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RIVER PATROL FORCE

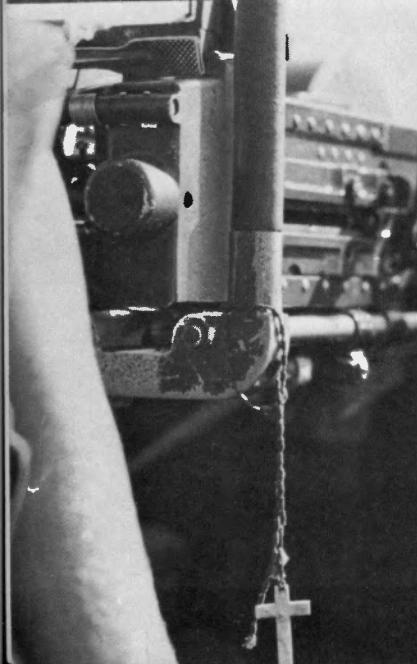
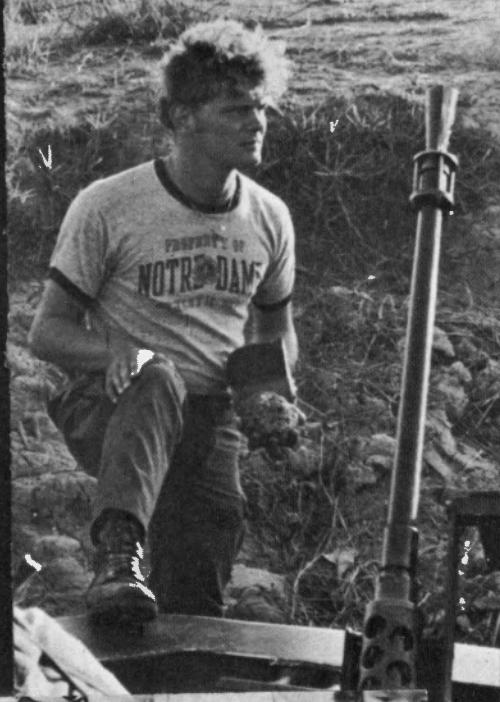
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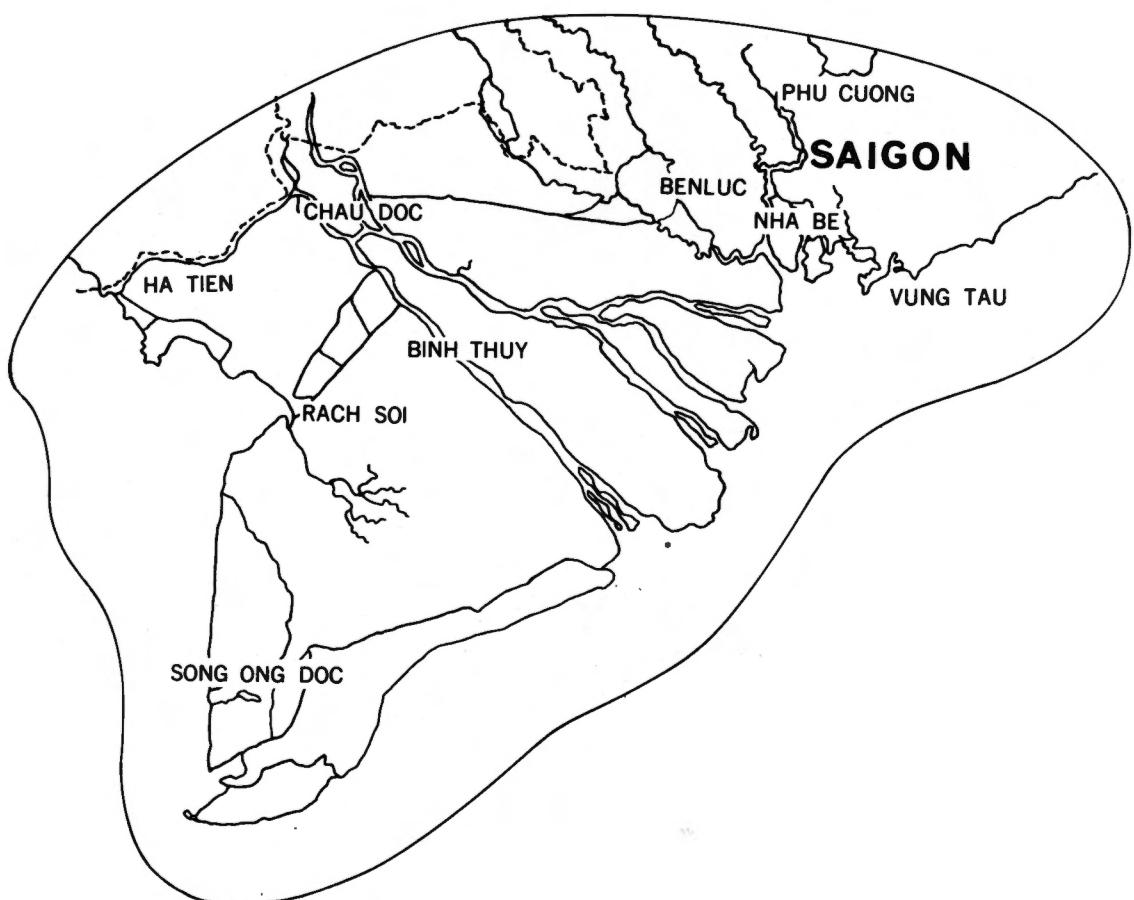
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Our special thanks to all the people who helped make this book possible, and the men
of the Brown Water Navy, to whom this book is dedicated.





THE MEKONG DELTA

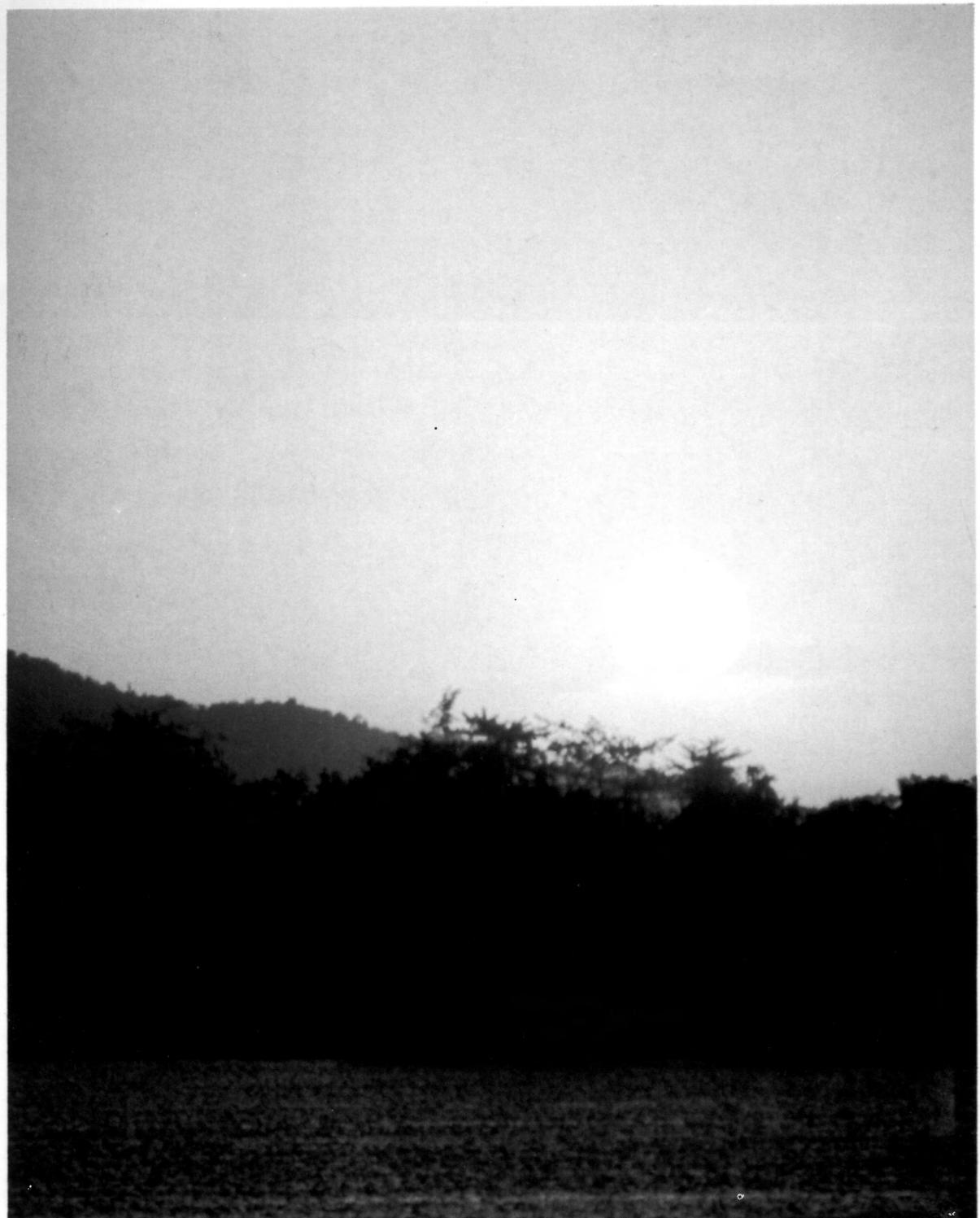


**HOME OF THE RIVER PATROL FORCE:
THE UNITED STATES BROWN WATER NAVY**

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE BROWN WATER NAVY...

MORNING: THE BEGINNING...GAME WARDEN

It is morning...just as the sun rises above the lush green jungle and although it is the middle of the hot, dry season, the air is still cool...



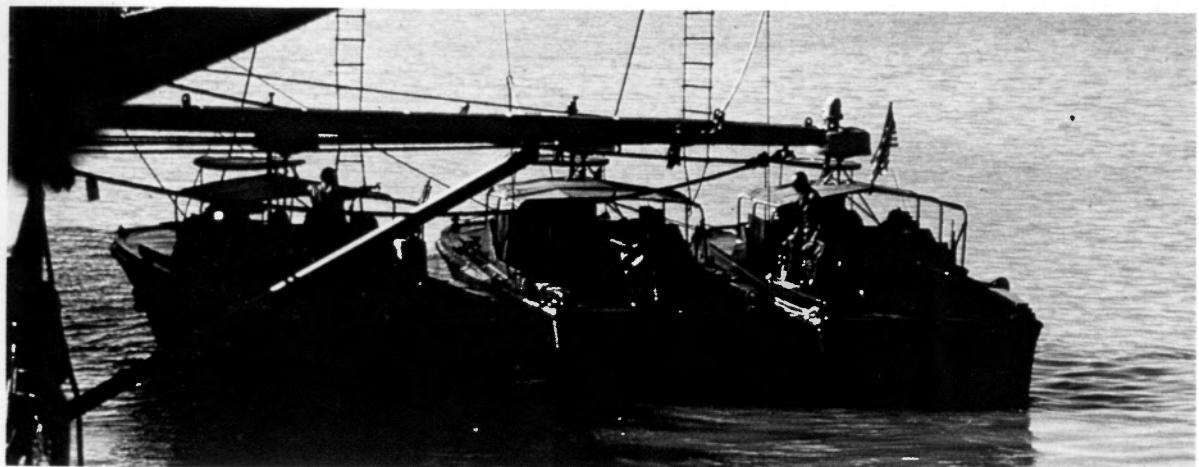
There are not many roads here and these waterways provide the principle means of transportation and a major source of food.



A highly valuable agricultural region, the Delta has been called the "Rice Bowl" of Asia.

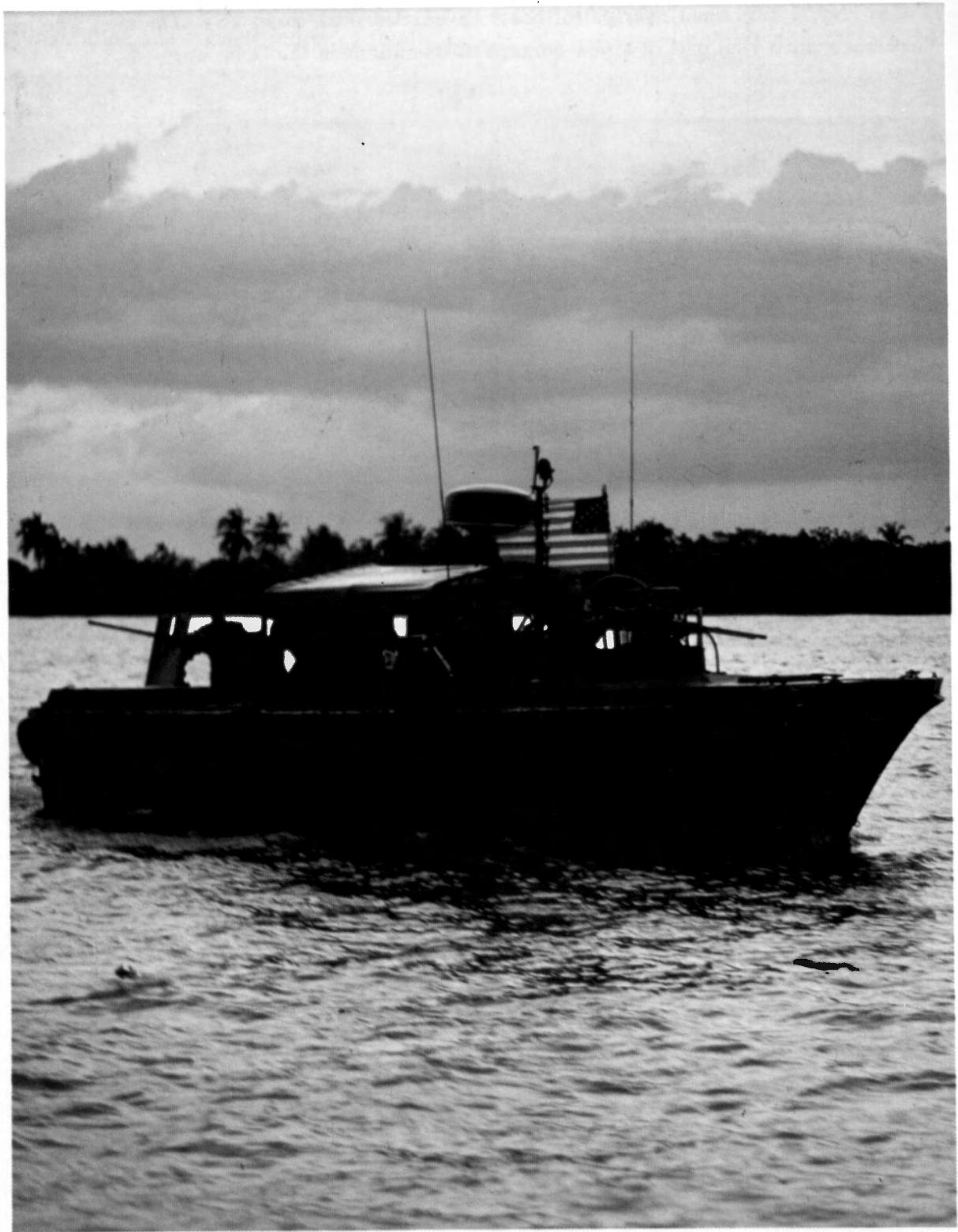


It is May, 1966...small river patrol boats lie nuzzled next to an LST. The men who man these boats are a vital part of a new concept of operations in the Delta war.



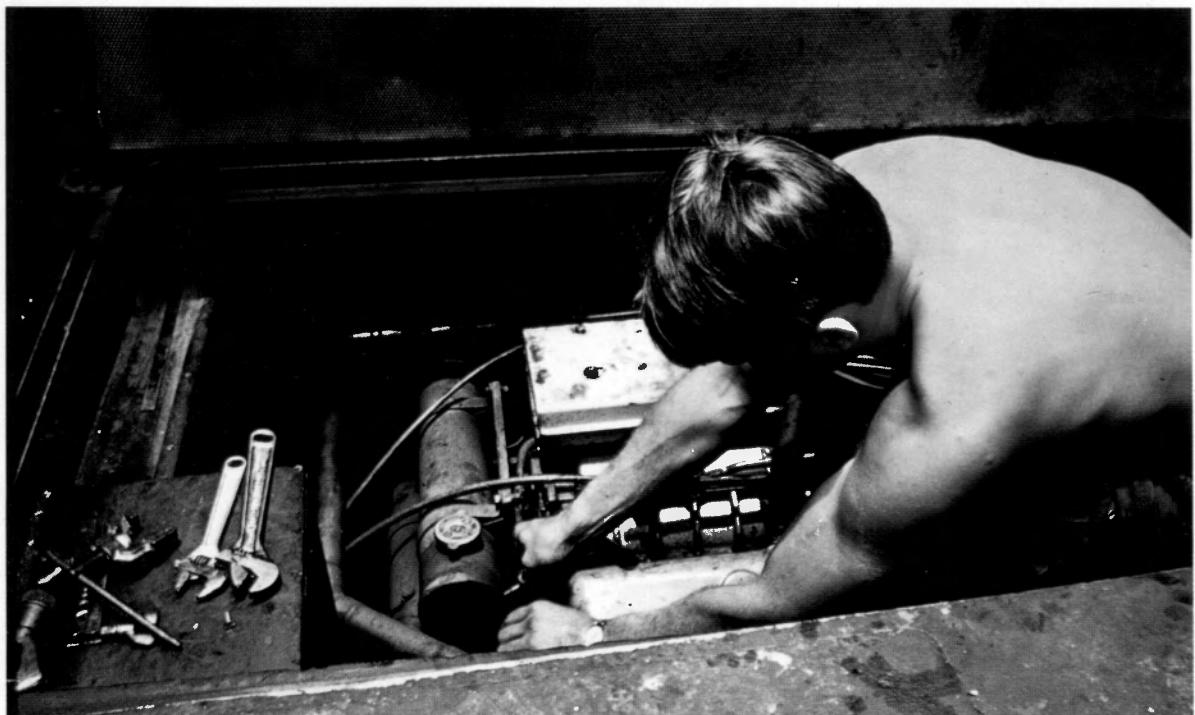
The mission of these men is to patrol the major estuaries and canals of the Mekong Delta and to keep these vital water routes free of Viet Cong harassment.





To accomplish their mission, the men use a 31-foot river patrol boat called a PBR. The boat is well armed and highly maneuverable. Built on a pleasure craft hull and adapted to a war-time atmosphere, it draws only nine inches of water at a maximum speed of over 25 knots.

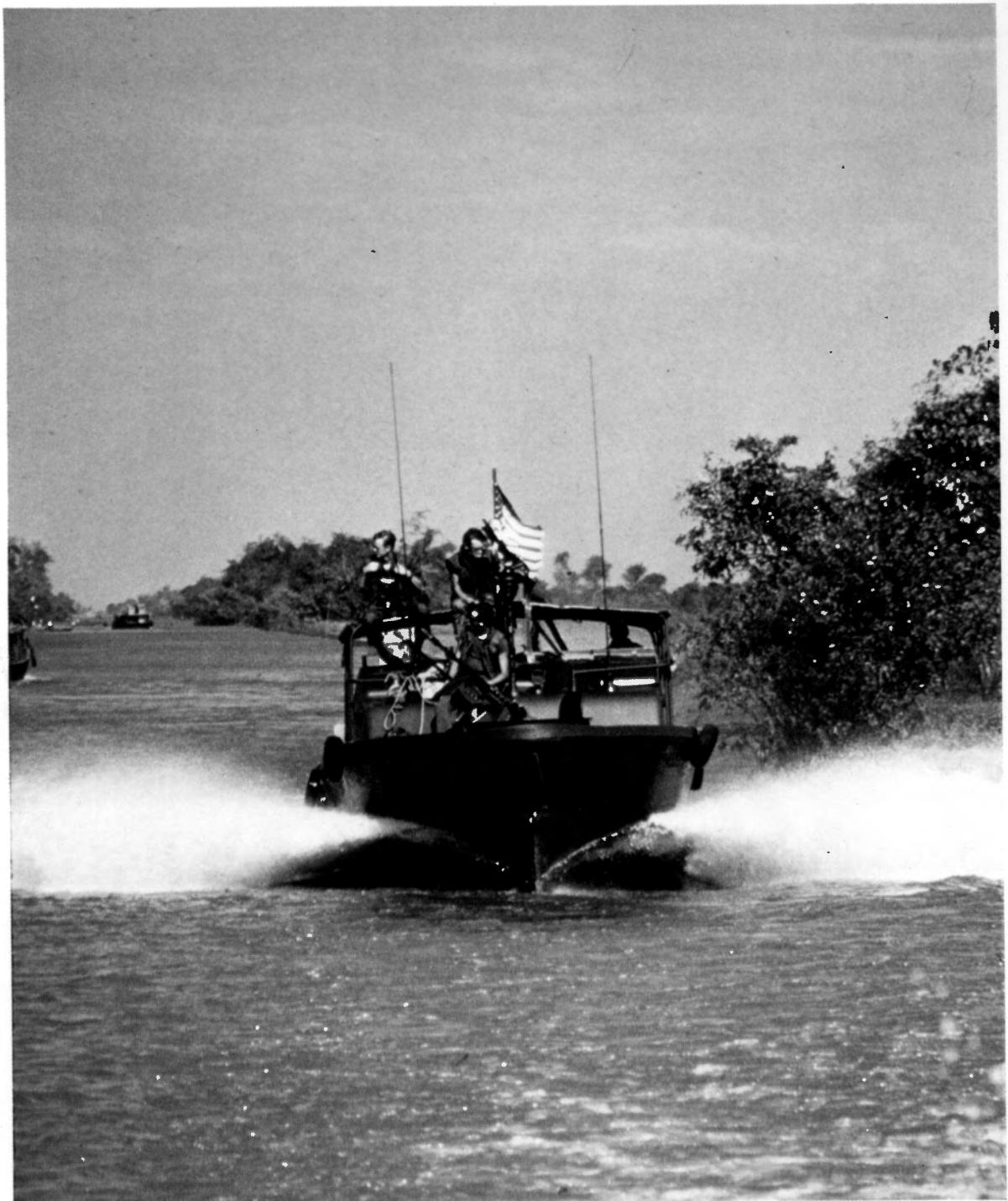
At 0800, the sun is beginning to draw beads of sweat from these men who have made the Delta their home for a year...



More than a year's operations have taken place. Since their introduction, the PBR's have been modified, tactics have been refined and the River Patrol Force has become a feared enemy to the Viet Cong.



January, 1968 brings the Force a completely modified PBR...



The Mark II is larger and has an improved water jet pump system with less corrosive metals.

The veteran Mark I would be maintained but would be modified with Mark II equipment. The Mark II has been specifically designed for river warfare.

By mid-morning the patrol is well under way...A patrol officer checks to insure that both boats on the patrol understand the day's operating instructions.



As the canal narrows the after gunner dons his flak jacket and helmet.

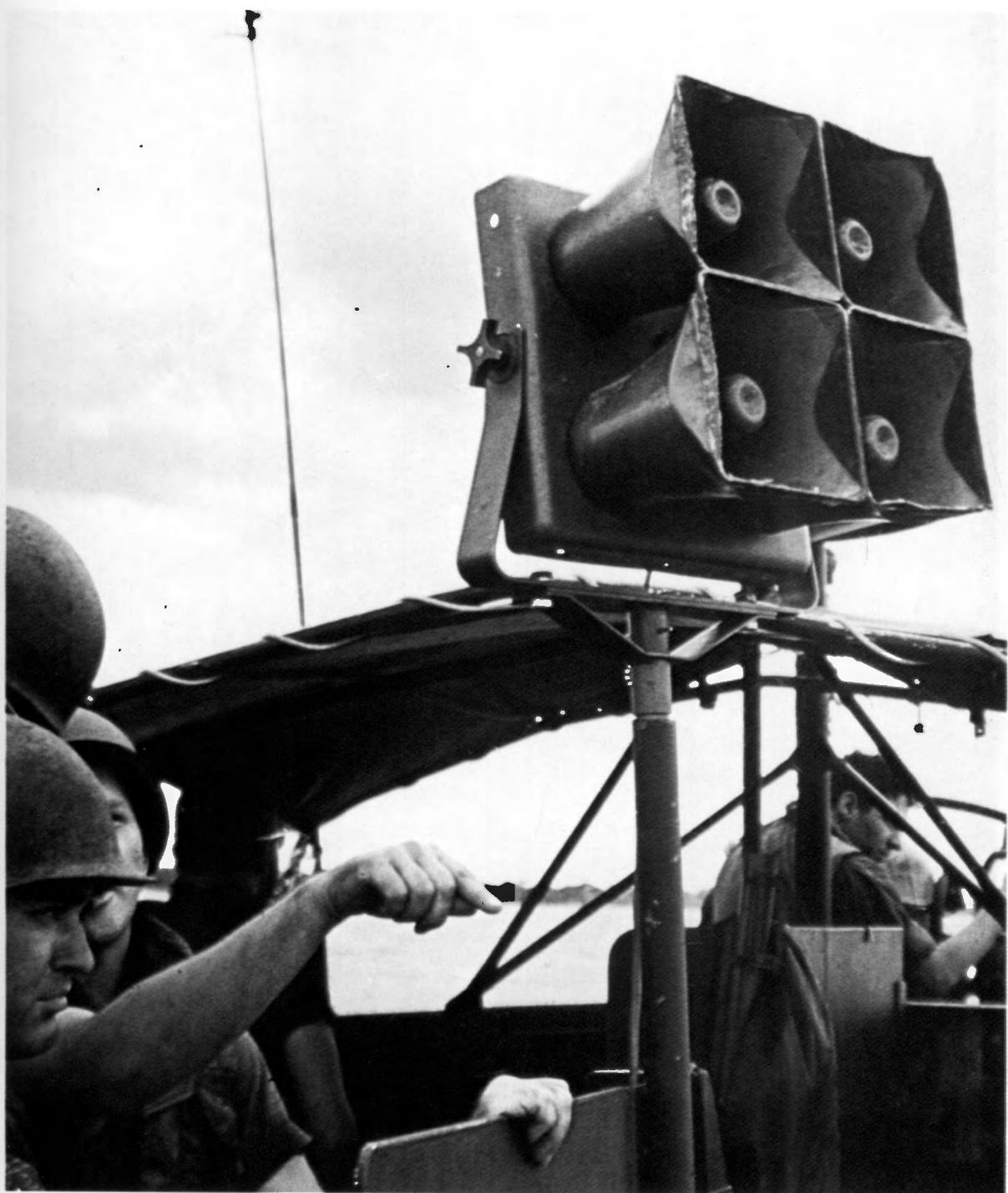
The four men on this boat have become an integral part of Delta life...a familiar sight to the many sampans and junks they check on the rivers and canals.

Day and night patrols such as these have earned the men the title: Brown Water Navy.





At 1100, the patrol enters one of the small canals that lace the terrain of the Delta. As the lead boat passes a small hamlet, the boat captain turns on a tape recorder...A Vietnamese man begins to speak in a sing-song manner that only the people of the hamlet understand completely. This is an essential part of the psychological operations program which urges the people to be faithful to the national government. As the tape continues, a sailor holds a small radio to his ear to find out if the Cards had beaten the Tigers in the '68 World Series...



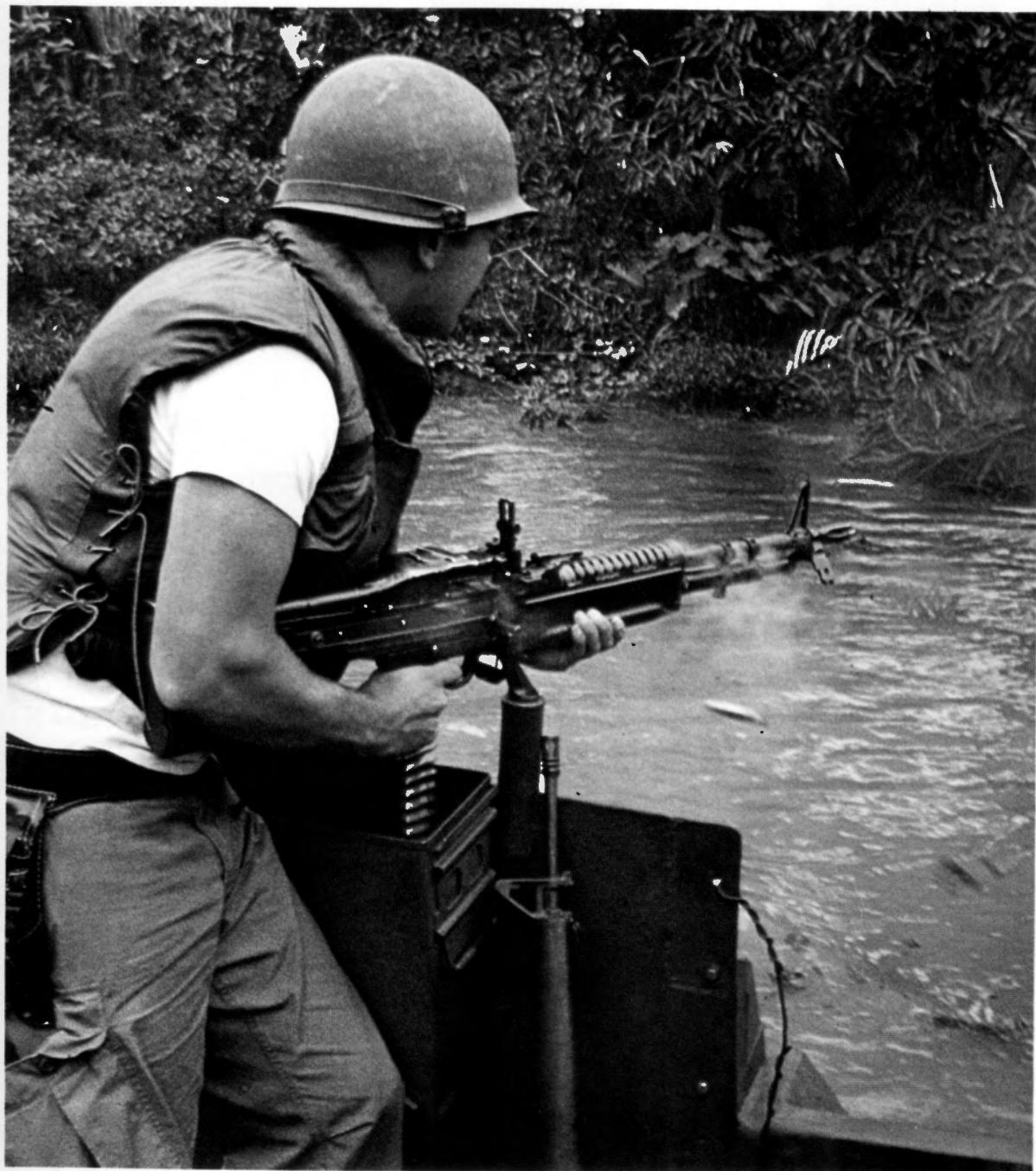
These patrols have been so successful that the enemy has found it difficult, if not impossible, to transport men and materials on the major rivers.



Operation Game Warden, now more than two years old, has forced the NVA and Viet Cong to move on the smaller rivers and canals in much smaller numbers. The morning is over...so far it has been a fine day...

AFTERNOON: OPERATION SEA LORDS

Noon has brought a change to the operational concepts of the River Patrol Force. The Force now operates with two other Navy Task Forces...the Mobile Riverine Force (TF-117) and the Coastal Surveillance Force (TF-115)...together they will bring the war to enemy held sanctuaries...



This is a new operational concept developed by COMNAVFORV called Operation SEA LORDS (South East Asia Lake Ocean River and Delta Strategy).





At 1300 a PBR glides past a village. Inside the village, a different aspect of the Delta war is taking place...there is more to winning a war than just pulling a trigger. In this type of guerrilla war it is essential to know the people, their customs, and their needs.

Quite often, MEDCAPS and DENTCAPS (Medical and Dental Civic Action Programs) are held among the people in order to provide the much needed medical aid to remote villages and hamlets throughout the Delta. PBR's are used to provide transportation for the MEDCAP and DENTCAP teams.

Modern medical methods are slow to reach the remote sections of this land... an end to suffering and sickness is something that is long remembered by the villagers.

Continuing on, the boats pass a minesweeping drone (MSD) and its cover boat, working the canal for mines. The minesweepers are manned by men from one of the two Mine Divisions in country operating with the Force. They have been locating and destroying mines which threaten military and civilian shipping on the major rivers and canals since 1966; when the Eastern Mariner was sunk in the Long Tau shipping channel near Nha Be.



As the afternoon sun grows unbearably hot, the lead boat receives automatic weapon fire from a tree-line a few meters inland. The cover boat breaks off in order to draw the fire away from the lead boat and to provide assistance...



The patrol officer calls for air support and immediately Seawolf helicopter gunships are scrambled from their LST base a few miles away. The helos are part of Light Attack Squadron THREE (HAL-3) and are the main air arm of the Force.





Moments after receiving the scramble call, the light helo fire-team is airborne and on its way. In the cockpit a flight experienced pilot receives exact co-ordinates from the ambushed PBR patrol. The door gunners peer from the open sides of their UH-1B gunships and check the readiness of their M-60 machine guns. The co-pilot insures that the firing mechanism for his mini-guns and 2.75-inch rockets is functioning properly. As they reach the area the patrol officer marks the enemy position with smoke grenades and tracer rounds.

The helos roll in at almost tree level and make their first firing run...



After the second firing run the fire is suppressed and the fire-team returns to the LST to be rearmed and refueled . . .



The maintenance crew aboard the LST works hard to have the gunship ready, for as it landed, another call for assistance was received.



At 1600 the day patrol turns to start home. As they enter one of the larger canals they pass an Explosive Ordnance Team diving to salvage some equipment lost in a fire-fight the day before.



Back at one of the Advanced Tactical Support Bases, the men who are going on the night-time water-borne guard-posts are eating chow...It is April, 1969 and the rainy season is almost upon the Delta. A petty officer starts to smear paint on his face and checks his weapons...He will lead the SEAL patrol tonight.

The SEAL team will leave under the cover of darkness and insert in areas of known VC activity. Their operations have given "Charlie" a taste of his own medicine.

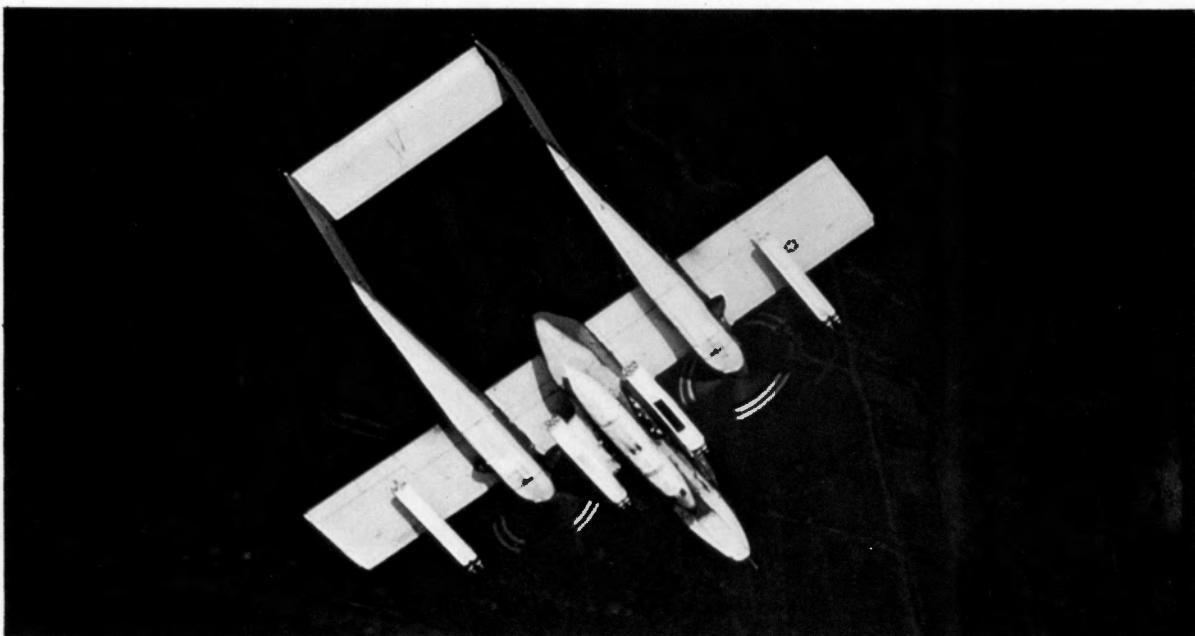


At 1800, the sun has lost some of its potency. A night patrol is on its way to a guard-post location...the cool of sunset is interrupted by the swish of a B-40 rocket passing within a few feet of the boat.

Within minutes, "Black Ponies" are overhead. In the cockpit, a Navy Lieutenant scans the canal below. He is leading a two plane patrol of OV-10A Broncos. The planes are attached to Light Attack Squadron FOUR and had taken off from Binh Thuy minutes before...



After marking the position of the enemy, the "ponies" roll in to deliver their 5-inch Zuni rockets, 2.75-inch rockets, flex gun and 20mm cannon fire...





One run and two secondary explosions later, all is quiet on the canal again.

By 1845, the sun is just a small glow in the western sky and darkness envelops the Delta...



An American advisor, the only American aboard the PBR, takes cover from the May rain as the rainy season has started in the Delta. The seventies have brought the beginning of the end of the River Patrol Force's role in Vietnam...

The lone advisor looks over his Vietnamese crew and is satisfied with their progress.

He was here in the beginning and marvels at the changes that have been made since those first eleven boats arrived back in 1966. .



He and many more like him will remain until the job started more than four years ago is finished...

EVENING: ACTOV

It is November, and as the sun drops beneath the horizon, a boat captain checks his starlight scope... One of the sailors checks his M-60 machine gun. His name is Nguyen Dong Thiu — he is a Vietnamese sailor receiving training aboard a PBR. This has all come about as a result of the

ACTOV training program which is preparing the Vietnamese Navy for the turnover most of our River craft.



Nguyen has already attended an eight week boat school in Saigon. This patrol is part of his on-the-job training with an American River Division.

As he gains proficiency in his job, he will become part of Vietnamese Task Force 212 which had been established earlier in the month with the turnover of 80 PBR's to the Vietnamese Navy.



SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE RIVER PATROL FORCE

1966

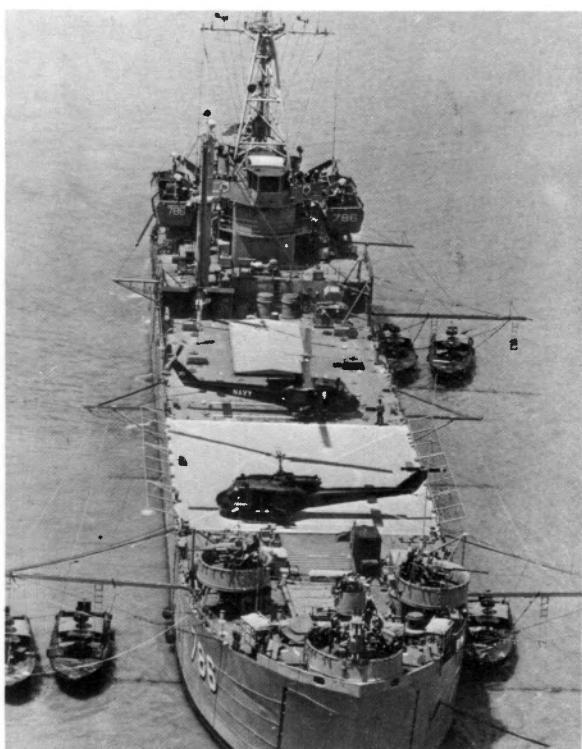
On March 21st 11 river patrol boats (PBR's) arrived in-country for use in Operation GAME WARDEN, operated from the dock landing ship USS Belle Grove (LSD-2), and on April 10th began Operation GAME WARDEN patrols along the Long Tau River in the first appearance of the newly introduced craft.



In May, the enemy initiated a mining campaign to interdict the movement of ocean-going ships on the Long Tau River. The VC campaign began with the sinking of the Eastern Mariner at Nha Be. Immediately following this incident, the River Patrol Force joined the Vietnamese Navy in a mine countermeasure campaign along the Long Tau River utilizing Minesweeping Boats (MSB's) and River Patrol Craft RPC's.

U. S. Navy pilots officially took over operation of the UH-1B "Huey" armed helicopters flying in support of Game Warden PBR's from the Army on September 19, 1966.

The first of the specially-configured Game Warden tank landing ships (LST's), the USS Jennings County (LST-846), arrived at Vung Tau and relieved the dock landing ship (LSD) as a support ship for U.S. Navy PBR's on September 19, 1966.



1967

Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE (HAL-3) was commissioned at Vung Tau April 1st, and the UH-1B helicopters flown by the squadron were nicknamed "Seawolves".

On September 30th, the U.S. Mobile Riverine Force struck for the first time at the birthplace of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) as landing craft and gun boats of River Assault Flotilla ONE moved two battalions of infantry troops from the Army's 2nd Brigade, 9th Division to an area 50 miles southwest of Saigon near An Dinh Village in Kien Hoa Province in a continuation of Operation CORONADO V.



1968

The first new Mark II river patrol boats arrived at Saigon on January 13th. These new boats were specifically built for use in Vietnam and employ a wider hull, rust-resistant water-jet pumps, and a new communications system.

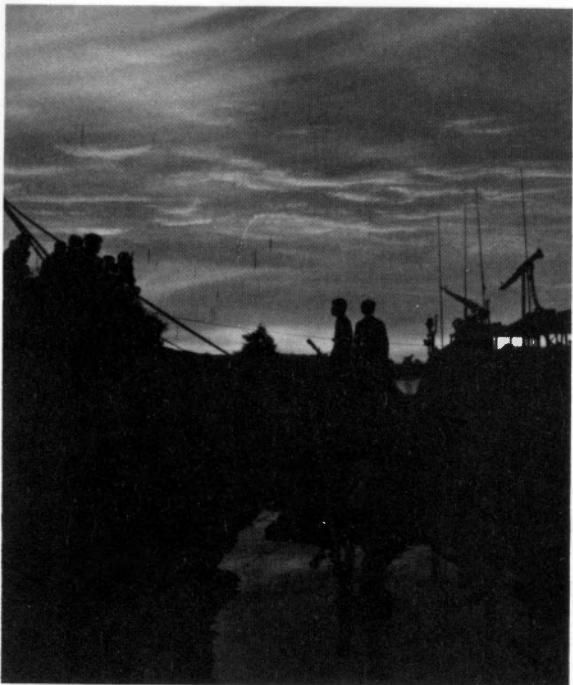


From January 31, 1968 to March 12, 1968, PBR's patrolled the Perfume River in "I" Corps near Hue, the old capital of Vietnam. River Division 521 escorted U.S. Navy supply ships and free world merchant ships to combat areas on the Perfume River, keeping it open and making it possible for the vital supplies to reach the troops during the height of the Tet offensive.

Captain Arthur W. Price, Jr., relieved Captain Paul N. Gray as Commander River Patrol Force (CTF-116) on April 3rd.

Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius presented the Presidential Unit Citation to the men of the River Patrol Force who operated in contiguous waters from May 1966 to June 1967, in ceremonies at Binh Thuy, on October 7, 1968.

On November 1st, Operation SEARCH TURN started along two canals in the southwestern part of the Republic, just north of the enemy infested U Minh Forest. This first water-borne barrier slowed the flow of men and materials coming across the border from Cambodia.



On November 3rd the U.S. Navy announced Operation SEA LORDS (South East Asia, Lake, Ocean, River, Delta Strategy), a new offensive effort designed to interdict enemy infiltration deep in South Vietnam's Mekong Delta. This operation brought all three major operating forces (TF-115: Coastal Surveillance Force, TF-116: River Patrol Force, TF-117: Mobile Riverine Force) of the Navy in Vietnam together to patrol seldom touched areas south and southeast of Saigon.

In November, Operation TRAN HUNG DAO I commenced. This was a series of interdiction patrols on the Rach Thang Giang-Vinh Te Canal waterway paralleling the Cambodian border between Ha Tien (on the Gulf of Thailand) and Chau Doc (on the Bassac River). River Patrol Boats, Swift Boats, and Mobile Riverine Craft participated in the operation, augmented by Vietnamese Navy Units.

Operation GIANT SLINGSHOT – the third of four major offensive operations to spring from the parent and continuing overall effort of Operation SEA LORDS, began on December 6th. GIANT SLINGSHOT has been called the most effective operation to date, in terms of tangible results. More than 40 U.S. Navy patrol boats (PBR's and ASPB's) moved into the narrow "Y"-shaped complex of rivers north of Saigon.

Centered on the Vam Co Tay and the Vam Co Dong Rivers which wind westward from south of the Cambodian border, the operation was designed to interdict enemy movement of personnel and logistics into South Vietnam. As of December 1969, the operation had accounted for over 2,100 enemy killed and 600 tons of supplies captured.

1969

On January 2, 1969, Operation BARRIER REEF, a task force of U.S. Navy river patrol boats and armored riverine assault craft, began patrolling a 56-mile long canal complex west of Saigon. The new operation locked into place the fourth and final link of a naval interdiction effort extending from the Gulf of Thailand to Tay Ninh City in III Corps.

COMNAVFORV, Saigon, announced a new program called ACTOV — the accelerated turnover of U.S. Navy assets to the Vietnamese Navy, and opened its Small Boat School in Saigon on March 18th. The first class to subsequently complete this school graduated on April 21st.

On April 19th, Light Attack Squadron FOUR (VAL-4) became operational with the River Patrol Force, and squadron headquarters were located at Binh Thuy Air Maintenance Facility while two detachments, ALFA and BRAVO, operated from the Vietnamese Air Bases at Binh Thuy and Vung Tau respectively. VAL-4 was commissioned on January 3, 1969, at San Diego, Calif., and is the first and only Navy unit to fly the OV-10A "Bronco" fixed-wing aircraft in Vietnam. The squadron's planes were nicknamed "Black Ponies".

Captain J. R. Faulk, USN, of Coronado, Calif., assumed command of the River Patrol Force and River Patrol Flotilla FIVE at a change of command ceremony at Binh Thuy, succeeding Captain A. W. Price, Jr., USN. Captain Faulk was also designated "Deputy First Sea Lord".

An operation Began on September 28th on the Ong Doc River and lesser canals in the extreme southwestern part of IV Corps, south of the long-time VC stronghold, the U Minh Forest. An LST, 10 PBR's, 10 River Assault Craft, and two helicopter gunships directly support this operation, whose target is the VC tax extortionists operating on the river and the surrounding communities.



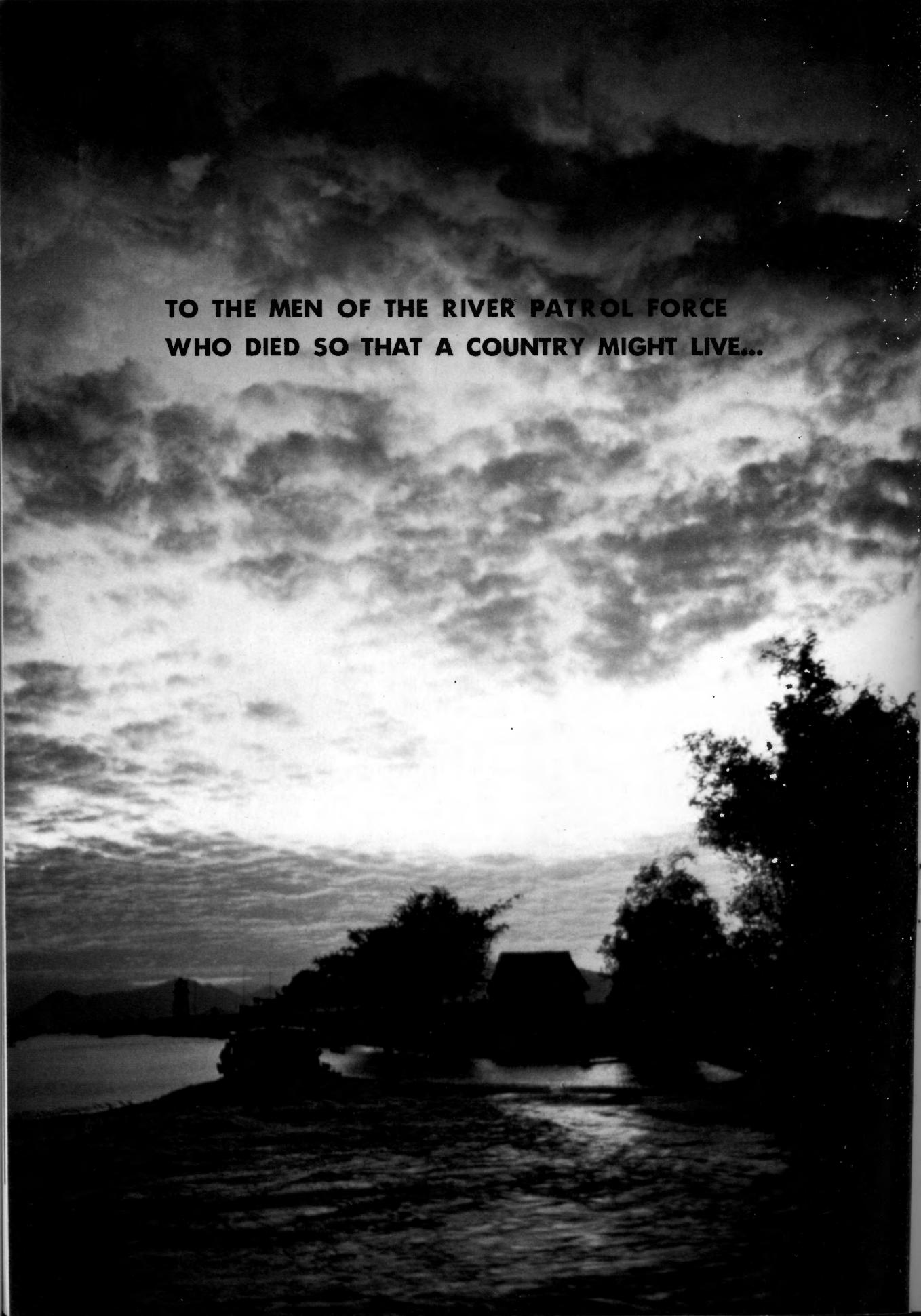
The Navy turned over the largest number of craft to date in ceremonies at the Vietnamese Navy Shipyard in Saigon on October 10, 1969. 80 PBR's were officially transferred to the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) and assigned to the newly commissioned VNN Task Force 212. The turnover brought to 229 the number of U.S. Navy craft transferred since June 1968. On November 12, 1969, Commander Task Force 212, VNN, Commander Phu, and his staff arrived at Binh Thuy.



A PBR Training School was started at Binh Thuy Navy Base for Vietnamese ACTOV trainees. It was initiated to fill the gap between the Boat School in Saigon and the on-the-job training the Vietnamese receive on the boats. The school was designed similar to the training U.S. Navymen receive in the United States before reporting to Vietnam. River Division 535 personnel were designated as instructors for the school which began on January 19, 1970.



**TO THE MEN OF THE RIVER PATROL FORCE
WHO DIED SO THAT A COUNTRY MIGHT LIVE...**



Printed by: **DAITO ART PRINTING CO., LTD.**
19, 2-chome, Shintomi-cho, Chuo-ku,
Tokyo, Japan

