

River Assault Interdiction Unit-72

Advisory TF-211

BY BRUCE McIVER

In July of 1969 President Nixon kept the promise he had made to the American people during his campaign. The war in Vietnam would be turned over to the Vietnamese, and American troop withdrawal would begin immediately. US military personnel went from 543,500 men and women in mid-1969 to 140,000 in 1971. The first troops to return were elements of the 9th Infantry Division, who fought the VC in some of the worst conditions experienced by combat troops in the 20th century, "The Mekong Delta of Vietnam".

As United States personnel were being withdrawn at a rapid pace, President Nixon was promising to end the war with honor. The Paris peace talks were off and on. Our prisoners of War (POWs) were to be released. The political process with all its Pomp and Pageantry was in full dress and drama. Meanwhile there was a war going on! More intensely than before the Paris peace talks and "Vietnamization", a term used to let the American people know that our troops were coming home and the war would be turned over to the Vietnamese. There was many problems with this concept.

The U.S. was turning over massive amounts of arms and equipment to the South Vietnamese Forces; including the boats of the Mobile Riverine Force. Although the South Vietnamese were taking over the equipment in order to fight the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars (NVA) main force units, they had to depend on the United States for the full support of this massive military machine that we (the U.S.) built. Food, supplies, military support from close air support-to Med-Evacs, and everything in between. The U.S. through our president had made promises to continue to support the RSVN militarily and economically.

My involvement with ATF-211-RAID 72 came when I received orders to report from Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Operations Group (MACVSOG) where I had been since July 1969, to Dong Tam for further assignment; this was now October 1969.

Upon arriving at Dong Tam I was told that MACV had formed through Naval Advisory Group (NAG) Advisory Task Force -211 The command structure for the River Assault Interdiction Unit's (RAID's).

This was to accomplish our advisory role; insuring the essential combat air and ground tactical forces still manned by U.S. combat and support personnel would work together with the Vietnamese units in a war that "In-Country" wasn't winding down. If anything it was escalating! All the advisors were volunteers and had combat experience. The unit I was assigned to was RAID-72, at the time the command center (CC) was in Rach Gia, operations were being carried out by this new unit. Composed RVN Marines, and RVN Navy. I left Dong Tam for Rach Gia after being briefed, so off I went in a huey to my new home when I got to Rach Gia—to my delight I was met by GM3 Dave Bell, and BM3 Bill Arbogast; I didn't even know they were alive it was a great homecoming .. Bill was one of my best friends through training at Mare Island as was Dave. We had pulled many ops together while with the MRF while in RivRon-13 68-69.

Bill and Dave brought me up to date seems we were in the U Minh forest, a VC and NVA stronghold; TF-211 working the maze of canals, and heavy mangrove swamps. We were close to Dong Hung, Kien Giang province; the area had been in communist control since the beginning of the war. Our base camp. Was a fire support base (FSB) the senior U.S. Marine advisor was Major Mike Cerrata; our senior Navy advisor was LT. Al Bell. We had a six man advisory team with RAID-72. The RVN Marines and TF0212 were a tough unit and had accomplished a great deal working in the region. Working as one unit - the VN Marines, Navy, U.S. Ad-

visors, helicopter gunships, and chinooks assigned to the operation the unit just been formed in September, 1969; and had showed it's fighting spirit was evident and most needed.

As on November 4th. We were attacked in strength by main force NVA and VC Battalions. Out-manned the battle raged on for more than five hours as we were overrun. We fought our way back with the aid of close air support from U.S. Navy fighters, Seawolf Gunships, Black Ponies.

The bond and spirit of the South Vietnamese had been shown to the NVA and VC. Enemy KIA was put at seventy five 56 of these were killed in the wire, around the FSB perimeter. Friendly casualties were listed as heavy.

We soon moved out of the U Minh and headed to Vi Thanh in Choung Tien province, another area that the communist had great control in. I could go into detail concerning our ops there but the importance of this is the U.S. Advisors many times operating alone with their Vietnamese counterparts. We got to know them and the willingness on their part to die for democracy. We lived to know them, eat what they did, drink what they did and slept where they did,

The Vietnamese commander had the call when it came to Air strikes, etc. we advisors were there to assist in coordinating all the U.S. machinery that had or was being turned over. We called in the gunships, air support, med-evacs and much more. We got to know them and their culture. They all had large families to support, low pay, and knew as my counterpart said "Ill die in this war" surprised I asked why he felt that way. He said, "you here maybe one-two, maybe three years, then you go home. He went I am home, "I'm here for the duration".

They were allocated two sets of tiger stripes uniforms per year they'd tear those up in one op in the bush. They knew the black market is Saigon had supplies we needed in the field, they were making big bucks off the war. Yet for the love of democracy, they saw the blood shed by U.S. Units, they tried to follow in our footsteps. They were a proud people and without our assistance they were out of luck.

The MRF and the 9th Infantry Division had shown them wed shed our blood for them, but didn't know why we were there. Our country called, most of us volunteered and didn't look back. We were well trained, tough, and willing to die for our nation, our democracy. It saddens me that our government sent us, we went without question; but never learned the Vietnamese people, their pride, spirit and the respect they had for us for being there to fight for them and die for them. 58,158 names are on the wall in DC. I think the number is up to 58,302... over 340,000 men and women were wounded in action. We are a proud group, all the Vietnam Veterans that served in the war.

The sad truth is our hands were tied but we won "our war" we served with honor, as we say with pride " Honor, Duty, Country" our combat troops were gone from Vietnam in 1973; and when the communist saw our congress turn down an appropriation for aid. Both military and economic. They saw the door wide open, without our support the war was over. The importance of our efforts and blood shed, will be reported in history

books in years to come, we showed the world, we would go anywhere, fight and fight to stop communism and preserve democracy. I'm proud I can say I served with the best of the best of our U.S. Military.

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