

8-12-91

Hi Don:

I am going to be sending you a article that just appeared in the latest issue of the Vietnam magazine. I thought that the article was interesting and informative. It also hit home because we are mentioned in the article.

I'm sure that you recall the Bright Light Operation that they are writing about. I remember it well and even have movie footage of the prisoners as they returned to Solid Anchor.

I have talked to a lot of the Seawolves since the last reunion and they were real happy with the article on the Seawolves that was made available at the last reunion. You may want to think about having select articles available for the next reunion. Let me know what you think.

I have heard from Dan Smiley and he asks whether the article about the Seawolves made available at the last reunion could be made available for Vietnam Magazine. Dan suggested that Photographs could be sent along with the article. I suggested that we would need the permission of the author in all probability but that I would get in contact with you to see if the project would be feasible. Since you are our historian, I thought this was your area and that you may have some thoughts on the subject. I would like to know what you think and can you do it.

This summer has been busy. In a hour or so I have to go with Adam and his cubscout group to a Twins baseball game. Hope all is well with you and your son and hope to hear from you soon.

Your friend,

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OPERATION BRIGHT LIGHT

Deep within Viet Cong territory, 19 allied prisoners of war were being held captive. SEAL Team One's mission was to bring them back alive.

By Steve Edwards

Today the exploits of the U.S. Navy SEALs (sea, air, land) on operations in Southeast Asia are legion. People who have heard some of the stories and heard General William Westmoreland's comments about SEALs being the "most effective fighting force in my command" might be surprised to learn that SEALs practically had to fight their way into the fighting.

U.S. Navy SEAL teams were commissioned on January 1 and January 3, 1962, with Team One assigned to the West Coast and Team Two to the East Coast. Within days, Team One had dispatched a platoon for training South Vietnamese SEALs—called Lien Doi Naguoi Nhai (LDNN)—for clandestine raids into North Vietnam, but for four years that was the total of SEAL commitment to Vietnam. By early 1966, both teams had new commanders and both were chomping at the bit to get into the conflict.

There were several problems. The SEALs had been commissioned to conduct small-unit unconventional warfare in a maritime environment. Nobody in the Navy, outside of the SEALs, knew what that meant; and if they did, they did not know how to apply it to Vietnam. The other problem is one that has always plagued elite unconventional units—prejudice. When officers of the regular Navy thought of the SEALs, they thought of prima donnas. Much of the criticism along these lines was not undeserved.

The SEALs descended from the Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs) of World War II. The teams had been conceived with very specific tasks in mind, such as clearing the Normandy beaches prior to the invasion. This was not conceived to be a continuing commitment and capability after the war.

In fact, it was not until the early '70s that a career path was designed within naval special warfare.

By early 1966, Lieutenant Jim Barnes, who was the second commanding officer (CO) of SEAL Team One, had made a proposal to COMUSMACV (the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam) to use SEALs in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ). The RSSZ, also known as the "Forest of Assassins," was critical to the continuing war effort from South Vietnam—the RSSZ could control the approaches to Saigon through the Long Tao River since Saigon is approximately 50 miles inland. The problem was that the RSSZ was a difficult operating environment, with deep mangrove swamps, and was a concession to the Viet Cong (VC).

On February 19, 1966, Lieutenant Barnes and his team of three officers and 12 enlisted men, deployed to South Vietnam and initially set their operation up at Vung Tau, at the mouth of the Long Tao River. This would be the one and only time that the commander of one of the SEAL teams would deploy to South Vietnam with one of his platoons while leaving his executive officer (XO) in charge of daily operations at the SEALs' home base at Coronado, Calif. From this deployment, the "Lessons Learned" file written by Lieutenant Barnes would form the basis for standard operating procedures for the platoons that followed.

It was learned that the standard SEAL deployment period of six months was the perfect time span because of the inten-

Fully armed and fully painted, a U.S. Navy SEAL (sea, air, land) team prepares to disembark from a PBR (river patrol boat) for an operation in the Mekong Delta.