

The Riverine Reporter

Sea Tigers Association

A publication of the US Army 458th Trans. Co (PBR)

**Summer
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Editor Mike Hebert

Greetings to all former 458th members, associated Military Police members, and our new-found friends of the Mid-Atlantic GameWardens. This is a special online only addendum extra to the July 2014 Newsletter.

Sit Rep: Riv-Ron 4

Everyone has days now and then that they just chalk up as being "one of the best." Saturday, July 26, 2014 proved to be one of those special, memorable, once-in-a-lifetime events that I will never forget. The GameWardens Mid-Atlantic Chapter and the crews of PBR 721 and PBR 6927 hosted a Shrimp Boil at Pelican Marina in Camden, NC for the sailors of Coastal Riverine Squadron 4, based at JEB Little Creek-Fort Story, VA. The squadron was in transit to a base in North Carolina for a training mission and had arrange to spend the night in Camden.

The GameWardens graciously extended an invitation to members of the 458th. Tom Farrell, myself, and my cousin-in-law, Norman Beaver showed up at Dennis Ambruso's house just after noon on Saturday. (We heard they had free beer!) Dennis, Dave Pizzoferrato, and Chief Pat Doyle were busy making preparations for the upcoming event.

After stopping by the cooler for beer, we were taken out to the massive workshop in Dennis's backyard and given the grand guided tour of PBR 721. Unfortunately, it was out the water for the Riv-Ron 4 event, due to some hull blistering. It has been repaired though, and Dennis plans to have the boat back in the water in a week or so.



PBR 721

It is difficult to describe the feeling of climbing aboard a PBR after so many, many years. It was kind of like going home. I climbed into the coxswain's flat and felt like I was 19 again.

Everything was just the same as I remembered it – with one exception. The radar on this boat really works!



Coxswain's Flat

Dennis has done a masterful restoration job on PBR 721. The craftsmanship is flawless. Especially impressive is the creation of props and shafts housed in respective tunnels in lieu of jet-drive units, which Dennis states were “simply too expensive”. Performance isn't negatively affected by any large degree, and maintenance is greatly reduced, especially since PBR 721 occasionally operates in salt water.



Stbd. Shaft and Rudder of PBR 721



Aft .50 Caliber Machine Gun

The .50 caliber machine guns are fired using a propane system. We listened to several very amusing stories of Dennis running “afoul of the law” when he had his boat up in Connecticut. His heavily-armed PBR caused quite a stir among local law enforcement!



Bow of PBR 721

Tom Farrell and I spent quite a while crawling around, inspecting things, and generally re-

acquainting ourselves with this wonderful craft of a war gone by.



Tom Farrell – back in the saddle!



Mike Hebert



Detroit Diesel 6V53

Dennis lifted the engine hatches to reveal a pair of pristine 6V53's, painted in the standard Detroit Diesel green. It brought back fond memories of days when I would sit on the deck and watch Lou Baumann work his magic with our engines in Vung Ro Bay. Yesteryear came

creeping back slowly as we toured this fine craft.



L to R: Mike Hebert, Tom Farrell, Dave Pizzoferrato, Dennis Ambruso, Chief Pat Doyle

Stopping by the cooler again, we finished up our tour and proceeded to head out to the Pelican Marina, just a few miles up the road.

The GameWardens had set up quite a feast at the small marina on the Elizabeth City causeway. In addition to the Shrimp Boil, the meal included an outstanding pulled pork BBQ (*who is responsible for that!*), cole slaw, potato salad, baked beans (which the Chief kept neglecting to stir!), and an assortment of snacks, and, of course – beer. PBR, naturally - Pabst Blue Ribbon!



L to R: Dave Pizzoferrato and Chief Pat Doyle

The Navy's new Riverine Patrol Boats were scheduled to arrive at 4:00 pm. A couple of their senior members, Chief David Mills and Force Master Chief Jeff Covington arrived by private vehicle. We waited, drank some beer,

waited some more, drank some more beer. (They didn't drink beer – we did!) News filtered down that they had experienced an engineering casualty. More beer.

Finally, at around 6:30 pm, someone using binoculars spotted four small dots on the horizon. In less time than it took to drink a beer, they were upon us. Incredible!

Riv-Ron 4 pulling into Pelican Marina

As the boats got closer, the awesome potential of these craft became quite evident. All the weapons had been removed. "Didn't want to scare anybody," one Chief commented. It didn't really matter, though. All one had to do was look at this craft close-up and it became quite evident that this was a machine you wouldn't want to tangle with – not under any circumstances!



Riv-Ron 4 arriving



Riverine Command Boat



Riverine Command Boat (RCB)



Riverine Command Boat – different color, still bad!



I regret, in hindsight, not inquiring as to the different color of the two RCB's in attendance. I would have assumed that, like our PBR's, they would all have been the same color.

Built by SAFE Boats of Bremerton, Washington these Swedish-designed are used by several other nations around the world. The bow and hull are built of reinforced material allowing the

craft to beach not only on sand but also on rocky shores if needed.

Master Chief Covington explained that the boats were equipped with “kickstands”, which, when deployed, would permit the craft to sit in the well deck of a LPD, LHA, or other assault ship. They simply dropped down under the RCB and after the water was pumped out of the well deck of the host ship, the RCB’s would be high and dry, resting on their stands, ready for transport to a combat zone.



RCB “Kickstands”

The RCB’s were unbelievably quiet as they pulled into the marina. I had been expecting something much more aggressive, but I suppose in this day and age of stealthiness, “silence is golden”. The boats made their way into their respective slips, the young boat captains barking orders to their crews. (*Ahh, the good old days!*)



RCB Boat Captain

The four boats tied up in their slips and all crews disembarked to enjoy the feast provided by the GameWardens Association. A line formed very quickly where the food was being served. I imagine these poor guys were ready for dinner, especially after being more than two hour late for the event. The hungry sailors ate with gusto, unfortunately unable to partake of any beloved PBR brews, since they were still on duty! (*Hey! SOMEBODY had to drink it!*)



Squeezing an RCB into the slip!



Chow Time! (Does the Navy call it that?)

Anyway, the day was fast approaching dusk. The boat crews all seemed to enjoy their feast, everyone appeared finished. A cry from the dock declared “Anyone wanna go for a ride?”

Are you kidding me? My hand was the first one up!

The RCB’s had the bow ramp lowered, which permitted very quick egress to Navy Seals or other Special Warfare types. I spoke with a sailor who told me that this craft has the ability

to hit the beach, offload 15 fully-outfitted Special Warfare troops, and back off the beach in less time than you can blink an eye. An exaggeration, for sure, but you get the idea!

I eagerly scampered aboard the boat, determined not to get left behind. I made my way through the below-decks cabin and past the head, (*Yes – a head!*). A passageway split the coxswains flat. I looked up above me to view the aircraft-style cockpit complete with a fancy steering wheel that looked like it might be more at home in BMW. Two very plush operator seats were placed on either side of the divided passageway. Making my way towards the stern door I was very surprised to find a very large room below decks. Seating for 15 lined both sides of the vessel. A corner was crammed full of electronics gear. Special type doors at the bow and stern sealed against any type of chemical warfare attack.



Lowered Bow Ramp

I went out on the stern and managed to find a spot up on deck, next to a tripod device, covered up with a tarp!

I wonder what the hell is under that!

I had spoken with Master Chief Covington earlier. He told me that all of the weapons and associated systems had been removed prior to the boats departing Virginia. Apparently, the boats are capable of delivering some very sophisticated firepower to the enemy. It was very interesting listening to him. He chose his words very, very carefully, being sure not to tell

me anything I shouldn't know. (*That way he wouldn't have to kill me!*)

The boats are capable of mounting weapons in six locations, including a remote-controlled .50 caliber machine gun mounted behind the cockpit. All six weapons mounts include electrical fixtures to allow the use of mini guns. Optional weaponry includes grenade launchers, a mortar tube, and Hellfire missiles.

One of the crewmen opened the engine hatch for us to get a good look at the twin turbo Swedish-built Scania engines that provided speeds, we were told, in excess of 40 knots. (*Probably quite a bit in excess!*)



Scania Twin Turbo Engines

So, finally, with all on board, the boats headed out into the Pasquotank River. The other RCB was already out in the middle of the river as we departed the dock. I was still amazed at how quite these craft were!

The boat coxswain steered the craft out into the river then I heard the boat captain yell "Hold On!"

All hell broke loose! The skipper jammed the throttles forward and the boat jumped up out the water and took off!

What a hoot! Hoo-yah!!!

We skimmed across the water at an incredible speed! I won't estimate a guess – in fear for my life (*Classified, you know!*)

Anyway, the two RCB's sped back and forth, up and down the Pasquotank River, for the better part of 45 minutes. We performed various maneuvers, turns, and quick-stops. It reminded me so much of the good old days on our PBR's - except these guys didn't crash into any buoys.

It was a thrilling ride – just absolutely thrilling! My wife told me, upon my return home that night, that this was one of those days that I'll never, ever forget. She was correct!



GamesWardens Shrimp Boil, prepared by Lawton (Possum) Ellis and wife Naomi



The Coxswain's Flat!



RCB Crews, Mike Hebert & Tom Farrell



Chief Pat Doyle's Shirt

In closing, I'd like to extend a very sincere "Thank You" to Dennis Ambruso, David Pizzoferrato, Chief Pat Doyle, Lt. Cortez, Master Chief Jeff Covington, Chief David Mills, and the crews of Riv-Ron 4!

Also, a very special thanks to Mike Taylor, manager of the Pelican Marina, for taking the time and effort to make sure everything went the way it was supposed to go!

All in all, it was a superb adventure – just absolutely superb!

And y'know... thinking about it... I guess those
Navy guys aren't so bad after all!

Mike Hebert