

COMMANDER RIVER ASSAULT FLOTILLA ONE  
FPO SAN FRANCISCO 96601

December 15, 1968

Dear Family and Friends of River Assault Flotilla One:

Within the last two or three months the Flotilla has begun a major change of personnel. As a result, this newsletter will be the first one for many of you and perhaps the last for others of you whose husbands and sons will be coming home soon. It is the first one which I am privileged to sign since taking command of River Assault Flotilla One from Captain Robert S. Salzer on November 3rd in ceremonies on our flagship, the USS BENEWAH.

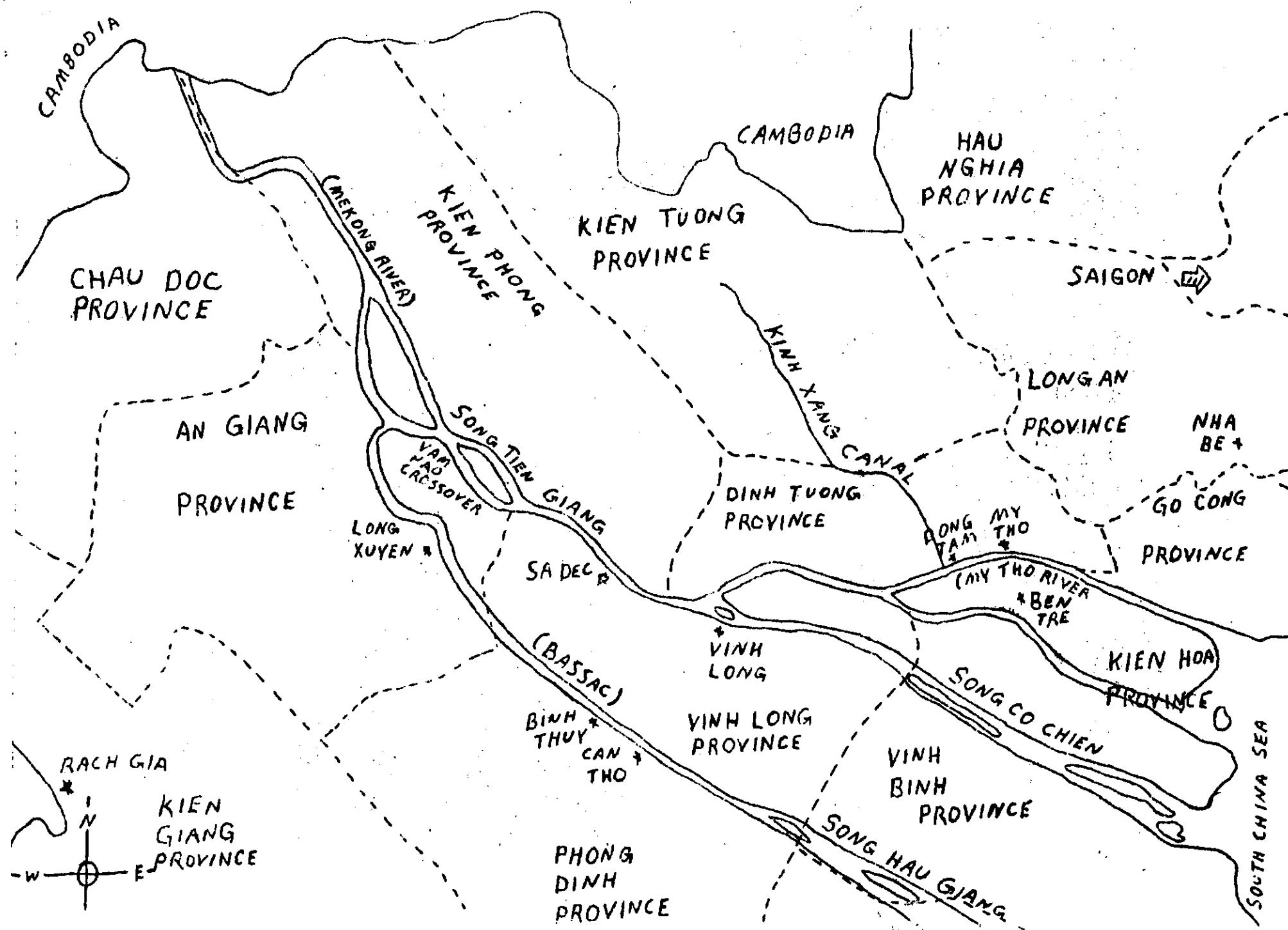
I am sure the oldtimers among you will be delighted to hear that Captain Salzer has been presented the nation's third highest award, the Distinguished Service Medal, in recognition of his outstanding and dedicated leadership and direction of the Naval portion of the Mobile Riverine Force during the past year. The Vietnamese government has also bestowed upon him their highest award to an individual, the Vietnamese National Order Medal 5th Class, in addition to the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. In accepting the medals, Captain Salzer said he considered the awards as a tribute to the accomplishments and effectiveness of the entire force.

The command that Captain Salzer turned over to me has compiled an enviable combat record in the Delta and I am proud to be a part of it. Perhaps since many of you have relatives and friends who are also new to the Flotilla, a little background information about the command may be of interest to you.

When our government made the decision to help the Vietnamese counter Viet Cong aggression in the Mekong Delta, it was necessary to face up to an environment very different from any in which we had operated in for more than 100 years. The Delta is a low flat area of rice paddies and marshland interlaced with one of the world's most intricate systems of rivers, streams and canals.

The planners had to develop an entirely new type of warfare and since most of our equipment at the time was not well suited for use in the Delta's mud and water, they had to create new equipment to support this new type of warfare. To meet this challenge they designed an assault force composed of combat sailors and Army infantrymen which together form the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF). Vietnamese ground and naval forces are also assigned by their respective commanders to work with the MRF from time to time.

The Naval element of the command presently consists of eleven



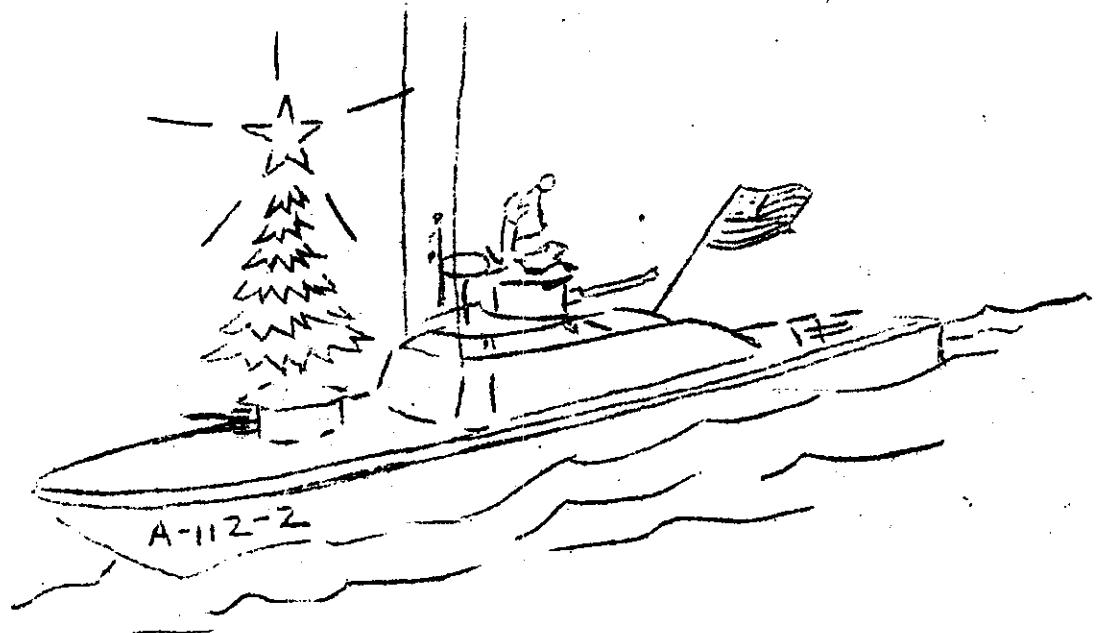
shallow draft surface ships, which serve as a base for both the Army and Navy, and nearly 200 heavily armed and armored assault boats which lift Army troops from the base to combat areas and provide them with logistic, communications and gunfire support while they are there. The permanent ground force consists of the 2nd Brigade of the U.S. Army's 9th Infantry Division. At the moment, however, the MRF also has two Vietnamese Marine Battalions assigned.

The operations of the force during the first year and one-half of its existence have been especially fruitful. We have found that the boats fight well, maneuver well and stand up well to enemy opposition. As a result the Viet Cong have been pushed further and further from the principal waterways that they would so much like to control. Yes, the force has taken casualties in carrying out its mission, but the boats are so well protected with armor that the number of casualties is much lower than the planners had dared hope to expect. The safety of our men is foremost in my thoughts and plans, and I can assure you that we are constantly re-evaluating our safety devices as well as continually developing new ones to insure that our men have the maximum amount of protection possible.

This December finds MRF operations strung out from one end of the Delta to the other. I am including a map of the Delta in this newsletter so that you can check our present locations and follow our movements as your sons and husbands write home to you. For more than a month, about one-third of our ships and boats have been working with Vietnamese Marines in the Southern Delta in the vicinity of Can Tho, Long Xuyen, and Rach Gia. Most of the remainder of the force has spent this period conducting operations around Dong Tam and Ben Tre. Several battalions of the 2nd Brigade are involved in vigorous pacification efforts in Kien Hoa Province of which Ben Tre is the provincial capital. Yet another group of boats and troops are operating in the vicinity of Nha Be, a few miles south of Saigon.

Within a few days the Christmas season will be upon us. Christmas is the one time of the year when everyone would especially like to be at home with loved ones. I regret that for many of your sons and husbands, it will not be possible this year.

Our supply department has ordered a large stock of fresh fruit, nuts, fruit cake and other special items which will be available for all hands during the holiday season. There will also be a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. In addition we expect a shipment of Christmas trees to arrive in the Delta before December 25th and I am sure there will be a lot of ingenuity shown in doing the decorations. And of course we will all be looking forward to those packages from home!



I realize this will be a somewhat somber holiday season for many of you whose husbands and sons are away. I, too, miss my wife and children and would like to be with them. But there come times in each of our lives when service to country must come above personal preferences and I am glad to be able to serve my country in this time of need.

Sincerely,

*Dale V. Schermerhorn*  
DALE V. SCHERMERHORN  
Captain, U.S. Navy  
Commander  
River Assault Flotilla One