

From Out of Nowhere

# The Navy Takes A Stab At The VC

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A STAB crewmember makes a firing run to keep his aim sharp



While on patrol in the Mekong Delta the boat captain searches for enemy activity.

The boat captain crouched in the moonlight. While peering through his starlight scope he spotted the enemy crossing the Mekong River.

The six Viet Cong, paddling these small sampans, looked carefully for American patrol boats and when they reached the other bank they felt sure they had crossed undetected with their cargo. Two of the VC died thinking that. The other four were detained along with their sampans filled with rice, ammunition and medical supplies.

To this day those men are still awestruck with the stealth and speed with which they were interdicted by the crew of a small boat that appeared to have come out of nowhere.

Successful interdictions of enemy infiltrations like this one are made easier by the new STAB (Strike Assault Boat). Since their introduction to Vietnam in February, they have been active on the Grand Canal in Operation Barrier Reef and, most recently, on the Mekong River as far north as Neak Luong in Cambodia.

The missions designated for the STABs are many. Reacting to intelligence, they quickly strike in rivers and waterways and just as quickly disperse. In these actions they may attack with their own impressive firepower or they may insert and evacuate troops with equal rapidity.

STABs are also employed in waterborne guardposts. The boat arrives at its predetermined site at dusk and moors. The crewmen keep a watchful eye out for enemy crossings all night and then break off at dawn. The waterborne guardpost was created to stop river crossing when and where they happen. The STAB's mere presence also acts as a deterrent to enemy troop and supply movements.

The highly maneuverable boat, with its hard-to-see low silhouette, extremely quiet operation and high speed, is a quadruple threat for the Viet Cong.

The low silhouette (only 3 1/2 feet from the waterline) allows the STAB to snuggle close to the bank and become virtually invisible at night. Its

speed is rated at 40 knots plus, and it can accelerate from zero to forty in 15 seconds. Shallow draft makes the STAB a highly maneuverable craft. At full bore it displaces only 18 inches of water.

The STAB is powered by two V-8 Chevrolet 427 cu. in. engines modified for marine use by Kiekhaefer-Mercury. These two burly brutes are muffled by generous amounts of engine compartment padding. The STAB is so quiet that when it approaches, one cannot hear the engines before he hears the water slapping against the hull.

The Strike Assault Boat also has tremendous offensive and defensive capabilities. Its hull is lined with ceramic armor which envelopes the boat. When small arms fire penetrates the hull the armor shatters, dissipating the force of the bullet. Four inches behind the ceramic armor is a thick nylon ballistic blanket that catches the flying ceramic pieces and renders them harmless. The STAB is equipped with aviation type self-sealing foam-filled rubber bladder fuel cells. These fuel

bladders can be punctured by anything from a small bullet to a B-40 rocket and still fail to explode or even leak profusely. There is no wasted space aboard because all dead spaces are filled with foam making the STAB unsinkable.

The lightning STAB can lash out with fury that belies its size. It is armed with four M-60 machine guns, two M-20 machine gun grenade launchers, and one M-79 grenade launcher. Each of the four crewmen are issued an M-16 automatic rifle and a .38 caliber sidearm. The crew consists of a boat captain, a gunner's mate, an engineman and a seaman. They are all specially trained for eight weeks at the Naval Inshore Operations Training Center (NIOTC) at Mare Island near San Francisco. The crew is schooled in map reading, special communications, weaponry, first aid, engine troubleshooting and counterinsurgency.

Also, they undergo five-day survival, evasion, resistance and escape training. They spend about half their time in classroom study and then put their

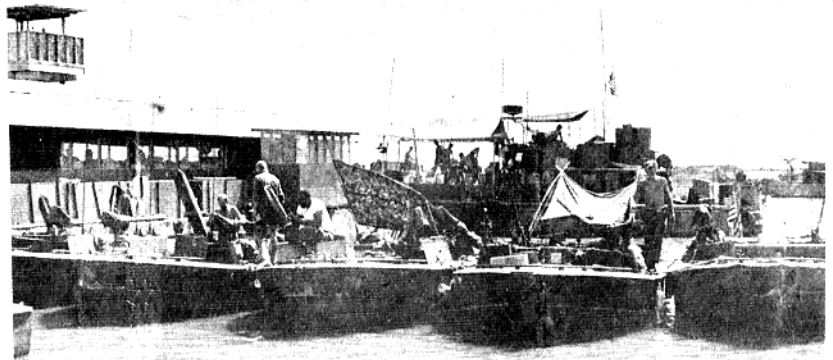
new skills into practice with field exercises during the remainder of school.

Strike Assault Boat Squadron 20, based at Phuoc Xuyen, is commanded by Lieutenant Commander John E. Ferguson of Riverside, California. He says "We have a fine boat and an excellent organization. The STAB, because of its characteristics, exceeds all other small craft in Vietnam. The men form the greatest group I've seen in a long time. They have an extremely long operating schedule with much work and little free time. In spite of this they still display high morale and are proud of their organization. It's hard to believe that in eight weeks they could be molded into such an elite group and work so well together."

With the aid of new weapons like the STAB the men of the Brown Water Navy form an efficient fighting team. They help thwart the VC on his home ground, and stand as a constant deterrent to communist infiltration in the Republic of Vietnam.



Gunner's Mate Third Class R.G. Molde of Albuquerque, New Mexico, maintains the weapons aboard his boat in peak condition.



STAB crewmen ready their boats for the evening's waterborne guardposts at their advanced tactical support base.