

Foreword

This last work completes David D. Bruhn's information-packed trilogy, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, which will stand for years as a standard reference on the wartime and peacetime contributions of the U.S. Navy's mine warriors and their sturdy ships. The current volume traces the development of wooden minesweepers as a result of the Korean War experience and the service of these combatants and their sailors in Atlantic and Caribbean waters. The Vietnam War is a special focus of the present work and Commander Bruhn has spared no effort to document minesweeping operations in South Vietnam's ports, along the 1,200-mile-long coast, in the waterways of the Mekong Delta, and on the vital Long Tau River that connected Saigon to the sea. Despite a concerted, multi-year Viet Cong effort to kill American mine warriors, sink their MSBs, and prevent merchant ships from delivering their precious military cargos to the capital, the enemy never succeeded. Thanks also to the hard-fighting men of Mine Squadron Eleven, American and allied troops never had to fear being cut off from the sea; at great sacrifice, mine warfare sailors kept open not only the Long Tau, but the Perfume River to Hue, the Cua Viet just south of the Demilitarized Zone, and numerous other vital waterways. The three-volume *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* will hold a place of honor within arms-reach on my book shelf for years to come.

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It is my great pleasure and reward to have served in our Navy's Minesweeper Force during the time frame of this study, first as executive officer/navigator and later as the commanding officer of USS *Conquest* (MSO-488), followed by command of the USS *Warbler* (MSC-206) and concurrent assignment as commodore of its parent division, Mine Division Thirty-two, homeported at Sasebo, Japan. This experience as a relatively young officer set me on course for a thirty-year naval career.

During the period of this writing, the wooden ships of the mine force did whatever fleet commanders required of them. They crossed wide oceans, operated off foreign coasts, partnered with numerous allied navies and as ambassadors, proudly conducted "show the flag" port visits when asked to do so. Time and again, the men aboard the ships proved themselves dependable mariners capable of high integrity while operating independently far from support staff and commanders, to the extent that even the "big ship navy" had a high opinion of the minesweepers' capabilities and esprit.

During a variety of operations, the small ships maintained the high readiness levels that proved the adaptability of their crews. In WestPac, sweeps made People to People visits to small ports in out-of-the-way locations, in some cases the first visits since the end of World War II, to promote goodwill between the United States and its allies. In addition, the ships functioned admirably with their cousin mine force navies of Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand, participating in extensive combined mine warfare exercises.

The iron men themselves had a reputation as competent professional sailors and officers. Often they were the only expert in their rate on board, and were often tasked with dual, out-of-rate responsibilities as well. A sweep's lone corpsman, in addition to his normal tasks of record keeping and holding sick call, might when under way stand Combat Information Center sonar/radar watches, operate the minesweep winch during Condition I, and act as a safety observer for myriad seamanship evolutions. This type of proficiency and flexibility was often displayed in other ratings as well, and it both contributed to and was the consequence of ship and force morale, esprit de corps, self confidence, and overall combat readiness.

Commander Bruhn stands alone as a naval historian in this genre. He has once again, through his depth of knowledge and accurate research, compiled a superb volume about the wooden-hull navy, and his book does

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justice to the professionalism and achievements of crews and their ships past and present. Readers of this work devoted to the history of small wooden vessels in war and in peace will gain an appreciation for a mine-sweep sailor's passion for his ship and for the sea.

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