



SILVER EAGLES  
TWENTY-NINTH NATIONAL CONVENTION  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA  
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This was part of my  
end of tour report that  
I made in 1970.

I don't know where  
the typed copies are now  
As I know where the  
other chapters are located -  
Probably in my attic. ad

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## Lessons Learned I Nat Police vs VVN participation

The Delta's network of rivers and canals are vital lines of communication and transportation for the VC as well as the GVN. In fact it is more important to the VC who lack air and large surface transportation. So we have both friend and foe alike trying to utilize the same waterways to move supplies and manpower. With little security provided on these avenues of movement the GVN has had to depend heavily on the main land routes from Saigon into the Delta. Highway 4 the main road in the Delta is some 217 miles long as it cuts thru 8 out of the 16 provinces in the Delta before it ends in the Can Mau peninsula. And so it is most important to Saigon and the Central Province to have an excess route to move the rice and fish from the Delta region to the marketplace.

The River Patrol Force (Don Warden ops) was introduced in the Delta for the purpose of impeding the VC's use of the main rivers such as the Mekong and Bassac. Its assigned mission was to conduct river patrols and enforce surveillance, enforce curfews, carry out mine countermeasures, and prevent VC infiltration, movement and resupply along the Delta Estuary Coast and across the major rivers of the Delta and the Pung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ).

The ultimate goal of the GVN is to rebuild their nation preceded by pacification and

military operations to secure the area. Thus since the National Police (ARVN and RF/PP) with part of the GVN forces necessary to maintain security after the area has been secured the National Police were designated by the JGS (Joint General Staff of RVN) to be the GVN presence with the River Patrol Force. It was probably established in this fashion because the VN in the Delta (South Riverine) reported to the IV Corp Commander for operations and were not available to the River Patrol Force for routine operations. Since the National Police were not established to conduct offensive military operations per se this became readily apparent during the offensive operations of the River Patrol Force after the Tet offensive of 1968. The Police in essence would not accompany the River Patrol if it was anticipated that a firefight would develop. Police would participate, if available, during boat searches but they were mostly established along a check point and then usually in a GVN controlled populated area along the river.

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The National Police when utilized in the maritime environment are referred to as Marine Police (MP) and their function is to perform resources control surveillance on the secure major rivers of the Delta. The important word in their function is secure, that is after the VVN or USN Operational Commander, declare a section of the river secure then the MP can take over the policing of that particular area's. Resources control is the term used applied to the surveillance effort on the waterways of the Delta. The objective is to intercept the movement of the enemy's personnel and movement. Its main features are inspection of boats that transited on the waterways and enforcement of restricted areas and curfews.

The ACTOV program for the River Patrol Force which commenced in early 1969 was unlike the program for the MRFC (TF 117) which trained a Coastal unit in tact and transferred the unit when ready in toto to the VVN. The River Patrol Force started by having assigned one USN sailor to a PBR. When he was qualified a USN crewman was removed and another VVN assigned. This was continued until the Coastal boat crew

was qualified then the boat was assigned to this boat crew for operation, once a complete unit was all qualified this in turn became a VNN unit with one or two USN remain as advisors. The establish of the VNN sailor on board the USN PBR's was far superior for the own presence than the use of the National Police. This also relieve the National Police of their responsibility so that they could concentrate on their primary mission - help maintain security in Pacific areas.

The intention to coordinate River Patrol operations with the general plan of operation for the Delta area is made clear by the section of the River Warden order which specifies that the River Patrol force is a combined United States/Vietnamese effort requiring close and effective liaison and coordination at all levels between River Patrol force personnel and assigned Vietnamese personnel, United States advisor personnel and their counterparts United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representatives and the National Police.

It is too bad that the use of the was not carried out when the River Patrol force was established in 1965 it would have provided a far better coordinated effort than the use of the National Police.

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## Lesson Learned 2 - River Patrolling.

1. The Base Warden (TF-116) assigned mission was to conduct river patrols and river surveillance, enforce curfews and prevent VC infiltration, movement and resupply along the Delta estuary coast and across major rivers of the Delta and the River Set Special Zone (RSSZ). In establishing this tactical operation it was determined that the main rivers would be patrolled at night to intercept movement and enforce curfews and in the daytime check points were established on the intersections - were minor waterways, no matter how small, entered the main rivers. This was usually set up by two patrols of two PBR's each. Two of the boats would head boats into the river bank check point where the other 2 boats with the help of the National Police would inspect the boats looking for personnel without proper Gov papers as well as contraband that may be embarked. This type of operation did not preclude the normal daytime patrolling of the main rivers by day, inspecting boats as they were encountered for the same reasons. However, it must be emphasized that the river bank check point operation at these known crossing sites utilized about 50% of the PBR's available for operation on any particular day.

The river bank check point operation should have been assigned solely to the National Police and where they did not have their own available boats (which were rather scarce) they could have utilized the VVN PBO boats which saw only limited action in the Delta other

other than escorting via convoys when they went by water and limited logistic support for SAUV ops.

Planned offensive operations, and these were not too often, actually utilized RAO craft transporting RF/PF troops that were used for sweep type operations thus leaving the PBR's to intercept enemy as well as other personnel in boat fleeing the operational area. The use of SAUV troops working in conjunction with Gou Ward planned operations were almost non-existent. This can also be said of the air assets and artillery pieces available to the Delta Cap Cdr. Whenever artillery and/or Cap Air was utilized there was so much planned briefing required that the tactical surprise was lost long before the operation commenced and this normally resulted in failure or no-enemy contact.

The above deficiencies did not occur in the RSSZ where the TF116 Cdr worked hard and close with the 3rd VNN Riverine Cdr who in fact had VNN marines ready available for assault troops as required. The Riverine Cdr also had an avenue of communication available for immediate assistance air, artillery and troops (if available) from the III FFV assets. This close relationship was brought about by the VNN Cdr and US Cdr utilizing the same headquarters at Nha Be where in the Delta the Joint River Cdr was stationed at Con Tho a few blocks from the

Cop Cdr and the TF116 Cdr was located at Bui Thi, about 8 miles west of Con Tho on the Bassac River. This unyielding command relationship in the Delta precluded any immediate assistance for air, troops and artillery from the Cop Cdr without the regional pre-planned operation briefings.

The tactics utilized by the PBR patrols, that were not involved with boat check points, were well within the parameters that were originally established for Base Warden operations. That is:

1. Boats patrol in open-column with an interval that will provide max coverage at the same time afford mutual support.
2. Boats must conduct a truly random patrol by utilizing some of the following techniques:

- (a) Drifting with the tide or current
- (b) Two boats proceeding down stream at low speed with two boats some distance astern drifting with the current
- (c) Patrolling to the left or right of the center of the river.

once known enemy crossing-points were encountered usually pre-planned operations were established providing for local forces PF/RF sweep the area and being transported to the area by PBR boats with the TF116 PBR's used as a blocking force to herd boats fleeing the area into a common assembly so that the US or National Police if available could screen the fleeing personnel and capt. Since TF116

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had Helo (LHFI) assets available under op com of CTF116 these known assets made it easier for coordinating one of the combined operations. As I said previously Corp Air and Artillery was too undependable for operation at this level. I do not mean to demean the Corp Air and Artillery, however they could be most responsible if the Corp Cdr or one of his four Corp BRUN Cdr was conducting an operation.

once the TF116 operations were able to provide enough coverage to stop these known enemy crossings it became apparent that the VC would have to shift to the smaller streams and then operate at night during curfew hours. Unfortunately the friendly not to violate river curfews became quite a problem because some District Chiefs authorized the RVN and USN to fire on anything moving in the river during curfew areas in his particular sector. The RVN would face under these conditions acted to deter a river crossing rather than shoot up the boats with the fear of hitting friendly. The noise from Helo's and motorized craft made it rather easy for the enemy to detect friendly presence thus the drifter patrols were usually used in conjunction with night patrols. These patrols provided more of a deterrent to cross rather than an enemy intercept.

as was previously mentioned

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the armament of the PBR although satisfactory for the big wide main river is not conducive to the small narrow (and sometimes high banks) streams. The forward 50 cal twin mount is useless (except to spray bullets over the countryside). The most effective weapon for these high bank narrow waterway was the MK 18 and M79 grenade launchers, with a range of approx. 400 yards this weapon is far superior to the machine guns normally carried because it enabled the gunner to expend his ammunition behind the river bank (where the enemy usually hides or wait in an ambush position),

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# Lesson Learned (3) Fixed vs Mobile Basing

The first phase of the inception of the River Patrol Force envisioned the protection of the Long Tan shipping channel to Saigon. This called for a base in the same geographical area between Vung Tau on the South China Sea and Saigon. Since distances were too great to operate from these 2 extremities it was decided to build a base adjacent to the present RSO base at Nhe Be. This not only would provide a base for the operation of a patrol for the protection of the shipping to and from Saigon it would also provide a base in which to accept and outfit the boats that would be assigned in carrying out the River Patrol Force mission. At this point in time the only other base in the Delta that was to be built to support the force was at Binh Thuy on the Bassac River 8 miles up-river from Can Tho and about midway between the South China Sea and the Cambodian border. A CVO analysis had proposed that a River Section of 10 PBR's could patrol, protect and search 100 kilometers of the river in a 24 hour period. Thus with 12 sections (120 PBR) for the initial plan of the River Patrol Force it was decided that other land bases necessary to support the operation could be obtained on a lease basis from facilities already in existence. Three bases were selected at My Tho, Sadec and Vung Long. At My Tho it required 3

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location to support the USV effort. a hotel for berthing and messing, a bonded airport to the USV Base for the Combat operations center and repair and maintenance of the boats and the sharing of the pier at the RSO Base. There 3 facilities were within 200 yards of one another and not too different so far as security of our USV personnel were concerned. Not so at Vinh Long and Sa Dec. Here the berthing and messing were located away from the river. at Vinh Long several kilometers and on the outskirts of town. at Sa Dec it was across the river and adjacent to a RVN compound. Both of these locations required which is to move the boat crews to the boat and during emergency conditions was very difficult due to local traffic.

In analyzing the introduction of the force into Vietnam two big problems faced the Navy in the Delta. First the lack of land to establish a USV base and the restricted mobility caused by the many hundreds of kilometers of waterways throughout the area. Suitable areas along the main river and adjacent to land transportation as already being populated by the Vietnamese. The relocation of people and the economic effort were undesirable. utilizing the waterways as the avenue of mobility; the afloat base concept was established.

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Since bases could not cover the delta, it was decided to utilize LST's and YRBM's for the float bases. To provide 3 float bases it would require 4 LST (one in repair at all times). The 542 class LST was selected and modified to support and maintain not only a section of 10 PBA's but also a two helicopter detachment. Thus the float-base concept was established by providing the flexibility for the River Patrol Force Command to move a float base and then embark/assist where the action was.

Realizing that the bases at My Tho, Soester and Vinh Long were required to expedite the employment of forces, action was taken to utilize YRBM's and APL's as non-self propelled barracks and repair ships. These units were modified to

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private berths, messin and limited  
maintenance for two sections of PBK's (20 boats)  
and with the addition of a helo deck to support  
a two helicopter detachment.

The facilities from which the various  
river sections would operate fell into the  
following four categories:

LAND BASES NAVY BASE Nha Be and Binh Thuy -  
All facilities, office space and quarters are  
located within a USV component which promotes  
good coordination, control and morale. Maintenance  
was generally more efficient due mainly to more  
supplies, and sufficient room to work as well as  
easier handling out of the water (use of ramps) and  
security was relatively easier.

LAND BASES - OPEN TOWNS - My Tho, Sa Dec and  
Vinh Long. Facilities, office space and quarters  
scattered; coordination difficult. Maintenance was  
less efficient and security more of a problem due  
to scattered personnel. Unity and morale are  
more difficult to maintain than on the Naval  
Base.

FLOATING BASE - Non-Powered - YRBM, APC  
(and later on the Mobile Base I and II). Facilities,  
office space and quarters close and integrated.  
Excellent coordination and morale. Maintenance was  
not as efficient as Navy Base due to limited  
space and difficult boat lifting and moving.  
Security placed an extra requirement on boat  
crews. Air-conditioned quarters improve efficiency.  
More vulnerable to VC attacks than LST, however  
attacked LCM's can not emerge, move on shore

notice if required when good  
intelligence regarding enemy intentions are  
wanted.

FLOATING BASES Powered - The LST's have  
all the advantages of the non-powered base plus  
ability to move rapidly and provide 40 or more direct  
fire support. Very difficult boat handling and  
maintenance. Cramped quarters provide limited  
supplies and shops. Could not support more  
than one Run Section (10 PBR's) and one  
Helo (2 Helis) ~~detachment~~.

Although it was obvious that the  
YRBM/APL were a far more superior  
support base than the, Sa La and  
Van Long, the introduction of Phase two with  
130 additional PBR's <sup>in 1968</sup> required the use of  
these non-powered afloat bases at areas  
other than these 3 bases. However, in 1969  
these 3 bases were closed for USN PBR  
operations with units reporting to the afloat bases  
for operation.

Although operation Great Slingshot  
utilized shore bases called ATSB this  
phase is covered in chapter — since the  
operation even though headed by CTF116  
was in essence a combined TFIK0117 operation  
under the SEALORDS concept.