own recovery and symbolic of those veterans who proved the stereotype wrong.

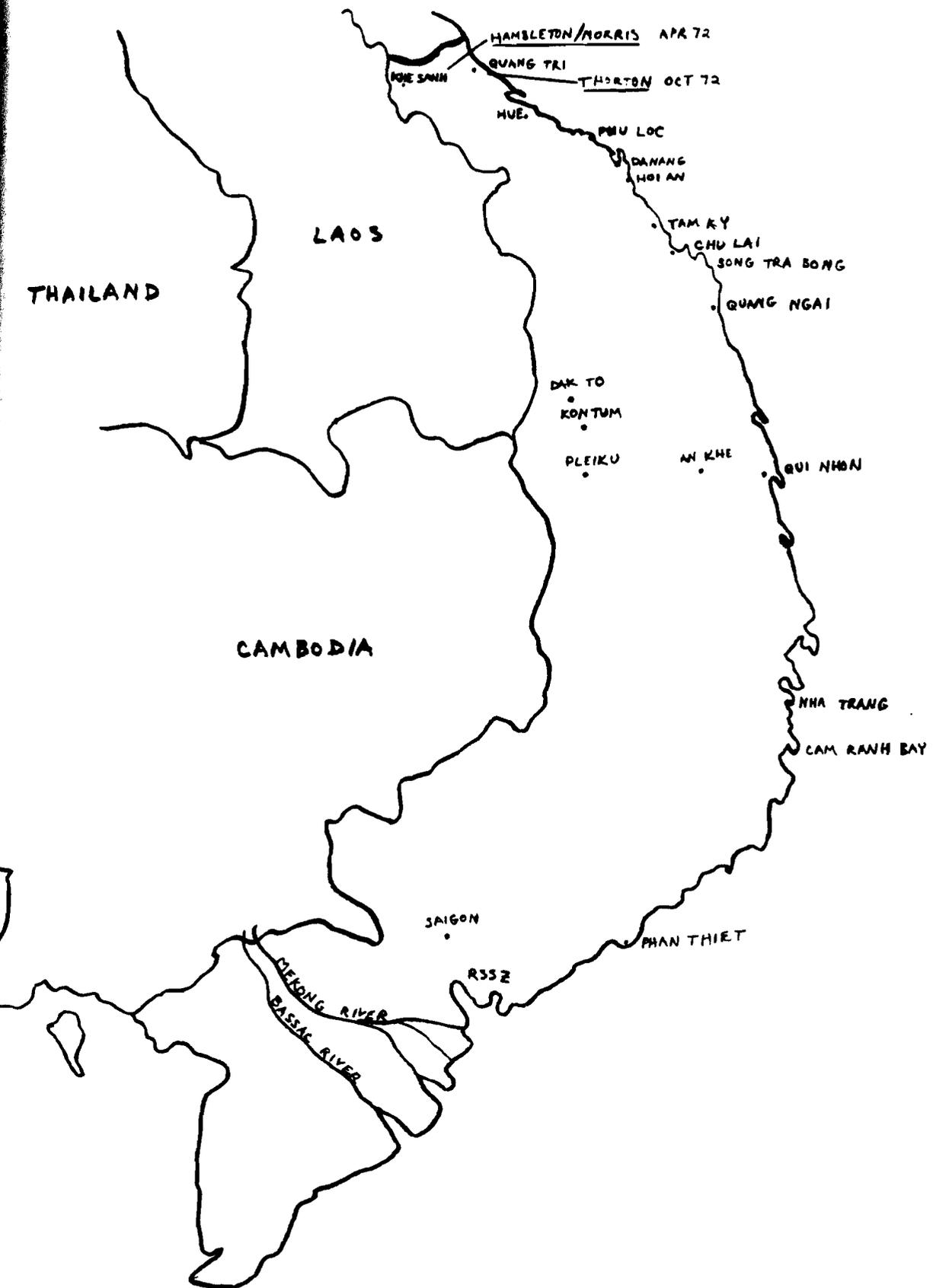
In 1983, the name Underwater Demolition Team was erased from the active duty Navy rolls. All the Teams are now SEAL Teams. Their mission remains very similar to UDTs and SEALs who served in Vietnam. Today they support fleet operations world-wide in amphibious and special operations. And even today, they look to the

lessons of the past and to those men who have acquired experience. Experience itself is the best teacher of all, and they fully realize they have a strong reputation to uphold.

## X. The Years After (1973-1975)

- (1) Navy Unit Commendation for the Naval Advisory Group, Vietnam and Marine Corps Advisory Unit, Vietnam.
- (2) Shelby Stanton, Green Berets At War (Novato, California, 1985), p. 278.
- (3) Interview with BMCM James Finley by author, 21 August 1987, Virginia Beach, Virginia.
- (4) Presidential Unit Citation for SEAL Team Two, second award.
- (5) Presidential Unit Citation for SEAL Team one, third award.
- (6) Unclassified Command History For SEAL Team One For the Year 1974, Enclosure 1(b), p. 2.
- (7) Ibid., p. 3.
- (8) Ibid., Enclosure 3(b)2.
- (9) Ibid., Enclosure 3(b)10.
- (10) Ibid., Enclosure 3(b).
- (11) New York Times, August 11, 1975.
- (12) For details of the Mayaguez Incident, see Roy Rowen, The Four Days of the Mayaguez (New York, 1975).
- (13) Drew Middleton, Air War-Vietnam (New York, 1978); Interview with CDR Thomas Coulter by author, 21 August, 1987, Virginia Beach, Virginia.
- (14) Benjamin Schemmer, The Raid (New York, 1976), pp. 237-238.
- (15) Statistics compiled by the author from the Command Histories for SEAL Teams One and Two.

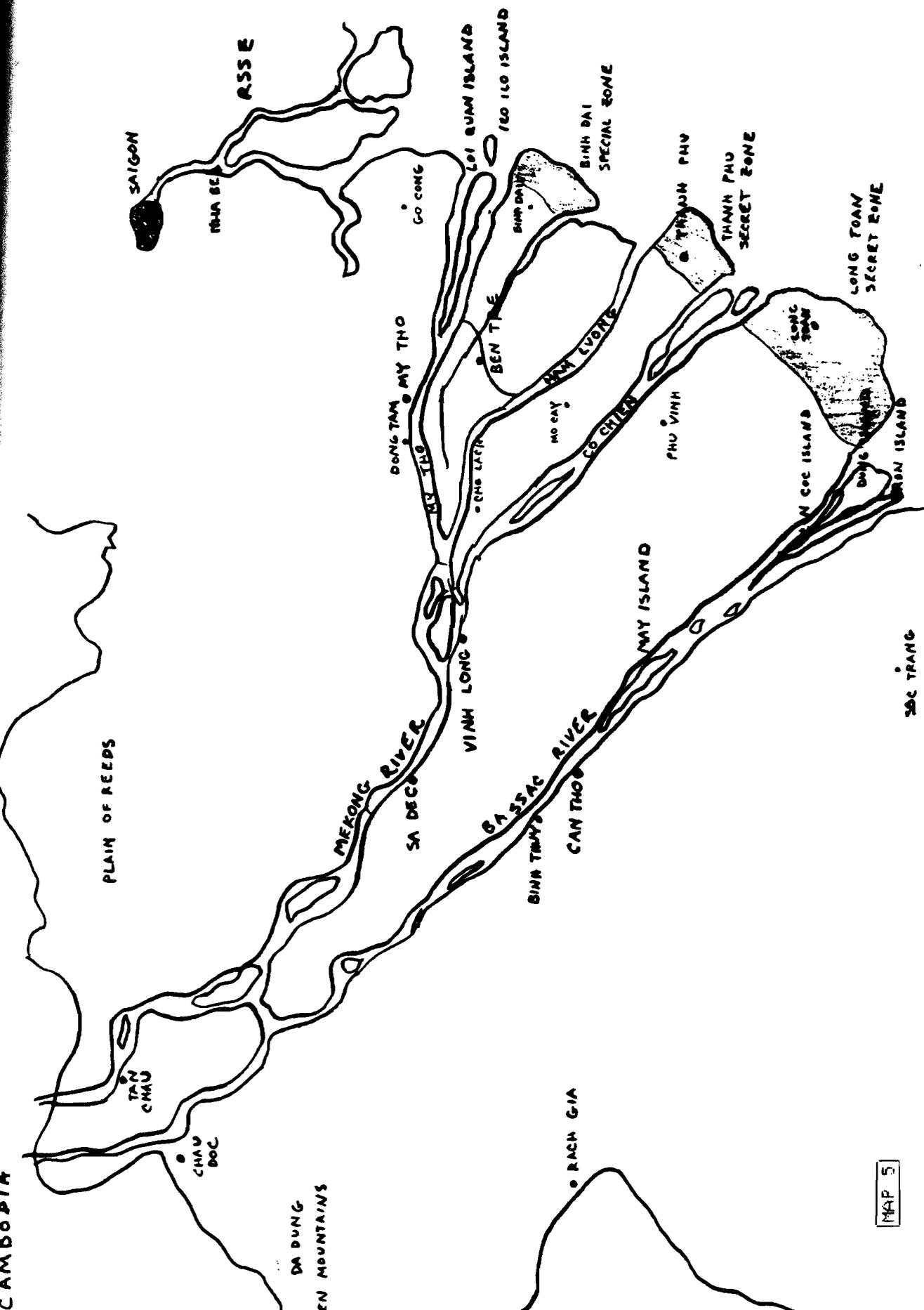




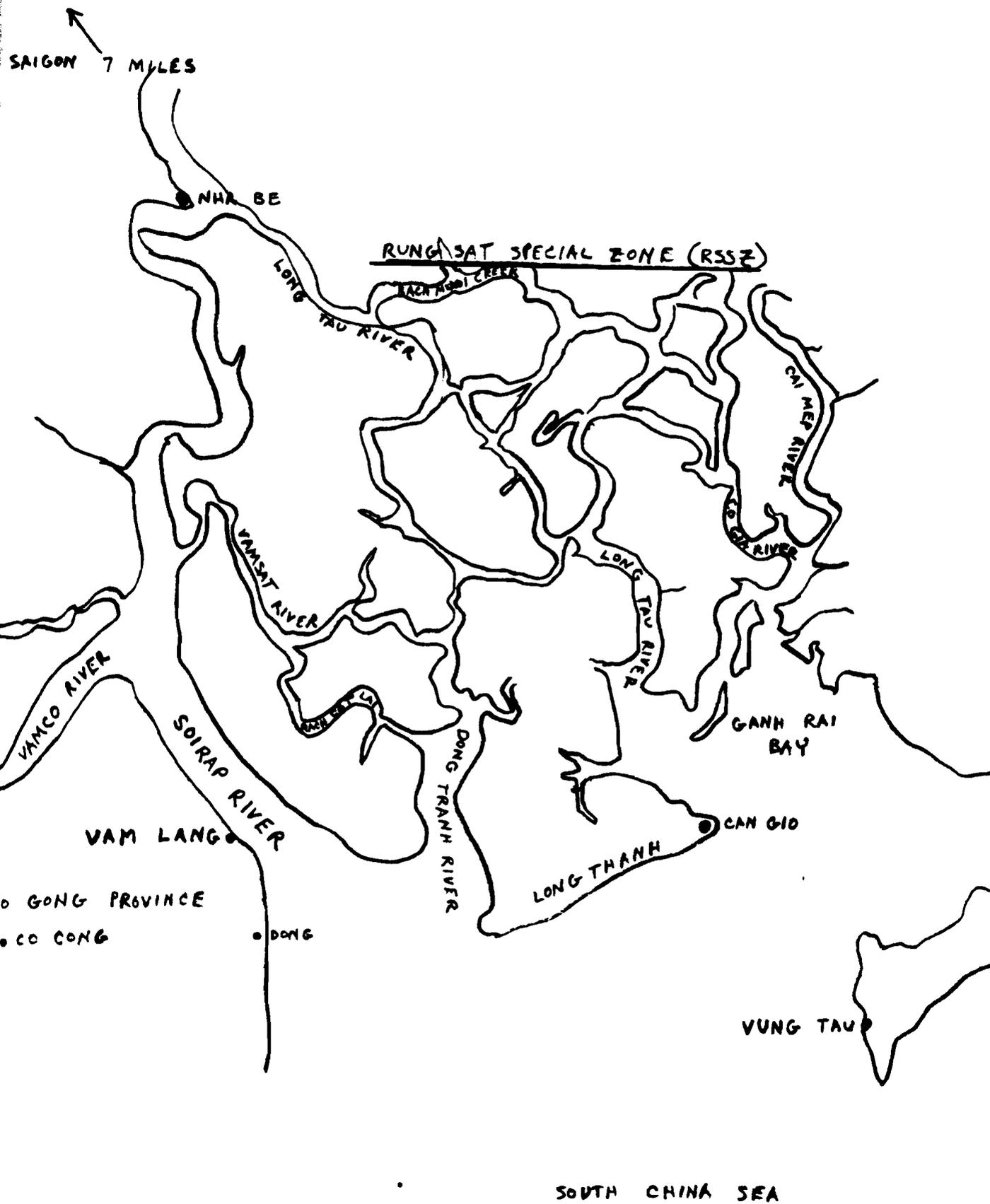


from Vietnam Order of Battle, by Shelby L. Stanton





MAP 5



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SEAL Team Two	1962-1975
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UDT 12	1946-1975
UDT 13	1968-1971
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<u>USS Tunny</u>	1967-1970
<u>USS Grayback</u>	1970-1973

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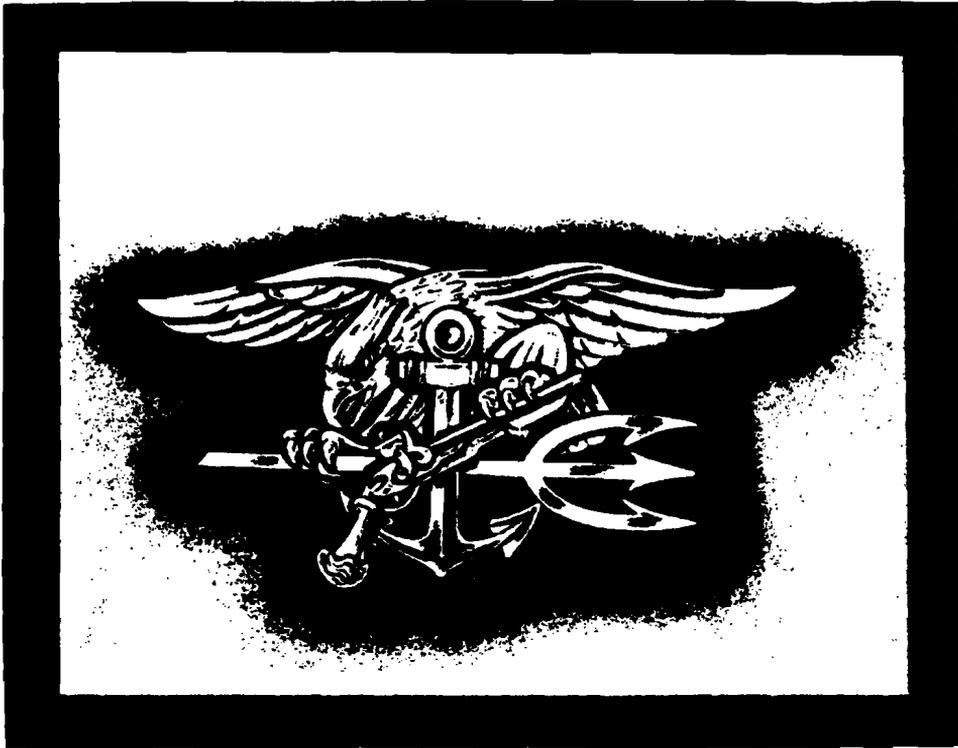
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May 27, 1973.



Appendix A  
Naval Special Warfare Breast Insignia

Appendix B: Navy Special Warfare Personnel Killed in Vietnam

	NAME	UNIT	DATE	LOCATION; INCIDENT
1)	RD2 Billy W. Machen	ST-1	19 Aug 66	RSSZ; Ambush
2)	LT Daniel M. Mann	ST-1	7 Apr 67	RSSZ; River Ambush
3)	IC3 Donald E. Boston	ST-1	7 Apr 67	RSSZ; River Ambush
4)	RM3 Robert K. Neal	ST-1	7 Apr 67	RSSZ; River Ambush
5)	SM3 Leslie H. Funk	ST-1	6 Oct 67	RSSZ; Drowned
6)	SN Frank G. Anthone	ST-1	23 Dec 67	RSSZ; Small Arms
7)	SN Roy B. Keith	ST-1	11 Jan 68	Ba Xuyen; Small Arms
8)	GMG1 Arthur G. Williams	ST-2	18 Jan 68	Mekong; Small Arms
9)	LCDR Robert E. Condon	UDT12	18 Jan 68	Mekong; River Ambush
10)	ADR2 Eugene T. Fraley	ST-2	21 Jan 68	Mekong; Boobytrap
11)	AMG3 Clarence T. Risher	ST-2	31 Jan 68	Chau Doc; Small Arms
12)	BM1 Walter G. Pope	ST-1	29 Apr 68	Kien Hoa; Non-Hostile
13)	SFP2 David E. Devine	ST-1	6 May 68	Kien Hoa; Drowned
14)	SK2 Donald H. Zillgitt	ST-1	12 May 68	Vinh Binh; Small Arms
15)	CS1 Donnie L. Patrick	ST-1	15 May 68	Vinh Long; Explosion
16)	EMC Gordon C. Brown	ST-1	19 May 68	Kien Giang; Boobytrap
17)	MM1 Joseph A. Albrecht	ST-2	2 Aug 68	Chau Doc; Boobytrap
18)	SK1 Robert K. Wagner	ST-1	15 Aug 68	Vinh Binh; Boobytrap
19)	W01 Eugene S. Tinnin	ST-1	20 Aug 68	Vinh Long; Ambush
20)	LT Fredrick E. Trani	ST-2	14 Sep 68	Mekong; Boobytrap
21)	ABH2 Roberto Ramos	ST-2	29 Oct 68	Long Xuyen; Small Arms
22)	ETN3 James K. Sanders	ST-1	22 Nov 68	Saigon; Non-Hostile
23)	SM1 David A. Wilson	ST-1	14 Jan 69	Vinh Long; Boobytrap
24)	GMG1 Harry A. Mattingly	ST-2	16 Jan 69	Mekong; Small Arms

25)HMC Robert L. Worthington UDT13 12 Apr 69 Duong Keo; River  
Ambush

26)ATN1 Kenneth E. Van Hoy ST-1 18 May 69 Kien Giang; Mortar Rd

27)QM2 Ronald E. Pace ST-1 18 May 69 Kien Giang; Mortar Rd

28)MM2 Lowell W. Meyer ST-1 18 May 69 Kien Giang; Mortar Rd

29)HM1 Lin A. Mahner ST-1 25 May 69 Kien Giang; Mortar Rd

30)LTJG David L. Nicholas ST-1 17 Oct 69 Nam Can; Small Arms

31)HM1 Richard O. Wolfe ST-1 30 Nov 69 Nam Can; Helo Crash

32)AE1 Curtis M. Ashton ST-2 27 Dec 69 Long An; Grenade

33)LTJG John Brewton ST-2 11 Jan 70 Mekong; Died of  
Wounds

34)PT1 Douglas E. Hobbs DET 6 16 May 70 Mekong; River Ambush

35)BM3 James R. Gore ST-1 23 Jun 70 Can Tho; Helo Crash

36)MM2 Richard J. Solano ST-1 23 Jun 70 Can Tho; Helo Crash

37)SM3 John S. Durlin ST-1 23 Jun 70 Can Tho; Helo Crash

38)RMSN John J. Donnelly ST-1 23 Jun 70 Can Tho; Helo Crash

39)FN Toby A. Thomas ST-1 23 Jun 70 Can Tho; Helo Crash

40)SN Luco W. Palma UDT13 18 Sep 70 Hai An; Mine

41)HMC L. C. Williams UDT13 18 Sep 70 Hai An; Mine

42)EMC Frank W. Bomar ST-1 20 Dec 70 Truc Giang; Ambush

43)EM3 J. L. Riter ST-1 20 Dec 70 Truc Giang; Ambush

44)LT J. F. Thames ST-1 19 Jan 71 Nam Can; River Ambush

45)FN Harold E. Birky ST-1 30 Jan 71 Ben Tre; Small Arms

46)LT Michael Collins ST-1 4 Mar 71 Kien Hoa; River  
Ambush

47)TM1 Lester J. Moe ST-1 29 Mar 71 Kien Giang; Mine

48)LT Melvin S. Dry ST-1 6 Jun 72 Gulf of Tonkin

Appendix C  
Medal of Honor

- (JG) Joseph R. Kerrey ST-1 14 Mar 69 Nha Trang Harbor  
Led a SEAL squad on a mission to capture important V.C. cadre on an island in Nha Trang harbor. The team scaled a 350-foot cliff to get above the V.C., then descended into their camp. Kerrey was severely wounded in the ensuing firefight. The mission was a large success.
- (JG) Thomas R. Norris ST-1/STDAT 158 10-13 Apr 72 Quang Tri Province  
SEAL advisor attached to STDAT 158. Norris led several patrols into enemy controlled territory to recover downed American pilots. He succeeded in recovering two men against heavy odds.
- (JG) Michael E. Thornton ST-1/STDAT 158 31 Oct 72 Quang Tri Province  
Assistant advisor on an intelligence gathering and prisoner capture mission with SEAL officer Norris and three LDNN. Once ashore, patrol became heavily engaged by North Vietnamese forces. Thornton rescued a critically wounded Norris from certain death and led the team in an emergency extraction under fire by swimming to sea.

Navy Cross

- (JG) Robert T. Gallagher ST-2/Det Alpha 13 Mar 68 Mekong Delta  
Assistant patrol leader for a SEAL squad on a night operation. The patrol penetrated a V.C. base camp and Gallagher and two SEALs entered a barracks building. A heavy engagement followed, and Gallagher led the patrol in a running firefight to extract after the patrol leader was severely wounded.
- (JG) Gary G. Gallagher ST-1/DET Bravo (PRU) 10-11 Oct 68 Mekong Delta  
Led a PRU unit on a prisoner capture mission. After securing several prisoners, the unit became heavily engaged. Gallagher rallied the force and extracted them under fire, carrying one wounded man over eight kilometers.
- (JG) Robert J. Thomas ST-2/Det Alpha 23 Mar 69 Chau Doc Province  
Aboard a Navy Seawolf helo when it was downed by enemy fire. Thomas, although injured, helped pull two injured crewmen from the flaming wreckage. He shielded them as enemy forces closed in on their position and fiercely countered the assault although only lightly armed.
- (JG) Donel C. Kinnard UDT 12/Det Golf 20-21 Jan 70 Mekong Delta  
Kinnard distinguished himself during a sweep and clear operation with Marine forces. Among other events, he was wounded while attacking enemy forces in a fierce firefight. He also overpowered an NVA officer who attacked him from behind in hand-to-hand combat.
- (JG) Guy E. Stone UDT 12 27 Jan 70 Mekong Delta  
After discovering several enemy soldiers waiting in ambush for his teammates, Stone alerted his men. He then was instrumental in leading the counter-attack of the frogmen, resulting in the Viet Cong defeat.

MC Barry W. Enoch ST-1 9 Apr 70 Ba Xuyen Province

While leading a combined force into enemy territory, the unit became heavily engaged and surrounded. Enoch deployed the forces and directed the defense, calling in close air support. He then led the men in a fierce break out and extraction maneuver.

M2 Harold L. Baker ST-1/Det Golf 20 Dec 70 Mekong Delta

Acting as rear security for his SEAL patrol, the unit was ambushed. Baker overcame his own initial shock and initiated a heavy volume of fire to keep the enemy from over-running the position.

Nguyen Van Kiet South Vietnamese Navy 13 Apr 72 Quang tri Province

Volunteered to act as guide for a clandestine recovery of an American pilot shot down deep inside enemy-controlled territory. Kiet became the sole South Vietnamese recipient of the U.S. Navy Cross.