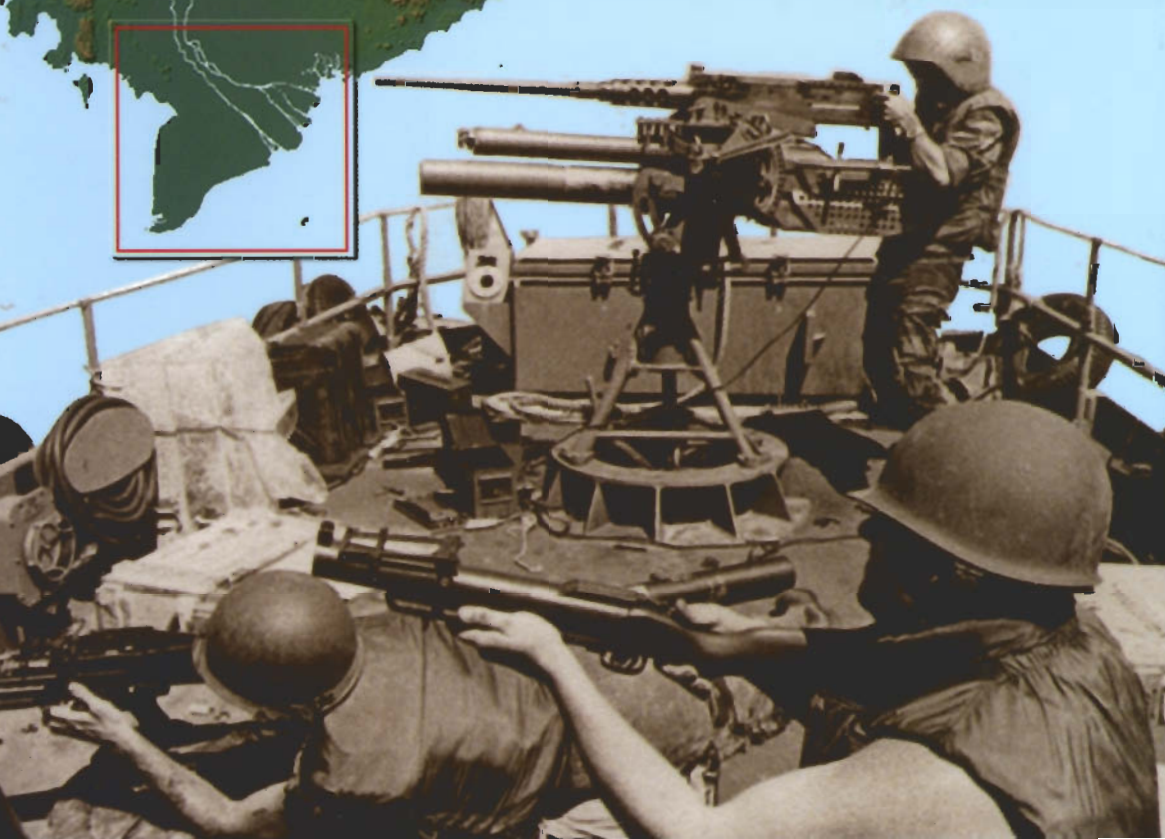


WAR ON THE RIVERS

**A Swift Boat Sailor's Chronicle
of the Battle for the Mekong Delta**

by Weymouth D. Symmes



SYMMES



The crew of PCF 56 in 1969 (l-r): Ed "Tex" Stokes, Gary Alexander, Bill Franke, Tam, Tony Gisclair and unidentified sailor.

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WAR ON THE RIVERS

THIS IS A STORY about sailors, and one sailor in particular, asked to do extraordinary things and make great sacrifices during the Vietnam War.

It's the story about how these sailors, many of whom should have been thinking about their senior prom instead of slugging it out with North Vietnamese regulars, prepared for war and fought with courage. In the process they were transformed from adolescents into hardened men with insights about life and war and survival that few will ever have.

Finally, this is a story of river patrol boats in Vietnam, the Swift boats, and the true American heroes that manned them.

Fought on the canals and rivers of the Mekong Delta, this was a private, dirty little war waged beyond the view of the cameras of the news services and often even beyond the view of the senior military command. It was a furious, savage war, where firefights often occurred twice a day, rarely less than once, and hand-to-hand combat was not unheard of. Hundreds of men were killed on both sides, and the survivors were scarred for life.

—Bill Franke, Operations and Tactical Commander of a Swift task group in Vietnam, while there he received the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Cross of Gallantry



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WAR ON THE RIVERS

COMBAT IN THE MEKONG DELTA is realistically and dramatically told in the pages of this memoir of the Vietnam War. The story follows the author's four-year enlistment in the U.S. Navy, starting with boot camp in 1966, then two tours aboard an aircraft carrier conducting combat air operations against North Vietnam during 1967-68.

The narrative shifts to Swift boat training in Coronado, Calif., and service aboard a riverine craft patrolling the Delta in 1969.

The final portion of the book considers how the warrior adjusts to civilian life, and his eventual reunion with others who served.

Although written from the perspective of the enlisted man, this chronicle also follows unfolding events in the outside world as the sailors aboard the Swift boats were fighting their own private war.

Recurring themes throughout the book relate to the meaning of courage, the impact of military service on character, and the consequences resulting from the intersection of fate and life.

Finally, there is an analysis of the meaning of Vietnam, and how it resonates in our own time.

ON THE COVER: Ready for battle on the stern of a Swift boat. In the foreground a sailor with an M-79 grenade launcher. On the deck a gunner mans an M-60 machine gun. In the background a gunner mans an over-and-under .50 caliber machine gun/81mm mortar. U.S. NAVY PHOTO

About the Author



Wey Symmes

WEYMOUTH D. SYMMES was born in Helena, Mont., in 1946. He was raised in Lewistown and Billings, Mont. In 1966 he enlisted in the United States Navy. During his service he spent two years aboard the USS *Ticonderoga* and one year on Swift boats in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam.

Honorably discharged in 1970, Symmes was awarded the Purple Heart Medal, Combat Action Ribbon, Presidential Unit Citation for Extraordinary Heroism, two Navy Unit Commendations, the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation (Gallantry Cross), and other awards.

Symmes married Terry Persson Symmes in 1970. He attended the University of Montana and received a bachelor's degree in 1973 and a master's degree in 1975 in Political Science. He entered the banking business in 1975, eventually working for Montana Bank of South Missoula and First Security Bank of Missoula. He retired from First Security as Senior Vice President in 1999.

Symmes was the treasurer for the Montana State Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and the first treasurer of the Swift Boat Sailor's Association.

Symmes and his wife Terry, with their Black Labrador Retriever Darby and cat Cosby, split their time between Mohave Valley, Ariz., and Missoula, Mont.



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BY WEYMOUTH D. SYMMES

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