

COMMANDER RIVER ASSAULT FLOTILLA ONE

"FAMILYGRAM"

12 May 1969

Dear Families and Friends of River Assault Flotilla ONE:

Before telling you of our activities since the last "FAMILYGRAM", I want to introduce myself. I am Captain J. G. NOW; on 27 March I took command of the Flotilla from Rear Admiral William R. FLANAGAN. For the preceding nine months I had commanded one of the Flotilla's two task groups, Group BRAVO, comprising River Assault Squadrons 13 and 15 plus four larger craft. All the Flotilla's ships and boats have now been consolidated into a single unit. Aided by the Flotilla staff, I direct its operations from our flagship, USS BENEWAH (APB-35).

The past months have been busy, and, in these pages, I can only summarize our activities. As you may know, we are turning over half of the Flotilla to the Vietnamese Navy. On February 1 the red and yellow Vietnamese ensign replaced the Stars and Stripes on the flagstaffs of River Division 91. RIVDIV 92 in turn is now training their Vietnamese counterparts, who will take over those boats early next month. River Divisions 111 and 112 will follow later in June. The Vietnamese are eager, intelligent pupils and our crews are fine teachers. Under their new officers and crews, the ex-RIVDIV 91 boats have performed splendidly. Working and fighting in close cooperation, the U. S. and Vietnamese craft are carrying the river war to the enemy.

In the meantime River Squadron 11 has been an important element of the "Giant Slingshot" forces. Teamed with Swift Boats (PCFs) and River Patrol Boats (PBRs), our River Assault Craft have helped to seal the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Patrolling and fighting along the Vam Co Dong and Vam Co Tay Rivers, these boats have prevented enemy troops and supplies from reaching the western approaches to Saigon. "Giant Slingshot", named for the resemblance of the two rivers to the arms of a slingshot, has become one of the most successful naval operations of the war. It has been hard, demanding work which left some of our boats away from home for as much as 72 days. Only first-rate, "can-do" boat crews could have operated and fought for so long without rest and refit.

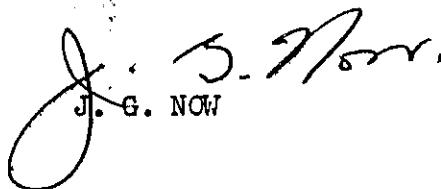
Squadrons 13 and 15 have been operating farther south. During SILVER MACE II, River Assault Squadron 13 craft spent three weeks in the Ca Mau Peninsula at the southern tip of the Mekong Delta. In a region barred to allied forces since 1963, our craft worked with U. S. "Swift Boats", Vietnamese Marines, and supporting ships of the Flotilla. Together they accomplished their task of fixing, locating, and destroying the Viet Cong. Courage and skill allowed the Allies to harass the enemy on his home grounds. No longer can the VC find a safe refuge in the Nam Can Forest.

The Twin Rivers of Chuong Thien Province and the U-Minh Forest of Kien Giang Province saw RIVRON 15 in action. Penetrating another VC stronghold, our boats carried the Vietnamese Marines on a far ranging offensive in enemy territory. Fierce enemy opposition did not prevent our boats from completing their job. RIVRON 15 has been "on the line" continually since they reached Vietnam nearly a year ago, and their performance has been uniformly excellent.

The Navy has honored the Flotilla for its earlier performance by awarding it the Navy Unit Commendation. Citing exceptionally meritorious services from June 1967 through January 1968, the Commendation reads: "By their gallantry in the face of enemy opposition, their dedicated zeal on behalf of a beleaguered people and their superlative performance as individuals and as a team, the officers and men of River Assault Flotilla ONE upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Many of us are approaching the end of our tours in Vietnam. We view the prospect with mixed emotions -- as the saying goes in country -- happiness and joy. But when he leaves Tan Son Nhut airport at the end of his year, each man of the Flotilla can experience another emotion: pride in a hard, dangerous job well done. In the meantime please keep your letters coming; mail call remains the most important call of all.

Yours sincerely,


J. G. Now