

## Preface

*The true rule for the Military is to seize such property as is needed for Military uses and reasons, and let the rest alone.*

—President Abraham Lincoln in a letter to Joseph J. Reynolds,  
dated January 20, 1865.

*Lying offshore, ready to act, the presence of ships and Marines sometimes means much more than just having air power or ship's fire, when it comes to deterring a crisis. And the ships and Marines may not have to do anything but lie offshore. It is hard to lie offshore with a C-141 or C-130 full of airborne troops.*

—Gen. Colin Powell, U. S. Army, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff,  
during Operation DESERT STORM.

*Simply stated the mission of the Squadron is the transportation of Marines and their equipment. However, this includes assault landings and the use of helicopters for vertical envelopment. It requires the constant exercise of much skill and endurance by all hands. Elements of the Squadron are constantly on call to serve in amphibious operations whether they are in the United States or in the Western Pacific.*

—U.S. Navy Public Affairs statement regarding  
Amphibious Squadron Three.<sup>1</sup>

The Halldorson brothers, Michael and Alan—both Navy veterans of the Vietnam War—are partially responsible for this book, and its predecessor and companion, *On the Gunline*. Mike, who authored *Navy Daze: Coming of Age in the 1960s Aboard a Navy Destroyer*, once asked me, “When are you going to write a book about destroyers?” The result was a book devoted to the 270 U.S. Navy combatant ships, and four Royal Australian Navy destroyers, that served on the gunline during the Vietnam War. I later met Alan, who served aboard the USS *Caddo Parish* (LST-515) and USS *Iredell County* (LST-839) in the dangerous, confined inland waters of the Republic of Vietnam. After acknowledging our work pertaining to destroyers, he posed the question, “Where are all the books on amphibious ships?”

Alan’s two tank landing ships were old, World War II veterans, commissioned in January and December 1944, respectively. The destroyer USS *Hopenell* (DD-681), which Mike served aboard off the Vietnam coast, was even older, commissioned in September 1943. One

duty which the brothers shared (Mike off the South Vietnamese coast providing gunfire support for allied ground forces, and Alan running rivers in South Vietnam delivering food, ammunition and other materiel to river ports) was assignment to gun mounts. The chief difference was that warships normally only set General Quarters and manned gun mounts before fire missions. “Gators” in confined inland waters did so whenever the possibility of attack existed; while passing close enough to a river bank to come under enemy automatic weapons, recoilless rifle, rocket-propelled grenade, or small arms fire—and sometimes when beached, berthed, or anchored handling cargo.

Photo Preface-1



Alan Halldorson standing next to the forward 40mm mount aboard the USS *Caddo Parish* (LST-515) on 22 November 1968. The tank landing ship was beached at Dong Tam, South Vietnam, to deliver cargo.

Courtesy of Alan Halldorson

## **LARGE NUMBERS OF GATORS SERVED IN VIETNAM**

Likely few Americans are aware of the numbers of amphibious ships that served in Vietnam during the war in Southeast Asia. There was ample newspaper and television coverage of aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf carrying out Rolling Thunder bombing missions, and of cruisers and destroyers off the coast shelling enemy positions ashore, but not much of the activities of the gators. Of the 142 amphibious

ships deployed at various times to the war zone, 62 (44 percent) were LSTs (tank landing ships).

Quantities by Ship Type	Quantities by Ship Type
4 AGC/LCC (amphibious force command ship)	4 IFS (inshore fire support ship)
12 AKA/LKA (amphibious cargo ship)	7 LPD (amphibious transport dock)
15 APA (attack transport)	8 LPH (amphibious assault ship)
3 APB (self-propelled barracks ship)	18 LSD (dock landing ship)
3 APD (high speed transport)	62 LST (tank landing ship)
5 ARL (landing craft repair ship)	

Twenty-three of the one hundred, forty-two gators earned three or more combat action ribbons (CR), as well as other unit awards. Of these ships, all but six—the landing craft repair ships *Askari* and *Sphinx*, high-speed transport *Cook*, inshore fire support ship *Carronade*, rocket ship *White River*, and amphibious assault ship *Tripoli*—were LSTs.

CR	PUC	NUC	MUC	Ship	Ship Class
7		1	2	<i>Page County</i> (LST-1076)	LST-542
6	2	4		<i>Harnett County</i> (LST-821)	LST-542
5	2	8		<i>Jennings County</i> (LST-846)	LST-542
5	2	5		<i>Askari</i> (ARL-30)	<i>Achelous</i>
5		4	3	<i>Tom Green County</i> (LST-1159)	LST-1156
5	1	2		<i>Sphinx</i> (ARL-24)	<i>Achelous</i>
4	1		5	<i>Whitfield County</i> (LST-1169)	LST-1156
4			2	<i>Luzerne County</i> (LST-902)	LST-542
4	1	1	1	<i>Iredell County</i> (LST-839)	LST-542
4		1	2	<i>Caddo Parish</i> (LST-515)	<i>LST-491</i>
4		1	1	<i>Meeker County</i> (LST-980)	LST-542
4			2	<i>Coconino County</i> (LST-603)	LST-542
4			2	<i>Cook</i> (APD-130)	<i>Crosley</i>
3	2	8		<i>Hunterdon County</i> (LST-838)	LST-542
3	1	4	5	<i>Vernon County</i> (LST-1161)	LST-1156
3		4	2	<i>Westchester County</i> (LST-1167)	LST-1156
3		2	1	<i>Carronade</i> (IFS-1)	<i>Carronade</i>
3		2	1	<i>White River</i> (LSMR/LFR-536)	LSM(R)-501
3		2	1	<i>Tripoli</i> (LPH-10)	<i>Iwo Jima</i>
3			2	<i>Hickman County</i> (LST-825)	LST-542
3			2	<i>Madera County</i> (LST-905)	LST-542
3			1	<i>Floyd County</i> (LST-762)	LST-542
3			1	<i>Wexford County</i> (LST-1168)	LST-1156

LST-491: No name for class  
 LST-542: *Chelan*-class  
 LST-1156: *Terrebonne Parish*-class

PUC: Presidential Unit Citation  
 NUC: Navy Unit Commendation  
 MUC: Meritorious Unit Commendation

A summary of the unit awards garnered by all 142 amphibious ships may be found in Appendix A. Chapter 2 provides readers an overview of the various types of amphibious ships that served in Vietnam, before progressing into operations—the heart of the book. Former crew members of LSTs desiring greater detail about these “work horses,” will find information related to the ships and their parent Landing Ship Squadrons or Flotilla in Chapter 9.

### **UNHERALDED U.S. NAVY AMPHIBIOUS READINESS GROUP/MARINE CORPS SPECIAL LANDING FORCE**

Many books and articles exist, rightly extolling the heroic actions of the crews of “Swift boats” (PCFs) that plied the coves and coastal waters of South Vietnam, and those of river patrol boats (PBRs) and “Seawolf” helicopters (UH-1B gunships) which engaged in combat on and over inland waters. There are few published works, other than by Marine Corps historians, devoted to the U.S. Seventh Fleet’s Amphibious Readiness Group/Marine Corps Special Landing Force teams. To help address this inequity, Chapters 4-7, 11, and 15 are devoted to the subject.

When many people think about amphibious operations, they likely picture the Normandy Landings on 6 June 1944. On that date, in the most famous assault from the sea in World War II, and of all time, British, Canadian, and American forces landed at Utah, Omaha, Gold, Sword, and Juno beaches in the largest amphibious operation in history. Some might also recall the large-scale amphibious assault on the walled city of Inchon during the Korean War. That operation, codenamed CHROMITE—involving 75,000 troops and 261 naval vessels, and which led to the recapture of the South Korean capital of Seoul—began on 15 September 1950 and ended on 19 September.

Few people, outside those who were involved, were likely aware of the numerous amphibious operations and raids carried out by the Seventh Fleet’s Amphibious Ready Group and Marine Corps Special Landing Force (ARG/SLF) in Vietnam. In support of allied ground combat, this versatile, and mobile formation struck along the length of the South Vietnamese coastline and far inland. The ARG usually consisted of a handful of amphibious ships: typically, a helicopter assault ship (LPH), a dock landing ship (LSD), an attack transport (APA) or a transport dock (LPD), and a tank landing ship (LST). Additional gators augmented this force as necessary.<sup>2</sup>

A Battalion Landing Team, the heart of the Special Landing Force, was a task unit built around a Marine Corps infantry battalion. Such a battalion was composed of four rifle platoons, one weapons platoon, and one headquarters and service company, consisting of an 81mm

mortar platoon, a 106mm recoilless rifle platoon, and a flame thrower section. To this core group, several specialized units were attached to provide support. The BLT's artillery support came from a battery of tanks and other types of fire power. Also attached were amphibious tractors, an engineer shore party, reconnaissance party, and motor transport units.<sup>3</sup>

Photo Preface-2



USS *Washtenaw County* (LST-1166) with her bow doors open to launch amphibious craft in support of Operation DECKHOUSE V. Two Marine Corps amphibious tractors are moving along the beach, with a UH-1 helicopter approaching, at right. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 103692

Photo Preface-3



3rd Marine Division Amtraks shuttle supplies to forces conducting clearing operations along the Cua Viet River supply route, 1968. Marine Corps photograph A191224

Photo Preface-4



Unidentified member of a Battalion Landing Team.  
USS *Valley Forge* (LPH-8) Western Pacific 1965-1966 cruise book

The Marine SLF included a medium helicopter squadron equipped with twenty-four UH-34s embarked in the amphibious assault ship. The ground combat element, an infantry battalion landing team, reinforced with artillery, armor, engineer, and other support units, were divided among the ships. This practice enabled landings of men and their equipment on shore by helicopter, or by the forty-one tracked landing vehicles (LVTs) carried aboard the ships, or by both methods. The LVTs were commonly called “Amtraks.”<sup>4</sup>

Photo Preface-5



Marine UH-34 helicopter taking off from the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS *Princeton* (LPH-5) to land Marines in the Vietcong-saturated Rung Sat Zone in South Vietnam, 26 March 1966. The landing was part of Operation JACKSTAY. National Archives photograph #K-31417

### **NAVAL SUPPORT FOR AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS**

The Seventh Fleet provided additional assistance for amphibious operations, including air cover by carrier aircraft, naval gunfire support, supply by the Logistic Support Force, and medical support by hospital ships *Repose* (AH-16) and *Sanctuary* (AH-17) positioned close offshore.<sup>5</sup>

Photo Preface-6



Hospital ship USS *Repose* (AH-16) off the South Vietnamese coast, 22 April 1966. Equipped with a heliport astern, medical staff, and advanced medical facilities, she was credited with saving many lives during the Vietnam War. National Archives photograph #K-31174

Naval personnel also supported the Marine Special Landing Force as medical corpsmen, chaplains, and spotters in 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company detachments. Underwater Demolition Team, SEAL, and Beachmaster units supported operations on shore.<sup>6</sup>



Photo Preface-7



UDT 12 members on Red Beach, Danang, South Vietnam, prior to the landing of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines, 10 April 1965.

Defense Department Marine Corps photograph A185082

James George Vanos (better known as Jesse “the body” Ventura, a former professional wrestler who would later serve as governor of the state of Minnesota) and Jan Vanos, his older brother, were both members of Underwater Demolition Team 12. Jim Vanos graduated with BUD/S class 58 in December 1970, and joined UDT 12 after additional requisite training.<sup>7</sup>

As needed, transport submarines *Perch* (APSS-313), *Tunny* (APSS-282), and *Grayback* (LPSS-574) carried Navy underwater demolition teams, SEALs, and South Vietnamese Marines to points off prospective landing beaches. The naval special warfare men then quietly exited the boats, swam or rowed rubber rafts through the surf, and carried out vital reconnaissance or other special operations ashore.<sup>8</sup>

Operating from Subic Bay in the Philippines, *Perch* had begun training in 1963 with Marine Special Forces, UDT teams, and special operations units from allies in covert reconnaissance missions. When the Vietnam War began for the submarine in 1965, her deck armament consisted of two 40mm guns and .50-caliber machine guns that could be mounted on the conning tower. In March, she participated in

JUNGLE DRUM III, an exercise in which a 75-man Marine Corps reconnaissance force was landed on the Malay Peninsula. At year's end, in support of Operation MARKET TIME, the interdiction of communist supply and infiltration along the South Vietnamese coast, *Perch* conducted amphibious landings as part of Operation DAGGER THRUST. Information about these and other actions—including one believed to be the last surface combat action involving a U.S. submarine—may be found in Chapters 5 and 6.<sup>9</sup>

Photo Preface-8



Guided missile submarine USS *Tunny* (SSG-282) off the Mare Island Navy Shipyard, 16 April 1953. She was converted to a troop-carrying submarine in 1966 (APSS-282), and reclassified an amphibious transport submarine (LPSS-282) on 1 January 1969. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 90809

Three high speed transports—*Alex Diachenko* (ADP-123), *Cook* (ADP-130), and *Weiss* (ADP-135)—also delivered and recovered beach reconnaissance teams, albeit not as stealthily as by transport submarine.

### **IMPORTANT ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY SUPPORT**

Australia was the only ally to provide naval support to the United States during the war. The contributions of RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam are briefly addressed in Chapter 6, along with heroic actions of the 1st Australian (Army) Task Force during the Battle of Long Tan. The other RAN naval unit in country, Clearance Diving Team Three, was charged with protecting merchant and military shipping at the port of Vung Tau. Ships lying at anchor, or pierside were vulnerable to enemy swimmer-

sapper attacks. The crews of vessels that called at Vung Tau between mid-February 1967 and mid-August 1970, owe the Aussie divers a debt of gratitude for the thousands of hull, rudder, and anchor chain inspections they performed—searching for and, when found, rendering harmless emplaced explosives.

Chapter 1 describes a mining attack against USS *Westchester County* on the night of 1 November 1968, which resulted in great loss of life and damage to the tank landing ship. Vulnerability to attack extended to areas other than ports; she'd been anchored on the My Tho River with other units of the Mobile Riverine Force. Between January 1962 and June 1969, there were 88 successful swimmer attacks against shipping, which killed more than 210 personnel and wounded 325. In comparison, only 20 enemy sappers were killed or captured for all attacks—whether successful or not—emphasizing the advantageous payoff to the enemy of this type of warfare.<sup>10</sup>

Swimmer-sappers were specialist North Vietnamese divers and Viet Cong who received nine months training in North Vietnam. At completion, they were capable of assembling and positioning land mines, command-detonated mines, and water mines. Enemy saboteurs, equipped with a snorkel, limpet mine, grenades, signal flare, and a nylon line, used currents and floating debris to assist in their approach to a target. Challenges they faced (other than detection) included low water temperatures, strong currents, and difficulty in navigating underwater (swimming to targets) at night. Mines (acoustic, magnetic, or pressure-detonated) were often transported by sampan to the area of the attack, slung beneath the vessel's keel, if there was sufficient boat traffic, for the 'minelayer' to proceed about its business unnoticed.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. Navy's Inshore Undersea Warfare Group One, Western Pacific Detachment, was responsible for the protection of shipping in the principal anchorages of South Vietnam against underwater attack. Operation STABLE DOOR provided harbor defense at Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon, Danang, Cua Viet, Nha Trang, Vung Tau, and Saigon. Each harbor defense unit:

- Maintained continuous visual and radar surveillance of harbor approaches and anchorage areas; and
- Operated harbor patrol boats to intercept and search local craft, maintain a vigilant watch for enemy swimmers or floating objects which could be mines, and carry Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) divers for inspection of ships' hulls and anchor chains<sup>12</sup>

Harbor patrols involved periodically dropping grenades into the water during random sweeps, and watching for bubbles that might mark a sapper's approach. Occasionally bodies washed up on the beach as evidence of their success, or ships suffered damage to explosives as evidence of their failure. Inspection of ships' hulls and anchor chains by EOD personnel, and removal/neutralization of mines found, lessened such occurrences. However, despite much effort by harbor defenses, enemy swimmers were elusive, and sabotage attempts on ships continued throughout the war. It was not until January 1968 that the first swimmer was captured by a STABLE DOOR unit.<sup>13</sup>

Although the scope of this book does not include harbor defense, short chapters 14 and 18, and portions of Chapters 6 and 13 as well as the postscript, are devoted to the elite group of forty-nine officers and men that comprised the RAN Clearance Diving Team Three (CDT 3).<sup>14</sup>

## ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY CDT 3 IN VIETNAM

*Our primary role at Vung Tau was ship protection. The biggest threat was diver laid mines. We went out every night into the harbour. The tidal streams in Vung Tau are very swift and we normally conducted our patrol two hours before and two hours after slack water. We were required to check all vessels for mines. We checked anchor chains in case a mine or other device had been attached to them. The tidal stream would then drag the charge back alongside the hull, which would detonate the mine magnetically. Alternately the attack swimmer would place a limpet mine directly against the hull and leave it there with a timing mechanism.*

*We did a lot of things we couldn't put in our reports. As OIC, I was not authorised to go into an ambush, or assault a VC held position or take part in a search and destroy sweep, but all of these things happened during CDT 3's time in Vietnam.*

—Lt. Alexander Donald, RAN, officer in charge of Clearance Diving Team 3 during its sixth rotation to Vietnam, remarking on activities from 12 August 1969 to 31 March 1970.<sup>15</sup>

The RAN approved the formation of Clearance Diving Team Three in late 1966 as one element of a larger naval contribution to the war in Vietnam, and the team arrived in country on 6 February 1967. The Aussies were initially attached to a U.S. Navy EOD unit based in Saigon. They relocated to Vung Tau twelve days later, with living quarters in a disused ammunition bunker, part of an old French-built coastal fort in the harbour entrance control post ("VC Hill") in the Nui Lon area. From their elevated position, the clearance divers had a commanding

view of their primary area of responsibility—Vung Tau Harbor seaward to Long Son Island—for the defense of shipping against enemy attack. Their duties included inspecting shipping in the Vung Tau anchorages, or berthed pier-side, for improvised explosive devices.<sup>16</sup>

Photo Preface-9



Repair ship USS *Jason* (AR-8) at anchor off Vung Tau in 1968 with a nest of small ships moored to port and the coastal minesweeper USS *Woodpecker* (MSC-209) moored starboard aft while refueling.

Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 107752

Vung Tau lay at the end of a peninsula jutting into the South China Sea, adjacent to Cape St. Jacques at the southernmost tip. Westward of the peninsula were three peaks of about 700 feet. The team took up living quarters on the seaward slope of the center peak (“VC Hill”). Vung Tau had two anchorages where merchant ships waited before proceeding to Saigon, forty-five miles to the northwest, via the Long Tau Channel through the Rung Sat mangrove swamps. Vessels lying in these anchorages were inviting targets for swimmer-sapper attacks.<sup>17</sup>

Inspection of anchor chains, rudders, and propellers was done daily as a routine measure, while hull searches were performed on request, or following a report of a suspected swimmer in an anchorage. A tidal range of ten feet and currents of 4-6 knots in the Vung Tau anchorages hindered ship hull inspections. Fortunately, these conditions also made mining difficult for swimmer-sappers.<sup>18</sup>

## **TEAM REDESIGNATION/COMPOSITION/ROTATIONS**

Clearance Diving Team 3 was designated EODMUPAC Team 21 in October 1967 for U.S. Navy purposes, signifying that it was functioning

as part of the USN Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit, Pacific. This designation was subsequently changed to EODMUPAC Team 35. CDT 3 contingents, comprised of one officer and five sailors, were considered to offer a two-team capacity. The standard U.S. Navy EOD Team was one officer and three enlisted.<sup>19</sup>

Eight contingents of CDT 3 personnel deployed to Vietnam—serving at Vung Tau from 6 February 1967 to 14 August 1970, and later at Danang, from 15 August 1970 to 19 April 1971. (During its time at Vung Tau, CDT 3 searched 7,441 ships.) The beginning and ending dates in the table reflect when the officers in charge relieved one another of their duties, with one exception. The Sixth Contingent left Australia for Vietnam on 12 August 1969.<sup>20</sup>

**Royal Australian Navy Clearance Diving Team Three  
(Sequential Deployments to Vietnam)**

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Ending</b>	<b>Officer in Charge</b>
<b>First Contingent</b>		
6 Feb 1967	25 Aug 1967	Lt. Michael T. E. Shotter, RAN
<b>Second Contingent</b>		
25 Aug 1967	26 Feb 1968	Lt. Robert J. Burns, GM RAN
<b>Third Contingent</b>		
26 Feb 1968	28 Aug 1968	Lt. William D. H. Lees, RAN
<b>Fourth Contingent</b>		
28 Aug 1968	26 Feb 1969	Lt. Clement J. Littleton, RAN
<b>Fifth Contingent</b>		
26 Feb 1969	12 Aug 1969*	Lt. Allan A. Davis, RAN
<b>Sixth Contingent</b>		
12 Aug 1969*	31 Mar 1970	Lt. Alexander Donald, RAN
<b>Seventh Contingent</b>		
31 Mar 1970	29 Oct 1970	Lt. Ross S. Blue, RAN
<b>Eighth Contingent</b>		
29 Oct 1970	19 Apr 1971	Lt. Edward W. Linton, BEM RAN <sup>21</sup>

## **CHANGES IN PROCEDURES/DISESTABLISHMENT**

In late January 1969, it was decided that most ship inspections were to be made at night as this was the most common time for enemy attacks. These night inspections began on 5 February 1970. Clearance Diving Team Three's responsibility for Operation STABLE DOOR at Vung Tau came to an end on 14 August 1970 when the Australians were relieved by two South Vietnamese Navy teams.<sup>22</sup>

The following day, CDT 3 divers, their monkey mascot ('WRAN EOD Fred') and equipment were airlifted to Danang in two C-130 Hercules aircraft. At Danang, the team was quartered at U.S. Navy

Support Facility, Camp Tien Sha, and became part of the security department of the facility. The divers were responsible for providing harbor patrols, EOD for the harbor area, naval policing, and ensuring physical security of the base.<sup>23</sup>

On 19 April 1971, CDT 3 relinquished its responsibilities to a U.S. Army EOD section and prepared for return to Australia. The arrival of the Eighth Contingent in Sydney on 5 May, marked the end of Clearance Diving Team 3's four years of duty in Vietnam. For its service in the war, CDT 3 was awarded the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy—the highest award for heroism a unit may receive, and equivalent of the Navy Cross for an individual—the U.S. Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, and the U.S. Navy Unit Commendation, three times.<sup>24</sup>

Upon arrival on Australian soil, CDT 3 was disbanded, with the provision “to be reformed again at the discretion of the Australian Naval Board.” The divers took up fleet support duties with Clearance Diving Teams One and Two, until CDT 3 was reactivated for overseas wartime deployments, including in 1991 for the Gulf War, and again in 2003 for the Iraq War.<sup>25</sup>

## UNIT AWARDS AND INDIVIDUAL HONOURS



**Distinguished Service Cross**



**Distinguished Service Medal**



**British Empire Medal**



**Mention in Despatches Clasp**



**U.S. Army Commendation Medal**

Receipt of the unit awards, as well as Australian and United States individual honours made Clearance Diving Team Three the most highly decorated Australian unit during the Vietnam War. Citations for the unit awards may be found in Appendix B. Members of CDT 3 awarded individual honours are identified below, followed by a photograph of recipients of the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation.

---

**Distinguished Service Cross**

Lt. Alexander Donald, RAN

**Distinguished Service Medal**

---

ABCD John A. Aldenhoven, RAN

LSCD Phillip C. Kember, RAN

**British Empire Medal**

CPOCD Albert V. Rashleigh, RAN

**Mention in Despatches**

CPOCD Barrie J. Bailey, RAN                      ABCD Jeffrey L. Garrett, RAN

**U.S. Army Commendation Medal**

CPOCD John F. C. Dollar, RAN                      LSCD Russel L. Steer, RAN  
 POCD John Kershler, RAN                      ABCD Bogdan K. Wojcik, RAN  
 ABCD Gerald Kingston, RAN

CPOCD: Chief Petty Officer Clearance Diver (CD)                      LSCD: Leading Seaman CD  
 POCD: Petty Officer CD                      ABCD: Able Seaman CD

Photo Preface-10



Four of the six Clearance Diving Team Three (4th Contingent) members awarded a PUC for their participation in Operation SEA LORDS. The photograph was taken at the Royal Australian Navy Diving School HMAS Penguin in 2014. L-R: Robert Spicer; Colin Darling; Robert Cox (deceased) is represented by Sally Broom Cox and daughter; Barry Wilson; and Clement Littleton. David Rhook is not pictured.  
 Courtesy of Don (Scotty) Allan

**CDT 3 (Fourth Contingent to serve in Vietnam)**

Lt. Clement J. Littleton, RAN                      LSCD David N. Rhook, RAN  
 POCD Robert J. Cox, RAN                      ABCD Colin L. Darling, RAN  
 POCD Barry W. Wilson, RAN                      ABCD Robert H. Spicer, RAN



### “AUSSIE” POEM

This prayer for Clearance Divers was penned by Chaplain Peter Ball (assisted by POCD Frederick Asher and ABCD Donald Allan), when onboard HMAS *Perth* in late 1970. He came ashore and visited Lt. Jake Linton, OIC of the 8th Contingent and his team at their base in Camp Tien Sha, Danang, for three days and presented the poem to them. Compliments of Commodore Hector Donohue, AM RAN (Rtd.)

O God in Heaven hear our plea  
 For clearance divers 'neath the sea  
 While in the ocean's dark embrace  
 Keep us thy sons within thy grace  
 And hear us lord, o thou who saves  
 For us thy servants 'neath the waves

### LST SUPPORT OF OTHER COMBAT OPERATIONS

As might be expected, deep-draft “amphibs”—command ships, helicopter carriers, transport docks, dock landing ships, cargo ships, and transports—did not operate in inland waters. When not participating in assault landings, they carried out other Seventh Fleet tasking. Tank landing ships were on the rivers (as well as offshore), joining barracks ships and landing craft repair ships in support of Task Force 116 (the River Patrol Force), Task Force 117 (the Mobile Riverine Force), and later the SEA LORDS Campaign. Less frequently, LSTs supported patrol craft engaged in Operation MARKET TIME (Task Force 115): offshore interdiction efforts to stop the North Vietnamese flow of troops, war material, and supplies by sea into South Vietnam.

Photo Preface-11



Preparation of a new ramp as LSTs approach to offload at Vung Tau. National Archives photograph #K-36318

Tank landing ships were extremely versatile owing to shallow drafts which allowed them to ply waters denied vessels that drew more water, and because they could beach to offload cargo. This was particularly desirable at underdeveloped ports with limited pier space and/or constricted anchorages. Specific to the support of River Patrol and Mobile Riverine Forces, four specially modified “T’s” served as “mother ships” for patrol craft and “Seawolf” assault helicopters.

Photo Preface-12



*Garrett County* (LST-786) on the Co Chien River, Mekong Delta, South Vietnam. A naval UH-1B helicopter is landing on her deck, and three PBR Boats are alongside, June 1968. National Archive photograph #K-51441

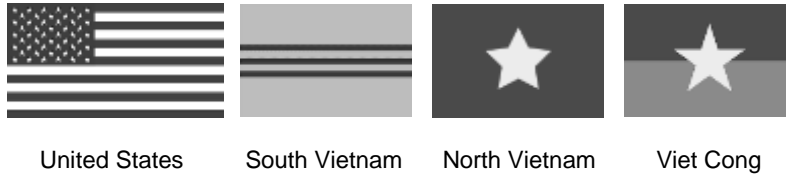
Chapters 8, 10, and 13 are devoted to the Mobile Riverine Force, River Patrol Force, and SEA LORDS Campaign, and the involvement of “amphibs” (primarily LSTs) with these forces. Four of the most highly decorated tank landing ships—*Garrett County* (LST-786), *Harnett County* (LST-821), *Hunterdon County* (LST-838), and *Jennings County* (LST-846)—served as mobile support bases for river patrol boats and helicopters on the rivers of the Mekong Delta. *Garrett County* is not listed in the earlier table because the ships are rank-ordered by number of combat action ribbons earned. However, in addition to her two CRs, she was notably awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, and six Navy Unit Citations. One of these citations may be found in Appendix C.

In May 1970, *Hunterdon County* had the distinction of being the first commissioned U.S. naval vessel to enter Cambodian waters, during an operation termed the “Cambodian IncurSION.” The entry of U.S. military forces into Cambodia angered many in Congress and set off a wave of anti-war demonstrations—including one at Kent State

University that resulted in the killing of four students by National Guard troops. “Cambodian Incursion” is the title and subject of Chapter 17.

## DEPARTURE OF U.S. FORCES FROM VIETNAM

Presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon pledged during his campaign to get America out of the Vietnam War and, following his election and inauguration, he took action to fulfil this promise. His administration’s resultant “Vietnamization” program, which preceded the Cambodian Incursion, is the subject of Chapter 16. Chapter 19 covers the final U.S. involvement in Vietnam from 1971 to 1973.



After years of negotiations from 1968 to 1973, the Paris Agreement of January 1973 between the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) provided that prisoners of war would be returned and that the North Vietnam military and U.S. military personnel had to be out of South Vietnam by 29 March 1973, except for U. S. embassy personnel. All U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel, with the exception of the officers assigned to the Defense Attaché Office and the Marines of the Embassy Security Detachment, Saigon, left Vietnam on that date for Honolulu, Hawaii.<sup>26</sup>

## OPERATIONS FREQUENT WIND AND EAGLE PULL, AND THE UNFORTUNATE *MAYAGUEZ* INCIDENT

*We’re going to have to send you back to rescue the Vietnamese navy. We forgot ‘em. And if we don’t get them or any part of them, they’re all probably going to be killed.*

—Directive to Comdr. Paul H. Jacobs, commanding officer of the destroyer escort USS *Kirk* (DE-1087) from Rear Adm. Donald B. Whitmire, commander of Operation FREQUENT WIND, embarked aboard the command ship *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19).<sup>8</sup>

In late April 1975, with the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese forces imminent, the U.S. Navy formed Task Force 76 off the coast of South Vietnam. Its mission was to evacuate thousands of Vietnamese who had supported U.S. efforts to stop the Communist takeover of the Republic of Vietnam, and a dwindling number of American civilians still remaining in Vietnam. Chapter 20 describes this operation, code named FREQUENT WIND, following the evacuation by air of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, termed EAGLE PULL. These were the last operations of the Vietnam War involving amphibious ships.

The final chapter of the book deals with recovery of the container-ship SS *Mayaguez* and her crew, captured by Khmer Rouge forces on 12 May 1975. In a hurried operation ramrodded by President Gerald Ford's National Security Council, because American's reputation was seemingly at stake, forty-three Marines, sailors, and airmen lost their lives saving the forty mariners.



Preface-13



Painting by Richard DeRosset, depicting a Viet Cong swimmer-sapper mining attack on the tank landing ship USS *Westchester County* (LST-1167), on 1 November 1968, in which the U.S. Navy suffered its greatest loss of life in a single incident, as a result of enemy action, during the entire Vietnam War.