

River Patrol Insignia

of the United States Navy
(Vietnam) 1966-1972

- Bassac •
- Soi Rap •
- Long Tau •
- Cua Viet •
- Vam Co Dong •
- My Tho •
- Co Chien •
- Vam Co Tay •
- Ham Long •



Scott Kraska & Stephen Kirby

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2



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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Maps	6
Historical Perspectives	8
General Notes on Patch Collecting	18
Berets and Insignia of Task Force 116	22
Uniforms, Headgear and Protective Equipment	30
River Patrol Unit Assignment Charts	38
River Patrol Units of Task Force 116	
<i>River Squadron 5 and Headquarter Units</i>	40
<i>River Patrol Flotilla V and Headquarter Units</i>	42
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 511</i>	46
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 512</i>	48
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 513</i>	52
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 514</i>	55
<i>River Division 515</i>	57
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 521</i>	61
<i>River Patrol Section 522 and River Division 571</i>	63
<i>River Patrol Section 523 and River Division 572</i>	65
<i>River Patrol Section 524 and River Division 573</i>	68
<i>River Patrol Section 525 and River Division 574</i>	70
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 531</i>	72
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 532</i>	76
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 533</i>	79
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 534</i>	83
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 535</i>	90
<i>River Patrol Section 541 and River Division 591</i>	94
<i>River Patrol Section 542 and River Division 592</i>	96
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 543</i>	98
<i>River Patrol Section 544 and River Division 593</i>	100
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 551</i>	103
<i>River Patrol Section and River Division 552</i>	106
<i>River Division 553</i>	108
<i>River Division 554</i>	111
<i>River Division 594</i>	113
<i>River Division 595</i>	115
HAL-3, The Seawolves	116
<i>Detachment 1</i>	126



<i>Detachment 2</i>	128
<i>Detachment 3</i>	131
<i>Detachment 4</i>	133
<i>Detachment 5</i>	135
<i>Detachment 6</i>	140
<i>Detachment 7</i>	141
<i>Detachment 8</i>	142
<i>Detachment 9</i>	145
U.S. Navy SEALs.....	148
VAL-4, The Black Ponies	160
Lighters of the River Patrol Forces	164



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Title page: EN2 H. Rick Jones on board PBR 110 of River Division 531 scanning the shoreline for enemy activity. Photograph was taken near My Tho, August 1968.



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The Mekong Delta stretches into South Vietnam like branches on a sprawling tree. Each major branch leads to dozens of canals and tributaries, which lead to hundreds of smaller canals. So penetrated by waterways is the delta region, that water transportation provides the main source of movement for both goods and people. During the Vietnam War, thousands of junks and sampans paddled and motored their way up and down these rivers to work, shop, and socialize every day. Their boats were seen in all shapes and sizes, from small one-man skiffs to ocean going transports. In the middle of this was the United States Sailor of Task Force 116 (TF-116), the goodwill ambassador to the Vietnamese civilians and an unyielding force against the Viet-Cong. Not since the days of Ironclads and Monitors in the United States Civil War had the U.S. Navy engaged an enemy force in twisting inland waterways. That would change once the men of Task Force 116 entered the shallow inland waters of South Vietnam.

Over the last 15 years we have sought an understanding of our nation's actions in South Vietnam during the Second Indo-China War, and studied a variety of land and naval battles. As we studied the history of the U.S. Naval Forces in the Mekong Delta, known as the "Brown Water Navy," we became fascinated with the methods, tactics, and equipment used by these troops. This was warfare where the rules were being written as the participants engaged the enemy. Equipment and vehicles were in a constant state of design and redesign as we "re-learned" river warfare. Much to their credit, our Navy crewman gained a foothold in the fight, and then later a victory over the Communists in the Delta and other waterways of South Vietnam.

The purpose of this publication is two fold. First, to create a greater understanding of the men of Task Force 116 and their place in the Vietnam War through the illustration of their insignia, emblems, and artifacts. Second, to provide today's historians and enthusiasts with a field guide for the acquisition of authentic items. The complete history of the River Patrol Forces will not be told here. Other historians more qualified have produced volumes on the history and the politics surrounding this U.S. Navy task force. There will, however, be information presented in a condensed form which will be invaluable for understanding the contents of this book.

Over 300 Brown Water Sailors gave their lives in Vietnam. It is to their memory, and to the recognition of those veterans living, that this book is dedicated. Although many came back with arms and legs intact, and bodies spared the piercing of bullets and shrapnel, no one came back unscathed. The sacrifices these men gave then, and continue to survive with now, should be an inspiration to all Americans.

*Scott Kraska
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