

Staring down the beast:

A history of U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal in Vietnam (1964-1973)

Related Sources:

- Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association
 - Navy EOD Technology Division, Indian Head, MD
 - United States Naval Institute
 - United States National Archive, Washington D.C.
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I. Forward

The proud history of United States Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict was in danger of being lost until the authors set about the task of researching and developing *Staring Down the Beast: A History of U.S. Navy EOD in Vietnam*. This work stands alone, save for a few anecdotal articles in periodicals of the time, as a testimonial to the EOD Technicians who served on land and at sea from 1964 until 1973 in support of combat operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

Starting in 1964 in the port of Saigon, the Navy EOD community rapidly responded to the joint service combat force build-up, mobilizing a number of small three- and four-man teams, to provide EOD and diving support services to major units and facilities. By 1968 Navy EOD teams were operating in Saigon and Da Nang, out of every STABLE DOOR seaport from Phu Quoc Island in the south to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the north, with the Mobile Riverine force in the Mekong Delta, and with Vietnamese Navy EOD Teams as advisors. Navy EOD Teams also served with distinction on aircraft carriers and ammunition ships supporting air operations off shore Vietnam and at shore based support activities in Thailand.



Vietnam: Two Navy EOD technicians render safe an unexploded bomb in the field (photo courtesy Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

Navy EOD missions were as varied as the areas of operations in which they were assigned. In addition to the diving and EOD services provided to their operational commanders, Navy EOD Teams were often assigned to support U.S. Army and Marine infantry units in the field, Special Forces and SEAL Teams, Australian Army and Navy units, as well as Vietnamese Army and Marine units. Their operational environments ranged from swamps and dense jungle in the south to mountains in the central highlands and desert-like conditions near the DMZ.

Our history is not a single story, but hundreds of stories that reflect the experiences of the individuals who lived the adventure. My sincere hope is that this brief history of a conflict years ago

has something that our Navy EOD warriors of today can find useful as they continue to employ their unique capabilities in the Global War on Terror.

Lawrence E. Ronan

Commander, USN (Retired)

President, Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association

June, 2007

II. Introduction

This history is intended to reflect and recount the many operations and heroics undertaken by U.S. Navy EOD personnel during the period in which they participated in the Vietnam War (1964-1973). Although the history drew heavily from the personal accounts of Navy EOD veterans of the war, much of the information concerning significant military operations, missions, and individual actions were verified by researching EOD command histories located in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The history is organized into five sections. The first section is a summary of the Navy EOD community during the war and discusses the impact the war had on the community and other ongoing EOD operations around the world. The second section concerns the many operations Navy EOD participated in and supported throughout the war. The third section outlines the critical effort to train and employ South Vietnamese EOD. The fourth section focuses on Navy EOD's relationship with other joint and combined units. The last section is a compilation of tactical encounters throughout the war.

Many former Navy EOD operators have generously contributed their time and memories to the completion of this project, their names are listed at the end of the history. A debt of gratitude is due to them for their input reflected in the history, and more importantly, for their unwavering dedication to the country and each other throughout the war itself. A very special thanks is due to LCDR Patrick Thomas USN (ret.), Bernard W. Diggs USN (ret.), CDR Lawrence E. Ronan USN (ret.), and CAPT Michael Murray USN (ret.).

This history is dedicated to those Navy EOD men who made the ultimate sacrifice for their teammates, the naval service, and their country during the Vietnam conflict:

Condon, Robert E. LCDR	UDT 12	Lexington, NE	18 Jan 68
Gallegoes, Manuel BMC (DV)			Apr 64
Keich, Calvin ENS			Aug 65
McCray, Billy J. ENS			Aug 63
McFadyen, Bruce S. LT	EODMUPAC	Montclair, NJ	17 Jan 69
Melady, Richard R. TM1 (DV)	EODMUPAC Team 33	Dumont, NJ	17 Jan 69

Plotz, Steven C. LT

Oct 66

Roberts, Donald V. CWO2

Jun 72

Winningham, Jerry L. PR1 (DV) EODMUPAC Team 15 Bowie, TX

25 Feb 68

*“I have eaten your bread and salt,
I have drunk your water and wine,
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
And the lives that ye led were mine.”*

— R. Kipling

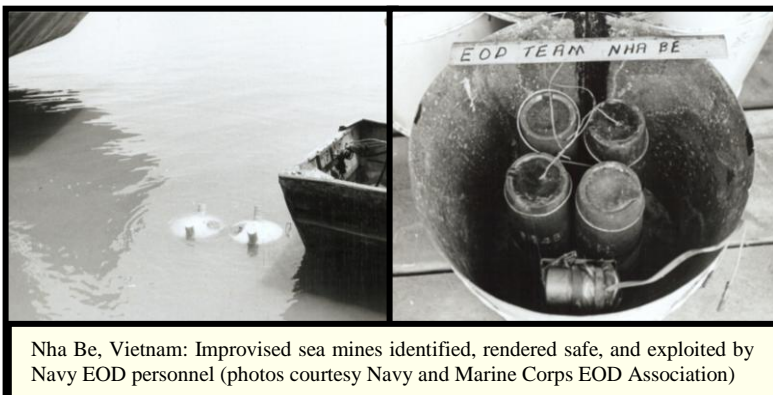
III. U.S. Navy EOD during the Vietnam era

The role of the U.S. Navy in Vietnam changed significantly in 1965, from a small contingent of support functions such as construction, medical, and Vietnamese Navy and Marine Corps advisory activities located at the Naval Support Activity (NSA) in the port of Saigon, to a large force conducting Operations MARKET TIME and SEA DRAGON, intended to stop troops and supplies from flowing by sea from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. CTF 71, and subsequently, CTF 115 were responsible for MARKET TIME and SEA DRAGON and planned and executed the offshore and coastal patrol and interdiction operations. Later in the same year, the continuing escalation of hostilities and Viet Cong control of the inland waterways precipitated expansion of Navy operations into the riverine areas of the Mekong Delta and Rung Sat Special Zone waterways and by 1966 Operation GAME WARDEN began—an operation designed to supplement Vietnamese units in patrol of the waterways. With the continually increasing U.S. Navy commitments in Vietnam, it was necessary to stand up a separate naval component command under the unified command of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. In 1966, Commander, Naval Forces Vietnam (COMNAVFORV) was stood up and headquartered in Saigon. Eventually, by 1968, Task Force 116 was formed and executed one other major Navy Operation—SEALORDS (an acronym for Southeast Asia Lake, Ocean, River, and Delta Strategy)—intended to disrupt North Vietnamese supply lines and isolate and destroy weakened North Vietnamese forces.

Concurrent with this build-up of naval forces in Vietnam and the beginning of new commands and operations, Navy EOD detachments were being deployed to key areas throughout Vietnam to counter the threat of Viet Cong mining operations and swimmer-sapper attacks. EOD support was also required for all the major shore-based facilities and ports, and demand for Navy EOD to support land-based Army and Marine Corps units increased exponentially.

All EOD operations in Vietnam were, by the very nature of the conflict, extremely hazardous and demanding. Navy EOD personnel were confronted by a new and ingenious type of ordnance—the improvised munition. Improvised water mines and limpet charges were a favorite weapon of the

Viet Cong because they could be fabricated from dud or captured ordnance. Since many of these devices were time or command fired and employed a variety of unique fuzes and circuitry, the standard render safe and recovery procedures were usually not applicable. Navy EOD personnel were continually on-call for ship bottom search and mine recovery operations in the waterways and harbors that supported the flow



Nha Be, Vietnam: Improvised sea mines identified, rendered safe, and exploited by Navy EOD personnel (photos courtesy Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

of equipment, troops, and supplies in and out of country via seaports of debarkation (these ports and the logistical trail they represented were called Operation STABLE DOOR). Initially, many of the recovered items had to be rendered safe for intelligence exploitation and the development of suitable countermeasures. Despite the extremely hazardous conditions, EOD divers removed

countless numbers of these munitions from ship bottoms and the waterways of Vietnam. Because they represented the only effective countermeasure to these water-borne threats, Navy EOD became an indispensable asset throughout the remainder of the war.

EOD operations in Vietnam were not, however, limited to mine countermeasures; the deployed teams were involved at various times with practically every naval unit in the country. Nearly every



Ben Tre province, Vietnam, 1970: Navy EOD technician from EODTEUPAC Team 82 in Mekong Delta area prepares an explosive charge under combat conditions. (photo courtesy of CDR L. Ronan, USN, ret.)

Navy and Marine Corps entity during the war made increasing demands on the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) to assign EOD teams forward in support of their own operations. In return, BUPERS pressured EODGRUPAC to deploy EOD teams to the conflict with increasing frequency and periods of deployments. This had severe impact on manning levels at both the Group and the EOD Units supporting the war. As a result, many Navy EOD technicians were frequently exposed to direct combat when operating with such forces as the Riverine Forces in the Mekong Delta or the Marine Corps in the Northern RVN regions in the vicinity of Da Nang. It was not unusual for EOD personnel to reconnoiter the banks of the rivers and canals for land mines and booby-traps in conjunction with Navy SEAL operations. They also participated with the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps EOD in the cleanup of explosive debris from ammunition dump explosions caused by Viet Cong sapper attacks. The requests for EOD services

were numerous and varied – each incident required a unique approach. The performance of the military EOD community in Vietnam was uniformly outstanding, reflecting great credit on the individual technician, the service organizations, and the training and technical support programs at Indian Head, MD. After the cease fire in Vietnam, Navy EOD played a key role in Operation END SWEEP—the clearance of mines from the waters of North Vietnam in 1973.



Nam Can canal, 1970: Combined US Navy and VN Navy operation in support of Operation SEA FLOAT. UDT and EOD members alongside VNN EOD lay Mk 1 explosive hose into position. This mission was designed to eliminate surface vegetation which hampered pursuit of VC attackers at Sea Float. View is from bow of HSSC to mid-channel. As with all waterways in the Mekong Delta there was the constant threat from snakes, eels, and occasionally a croc. There was always the annoyance of leeches and almost instant infection of any injury. Everyone was on over watch by personnel armed with rifles and shotguns to protect against human and animal attacks. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

Throughout the Vietnam war, Navy EOD continued to support Fleet Commanders both with local and regional response, contingency response, and U.S. Secret Service. Navy EOD also continued to deploy from EOD Shipboard Units that specialized in EOD operations in support of carriers and ammunition ships conducting daily air strikes in the Vietnam theater. In addition, there were a handful of EOD teams conducting ordnance disposal operations in the vicinity of Micronesia and the Philippines cleaning up World War II U.S. and Japanese bombs, artillery, mortars, small arms, torpedoes, and mines; there was also a similar contingent of EOD technicians involved with the

Military Assistance Command, Thailand acting in advisory roles to Thai EOD personnel. However, Vietnam operations in green and brown water, and on land were certainly the focus for the community as nearly every operating technician in that period did at least one tour in Vietnam at one of the many ongoing or newly established Vietnam EOD operations.

The operational tempo was most significant for the West Coast units. EOD Unit ONE, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii deployed most of the EOD detachments throughout the conflict, usually in three-man teams. Due to the shortage of EOD technicians following major cuts to community manning following the Korean War, and to meet the demand created by Vietnam operational requirements, a major recruiting effort was undertaken on both coasts. EOD “Recruiting Teams” were stood up, manned by EOD technicians that were assigned to shore duty, usually in between deployments to Vietnam. Presentations, screening, and swim tests were conducted at “A” schools in Jacksonville and Great Lakes.

It wasn't until the Suez Canal clearance in 1974 that the community as a whole experienced another major operation.

IV. Vietnam operations

Headquarters Support Activity (HSA) and Naval Support Activity (NSA) Saigon (1964-1972)

Navy EOD made its debut in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in 1964 with a small team of EOD techs assigned as the bomb squad for HSA, Saigon (later to become Naval Support Activity, Saigon upon the decommissioning of HSAS). The Navy was responsible for the port of Saigon, and HSAS

Saigon, 1965: Vehicle bombing of the Hotel Metropole (U.S. enlisted BEQ) in downtown Saigon. Navy EOD technicians LT Ronan, EN2 Thiel, and BT1 McCraw from HSA Saigon conduct post-blast analysis at the scene. The explosion killed an estimated 50 people and wounded hundreds (flying glass). The team rendered safe a secondary device at the scene: a 14-inch diameter improvised claymore mine (with wristwatch timer) left in a bag at curbside and designed to kill rescue personnel. The timer was removed from the claymore and upon later examination, noted to be timed-out (ready to detonate). (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)



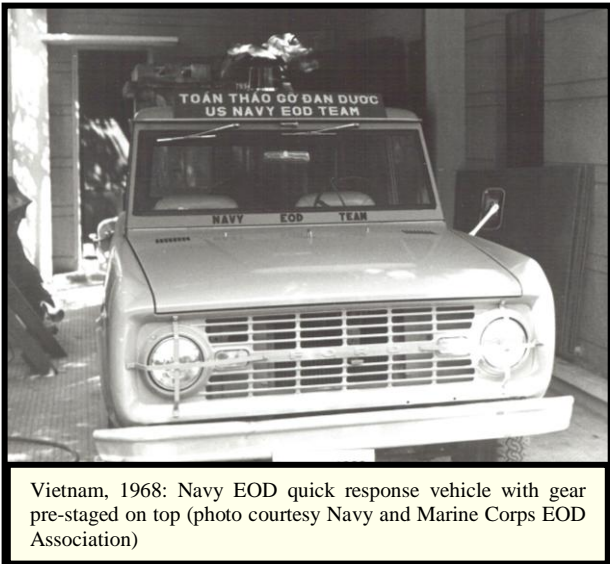
was the only Navy contingent in RVN at the time. The first members of that team were LT T. C. Burke, LTjg L.E. Ronan, BT1 Paul McCraw, BM1 Mike Dahmer, EN2 Richard Thiel, ABF2 Joe Levac, and EM3 Ralph Loux. The team was responsible for responding to all explosive hazards in the Capital Municipal

District (Saigon/Cholon) and was under operational control of the Army 716th Military Police Battalion. The team also provided diving services to include salvage, body recovery, and minor underwater ship repair.

The team's office, workshop and storage area was located in the servants living quarters behind a villa that doubled as the compound for Office of Naval Intelligence personnel in Cholon. It was a long, narrow building approximately 10 feet wide and 40 feet long divided into office, workshop,

and storage area/museum. The museum was a hands-on training display of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and US/foreign ordnance items that had been picked up at EOD incidents the team had responded to. Outside the building were two CONEX boxes, one contained foreign ordnance waiting to be inerted and the other contained miscellaneous gear. In the same general area was a large fenced cage. In it resided "Charlie" a twelve foot Rock Python who was the team mascot. From these meager beginnings, Navy EOD began to have a significant impact on U.S. operations throughout the remainder of the war.

The HSAS bomb squad conducted disposal of unexploded ordnance, dismantling of Viet Cong booby traps and improvised devices, and post blast analysis of bomb attacks within the city. Most



of their responses were land-based and in urban terrain. Their tools were crude by current standards—instead of using robots and bomb suits to interrogate suspected enemy bombs, many times they used hand tools, hand entry or remote pull procedures, and a lot of common sense and ingenuity. The team responded to approximately 70 calls for EOD assistance each month. One of the EOD technicians recalled that about half of the responses involved explosive devices: either standard military ordnance like grenades, claymore mines, and bulk explosives or improvised and booby-trapped ordnance. The improvised devices were fairly unsophisticated and mostly consisted of modified watches or alarm clock timers that controlled standard firing circuits. Very rarely did any of the improvised devices incorporate safety

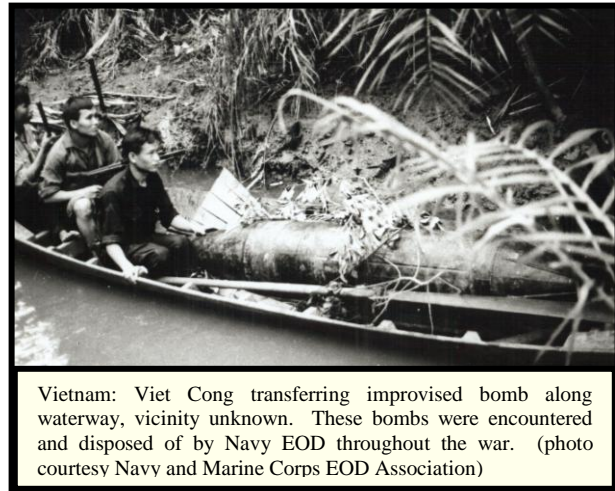
devices for the bomber. Many times, the main charge was either TNT blocks made into various sized bulk charges with shrapnel producing fragmentary material or Chinese-made claymore mines.

HSA Saigon was decommissioned when the Army took over responsibility for Saigon, and on April 1st, 1966, with the arrival of the 1st Logistics Command, U.S. Army EOD assumed duties as the bomb squad for the Saigon area. The Navy EOD team from HSA Saigon was moved down to Nha Be Naval Base, but there continued to be a rotation of many Navy EOD teams to continue EOD response in support of Naval Support Activity Saigon, in the port of Saigon. Eventually, two 3-man EOD teams in addition to a logistic support team comprised of EOD technicians that supported Navy EOD teams throughout the entire country were on a consistent rotation for the remaining eight years that the Navy retained a presence in Saigon. These teams continued to use the original EOD compound as headquarters and were flown all over the country for up to two weeks at a time to complete missions, from areas south in the Mekong Delta to the northernmost province of Quang Tri, just south of the North-South demarcation line.

Nha Be Naval Base

Nha Be is located 10 miles to the south of Saigon and was chosen to be the location of a Naval Base. A river bank at Nha Be was dredged in order to create a dry bed upon which to emplace steel

pilings and the base itself. The purpose for creating the base was to establish a naval and riverine presence along the Saigon river to escort cargo ships enroute Saigon and conduct maritime security operations along the 45 mile river. More specifically, the Navy in this sector was responsible for keeping the Long Tau and Saigon shipping channel open to the Military Sea Transportation Service and friendly merchant ships delivering large quantities of vital supplies to the Saigon Port Complex. Navy EOD attached to COMNAVFORV were sent to Nha Be and conducted operations with PBRs and SWIFT boats to identify suspicious cargo onboard large and small craft alike. At any given time there were three 3-man EOD teams operating out of Nha Be.



Many times, there would be calls for support that required use of the Nah Be helicopter pad to lift EOD technicians up and down the Saigon river and into the Rung Sat Special Zone when required.

There were several incidents of Navy EOD intercepting, identifying, and rendering safe improvised and conventional floating mines and fougasse bombs emplaced in the river banks intended to target cargo shipping and navy vessels, especially on the Soi Rap and Long Tau rivers. Perhaps the most widely-reported incident for Navy EOD operations out of Nha Be was a response involving a floating Russian mine. This incident was significant as it was one of many confirmations that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were being supplied with ordnance and weapons by the Soviets and Chinese. An excerpt on the incident is recounted below:

In 1966, U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team members, Lieutenant Frank Talarico, USN and Lieutenant Junior Grade Anthony O'Connell, USNR, were attached to Commander U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam.

On December 31 1966, at approximately 1200 hours, the Nha Be Operations Center received a call that an Army helicopter crew had sighted a cylindrical object, with some projections around the casing, floating free on the Long Tau River. The object was drifting towards the Saigon Port Complex. The EOD Team was immediately called to the Operations Center and received a briefing from the Duty Officer about the incident. After the briefing, the team was ordered to proceed to the Long Tau River and investigate the object. A PBR riverboat, with guns manned, was standing by for support. A Jeep was provided to transport the team, equipment, publications and rifles to a near by fishing village. A Vietnamese fisherman then transported them to a safe area on the riverbank. Using binoculars, they identified the object as a foreign chemical horn contact mine and reported this fact to Operations Center. Talarico later stated that to his knowledge this was the only chemical horn contact mine found in Vietnam. The Operations Center passed the word, via the PBR radio, to inform the EOD Team to render it safe. The PBR crew kept a sharp lookout on both sides of the river and stood ready to pick up the EOD Team if hostile fire was encountered. The team swam to the mine and after checking the publications, identified it as an armed Russian MKB Variation Chemical Horn Contact Mine. They noticed that the anchor wire had been cut and was frayed. All the horns were intact with horn cover guards installed. They secured a long line to one of the lifting eye rings and

carefully towed the mine closer to shore. This permitted the men to stand on the mud bottom for secure footing, prior to commencing the rendering safe procedure.

Talarico called the PBR to notify the Ops Center of the mine's identification. The only mine of this type found thus far in Vietnam, and that they were ready to render it safe. Talarico directed the PBR to maintain a safe distance until the team was ready for pick up. They still felt vulnerable, even though the PBR was standing by several hundred yards away.

The team was in the water, next to an armed contact mine that could be seen from both riverbanks covered with jungle growth and Vietcong. The mine was covered with barnacles and the mercury switch plug and booster cover plates were rusted. The team would have to put some pressure on the wrench to break the cover plates loose while being alert for booby traps. Since this area was not secure and they were in the middle of the riverbanks, they had to RSP the mine as quickly and safely as possible. They checked carefully for booby traps and finding none commenced to render it safe. The team carefully removed the booster cover plate. Upon its removal, the detonator, under pressure of the detonator securing spring, pushed up suddenly and startled them. Their hearts jumped. Talarico carefully pulled the detonator and booster out far enough to cut and tape the leads thus breaking the explosive train.

The PBR was called to hoist the mine aboard. Using the boat davit, with the help of the boat crew, they carefully hoisted the mine on the fantail being careful not to damage the horns. They covered the mine with a tarp and headed back to base. The mine and booster was off loaded on the dock. The booster and mine were later flown to Indian Head, Maryland, to the EOD School. It was later incorporated into the underwater ordnance practical training at Stump Neck. A briefing was conducted by the staff and team to determine how this mine got there. Since the mine was covered with barnacles and the anchor wire cut and frayed, it was assumed that the mine broke loose from its anchor or was cut by a MSB. It could have been hidden in a river in



Nha Be Vietnam, 1966: LCDR Talarico holding detonator/booster assembly of captured and safed Russian MKB chemical horn mine. (photo courtesy Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

the Rung Sat Special Zone and towed to the Long Tau River. This was the first and only chemical horn contact mine of foreign origin found in Vietnam, all other mines found in the Long Tau River were types detonated by remote control or crude devices attached to vessels and set off with a timing device. The team was commended for the identification, successful rendering safe and removal of the mine from the Long Tau River in an insurgent infested area. This was LTJG O'Connell's first EOD assignment after graduating from EOD School. During the entire operation LTJG O'Connell did an excellent job. Lt. Talarico was awarded the Bronze Star and LTJG O'Connell was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal.

The Mobile Riverine Force (Operations GAME WARDEN and SEALORDS)

Although Navy EOD was involved in Operation GAME WARDEN, supporting the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) in maritime security operations throughout RAN waterways, the community really began to make an impact in the riverine war with the onset of Operation SEALORDS which began October 8, 1968. A minimum of two 3-man EOD teams were assigned to Riverine Flotilla ONE at all times and they lived and operated out of barges attached to the command's massive afloat base.

Their mission was to provide EOD and diving support services to Navy Riverine and Market Time Forces, 3rd Bde 9th Infantry, VN Marines, VN Army, VN Regional and Popular Forces.

Tactical employment of EOD in support of the riverines involved close-work with the first boats in the patrol line—those boats were designated as the minesweepers. The teams, as individual EOD



Nam Can canal, 1970: EODTEUPAC Team 82, VNN Underwater Missions Battalion (EOD Company), UDT 13, and SEAL Support personnel explosively deepen a canal connecting “old” Nam Can with “new” Nam Can (a US Navy afloat base named “Sea Float”)—a distance of approximately 20 miles, to allow friendly patrol craft to pursue VC and NVA that had used the area between to two villages as a sanctuary. This area was also an infiltration route for enemy forces. This photo shows explosive hose being offloaded from a Heavy SEAL Support Craft (HSSC) on to air mattresses for further placement on the canal bottom. The connected hose sections were then detonated to provide channel deep enough to allow access by Market Time PBR’s. Several prisoners were taken during this operation. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

technicians or groups of two or three, would go out with the assault craft patrols of the riverine squadrons or on specific missions embarked on the minesweepers and would assist those boats in sweeping operations in addition to conducting identification of suspicious items sighted by the riverine ‘convoy’ in the water, underwater, and on land. If a landing was underway to place soldiers or marines ashore, the minesweepers would convert to aid boats during the landing and Navy EOD would be in stand by to receive calls to the forward line or beach head in order to clear hazardous explosive items encountered. Some EOD detachments were inserted with South VN Rangers and VN Navy Underwater Missions Battalion (a VN EOD company) on a consistent basis in

the Nam Can canal area of operations. Nam Can was located in the extreme south of RVN and was a hotly contested area throughout the entire war.

On many occasions, Navy EOD accompanied Army patrols that were placed ashore by RIVFLOT ONE. The EOD operators would render safe booby traps, unexploded American bombs, and destroy bunkers in support of the patrols. There was also infrequent coordination between the EOD detachments at RIVFLOT ONE in Dong Tam and the SEAL detachment located down river at My Tho to conduct identification and destruction of remote Vietcong and North Vietnamese caches located in close proximity to the Cambodia border.

Also, as everywhere else in theater, Navy EOD attached to RIVFLOT ONE conducted daily underwater hull checks of the afloat base and the watercraft (PBR’s, SWIFT boats, etc). According to several accounts, EOD techs assigned to RIVFLOT ONE responded to incidents involving Vietcong use of floating mines intended to snag anchor chains or have a direct impact on the afloat base and attached



South bank of Mekong River across U.S. base at Dong Tam: LT Ronan of EODMUPAC Team 39 crawls into a Vietcong bunker to ensure it is clear of arms/munitions and then places an explosive charge to destroy the bunker. This area was heavily contaminated with booby traps, claymore mines and sometimes landmines. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

units. These mines were often plastic explosive wrapped in plastic sheeting, filled with electric blasting caps, and initiated remotely with Claymore hand generators.

Naval Support Activity (NSA) Da Nang

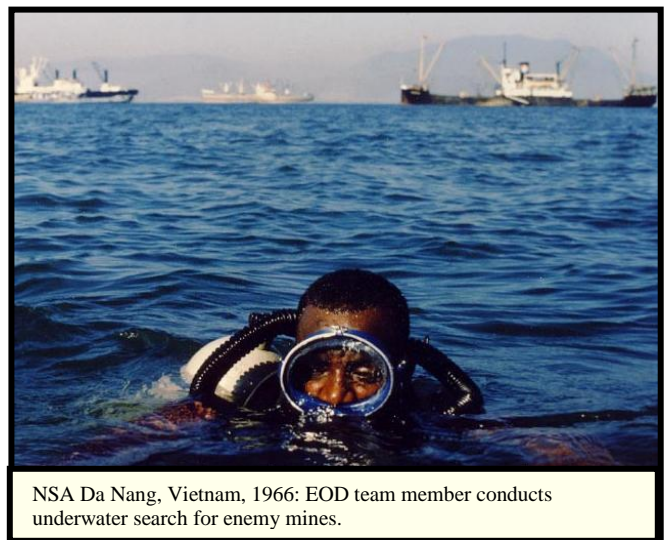
Shortly after the establishment of the first Navy EOD team in Saigon, EOD technicians were employed in the northern city of Da Nang, to support USMC 1st Amtrak Battalion and 3 MAF conducting demolition operations, response to river hazards, and response as requested throughout I Corps' northern territories and the DMZ (Qua Viet River). Da Nang was critical as the most northern US Navy Support Activity, a major US airbase, and as a step-off point for operations into the northernmost province of Quang Tri, just south of the demarcation line.

The teams that rotated to Da Nang on a continuous basis patrolled with several entities and responded to IED calls both local and regional. The IED threat in the region was the greatest hazard, with encounters with improvised US Anti-Tank mines and artillery rounds frequently found and rendered safe. Some of the IED's incorporated shape charges for heavy vehicles. Also, like elsewhere throughout the country, Navy EOD teams in Da Nang were often called to ensure that bodies floating in the Da Nang River were clear of booby-traps and ordnance. For transportation to responses throughout the I Corps territory, the Da Nang teams primarily used helicopter due to the terrain limitations.

Operation STABLE DOOR

Key to U.S. operations in Vietnam were seaports such as Vung Tau, Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Cam Rahn which flowed equipment, supplies, forces, and aid into the country. At each seaport there was a US Navy Support Activity and associated with each NSA was a minimum of one 3-man EOD detachment to conduct hull and pier searches, IED response, and UXO response in support of the NSA. However, each of these EOD detachments was in high demand and tended to be tasked to support adjacent Army or Marine units. Several of these detachments were augmented by US Navy divers in order to ensure diving operations remained fully mission capable while the EOD team members were tasked in support of missions outside the immediate port area.

Harbor security at these ports usually consisted of conducting night dives on allied shipping (transports and warships) to include their anchor chains, screws, and rudders to ensure they were clear of enemy limpets or floating mines. EOD also was responsible for searching generator ships which supplied power to shore facilities such as Quin Nhon. In addition to ship checks, EOD also



NSA Da Nang, Vietnam, 1966: EOD team member conducts underwater search for enemy mines.

responded to requests for emergency diving services, identified suspicious items around the harbor, and recovered friendly and VC bodies drifting in the waterways. The detachment at Nam Can was also tasked on a consistent basis with assisting local units clearing nearby rivers by making 10-12 anti-swimmer charges and throwing the charges overboard up and down the river.



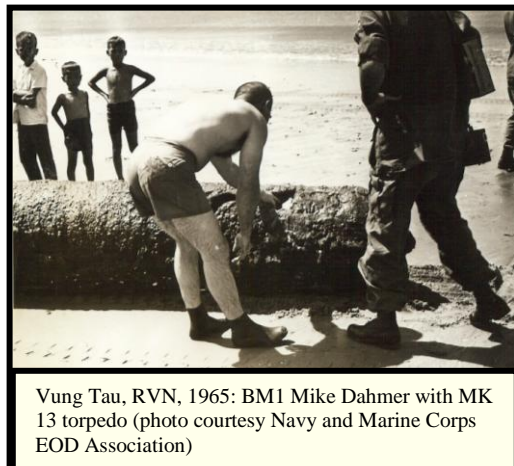
South China Sea near Nha Trang, 1965: Navy EOD Technician LT Ronan engaged in recovery of a RVN Air Force A-1 Sky Raider. The aircraft was piloted by a USAF LtCol. The pilot lost power on takeoff with a full ordnance load. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

There were also many responses carried out by these detachments to locate and salvage U.S. aircraft downed in the South China sea and riverways. These missions were often lengthy and difficult as the objective often involved the recovery and disposal of ordnance underwater, the recovery of flight recorder 'black boxes', and the collection of intelligence, in addition to recovery of the actual aircraft.

Of special note was the EOD unit stationed at Vung Tau. Vung Tau was initially expected to be a relatively low-threat port due to its southern position along the coast. NSA Vung Tau was assigned Royal Australian Navy Clearance Dive Team THREE instead of a U.S. Navy EOD team,

and the RAN rotated several contingents of EOD teams to the port throughout the war. However, as the war went on, Vung Tau was many times the target of Viet Cong, and CDT-3 became busy with EOD work. In addition, there was a consistent exchange program between US Navy EOD detachments located in Saigon and Nha Be and the CDT-3 detachments located at Vung Tau. One significant US Navy EOD response in Vung Tau is recounted below by an original member of the Saigon bomb squad:

We got a call from Vung Tau for EOD assistance: report of a torpedo visible at low tide in the back beach area. BM1 Dahmer/EN2 Thiel were sent to Vung Tau via helo. LT Burke told us to take a couple days R&R as none of us believed there was an actual torpedo. A captain in the Army Engineer Corps met us and took us to the beach. The tide was in and the object could not be seen. The next day at low tide we went out to the object. After removing a VN fisherman from on top of the object, we found a MK 13 torpedo that was very easy to ID because of the shroud around the propeller. Further examination showed the after body and warhead had huge holes in the metal casing exposing the gears and other components in the after body and the explosive in the warhead. Careful cleaning of the exploder produced a circular brass surface-possibly a MK 4 or Mk 8 impact inertia exploder. No inlay to tell condition as it was badly corroded and fused into the warhead metal from the electrolytic action over the years. Not having any tools or publications and the location precluding us blowing in place, we decided to move it to an area about 6 kilometers distant. Even if we had tools, I don't believe the exploder could have been removed. An army tow truck



Vung Tau, RVN, 1965: BM1 Mike Dahmer with MK 13 torpedo (photo courtesy Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

and a 6X6 cargo truck were procured and run out on the beach on the next low tide. A chain picked up the torpedo. We had run one end in the bullring in the warhead and run a choker around the after body just forward of the shroud. When the weight was taken up, sure was a lot of creaking and cracking as we had no spreader bars and the torpedo was sagging in the middle. We lowered the torpedo into the bed of the 6X6, blocked it up as well as we could and took off for the beach that bordered the approach to the airfield at Vung Tau. The VN police escort took us right through the middle of town. Sure was interesting as that torpedo bounced all over the back of that truck. "Dickie" and me were in the back trying our best to keep it as still as possible. The only demo gear the captain could find were two 1-pound TNT blocks and 1 electric blasting cap from a claymore. I told the captain I needed a 6-volt dry cell battery and a commo wire reel. Commo reel had 550-600 ft. of wire on it. Talk about close in work. The warhead had, if I remembered right, 600 pounds of HE. This torpedo was evidently a WWII



Vung Tau, RVN, 1965: Navy EOD Technicians BM1 Mike Dahmer and BT1 Paul McCraw from EOD Team, HSA Saigon identify and render safe a US torpedo fired during an attack on Japanese shipping in Vung Tau harbor during World War II. The torpedo washed ashore near a US Army unit. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

holdout. Vung Tau had been a Japanese anchorage during that time. We placed the TNT blocks in one of the holes in the warhead, ran out the commo wire as far as it would go, got on the far side of a sand dune and thought about it. I went back to the torpedo, hooked the blasting cap up to the commo wire, made sure everybody was clear and placed the blasting cap in the well of one of the TNT blocks. Taking one more look around, I headed back for the sand dune where "Dickie" was guarding the other end of the commo wire. Sure seemed close. I hooked up one lead of the battery terminals, gave a loud "Fire in the hole" and touched the other lead to the opposite terminal. All hell broke loose. Big chunks of metal were going overhead

and chunking all around us. Thankfully the sand dune shielded us though it did shimmy and shake. It shot chunks of metal—air flask, propeller and propeller shaft, misc. gears. No one was hurt though the Air Force went to G.Q. The Army Captain forgot to notify them. I know that "Dickie" and I both enjoyed our cold beers and dinner that night. We stayed in Vung Tau for a couple more days and then boarded a helo for our trip back to Saigon.

Marine Mammal Systems, Da Nang and Cam Rahn Bay

Operation END SWEEP (1973)

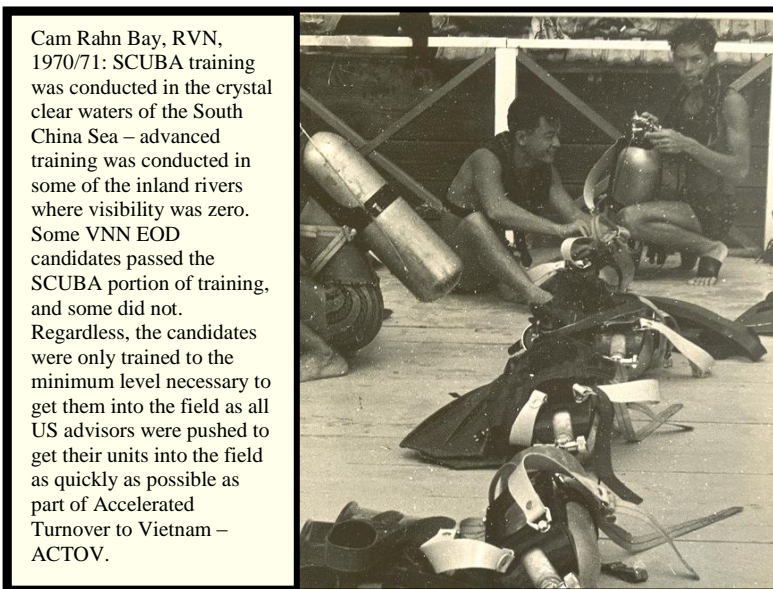
V. Navy EOD's role in "Vietnamization": the making of RVN EOD technicians

Shortly after the election of President Nixon in 1968, the United States pursued a policy called ‘Vietnamization’, designed to enable the United States to pull its combat troops out of Vietnam by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese. This meant that the U.S. military had to train and equip the RVN military to eventually execute operations on its own. Navy EOD was not exempt from this new policy and like nearly all other units in country, began to train RVN Navy members as EOD technicians. The mission was to establish a Vietnam Navy (VNN) EOD capability and train VNN personnel to continue to support line units engaged in the war.



Cat Lai, RVN, 1970/71: EODTEUPAC Team 82 and Vietnamese Navy candidates for the Underwater Missions Battalion EOD Company. Initial screening involved physical ability evaluation and swimming skills. Names: AO1 Jerry Taylor (white shorts), LT Ronan (black shirt). (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

The effort began with the US Navy training the VNN “Underwater Missions Battalion” at Cat Lai (50km north of Saigon). This battalion was comprised of companies of RVN SEALs, EOD, and divers. Training was intense and accelerated due to the political pressures of Vietnamization.



Cam Rahn Bay, RVN, 1970/71: SCUBA training was conducted in the crystal clear waters of the South China Sea – advanced training was conducted in some of the inland rivers where visibility was zero. Some VNN EOD candidates passed the SCUBA portion of training, and some did not. Regardless, the candidates were only trained to the minimum level necessary to get them into the field as all US advisors were pushed to get their units into the field as quickly as possible as part of Accelerated Turnover to Vietnam – ACTOV.

Many of the RVN “volunteers” sent to the battalion by RVN officers were rejected for service in the RVN military elsewhere, but the Navy EOD advisors would retain those rejected individuals if they performed heroically in the field. For a long time, VNN members of the battalion were sent to the field to support US operations. Then, a school was established at Cam Rahn Bay because of the relative security at Cam Rahn. US Navy advisors from the SEAL, UDT, EOD, and diving communities were sent to train VNN members of the Underwater Missions Battalion at the Cam Rahn camp. The camp

increased the practical experience of the students and the throughput of graduates, thereby expediting their ability to conduct actual operations in the field. The camp was called “Lin Nui Nuinai” which translated literally means “Combined Group of Frog People”.

Eventually, nearly every Navy EOD team in RVN had some level of coordination or support relationship with RVN EOD technicians.

VI. Joint and combined operations and relationships

Throughout the war, Navy EOD operators worked in support of many different joint and combined units. An EOD team could be operating in support of its designated tactical commander one day



Ben Tre area, RVN, 1970/71: EODTEUPAC Team 82 and VNN Underwater Missions Battalion members. CWO James Ennis and VNN EOD technicians in the field in support of an ARVN infantry unit conducting a search and destroy operation. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

and then be flown by helicopter to another division's area of operations to support army or marine elements of U.S. or foreign services. Typically, commanders with operational or tactical control of Navy EOD forces were generous with sharing their EOD technicians with adjacent commands. This was largely due to the fact that the threat from improvised devices and UXO throughout the theater of operations was shared by everyone, and everyone lacked EOD techs to properly neutralize and dispose of the explosive hazards present. Such ad hoc tasking was therefore commonplace and the EOD teams were

allowed significant flexibility to coordinate missions and operational relationships beyond the immediate chain of command.

As mentioned previous, some of the joint operations conducted by Navy EOD involved riverine operations in support of the 9th Infantry Division ashore during both opposed and unopposed landings, missions supporting Army and Marine infantry patrols, missions in support of Army and Air Force search and rescue and clearing of downed aircraft, and EODMU teams providing direct support to USMC I Corps in vicinity of Da Nang. EOD techs were also attached to the Army base at Dong Tam to support dredging operations at the port that oftentimes produced unexploded ordnance. Diving operations in support of the Army were especially prevalent missions conducted by Navy EOD. Since Navy EOD's mission sets were synchronous with the other services with the exception of additional diving and mine countermeasure capabilities, Navy EOD conducted nearly every conceivable mission in support of joint operations possible during the period of the Vietnam war.



Nam Can Canal, RVN, 1970: Combined US and VN Navy operation in support of Operation SEA FLOAT. This photo shows detonation cord being wrapped to the end of Mk 1 explosive hose. The hose was placed on the river bottom with the cord leading to the surface where it and the blasting cap/time fuze was floated on an air mattress. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

Interestingly enough, even though there was a great deal of joint operations conducted by Navy EOD in the war, there was very little intentional coordination between Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps EOD teams in country. Often, these service EOD components would find each other working side by side on the same mission (e.g. safe disposal of destroyed ammunition storage points), but since there was no joint EOD entity to manage EOD employment in the Vietnam theater,

each EOD team tended to stay aligned directly with its operational chain of command except when receiving short-term tasking to support adjacent commanders that lacked EOD forces.

Combined operations for Navy EOD were as prevalent throughout the war as joint operations. As previously mentioned, many Navy EOD technicians were assigned a tour in country as military



Vung Tau, RVN, 1970: U.S. Navy and Royal Australian Navy EOD team members pose for photo. Throughout the war, USN EOD technicians from Saigon and Nha Be engaged in personnel exchanges with RAN EOD technicians operating out of VungTau. (photo courtesy of Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

advisors to train and employ Vietnam Navy EOD personnel. In addition to training and working side-by-side with the VNN EOD forces in a combat environment, Navy EOD personnel also conducted a handful of missions in conjunction with Korean clearance divers.

Perhaps the most remembered and significant operational relationship that Navy EOD engaged in during the war was with Australian Clearance Diving Team THREE based out of Vung Tau. The Australian CDT-3 teams would conduct a consistent personnel trade

with the HSA (and then NSA) Saigon bomb squad. Earlier in the war, when the Viet Cong had yet to fully spread their operations as far south as Vung Tau, the U.S. Navy EOD techs viewed their stay in Vung Tau as a welcome relief, and the CDT-3 personnel were excited to get closer to the action in Nha Be or Saigon.

VII. Tactical encounters

Headquarters Support Activity (HSA) and Naval Support Activity (NSA) Saigon

From LCDR E.L. McDaniel Jr., USN (Ret.):

In Saigon, we were always prepared to give technical support to Combined Material Exploitation Center (CMEC). Up north myself and Chief Roberts worked an Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) that VC had hit. I was OinC of one shift. We were working 4 hour shifts on a pad that had contained 240,000 40mm grenades before the VC hit it. I had Navy, Army and Air Force EOD personnel working for me. Also, the Air Force requested a Navy EOD team to work a site on the Moon River in Thailand. An F-4 from Udon had jettisoned a full load of CBU's into the moon river. It was shallow water and the natives fished the area with nets. At Nha Be we supported Marine Corp advisors working with VN marines in Rung Sat Special Zone. In addition to the booby traps and ordnance problems that might occur we also destroyed VC bunkers.

From Michael Dahmer, USN (Ret.):

I will try to break down the Ops, incidents/situations that the team responded to while I was there. There were two distinct time frames for me-12/5/65 to 4/1/66 as part of HSAS EOD Team. On 4/1/66 the Army relieved us of the Capital Municipal District. The other was 4/1/65 to 12/15/67. During this time frame I was first assigned to Naval Support Activity Saigon for a short time after HSAS was decommissioned. Then I was assigned to Naval Advisory Group, Military Advisory Command Vietnam (NAG/MACV). By the time this occurred and my HSAS team members had rotated back to the U.S. I was the only PCS Navy EOD man in country until the arrival LTJG McConnell, CS1 McMahon, DC1 Santino and EM2 Simmons a few months later.

The US Navy EOD Team, HSAS, RVN responded to approximately 70 calls for EOD assistance monthly. About half of the calls involved explosive devices; standard military ordnance: grenades, claymore mines and bulk explosives. Some were of US origin but most of foreign origins Chinese Communist (Chicom), Russian and Soviet Bloc countries. IEDs also were a large part of these incidents..

The IEDs were fairly unsophisticated and mostly consisted of modified watches/alarm clock timers that controlled a standard electric firing circuit. No safety devices were incorporated in these devices. The main charge was either 1-kilogram Chicom TNT blocks made up into various sized bulk charges, MDH10 Chicom claymore mines and various types of homemade shrapnel producing explosive devices. Here is a sampling of the calls the team responded to:

Gunnysack thrown from moving vehicle came to rest against concrete wall of compound housing US Embassy personnel. BM1 Dahmer/EN2 Thiel answered call. Gained entry to gunnysack by cutting open one side. Contents: dead dog. This was my first EOD call my second night in Vietnam.

Call from Brinks Hotel. Briefcase left unattended in lobby. LTJg Ronan responded. Gained entry by cutting out side of leather briefcase. While performing entry procedure an Army colonel approaches looking for his briefcase. He'd left it next to the desk while checking in. Was really irate, as the briefcase was a going away gift from his wife. MP's managed to cool down the colonel-told him never to leave any packages, luggage, etc. unattended as this was a standard VC tactic to place explosive devices in US compounds.

Responded to small explosion on edge of Saigon. An IED had been detonated at a bus stop that normally was used by third world nationals i.e.; Koreans, Thais, etc. The only casualties were Vietnamese women and children. Device was thought to be a vegetable can packed with nails, nuts and bolts with an explosive center and fired by timer. Delivery vehicle-bicycle.

Call from HSAS Chaplain's office. Upon arrival a VN electrician was found sitting on a bench under an opening in the false ceiling. He had been called in to do some wiring in the ceiling crawl space and after going up and looking in the opening came down and refused to go back up. Questioning by the Chaplain's assistant led to a "I will not go up there while that is in there" and he retained his seat under the opening. LTJg Ronan responded, found out what the situation was and decided to look in the opening. Figured there might be a rat or snake up there. No such luck. Instead there was an IED weighing approx. 2 1/2-3 kilograms. The device was rather sophisticated and well constructed for a VC IED. Upon gaining entry to the device, a neatly laid out electrical firing circuit was discovered, complete with batteries, electric detonator and two holders for modified wrist watch timers hooked up in parallel. True to VC methodology, they had fouled up again—no timers had been installed. Throughout the whole operation the VN electrician maintained his seat on the bench. Must have really needed the job.

Another standard VC method was to load a car up with explosives, run it up close or into a U.S. or RVN building and either timer or manually detonate it. Received a call that a Volkswagon Beetle had been run into a parking space adjacent to a RVN government building and the driver was seen running from the vehicle. Upon arrival at the scene a new VW Beetle was found abandoned. MPs had set up a perimeter. The EOD Team approached the vehicle and decided a forced entry was appropriate. In our toolbox a 5-pound engineer mallet was carried. LTJg Ronan promptly put it through the windshield. Looking the interior of the vehicle over, it was determined no booby trap devices were readily visible. Reaching in the hole through the windshield, the driver's door was unlocked and the door carefully opened. About the same time an irate US civilian came running up and demanded to know what was going on. He really got mad when he saw the busted windshield. Turned out he was assigned to the US AID mission and the VW was his. Seems like he was late for a class in which he taught English at a nearby building. No explosives were found and the MPs managed to calm the guy down before LTJG Ronan hit the guy.

Responded to a call at main gate, Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. Explosion- No casualties. Investigation of scene showed a Chicom MDH-10 claymore mine had been detonated about 80 ft. from the main gate. The VC did one of his famous foul-ups and

directed the blast into the base of a tree. If the MDH-10 had been positioned 6 ft. right or left, the casualties would have been high as the detonation was timed to go off at quitting time when U.S. and RVN military and civilian personnel were heading out the gate.

LTJG Ronan, BM1 Dahmer and ABF2 Levac departed for Pleiku for body recovery in a lake. A US soldier had drowned and they wanted the body for a positive ID. The request had come from the Provost Marshal at Pleiku. The team and our gear were flown to the airbase at Pleiku where the Provost Marshall took us to the lake. There we found an Army APC with several crewmembers standing around. The day before, after having been out on a sweep operation, they had come to the lake and as it was rather hot, decided to go for a swim. One of them went running into the lake and never came up. The lake was an old volcanic crater that had filled up from springs and had very steep sides. Levac and Dahmer got on their SCUBA gear and started a search. The water was very cold and after about five minutes we found the body. This was the second day he had been in the water and already a good portion of his body was covered with silt. A combination of the cold spring water and the silt being stirred up by the spring's action was probably the reason no other bodies had ever been recovered. This was a first. We put a line on him and brought him to the surface. The water depth was about 30 ft, and we were less than 20 ft, from the shore. Returned to Saigon the next day.

Request for EOD services for search of black staff car reported missing earlier and later found after dark. LTJG Ronan, BM1 Dahmer and 2 others responded. Vehicle was out of city on highway to Bien Hoa about 10-12 kilometers. Highway was not secure after dark so two jeeploads of MPs accompanied the team. Talk about hairy—red and green tracers were flying all over the place, a lot overhead. Searched the suspect vehicle, no explosives found. On way back to Saigon stopped at Ho Ngoc Tao Special Forces "B" Camp. We used their mortar range for a demo range and had a good relationship with them. They had asked us for EOD assistance at a couple of their "A" and we had provided it. They also told us that the VC had been extremely active the last couple of nights and if we had to make any more trips out that way to stop and they would provide us with a couple squads of strikers for security. After a couple of beers we headed back for Saigon.

Explosion at bar in Saigon waterfront/dock area. BM1 Dahmer/EN2 Thiel respond. Determined from residue (Cap covering striker/grenade spoon) that an F-1 Chicom grenade had been thrown into the bar. Possible "Cowboy" incident. No other explosives found. This was my first run in with Army CID personnel. This guy kept flashing his ID card in my face, saying he was Mr. So & So and kept demanding to know what was going on. A real pain in the butt. Me, being new and not wanting to cause an incident with the Army, tried pacifying the guy. Really thought he was some officer or other big wheel. After much agitation and many attempts on my part to be civil, EN2 Thiel came to my rescue and told the guy to pump off. "Dickie" had run into these guys before with the same results I had. We found out the majority were just Spec 4 or 5, wearing civilian clothes with CID ID cards. I never put up with their BS again.

One of the things I'm sure you noticed was the fact that at all incidents where explosions occurred, the team always looked for other explosive devices. The VC used backup

devices, particularly MDH-10 claymore mines, to get rescue personnel and crowds that gathered at these incidents. Our team was tasked for a helo recovery operation. A troop carrying "Huey" had gone down in a river and the large eyebolt that linked the transmission and rotor blades and was the main point hookup for downed helo recovery was above water. The thought was that the bodies were still in the helo and the bodies were wanted for positive ID. There were numerous problems in this particular operation: 1) The area was not secure, 2) Team and gear would be inserted by helo about 1 mile upriver from downed helo, 3) Water was fast moving and a short distance below the downed helo the river narrowed and rapids were present. LTJG Ronan, BM1 Dahmer and one other team member responded. They took a 7-man IBS with paddles, one SCUBA tank/swim gear and personal weapons. The plan was: 1) Get inserted by helo upriver, 2) Drift downriver to the downed helo, 3) Wait for arrival of "Flying Crane" recovery helo, 4) Hook up recovery pennant to eyebolt of downed helo, 5) Untie IBS from downed helo, 6) Drift downriver to a clearing just above the rapids and get extracted by helo. With all the things that could go wrong, it was surprising nothing did. The only real problem was caused by the downdraft of the recovery helo while it was hovering over the downed helo. Made it extremely difficult to hook up the recovery pennant. No bodies were in the helo. Footprints in the mud of the riverbank indicated some survivors. Never did find out if any made it out or not. These are just a few of the incidents that took place in the four month period I was assigned to HSAS EOD team.

Nha Be Naval Base

Nam Can Bay

From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret.):

From our base at Nam Can, we were flown to Ca Mau to provide diving services for the Army. Convoys supplying remote Army advisors in the area were getting hit with water mines on every trip. Upon arrival at Ca Mau, an Army liaison turned us (myself and PO2 Ralph Porter again, we were supposed to be advisors but seldom had VNN EOD, so we responded) over to a VN Navy Tu Ta (Lcdr.) to show us what he wanted. We only had 2-72 singles with us because we weren't fully briefed until we got there. The Tu Ta wanted us to remove 2-20mm guns from a sunken PBR about one half mile from the convoy route. I explained the paucity of breathing air to him and he was persistent, so we dove and recovered his guns. As we were surfacing from the dive, we saw a convoy of Mike boats proceeding North with building supplies for the Army outposts. Just as we climbed about the dive boat, boom! A sea-mine went off, lifted the entire Mike 8 (70' long) out of the water, and we could see bodies flying through the air. Some actually landed ashore and hit the beach running. I turned to the Tu Ta and said, "well, there's your mine"!

The Mobile Riverine Force (Operations GAME WARDEN and SEALORDS)

From LT Steve Wells, USN (Ret.):

The first time I was shot at in the Delta, we were taking fire from automatic weapons using both red and green tracers. We had just left a side canal and anchored out in the main stem of the Mekong to blow up a device picked up in that canal. We were aboard a PBR wearing swim trunks and nothing else. We were far enough away that the tracers were burning out before they got to us, so I figured if I was going to get hit, it would be a random event. I remember thinking that I was willing to get hit in some kind of macho John Wayne fashion, but I was totally unwilling to get hit by a random bullet falling indiscriminately from the sky. So I walked to the stern and got a helmet and flak jacket and returned to the bow where the team was working. They looked at me quizzically (or with something else in mind), said nothing, and returned to the task. I was embarrassed enough to take the helmet and flak jacket back to the rack. Now, weren't the ARVNs using one color tracer and the VC another? It would be totally consistent with the entire experience if it turns out we were being shot at by both sides.

From LT Steve Wells, USN (Ret.):

One day after weeks of calls, we got a call from Tiger's Lair with a request that we come down for a job. I assumed it was to blow up another pile of surplus ordnance. I was wrong, and when we got off the helo a senior officer asked what I needed "to do the job". He explained that they had two downed helos in a grassy field filled with booby traps. We asked him to round up vice grips, tape and paper clips or other wire, and we headed over to the field. The devices scattered throughout the field were hand grenades taped to a stake. There was about 10 feet of wire extending from the pin of the grenade to another stake. When the copter set down in the tall grass, its skids would depress the wire and pull the pin. The grenade would "shoot down" the copter. When the first copter was hit, the second tried to land to assist and also got hit. The solution was straight forward once all the devices were found.



Navy Operating Base "Sea Float", anchorage in the Ca Mau River close to Nam Can, 1970/71: Photo taken post op on board Navy Operating Base "Sea Float". Sea Float was a series of AMMI barges anchored in the Ca Mau River adjacent to the village of "old" Nam Can. Plywood huts were built on the barges. One end of the base was a helo pad, which also was a storage area for avgas and ammunition. The area was hotly contested because it was a valued infiltration route for main force VC and RVN units. Operations were conducted daily/nightly by EOD, UDT, SEALs, Biet Hai (VN Navy Rangers), and Chu Hoi's (ex-VC that realigned with the South Vietnamese Government). Shown is EODTEUPAC Team 82 and VNN Underwater Missions Battalion (EOD): (left to right, kneeling) AO1 Jerry Taylor, Petty Officer Duc (VNN), Seaman Quan (VNN); (left to right standing) CWO Gary Wenter, GMTC Hill, LT Ronan. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

We still called them "booby traps". Most were mechanically simple devices, easy to defeat once found. Most were found by the field troops, and we'd be called in if they were sufficiently troublesome. Many were fabricated from garbage discarded by U.S. forces. Favorite devices used wire and hand generators from abandoned Claymore mines. I appreciated the genius of a timing device built with two c-ration cans one floating inside the other. Each had a wire soldered to the rim, and the circuit would be complete when the two cans touched.

The larger had one or more holes punched in the bottom to allow water to drain. Once drained, then bingo.

From LT Steve Wells, USN (Ret.):

RVN firebases were often triangular in shape, with a lookout at each corner. One incident occurred when the lookouts at one corner fell asleep or looked the other way. The VC infiltrated the fire base and had sufficient time to stuff C4 into the fuse well of many artillery rounds as well as entering the sleeping quarters to place charges under the bunks. When the time fuses went off there was a big mess left behind including much unexploded or low ordered ordnance. We were called to clean up the mess.

From CDR Lawrence E. Ronan, USN (Ret.):

The SEALs had a det down river from Dong Tam at My Tho. I had infrequent contact with them. However, they had swum the length of the Bo Bo canal (extending from the Cambodian border across the Delta) and found a large cache of ChiCom mortar rounds hidden underwater. We flew in to blow up the pile. It's a long story, filled with fun and also exasperating aspects, and suffice it to say that the SEALs were great. Their support boat was great. We eventually got home knowing that our priority for Army helo assets was extremely high to get to a job but woefully low when the job was done.

From CDR Lawrence E. Ronan, USN (Ret.):

Improvised devices in the river environment were usually command detonated mines. Again, homemade devices, and some of them huge, just beyond belief and they'd put them along the shoreline. We got hit with one, it was buried in a bank. The tide was low and the bank was quite high. We actually had a helicopter up and our operations officer relayed that the helo thought he saw a wire, and about that time it went. The thing—a fougasse—was in about a 55 gallon drum. Special forces used a lot of those too in berms around their camps.

From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret.):

The operation with UDT involved the discovery of a Russian Trawler high and dry deep in the jungle. Our OPCON decided that PO2 Porter and myself along with members of the UDT Team at Nam Cam, should insert by helo, proceed to the trawler, kill anyone aboard and obtain any intelligence data available from door/hatch labels, equipment, whatever. After boarding the ship, we were unable to find one single nameplate or label. It had been stripped so clean that the EPA would have approved it for the artificial reef program! We carried chain saws in to cut an LZ close to the trawler, but the ironwood trees of the area proved to much for the saws, so, after setting a couple hundred pounds of C-4 at strategic locations along the hull, we left the same way we came in....not good. This was the first of three trips into the area to find intel which simply wasn't there.

From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret.):

An op with SEALs proved equally exciting. They asked PO2 Porter and myself to accompany them on a operation based on "really good intel", to destroy a weapons manufacturing facility deep in the delta. We inserted by helo after heavy NGF laid the area low, but after an hour of slogging through the mud, rice paddies, canals, etc., we determined that we had been inserted in the wrong place. So, back on the birds and reinserted in an equally pleasant area, where we walked endlessly down the middle of a

canal until we finally came upon a small hamlet with some tired old VN's and children hiding in a mud igloo. After persuading them to come out, they were interrogated by the SEALs' interpreter, and I guess they finally figured out this wasn't such great intel after all. We walked some more and finally were extracted and flown back to base by Navy helos.

From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret):

While attached to EODMU-1 Team 34, I was selected to accompany EODMU-1 Team 36 on a special op down in the delta. It seemed that every time one of our PBR's or swift boats approached the area at the mouth of the Song Bo De River, they would take a lot of enemy fire. We assembled on a WWII flat bottomed LST anchored off shore and after a minimal air strike by Air Force jets, hit the beach on the South side of the river at 0700 on my 31st birthday. We disembarked the LCVPs and commenced



Riverside, 1968: CWO Bobby L. Henshaw preparing a demolition shot to destroy captured ordnance. (photo courtesy Navy and Marine Corps EOD Association)

heading west, clearing and blowing bunkers along the waterfront. In addition to using C-4, we would place bags of CS-2 on the shot so if they came back and tried to re-dig their bunker, they would get gassed. The bags of CS-2 were paper and carried as many as we could. At each site (bunker), we would all toss our bags on the ground and inspect the area for booby traps before setting up our shot. As we continued on, I noticed everyone behind me rubbing their eyes and

complaining about the gas. At the next bunker, I happened to notice that one of the bags I was carrying had a hole punched in it, probably from throwing them on the ground.

Naval Support Activity (NSA) Da Nang

From CWO Larry S. Hart, USN (Ret.):

We responded to calls regarding numerous bodies floating in the Da Nang River. They had to be checked out for IED/ordnance. Periodic hull searches as requested. Called to check out floating objects with tethers suspected of being an IED. Enemy used U.S. AT Mines and artillery rounds quite frequently. Most often were controlled detonation devices. Jungle density enhanced the use of controlled devices and booby traps.

Assistance requested by the Army to check out a small aircraft field that had recently been overrun. Flew team by helicopter to area. After the enemy assault, the 6 or 7 A/C were left intact leading to suspicions that IED's/booby traps had been set.

Accomplished mission with negative hazards found. Other similar operations were on going.

The team that we relieved experienced an unusual event when called for assistance by a USMC Infantry unit that had discovered a MK 82 Bomb and suspected that it had been booby-trapped. A USMC Infantry Squad accompanied the team. After initial recon the team moved back to 100 meters to firm up plans. Plans made, they returned to the site and the MK 82 was GONE! A tad hairy as a 82 weighs 500 lbs and it took more than a few enemy troops to pull this off. It is likely very lucky that they wanted the HE more than the firefight/ambush. I cannot validate this one.

Another incident occurred in April or May 68 in the I Corps TAOR supporting NSA & the 1st Amtrak Battalion, 3rd Marine Amphibious Force (3 MAF). Enemy artillery and NVA troops (North Vietnamese Army) were less than 20 miles away. Incoming 130mm enemy artillery was a constant hazard and most Marine and Navy personnel remained under cover most of the time or when we could. Flak jackets and helmets were mandatory. An incoming round hit one of the Marine 105mm gun batteries and put it out of commission resulting in 105mm ammunition and components scattered over the impact area in extremely hazardous conditions including leaking WP (white phosphorous), partially exploded shells, and fuses. The battery was placed out of commission while we were tasked with the job of rendering the area safe and disposal of all hazardous ordnance. This had to be done with the known risk of exposure to incoming enemy artillery, as readying this gun to operational status was a priority. Our team members and myself proceeded to handle and remove the hazardous ordnance from the impact area and remove to a suitable demolition site. This was done with occasional incoming artillery requiring that we take cover and resume operations when it was thought to be safe. When we resumed operations another round came in and detonated around 20 or 30 meters from me, the concussion blowing me prone with minor injuries. This round impacted next to our team member PR1 Jerry Winningham USN and caused a traumatic amputation of his foot with severe multiple fragmentation wounds. We were able to get him to a battalion aid station inside Dong Ha via a medivac helicopter. Jerry was still alive when last seen. We tried to find out his condition but our communications had also been hit. We stood down a few days later and returned to Da Nang and learned that he didn't make it and was in the I Corps Morgue. We were required to I.D. the body and this required an officer and a senior NCO. Lt Kudzma (OinC) and myself were assigned this sad duty. Sometime days later EOD tech GMG1 Garland Skaggs came out of our bunker to get water and an incoming round hit a pallet of ammunition (was not supposed to be staged). The concussion blew him around the hooch and injured his back resulting in his medivac to CONUS. I was not there at this incident.

Operation STABLE DOOR

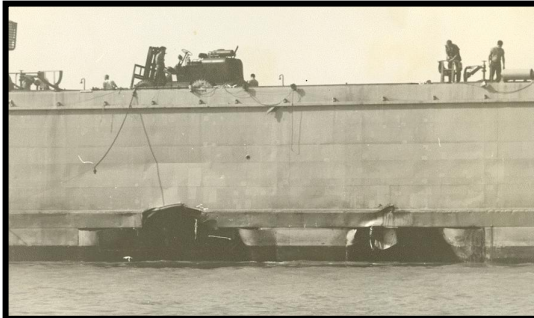
From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret):

If you consider a 150 lb. Mine, composed of Chicom C-4 and Russian Chemical delay pencils wrapped in plastic and tied together with poly rope an IED, then I encountered several in Cam Rahn Bay. Under cover of darkness, several sapper/swimmers would ride the current downstream guiding the aforementioned mine with flotation attached (to achieve a slight positive buoyancy) past a ship at anchor. As they passed the ship, one of the swimmers would reach out and attach a line (always monofilament) to the anchor chain of the moored ship about 4-5' beneath the surface. They would then ride

the current alongside the ship, position the mine to obtain maximum effect, cut away extra flotation so the mine was held next to the ship by the current (in the case of SS Cowanesque, the mine was actually tied to a pad eye on the hull). They would initiate a short delay via chemical pencil, and continue to follow the current downstream and escape.

From CWO-4 David M. Royster, USN (Ret):

Most of the ordnance, underwater mines, weapons, and firing devices I encountered



Dong Tam anchorage, Mekong Delta, 1969: USS Westchester County assigned to RivFlot 1 was the victim of attack using bulk explosives buoyed on the surface by inner tubes and initiated by chemical delay pencils. (photo courtesy of CDR L. E. Ronan, USN, ret.)

were of Russian or Chicom origin. I don't know about their tactics but they were very effective. I was lucky to never have lost a ship due to underwater ordnance but they came so close. In one case, at Cam Rahn Bay, the mine was actually attached to the ship (SS Cowanesque, an aviation fuels carrier anchor in the harbor) and on another, we discovered the mine pre-positioned near our ammo pier in 15' of water. In Nam Cam, we recovered a "bladder mine" in the Kai Nhap Canal put together with Chicom C-4 and boosters, rigged to fire when the bow wave of a

passing boat increased the water pressure over the mine.

From LCDR Patrick E. Thomas, USN (Ret.):

On 13 April 1967 an Air Force MAC C-141 crashed into the South China Sea. The EOD Team provided diving support to recover and dispose of the 13,000 pounds of ordnance that was on the aircraft and recover the remains of the crew that were trapped in the wreckage. In addition, the team provided underwater photographs of the cockpit control panels and were able to recover the black box for study.

Team 22 provided recovery service for an Army Helicopter that crashed in the South China Sea.

Team 22 provided search and recovery of remains from a C-47 "Puff the Magic Dragon", that crashed near Cam Rahn Bay. This was more of a search and recovery for the crews remains.

Team 22 provided diving service for the Army to locate and help recover a DUCK that sank in the harbor at Cam Rahn Bay

Operation END SWEEP (1973)

VIII. Contributors

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