

Foreword

David Bruhn's *Support for the Fleet: U.S. and Royal Australian Navy Service Force Ships That Served in Vietnam, 1965 – 1973* follows his two previous works that detail vital aspect of the naval side of the Vietnam War. In *Gators Offshore and Upriver* and *On the Gunline* he examined the important role played by amphibious warfare and naval close support throughout the conflict. In *Support for the Fleet* he takes us from Subic Bay in the Philippines to Yankee and Dixie Stations off the coast of Vietnam, to the inland water ways of Southeast Asia to document the unheralded, yet essential role that logistics and naval auxiliaries played in persecuting the war in Vietnam by both the United States and Royal Australian navies. He examines all aspects of this type of warfare, from surveillance operations, to fleet support, and salvage operations.

The naval aspect of the Vietnam War has not garnered comprehensive attention by historians or the general public throughout the years. The quintessential images of the naval war are aircraft catapulting from carriers assigned to Task Force 77 or river patrol boats (PBRs) streaking up a river. Yet, the role played by naval auxiliaries in the Vietnam War were essential to the conduct of the fighting and exposed these vessels to great dangers in the execution of their missions. Not since the Civil War had the U.S. Navy waged a coastal and riverine campaign, with a large offshore presence to the scale conducted in Vietnam. David Bruhn captures this from the outset with an attack on USS *Brule* (AKL-28) on the Co Chien River. *Brule* was an ex-Army freight-supply ship, best depicted in the movie *Mr. Roberts* as USS *Reluctant* – banished to supply the backwater ports of the Pacific. Unlike *Mr. Roberts*, action found the crew of *Brule* on the morning of August 24, 1968 when she came under rocket fire. She sustained damage, but no casualties, and was able to complete her resupply mission.

The attack on USS *Brule*, along with numerous other instances, and a wealth of information and data on the ships of the U.S. Navy Service Forces, along with those of the Royal Australian Navy – including the famed Vung Tau Ferry – make *Support for the Fleet*, along with Bruhn's earlier works required reading for all those studying military operations in the Vietnam War. The contribution of the ships and crews was essential to the execution of the military strategy undertaken by the

United States during the Vietnam War. Of importance, is the understanding of the logistical undertaking required to support the deployment of such a large force to Southeast Asia over the course of eight years. The scope of the mission is indicated by the service of USS *Hassayampa* (AO-145). Over the course of several deployments during the war, *Hassayampa* completed a total of 64 combat tours (termed “swings on the line” by the Service Force) in delivering fuel to warships offshore, earning a Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Stories like *Hassayampa* and *Brule* make us appreciate the role of the sailors who crewed their naval auxiliaries during the Vietnam War. Rear Admiral Worrall Reed Carter titled his work on naval logistics during the Second World War, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil*. In that same vein, *Support to the Fleet* details Vietnam naval logistics down to all levels of naval auxiliary vessels and elevates their role alongside the carriers and PBRs of the Vietnam War.

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