

COAST GUARD OVER-UNDER WEAPONS ★ DEFENSE AT KHE SANH

# VIETNAM

*Camp Carroll*

## MARINE DEFENDERS AT THE DMZ

101st Airborne vs.  
Viet Cong at An Ninh

New Insights  
Into the Gulf of  
Tonkin Incident

*Return to Vietnam:*  
A GENERAL'S  
PERSONAL  
JOURNEY

AUGUST 1997

U.S.: \$3.99; CAN.: \$4.99

RETAILER: Display Until August 25



# VIETNAM



U.S. COAST GUARD

## 6 EDITORIAL

### 8 FIGHTING FORCES

"Vietnamization" was the mission, and ACTOV was the U.S. Navy's solution.

By *R. Blake Dunnavent*

### 10 ARSENAL

The Coast Guard's piggy-back mortar/machine-gun combination proved its worth in Vietnam.

By *William R. Wells, II*

### 12 PERSONALITY

Fong Nguyen believes a series of miracles brought him safely from Saigon to San Antonio.

By *Arthur Santana*

### 50 REVIEWS

The Vietnam War was lost in Washington, D.C., even before it started.

By *Colonel H.G. Summers, Jr.*

### 58 PERSPECTIVES

The North Vietnamese Army failed to capitalize on the vulnerability of Khe Sanh's water supply.

By *Peter Brush*

### 63 VIETNAM

#### MARKETPLACE

## 18 SHEDDING NEW LIGHT ON THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT

By *Captain Ronnie E. Ford, U.S. Army*

With fresh evidence now available, claims that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was deliberately provoked gain new plausibility.

## 26 BIG GUNS OF CAMP CARROLL

By *Peter Brush*

U.S. strategy for the defense of the DMZ called for interlocking bands of artillery fire, and the firebase at Camp Carroll was the linchpin.

## 34 MUTUAL SURPRISE AT AN NINH

By *Colonel Thomas E. Faley, Jr., U.S. Army (ret.)*

Outmanned and outgunned, the 101st Airborne paratroopers were fighting for their lives.

## 42 REFLECTIONS ON A LOST WAR

As told by *Maj. Gen. John E. Murray, U.S. Army (ret.)*

"Twenty years ago I wanted a rematch," says General John Murray. "But now I look at America's involvement as a re-engagement in the interest of freedom."

**Above:** Mounted on U.S. Coast Guard patrol boats such as *Point Hudson*, the dual purpose 81mm mortar/.50-caliber machine gun was used to illuminate and hunt down enemy vessels (story, P. 10).

**Cover:** U.S. Marines on a search-and-destroy mission along the Demilitarized Zone between Camp Carroll and Khe Sanh fire a 3.5-inch rocket launcher at a suspected enemy position in 1968. Camp Carroll was a crucial link in a network of firebases constructed close to the border between North and South Vietnam (story, P. 26).  
Cover: U.S. Marine Corps

# 'Vietnamization' was the mission as the U.S. withdrawal began, and ACTOV was the U.S. Navy's solution.

By R. Blake Dunnavent

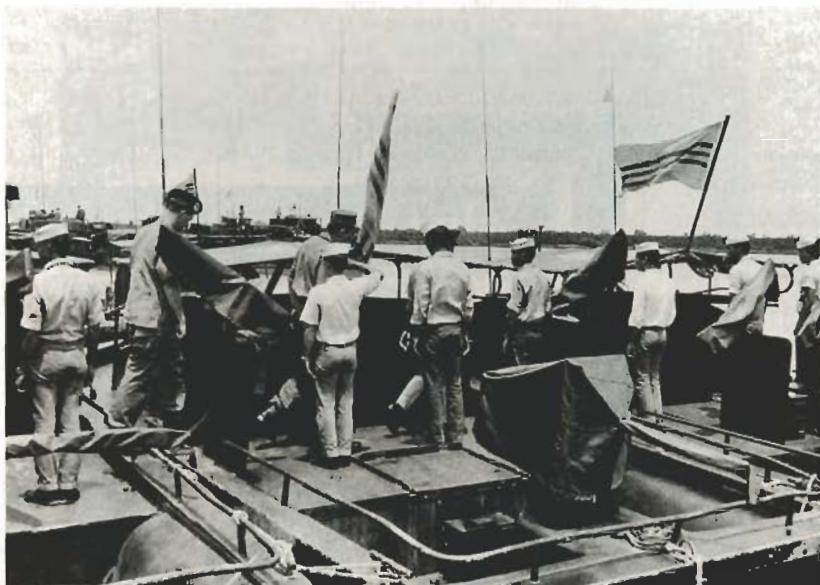
When Vice Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., became commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, in September 1968, he established a plan to have the Navy adopt an offensive role in the war. The U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Navy joined forces in SEALORDS (Southeast Asia Lake, Ocean, River, Delta Strategy) to cut enemy supply lines from Cambodia and attack enemy base areas in the Mekong Delta and other waterways. The operation involved placing patrol "barriers," including electronic sensors, along waterways.

The United States wanted the South Vietnamese to eventually assume full responsibility for carrying out the missions. Following the initial SEALORDS missions, subsequent operations were shaped to enable the Vietnamese Navy to take over command as American naval forces withdrew.

The plan to transfer responsibility of SEALORDS operations to the South Vietnamese emerged during an October 1968 meeting between General Creighton W. Abrams, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and his senior military leaders. Admiral Zumwalt presented the U.S. Navy's plan, dubbed "Accelerated Turnover to the Vietnamese" (ACTOV), which entailed the incremental transfer of the U.S. Navy's river and coastal combatant fleet in Vietnam to the South Vietnamese, along with the logistic support establishment.

Zumwalt recommended a staggering increase in South Vietnamese naval personnel to carry out ACTOV. The South Vietnamese Navy's total manpower numbered about 18,000 in 1968. The admiral asked for 23,391 in 1969; 28,414 in 1970; and 30,221 in 1971.

Responsibility for carrying out this complex task fell upon the members of the U.S. Naval Advisory Group. These naval advisers



Vietnamese and American personnel on board a "nest" of river patrol boats during ceremonies transferring the boats to the South Vietnamese Navy. While the accelerated turnover of operations had its critics, it was a vital component of Vietnamization.

U.S. NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER

had operated with the South Vietnamese Navy since the late 1950s and would continue to do so until the end of American involvement. The advisers would teach the Vietnamese how to maintain, supply and operate their rapidly growing naval force and also assist in integrating U.S. and Vietnamese operations to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Initially, the Vietnamese recruits attended one of the naval training centers located at Nha Trang, Cam Ranh Bay or Saigon that provided instruction in the necessary technical skills such as electronics or engine repair. Saigon was also the site of the Small Boat School. The 12-week training course included instruction at an English-language school designed to teach the Vietnamese the few basic English words necessary to understand PBR (patrol boat, river) operating procedures. Trainees then used this information during on-the-job training aboard a PBR.

Prior to the inception of ACTOV, the South Vietnamese Navy had already independently operated PCFs (patrol craft, fast), along with other river and coastal craft, and had conducted patrols during Operation Market Time coastal surveillance and riverine operations. Although ACTOV was not officially accepted by the Pentagon

until February 12, 1969, this did not delay Zumwalt's command from implementing some of his plans immediately. Zumwalt instructed the riverine commander, or "First Sea Lord," Captain Robert S. Salzer, in December 1968 that "[South Vietnamese] PCFs be employed by themselves in incursions in the Gulf of Thailand AO [area of operations]." He also ordered the integration of South Vietnamese naval forces with U.S. naval forces in the future.

The first turnover of U.S. equipment occurred on February 1, 1969, and consisted of 25 river craft. The South Viet-

namese Navy split these boats into two units: River Assault and Interdiction divisions (RAIDs) 70 and 71. The RAID missions would be similar to the river assault and interdiction operations carried out earlier by the U.S. Navy in the Mekong Delta. Following thorough training about the area of operations and rules of engagement, RAIDs 70 and 71 began patrolling rivers bordering Cambodia.

Due to the length of time it took to turn over complete units, Zumwalt decided to implement on-the-job training. Each Vietnamese sailor trained side by side with his American counterpart for two to 12 months. After the Vietnamese seaman acquired the training necessary to assume the American's duties, the U.S. sailor was rotated home. This procedure continued until the entire crew was Vietnamese except the captain, who remained for a time as an adviser until he was also replaced. After the last American departed, the craft was officially turned over to the South Vietnamese Navy.

In May 1969, the U.S. Naval Advisory Group established Project START (swift training and rapid turnover) to instruct the Vietnamese how to operate PCFs. Meanwhile, additional river assault craft were

*Continued on page 62*

## □ FIGHTING FORCES □

*Continued from page 8*

transferred to the South Vietnamese Navy, which created more RAIDs. In subsequent years, the South Vietnamese formed river interdiction divisions—composed of river assault craft, and river patrol groups, which primarily encompassed PBRs—to prepare for the impending turnover of American naval operations.

On July 10, Captain C.F. Rauch, senior naval adviser to the South Vietnamese Navy, sent a letter to every in-country naval adviser in which he identified several potential problems and explained how to cope with them. The first point was “to offer advice without portraying an air of superiority.” He suggested that the advisers think of themselves as members of the U.S. president’s cabinet. Like a cabinet member, Rauch said, the advisers must always remember that they were only giving advice, not making decisions. Second, he wanted the South Vietnamese Navy to be trained to take over the U.S. Navy operation without “Americanizing” them. Third, the South Vietnamese Navy was to operate more freely but not to the point where the U.S. Navy could not analyze its strengths and weaknesses. The last point alluded to expediting the ACTOV program as quickly and with as much patience as possible.

The naval advisers promptly put Captain Rauch’s advice into practice. In the START program, for example, the advisers color-coded engine room pipe systems and used arrows to indicate which way the liquid was flowing to help train the Vietnamese crews.

In August 1969, an ACTOV logistics program was started to provide on-the-job training to the Vietnamese, in preparation for their assumption of all work in the repair departments. Essentially, this program centered on turning over existing U.S. naval bases and building 33 planned new bases. Then, in November, an ACTOV communications program was introduced that focused on the turnover of all U.S. Navy communications electronics assets, hardware and software (such as doctrine, concepts and procedures) to the South Vietnamese.

By 1970, the South Vietnamese Navy had entire naval units under its command. On March 7, as part of the sequential turnover plan, the South Vietnamese Navy assumed command of its first operation. The same day, a new program superseded ACTOV. Entitled ACTOV-X, the program’s goal was to turn over all remaining small combatant craft to the Vietnamese by December 1970. Moreover, it set the South Vietnamese Navy’s personnel ceiling at 39,611, a considerable increase from its former strength.

In addition to the ACTOV logistics and communications programs, there was the

ACTOV intelligence program, which instructed the South Vietnamese to gather and disseminate large amounts of intelligence. Another program involved the Vietnamization of special warfare activities by SEALs (sea-air-land commandos), explosive ordnance disposal personnel and others.

The South Vietnamese Navy was becoming increasingly involved in combat roles, and Americans had faith in its capabilities. On May 9, 1970, the South Vietnamese contributed to the allied invasion of Cambodia. The mission was to "establish and ensure the security of the Mekong River from the Cambodian border to the capital, Phnom Penh, and to assist in the evacuation of refugees." Due to the success of this joint operation and the need to prevent enemy attacks on merchant shipping and to continue evacuating refugees, the South Vietnamese continued to furnish river craft to protect convoys along the Mekong River to Phnom Penh until 1974.

With the transfer of operational control to the Vietnamese increasing, South Vietnamese Chief of Naval Operations Rear Adm. Tran Van Chon assumed command of two-thirds of the riverine and coastal operations on July 1, 1970. Following the December 1970 turnover of all the U.S. Navy's Brown Water Fleet, which consisted of 293 PBRs, 224 river assault craft and 107 PCFs, the South Vietnamese Navy undertook responsibility for the last U.S. naval operation in April 1971. The ACTOV logistics program continued, however, until the end of 1971.

As the ACTOV programs were successfully introduced, U.S. naval personnel either transferred to other assignments abroad or went home. The program's effectiveness is apparent in the number of U.S. sailors who left Vietnam. In 1968, 38,083 naval officers and enlisted men served in Southeast Asia; two years later only 16,757 remained. In January 1973, U.S. Navy manpower totaled 1,413, and by the end of February their numbers had decreased to 576. Following the disestablishment of U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, in March, only five U.S. naval officers remained on watch in Vietnam.

When the U.S. naval force stood down in 1973, nothing remained from the ACTOV program save paperwork in filing cabinets. The rivers and canals of South Vietnam's Mekong Delta, which had been the scene of American naval effort since the beginning of the American involvement—initially as advisers, later bearing the principal burden of the efforts, and finally as teachers and advisers once more during the final months—were then patrolled exclusively by the South Vietnamese Navy.

But was ACTOV a success? The answer lies in the strategy of the American withdrawal. Militarily, the United States needed a sufficient amount of time to withdraw

