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# RIVER WARFARE

## A SUMMARY OF PAST EXPERIENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

### VOLUME 1

Declassified by the Director of Marine Corps  
History and Museums in accordance with the  
provisions of GND Ltr Op-9420323 Joy, Ser:  
10770 P942 of 12 October 1971.

Signature/date 4/15/97



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13 Aug 74

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY AND MUSEUMS

Subj: Recommendation for Declassification of FMFPac study  
"River Warfare: A Study of the Tactics, Techniques,  
Doctrine, and Equipment for Southeast Asia Operations,"  
(2 Vols., 1966)

1. Volume one contains considerable discussion of command relationships, communications arrangements, equipment and armament of Vietnamese river craft, and maps which delineate tactical areas of responsibility in South Vietnam. Appendices of this volume also contain detailed after-action reports, diagrams of enemy ambushes, and diagrams of river operations. It would appear, however, that this information is outdated. The authors establish the tone for this assessment with the following comment: "The evolutionary process [for the VN Navy] continues, and a review of the Navy's present [1966] organization cannot be taken as definitive." (Vol I, p. 23.) This document, moreover, includes valuable historical summaries relative to the origin and evolution of the Vietnamese Navy and Marine Corps which are not to be found elsewhere.
2. Volume II is devoted essentially to river warfare doctrine as applied in South Vietnam during 1966. This volume likewise contains some technical discussion relative to equipment and communications. While it has less historical value than Volume I, it does not contain information worthy of continued classification.
3. It is recommended that both volumes of this study be declassified.

Respectfully,



R.H. Whitlow  
Capt., USMCR

14 Aug 74

1. Approved.



March 1966

FOREWORD

The challenge of inland maritime operations in Southeast Asia which faces the U.S. and its allies, coupled with the large voids in our knowledge respecting the tactics and techniques for the conduct of such warfare, caused Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific to undertake an analytical study of the problem. The study, conducted under the direction of Colonel Victor J. Croizat, sought first to develop a historical background of the problem particularly as it related to the Indo-China War, exposing, largely through their own records, how the French attacked the river war problem. Subsequently, the study undertook to exhibit the character and capabilities of the forces now employed in riverine operations, and to give some evidence of what they are doing, and how.

Finally, from the background of history and current activity, there was distilled a discussion of landing force tactics, techniques, organization and equipment regarded as applicable to solution of the problem we face today; in short, a proposed basic doctrine for the landing force.

Following the foregoing format, the study is presented in two volumes:

River Warfare, Vol I

A Summary of Past Experience

in Southeast Asia

River Warfare, Vol II  
(Tentative)

Tactics, Techniques, Doctrine and Equipment

for Southeast Asia Operations

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INTRODUCTION

"If revolutionary war lacks a political goal, it will fail. If revolutionary war seeks to attain a political goal which is incompatible with the aspirations of the people, again it will fail for it will not receive from the people the support, participation, and active collaboration which is essential for its success."

Mao Tze Tung

The war in South Vietnam is a conflict of ideologies which only the Vietnamese people themselves can resolve.

On the one side the communist world is directing and supporting the Viet Cong in its effort to dominate South Vietnam. On the other side, the United States, with the support of certain other non-communist nations, is assisting the Government of South Vietnam to regain control over the whole of its national territory. But, while that Government retains the ultimate responsibility for the prosecution of the war in South Vietnam, it is the United States which is providing most of the resources and much of the determination to counter communist aggression throughout Southeast Asia. This is a formidable task for the war in South Vietnam has already extended beyond the borders, and the whole of Southeast Asia has become a theater of operations.

The people of South Vietnam are the fundamental object of both contenders. This being so, the basic strategy to be pursued is written on the population map. Where the people are, there must the effort be made.

For this effort to succeed, it must encompass a judicious combination of civil and military power. Political action alone can accomplish little; neither can military action by itself produce decisive results. Indeed, seldom will it be possible to exploit the full potential of military power because political, economic, and other related factors will impose restrictions on its use. Moreover, for this coordinated effort to be fully responsive to the conditions prevailing, the people of South Vietnam must assume the dominant role.

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SECTION 1. GEOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

In South Vietnam, one third of the population is concentrated in the Mekong delta; another third is found along the littoral of the I and II Corps Areas while the remaining third centers in the greater Saigon area. (figure 1)

In the I, II, and III Corps Areas the lines of communications are a combination of road, rail, and water; with the latter playing a dominant role only in certain specific localities. However, in the delta of the IV Corps Area, the main lines of communications are the waterways. These total some 2,500 miles in length, of which 500 miles are major rivers exceeding 1,000 meters in width. This whole system is interconnected by numerous lesser canals and streams to form a veritable web over the southeastern tip of Asia. (figure 2)

This vast delta of South Vietnam takes its name from the 2,400 mile long Mekong River which, from its source in the mountains of Central China, sweeps south to deposit each year some 800 million cubic meters of rich alluvium along the shores of the South China Sea. Truly, "Le Mekong est le chemin et la vie de ce Sud Vietnam qu'il a fait".

The fact that the Mekong is both the "road way" and the "lifegiver" of South Vietnam is due in part to a prolonged effort by the French at land reclamation, canal building, and waterways development. When the French first came into the area in 1880, there were about one million acres of land producing rice. When they left in 1954, this acreage had multiplied fivefold, and the delta produced annually one and one half million metric tons of surplus rice. This production has now been significantly reduced by the effects of the war. For example; because of light rains in 1965, rice production fell off some 4%. However, the rice reaching the Saigon market fell off 25%. This is eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of the control which an estimated 70,000 Viet Cong exercise today over the economic life of the delta.

The waterways of the Mekong delta are vital not only to the economic life of the area but also serve international commerce destined for Laos and Cambodia. The CONVENTION REGULATING MARITIME AND INLAND NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG AND ON THE APPROACH TO THE PORT OF SAIGON which was signed

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on 29 December 1954 continues to be observed, although the regulating body prescribed by the convention has ceased to function. (Annex 1)

In addition to the major Mekong delta waterways complex, there are numerous waterways along the coast formed by short rivers which flow eastwards from the mountainous spine of Vietnam. These waterways are not interconnected and have, as already suggested, only local economic importance. This importance, however, cannot be minimized. The major waterways of these coastal rivers extend from 150 to 600 miles depending on the season, but the mileage of their shallower reaches is far greater although less easily measured. For example; one U. S. Marine Corps regiment in the I Corps area is responsible for an area of 128 square miles which includes 520 miles of waterways regularly used by small sampans and other local native boats. (figure 3)

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POPULATION DENSITY IN SOUTH VIETNAMJanuary 1966

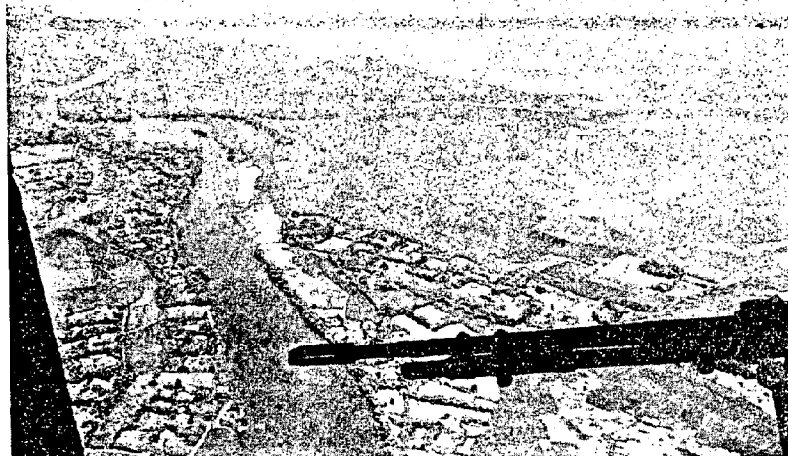
	I CORPS	II CORPS	III CORPS	IV CORPS	CMR*
MILITARY					
Regular	31,267	30,507	37,810	36,589	1,990
Regional	15,777	26,435	23,409	41,333	5,106
Popular	24,438	28,098	17,238	57,257	4,177
General Reserve					6,895
CIVILIAN	2,589,600	2,633,000	1,844,800	5,430,100	2,266,800

\*Capital Military Region

Figure 1

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THE MEKONG DELTA

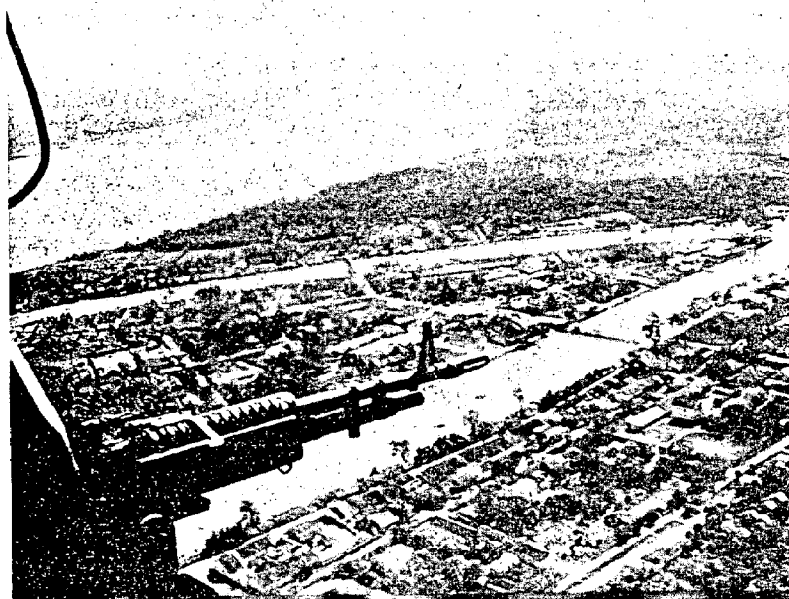


Figure 2

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COASTAL WATERWAYS Figure 3

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## SECTION 2. MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

The establishment of secure base areas and the control of lines of communications are essential prerequisites for the support and movement of military forces. At the same time these efforts also contribute to the restoration of economic activity in an area. However if this latter benefit is to be gained, the effort to ensure friendly use of lines of communications must be continuous. Military forces denied the use of certain lines of communications may continue military operations by utilizing air transport. But this alternative is seldom if ever available to civilian populations.

The return of governmental authority to the whole of the Mekong delta will depend in large measure upon ensuring effective control over its waterways. For the same but less imperative reasons, the control of the waterways in the coastal areas of the other Corps Areas of South Vietnam will facilitate the task of pacification there.

The degree to which the Viet Cong utilizes the waterways for the infiltration of men and materiel, and for the extraction of tribute from the people cannot be ascertained with accuracy. However, where movement is difficult if not impossible other than by water, both enemy and friendly forces will have to conform to the geography. Under these circumstances, combat along the waterways becomes inevitable.

In areas where land transportation is inadequate or cannot be used, a waterway like a road or a railway is simply a communications link. If waterways are regarded as such, it is evident that the tactical principles which govern the control and use of waterways for military operations are essentially the same as those which apply to land lines of communications. This means that the type of equipment required on the water, while differing in appearance from that which is used on land, will need to serve comparable purposes. The requirements for mobility, armor, firepower, and transport capacity which are satisfied on the ground by a range of wheeled and tracked vehicles will have to be met on the waterways by a variety of ships and craft adapted to the same ends. Moreover, ground forces will need to learn to look upon waterways as something other than obstacles to be crossed, while Navy forces operating inland will need to become familiar with the principles of ground combat which they must respect and which dictate the characteristics of the ships and craft they will employ.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~SECTION 3. THE INDOCHINA WAR

The fact that river warfare involves the engagement of naval forces in what are essentially ground operations has been demonstrated historically and is particularly evident in the experience of the French during the Indochina War. This last experience is unusually valuable. Aside from the fact that it was acquired at a cost of 61,560 dead and 78,992 other casualties, it embodies the lessons learned in fighting the same enemy in the same terrain U. S. forces are encountering today. Its value also lies in the fact that it was acquired by a military power which utilizes organizational and operational concepts not unlike those of United States forces. Further, the Vietnamese Armed Forces with which U. S. forces work today are French creations which still retain considerable evidence of their origins. Finally, it appears that the Vietnamese communists continue to favor those operational techniques which they used successfully against the French. The French assessment of their enemy, therefore, retains its validity; a fact that is confirmed by comparing reports of combat actions today with those of a dozen years ago.

At the end of the Indochina War, the High Command in Saigon directed that an analysis be made of 1,400 after action reports together with related miscellaneous documents and records of personal interviews. The results were published in May of 1955 in a classified volume entitled "Lessons Learned in the Indochina War". The preface states that the volume "contains all that the various Arms and Services learned in the course of the war which would remain applicable if it became necessary to fight a comparable type of rebellion outside of Europe". As a parenthetical note, many of the lessons learned by the French in Indochina were applied in the Algerian War with considerable measure of success in military if not in political terms.

The volume is an official publication which relates the facts as they occurred, and reports personal views and attitudes only where their soundness was confirmed by repeated operational experience. Because of the evident worth of this document and its direct application to the problems being encountered today in South Vietnam, translations of pertinent portions of certain chapters have been made. These are contained in Annex 2. In addition, translations of the complete text of Part III, Chapter 5, "River and Coastal Actions" and of Part IV Chapter 13, "The River Forces" are presented at Annex 3 and Annex 4 respectively.

The chapter on "River and Coastal Actions" begins with the statement that; "In the course of the campaign the Viet Minh, who was a

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remarkable infantryman, never revealed himself to be a sailor". In a NOFORN evaluation of the Vietnamese Navy Sea Force prepared by the U. S. Naval Advisory Group in Vietnam and dated 17 December 1965, appears this statement: "The level of training of the non-rated personnel is very low ... Naval life is entirely new to most of these personnel, and Vietnamese seem to be particularly susceptible to seasickness".

In the chapter on "River Forces", the French state; "It had already been demonstrated in Central Vietnam incident to the operations at Faifoo (Hoi An) and Quang Khe that a group of river craft had to have with it an infantry unit under its control. This infantry unit would be responsible for the defense of the river base and would also be trained to land under fire in the event of ambushes. In Cochinchina and above all in Tonkin, the Dinassauts had Navy Commandos attached to them. But they did not have permanently assigned infantry which would have permitted them to move from place to place with complete autonomy, and which would have permitted more effective control of an area in the periods between major joint operations".

In the U. S. Navy NOFORN evaluation of the Vietnamese River Force, contained in the 17 December 1965 document cited above, there is stated: "The RAGs during their infrequent 'independent' patrols, i. e. when they are not under ARVN control, run into ambushes which, thus far, they have been able to counter effectively. However, they are not able to followup this counter action because they do not have a force of men to land and pursue and destroy the enemy ambushes. Herein lies the greatest weakness of the River Force, i. e. inability to consummate a fire fight because each patrol group does not have its own landing force under the operational control of the RAG Commanding Officer".

It should be noted that the ability of the RAGs to "counter ambushes effectively" is dependent upon interpretation. In an action which occurred on 4 October 1965 in the vicinity of Ben Tre, (detailed in Report No. 1 at Annex 5) the U. S. Navy advisor aboard an LSSL assigned the task of escorting a RAG with a Vietnamese Ranger Battalion embarked, personally described the countering of an ambush as follows:

"Our LSSL was in the lead, the RAG commander was in his Command LCM in the troop carrying column. No command arrangements between the Navy and Army commanders present had been made, and we had no details on the operation involved other than the ultimate destination of the Ranger unit. An L-19 reported the river ahead to be free of enemy troops but we were suddenly fired upon by VC using

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automatic weapons and at least one 75mm recoilless rifle. The VC opened fire at a range of about 400 yards and immediately hit two troops carrying LCMs causing heavy casualties. The LSSL turned and took the VC under fire from its three inch gun, making several passes in front of the ambush site to cover the withdrawal of the troops carrying LCMs. The VC fire eventually ceased and the LSSL then followed the withdrawing LCMs. Obviously in this action the VC ambush was countered, but the RAG was unable to continue to its destination.

It is evident from the information concerning coastal amphibious operations (Annex 3) that the French had neither the materiel, personnel, nor doctrine to exploit their control of the sea areas off Vietnam. However in the river complexes of the whole country, they displayed a remarkable ingenuity not only in adapting ships and craft to the exigencies of river warfare, but also of devising tactical procedures which proved themselves time and again in violent combat.

An example of this is an operation which occurred in February 1948 in the delta of North Vietnam and is described in an intelligence report by the U. S. Naval Attache', Paris (Ser 590-50 dated 11 December 1950).

French intelligence had reported that an important Viet Minh installation was located on the Day River about 10 kilometers north of Gian Khau. It was decided to raid this installation with a Dinassaut based at Nam Dinh 65 kilometers by river from this enemy concentration. The approach would need to be through Viet Minh territory.

On the evening of 1 February 1948, the Nam Dinh Dinassaut, composed of 4 LCMs and 2 LCAs (ex-British craft similar to U. S. LCVs) with embarked Marines, left the base and set its speed to reach the target area on the following morning. By making the movement under darkness a degree of surprise was attained. Early the next morning the Dinassaut landing party swept through the enemy installations against light opposition, leaving behind a path of destruction.

The French Dinassaut commander anticipated a quick enemy reaction, most probably in the nature of an ambush during his withdrawal either while his troops were returning to their boats, or later as the boats proceeded downstream to their base. To meet the first threat, the landing force was instructed to return to the beach as quickly as possible in the hope that the enemy would not have time to collect himself and take position. This was successfully done.

After spending the night of 2 February off Gian Khau, the Dinassaut began to move down river to Nam Dinh. Fully expecting an ambush, a

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plan had been developed by which the LCM's and LCA's would be divided equally into two columns. One LCA preceded each of these columns by about 500 yards and stayed close inshore to detect enemy mines controlled from the banks. In the event of ambush, instructions were clear. One of the two LCM's in each column would immediately close the nearest bank and debark its troops who, under cover of the Dinassaut's fire power would push inland against the enemy. The LCA's would perform the same maneuver and their troops would land against the enemy flank and rear. Meanwhile the remaining LCM in each of the columns would provide fire support but retain its troops in reserve.

This simple plan was soon put to use. At noon, the convoy was hit with a heavy concentration of 37 millimeter, machine gun, mortar, and small arms fire. On the north bank, the French counter-attack completely disorganized and then trapped the Communist forces who lost 105 dead. On the south bank the counter-action did not proceed as well, due primarily to the breakdown of the LCA in this column and the need for it to be taken in tow by one of the LCM's. This LCA was sunk early in the action, but the landing party from the LCM forced the Communists to withdraw from their positions, leaving behind several dead and some 60 millimeter mortars. Despite the fact that the enemy on the southern bank escaped, this action, which lasted only 20 minutes, proved tactically sound. French losses during the entire raid amounted to only one LCA lost and one man wounded.

It should not be assumed from the foregoing that the French Navy was always able to defeat the ambush problem. On the contrary, many waterways had to be abandoned because of enemy activity. However, the major waterways were generally kept open, although at an ever increasing cost in personnel and materiel. Neither should it be assumed that raids of the nature just described were a main feature of the river war. Such raids were frequent, but so were operations conducted in close coordination with major land offensives. Finally, the Dinassauts could be as effectively coordinated in a defensive role as they were in offensive operations.

This last ability is exemplified in the efforts of the French to beat back a major Viet Minh offensive in the southwestern region of the Red River Delta in May-June 1951. The enemy aim was to advance across the Day River and smash the French forces concentrated in the area. The key to the French position was the river town of Ninh Binh to the south of the Day River. But the climactic battle, which thwarted the Communists advance, occurred in the nearby town of Yen Cu Ha, which was on a tributary of the Day.

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In each critical aspect of this campaign, the embattled inland navy of the French played a significant role. On the night of 28/29 May 1951, as the Communists first crossed the Day at many points, a Dinassaut quickly landed its Marines in besieged Ninh Binh and stood by to give fire support. On the following morning all but 19 of the original 80 Marines landed had been killed, and bazooka and recoilless cannon fire from the river banks had severely damaged some of the Dinassaut craft. But the key position of Ninh Binh still remained in French hands. The focus of action then shifted to neighboring Yen Cu Ha. Here again a Dinassaut was at the center of the battle and the flagship of the unit, an LSSL, was credited with saving this key position with its concentrated gunfire.

Inland seapower performed perhaps its most important mission in the campaign by wreaking havoc with the Communist supply line across the Day River north of Ninh Binh. This line composed of small junks and sampans was attacked by the river forces who, together with French aircraft cut it to ribbons. By 18 June, the Communist effort to capture the key posts of Ninh Binh and Yen Cu Ha had been repulsed. They had suffered heavy casualties and worst of all they were unable to maintain the forces they had succeeded in placing across the Day River because of the determined attacks by French river craft. The Viet Minh had no alternative but to retreat and thereby abandon a costly offensive.

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#### SECTION 4. THE ORIGINS OF VIETNAMESE NAVAL FORCES

United States military operations in South Vietnam are being conducted in support of the Government of that country and in coordination with its armed forces. The effectiveness of this coordination depends in considerable degree upon mutual understanding. A knowledge of the factors which influenced the organization of the Vietnamese forces now being engaged will contribute to the development of such understanding.

The impact of the French military experience in Indochina has been covered. How this experience affected the organization of Vietnamese Naval Forces, and how these evolved under later United States influence is the subject of the succeeding paragraphs.

Navies however modest do not appear suddenly; they evolve. The Navy of Vietnam was originally included in the Vietnamese Armed Forces established by the Franco-Vietnamese Military Convention signed in Paris in December 1949. The Vietnamese flag, however, did not break over the first naval unit until 10 April 1953. This unit was a Naval Assault Division (DINASSAUT) comprised of 3 LCM and 2 LCVP and was named after the river town of Cantho. Shortly thereafter in June, a second unit of similar composition was formed at Vinh Long, another river town 34 kilometers from Cantho.

This long period of gestation was due in part to differences of opinion not unlike those found in the armed forces of other countries. General de Lattre de Tassigny, CinC French Forces Indochina, held that the Vietnamese Armed Forces should be "monolithic" in structure; i.e., primarily Army. The Navy Department in Paris objected because it wanted the Vietnamese Navy to include sea going units, and was not prepared to agree that naval forces should function as a service element of the Army. Vice Admiral Ortoli, CinC French Naval Forces Far East, for his part believed that the Vietnamese should start with a river Navy.

Despite these differences, all agreed that a naval training center was required, and construction of this facility began at Nha Trang in November 1951. Then, in early 1952, a naval organization plan prepared in Saigon was submitted to Paris. This plan proposed that the Naval Training Center at Nha Trang be activated in 1952; that two naval assault divisions, one river flotilla, and one division of three auxiliary mine-sweepers be transferred to Vietnam in 1953; and that a Vietnamese naval headquarters and coast guard be formed in 1954. Happily enough this Saigon plan conformed in general with a similar plan just prepared

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in Paris. This coincidence of views, and the publication of Imperial Ordinance No. 2 of 6 March 1952, formally establishing the Navy of Vietnam, provided the impetus needed to give substance to what had been previously only general proposals.

But smooth sailing for the Vietnamese Navy was by no means assured. First, the beginnings of this Navy had been modest indeed; a bare handful of LCM and LCVP which had taken more than two years to materialize. Also the question of the growth of this force beyond the organization plan set forth for 1952 remained to be defined. This was referred to in the report of a joint study group which met in 1953 to determine personnel and materiel requirements arising from a recent Franco-Vietnamese agreement to increase the Vietnamese Army to 57 light infantry battalions. As part of this study, it was proposed to augment the Navy in 1954 by three river flotillas, one LST, and 4 LSSL. At the same time the question of whether the naval forces should serve as a support element of the Army, or were to become autonomous, was again raised because Vice Admiral Auboyneau, the newly appointed Commander of French Naval Forces Far East, was advocating the creation of a separate Vietnamese Marine Corps. This whole issue was resolved in June 1953 when a single staff for the Armed Forces was organized wherein the Navy and Air Force's senior representatives were accorded subordinate positions. The preeminence of the Army was further assured when it was charged with preparing the single armed forces budget.

Meanwhile, the recruiting of personnel to meet the original organization plan of 1952 was continuing. This was carried over into 1953 on the assumption that part, if not all, of the study group's proposals for increased naval forces for 1954 would be accepted. This turned out to be a prudent decision since three auxiliary minesweepers were turned over to Vietnam in February 1954; 2 LCU's and one DINASSAUT followed in March; and another DINASSAUT was activated shortly thereafter.

Progress was being made, albeit slowly. But it was evident that this piecemeal approach toward the creation of an effective naval force was highly unsatisfactory. The matter was taken up by the Franco-Vietnamese High Commission in February 1954. The Commission's report forwarded to the respective governments in March, stated that agreement had been reached to program the development of Vietnamese Naval Forces through a series of five year plans. In addition, the mission of these forces was set forth as the patrol of inland waterways; coastal surveillance; hydrographic survey; and participation in the defense of the French Union. It also specified that the naval forces should consist of Navy personnel to man seagoing ships including those which might be serving on the rivers, and of Marines to man river

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craft, to provide the associated assault infantry, and to form a separate amphibious battalion. A rather elaborate schedule of new construction and ship transfers was enclosed but this was never to be implemented because it was economically infeasible, and in any event, Giap's artillery had just opened the attack at Dien Bien Phu. France's time in Indochina was running out.

The Geneva Agreements of 20 July 1954 which brought an uneasy end to the Indochina War also resulted in the United States becoming directly involved in the future of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. The United States had already been indirectly involved for several years, since part of the military materiel it had been supplying to the French had been used to equip Vietnamese units. But now, with the end of the war, the flow of this materiel had ceased. Yet, the political situation continued to be precarious, and with the gradual withdrawal of the Expeditionary Corps, the United States had to assume the full burden of support for the Vietnamese Armed Forces. In mid 1954 these exceeded 200,000 men. In addition to the matter of support, there was the question of organization which had to be addressed. This arose from two factors. First the overall personnel strengths had to be reduced to conform to the United States support ceilings. These were initially set at 90,000 men, then were augmented to 100,000 men, and finally were levelled off in 1955 at 150,000. This last figure included 142,000 for the Army, and 4,000 each for the Navy (including Marines) and the Air Force. The second factor was that the French had been furnishing virtually all of the command, administrative, and service elements for all of the armed forces. Thus the Vietnamese Army consisted mainly of separate infantry battalions. A complete military structure was required, and, insofar as the Army was concerned, United States advisors intended to form this into four corps totalling ten divisions. Finally, there was the problem of continuing the training of Vietnamese forces. This responsibility previously had been discharged solely by the French. Participation in this activity by Americans was complicated by the fact that the available training publications were in French and that there were differences between the French and Americans in training methods and procedures.

With the direct involvement of the United States in these many problems, it became necessary to ensure the fullest possible coordination between the Americans and French.

This began with the formation in late 1954, of the Advisory Training and Operations Mission (ATOM) which evolved, in early 1955, into the Training Relations and Instructions Mission (TRIM) with 120 U. S. and 225 French officers. It should be noted that this organization

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headed by Lt General John W. O'DANIEL, USA, who was also Chief of the U. S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group, Indochina, included all U. S. advisory personnel Vietnam. However, French command and advisory personnel within the Vietnamese Armed Forces as well as the French Staff of the Naval Training Center at Nha Trang, remained exclusively under French control. Parenthetically, the change in name from ATOM to TRIM occurred because it was thought that the former might offend Asian sensibilities.

During the same period Vietnamese Naval Forces included some 2,000 "Marine infantry" scattered into more than a dozen units bearing the designation of commandos, light support and river companies; and some 1,500 navy ratings manning 4 DINASSAUT, 3 auxiliary minesweepers and 2 LCU. The administrative status of these forces was obscure. The DINASSAUT were directly under Army control, but the French Navy continued to provide all naval logistic and training support as well as the senior command personnel and most of the subordinate unit leaders; this despite the fact much of the French personnel was being withdrawn from the Vietnamese Army and the reorganization and training of that Service was proceeding under combined French and American effort. Moreover the Navy Section of TRIM which presumably was the sole advisory agency for the Vietnamese Naval Forces, was headed by a French Navy Captain who was also the de facto head of the Vietnamese naval service. Under the circumstances American influence in Vietnamese Naval matters was minimal. There was also strong evidence that this situation would continue. In late 1954 the French Navy had undertaken the expansion of its facilities at Tourane (Danang) and Cap St. Jacques (Vung Tau) apparently with the intention of retaining these as French bases in Asia. This also suggested that French control of the Vietnamese Naval Forces would be retained for sometime; an assumption which was eventually confirmed when the French announced that they planned to retain control of these forces until 30 June 1956.

Meanwhile the Vietnamese government was beginning to exert its authority in naval matters, and on 1 October 1954 issued a decree which formally "created within the Naval Establishment a corps of infantry specializing in the surveillance of waterways and in amphibious operations on the coasts and rivers to be designated as the MARINE CORPS". Article 3 of this decree specified that "THE MARINE CORPS shall consist of various types of units suited to their function and either already existing in the Army or Naval Forces, or to be created in accordance with the development plan of the Armed Forces". With this as a basis, American organizational concepts began to emerge. The 1st Vietnamese Marine Battalion came into being in April 1955; a Marine Corps Headquarters was organized in May, and the ground work was laid for the grouping of remaining Vietnamese Marine Corps units into a second

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battalion to form a regiment. It was intended to follow this by the organization of a third battalion as soon as personnel ceilings permitted.

At this same time it became clear that President NGO DINH DIEM was opposed to the retention by France of any military bases in Vietnam. Further, the Vietnamese were increasingly anxious to assume full control over their armed forces, despite the fact that they were woefully short of experienced senior officers and that many of their forces were engaged in active operations against dissident groups in the Mekong Delta. In view of these feelings, 31 December 1955 was set as the date when Vietnamese Naval Forces would pass under Vietnamese command; this being a six month advance on the French date previously announced. But the move occurred even earlier, for on 20 August 1955 the President appointed Lieutenant Commander Le Quang My to head the naval forces. This act precipitated the withdrawal of French Navy personnel from the Vietnamese Naval Forces. Having lost their command status, the French henceforth could only exert influence in Vietnamese naval affairs as advisors. As a result, collaboration between the 3 American and 2 French members of the Navy Section TRIM was greatly enhanced. These, in consultation with Vietnamese officers, undertook a comprehensive review of the naval requirements of Vietnam, taking into account local materiel resources, personnel ceilings, and training capabilities; and in addition, several other factors less easy to assess. The nature of these last can perhaps best be presented in extracts from personal letter forwarded by the U. S. Marine Corps member of TRIM to the Commandant of the U. S. Marine Corps. A letter dated 17 September 1955 contained the following:

"From the communist side there has been increasing evidence of activity in the Camau peninsula southwest of Saigon. The Vietminh are showing their strength in a number of places and the population is listening. The presence of these elements may interfere with or even delay the reorganization and regrouping of the Vietnamese army. . . . In essence we are trying to build an effective armed force while many parts of it are required to actively fight or at a minimum must be deployed ready to fight an internal enemy".

Another letter dated 12 November 1955 states in part:

"At the moment the French Navy no longer patrols the coast or the inland waterways. By stretching the capabilities of the Vietnamese Navy to the utmost, perhaps 60% of the coasts and inland waterways can be patrolled. Such patrolling can at best be limited in scope. Reducing the situation to basic terms, the communists or other dissident groups in the area can freely penetrate the coast or can easily enter the large

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navigable waterway system of Cochinchina. We have been informed that extensive smuggling is going on and that communist elements in Free Vietnam are being supplied from the sea".

From the comprehensive review prepared at TRIM, it was evident that Vietnamese Naval Forces, which had been organized primarily into a river navy, were no longer adequate to meet their ever increasing responsibilities. The departure of French naval units threw into sharp focus the need for South Vietnam to patrol its coasts as well as its inland waterways. Moreover, as combat operations continued in the Mekong and coastal delta areas, the need for shipping of all types to move and supply troops increased. It was therefore concluded that two plans were required; one to provide for the immediate reorganization of Vietnamese Naval Forces utilizing available resources and conforming to authorized personnel ceilings; and a second plan to provide for an orderly expansion of these forces as trained personnel and required ships and shore facilities could be obtained.

The first plan for the reorganization of Vietnamese Naval Forces was submitted to the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Armed Forces on 1 November 1955. This plan, approved on 7 December 1955, called for a Vietnamese Navy of 195 officers and 2,650 men. The Marine Corps strength was set at 96 officers and 1,739 men formed into one regiment of two battalions. The Navy was to retain its headquarters and service elements in Saigon, and its training center at Nha Trang. Four coastal commands were to be established with headquarters at Saigon, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Danang; and four river bases in the delta were to be developed at Mytho, Cantho, Long Xuyen, and Vinh Long. Finally, boat repair facilities were to be made available at Saigon, Cantho, and Danang. The river force was to be increased to 5 DINNASSAUT each with 6 LCM, 5 LCVP, and 5 shallow draft outboard motor boats; backed by 5LSIL, 2 LSSL, and 5 LCU, of which one LGU would be a floating boat repair craft. The remaining ships in the Navy; 5 PC, 2 LSM, 3 YMS, 2 YTL, and 10 motor patrol boats, were to be used for coastal patrol, training, and service support, and as the nucleus of a seagoing transport force.

This was the plan to meet the urgent and immediate needs. It was designed for rapid implementation, since the resources required were all available locally. It was also the point of departure for the second plan which was delivered to the Chief of Staff on 7 December 1955; the same day he approved the reorganization plan. This second plan called for the gradual expansion of Vietnamese Naval Forces over the next two years. It envisaged that by the end of 1957 the naval forces would be doubled in strength to total 9,000 men. No increase in the river forces

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was contemplated. However the coastal patrol and amphibious lift capabilities were to be significantly improved. The coastal patrol force was to comprise 4 DE, 10 PC, and 27 motor patrol boats; and the transport force was to be built up to 4 LST's and 4 LSM's. The Marine Corps Regiment would receive its third battalion. And, finally, the creation of a naval air arm consisting of one squadron of patrol aircraft was urged, since no such capability existed in the Air Force.

In the conclusions contained in a study dated 10 December 1955 on the subject of the naval forces of Vietnam, the U. S. Marine Corps member of TRIM stated:

"The unstable situation in Vietnam appears to continue and there is little evidence to support the belief that a change for the better will occur in the near future. In fact, signs of increased Vietminh activity appear to decrease the possibility for peace in Vietnam. Without being unduly pessimistic it appears reasonable to assume that fighting on at least a limited scale will continue in Vietnam for some time to come. It is thus imperative that Vietnam be given the means essential for its own internal security".

It was intended that, with the implementation of the two naval plans, the government of South Vietnam would have improved capabilities to provide for internal security of the country. There would be naval forces for limited patrol of the coasts and inland waterways, and to provide the lift for forces up to regimental size. There would be a Corps of Marines trained for a variety of amphibious tasks, which could also join with the Army's Parachute Regiment to form a highly mobile and versatile General Reserve immediately responsive to the highest echelons of government. And there would be the shore facilities to control, administer, and support all the naval forces involved, except for the overhaul of larger ships.

The reaction of the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, to these developments was highly favorable. Speaking of the naval plans he stated that he was prepared to accept them even if a compensatory reduction in Army forces was required in order to remain within the 150,000 man ceiling the United States was then supporting. This effort thus provided the broadend basis for the continuing development of the Vietnamese Naval Forces. It was the first major American contribution on the subject of overall naval organization, and it was also to be France's last. Transfers of ships from the French Navy to the Vietnamese were to continue for a few months more, but the tricolor was fast disappearing from southeast Asia. Cambodia and Laos had received their independence after the Geneva

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Agreements, and the evacuation of the North Vietnam had ended in May 1955. By April 1956 the last French units had left South Vietnam and French Indochina had ceased to exist.

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~~UNCLASSIFIED~~SECTION 5. PRESENT ORGANIZATION OF THE VIETNAMESE NAVY

The Vietnamese Navy which in 1956 included only some 1,500 men was primarily a river Navy and only began to move towards the sea when it was called upon to assume coastal surveillance responsibilities as a consequence of the withdrawal of the French. Today this Navy aggregates 16,000 men fulfilling a wide range of functions many of which are coordinated with U. S. forces. It is no longer solely a river Navy, but its three major operational branches all play some part in river warfare. Thus, a survey of the whole of the Vietnamese Navy is essential to an understanding of anyone of its parts. For example, the Sea Force provides fire support, minesweeping, and lift for ground forces operating on the waterways, as well as conducting independent single ship patrols of the major rivers. The Coastal Force, formerly the Junk Force, with its hundreds of junks operating close in shore, provides intelligence which the River Force exploits, and in the I Corps Area, actually conducts inland waterway patrols.

What had been planned by the United States advisors in 1956 as a gradual development of the Vietnamese Naval forces was to be greatly accelerated by the turn of events. This acceleration became particularly evident beginning in mid 1962 with the re-organization and expansion of the United States Advisory effort in South Vietnam. Of the two original components of the Vietnamese Naval Forces, the Navy proper and the Marine Corps, it is the Navy which has suffered the most from the dilution of what was, at best, only a modest reservoir of experience. The fact was further aggravated by the position of the Vietnamese Naval Service far down in the hierarchy of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, where the Army has played the dominant role from the very beginning. These facts, coupled with the lack of strong Navy leadership at the top, and the obsolescence or nonavailability of operational and administrative doctrine all contribute to a Vietnamese Navy of marginal effectiveness today. This is confirmed by U. S. Navy advisors who state that the majority of procedures followed by the Vietnamese Navy are dependent upon the individuals in command, and this leads to the general use of unwritten policy and verbal guidance.

The evolutionary process continues, and a review of the Navy's present organization cannot be taken as definitive. Indeed, the Vietnamese Navy is currently undergoing an informal reorganization which presumably will eventually be regularized. With this note

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of caution the present organization of the Vietnamese Navy can be summarized as follows:

- a. A command, supply, repair, and administrative grouping including four area commands, aggregating some 2,500 personnel.
- b. A Training Command with facilities at Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay, aggregating some 1,000 personnel.
- c. A Sea Force of about 3,500 personnel.
- d. A Coastal Force of about 6,000 personnel.
- e. A River Force of about 2,000 personnel.
- f. A pipeline of about 1,000 personnel.

The reorganization referred to above is intended to decentralize the command authority over ships and craft now exercised primarily from Saigon. It involves the dissolution of the River and Coastal Force Commands and the change of the Sea Force Command into a type command. The four zone commands are also being reorganized into four Naval Commands/Coastal Area Commands located at Danang, Qui Nhon, Vung Tau and An Thoi; and two River Area Commands located at Saigon and Cantho. (figure 4)

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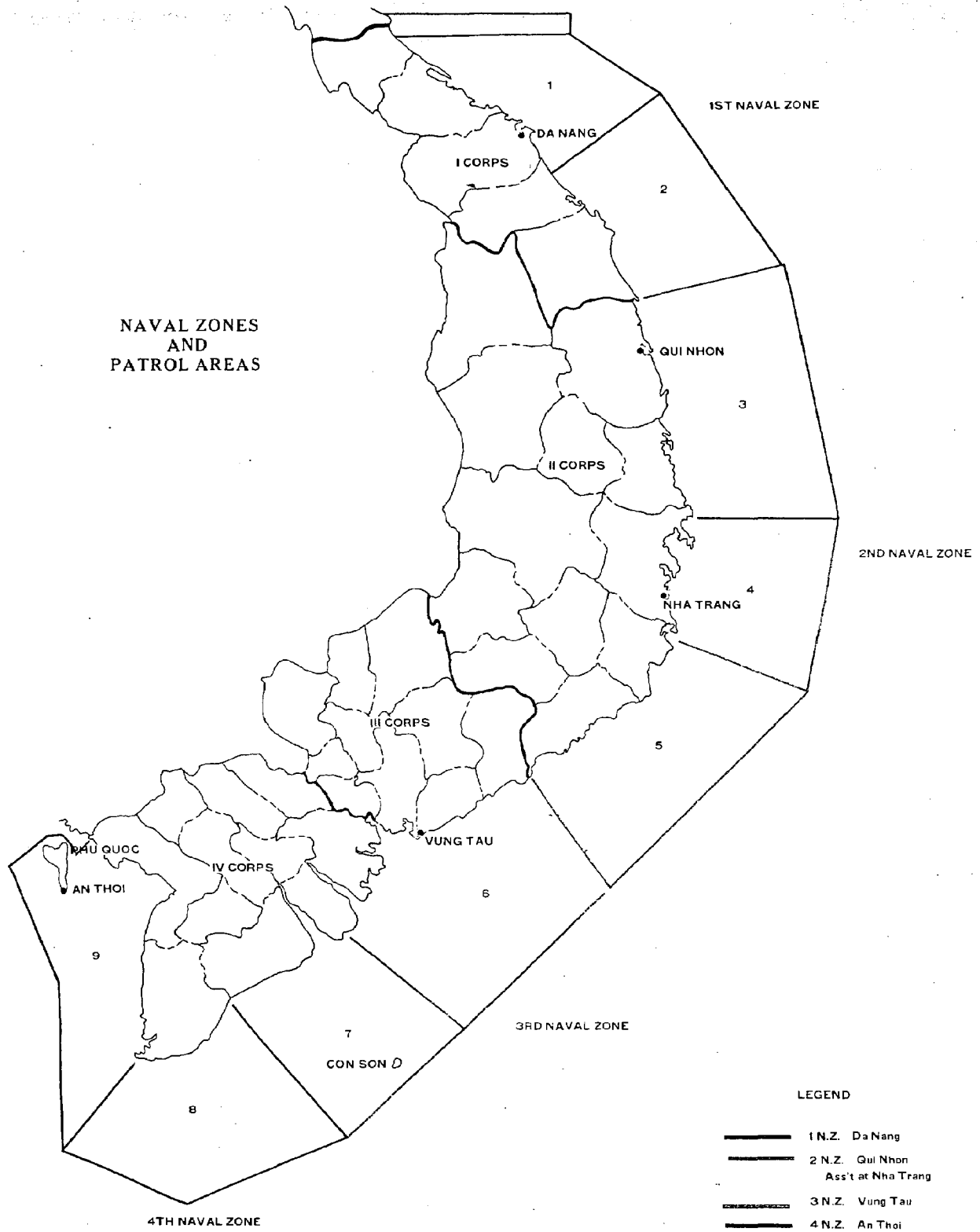


Figure -4-

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~~UNCLASSIFIED~~SECTION 6. THE VIETNAMESE NAVY SEAFORCE

The Sea Force is charged with coastal patrol missions, naval gunfire support, amphibious lift, anti-submarine warfare, and mine countermeasures. The ships assigned to the Sea Force for these missions include; 2 PC, 5 PCE, 6 LSSL, 5 LSIL, 15 PGM, 3 MSC, 3 LST, 7 LSM, 12 ML/MS, 2 YOG, and 1 AKL. The addition of 1 PCE and 6 PGM are currently programmed.

The coastal patrol mission which is ostensibly one of the major responsibilities of the Sea Force, requires the assignment of three or four ships to each of the four Navy Zones. The operations of these ships are coordinated with U. S. Navy coastal surveillance operations (MARKET TIME, TF 115). Of particular significance to the river warfare effort is the fact that two LSSL/LSIL are usually assigned to operate in the Mekong Delta in support of the River Assault Groups (RAG) of the River Force.(figure 5) Additionally, one 3" gun ship is normally available to the Commander, Rung Sat Special Zone for patrol of the major waterway approaches to the port of Saigon. The 12 ML/MS are used for minesweeping in the waterways, but RAG operations normally require the use of RAG craft for this purpose.

The nature and effectiveness of Sea Force operations are best revealed in reports of the U. S. Navy advisors assigned to the various ships. Several such reports are included at Annex 5; the first report being of particular interest to riverine operations. Additionally, the following extracts from an evaluation of the Sea Force prepared by its senior U. S. Navy Advisor provide further insight on the current situation.

"The Sea Force personnel situation is somewhat confused since the Sea Force Commander doesn't know just what his allowance is. He knows what the individual allowance is for the various types of ships, but not what his overall Sea Force allowance is. . . . On board count has been averaging 85% for officers, 82% for petty officers and 70% for non-rated personnel."

"The Sea Force Commander has no control over the assignment of personnel beyond making recommendations to VNN N-1 or the VNN Chief of Staff, Deputy CNO or CNO. All orders to personnel, both officers and enlisted, emanate from the

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VNN N-1. In the past, assignments were frequently made over the objections of the Sea Force Commander, and many officers were assigned to command without having proper qualifications and experience for command. Assignment to command was not considered attractive and was sometimes even done as a form of punishment to keep someone at sea who wanted to go ashore, and had displeased his seniors in some way. Recent assignments to command, however, show evidence of greater attention being paid to the selection of well qualified officers for command billets. The officers assigned to command the four new LSSL's for example, are all outstanding officers. In addition, two officers whose performance was substandard, have recently been removed from their commands when this was recommended by the Sea Force Commander."

"Morale of officer personnel in the Sea Force has recently been quite low due to their feeling that the Sea Force did not receive an equitable number of promotions in the recently published list. Whereas 100% of the LTJG in the Coastal Force were promoted, very few promotions were made in the Sea Force, and none of the PGM CO's were promoted. The Sea Force received a letter from the CNO which said that since the Sea Force is not a combat organization, it received low priority for promotions. This letter was extremely bad for Sea Force officer morale."

"The major problems in the personnel field in the Sea Force are shortages of personnel, shortages of experienced petty officers and technicians, and the low level of leadership among both officers and petty officer personnel. There are, however, many very capable and effective officers in the Sea Force and it is believed that the level of leadership is steadily improving."

"Operational control of Sea Force units varies depending upon the type of ship involved. The patrol ships (PC, PCE, MSC, LSSL, LSIL, and PCM) are under the operational control of the Sea Force Commander when in the Saigon area, but chop to the control of the Coastal District Commander, Riverine Zone Commander, or Rung Sat Special Zone Commander, when operating out of Saigon. The YOG and AKL are under the direct operational control of the Sea Force Commander while in Saigon and when deployed. The LSM(H) is under the operational control of the Psy-war section of the Naval Staff. The LST and LSM are under the operational control of VNN N-4 who in turn is directed by the JGS J-4 in scheduling their

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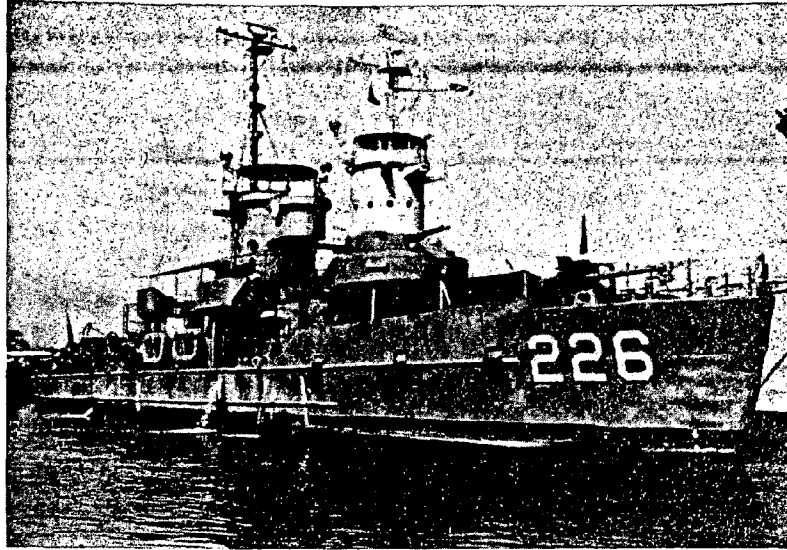
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sailing. Frequently too, the VNN N-3 will assume operational control of Sea Force units when he sees fit to do so."

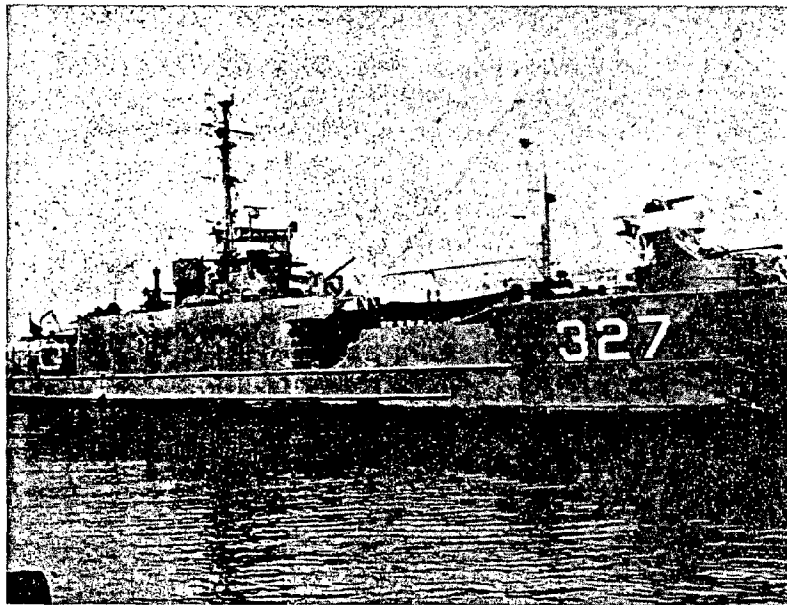
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SEAFORCE SHIPS ASSIGNED TO SUPPORT RIVER FORCE



LSSL



LSIL

Figure (5)

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SECTION 7. THE VIETNAMESE NAVY COASTAL FORCE

The Coastal Force, formerly the Junk Force, is an outgrowth of a proposal made by the Vietnamese Navy late in 1960 to recruit fishermen and provide them with sailing junks so that they could mingle with other local fishermen and gather intelligence along shoreline areas. These operations were to be coordinated with the National Police, and Vietnamese Navy participation was to be limited to the training of the personnel involved. By early 1961 there were 80 sailing junks operating in the I Corps Area.

In 1962 the United States proposed an expansion of the Junk Force to permit coverage of the whole of the coast of South Vietnam. The concept remained austere and included the establishment of limited repair facilities at Rach Gia, Cat Lo, Nhatrang, Quinhon and Danang. A total of 84 command junks, 100 motor/sail junks, 140 motor junks and 320 sailing junks were to be procured. The Force was to remain paramilitary, and its personnel were, as before, to be recruited locally. It was also planned that Junk Force base security would be provided by Regional Forces in the vicinity.

This augmented force came into being in 1963. However, although the junks and repair facilities were then available, there were chronic shortages of personnel to man the junks and to operate the repair facilities. Additionally, the contractors had not completed the marine railways required, and the Regional Forces were not providing security for the junk bases. It also became evident as time went on that sailing junks were no longer effective since the number of motorized fishing junks had grown appreciably, partly because of USAID efforts. In 1964 it was decided to begin the gradual replacement of the sailing junks with a U. S. - Japanese designed junk; the Yabuta (figures 6 and 7)

On 1 July 1965 the Junk Force was integrated into the Vietnamese Navy and became the Coastal Force. This presently consists of 389 motorized junks and 95 sailing junks distributed into 28 Coastal Groups based at 22 different locations along the coast of South Vietnam. (figure 8) Base security continues to be a problem, particularly in the Mekong Delta area where the isolation of the bases makes them unusually vulnerable to Viet Cong attack.

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Operational activities and related problems of Coastal Groups are reported periodically by their U. S. Navy advisors. These are revealing documents, and several are included at Annex 6. In addition, an evaluation of the whole of the Coastal Force made by its senior U. S. Advisor includes the following pertinent comments:

"At present personnel is the critical factor that directly affects the performance of the Coastal Force. There is a shortage of officers, petty officers, and enlisted men. The Coastal Force is presently at approximately 63% of its authorized strength when 874 base defense personnel are included in total strength figure."

"The Coastal Force Commander and the four Coastal District Commanders are fairly competent officers and have the ability and experience to perform their duties. Two of the District Commanders tend to be erratic at times but this is balanced by two who are considerably above average. The main weakness in the officer corps is found among the junior officers."

"The present Logistic System in the Vietnamese Naval Coastal Force does not meet the needs of the Coastal Force. The Vietnamese supply organization is centralized around the Naval Supply Center Saigon, and embodies no formal distribution system. This problem area is critical because unlike the Sea Force and River Force, Coastal Force units are widely dispersed. The situation is further aggravated by a general lack of communications between the NSC, Saigon and Coastal District Headquarters."

"At present there is no Force wide training program in effect. One has been outlined for the training of Base Defense personnel when they are assigned. At present, training is limited to the initiative of the individual Commanding Officers and U. S. Advisors. Some of the Coastal Groups have conducted limited training in such area as seamanship and marksmanship."

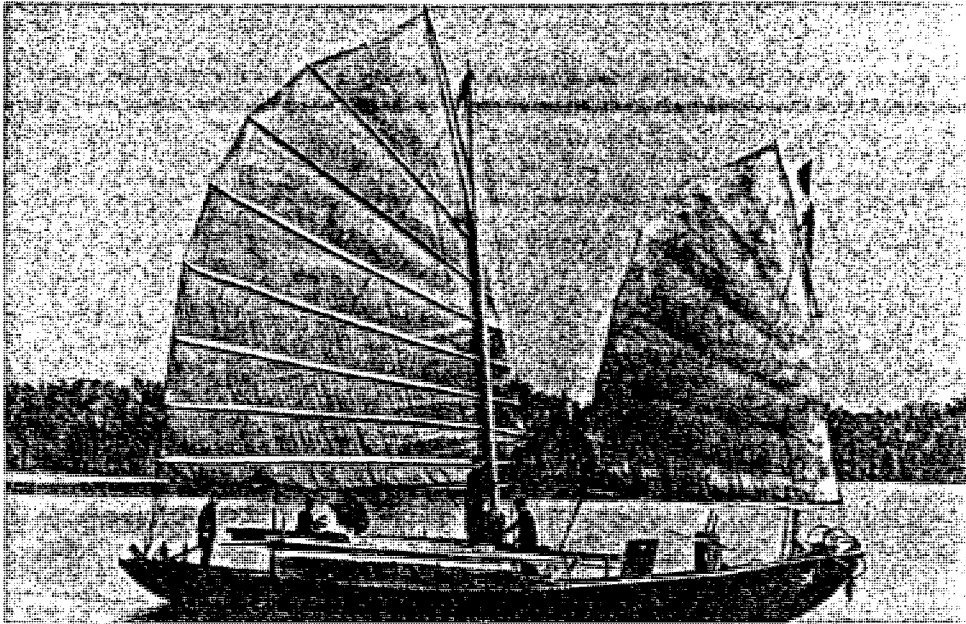
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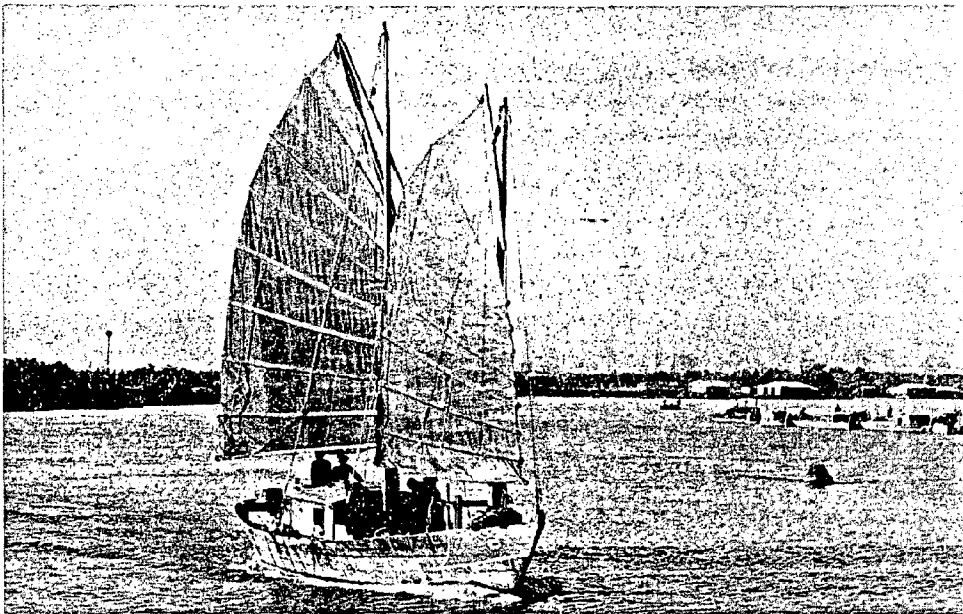
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COASTAL FORCE JUNKS



SAIL ONLY JUNK



MOTOR/SAIL JUNK

Figure 6

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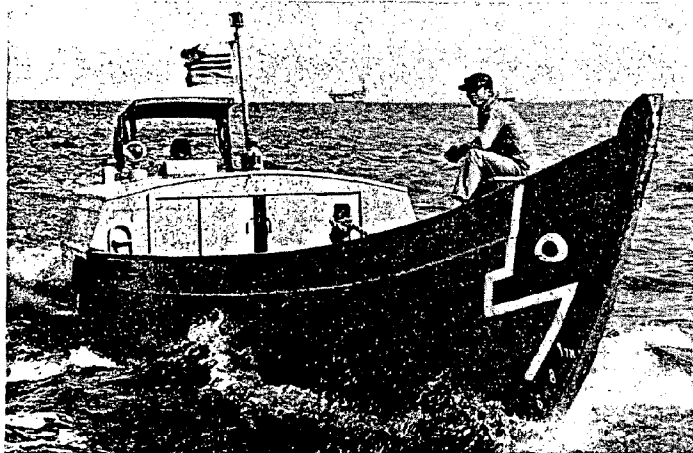
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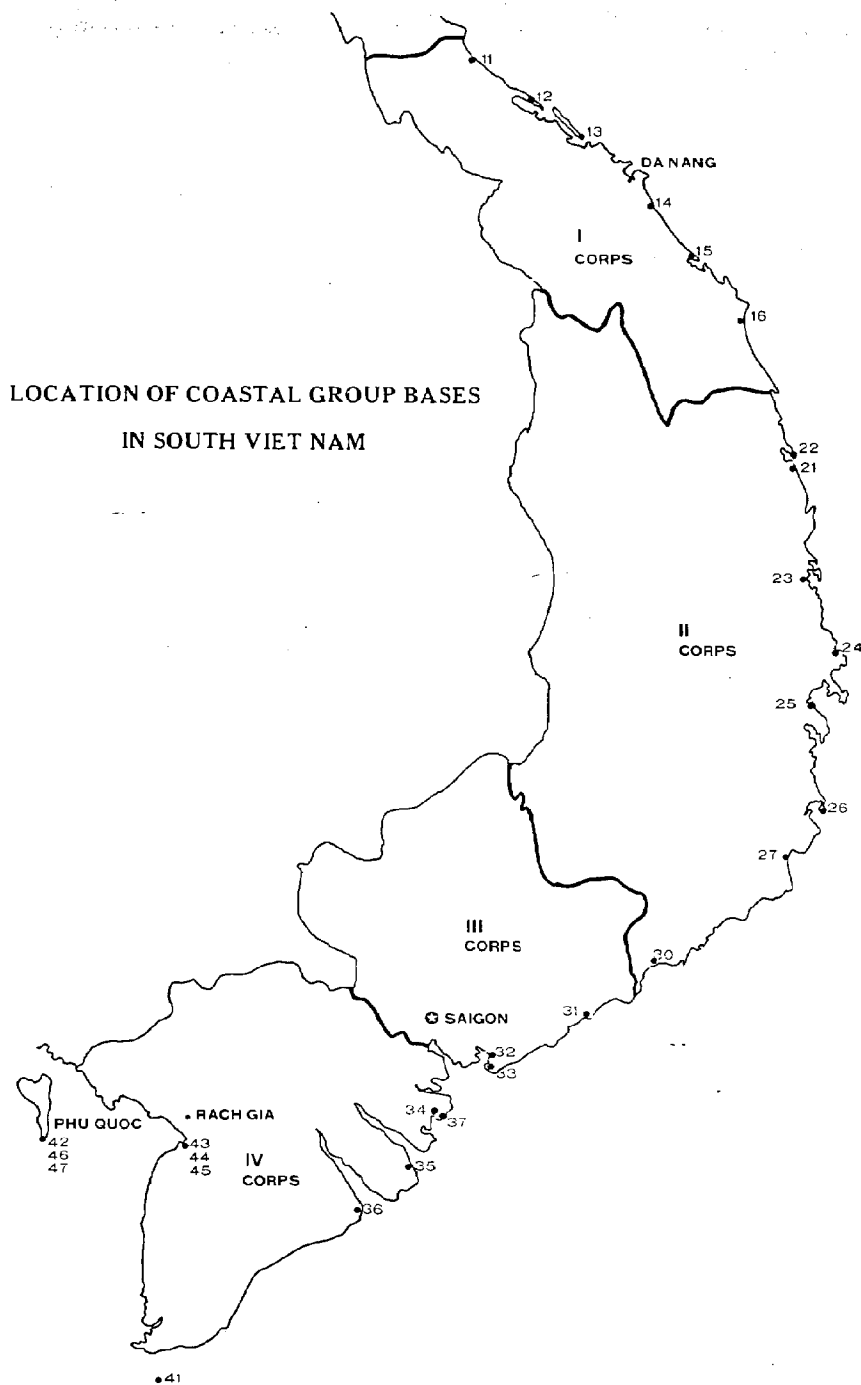
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**MOTOR ONLY JUNK**

Command Junk carries 1 .30 MG forward and 1 .50 cal. MG aft. Note 60 mm mortar amidships

**YABUTA MOTOR JUNK****Figure 7**



- Repair facilities exist at Rach Gia, Cat Lo, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Da Nang
- A new repair facility at Rach Soi was planned in 1965 and is being built
- Relocation of bases for defensive purposes causes existing groupings and mis-ordered sequence of numbers

Figure -8-

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~SECTION 8. THE VIETNAMESE NAVY RIVER FORCE

As the original element of the Vietnamese Navy, the River Force has fallen heir to many of the older facilities and to considerable equipment of honorable but ancient lineage. The River Force also continues to reveal, more than any other unit within the Vietnamese Armed Forces, the influence of the French. This is manifest in the organization of the basic tactical unit of the River Force, the River Assault Group (RAG) which is simply a more generously endowed Dinassaut.

Each River Assault Group today consists of about 200 officers and men and includes the following type of craft: (figure 9, 10 and 11)

- 1 LCM(6) Modified for Command purposes
- 1 LCM(6) Modified as a Monitor for heavy (40mm.)  
gunfire support
- 5 LCM(6) Armored troop/cargo transport
- 6 LCVP Armored troop/cargo transport (also used  
for minesweeping)
- 6 STCAN Armored support/minesweeping/patrol

In addition, there are 6 LCM(8) in the River Force which are normally assigned to RAG 27 at Mytho.

The River Force of the Vietnamese Navy includes:

- a. An Eastern (ERF) and Western Repair Facility (WRF) located at Saigon and Cantho respectively.
- b. A River Transport Escort Group (RTEG) located at Saigon and normally operating under control of RAG 24. The RTEG consists of 4 LCM (monitors), 15 LCVP and 10 STCAN.
- c. A Transport Group of 7 LCU located at Saigon.
- d. The Nine River Assault Groups (RAG) are located as follows:
  - RAGs 21 and 27 at Mytho
  - RAGs 22 and 28 at Nha Be
  - RAG 23 at Vinh Long
  - RAG 24 at Saigon

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RAGs 25 and 29 at Cantho  
RAG 26 at Long Xuyen

The primary mission of RAGs as normally configured is to conduct offensive operations along the waterways with a landing force not exceeding battalion size i.e. about 500 men. Each RAG is considered capable of providing the lift, minesweeping, command and fire support required for such operations. If additional lift is required for a specific operation, LCU of the Transport Group may be assigned, or additional craft from other RAGs or Regional Force Boat Companies may be provided. Requirements for additional fire support are usually met by ships of the Sea Force; LSSL/LSIL. Craft of the River Transport Escort Group may also be assigned for this purpose, but RTEG boats usually are held for escort duties of other than RAG units.

RAGs are under the operational control of the Corps Area Commander. This officer normally delegates operational control of the RAGs to division, regiment, or even battalion level for offensive operations. The RAG commander when not otherwise engaged may conduct limited patrols. Since infantry is seldom available to participate in such patrols, the effectiveness of this effort is marginal.

Logistic support for ground forces is another mission of the River Force. River boats engaged in this activity will normally be formed into convoys and operate generally as a RAG involved in offensive combat operations. RAGs may be used for logistic missions, or separate task forces may be formed for this purpose with craft from the RTEG and the Transport Group. The RTEG may also be called upon to provide minesweeping and escort for Regional Force boat units engaged in logistics missions.

Excellent coverage of the usual type of River Force operations are contained in the reports of the U. S. Navy advisors assigned to each RAG. Several such reports are included at Annex 7. In addition, the senior advisor to the River Force reports that the role of this Force is generally misunderstood because the Vietnamese Navy has virtually no control in operational matters. The River Force Commander functions as a Type Commander only, and frequently has no way of maintaining accountability of the craft. In river operations, the entire operation from its inception and irrespective of the phase, comes under the command of the Army. Only after the operation has been terminated and

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the troops returned to their posts, is the Navy allowed some degree of operational control. This consists of river patrolling for the purpose of interdicting any illicit river traffic, including the movement of enemy troops by water. He adds that on occasion the Army employs river craft for static defense and reconnaissance in area of special interest. He cites as an example the fact the Army has assigned an element of RAG 22, normally based at Nha Be, to defend the bridges over the Oriental River at Ben Luc. In executing this assignment, the RAG element is based at the village of Ben Luc and patrols the waterways in the immediate vicinity of the bridge.

#### RIVER ASSAULT GROUP BOATS

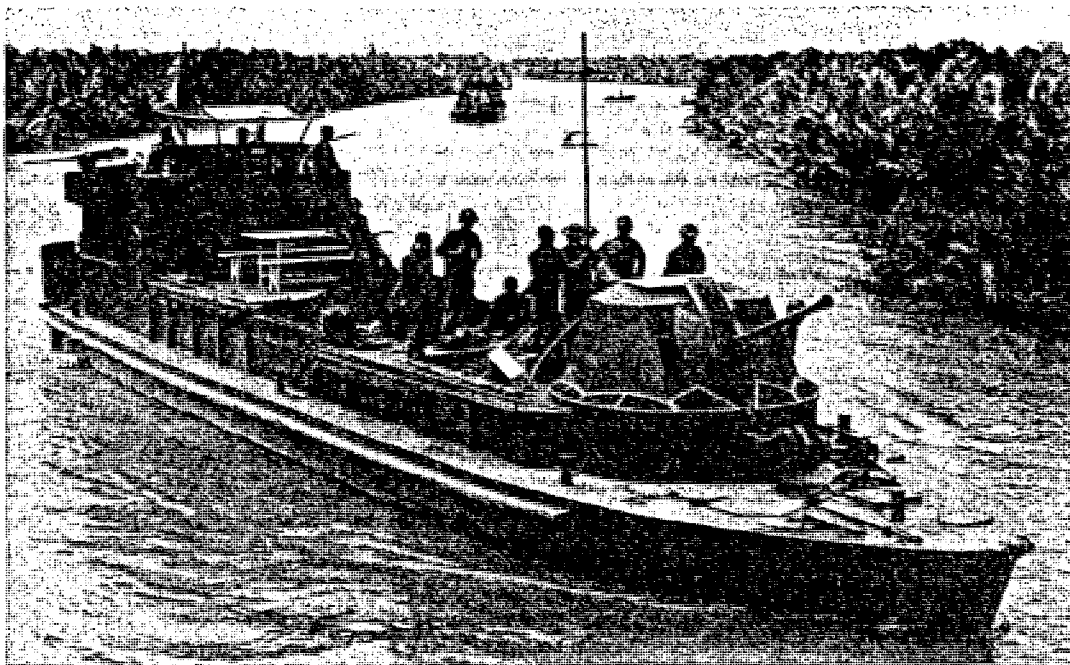


ARMORED LCM

Modified LCM 6; carries crew of 7. Armed with 3 20mm cannon and 2 .50 cal MG. (Figure 9)

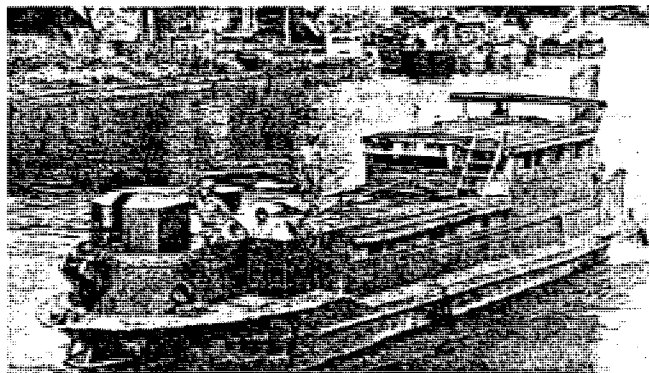
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#### THE MONITOR

Modified LCM6; carries crew of 10. Armament includes single 40 mm cannon in turret; 2 20 mm cannon; 1 .50 cal MG; and 81 mm mortar aft of forward turret.

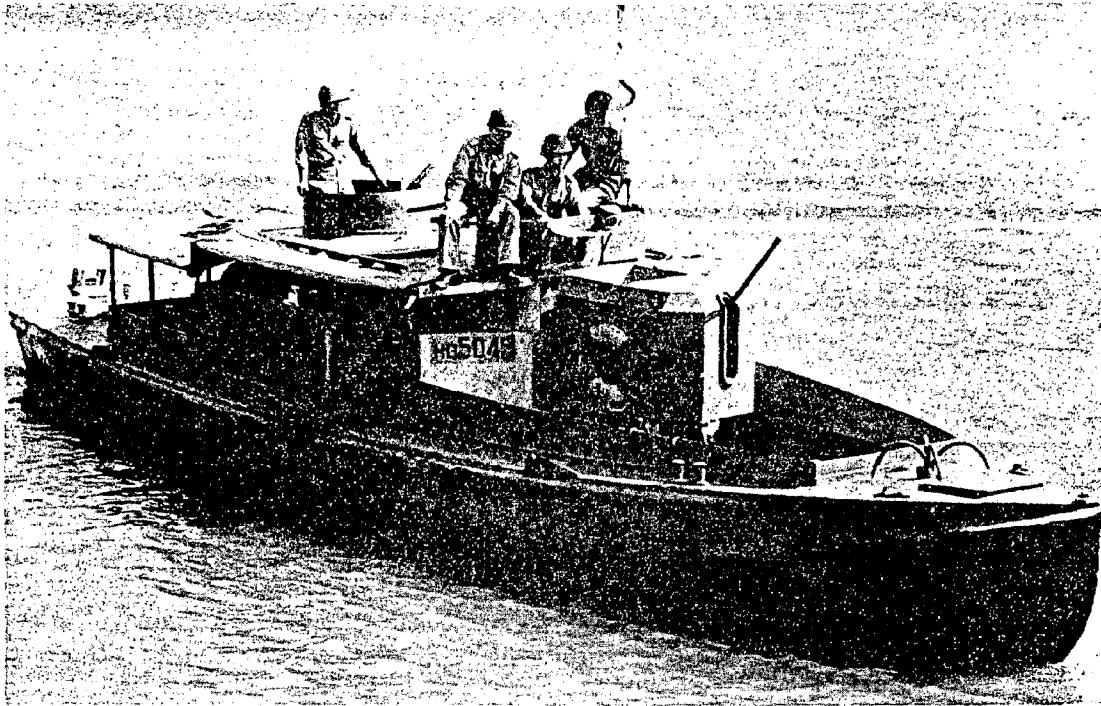


#### THE COMMANDAMENT

Modified LCM 6; carries crew of 10. Armament includes 2 20 mm cannon; 2 .50 cal MG; 2 .30 cal MG; and 81 mm mortar aft of forward gun mount.

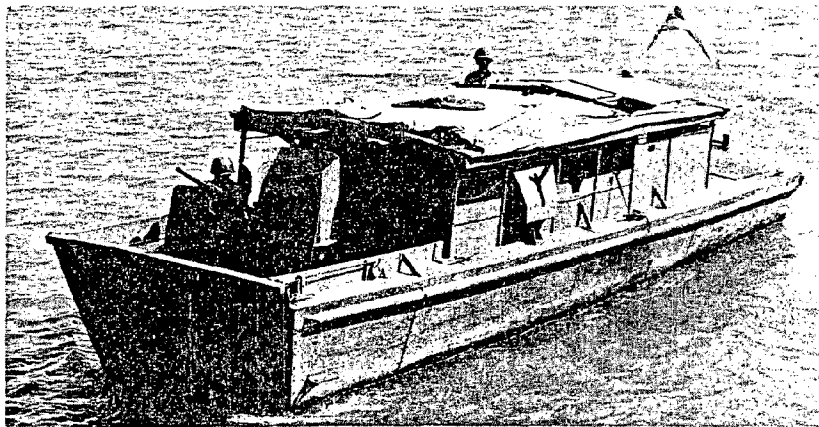
Figure 10

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## STCAN/FOM

French designed boat with "V" hull resistant to mining. Length 34' 9"; speed 10 KTS. Carries crew of 8 and mounts 1 .50 cal MG and 3 .30 cal MG.



## ARMORED LCV

Modified LCV with 1 .20 mm cannon and 3 .30 cal MG.

Figure 11

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## SECTION 9. THE RUNG SAT SPECIAL ZONE

The only territorial command exercised by the Vietnamese Navy is that of the Rung Sat Special Zone. The name Rung Sat means "dense jungle" and is most appropriate since 85% of the Rung Sat is thick mangrove swamp. (figure 12) This area which contains the approaches to the port of Saigon was assigned to the Vietnamese Navy in April 1964.

The Naval Commander of the Rung Sat Special Zone has under his operation control 6 Regional Force Companies (about 100 men each), 9 Popular Force Platoons, (about 30 men each), 1 Regional Force Boat Company (about 40 men and 8 LCVP). In addition, the services of one RAG are available on call; and it is normal practice to have one 3" gun fire support ship in the Rung Sat.

The Commander, Rung Sat Special Zone maintains headquarters at Nha Be. He is directly under the Vietnamese Navy headquarters in Saigon for operation control and intelligence collection. His Regional Force units are administrated by the Regional Force Headquarters at Gia Dinh. In addition, the control of resources and population, the development of rural economy, psychological warfare, and civil defense programs in the New Life Hamlets are handled by the committee in charge of the HOP TAC plan for pacification.

The mission of the Vietnamese Navy in the RSSZ is to deny to the VC freedom of movement in the zone, to locate and destroy VC personnel and positions, and to restore positive control of the zone by the Government of Vietnam in order to eliminate the threat of VC offensive action in adjacent land areas and against shipping moving to Saigon. The forces now assigned for this purpose are insufficient and the command relations both within the zone and between the zone and external government agencies are too complicated for effective operations.

A detailed review of the terrain in this area and some observations on tactical procedures required for the conduct of operations in the Rung Sat are contained in Annex 8. This annex was prepared by a United States Marine Corps officer with extensive experience in small unit combat operations in the area in late 1965 and 1966.

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THE RUNG SAT

Figure 12

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~SECTION 10. OTHER VIETNAMESE NAVY ACTIVITIES

The Vietnamese Navy also includes a SEAL/UDT of approximately 50 men with a potential which is not being exploited. The United States Navy has suggested several suitable missions for this force but the Vietnamese Navy has not pursued the matter. The development of the capability was initiated in September 1960 when 18 volunteers were sent to Taiwan for training under Chinese Nationalist instructors. In February 1963, a qualified U. S. Navy advisor was permanently assigned, and in July of that year a second group of 46 volunteers began training at Nha Trang. Unfortunately, in March 1964, most of the personnel in this organization were detached and scattered to other billets in the Vietnamese Navy. Then, in the summer of 1964, a recruiting program was again started and resulted in a new class of 3 officers and 57 men being selected from 150 volunteers. This group began training at Nha Trang in September, and on 16 January 1965 two officers and 31 men were graduated. One other officer and one enlisted man from this class were then sent to the United States for the UDT training. They returned to Vietnam in May of 1965. Of related interest is the recently acquired information which indicates that selected VC personnel are currently receiving UDT training at a delta base somewhere along the Cambodian - South Vietnam border area.

One final Vietnamese Naval organization which is currently being activated is a seaborne raiding force to be made up of four commandos aggregating some 550 personnel to be assigned one to each of the 4 Naval Zones. Two of these commandos have already been recruited and the U. S. Naval Advisory Group in Saigon has borrowed the services of a U. S. Army officer as advisor for this force. However the United States support for this force has not been agreed, and may not be, because its contemplated role is already within the capability of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. Some American Naval Advisors in Saigon also believe that the organization of this commando force may have been prompted by the fact that the Vietnamese Navy today has no ground force under its direct operational control. The Vietnamese Marine Corps was formally divorced from the Navy in May 1965 to become an autonomous Service.

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## SECTION II. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE VIETNAMESE MARINE CORPS

The Vietnamese Marine Corps which was formed by the consolidation of numerous "Marine Infantry" units originally created by the French for combat along the waterways, now numbers some 7,000 personnel organized into a Brigade of 5 Infantry and 1 Artillery Battalions with associated combat support and combat service support units. The recent creation of two Task Force Headquarters provides added flexibility by permitting the formation of temporary organizations each containing two reinforced infantry battalions.

The Vietnamese Marine Corps is a well trained professional fighting force as its performance in a variety of combat missions attests. There is, nevertheless, a tendency to retain Vietnamese Marine Corps units in the Saigon area where most of them have their home bases. The reason for this is twofold.

In the formative period of the Corps, the U. S. advisory effort was predominantly U. S. Army oriented and the Vietnamese Armed Forces were greater than the forces the United States was prepared to support. Therefore, the reorganization of the Vietnamese Armed Forces was to be accompanied by a partial demobilization which could easily have resulted in the disappearance of Corps. The senior U. S. Marine Corps advisor at the time approached General Le Van Ty, the then Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, and suggested that, following the reorganization of the Vietnamese Army, it might be desirable to look upon the Vietnamese Parachute Battalions and Marine Battalions as versatile and flexible General-Reserve units responsive to the General Staff.

Later, when the continuation of the Vietnamese Marine Corps had been assured, there emerged from within its officer corps a highly intelligent and dynamic individual, Le Nguyen Khang. In the succession of coups directed against the Diem and later regimes, this officer, as commander of one of the Vietnamese Marine Corps battalions, distinguished himself by consistently giving his full support to the legally constituted government of South Vietnam. This earned for him and his Marines the reputation of constituting a force loyal to the government whose presence in Saigon would enhance its security. Khang eventually became Commandant of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, and at present time also commands the Capital Military Region. In addition, he is the Military Governor of Saigon, and serves as a member of the National Directorate.

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As a result of these developments, the Vietnamese Marine Corps is one of the better combat organizations in the country. But at the same time General Khang's responsibilities in Saigon exert a strong influence on the employment of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. The Vietnamese Marines do participate in amphibious operations with U. S. Marines as indicated in the report at Annex 9. But it should be anticipated that they will continue to be employed in operations more directly related to the security of the Capital Military Region.

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SECTION 12. OTHER VIETNAMESE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN  
AGENCIES ENGAGED IN RIVER OPERATIONS.

In addition to the Vietnamese Navy which provides the bulk of the fighting forces on the waterways of the IV Corps Area, the Vietnamese Army has a limited water transport capability; this being used primarily for the crossing of waterways rather than for movement on the waters themselves. At the present there are five boat platoons in the Army each with 50 16 foot plastic assault boats. These platoons are assigned one each to the 5th and 25th Divisions of the III Corps; and one each to the 7th, 9th and 21st Divisions of the IV Corps.

The Regional Forces of South Vietnam, which as the name suggests, are used for military tasks within a specified area, include 24 boat companies. These companies are deployed on the waterways of the III and IV Corps Areas, essentially the Mekong delta complex. They operate a total of 22 LCPR and 147 LCVP type boats primarily in transportation roles. These boats are both armed and armored, but are seldom available for their secondary mission of patrol. They are, however, sometimes used to augment the lift capacity of the RAGs, and as such engage in operational missions.

None of these boats are in the I or II Corps Areas. However a request has recently been received in Saigon for the organization of 3 Regional Force Boat Companies for use in the I Corps area. This request is receiving favorable consideration, and it is anticipated that 45 boats will be made available for missions in that Area comparable to those being performed in the southern delta.

In addition to the above, Civilian Irregular Defense Groups which are a paramilitary organization of the Vietnamese Special forces, operate some 150 16' plastic assault boats. There are 23 CIDG camps in South Vietnam, and those along the Cambodian border use these plastic boats, augmented by locally purchased sampans, for limited patrol of the waterways. Air cushion vehicles of several types have recently been evaluated for surveillance and combat support missions and a recommendation for the acquisition of from 30 to 50 of these vehicles by U. S. Army Special Forces is currently being staffed. These, when and if made available, would be operated by U. S. Army Special Forces personnel.

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Of particular significance to the problem of waterways control is a major effort recently initiated by the National Police with the advice and assistance of USAID personnel. On 26 October 1964, the Director General of National Police was assigned operational responsibility for resources control. The Bureau established to discharge this function was also charged with the staff responsibility for the Family Census and Identity Card programs. These last programs are substantially completed, but the resources control effort necessitated a preliminary study by USAID to establish the equipment and personnel requirements and to determine funding. The recommendations made in this study have now been approved, and the personnel are being trained and the equipment is being procured.

Basically the plan now being implemented consists of establishing 649 fixed and mobile checkpoints throughout the Mekong delta utilizing a force of 12,129 National police over and above present force levels. Fixed check points on the waterways will utilize a total of 466 16' plastic boats. In addition, 34 River Control Units will be established as mobile checkpoints on the major waterways. Each of these units will consist of 40 men, 2 LCP and 4 plastic assault boats with 45 h. p. outboard motors.

The concept of employment of the mobile checkpoints is that the LCP will anchor in midstream to check the larger craft, while the associated plastic assault boats will check the smaller craft along the banks. If security conditions permit these may move into the narrower waterways in the vicinity for the same purpose. A total of 76 LCP and 152 plastic assault boats, which includes spares, will be required for these mobile river control units.

The Vietnamese Customs Service also makes a contribution to the waterways surveillance effort, although its USAID advisor reports this is minimal. This service aggregating some 1,700 personnel is dispersed in 51 locations throughout the country; 11 of which are on the major waterways of the Mekong delta. One of its major functions is to provide shipriders, normally two, to remain aboard each foreign flag ship which transits the international inland waterways leading to the Cambodian border. The bulk of the personnel of the Service, some 75%, is held in Saigon for this purpose and for port operations. Physical assets of the Vietnamese Customs Service include four steel, and 23 wooden patrol craft, all armed with automatic weapons. An additional 22 patrol craft

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have been requested, but none of these have been received.  
It is anticipated that when these added boats become available,  
the Vietnamese Customs Service will be better able to operate  
check points and extend their limited patrols on the waterways.

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### SECTION 13. THE U. S. NAVAL ADVISORY AND OPERATIONAL EFFORT

The advisory effort in South Vietnam is generally organized to provide U. S. personnel at the more critical command and staff points in the Vietnamese military and governmental structure. The duties of the U. S. Advisors in the combat units of the Vietnamese Armed Forces are particularly difficult and require a high degree of tolerance and understanding on the part of the individuals concerned. The effectiveness of the advisory effort, particularly at the lower echelons, is directly related to the compatibility between the advisor and the advisee; basically it is a question of personalities. The American must gain the confidence of his Vietnamese counterpart. At the same time the American advisor must learn to avoid offending the sensibilities of the Vietnamese, and must be prepared to accept situations where his advice may not be taken. This state of affairs is not easily attained in the relatively short tour that an advisor serves. That the advisory effort is succeeding as well as it is is eloquent testimony to the adaptability of the young men involved.

Some four fifths of the 750 U. S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel in the Naval Advisory Group in Vietnam serve in an advisory capacity; many at sea or in the field. The Vietnamese River Force has just over 60 U. S. Advisors, while the Sea Force has just under the same number. The Coastal Force, because of its wide dispersal and large number of junks, has more than 135 advisors. The Vietnamese Marine Corps has some 30 U. S. Marine Advisors, and the Rung Sat Special Zone has an advisory group headed by a U. S. Marine Officer with two district advisory teams provided by the United States Army.

In addition to the significant responsibilities related to the advisory effort, the Chief of the U. S. Naval Advisory Group in Vietnam has two operational responsibilities; one as Commander Task Force 115, the Coastal Surveillance Force which has been active for sometime; the other as Commander Task Force 116, the River Patrol Force which is currently being activated.

Two factors contributed to the organization of the United States Coastal Surveillance Force, TF 115 (Market Time). The first was a significant difference between the U. S. Navy advisors reports on Vietnamese Navy patrol activity and the reports submitted by the Vietnamese Navy itself for these same patrols.

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These made it evident that the Vietnamese Navy patrol effort was far less effective than was being claimed. The second factor was the discovery of a Viet Cong supply ship in Vung Ro Bay on 16 February 1965. Air strikes sank this 130 foot 100 ton ship in shallow water. Subsequent diving operations proved that the ship was North Vietnamese and was employed in infiltration. In addition to the discovery of the ship, large arms caches in the area indicated that more than one shipload had been infiltrated.

On 21 February, COMUSMACV requested that CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT representatives meet to plan for a combined USN-VNN patrol effort. By 10 March a concept had been derived based on the assumption that sea infiltration consisted of two categories; first, coastwise junk traffic mingling with the junks off the coast; and second, seagoing craft or trawlers of larger type that approached the coast more or less perpendicularly. The second category could be further divided between those vessels that offloaded directly to the beach, as at Vung Ro, and those that offloaded to smaller craft offshore, perhaps out of sight of land. The first type was considered the least amenable to U. S. Navy action, and it was felt that the best tactic to interdict coastal traffic infiltration would be to assist and inspire the Vietnamese to increase the quality and quantity of their searches. With regard to the second type of infiltration, it was felt that the conventional patrol effort by U. S. naval ships and aircraft employing radar and visual search would be fairly effective. The concept was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 16 March 1965 and one VP aircraft and two destroyers were on station that same day.

The initial concept was predicated on the fact that the rules of engagement gave the Vietnamese Naval Forces the authority to board, search or seize suspect vessels only in RVN territorial and contiguous zone waters to a 12 mile limit, and GVN craft or craft posing as such could be boarded and searched on the high seas. U. S. Navy forces had no boarding authority anywhere, not even in RVN territorial waters. Pending authority for the USN ships to board and search, the mission of the USN ships was to detect, track and report all suspicious contacts to Vietnamese naval units. Vietnamese navy liaison personnel assigned to U. S. ships were to ensure effective USN/RVN communications and contribute local knowledge. On 27 April the Government of the Republic of Vietnam established the legal and diplomatic foundation which permitted U. S. ships to board and search. On 11 May rules of engagement were promulgated which authorized U. S. units

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to stop, search and seize vessels not clearly engaged in innocent passage inside the 3 mile territorial limit of the RVN, and in a contiguous zone extending 12 miles off shore.

Responsibility for U. S. participation in Market Time was initially assigned to the Seventh Fleet. However, this was passed to Chief Naval Advisory Group on 30 July 1965 when Task Force 115 was activated; an augmentation of 79 Navy personnel for the headquarters for the Naval Advisory Group was authorized for this purpose.

The mission of Task Force 115 is to conduct surveillance, gunfire support, visit and search, and other operations as directed along the coast of RVN in order to assist the RVN in the detection and prevention of communist infiltration from the sea. An additional mission assigned on 8 September 1965 is to improve the Vietnamese Navy's counterinsurgency capability and assist the GVN and U. S. forces to secure the coastal regions and major rivers as part of the overall effort to defeat the communist insurgency in Vietnam.

For Market Time operations the coast of South Vietnam is broken down into 9 patrol areas (figure 4). The Vietnamese Navy Coastal Force normally maintains 190 junks at sea for close inshore patrols in the vicinity of the junk bases. The Vietnamese Navy Sea Force normally maintains 16 patrol ships on station off the four Naval Zones. The United States in-country contribution to the inshore patrol effort consists of three Coast Guard Divisions soon to total 26 WPB (82 foot cutters), and two Navy Divisions now manning 14 PCF. These last are being rapidly augmented and a total of 84 PCF are expected to be in South Vietnam by the end of 1966. In addition, COMSEVENTHFLT provides the equivalent of eleven 17 knot ships for off shore patrol, and VP aircraft are maintained on continuous air patrol some 40 miles of the coast.

Command and control of USN and USCG forces is originated at the headquarters of CTF 115 in Saigon, relayed to the Coastal Surveillance Centers located at Danang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Vung Tau, and An Thoi, and passed to the ships, craft, and aircraft. Coordination with the Vietnamese Navy Sea and Coastal Forces is accomplished at the Surveillance Centers which are jointly manned by USN and VNN personnel.

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A summary covering the first five months of operations of Task Force 115 has recently been prepared by the Naval Advisory Group and is appended at Annex 10.

The activation of a U. S. Navy River Patrol Force, TF 116 (Game Warden) was authorized in December 1965. The first elements of this force are arriving in country and will be used to patrol the Rung Sat Special Zone. The remaining elements will deploy to the Mekong delta. The primary purpose of TF 116 is to complement the activities of the Vietnamese Navy River Force units whose craft are seldom available for patrol of the waterways.

When fully operational it is expected that Task Force 116 will include 58 officers and 1138 enlisted ratings to operate one River Patrol Boat Squadron composed of 10 River Divisions each with 10 PBR, and one River Boat Division with 20 LCPL. The complement for the LST bases and the crews for the associated helicopters discussed later will be in addition to above cited personnel figures.

The distribution of the 11 river patrol boat divisions will be as follows:

- a. River Patrol Unit Echo consisting of River Division 41 with 10 PBR based at Cat Lo, and River Division 42 with 20 LCPL based at Nha Be will patrol the Rung Sat Special Zone.
- b. River Patrol Unit Bravo consisting of River Division 21 with 10 PBR will be based at Mytho, and its River Division 22, also with 10 PBR, will be based at Vinh Long.
- c. River Patrol Unit Charlie consisting of River Division 31 with 10 PBR will be based at Sadec, and its River Divisions 32 and 33 each with 10 PBR will be based at Chaudoc.
- d. River Division 23 with 10 PBR will be based at Cantho.
- e. One Division of three LST will provide afloat bases at the mouths of the Mekong Delta Rivers as follows; one LST off the Cua Dai, as base for River Division 11 with 10 PBR and 2 helicopters; one LST off the Song Co Chien as base for River Patrol Unit Alfa, River Division 12 with 10 PBR, and 2 helos; and one LST off the Bassac as base for River Division 13 with 10 PBR and 2 helos.

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The mission of the U. S. Navy River Patrol Force is to conduct river patrols and inshore surveillance in order to enforce curfews and prevent VC infiltration, movement, and resupply along the coast and across the major rivers of the Mekong Delta and the Rung Sat. The 100 PBR craft which are to be the mainstay of this patrol effort are not armored. This makes them vulnerable to small arms fire and will restrict their operations to the larger waterways. Further they will be unable to approach too close to river banks where hostile elements may be present. However their excellent radar and high speed should provide them with excellent capabilities for night surveillance and traffic intercept.

It is evident that Game Warden presently is intended to be solely a United States Navy effort. Nevertheless the activities of this force will have to be coordinated with those of the Vietnamese Navy and other government agencies operation on the waterways. Coordination will also be required with TF 115 patrols at the mouths of the Mekong and in the vicinity of Vung Tau. It is also anticipated that should U. S. forces become engaged in river warfare in the III and IV Corps areas, support by Game Warden patrol units will be required. Such support should become readily available when the USAID assisted Resources Control Program discussed in Section 12 becomes fully effective and the Game Warden patrol effort can consequently be reduced or reoriented elsewhere in South Vietnam.

Following quickly upon the activation of the U. S. Navy River Patrol Force, the U. S. Naval Advisory Groups drafted recommendations on the numbers and types of river craft which would be required for a U. S. Navy manned River Assault Group to be used in offensive riverine operations. Annex 11 includes the detailed modifications proposed to convert LCM(6) into command boats, fire support monitors, and armored personnel/cargo transports for this purpose. It also includes the desired characteristics of an assault/support/patrol boat (ASPB) based largely upon the French designed STCAN. The RAG as envisaged would be capable of lifting and providing support for up to one reinforced infantry battalion, and would include:

2 LCM(6)	Command
4 LCM(6)	Monitor
19 LCM(6)	Armored troop/cargo transport
12 ASPB	Support/minesweeping/patrol

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The recommendations contained at annex 11 conform generally to the type of craft now in the Vietnamese Navy RAGs and hence have been strongly influenced by the French experience. But the French themselves emphasized that most of their river craft of necessity were adaptations of whatever was available, and the results were not always wholly satisfactory. Thus the U. S. Naval Advisory Group proposals should be considered, except for the ASPB, as possible interim solutions to the requirement for specialized river craft. It should also be noted that no recommendation is included at Annex 11 for larger fire support ships comparable to the LSSL/LSIL type whose effectiveness on the major waterways of South Vietnam has been proven time and again. Situations can be anticipated where the support of such ships to include LSMR would be highly desirable. Finally, the recommendations at Annex 11 relate only to the possible conduct of operations in the Mekong delta. The requirements for craft suited to operations on the shallow but extensive waterways in the coastal plains also need to be investigated. Of the craft recommended only the ASPB offers some potential for operations in these waterways, and then only in limited areas because of their draft.

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ANNEX 1

CONVENTION REGULATING MARITIME AND INLAND  
NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG AND ON THE APPROACH  
TO THE PORT OF SAIGON

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CONVENTION  
REGULATING MARITIME AND INLAND NAVIGATION  
ON THE MEKONG AND INLAND NAVIGATION ON THE APPROACH TO  
THE PORT OF SAIGON

(Signed at Paris December 29, 1954)

His Majesty the King of Cambodia,

His Majesty the King of Laos,

His Majesty the Chief of State of Vietnam,

Considering the unusual geographic configuration of the Mekong in Indochina, which makes this river a thoroughfare of common interest to the three States,

Desirous, within the framework of their friendly relations, of maintaining and consolidating cooperation among their countries, whose economies are interdependent,

Convinced that free navigation on the navigable course of the Mekong will develop these economies as well as the cooperation of the three States among themselves, in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter,

Have resolved to conclude the present Convention.

For this purpose they have appointed as their plenipotentiaries:

His Majesty the King of Cambodia:

His Excellency Au Chheun, Minister of State;

His Majesty the King of Laos:

His Excellency Leuam Insisienmay, Minister  
of Finance;

His Majesty the Chief of State of Vietnam:

Mr. Nguyen Van Thoai, Minister of the Plan and Reconstruction.

Who, having exchanged their full powers, found to be in good and due form, have agreed upon the following provisions:

#### ARTICLE I

On the basis of equality of treatment, navigation shall be free throughout the course of the Mekong, its tributaries, effluents, and navigable mouths located in the territories of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, as well as on the waterways giving access to the Port of Saigon and to the sea.

For purposes of the customs laws and regulations of each riparian State, navigation between Phnom Penh and the sea by way of the Mekong and the waterways mentioned in the preceding paragraph shall be considered maritime navigation (explanatory notes).

#### ARTICLE II

Such freedom of navigation is automatically granted to the States that have recognized the High Contracting Parties diplomatically. It shall become effective after the adherence of each State to the protocol annexed hereto prescribing the conditions of navigation.

As regards States that have not recognized the High Contracting Parties diplomatically, freedom of navigation shall be subject to their consent. (Explanatory Note).

#### ARTICLE III

Each of the High Contracting Parties undertakes, in respect of the other two, to refrain from adopting any measure that might directly or indirectly impair navigability or make it permanently more difficult, and to take, as promptly as possible, the necessary measures to remove all obstacles and hazards to navigation.

If such navigation requires regular upkeep, each of the High Contracting Parties shall, to that end, have an obligation toward the other two to take the measures and to carry out the necessary work in its territory as quickly as possible.

## ARTICLE IV

Subject to compliance with the provisions of the preceding article, the High Contracting Parties reserve the right to utilize the waters of the Mekong, its tributaries and effluents in their respective territories, for industrial or agricultural purposes.

Barring legitimate reasons for objection by one of the High Contracting Parties, especially by the State whose territory is concerned, based either on essential conditions of navigability or on other vital interests, a riparian State may not refuse, when requested by either of the other High Contracting Parties, to carry out the necessary work to improve navigability, if the said High Contracting Party or Parties offer to pay the full cost thereof and, subsequently, a fair share of the increase in maintenance costs. The work may not be undertaken if the State in whose territory it is to be done maintains its legitimate reason for objection.

The State bound to carry out the work of maintenance may free itself of that obligation by entrusting it to one or both of the other High Contracting Parties. As regards improvement projects, the State bound to carry them out shall be released from that obligation if it authorizes one or both of the High Contracting Parties making the request to carry them out in its place. Execution of the work by States other than the State whose territory is concerned shall be without prejudice to the latter's right to supervise the execution, and to the prerogatives of its sovereignty over the navigable waterway. The State whose territory is concerned will, for its part, undertake to assist the executing country to the fullest extent possible in all circumstances.

## ARTICLE V

In the spirit of the present Convention and with a view to facilitating its application, the High Contracting Parties agree to take concerted action on the following questions:

Police and navigation regulations to be established by each of the High Contracting Parties on the navigable waterway under its sovereignty;

Programs and projects for the improvement of waterways, their installations and equipment;

Work projects of benefit to industry, agriculture, etc., to the extent to which they might seriously and permanently impair navigation;

Apportioning of costs of maintenance and new work among the High Contracting Parties;

Questions relating to duties, fees and taxes of any kind levied by each of the High Contracting Parties by reason of navigation on the waterways defined in Article I;

All other questions recognized to be of common interest.

#### ARTICLE VI

A Commission composed of representatives of the High Contracting Parties and known as the Commission of the Mekong is hereby created. This Commission is charged with obtaining compliance with the provisions of the present Convention and with ensuring the concerted action referred to in the preceding article, particularly as regards:

1. The preparing of navigation regulations;
2. The suggesting of useful projects to the riparian States;
3. The receipt of communications from the States concerning any improvement projects planned by them;
4. The proposing of a system of charges and their collection.

This Commission is authorized to receive requests, proposals and recommendations from natural and juridical persons of all nationalities, including representatives of foreign countries, using the waterways described in the present Convention, or, at the request of either Cambodia, Laos, or Vietnam, to hear the said persons.

It shall address its studies and recommendations to the Governments concerned.

This Commission shall have a Secretariat with headquarters at Phnom Penh. It shall hold its first meeting in January 1955 and at that time draw up the regulations governing its organization and functioning.

## ARTICLE VII

In the event of litigious questions arising between the High Contracting parties in the application of the present Convention, which cannot be settled by mutual agreement or through diplomatic channels, they will submit the dispute to the courts provided for in the agreement on conciliation and arbitration to be concluded within three months of the signing of the present Convention.

## ARTICLE VIII

This Convention shall be ratified.

The instruments of ratification shall be exchanged between the Government of the High Contracting Parties.

## ARTICLE IX

The present Convention shall enter into force on January 1, 1955.

Done at Paris in three copies  
December 29, 1954

For Cambodia:

For Laos:

For Vietnam:

His Excellency  
Au Chheun

His Excellency  
Leuam Insisienmay

Mr. Nguyen Van Thoai

## ANNEXED PROTOCOL

TO THE CONVENTION REGULATING MARITIME AND INLAND  
NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG AND INLAND NAVIGATION ON THE  
APPROACH TO THE PORT OF SAIGON

The Governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Kingdom of Laos, and the State of Vietnam have agreed as follows:

## ARTICLE I

With a view to enjoying the full benefit of freedom of navigation throughout the course of the Mekong, its tributaries, effluents, and

navigable mouths,

It is requested:

Of the States that have recognized the States of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam diplomatically, and

Of the States that have not yet recognized the States of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam diplomatically, but to which the latter States have agreed to grant such freedom of navigation,

That, through exchanges of notes with the States of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, they declare their willingness to abide by the terms and conditions respecting navigation which are specified in the present Protocol.

#### ARTICLE II

Navigation throughout the course of the Mekong, its tributaries, effluents, and navigable mouths, must conform to the requirements prescribed by the riparian States, particularly in sanitary, police and customs matters and with respect to the maintenance of general security.

#### ARTICLE III

Such riparian State shall have the right to subject the transportation of persons and goods to certain conditions, provided that these conditions fully respect the provisions relating to equality of treatment.

#### ARTICLE IV

Freedom of navigation shall not be in violation of the national laws and regulations of the riparian States concerning the importation and exportation of goods, or immigration and emigration.

#### ARTICLE V

Navigation shall give rise, on a basis of equality of treatment, to the payment of duties, fees, taxes and charges payable in accordance with the territorial laws in effect.

## ARTICLE VI

The provisions of Articles II, III, IV, AND V shall be applied without prejudice to those of Article I, paragraph 2, of the Convention regulating navigation on the Mekong.

## ARTICLE VII

Cabotage from one part to another located on the course of the Mekong, its tributaries, effluents, and navigable mouths shall be reserved to the vessels of Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese registry.

However, these States reserve, in so far as they are respectively concerned, the right to authorize the vessels of States enjoying freedom of navigation on the Mekong to engage in such trade.

Done at Paris in three copies on \_\_\_\_\_,  
for annexation to the Convention Regulating  
Maritime and Inland Navigation on the Mekong  
and Inland Navigation on the Approach to the  
Port of Saigon.

For Cambodia:

His Excellency  
Au Chheun

For Laos:

His Excellency  
Leuam Insisienmay

For Vietnam

Mr. Nguyen Van Thoai



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ANNEX 2

EXTRACTS FROM FRENCH OFFICIAL DOCUMENT  
"LESSONS LEARNED IN THE INDOCHINA WAR"  
PUBLISHED BY HIGH COMMAND, SAIGON, 31 MAY 1955

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## PART 1, CHAPTER 1, "THE PRE-INSURGENCY PERIOD"

"A pre-insurgency period is difficult to define. However it would appear to begin when opposition to established order attains sufficient influence over the population to provoke troubles".

"It is difficult to learn from this period lessons which do more than confirm established rules. If these lessons were not observed in full, it is undoubtedly because no one suspected the existence of a pre-insurgency situation, and because the rebellion had lost its traditional form; an evolutionary process which came as a surprise."

"The reports on the pre-war situation contained optimistic views concerning internal security, and attributed the responsibility for incidents and troubles to a few isolated individuals against whom recourse to force was both normal and adequate."

"The very nature of a pre-insurgency situation is that it cannot be resolved by the use of force alone. The authority charged with maintaining order must intervene more in the political, economic, and social domains than in that of the police."

"If the Indochina War has few positive lessons to reveal, it does nevertheless highlight many of our shortcomings."

## CHAPTER 2, "PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE STRUGGLE"

"In the areas which our troops attempted to sanitize or at least secure against Viet Minh contagion, it was normal to use propaganda as well as weapons. But our troops were, with few exceptions, extremely poor at persuasion and indoctrination."

"In areas controlled by the Viet Minh where we occasionally penetrated, we most often had to pay for military success with the alienation of the people. These often believed in the return of Franco-Vietnamese forces; observed a benevolent neutralism and often provided some evidence of support; but then found themselves abandoned to Viet Minh reprisals. Therefore, a raid or incursion in a non-controlled area should never include efforts to rally the people to our side."

## PART 2, CHAPTER 1, "ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS"

"We have often heard that one of the basic causes of our failures was the inadequacy of intelligence. Yet a day seldom passed when

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Commanders of major units could not read the complete order of battle of the Viet Minh on their intelligence maps most often with an accuracy of 80% or better. At the same time, battalion commanders, outpost commanders, or even mobile Group Commanders (RLT) were from time to time victims of the most brutal surprises. . . . . It is thus necessary to differentiate between "deep intelligence" which was always available to the high command with considerable accuracy, and "close-in intelligence" which was seldom obtained by the lower echelons. . . . . Very often at the lower echelons the important functions of the intelligence officer were largely ignored. "

"But if conditions were such that we could not profit from intelligence provided by the people, we could note the benefits that our adversary could draw from this source. "

"The gradual growth of the Viet Minh potential and the rot which followed in certain areas made it necessary for us to pay an ever increasing price for the security of our facilities and movements. "

"Mobile units had to utilize about 1/4 of their personnel for security of their artillery, CPs, and vehicle parks. More than one third, and often half of infantry activity was devoted to security measures. Surveillance of a 20 kilometer section of road would require a battalion of infantry supported by a battery of artillery. The enemy could render the same area insecure with one rifle company. In less hostile areas to counter the activities of one or two enemy platoons and secure 40 kilometers of road, we had to use one infantry battalion plus auxiliary troops to man a certain number of fixed posts . . . . . These requirements could have been greatly reduced if we could have enjoyed more reliable information of the enemy. . . . . "

## CHAPTER 2 "CONTROL OF AXES AND CRITICAL AREAS"

"Once a rebellion has taken hold in an area, it is necessary to establish:

- Forces to guarantee the use of a minimum of land and waterways axes, if such exist.

- One or severable secure bases to serve as maneuver areas essential to the conduct of operations.

The free use of axes was a constant and major concern. But because of the length of our communications routes and the difficulties of the terrain, we had to quickly content ourselves with assuring the security only of certain roads and then only during daylight hours. . . . . With

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reference to waterways, free use could only be assured on part of them, in South as in North Vietnam, by the expediture of ever increasing efforts to sweep channels ahead of river convoys, and by the provision of escorts with sufficient power to break through ambushes."

"The control of a route was obtained by:

- A chain of posts which assured the security of critical points along the route .....
- Surveillance exercised by detachments which would patrol the area between the posts and would provide flank security.....
- The use, if required, of reserve elements, often including armor, stationed in certain of the posts.....

The control of waterways was exercised in comparable fashion, but there were far fewer posts. Except on very busy waterways, or where the width of a river provided an acceptable degree of protection, movement was restricted to convoys which were heavily escorted and were preceded by mine sweeping formations."

"Each night the roads were left to the enemy, although we tried to control them with armored patrols operating at night and using infrared viewing devices..... In any event the rule was that a section of road between two posts had to be opened each morning when the route was required for the movement of friendly forces."

"As a matter of interest, a study was made to determine what it cost to utilize four main sections of road in Tonkin during a period when the enemy was particularly active; i. e. at the time of Dien Bien Phu..... On the four routes involved, defensive posts were spaced on the average of 5 to 8 kilometers apart. If we add only the troops engaged in static defense to 50% of the auxiliary forces in the area..... one arrives at the figure of 20 to 30 troops per kilometer of route. The opening of a section of road between posts, which occurred daily, required 10 men per kilometer. In normal conditions this figure could be cut in half. Casualties sustained in defense of posts and in opening routes averaged 3 to 10 men per day; 1/4 to 1/2 of these casualties being due to mines."

"The Commander must therefore accept an inability to control other than the most indispensable roads; while, admittedly, remaining ready to open selected roads for specific operations and keeping them open throughout the duration of such operations."

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## CHAPTER 3 "AREA CONTROL"

"In south Vietnam, favorable conditions permitted a rather quick passage from control of axes to control of areas; at least in certain regions.

Political action helped, and pacification could follow. . . . In North Vietnam on the contrary, military, political and geographic factors prevented effective area control. . . . At the end of 1953. . . one could say that it was not the Viet Minh who were infiltrated in the delta, it was us."

"In contrast to the situation in Tonkin where the initiative slipped from our hands more and more, one could observe in South Vietnam a gradual extension of area control carried out in accordance with classic principles. As a result of an 'oil spot' policy, control was gradually established over a region. This had been tied together little by little by a communications network carefully safeguarded by a closely knit system of posts. The areas at the periphery of the area were curtailed off in order to prevent the return into the area of rebels which had been driven out."

"Activity in an area involved daily operations whose nature and strength were very variable. But the most important of these operations always involved sweep and search. . . complete search is absolutely indispensable, and all unit leaders were unanimous in deploring the lack of time which was normally available for thorough searches.

## CHAPTER 5, "PACIFICATION"

"For a Province to be considered as pacified it is necessary; for the authority of the legal government to manifest itself by the establishment of regular political organisms; for the cleansing of the Province to have been conducted by the people themselves; and for the communal centers to have created self defense formations capable of assuring the protection of critical points within the Province."

"A returned POW medical officer reported; 'The Viet Minh told me several times that their worst enemy was a doctor who treated the people.'"

## PART 4, CHAPTER 5 'ARMORED FORCES'

"In 1948 two companies of M29C (Weasels) were organized in South Vietnam. . . . they operated throughout the Plain of Reeds

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sowing confusion in the ranks of the enemy. The results were so encouraging that two additional companies were organized in South Vietnam and North Vietnam. But very quickly the question of infantry support arose; the M29C units would receive far ranging reconnaissance missions where the infantry could either not follow, or could follow only with difficulty. The assignment of a platoon of infantry to each M29C company was tried but without much success; the infantry strength was inadequate and the added load on the vehicles reduced their mobility. Consideration was then given to the use of LVTs. These were initially assigned on the basis of one platoon, carrying a Vietnamese Commando, per company of M29C. This solution was generally satisfactory and eventually led to the organization of. . . . . Amphibious Groups which in 1954 each consisted of:

- Two companies each with 33 M29C, organized into three platoons. These were used for scouting, encirclement, and pursuit.
- Three companies of LVT (4), each with 11 LVT (4) to transport a rifle company of about 130 men.
- One platoon of 6 LVT (A) (4)(75mm. howitzers)
- Two command groups to permit task organizing the force as required."

"The amphibious groups could be profitably employed during the night."

"Armored Forces river units. . . . equipped in the course of the war with several types of boats, both armored and unarmored, were, at the end of the hostilities, generally equipped with scout craft of 8 to 11 meters. These were used on the waterways on missions comparable to those assigned to land units on road; breaching, escort, liaison, supply operations, encirclement, etc., etc.. A boat unit commander reported . . . . . we intensified our night work, and this forced the Viet to be alert 24 out of 24 hours. The atmosphere of insecurity thus created contributed to a number of defections."

## CHAPTER 8 "HELICOPTERS"

"Despite their utility, helicopters appeared very late in Indochina"

"Of 42 helicopters delivered in the course of the campaign, 9 were destroyed but only two were shot down. However one should not draw any conclusions on this basis regarding the invulnerability of helicopters."

"With very few exceptions, helos were used for medical evacuations.."

"By the time of the cease fire all helos working in the delta had received some hits. . . . ."

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"The few helos available during the campaign did not permit them to be used tactically. Nevertheless an H 19 moved a commando into Central Annam in two trips. . . . the mission was a complete success. Another incident involved the helo lift of a commando to a Viet Minh controlled area of Cochinchina without alerting the enemy."

"A plan to introduce 100 helos (into the theater) by the end of 1954 would have been only the first step, for studies conducted in 1953 had envisioned tactical maneuvers (utilizing helos) which because of their mobility and security would have had great advantages over enemy forces moving only on the ground."

#### CHAPTER 9 "THE ENGINEERS"

"General Reserve units included. . . . One River Boat Company used as ferries. . . . On Armored Heavy River Company to work on the rivers."

#### CHAPTER 10 "THE TRAIN"

"River Transport units were equipped with their regular allowances by 1951. The LCM were grouped into platoons of 8 craft commanded by one officer and manned by 80 men. Two companies of four platoons were thus created. All river platoon leaders regretted that their NCOs has not received some naval training because these craft were entirely unfamiliar to them"

"Nevertheless these platoons regularly made runs of 75 to 200 kilometers, each transporting 30 tons. The LCMs were used to transport supplies, equipment and personnel. . . ."

"The procedures used to assure the security of the waterways was analagous to those used for roads."

"Everywheres movement by convoy was the rule. In Central Annam and in Tonkin, LCM participated in numerous operations fulfilling transport tasks. They were, under these circumstances, integrated with Navy units into convoys formed as follows:

- A mine sweeping element
- A heavy fire support ship
- A transport element with Army LCM and Navy LCT
- A heavy fire support ship
- Several scout craft to screen around the convoy

On occasion, notably in Central Vietnam, LCMs of the Train carried out operational transport missions alone. However it was always necessary to arrange for scout craft to accompany them to reconnoiter

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critical points.

## CHAPTER 12 "AIR SUPPORT"

"Our air superiority was a fiction, and these words so often uttered were meaningless. Our aviation admittedly had no enemy in the sky, but the battle of Dien Bien Phu had created demands which our resources were unable to meet. Distance, topography, climate, command organization, infrastructure, and the tactics of the enemy, all contributed to reduce in a tragic fashion the effectiveness of an aerial fleet whose resources were already most modest."

"Attack aviation was initially equipped with Spitfires which did poorly in the tropical climate. Then came the King Cobra (P63), then the Hellcat (F6F), and finally these last were replaced by the Bearcat (F8F) which remained throughout the hostilities."

"There were only two squadrons during the early years. A third and then a fourth were eventually organized. All had about 20 aircraft each....."

"Bombardment aviation was not available during the first five years of the war, and we used JU 52 to drop bombs until 1951....."

"Three squadrons of B 26 were eventually organized; one in February 1951; the second in March 1952 and the third in June 1954."

"During the last phases of the campaign we organized two reconnaissance units equipped respectively with the F8F and RB 26."

"Transport aviation grew to four squadrons at the end of the war equipped with a total of 100 C-47. In the last three months of the war this Transport aviation was augmented by 25 C119."

"Naval aviation was represented by one squadron of Catalinas and another equipped with captured Japanese aircraft and with the Loire 130. This last was eventually reequipped with Catalinas and Grumman Goose; a third squadron organized in 1950 was similarly equipped. The Catalinas in the first squadron were later replaced with Privateers. These three squadrons were reinforced in the last three months of the war by two other squadrons; one equipped with Privateers and the other with the Corsair (F4U)."

"The carriers DIXMUDE and ARROMANCHES each served two and one tours respectively in Indochinese waters during 1950 and 1951. During the last three years of the war the LAFAYETTE, BOIS BELLEAU

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and ARROMANCHES served a total of five tours in Indochina; these each had two squadrons embarked."

#### CHAPTER 15 "LOGISTICS"

"From the point of logistics the Indochina War was carried out only by a series of successive improvisations. The Services had to change their organization constantly, and had to face ever increasing burdens with resources which were invariably inadequate." (fig 1)

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# CARGO MOVEMENTS-1953 (In Metric Tons)

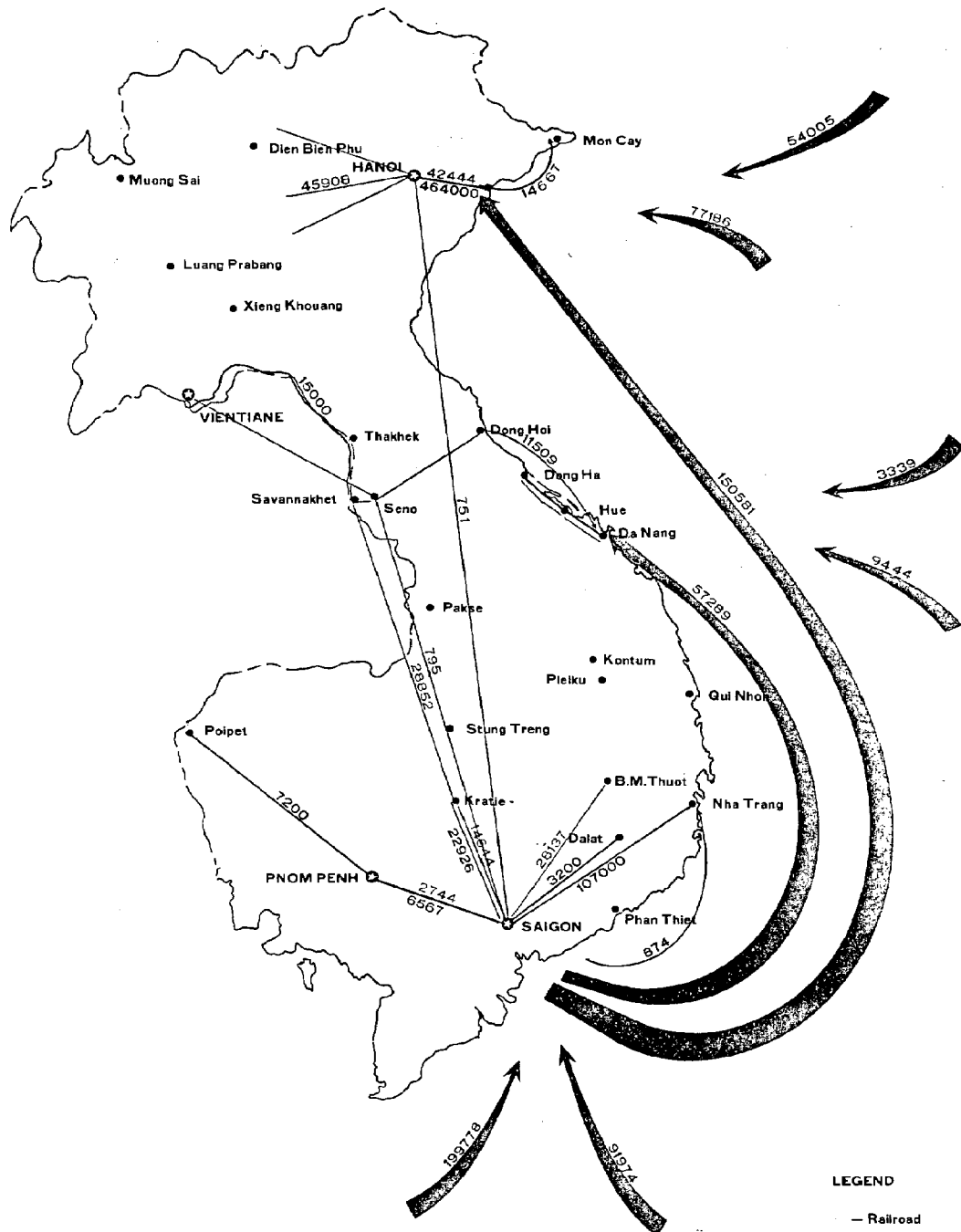


FIGURE 1

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ANNEX 3

TRANSLATION OF PART III, CHAPTER 5 "RIVER AND  
COASTAL ACTIONS" CONTAINED IN FRENCH OFFICIAL  
DOCUMENT "LESSONS LEARNED IN THE INDOCHINA WAR"  
PUBLISHED BY THE HIGH COMMAND, SAIGON, 31 MAY 1955

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~PART III CHAPTER 5 "River and Coastal Actions"

In the course of the campaign the Viet-Minh who was a remarkable infantryman, never revealed himself to be a sailor. We did not encounter the enemy afloat because not only did he not possess small boats especially modified for combat, but each time his transport craft were taken by surprise they never tried to use their armament to defend themselves. By a sort of contradiction the V.M., who did not hesitate to launch attacks at night against our fortifications, always showed on the water a timidity and occasional lack of aggressiveness when it came to exploiting the effects of his firepower or mines. In no case did the enemy try boarding which many times would have placed us in mortal danger.

We therefore encountered only ground elements posted on the banks to deny us free use of the water ways. These used mines controlled from the shore to permit selection of targets, or laid ambushes which were occasionally coordinated with the use of mines. In addition, enemy swimmers were a constant threat to our anchorages.

In these diverse enterprises the V.M. relied on his ability to collect intelligence and to obtain the support of the people along the river, either through terrorism or persuasion. He was meticulous in the planning of even the smallest actions; masterful in the use of terrain and camouflage; and most often enjoyed the advantage of surprise because of his excellent fire discipline. He could also rely on the effectiveness of local partisans. The V. M. knew how to use the numerous junks and local sampans to infiltrate everywhere and break out of our most carefully deployed formations. Our systematic destruction of all native craft spotted in the course of the operations only affected a small proportion of the total craft dispersed in the area. Moreover, the Viet Minh often used tree trunks to provide flotation for small groups of infiltrators or saboteurs. The enemy also knew how to take prompt action against our static elements (military or river posts) in coordination with attacks against units sent to reinforce a beleaguered post (river convoys).

On the other hand, the Viet Minh was handicapped by an almost total lack of "naval sense" and revealed an ignorance of the capabilities and weaknesses of our craft. He only partially exploited the difficulties we had with river navigation; had only an elementary knowledge of naval material; and was invariably surprised after an initial exchange of fire by the density and extent of our return fire

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power. He counted too much on the protection and the camouflage of his weapons which were often set up in emplacements permitting only limited fields of fire against moving targets at short range such as our self propelled craft. Finally, he did not sufficiently concentrate his means except on rare occasions. Most often he used only one or two recoilless rifles and a few mortars or automatic weapons. When greater numbers of weapons were available to him, these were dispersed along the river banks. This concern to protect their weapons by dispersing them often reduced the effectiveness of their fires.

Our poorly armored craft would have been less resistant to heavy concentrations of fire, rather than to less heavy but sustained fires. These last permitted us to react quickly and successfully after the initial seconds of confusion incident to going to battle stations.

In summary, the enemy showed himself incapable of going beyond the tactic of the ambush at point blank range or of individual action against ships at anchor, to more complete actions coordinated in time and space and directed against our major troop concentrations. He also displayed a lack of imagination in the selection of means and localities for his attacks; these remaining practically the same throughout the campaign.

Of course this weakness and inability to adapt to water combat was not to last, and the increase of enemy resources, especially in 1954, tended to make more difficult the three missions which our river forces had to assume. These were:

- To retain free use of the waterways;
- To conduct assault landing; and
- To provide security of anchorages.

The techniques used to meet these several requirements evolved in course of nine years of war as our resources and those of the enemy changed, without however resulting in any significant conceptual modifications. The techniques described hereafter, which were those used at the end of the campaign, were therefore essentially those used throughout the period of hostilities. They are dominated by the fact that, contrary to the ground forces, river forces never enjoy the advantages of camouflage and only rarely can they dig in. On the other hand they have generally the advantage of power and mobility. If, therefore, tactical surprise is most often denied to them, strategic surprise is one of their best trumps.

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The Convoys - All groups of ships sailing together, whether or not cargo craft were included, adopted the following formation, at least in North Vietnam: (fig 1 )

An "opening group" consisting of three sections of mine sweepers plus one relief sweeper headed the formation; with an LCM (Monitor) as lead guide. A large fire support ship followed the last sweeper by a hundred meters.

Behind the "opening group", at a distance depending upon the configuration of the river but usually within two to three hundred meters, the main body moved in column following most carefully in the swept channel. The main body normally consisted of two elements as follows:

Fire support ships (LSSL or LSIL; heavily armed LCT; or sections of LCM Monitors).

Transport ships or craft (LSM, LCT, LCM, or other types of cargo craft).

When there was only one fire support ship, it carried the force commander and took station in the lead of the main body. When there were two such ships, the command ship followed the main body except in the case of particularly delicate navigation, as at night.

If there were three support ships, the command ship was in the center of the main body.

The distance between ships or craft depended on the skill of the deck officers or coxwains; a distance of 50 meters between large craft and 20 meters between small craft was considered normal. In the case of large formations and when the width of the swept channel permitted it was oftentimes better to organize the main body into two parallel columns. This would not only reduce the size of the formation but would help ensure mutual support in the event of attack from both banks. The securing of cargo craft in pairs was found to be particularly desirable.

At night, the ships and craft navigated under black-out conditions. However flashing lights were occasionally used to help the craft keep station. Experience has proven that even during the darkest of nights or in the more difficult areas it was possible to move large groups in tight formations without serious difficulty provided the personnel were properly trained. Enemy reaction to our

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night movements was less frequent and less effective than that against our daytime movements; this being due in part to the fact that it was easier to spot their weapons at night because of their flashes.

These diverse formations limited the effects of ambushes, but when intelligence reported the probability of an encounter, and particularly when the location of an enemy force was known, several additional measures could be taken.

First; the organization of the convoy was carefully planned, arrangements were made to have an aircraft provide close reconnaissance for the column, and constant liaison was maintained with friendly artillery units within range.

Second; the light escort companies of the Dinassauts with additional reinforcing infantry elements if available, were embarked so as to be ready to land in assault; all personnel manned battle stations in advance.

Third; once the convoy was underway, likely locations for enemy forces along the banks could be swept by fires from the support ships or by support aircraft on air alert when these were available (an infrequent situation).

Regardless of whether one could take these supplementary precautions, or if the convoy was not alerted in advance, one reaction to the ambushes was always possible; this was to break through with speed and therefore lessen the critical period. To do this, it was necessary to navigate with all lookouts manned; be prepared to react immediately by prompt movement to battle stations; and open heavy fires with all the weapons until the passage was forced. This was the tactic called "the ball of fire", and most frequently was the best method to ensure the protection of the convoy. In these always brief and brutal engagements, prompt and energetic action is the essential ingredient. It is an illusion to look for techniques other than the tightening of the formation in order to permit the mutual support and the heaviest volume of immediate fire. This method was most often used when it was urgently necessary to send out reinforcements or supplies and when the separation of fire support ships did not permit prolonged combat. This was also the normal procedure in the course of offensive reconnaissances in an uncontrolled zone. It had the major disadvantage of inflicting only moderate losses on the almost always carefully entrenched enemy.

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Moreover it neutralized him more than it destroyed him, and it made it more difficult for air forces to cover the mine sweeping units. The enemy will most often seek to ambush the main body and will therefore not reveal his position prematurely by firing on the smaller craft of the opening group. On the other hand when an ambush was anticipated, it was possible to prepare an assault landing. This maneuver normally could only be carried out on the flanks of the enemy position, and was intended to encircle him; a hazardous undertaking when only few escort troops are available. In addition, the Navy advocated the systematic destruction of enemy positions, by deliberate and adjusted fires called for by leading ships or craft, which were stopped or beached. The landing of troops was carried out from the center of formation and under the cover of intense point blank fire. The above method has the comparable advantage of breaking up an enemy ambush and of inflicting massive losses of personnel and material. Applied with determination and fearlessness, it can end in a smashing success, and will tend to discourage enemy attempts for a time, which are more often repeated when they can anticipate less effective reactions. Admittedly this presupposes the ability to attain fire superiority, at least locally, and to have craft available which are capable of enduring in such combat. It can succeed with LSSL's as long as the enemy does not have conventional artillery of 105mm or better. However this method is very sensitive to the massed fires of mortars. Finally, it involves long delays which are sometimes incompatible with the urgency of the mission involved. It could only be adopted unreservedly in the case where one possesses powerful armored gunboats in sufficient number. This was never realized.

In addition, whatever the method adopted, the participation of ground artillery or aviation fires should be used when at all possible particularly during the break through of an ambush.

This opinion was expressed by an artillery officer as follows:

"During the period from January to June of 1954, the Artillery Staff of the Southern Zone at Nam Dinh furnished artillery liaison officers on numerous occasions aboard the escort boats of the Red River convoys."

This system was highly valued by the Navy, who always sought to have shore based artillery support for their convoys. However, experience revealed it was seldom possible to use effectively shore based artillery for convoy protection.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~Assault Landings (fig 2 )

Assault landings executed incident to the breaking out of ambushes as outlined above, involved only limited forces and succeeded only in the temporary occupation of a narrow strip of terrain. Other landings were conducted as part of major ground operations. These involved the landing on a hostile river bank of forces most often equipped with heavy material; artillery, tanks, supplies etc. Such operations were planned and conducted in accordance with our own desires and were different from the previously discussed landing operations which were more in the nature of counterattacks in response to enemy action. Although surprise was always sought in the case of preplanned assault landings, the landing could be preceded by a preparation delivered by shore based artillery or air. The unleashing of the attack was possible by day or night, but the more favorable hour was that which preceded the dawn. Finally, the landing point was chosen according to the configuration of the shore and the demands of ground maneuver. On this basis, such operations were normally conducted as follows:

The convoy carrying troops (composed of LCT's or LSM's) was preceded at a distance of 1000 to 1500 meters by a "shock group" which navigated behind the "opening group" previously described. This "shock group" consisted normally of two fire support ships (LSSL or LSIL), one as a guide and the other carrying the Senior Naval Commander and the Troop Commander. Behind the lead fire support ship were three to six armored LCM's which carried the assault companies of the first wave; two to three LCM's being allocated to each company. This formation was accompanied by one or two sections of LCM monitors. When the whole group neared the selected landing site, "the shock group" shifted to maximum speed. The guide fire support ship moved ahead to a distance about twice that of the width of the landing front. In this movement along the landing front, it fired at point blank range on the landing site, and then beached on the far flank.

The LCM's of the first wave proceeded in column behind the guide ship, lowered ramps, and when abreast of the landing site, executed individual turns and beached.

During the landing of the assault companies, carried out at maximum speed, the two fire support ships covered each flank by fire, while the LCM monitors moved into position above and below the landing site and patrolled off the bank opposite to the landing.

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During the assault phase, the remainder of the convoy maintained station 1500 meters to the rear. As soon as the assault companies had established a beachhead, the Senior Naval Commander directed the succeeding units to land. The LCT's then moved in to land in the area marked by the two flanking fire support ships. The landing of the remaining troops and equipment was effected promptly and the transport boats were withdrawn immediately after.

This method always gave excellent results. Landings conducted at carefully selected sites and enjoying a modest surprise effect, rarely found a determined opposition from the enemy who was more inclined towards using ambush tactics than to stand up and fight it out.

Several such landing operations were often undertaken simultaneously within a large area, and in TONKIN it was not uncommon to have ten infantry battalions so engaged at one time.

As soon as the landing force was ashore, the river forces were regrouped to provide supporting fires as prescribed in the plan jointly agreed between the naval and ground force commander. Some craft would also be used for logistic support and the larger ships were used as afloat CP's for the ground unit commanders.

#### The Security of Anchorages

The totals of our losses for the entire campaign show that attacks while at anchor were more dangerous than engagements when underway.

This term "anchorage" pertains to all ships and craft when not underway and whether anchored off a river bank, beached, or tied up to a pier. It is however, necessary to differentiate between temporary halts during movement and periods spent in ports or river posts. In the latter case the enemy had the time to prepare his attack. This most often consisted of swimmers, drifting mines, artillery fire, or raids. Security requirements can also be studied in detail based upon large but powerful static defenses. Under these conditions, one bank is by definition under our complete control, and the opposite bank is generally covered by friendly forces.

The answer to attacks by swimmers or floating mines was the use of nets placed obliquely across and up a river from the anchorage. This had to be modified when tidal effect changed the current flow.

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A system of security watches was also a matter of constant concern. Other methods used were systematic firing on all floating objects, use of patrol craft, grenade attacks on unidentified objects or at irregular intervals, and the use of lights in the approaches to an anchorage.

All of these techniques were useful but relatively inadequate and in 1954 the Captain commanding the South Indochina River Forces deplored the fact that other measures against swimmers had not been studied; such as the use of special non-ricocheting ammunition; horizontal underwater listening devices; electric barriers as used by fishermen in some areas.

Protection against artillery harassment is essentially a counter battery problem. When this latter is ineffective, the security of the anchorage is compromised. It is in this way that in early 1954 harassing mortar fire rendered the river port of SEPT PAGODES untenable, and the 1st Dinassaut had to be withdrawn first to LIN KHE and then to HAIPHONG.

Protection against raids is a particular security problem of sensitive points, and the defensive organization of river posts to meet this threat must not be neglected as was often the case.

In the case of temporary anchorages it is rare that enemy has the time to prepare elaborate attacks. The use of swimmers or floating mines is generally less to be feared. The enemy most often depended upon harassment by automatic weapons and light artillery or mortars placed in position and sited prior to nightfall.

The defense cannot rely on static formations shielded by obstacles. It must rely (other than on the normal security watches) on the ability to use massed fires. Moreover, anchorages should be shifted during the night to avoid enemy preplanned fires. The adjacent water areas should be patrolled by small craft. Particular care should be taken when these operate out of sight of one another to avoid individual craft being attacked and destroyed before they can be supported.

If one must remain beached in hostile territory it goes without saying that the beach front should be covered by a ground unit or at least by outposts. But such a situation is always hazardous at night, and an anchorage in the middle of the river is generally preferable. In this case there is no need to maintain friendly elements on the banks, which often gives only an illusory sense of security;

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impedes fields of fire; lend themselves to confusion; and in the event a quick departure is required, impose added delay because of the need to be reembarked.

Despite occasional success the enemy did not fully exploit the possibilities of attacking our ships at anchor, and in particular never used his medium caliber artillery, whose effect on our craft would have been deadly. It should be borne in mind that an enemy who was better informed on the characteristics and capabilities of various ships and craft and who enjoyed resources comparable to those the Viet Minh possessed at the end of the war, would be able to prevent us from anchoring outside of zones strongly held by ground forces.

#### Coastal Amphibious Actions

Operations in Viet Minh controlled coastal zones or along the 2400 kilometers of the Indochina coast were rare. They were limited until 1952 to raids and actions by seagoing surveillance ships using their own personnel to land and destroy such installations as were readily accessible. Nevertheless, information on the techniques involved had been available since April 1951.

In Annam, as on the coast of Cambodia, large segments of the coast are practically inaccessible by land routes and amphibious operations are required to effect a surprise occupation of a region, or to raid rebel installations.

Those coastal operations which involve the movement and landing of a force, by surprise or assault, can be carried out with or without the Navy. If the operation is large, involving major forces or requiring fast ships, it is necessary to call upon the Navy which will utilize either their large landing ships (LCT, LCI or LST) or corvettes and minesweepers.

Seldom will we be able to land directly from transport ships because of the existence of shallow bottoms or rocks. Personnel and material must frequently be transferred from larger ships to landing craft. This transfer may be; to junks or sampans that the mother ship has towed; to regular shipboard boats, motor launches, dinghies, or to engineer corps boats carried aboard the ships; or finally, in major operations, to special landing craft. Such transfer operations are difficult in rough seas, and some of our troops display a natural clumsiness and fear which tends to cause accidents.

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If the operation does not require the Navy, the movement is accomplished by local sector craft or native boats. The troops embarked in this case are few, and are usually infantry elements. The required orders are issued before departure and each individual group has its mission designated for the landing i. e., movement inland; fire support etc....

Finally, numerous minor amphibious operations were conducted incident to naval coastal surveillance functions. These included control of shipping; intercepting rebel forces moving by sea; apprehension of arms smugglers, and search of islands; landings of opportunity on areas of the coast inaccessible by overland routes; and the organization of ambushes to cut the retreat of Viet Minh bands being pursued. Such actions were generally conducted by naval commandos or ships' detachments, occasionally reinforced by ground units, and were controlled by the naval commander responsible for the Sector of Surveillance involved.

The frequency of these raids and their importance tended to grow as the potential of the V.M. grew and when the coastal areas offered more lucrative targets. However the enemy coastal traffic diminished, and we had to look for cargo and junks inland.

The general lesson to be derived from these operations (aside from the changes in organization required to meet improved coastal defenses) is that the "punch" tactic (the classic tactic of commando units) is always more effective than encirclement in which the net in most cases encloses an innocent population which are often the only ones to suffer from the operation.

From 1952 on more important operations were undertaken, although with inadequate naval resources. Despite increased lift capabilities, the problem of the actual landing was still difficult. The LST's normally could not beach in the assault wave, and in any event suitable beaching areas for this type ship were scarce. It was necessary therefore to use small craft such as the LCM's and LCVP's and these had to be transported to the landing areas. Unfortunately the LSD FOUDRE, the only ship suited to this task, was not available until July 1953.

Our amphibious operations during the last two years of the war were therefore limited. Most often they involved a landing on an undefended or slightly defended coast; usually in conjunction with a ground operation. This last significantly increased the difficulties.

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None of these operations was a failure, but neither were any really satisfactory in relation to organization and execution.

In 1952 the Admiral Commanding the Naval Division of the Far East had pointed out that the landings were basically a deployment of units moved by LST and that H-Hour defined as the time the last element landed was neither logical nor official doctrine. He argued that this definition inhibited rapid movement inland, made it difficult to attain surprise, and should be changed to the usual arrangement whereby H-Hour was the time of landing of the first wave.

The Commander in Chief, in January 1953, set forth how amphibious operations should be conducted in the following terms:

"A combined operation requires the closest coordination between the three services; this must be continued throughout the planning, preparation and execution phases of the operation.

Planning should be conducted by the overall commander of the operation in conjunction with qualified representatives from the Navy and Air Force as well as those from airborne troops if a parachute operation is involved.

Adjustments in plans should be accepted as required to relate operations ashore to the technical capabilities of the other services.

The size of the landing force, the timing of the amphibious phase and the selection of landing sites can only be determined after agreement by the Navy, taking into account the means at its disposal (Number and type of ships and craft) and the meteorologic and hydrographic conditions. The timing of the operation and its amphibious phase must be carefully related particularly under variable weather conditions. It is also necessary to plan on an overland withdrawal of forces if weather conditions don't permit their reembarkation.

In addition, it is necessary to anticipate possible enemy action against the troops and small craft at the time for the landing. The amphibious phase should not be regarded as a simple transportation operation."

This directive was not, however, faithfully applied, and during the years 1953 and 1954 there continued to be errors of planning and coordination. In the realm of execution the deficiencies were due to the lack of training as well as to the type of craft used; the crews of certain ships and craft having received no training in landing

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operations.

The LCT and LCM's available had been modified as river craft which diminished their seaworthiness; reduced their cargo capacity; and hindered transfers. They were therefore no longer suited for their primary mission of landing from the sea. The LCVP's were insufficient in number to allow the rapid and simultaneous unloading of three LST's which in any case often did not carry enough nets for troop use.

The principal obstacle to the rapid execution of the landings was the lack of trained troops capable of coming down the nets with their equipment. Ships ramps, when in use, were reserved for unloading vehicles. Eventually there was created an Amphibious Training Center at CAM RANH in December 1953, where an RLT and an Amphibious Group were trained for the assault phase of operation "ATLANTE".

A landing at Qui Nhon organized to assault a regular V.M. regiment supported by regional formations met an undefended coast. Nevertheless the improved competence of units trained at CAM RANH proved the value of that Center.

The hostilities ended before the major amphibious operations planned for 1954 could be carried out. This makes it easy to understand the views contained in a report on the conduct overall of the naval war in Indochina:

"It can only be regretted that the sea over which we had total control and where easy passage was possible from April to August, did not enjoy a more important place in operational planning, (with the understanding that the special training of personnel required would have been taken in time.) . . .

We should also admit that such actions supposed that we had the means to fight in several land areas while at the same time open a new front from the sea. Unfortunately these conditions were not possible and it was fruitless to expect to be able to destroy large V.M. forces by amphibious operations."

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EXAMPLE OF RIVER CONVOY (NVN)

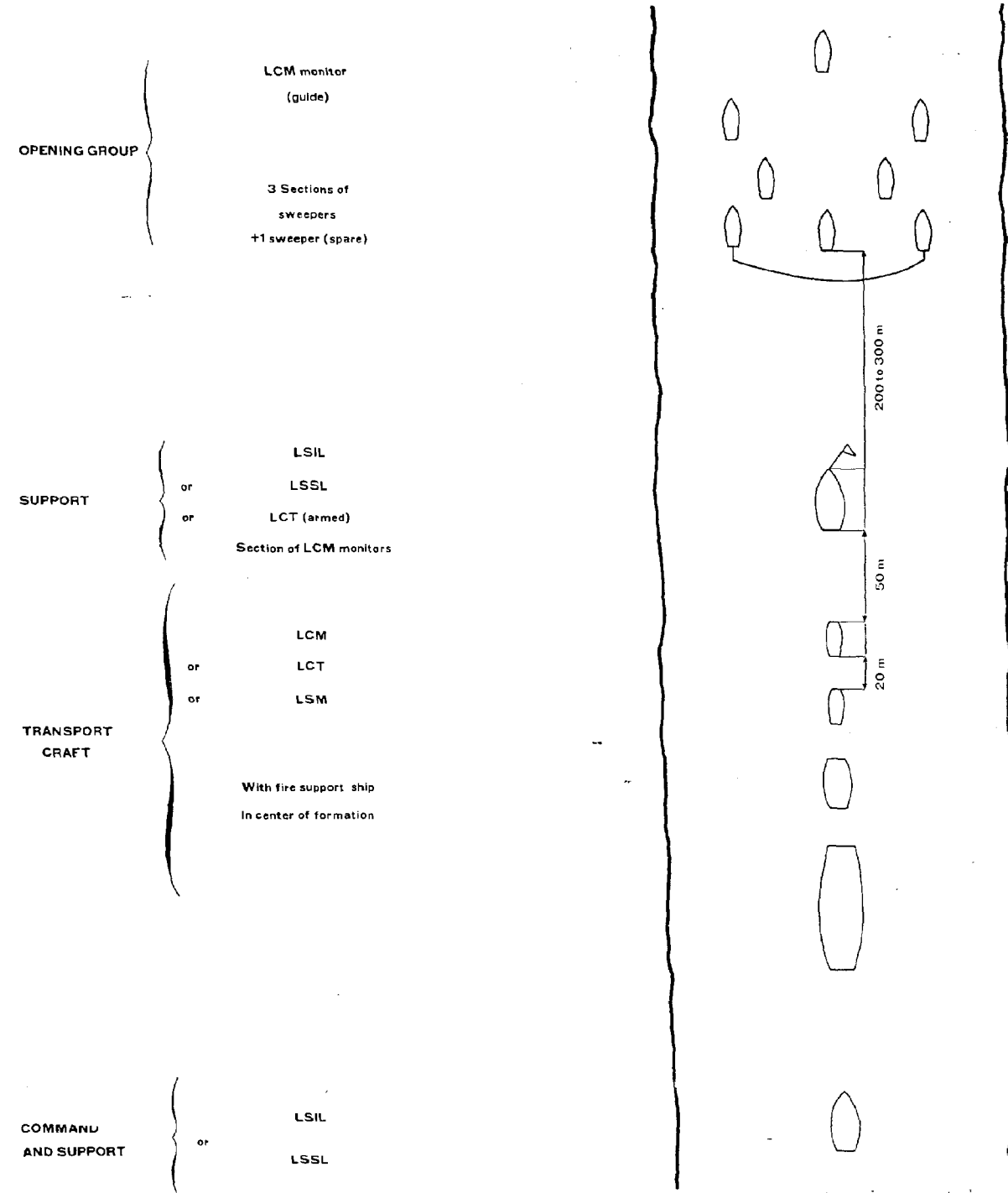


FIGURE 1



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# ASSAULT LANDING (NVN)

## Shock Group Action

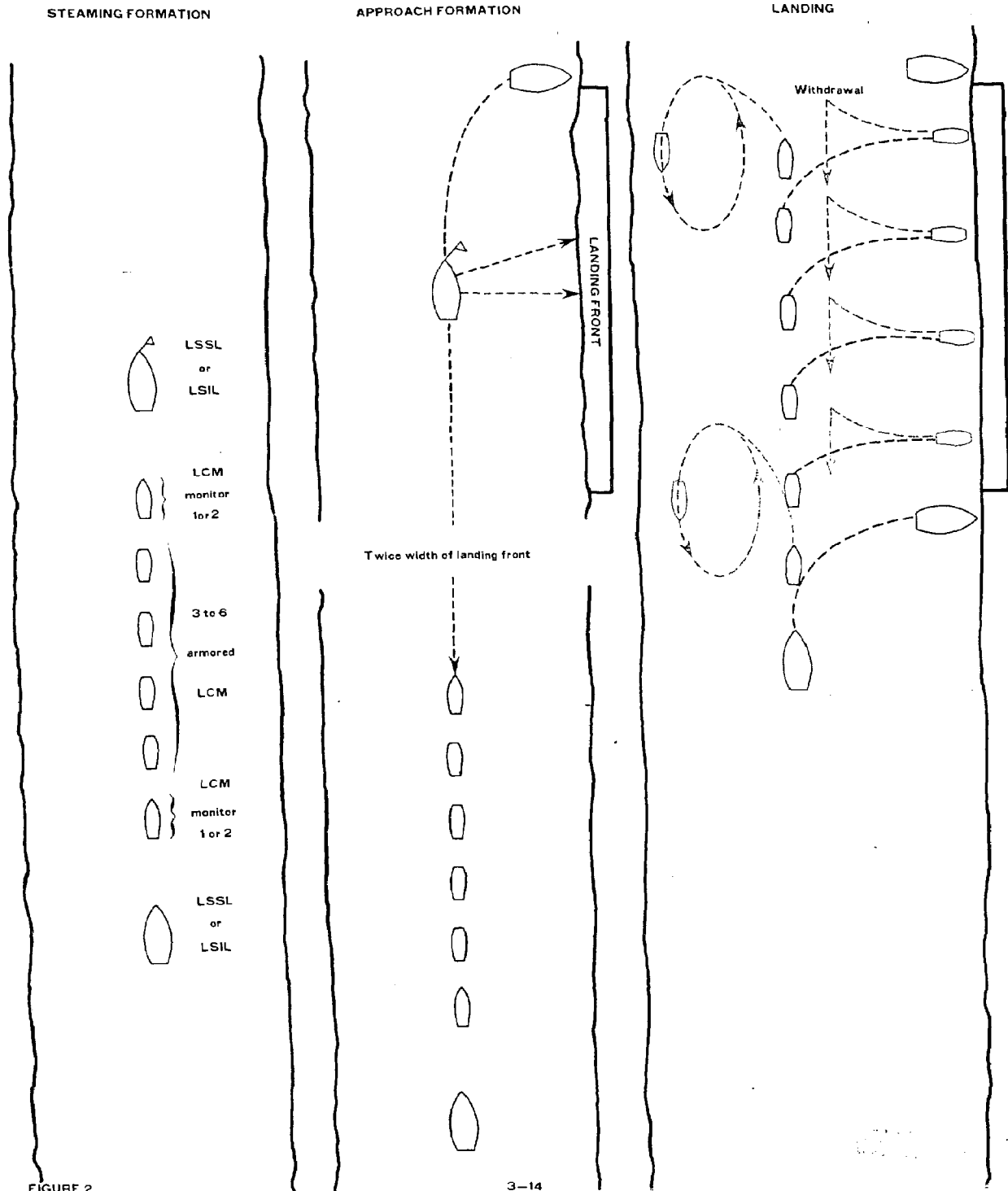


FIGURE 2

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