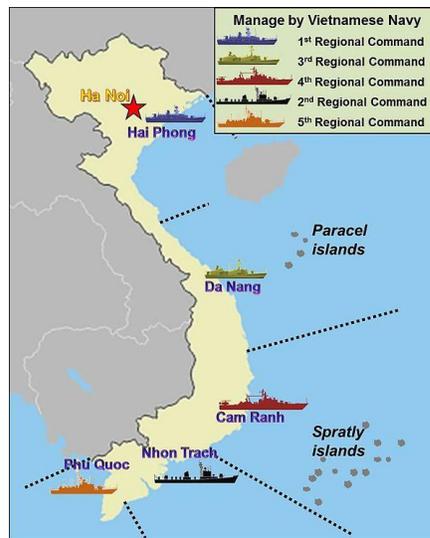


# With Coastal Group 26

by David B.A. Moore, Cdr, USN (ret)

*The following is an Operations Summary of my year as Advisor to Coastal Group 26, VN [Vietnamese] Navy located on Binh Ba Island in the Cam Ranh Bay (CRB) outer harbor. All of the places mentioned can be seen on Google Maps, especially the satellite views. The viewer will appreciate that the population, economy and infrastructure of the area has changed dramatically in 50 years.*

Bottom line assessment: The only valuable contribution of Coastal Group 26 (CG-26) to the war effort during my year was: (1) Providing five English speaking petty officers to the Swift Boats going out on 24 hour patrols each morning and (2) Transporting a US Army medical team from Cam Ranh to Binh Hung Island every other Wednesday to help the small fishing village there. Although I had many unusual experiences and I take pride in my service in that year, my service pales in comparison to most who served in Vietnam.



On top of Mount Binh Ba where French placed guns. The low white beach in background is the Korean LST beach and the dark mass to the left is rocky entrance to inner harbor, PCF base to right of picture.

**Background.** The French Army built a base on Binh Ba before WW2 which supported four gun emplacements on the mountain top to defend Cam Ranh Bay. The main structures consisted of 2 large and one small two story barrack buildings made of brick, yellow stucco and tile roofs. A two story family-style house provided lodging for the four Vietnamese officers (and the C.O.'s wife). Just outside the perimeter fence line south of our building were three small "cottages" in the same Mediterranean architecture with barely room for a card table and chairs with 3 alcoves with barely room for a cot in each. These were French Army bordellos and a popular photo spot for our visitors. Only one of these remains in satellite photos. The base had a small stone and dirt pier. The Binh Ba fishing village was about 100 yards from our barrack building and not even visible due to a small ridge between and vegetation. Unlike today, there were no fishing sampans anchored in the water.

Our four man advisory team (LT, LTjg, Bosun Mate 2/c and Engineman 2/c) occupied one half of the second floor. The interior dimensions of our "hooch" were about 30' x 120' with very high ceilings. About every ten feet of wall space there alternated a 10' high double door or a high window with bars but no glass so we had plenty of ventilation. At the very south end was a room 10' x 15' that served as our shower/shaving room with a concrete urinal in one corner of the shower area. Also, there was a 6' wide balcony with

concrete balustrade around the hooch with an incredible view of CRB. Where the outside staircase penetrated the second floor a door frame and hinged door were installed and festooned with barbed wire. At night a large chain locked the door and our three dogs stood guard. Below us lived many VN sailors and their families. One of the sailors below was also the dog butcher for the base and our dogs disliked the VNs because of that.

We had no running water but we had about a dozen 5 gallon "jerry cans" which we could fill from a garden hose at the Swift Boat piers (as did the entire Junk Base). Carrying two cans (80 lbs) from the pier, up the slight hill, up the staircase on a hot day was not fun. Our shower was a 55 gal drum mounted horizontally on a 7 foot angle iron frame. To conserve water the shower head was set at the exact point where droplets became a steady drip; each drop moved a lot of suds. About ten yards from the south end of our building was a regulation haze gray outhouse complete with crescent moon cut in the locked door; thank goodness for our big box of lye.

The base had a big new blue USAF 40KW generator that no one had ever been able to fix. Luckily, the base had an old 10KW generator which at night provided power to the Advisors and VN officers and one light bulb on the pier. It also allowed us to charge batteries for our PRC-25 radio that connected us to COSDIV 14 and their Swift Boats. We had a Roper stove with butane tanks and an old Servel refrigerator that ran on kerosene burning from a wick sufficient to cool beer and sodas. We also had two new 6cf refrigerators with associated butane tanks that we could never make work. Our food was obtained from the Market Time Base in large cans and ten lb frozen boxes. We all four shared equally in domestic chores.

On Day 2 my predecessor set up an Orientation Cruise to our primary OpArea. In general my area of responsibility (AOR) was from Nha Trang to Phan Rang. But CRB and Nha Trang were urban areas and defended by a large contingent of the Korean Army. A large mountain called Dong Bo was located between CRB and Nha Trang as well as Hwy 1 and the ocean but it reportedly had NVA<sup>1</sup> troops so that was a "no go" zone for us. That left about 18 miles of coast line that was devoid of people and thus a "Free Fire Zone". Hwy 1 ran from Phan Rang north to CRB through a mountain valley. I estimate the mountain ridge to the east of Hwy 1 was approximately 2,500 feet high and sloped to the ocean. In the southern half of that stretch of coast, there is a flat bench of land about ¼ mile between the mountains and ocean. In the northern half, the mountains crowd the coastline and are heavily forested.

Our Orientation Cruise passed by Binh Hung Island where a fishing village is located and the Army medical team would visit. We rounded a curve in the coast line and reached the entrance to Vinh Hy Bay, which is more of a narrow inlet leading to a mountain stream. Bosun Mate Ramiriez called out that he saw people in the boulders near the entrance so we swung the bow around. We could see two people hiding in the rocks and fired an M-79 grenade in their direction. One person ran and the other hunkered down so we jumped ashore and took him prisoner. It turned out he was a fourteen-year old Montagnard who lived with his group high on the mountains. He had never worn shoes in his life and had calluses on his feet that were very

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<sup>1</sup> NVA: North Vietnamese Army, so called to distinguish northern communists from the southern communists, called Viet Cong or National Liberation Front.

thick. He said that the VC<sup>2</sup> would sometimes cross Hwy 1 and come into their mountain home for R&R. They would force the villagers to act as porters and carry their gear. We headed back to base where our "prisoner" became a "house boy" for the VN officers and lived with them. Later he would guide a VN army unit from Hwy 1 to various VC supply and weapon caches in his home mountains.

In the early afternoon of 29 February I received a transmission from COSDIV 14 that they needed five more interpreters in about one hour. I went to see my counterpart and set it up but had no idea what it was about. It turns out the North Vietnamese were trying to simultaneously infiltrate four armed, 100 ft. steel hulled trawlers full of weapons but they had been spotted and trailed by Navy aircraft. Now they had turned toward the coast. At the last moment the northern trawler turned back but after midnight the other three were greeted by many hostile units including seven Coast Guard cutters, one USAF AC-47 Gunship, seven Swift Boats, two Army helo gunships, one VN gunboat and two VN Yabuta junks (probably from nearby Coastal Group 25) who had themselves a field day. The Swifties said that the next day there was an unpleasant confrontation near Nha Trang over who would get the weapons as trophies.

A few days later we were told by VN Navy Headquarters to bring all our men and junks to the Hon Heo Peninsula north of Nha Trang where Trawler #2 had run aground. CG-25 was also there in force as well as several VNN blue water ships. All the "junkies" debarked on the beach and lined up at the water's edge. At a given signal we all charged up the beach line abreast at port arms while photographers took pictures. (Note: Several months later I visited VNN Headquarters in Saigon and saw framed copies of those photos hanging on the walls.). I took the CG-26 "junkies" about 100 yards inland where we found two crude lean-to's and some sort of cultivated crop which, I was told, was used for smoking. We cut down everything.

As I became more familiar with my counterpart, I would encourage him to schedule some operations to search for VC but he was not interested. They were safe and sound on a remote island with their families and had a sweet deal for themselves. I was surprised in March when he informed me we were going to "make an operation at night". So after dark we took two Yabuta junks and perhaps a twenty man landing force plus the four advisors. While enroute, the CO informed me that we had to stop briefly at Binh Hung Island to pick up a guide who was familiar with the trails. We landed on the coast only about 200 yards south of Binh Hung. We were single file with the guide and CO near the front and the advisors in the middle. After a few minutes I noticed that the men up front were shining flashlights which alarmed me. I told my three men that something was not right and we were going to slide to the rear of the column. Just then a shot rang out and everyone ran forward. There was the guide crouched down next to a deer and proudly showing off the bullet hole between its eyes. It turns out that a Vietnamese holiday was approaching and they needed extra meat at the base to celebrate. I later told the CO that anytime he wanted to go on a hunting trip I would be happy to coordinate with other agencies but do not tell me it is "an operation". I was very naïve.

A month or so later my counterpart told me we were going to "make another operation" and we were going up to the village of Suoi Hai. I had never heard of the place but they said it was at

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<sup>2</sup> VC: Viet Cong, also known as the National Liberation Front of Southern Vietnam or FNL, was an armed communist political organization in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

the far north end of CRB. (Lana had several USO employees who lived there). So we grabbed our battle gear and off we went – this time in the daylight. After we passed under the pontoon bridge that connected the CRB peninsula to the mainland the waterway became much more narrow and shallow. Soon our two junks found ourselves in a maze of mudflats and we could not find our way forward or out. A solution presented itself in the form of two water-skiers being pulled by speedboats from Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation. We waved then down and they guided us out of the maze. As we cruised back home, someone let it slip that the reason we were going to Suoi Hai was to buy blue crabs.

One of my most valuable contacts in Vietnam was our local Navy Intelligence Liaison Officer (NILO) named Eric Ernst (USNA '65). We jointly decided that since our 14 year-old Montagnard had been so useful, we ought to do a “body-snatch” and get another assuming that they go down to the same area in Vinh Hy Bay to catch fish on a regular basis. A good plan – or at least better than sitting around doing nothing. I went over to the Market Time base to eat an evening meal in the mess hall and be ready for our Swift Boat ride. I was joined at the dinner table by a SEAL officer and he eventually asked what I was doing and I told him. He told me I was out of my mind or words to that effect. Coming from a SEAL, I did not know if that was a compliment or a warning. A few hours later Eric and I jumped off the bow of a Swift Boat on the beach in Vinh Hy Bay and travelled a few yards to the remaining corner of a bombed out stone farm house. Since there were no known VC in the area the major concern spending a night in the rubble was snakes because there are big cobras in Vietnam. In the wee small hours we actually heard some distant voices but we could not see anybody and were not going to give up our concealed location. In the early morning light we crawled back over the nose of the Swift Boat and went home. The location of that bombed out house is now a swimming pool at a resort. (Note: I finally decided that the SEAL's comment was a compliment and it was the only personal award I received in Vietnam).

I received a thick packet of glossy photographs that some photo reconnaissance plane had taken of my OpArea between CRB and Phan Rang. I put the over-lapping photos on a 4x8 sheet of plywood in the hooch. It appeared that near the top of the mountains someone had dammed up a stream to make a pond of fresh water. It seemed to me that if the dam could be destroyed, life would be made more complicated for the possible VC up there. I checked with the four-man EOD Detachment on the Market Time Base and they said they could get me some C-4 plastic explosive and furthermore would be pleased to go with me and the Vietnamese of CG-26. I then sold the idea to my counterpart. The plan was dependent on total surprise and we would go up the mountain using the dried creek bed coming from the dam. At the last minute the EOD said that their boss would not let them go but they gave me 10 bricks of C-4 with detonators and fuses and 30 minutes of instruction. We used our Yabuta junks to reach the mouth of the dry creek bed and about 30 VN sailors came with our four advisors. Two VN sailors carried the small wooden box with the C-4 and detonators. The creek bed idea did not last long due to very large boulders that were unclimbable so we so we went up the forested slope making liberal use of the vegetation to pull ourselves upward. I had radio communications with the NILO who was flying his Cessna overhead but we could not see each other due to the forest canopy. After about 30 minutes of scrambling uphill, we heard a rifle shot in the far distance and were forced to conclude we had been seen. We headed back down the hill going

much faster than we came up. When we reembarked on the junks, I asked where the box of C-4 was but no one had a clue. In the following weeks on at least two occasions I heard a muffled explosion and then saw a tall geyser of water in the area in front of our base followed by a rush of sampans to pick up dead fish.

In April, the Senior Naval Advisor and his staff thought it would be better for Coastal Group Advisors to receive more training in non-naval subjects such as base defense and ambushes. The overrunning of Coastal Group 16 in August 1967 (and death of my USNA '63 classmate Bill Fitzgerald) may have been part of this decision. I think I was in the first group of "Junkies" to be selected for this training from the US Army. In late April I flew to Saigon and the next day was taken by vehicle to the NE of Saigon, past the big US Army base at Long Binh to a small auxiliary base named Bear Cat. It was a fairly small and rudimentary base, triangular in shape with a 155 mm artillery battery at each corner. The make-shift barracks had metal cots with a thin mattress covered in factory plastic which was covered in red dust.

There was very little "hands on" training that applied to our situation; we mostly attended lectures with a group of new Army arrivals from Fort Lewis, WA., and I assume they had never heard of the Vietnam War as the information provided was really basic. We were scheduled for a practice ambush outside the berm on Thursday night and I did learn that in a cool weather ambush you take your poncho liner and not the plastic poncho that rustles.

But in the early morning hours of Thursday the night quiet was shattered by the roar of artillery and outgoing rounds. The enemy was marking May 1 as an occasion by launching a mini-Tet Offensive in many places around Saigon. All training was cancelled for the week and we spent the day at an open field waiting for an ad hoc helo ride to someplace else. I was finally taken to the coastal resort city of Vung Tau where I checked into a billeting hotel. I was enjoying a late afternoon beer with some strangers in the hotel bar when suddenly there was a very loud explosion. There was instant chaos as we all fled for cover. Apparently, a depressed GI decided to pull the pin on his grenade and hold it to his chest as he sat on the patio of the bar. Later, as I inched toward the patio to scope out the situation, an MP picked up the man's head with two feet of white spinal column – a vision not easily forgotten.

The next day I went back to the helo landing field and waited for a ride to Saigon. Finally, my turn came for a Huey ride. They put me in the door gunner's seat, put a helmet on my head and plugged me into the intercom system, showed me the safety and trigger on the M-60, told me it was loaded and ready to go, and then closed the door so that the M-60 and I were on opposite sides of a plexi-glass window. (????) We flew north over the Rung Sat Special Zone, which had been heavily doused with Agent Orange making all the snaky canals and bayous looking like hell on earth. While the intercom played pop music from AFVN Radio, the cockpit crew spent the whole trip talking about oil pressure.

The arrival of June brought the extra hot weather but also good new developments:

The Market Time Base did not have an Officer's Club. The COSDIV 14 officers had a lounge area at the end of their barracks called "The New Kid Memorial Library and Coffee Mess" and it was the size of four rooms. My assistant and I always had our names on the "tally sheet" on the refrigerator door so we could get a soda or beer whenever we wanted. But in early June a real "O Club" opened right next to the beach. The inside of the new facility was fairly small but the kitchen could make good burgers. The best part was a large wooden deck over-looking the

beach complete with tiki torches. It was "THE" best place to be on a Sunday afternoon when a few beers could expedite the military planning process.

Coastal Group 26 received a new CO: DaiUy Ho Dac Cung. He was previously a school teacher, very smart, and a good administrator. He tightened discipline: if the sentry at the pier was caught sleeping he spent a few days in the sun in a wooden crate not unlike a crate for a large dog. Cows no longer wandered on the base at night to eat grass. My job as Co Van My (Advisor American) was made much easier but I still felt I needed to exercise initiative to set a good example.

The Navy gave us a new 18' Boston Whaler with a 25 HP engine and a steering wheel up front where we could sit in relative luxury. That was followed up by an M-60 machine gun (with no recoil) and a new hybrid over/under M-16/M-79.

My boss, CDR Flynn, Second Coastal Zone Advisor, was expecting a new Ford Bronco to replace his existing Bronco which he was giving to me to replace my jeep that was falling apart.

Except that the night after the new vehicles arrived in Nha Trang the VC mortared the cargo storage yard and the new Bronco was destroyed. Close but no cigar.

COSDIV 14 got their hands on an old Boston Whaler (BW) and people started to develop some ideas (another beer please) for Boston Whaler Ops. I volunteered to help the Swifties and went on one of the first such efforts. We departed in a Swift Boat about dusk and headed north with the BW in tow. We were quite a few miles north of NhaTrang where there is a long, long white beach in a free fire zone. Three officers got in the BW with an M-60, three M-16s, one M-79 grenade launcher and a Starlight Scope. We slowly approached the beach and then slowly paralleled the beach about 100 yards out. All we needed was for someone to come out on the beach. We traded turns being the "engineman" which was not easy because the handle on the engine that is used to steer the engine and to adjust the throttle was broken off. So you sat on the transom with your arms around the engine casing to turn it and, if necessary, reach down to the bottom of the opposite side of the engine to adjust the throttle linkage. After a few hours with no contact, we turned out to sea only to discover we were now inside a very shallow reef. We went out the way we came in. (Note: Some while later LTjg John Kerry would also do the same mission but when he fired the M-79 it detonated very prematurely slightly injuring his arm and eventually he received a Purple Heart).

In mid-August a scheme was developed by a USO Director who dated a Swift Boat OinC's to arrange a double date to go dinghy sailing on Cam Ranh Bay with Lana Arthur and David Moore. On 7 September Lana and David got engaged.



My boss from Nha Trang drops in for a visit bringing Red Cross Dollies. It's a tough job but it has to be done,

In late September the notion of “volunteer ops” was alive and well on the Market Time Base. And since I wore a beret, I was the obvious choice to lead something. (Another beer please). I made it perfectly clear to my advisory team that this had nothing to do with our advisory role and I think the enlisted men exercised good judgment since they were short timers. And we were going to use the Boston Whaler again. My display of intel photos clearly showed that an old dirt road ran along the base of the mountains from Phan Rang to Vinh Hy Bay and that would be a good place to meet anybody moving around in the free fire zone. About 10 pm a Swift Boat dropped ten of us off the bow touching the beach. Included were one interpreter from Coastal Group 26, my Assistant Advisor Frank MacRory, and seven men from various commands on the Market Time Base.



Author in camo beret

In spite of the moonlight, the first problem was some navigation as the farmer who lived in that spot many decades ago had planted solid fences of cactus to keep his livestock penned up. We finally got around the cactus and reached the dirt road and headed south. As my photos clearly showed, there is a rocky vein coming perpendicular off the mountain range which creates a hump in the dirt road and then proceeds to the coast ending in a promontory 120 feet above the surf. We used that constricted area of the road to set up our ambush among the large boulders. I also deployed a claymore mine. But nothing happened.

When the sun came up, we picked up the claymore and proceeded south around the rocky vein and turned left to the coast line below the 120' promontory. We could see the Swift Boat about a half mile away and told him we were ready for pick up. A few minutes later the PCF<sup>3</sup> said he was having trouble starting the BW engine but should have it running soon. Based on those reassurances, I decided to walk out on the shallow reef to facilitate the BW pick-up. Our group of ten was about waist deep when bullets started dancing in the water around us. A little further out were two large rocks sticking up from the water so we put five men single file behind each rock. But now we were chest deep. We could see that the firing was coming from two or three guys on the promontory but we discovered that our M-16s were not working apparently due to the salt water. The PCF started to use his three 50 cal on the promontory and that reduced the incoming rounds. Soon we had a spotter aircraft overhead from Phan Rang Air Base and two more PCFs going to southern stations and then two more PCFs returning from southern stations. Now we had overwhelming fire power but the spotter told me we better get out of there ASAP as he could see people coming out of the mountains toward us. We waded ashore and started south down the beach to the nasty little fishing village of My Tan.

(Again, I emphasize that there was nothing in this area in 1968, especially the highway DT702 along the beach. Google satellite photos clearly show all these locations.) A Swift Boat picked us up at My Tan which is the very southern end of my AOR. Just as the Swift Boat got us back near the promontory, two F-100s from the Colorado Air National Guard came over and put several HE and napalm bombs on the promontory.

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<sup>3</sup> PCF: Patrol Craft Fast – the official designation of the Swift Boats: all aluminum, 50-ft long, shallow-draft vessels operated by the US Navy to patrol the coastal areas and some interior waterways.

I was later told that the people in Saigon were happy with the day's adventure.

I believe it was in October when I noticed a FRAM destroyer anchored in outer CRB. I finally contacted an officer on the ship and he said they were told to just hang around that section of coastline for a few days. That gave me an idea (another beer please). Perhaps they could shoot some H&I<sup>4</sup> fire into the mountains above Vinh Hy Bay and I would be in position to see if anyone was curious enough to come down to the coast. I call this next experience "A Day at the Zoo".

We assembled a four man team including my assistant Frank MacRory, the NILO (radioman), and a Swift Boat OinC. With the DD positioned a mile or so off the beach, a PCF dropped us off at the bombed out farmhouse previously mentioned. Step 1 was to spread out to search the perimeter of the large (~ 40 acre) farm field to find the best trail leading into the mountains. The mountain stream that emerges there spreads out in a small delta with streamlets about 1 or 2 inches deep. After I walked across the little delta, I looked backed and was shocked to see a (crocodile?) running straight at me across the delta with its legs wildly thrashing and water being kicked up right and left. The animal stopped and turned and I could see it was only an iguana/water monitor about 4-5 feet long. Whew! I continued on to the far south edge of the field where the two foot grass met thick bushes. As I walked near the bush-line I suddenly heard a loud rustle to my immediate left; for a second I thought I was about to die. But then a big buck deer jumped out right in front of me and trotted across the field. Whew! I moved away from the bush-line and continued walking through the grass when some kind of grouse jumped up right in front of my feet. Whew! After scouting the large field we decided to use the trail next to the stream. (Saw my first punji sticks). But the deeper we went into the forest the less we could see. We saw a climbable tree on a rocky knob and two of us went up there to spot the H&I fire. But the forest just swallowed up the 5" shells and we could neither see nor hear them.



Four man team in Vinh Hy Bay at start of "Day at the Zoo" taken from the PCF. The NILO has the radio. My assistant has his M-14 as he never trusted his M-16 after our salt water immersion test. I am wearing a ball cap and sporting my new hybrid M-16/M-79

Then we discovered that the tree we were in was full of thousands of angry red ants and now they were on our uniforms. End of the noble experiment. I am glad I did not meet the tigers that lived in that area.

Then we discovered that the tree we were in was full of thousands of angry red ants and now they were on our uniforms. End of the noble experiment. I am glad I did not meet the tigers that lived in that area.

In late November, the NILO was flying his Cessna over that rocky vein discussed above. The south face of the vein is a 40' – 50' vertical escarpment. The NILO thought he saw a cave in the cliff or it could have been a shadow and he asked me to check it out. We organized another

<sup>4</sup> H&I: Harassment and Interdiction

volunteer op with 12 men but eliminated any idea of using the Boston Whaler. A Swift Boat dropped us off at the village of My Tan. My counterpart warned me that My Tan residents had mixed loyalties even though some of the men were issued small, lightweight M1 Carbines and were classified as Popular Force Militia (paramilitary). The village was very poor with most shacks made of flattened cardboard boxes. There was tremendous infestation of flies which probably caused the white irises seen in the eyes of so many residents of all ages. South of the rocky escarpment the land is very dry and sees little rain; it looks much like the Sonoran Desert in Arizona.

We hiked three miles north and once close to the cliff could see it was a shadow and not a cave. We moved closer to the beach where the September fight took place and then headed south. Because of the scruffy vegetation and cactus, I put nine men including myself in line abreast about 10 yards apart. I put three men on the beach. As we got closer to My Tan, I noticed that the men on the beach were falling behind so I started moving to my left and rear to get them to catch up with the rest of us. As I neared the dune line, my mind suddenly went blank ...

I was later told that there were two VC hiding in a bush on top of the dune line. I know that we must have surprised them as there was a pile of fresh excrement by the bush. One of the VC shot the nearest American on the beach and he fell face down on the sloping dune – a bullet hole in the top of his foot. The VC jumped down the dune to the prostrate American, put his rifle muzzle against the upper back and fired. He then threw down his old rifle and grabbed the M-16 nearby. The two VC then began running north through the desert vegetation.

When my mind began functioning again, I saw two men in typical VN “black pajamas” running away through the brush and my first thought was “That’s strange !!”. Then I figured out what was happening and I emptied my magazine in their direction as was everyone else. I told the men to stand fast and not run after them as they were not worth it. Just then, the Popular Force men in the village became alarmed and starting shooting their M1 carbines in our direction. The M1 Carbine has very low muzzle velocity and it seemed to take several seconds for a bullet to go chugging by. We hit the deck and waited for the bullets to stop.

Our wounded man had the bullet enter his back just inside the shoulder blade and out his chest near the collar bone. Nothing critical was injured. We got a medevac helicopter from Phan Rang very quickly and they took him directly to CRB hospital. Later that night he called his girlfriend in the USA from his hospital bed. He was pleased with his Purple Heart. Higher authority wanted to know how somebody from the CRB Harbor Defense Unit got shot 20 miles to the south.

My last operation started when my counterpart announced that we were going to make a joint operation with Coastal Group 25. Excitedly I asked “where we going” and he replied “the Dong Bo”. I kept my mouth shut. It turns out we landed about a mile or less from Nha Trang in what had been a coconut plantation. It was a lovely spot with lush green grass but the neat rows of coconut palms made me uneasy. We had a large group with six junks and sixty people. We only went in about 150 yards and then sat down in the soft grass for a meal break. No lookouts were posted so I took my three men and moved about 30 yards away to better observe and stay out of the line of fire. Then the VN sailors started to have some wrestling matches. My

counterpart directed his men to dig up the coconuts that were taking root in the ground and take them back to Binh Ba for base beautification. With all the palm trees our junks reminded me of a funeral barge for some ancient king. Since this was my last operation my after action report was much like this paragraph; my boss in Nha Trang was not amused. The following week the Koreans had a large sweep higher up on Dong Bo Mountain and killed 386 NVA.

In early February I turned things over to my relief. I took him and the rest of the team on a jeep tour of the harbor front inside Cam Ranh Bay; I was given a traffic ticket for having 5 people in a jeep. Later I told him that if he ever went back to the spot where I got stuck in the surf, he should take it very, very seriously. Later I learned that they did go back to that exact spot. The VC were waiting for them in force and DaiUy Ho Dac Cung was shot through the head. The next day there were B-52 strikes in that location.

When I went through 12 weeks of Advisor Training in Coronado, they told us that the field advisors were getting medals including Bronze Stars. I had just finished four years in destroyers where nobody received medals except Good Conduct Medals for enlisted. I really wanted to earn a Bronze Star and that was often my second motivation for my extra-curricular activities. My primary motivation was to show my counterpart what could be done and perhaps even embarrassing him into taking action. In January 1969, my boss's assistant phoned me to ask that I write myself up for an award. My admin system on Binh Ba consisted of a Navy gray metal desk, lined yellow paper tablets and Skillcraft ball point pens. I had never seen the Navy Awards Manual. I advised Nha Trang that I could never and would never do that.

I remain grateful to the Navy for giving me such an unusual experience which led to finding Lana.

Our engagement proceeded to 50 years of marriage, easily the best engagement outcome of my one-year tour.



(right) January 1969. Dave at Lana's Farewell Party at her USO "Aloha" Club.

