

MPs Make Waves



The signal is given and the five men of each boat called jump into action. Engines are started, lines are cast off and the boats swing into the channel. For an hour-and-a-half the boats "highball" at 32 knots, all the way to Saigon. The two radios on board squawk out commands; one from headquarters in Vung Tau, the other used as communications between the two boats on the mission. A Vietnamese Military Policeman (Quan Canh), and a Vietnamese National Policeman (Canh Sat) stand beside the 40 millimeter grenade launcher. A US military policeman mans the twin .50 caliber machine guns in the bow while the boat engineer stands ready behind the rear .50. The boat storms towards its rendezvous point with other boats of the same company; the coxswain steering his craft along a prescribed route . . .

The many problems of maritime warfare in South Vietnam, including the protection of ships on the rivers, protecting water terminal facilities and assisting in the overall waterway security may have been solved by the 18th Military Police Brigade with the activation of an innovative unit. Never before has the Army had a patrol boat company as an integral unit. This is also the first time that a transportation company has been assigned to a military police brigade. This new "policy joins five men and a boat—a new and exciting team—the crew of the military police PBRs (Patrol Boats, River).

In April 1968, the Army received the first ten craft of a proposed boat company. They were delivered to Vung Tau on the WWII victory ship *Mercer Victory*. Vung Tau, located 110 jeep-miles southeast of Saigon, a half-hour flight by plane, had been designated outfitting headquarters for the PBRs. Assigned to the 458th Transportation Company (PBR), and under the direct operational control of the 18th Military Police Brigade, the ten boats were outfitted and ready to go in less than two weeks.

A great deal of work had to be accomplished before the PBRs were seaworthy and ready for duty. The craft had to be outfitted with weapons, engines had to be tuned, and uninitiated Army crews had to be trained and cross-trained so that they could meet any emergency.

The coxswains and engineers, billeted at Cat Lo, the outfitting headquarters for Vung Tau, received their initial training at Mare Island Naval Base in California. Six vigorous weeks of hard work were spent in learning the skills that make the difference between a safe and unsafe mission on the waterways of Vietnam. When these men came to Cat Lo, it was their job to not only outfit the new craft, but to also train crews for the next shipment of PBRs from the states.

The combined military police forces, who were to provide security aboard the PBRs, also had to be trained.

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MPs MAKE WAVES *Continued*

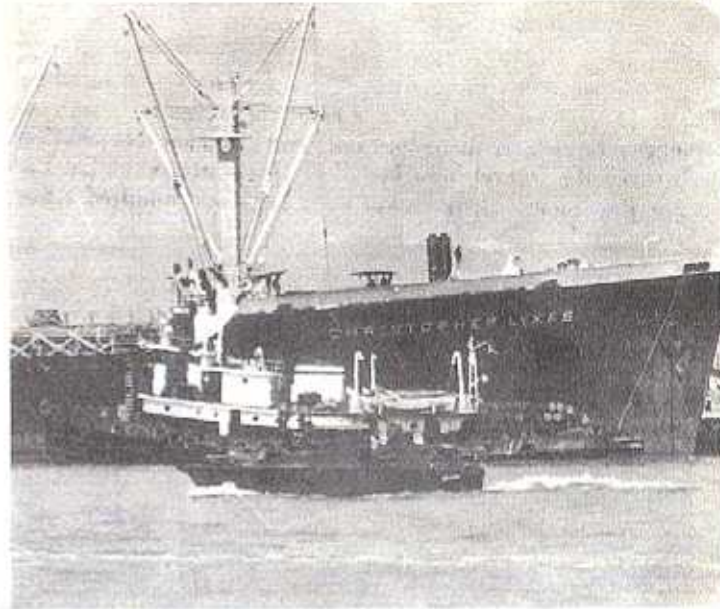
The MPs, Quan Canh, and Canh Sats assigned to the PBRs had to attend two weeks of highly informative classes before they could take part in any of the missions. Their training included courses in map reading, hydrographical chart interpretation, weaponry, communications (to include all electronic equipment aboard), vessel operations, "rules of the road," and basic seamanship. Taught by highly trained personnel with many years experience, who are assigned to the 458th, these courses fill the requirements needed to make a PBR mission successful. When their training is completed, the policemen, be they US or Vietnamese, are cross-trained so thoroughly that they can take over any job on the craft at a moment's notice.

Entire crews not only had to be trained, but the capabilities of the PBRs had to be tested as to their effectiveness. Extensive "shake-down" missions were conducted and crews were kept at-the-ready, 24 hours a day.

Innovation is the key to the Army's new PBRs, the first in what is expected to be a line of new river patrol craft in South Vietnam. The boats are 32 feet in length, seven and one-half feet high at the canopy, and almost 12 feet across the beam. Powered by two V6 220 hp Diesel engines, the PBRs can run at up to 32 knots, close to 35 miles per hour.

The boat itself is a modified version of the type the Navy has used in South Vietnam since the early 1960s. It is propelled by two water jet-propulsion pumps which displace more than 10,000 gallons of water per minute (in two powerful eruptions at the stern). Another innovation is the lack of any type of keel, giving the craft much more maneuverability. By turning either the port or starboard engine in full reverse while the other is left at full ahead, the boat can turn 180 degrees in its own length. Thus, the boat, while at full speed, can turn completely around and

SP4 James A. Jones, Jr., a member of the 458th Transportation Company (PBR), 18th Military Police Brigade, prepares his electronically operated twin .50 caliber machine guns prior to a fire mission on the Nha Ba River.



Dwarfed by the giant vessels of Saigon Harbor, PBRs of the 458th perform one of their designated duties of patrolling the Saigon/Newport area.

go in the opposite direction in just thirty-one feet. Even more amazing is the fact that the boat can "dead-stop" from full speed in 32 feet. This can be accomplished because the water jet-propulsion pumps have gates, which, when closed, redirect the outgoing streams of water in the opposite direction.

The physical capabilities of the new PBRs have brought immediate acknowledgment from the men who work on the boats. "When the Army said these PBRs were fast, as well as maneuverable, they meant it," says SP4 James A. Jones, Jr., a marine engine mechanic with the 458th. "From my experiences with these boats, especially the engines and pumps, running at anything but 'wide open' is a waste of superior equipment."

As far as armament capabilities, the PBR is the epitome of firepower. There are three .50 caliber machine guns, two M-79 grenade launchers, one MK-18 grenade launcher (that will cover the area the size of a football field with 24 deadly grenades in ten seconds), three M-16 rifles, and a .45 caliber pistol for each crewmember. All this is wrapped into a nice, tidy, 31-foot package—the PBR.

Although armament and maneuverability are the PBR's "number one" selling point, the boats are also well-equipped electronically. Two AN/VRC-46 radios, one for command purposes and one for operational purposes, between supporting or supported forces on a mission, are on board. In addition, the boats have an intercom system between the coxswain and forward gunner. Important to night operations is the up-to-date radar unit aboard and the "Nancy Beacon" light used to send morse code messages without detection.

The PBRs have been fortunate to receive considerable assistance from units of both the Navy and Coast Guard who are stationed at some of the same installations.

The boat crews at Cat Lo, where docks, fuel and equipment for the PBRs are located, hold the Navy in high esteem. Says WO Ernest E. Godwin, who heads the Army's



Maintenance Division for the PBR's at the docks of Cat Lo, "Navy Commander Roy Lanphear, who is head of the Cat Lo Naval Support Activity here has done an outstanding job in providing housing, messing and maintenance facilities for us. If there had not been complete cooperation between the several branches of service stationed at Cat Lo, our first months here would have been one hundred times as hectic."

What does the future hold in store for the PBRs of the 458th? Only time will tell. With boats patrolling the waters of Qui Nhon in the North, the Vung Tau area in the South, and the port areas of the Saigon and Long Binh areas, to include 14 locations throughout II and III Corps, the port areas of South Vietnam will definitely be safer and far more secure. Community relations and civic action programs in the coastal areas will definitely be improved because of the added security. And the cooperation between our men and the military personnel of Vietnam will bring a greater understanding between American and Vietnamese. But the immediate, gratifying results are plain—a more secure US supply system and a safer means of transportation for those Vietnamese who depend so heavily on the coastal waterways for their existence.



The men of the 458th Transportation Company secure their PBR at the docks at Cat Lo after a day-long mission on the Saigon River.