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CAN THO, SOUTH VIETNAM--Like Biblical Noah, the famed Green Beret Special Forces here are preparing to meet the annual monsoon floods by building floating home bases.

Currently, the mud and water in the Delta is too deep to wade in--but not deep enough for paddling sampans. In ^{mid}-September, though, the monsoon floods hit the Mekong Delta region south of Saigon and last for three or four months.

Last year, the king-sized flood covered the tops of trees and houses; Vietnamese peasants lived in sampans or treetops. Part of the Vietnamese-American Special Forces camps simply floated away. And, the Viet Cong, too, were driven out of their underground bunkers to the scarce high, dry ground; their beds of land mines and boobytraps were drowned out.

Many of the 22 Special Forces camps in the Delta region are perched along the ill-defined border with Cambodia to cut infiltration across the wastland. "Our border area is the quietest part of this region," one Special Forces officer explained. "Either there aren't any Viet Cong there or else our troops have saturated this area enough to keep the Viet Cong out--or if they are moving through, they are moving so fast that they don't mass for attacks."

For the past year, the Special Forces commanders have prepared

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for the floods, when, as one of them explained, "We can make the water work for us--not against us." They began experimenting with floating home base camps--where their elite forces live when they're not out on patrols.

Thousands of empty oil drums were dropped into the camps; the civilian irregulars who fight with the Special Forces latched the barrels together and then built their ~~bunks and operation~~ ^{BARRACKS And} "Tactical Operations Center" on top of the steel raft.

"Later, we found it was a waste of oil drums to float the whole building," one U.S. Army Special Forces spokesman explained. "We built the building on piles and then floated only the floor. As the waters rise, so will be the floor."

Several of the 22 Special Forces camps were surrounded by water the year-round and had to be constructed from material airdropped into their perimeters.

"We had to mount an operation to get the troops into the area when they would build their camp," one officer explained. "Then we had to airdrop shovels, barbed wire and tents to them. We had to get a bulldozer into build the camp and the dikes, so we disassembled one, loaded it into dump trucks and with a Flying Squirrel helicopter we set the trucks into the perimeter, and then re-assembled the bulldozer on its tracks.

"To secure the camp while it was being built, we dropped in pre-fab, sandbagged bunker and a command center that we made from a large tin crate used for shipping materials to Vietnam."

In other cases, the U.S. Special Forces teams, who virtually command their Vietnamese Special Forces counterparts and their companies of civilian irregular forces, became experts on drainage problems and dike systems--a miniature of the Netherlands systems. Using small sampan motors as pumps, the Special Forces moved water from inside their dike wall to the outside--only to find some of their dike walls wouldn't stand the pressure and would cave in. They then began to reinforce their dike walls and, if they had time, to sod them with wild grass so they would shed the moisture.

After finishing their floating barracks and operations buildings, however, they discovered that their heavier weapons, such as mortars, were widely inaccurate if fired from such unstable platforms. Their command bunkers and electric generators, ^{USED} ~~needed~~ for powering their radios, also needed more stable platforms. They learned to solve the problem by building tall concrete tanks around their mortars and generators, and as the water rose, the tank kept the equipment dry. Since there were no doors in the tank, the troopers ^{had} ~~had~~ to leap over the top when they wanted to fire the weapons.

Even while the camp was being built--in the middle of a Viet Cong stronghold--the Viet Cong proceeded to attack it regularly. And once completed, still more problems arose, the officer explained.

How could they get the bulldozer out of the newly-built camp? If they tried to drive it across the road, it would sink away in

the mud. If they brought in the flying sky crane which had dropped it into the perimeter in the first place--the giant helicopter, with its 100 knot downblast, would blow over the fragile camp buildings. So, another military operation was launched to take the bulldozer out in a naval vessel by canal and river.

"Once the troops got settled into the camp, they had a problem with the dependents of their civilian irregular fighters. When the waters rose, the dependents rushed into our camp--the only dry place around--which is exactly where we didn't want them.

"So we built two-story grass houses for the dependents with families living on both the first and second floors.

"Then, we had a very peculiar difficulty. The family living on the first floor was getting furious--because the Vietnamese babies living above them did not wear diapers. So, we solved that headache, by giving one family both floors--they live downstairs during the dry season and move to the second floor during the floods."

"This has been an unsung year," its almost as difficult to live here as to fight he concluded. But now we are ready for the floods--and the Viet Cong."