

(1968)

CHRONOLOGY OF OUTSTANDING EVENTS

(1968)

1 January Anchored on station at the mouth of the Ham Luong River, Republic of Vietnam.

7 January Commanding Officer of USS JENNINGS COUNTY (LST-846) and USS GARRETT COUNTY (LST-838) and representatives from COMNAVFORV, AFL-55, and COMNAVSUPPACT, Saigon arrived on board for conference concerning sapper defense measures.

17 January Commander River Patrol Forces, Vietnam arrived on board and conducted personnel and material inspection of USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST-821), HA(L) 3 Det 5 and River Section 531.

1 February Launched continual helicopter strikes at Viet Cong positions in Kien Hoa sector. Shifted anchorage to provide 40mm shore bombardment of Ben Tre Canal.

20 February Relieved on station by USS HUNTERDON COUNTY. Transferred River Patrol Section 532 and HA(L) 3, Det 5. Transited upriver to My Tho.

21 February Underway downriver and entered South China Sea.

22 February Underway for Sasebo, Japan.

4 March Moored starboard side to Berth India 2, United States Naval Fleet Activities, Sasebo, Japan.

5 March Commenced RAV with SRD Sasebo and USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (AD-37).

17 March USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (AD-37) underway. Availability transferred to USS AJAX (AR-6).

24 March Concluded RAV with SRD Sasebo and USS AJAX (AR-6).

25 March Underway via Kaohsiung, Taiwan to the Mekong Delta, IV Corps, RVN, to resume operations.

31 March Entered Kaohsiung Harbor, Taiwan.

4 April Underway from Kaohsiung Harbor, Taiwan for Vung Tau, RVN.

9 April Anchored in Vung Tau Harbor. On-loading supplies and ammunition.

10 April Underway for Binh Thuy. Entered Bassac River. Embarked River Patrol Section 513 and HA(L) 3, Det 1.

Enclosure 1

11 April Relieved USS JENNINGS COUNTY (LST-846) on station.

18 April Shifted anchorage up river to take on potable water.

20 April Replenished stores and ammunition from USS MARK (AKL-12),  
USS BRULE (AKL-28) and YFR-890.

30 April Conducted 2500<sup>th</sup> accident free helicopter landing.

29 May Temporarily disembarked River Patrol Section 513 and HA(L)3,  
Det 1. Rendezvoused with USS GUADALUPE (AO-32) at the  
mouth of the Bassac River. UNREPed receiving JP-5.

30 May Reembarked PBRs and helos. Resumed river operations.

19 June Embarked 9<sup>th</sup> Seal Platoon.

20 June Completed 3000<sup>th</sup> accident free helicopter recovery.

30 June USCGC Point Clear (WPB 82307) alongside to embark 9<sup>th</sup> Seal  
Platoon.

13 July Embarked UH-1B downed by enemy fire. Four embarked personnel  
KIA.

16 July Ship received automatic weapons fire. Suppressed with 40mm  
HEIT-SD.

3 August RIVSEC 513 provided a troop lift and supported an ARVN/PP  
sweep of Can Lan. SEAWOLVES provided air coverage of PBRs  
and ground troops.

13 August Provided cover for 200 ARVN's inserted by RIVSEC 513.

22 August Transited seaward to rendezvous 45 miles out of the river  
mouth with USS CACAPON (AC-52). For JP-5 UNREP.

24 August Conducted night qualifications for HA(L)3, Det 7.

5 September Embarked Seal Team, Det Alfa, Fourth Platoon and AST-2  
Det Alfa for special operations.

28 September Presented the ship for inspection by Prospective Commander,  
Naval Forces, Vietnam VADM ZUMWALT and Commander River Patrol  
Force.

6 October Visited by the Secretary of the Navy, Commander Naval Forces Vietnam, and Commander River Patrol Force.

1 November Relieved on station by USS HUNTERDON COUNTY (LST-838). Disembarked RIVSEC 513 and HA(L) 3, Det 1. Entered South China Sea enroute Subic Bay, Republic of Philippines.

6 November Moored at pier 18, U. S. Naval Base, Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. Commenced RAV with SRF Subic and USS DIXIE (AD-14).

4 December Completed RAV with SRF Subic and USS DIXIE (AD-14). Underway for Vung Tau, RVN to continue GAME WARDEN Operations.

9 December Anchored in Vung Tau Harbor, RVN. Received ammunition and supplies. Underway to Nha Bay via Long Tau River. Commenced on-loading FBR spaces and personnel gear of RIVDIV 553.

10 December Underway for Vung Tau. Anchored in Vung Tau Harbor.

11 December Proceeded to Vinh Long. At Vinh Long embarked RIVDIV 553.

12 December Advised by Commander River Patrol Forces, Vietnam that Ham Luong GAME WARDEN orders had been cancelled and reassigned to Song Vam Co Dong (vicinity of Ben Luc bridge) to support "GIANT SLINGSHOT" operations.

13 December Embarked COMRIVRON 57 as CTU 194.9.6 second in command of operation "GIANT SLINGSHOT". Shifted anchorage up river in vicinity of Ben Luc bridge, Song Vam Co Dong.

13-27 December Made daily transits between Ben Luc bridge and anchorage in the vicinity of "French Fort".

23 December While in transit to night anchorage the ship received five rounds of enemy B-40 rocket fire from river bank ambush site. All units in transit returned fire immediately and suppressed enemy fire. All enemy rounds missed.

27 December The ship begins its permanent anchorage in the Ben Luc vicinity, XS 617756.

29 December

Commander River Squadron 57, LCDR Arthur J. ELLIOTT, USN was killed instantly when the PBR, in which he was riding while serving as on scene commander for Vam Co Dong Giant Slingshot forces as CTU 194.9.0, was hit from ambush by B-40 rocket and automatic weapons fire on the upper Vam Co Dong river. LCDR C. J. PETERSON assumed duties as CTU 194.9.0 and COMRIVRON FIVE SEVEN.

[1968]

BASIC NARRATIVE

**A. Mission and Function of Command**

HARNEST COUNTY is one of four uniquely outfitted LSTs operating as part of Operation GAME WARDEN on the rivers of South Vietnam. Recommissioned as a PBR/helo support LST, HARNEST COUNTY's primary functions are:

1. Logistics support of embarked river patrol sections and light attack helicopter detachments
2. Maintenance and repair of PBRs
3. Messing and berthing of embarked personnel
4. Coordination of river surveillance efforts by embarked personnel

HARNEST COUNTY also serves as:

1. Communications relay station
2. Radar surveillance unit
3. Interim medical facilities for the treatment of wounded personnel and "Dust Off" helo MEDEVAC landing site.
4. Staging center for SEAL, PRLI and other riverine warfare operations
5. Mobile gunfire support platform equiped and ready to provide harassment and interdiction fire and direct call fire for all friendly forces within her designated area of operation
6. Transhipment and limited storage point for food, fuel, parts, and ammunition consigned to advanced tactical support bases ashore

**B. Embarked Units**

The following operational units were assigned to and supported by HARNEST COUNTY during 1968:

1. River Patrol Sections

- a. Section 531 Disembarked 31 January
- b. Section 532 Embarked 31 January. Disembarked 20 February.
- c. Section 513 Embarked 10 April. Disembarked 1 November.
- d. Section 553 Embarked 11 December. Embarked at year's end.

2. Light Attack Helicopter Detachments

- a. HA(L) 3 Det 5 Disembarked 20 February.
- b. HA(L) 3 Det 1 Embarked 10 April. Disembarked 1 November.

**C. Operations and Activities**

After successfully completing its first full year in Vietnam, HARNEST COUNTY leaped into 1968 with many lessons and awareness learned from the previous year.

The year began with HARNETT COUNTY anchored at the mouth of the Ham Luong River, Republic of Vietnam receiving supplies from YFR-890. It proved to mark the beginning of a busy and exciting new year. The ship made daily transits of the river that first month. During January, helicopter landings were thirty less than the record set the preceding month of December 1967: The flight deck team landed 314 helicopters. The 40mm mounts were kept busy conducting firing in Specified Strike Zones along the river, the 20,762 rounds of HEIT-SD were effective in destroying 30 structures, 3 bunkers, 1 sampan, 1 brickyard, and damaging 23 structures and 6 bunkers. Much of this action was seen during the first month on the Ham Luong River between the sea and Ben Tre.

The TET Offensive began on the end of January and continued into February. HARNETT COUNTY utilized her full potential fire power in aggressive attacks upon Viet Cong strongholds and defending friendly units. During this month HARNETT COUNTY disembarked River Patrol Section 531 and embarked River Patrol Section 532 at My Tho. HARNETT COUNTY still maintained control over both units and helicopter gunship's. The first week of February found the ship constantly supporting these units during the enemy violation of their own "Truce".

On 7 February HARNETT COUNTY replenished her seriously depleted magazines. Operations continued as normal; firing at targets of opportunity and support of embarked units on the Ham Luong River.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February HARNETT COUNTY was in anchor with USS HUNTERDON COUNTY (LST-838) and YFR-890. All three vessels weighed anchor to make to a more favorable anchorage south of Ben Tre. While in transit both LSTs took various structures, bunkers, and other targets under fire along the South river bank. HARNETT COUNTY transferred its embarked units to the HUNTERDON COUNTY that same day. Having shut down her engines after 17 days of continuous running, HARNETT COUNTY found herself unable to light off her port engine, due to weak starting batteries. The transit into the My Tho River was made on the starboard engine alone. On 21 February HARNETT COUNTY succeeded in lighting off her port engine and began the passage to Sasebo, Japan for a much needed upkeep in accordance with COMSEVENTHFLT Quarterly Employment Schedule.

During the transit to Sasebo, Japan heavy seas and gale force winds were encountered. Topside damage was sustained during transit to antennas and ships radar.

During the month of March, HARNETT COUNTY was away from combat operations. She had just completed a 2100 mile passage to Sasebo, Japan from the Ham Luong River, RVN. A much awaited for RAV commenced with SRD, Sasebo, Japan after spending seven months on station in Vietnam. By the 24<sup>th</sup> of March all major work requests had been completed and HARNETT COUNTY made preparations for getting underway for Kaohsuing Harbor, Taiwan. The ship arrived at Kaohsuing Harbor on the 31st of March and began anticipating a return voyage to the Bassac River, RVN to relieve the USS JENNINGS COUNTY (LST-846).

The first of April found the ship moored at Chinese Pier Two, Kaohsuing, Taiwan. Four days later, after a needed rest and relaxation, HARNETT COUNTY got underway and began the final part of her voyage to Vietnam. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of April the ship was in Vung Tau Harbor to load supplies and ammunition. Two days later HARNETT COUNTY relieved JENNINGS COUNTY on station 1000 yards south of the Binh Thuy PBR base.

After assuming the PBR/ helo units, operations continued much the same as had occurred on the Ham Luong River. Support fire, stores replenishment, and daily shifting of anchorages was as routine as before.

May proved to be more eventful on station than the previous month. HARNETT COUNTY had become familiar with its operating area as well close liaison had been made with several units in Vinh Binh and Ba Xuyen provinces.

On 14 May while part of the crew was returning from a short liberty at Binh Thuy one of the crew fell overboard from the returning LCVP. COTA, Ernest K., 773 19 65, EN2, USN was presumed drowned after an unsuccessful search by all units for five hours.

River operations were temporarily stopped as HARNETT COUNTY made preparations for an UNREP with the USS GUADALUPE (AO-32) in the South China Sea. After receiving JP-5, helicopter fuel, HARNETT COUNTY returned to the Bassac River after midnight on 30 May.

During June HARNETT COUNTY made little use of her 40mm mounts. In all she was called on only three times for gun fire support.

On 19 June the 9<sup>th</sup> SEAL Platoon was embarked and used HARNETT COUNTY as a staging unit for their operations.

During a routine flight quarters on 16 October the LSE was forced to dive over the starboard side to avoid an uncontrolled tail rotor of Det 1, helo 323. No injury was sustained.

On 28 October the ship went to General Quarters at 0245 on the report of swimmers in the water 5000 yards north of anchorage. The ship got underway and no further sightings were made.

The months since leaving Sasebo, Japan were spent preparing for the next pending RAV with SRF Subic. On 1 November HARNETT COUNTY disembarked River Patrol Section 513 and HA(L) 3 Det 1 and was relieved on station by USS HUNTERDON COUNTY. That evening HARNETT COUNTY entered the South China Sea and was underway for Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. Five days later the ship moored alongside Rivera Point Pier 18, U. S. Naval Base, Subic Bay.

Much work was scheduled with SRF Subic and USS DIXIE (AD-14). Several delays, and poor coordination caused the ship to be delayed two weeks in leaving Subic Bay with a subsequent cancellation of R&R in Hong Kong. Despite the delay several important work requests were completed (see enclosure 4, Annex C for November).

During the RAV in Subic LCDR Kenneth J. WARDEN, USN relieved LT F. Wayne BROWN, USN, as Commanding Officer, USS HARNETT COUNTY.

On 4 December HARNETT COUNTY was underway for Vung Tau, RVN, with the expectation of continuing GALE WARDEN operations on the Ham Luong River. After arriving in Vung Tau on 9 December HARNETT COUNTY was advised of the cancellation of the Ham Luong patrol station. The ship was to be reassigned to Vam Co Dong (vicinity Ben Luc) in support of the new operation "GIANT SLINGSHOT", a patrol and interdiction effort along the two tributaries of the Vam Co River (Vam Co Tay and Vam Co Dong) all the way from their confluence south of Saigon almost to the Cambodian border on either side of the salient known as the "Parrots Beak".

After embarking COMRIVRCN 57 as CTU 194.9.0 and River Patrol Division 553 the ship began what was to be daily transits between the Ben Luc bridge vicinity and confluence of the Vam Co Dong and Vam Co Tay rivers. Each transit was made at General Quarters.

On 23 December while making what had become a routine transit, at 1730 to 1900, down river to an intermediate anchorage HARNETT COUNTY received five rounds of enemy B-40 rocket fire. 40mm gun mounts, .50 caliber and various small arms answered immediately and suppressed fire. The engagement occurred about 8 miles down river from Ben Luc on the Vam Co Dong and lasted about 4 minutes. There were no friendly casualties.

Upon making liaison with friendly units in the Ben Luc area, beginning construction of an underwater "concertina-wire" anti-swimmer net, and implementation of other security measures it was felt safe to remain anchored in the vicinity of the Ben Luc Bridge. At the year's end the ship felt reasonably safe enough to carry out its support role for River Patrol Divisions 553 and 593. Greater emphasis was placed on security which later was developed into Standing Night Orders (see enclosure (5)).

A tragedy marked the close of the year for HARNETT COUNTY. While on patrol, Commander River Squadron 57, LCDR Arthur J. ELLIOT, USN was killed by a B-40 round from an ambush site on the upper Vam Co Dong. The next day memorial services were held and LCDR C. J. PETERSON, USN assumed duties as CTG 194.9.0.

#### D. Operational Statistics

##### 1. Helicopter Recoveries:

a. January	314
b. February	153
c. March	---
d. April	215
e. May	295
f. June	282
g. July	318
h. August	250
i. September	280
j. October	260
k. November	5
l. December	<u>68</u>
Total	2440

##### 2. Ammunition expended by 40mm mounts

a. January	20,672
b. February	19,566
c. March	-----
d. April	2,078
e. May	8,107
f. June	1,568
g. July	584
h. August	2,343
i. September	1,330
j. October	420
k. November	---
l. December	<u>240</u>
Total	56,908

#### E. Logistics and Support

The year opened with many items in critical shortage and in high demand. The ship had exhausted its supply of 7.62 ammo and required a PBR run to relieve the shortage. Spare parts for PBRs still remained a serious problem as they had been in the past. The problem of parts was partly alleviated due to the PBR LSTs pooling resources where possible. Clothing was in short supply for many of the crew. A trip to Saigon by the Supply Officer obtained NAVSUPPACT Saigon's attention and a supply arrived via helicopter.

After continuous operation and little opportunity for maintenance, machinery performance began to deteriorate rapidly. It is felt even today that if a short availability were made in Vung Tau at periodic intervals major maintenance could be performed before casualties occurred.

The RAV in Sasebo, Japan in March provided HARNETT COUNTY an excellent opportunity to replenish supplies. FLEACTS Sasebo was extremely helpful in providing delivery of NC and NIS items. Material in most cases arrived within one or two weeks after requisitions were passed on to NSD, Yokosuka. The Navy Exchange tried its best to restock HARNETT COUNTY, however recent port calls by several aircraft carriers had depleted stocks.

Throughout the period prior to beginning Giant Slingshot operations the USS MARK (AKL-12), USS ERULE (AKL-28), YFR-889, and YFR-890 continued to replenish HARNETT COUNTY's supply; these units are primarily responsible for keeping the GAME WARDEN LSTs on station and able to continue their mission for extended periods of time.

The close of the 1968 Fiscal Year saw diminished OPTAR fund assets and heavy expenditures. Many items previously ordered resulted in cancellations from NAVSUPFACT, Saigon as a result of a vigorous follow up program.

After two months of relatively trouble free operation, HARNETT COUNTY saw an uncommonly large number of CASREPTS during October. The armature windings of the dishwater motor were grounded and had to be sent to SRF Subic. The three ton air-conditioning unit near the ships store was CASREPT for a refrigerant compressor. HARNETT COUNTY received two compressors immediately afterward but neither conformed to specifications of the D/C unit.

Relief from problems of fresh water manufacture came when the ship received a large diatomaceous earth water purifier with a rated 105 gallon per minute capacity. The installation was lacking an instruction booklet. Upon return to Giant Slingshot Operations from SRF Subic the engineering department made the unit operational and success in producing large quantities of water were existent throughout all of December.

A second ice cube maker arrived also in October. This with the previous unit satisfies the entire ship's consumption including all embarked units.

The PBR support division completed many of their outstanding jobs. These were:

1. All boats had trim tabs installed
2. All boats had draft markings completed
3. All boats have been completely refiberglassed and are in excellent material condition and appearance

[1968]

LESSONS LEARNED

... The rivers still posed a problem that was eventually solved by probing. Navigation aids are in most cases non-existent and required cooperation by everyone. The lack of charted maps and inaccurate tide tables required that the LCVP guide the ship up and down the channels until familiarity was established.

Security precautions at night were established that have been modified or added to to reflect the area of operation. The first of the year found HARNETT COUNTY following these measures:

1. Shift anchorage at least once every 24 hours
2. At night slack water rotate screws at least every half hour
3. Night illumination of the sides at the water line
4. Deck sentries employ high intensity flashlights
5. Use LCVP to patrol around the ship in a random pattern with chain dragging to cut command detonated leads

By the end of the year - particularly in light of experience gained in GIANT SLINGSHOT - a distillation of lessons learned was completed as a set of Standing Orders which embody a considerably larger, more exhaustive list of security measures (see enclosure 5).

After completion of a RAV in March with SRD, Sasebo it was found that much could be accomplished by detailed preparation and coordination with the repair facilities. Delays in work request submission caused delays and in some cases incompletion of work. A work package should where possible be completed well in advance to aid repair facilities in setting work schedules.

As a result of a VC ambush in August of HUNTERDON COUNTY, two .50 caliber machine guns were mounted on the bridge in the signal light tubs. The height allows a wide cover and fire area. Also to increase fire power a 81mm mortar was mounted on the O1 level port side. The train is limited by the replenishment ringing and welin davits. This was eventually replaced by two 81mm mortars mounted in the main deck port and starboard just forward of the flight deck. This location offers the widest train and is readily accessible.

It was thought that GAME WARDEN LSTs had finally realized their full potential as the year came to a close. HARNETT COUNTY was to learn otherwise as she began operations with "GIANT SLINGSHOT". Never before had an LST been inserted so far inland in a "river" which averages 200 meters in width. Greater stress was placed on her role as a support ship with two river divisions to serve in an area never operated in on a full scale as operation GIANT SLINGSHOT required. Hotel and restaurant activity assumed 24 hour importance. Additional riverine force assets such as Tango, Alfa, and Mine-sweep boats are always alongside requiring HARNETT COUNTY's valuable services. Coordinated efforts by the Navy, Army and Air Force demonstrate a unified effort in suppressing Viet Cong in South Vietnam. As a new year unfolds more potential and acceptance of amphibious bases demonstrated by HARNETT COUNTY will surely play a dominant role in the ending of the war.