

CSM

(The U. S. Navy is again engaged in river warfare--for the first time since the American Civil War. This three-part report examines America's Rice Paddy Navy in ~~Viet~~ Vietnam. This first ~~re~~ article details the U. S. Navy's biggest river battle in a century).

October 17, 1971
Mekong

ON SEPTEMBER 15 last year

The Battle of Snoopy's Nose began at 7:30 as pink blushes swirled into the dawnscapes. Fifty miles from the sea, a caravan of 23 U. S. Navy riverboats trekked forward in double file, like giant ironclad turtles. The caravan left the main channel of the ~~h~~ tobacco-tinted Mekong River and turned north into a small ~~sg~~ streamlet called Ba Rai. America's Rice Paddy Navy was planning to land an Army infantry battalion two miles upstream around the bulbous curve that to the sailors resembled the snout of Charlie Brown's cartoon canine companion.

Suddenly it happened! "I'm sick and taking on water," Delta Taxi, the lead miniature minesweeper, radioed. For the next four hours, the U. S. Navy fought a hectic melee--it's longest, ~~blouidi~~ bloodiest river battle in a century. From the shore, khaki-clad Viet Cong regulars with red neckerchiefs hid in mud-baked bunkers and hurled bazooka-styled ~~sup~~ B-40 rockets at the mini-Navy. The rockets' heat-tongues, of several thousand degrees Fahrenheit, bore hole after hole, the size of ~~nickels~~, nickels, in the inch-thick steel gun turrets and spewed thimbles of molten metal over the American gunners.

(More)

Instantly, Naval guns spit out their projectiles--incendiary ^{TASSE} ~~demi-torp~~ cups and saucers. Fluffy puffballs erupted like white cotton blossoms. Firing from ship to shore was so close--only twenty five yards--
American troopers, from behind their armored cages, hurled hand grenades ^{at the enemy} ~~work~~ as though they ~~were~~ ^{were} red-hot baseballs. The short distance prevented a few Communist bazooka shells from having time to ^{ARM} ~~rise~~ and explode; they careened harmlessly off the boats like iron confetti. Within the armored turrets, the temperatures ^{NAVY} ~~grew~~ so intense one gun-loader passed out from heat exhaustion. The firing was so furious one Navy gunner aimed his weapon with his knees, while using his hands to grab more ammunition. One young gunner fired three weapons simultaneously. As ammunition within the turrets ~~was~~ expended, Army soldiers below passed forward more caseloads; one hand-loaded 40 mm. cannon, the standard World War II anti-aircraft weapon, thus belched out 500 rounds in an hour. "The rounds were flying so fast and heavy you could walk on them," one sailor recalled. An incandescent carpet of smoke-heat rose above the battle scene and kissed the low-hanging, river-bottom fog. Three times the Naval commander ordered all his guns to ceasefire "so I could see what was going on."

(More)

^{within} ~~at~~ 7:30 ^{later} that morning; ~~And seconds~~ ~~later~~
~~within minutes~~, Delta Taxi and her sister-sweeper, Miss Carriage,
 had been hit by eleven bazooka rounds; each of their eight-man crews was wounded.
 The force of the bullets spun the boat^s around, like lazy tops, and they
 floundered downriver. [At 7:33, the next two vessels in the caravan, the
 heavily armed baby battleships, came under ~~withering~~ withering attack. Rocket
 fire shattered the machinegun of Monitor River Rogue, knocked out the radio,
 wounded the boat captain and three others. The vessel swerved wildly ~~out~~^{out}
 of control and ran aground on the fiery beach. Nearby, command boat Vini
Vidi Vici was hit by such force the boat captain and crew were blasted
 to the deck and the commander of the whole naval operation was momentarily
 knocked unconscious. Soon, the veteran commander, Lt. Cmdr. Francis E.
 (Dusty) Rhodes, Jr., of Norfolk, Va., was back on his exposed topside
 position; once he saw the red neckerchiefs of two Viet Cong fleeing the
 area, dropped his command radio mouthpiece, picked up ~~M-16~~^{M-16} ~~and~~^{RIFLE} killed
 both of them.

(More)

At 7:35, the second lead Monitor Why Not was hit directly in the engine and ^{then} in the forward turret; one sailor was killed and ~~five~~ ^{FIVE} wounded. A Navy lieutenant rushed to the aid of the wounded. He was ~~not~~ killed by the third round. The wounded were wounded again. Within minutes, the whole crew of eleven were casualties. [Next in the caravan came the troop transport vessel^s, each carrying a 40-man ~~squad~~ ^{PLATOON} of Army soldiers. The Gargantuan was splattered by two rockets. Her radio was knocked out. But, alone she proceeded upriver, braving the mile-long gauntlet of Communist shot and shell. Alone, she reached the objective area, named Beach White 2, and unloaded the Army ~~squad~~ ^{PLATOON}. Isolated, she was ordered to re-load the troops and return downriver, again ^w ~~using~~ ^{NO S, NG} through the mile-long Communist inferno. All but one of the crew was wounded; a young seaman ^{Brought} the boat back. The second troop carrier, Wild Angels, was hit near the fantail ~~where~~ where three of the seven-man crew were wounded. A small Army fiberglass motorboat trailing behind was set afire like cellophane and flames spouted fifteen feet skyward.

(More)

Deepe

River--page 5

After fifty minutes of fighting, the Mobile Riverine ^{Force} ~~Force~~ returned downstream to re-organize, evacuate their wounded, re-man the boats and replace their damaged vessels. ^{Then, moving upstream,} Again, the caravan came under withering Communist fire and another touch-and-go battle began. Again, the lead minesweepers, Green Grabber and Delta Dragon, were hit; ^{four} ~~two~~ troop carriers took eleven rocket and recoilless rifle rounds. Again, another Army fibreglass putt-putt spouted flames fifteen feet high. One Communist sharp charge hit ~~the~~ tarpaulin canopy above the Army's troop pit on Big Boy Pete; the canopy fountained into flames. One soldier and one sailor were killed; seventeen--or nearly half the soldier^s aboard--were wounded. ^[But] Naval gunmanship again found its mark. ^{And} Army soldiers from their armored compartments fired machineguns, grenade launchers and rifles from the side of their gunboats as though they were shooting ~~from the side of their~~ gunboats as though they were shooting from Old West wagon trains. The fury of gunfire again riveted ship-to-shore carpeting along the walls of the river bottom. ^{Continued to} ~~But,~~ the ironclads sped forward, surging through the brown waters and flaming gunfire. At 10:48 all boats reached [[] their objective and landed the Army troops at Beach White 2. []] When the smoke had cleared, 18 of the 23 vessels had been hit; some suffered eight major holes and countless niches, but all were in operating order a day later. More sailors suffered casualties than soldiers: ~~3~~ Navy killed, 70 wounded; 12 Army killed and 58 wounded. More significant, more Viet Cong than Americans were killed--213 confirmed by bodycount, plus, villagers reported, hundred of others sampaned out later. ^{In 5 hours} Fourteen Viet Cong had been confirmed killed for every American that died in action. Six hundred Communist bunkers ^{HAD BEEN} ~~were~~ destroyed and large quantities of war munitions captured.

(More)

Deepe

River — page 6

U.S.
has ended the Navy's "little boat" navy's
most decisive river victory in Vietnam (the Battle of the River)
the Navy's most decisive river victory since the fall of
the Navy's Bitterest river battle since the fall of
The September 15th victory, praised by American commanders throughout the Pacific area, was the Navy's most decisive river victory since the fall of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, which opened the Mississippi River and scissored

the Confederacy so that, as President Abraham Lincoln wrote, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea." As the Mississippi River Monitors under Rear Admiral David D. Porter successfully carried the war into the heart of Dixieland, so the Mekong River Monitors 104 years later, in the Battle of Snoopy's Nose, successfully carried the war into the Viet Cong's backyard.

America's ~~20th-century~~ 20th-century Navy, famed for ocean-to-ocean supremacy) was again fighting an "ocean-river" conflict as it had done in the ~~American~~ *WAR BETWEEN THE STATES*

"America's salt water Navy has been expanded to fight a muddy water war eighty miles inland," one senior officer explained. "Naval warfare used to be impersonal -- we never saw our enemy except with ~~over-the-horizon~~ radar or from airplanes. Now we are fighting nose-to-nose with them as well."

(more)

Deepe

River — page 7

Naval bombardment & ~~its~~ aerial

While the bombing of North Vietnam has ~~it~~ gained the focus of *waldwin* headlines and controversy, the Navy's role in and around South Vietnam has followed the broad strategy of the American Civil War. First, ~~it~~ to blockade the infiltration of war materials from the sea. Second, internally, to tie an ~~an~~ aqua-knot around the ^{IR} enemy's free movement of food, weapons and manpower. Third, to destroy ~~his~~ *the Communists* fort-like bases and main force units.

During 1865, 450 Union vessels, including ferryboats and commercial steamers, imposed an iron blockade around the 3,000-mile Confederate coastline, concentrating on principal seaports. A century later, 55 U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships, reinforcing 200 Vietnamese patrol junks, have ~~an~~ established a 900-mile sea blockade around South Vietnam, concentrating mostly on the wilderness swamp and jungled areas the Viet Cong are forced to use. This Vietnamese operation, aided by patrols of aircraft ^{GUN-RUNNING} carrying sensitive detection equipment, has in the past two years netted six iron-hulled trawlers, mostly of North Vietnam origin, and chased two others back to Chinese communist waters.

(More)

Deepe

River — Page 8

Implementing the famed Anaconda Plan during the American Civil War, the Union Navy knocked out Confederate river forts and installations, thus sealing the Mississippi River, to constrict the flow into the Confederacy of valuable foodstuffs and raw materials from the West, particularly Texas. Today, in Vietnam, the Navy strategy is similar — to knock out the Viet Cong fortified bases, such as at Snoop's Nose, and to interdict the flow of Viet Cong materials across the major branches of the Mekong River.

At the tactical level, America's inland water war in Vietnam is conducted in much the same way Rear Admiral Porter fought along the Mississippi. "River warfare can't change that much," one naval commander in Vietnam told ~~me~~. *IRIS Correspondent.* "As in the battle of the Mississippi, we try to ~~fix~~ force and flank ~~Viet Cong~~ strongpoints along the Mekong channels. "The difference is in the enemy strategy — not in ours. The Viet Cong hasn't engaged us in ship-to-ship battles, ~~xxx~~ which dramatized the Civil War. And the Viet Cong strongpoints are not permanent strongpoints. We put pressure on the Viet Cong and they fade away to set up a bunkered ^{position} ~~strongpoint~~ in a new place. They have mobile Vicksburgs."

~~(over)~~

~~IRIS~~
- 30 -