

OFFICER IN CHARGE  
RIVER SECTION FIVE FOUR FOUR  
FFO, San Francisco

20 Aug 1968

Family Gram

Dear Families and Friends of River Section 544;

Once again I would like to fill you in on the activities of the section since our last family gram. Several incidents of interest have happened and some rather humorous events have taken place.

It is realized that to the great majority of you the mention of the names of rivers and villages in the Hung Sat Special Zone have little meaning. As an addition to this letter we have provided a sample map of our area. This may give you a better idea of our location with respect to Saigon and the location of the major rivers and villages. It is hoped that by having them in writing will aid in recalling their names and locations to your loved ones when they return should they desire to discuss any of them with you. You might even recognize their names in the news paper or on radio or television when mentioned. You may see a film shot of the area in which your husbands, sons, or friends work. In this vein we will continue to mention the names of major rivers and villages.

On 2 July and again on 6 August we conducted our second and third Medical Civic Action Programs (MEICAP) to our adopted village of Ly Nhon, where, on each, over 150 villagers were treated. Soap, vitamin pills, cigarettes, clothing and similar items were passed out. Plans were formed concerning the delivery of the 3 section pier. This pier was delivered on 13 August and work is now in progress by the villagers on permanent positioning.

The month of July was a busy one for all hands as we prepared for our annual administrative, material and personnel inspection. We emerged with considerable praise, receiving a grade of outstanding on the personnel inspection and an overall grade of excellent. Our Commodore, Commander, River Squadron FIVE, CDR S.A. SWARZTRAUER, was highly impressed with all of our men and our outstanding operational

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record. This is mentioned as it is your men who are the ones responsible for our fine reputation. This section in its short period of operation as a full section of 10 boats (24 May to 20 August) has accomplished a great deal. From a section with only 21 of 58 seasonal (2 months or more in-country experience) personnel in May we have come to the present with, now eleven fully seasoned and well qualified crews. When new men report to us now they are rapidly assimilated into the existing crews and are very soon qualified crewmembers themselves.

Here are some rather interesting facts and figures to illustrate what we do in our operations, and how the long working hours are spent. Since 9 May we have spent 8,368 patrol hours on the river. This average of over 100 hours per day, or simply stated represents 12 hours per man per day of just patrolling. This does not count maintenance time. Each man averages 24 twelve hour patrols every month. The section is required to maintain 96 patrol hours everyday. In short the men are working long hard hours and doing an excellent job.

What do we do during these long hours on patrol? We have boarded and searched 15,535 junks and sampans and checked 32,694 ID Cards and working/fishing permits. This figure does not include those persons under 16 years of age of whom there have been many thousands. We have captured and or destroyed much that use to belong to "Mr. Charles". Among these items are: \$134,000 piastres (about \$1135.00 US), 16 sampans, 13 motors, 4 AK-47 Chinese Communist Rifles, three 82 millimeter mortar rounds, hand grenades, numerous ammunition and some documents. Some of the sampans and motors are given to poor Vietnamese in the area who cannot afford either.

In the three short months we have been operational our section has worked with Navy Seals (Sea Air and Land Team), Army LRRP's (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols), Vietnamese Commandos and other units. We have carried these units to and from their ambush positions and, provided cover for them while the ambush was active. We have also conducted many "special" operations in which we carry the voice of the Government of South Vietnam issuing its Chieu Hoi appeal via tape recorded broadcast to seldom traveled VC Controlled areas. Chieu Hoi means "open arms", an appeal to the Viet Cong to rally to the government cause. Last year over 27,000 VC so

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ralled and some are now serving in special units for the government. They make deadly opponents for their former comrades.

The August exams for advancement in rate have come and gone and we now await anxiously the results as we know you do. We will summarize the results in a future letter.

Our section has acquired a mascot in the form of one foot long by 8 inches tall light brown pup. He wears a green tropical uniform with two section patches and 1st Class Petty Officer insignia. He is always included on the liberty list. He has made over a dozen patrols on the river and after a warning at most he is house and boat broken. His name is K-9 and he's a Vietnamese example of a Heintz 57, very lovable mut. He is quite a sight in his uniform however everyone is wondering just how large he will finally become. However large or small you can be assured that K-9 will be well cared for and babied more than is perhaps advisable. He is already spoiled and eats only the choicest of steak bones. We will keep you posted on his adventures.

Several of our men have earned nicknames due to their tactics and operations on the river. Such names as "Sampan", "Hard Core", "The Big Anchor", "Hambone", "Cool Hand Sinclair", and "Swim Call Spicco". I'll leave it up to you all to find out their individual stories. They make good reading.

As most of you probably know, the PBR Sailors wear Black Berets as part of our uniform. Tradition has it that after ones first encounter with hostile fire (known "in-country" as a "firefight") the man involved may cut the loop (tassel) of black ribbon on the back of his beret. This is one of the goals of all PBR Sailors.

My being the Officer in Charge and not having been in a "firefight" has created some embarrassing moments for as we have some men who have been in several. I finally joined the group though. After having been "in-country" for some 6 months and 2 days my patrol was taken under fire on a usually boring Long Tau night patrol. On our way back to station after having evacuated two sick Vietnamese soldiers from Tac Ong Nghia to Nha Be we were taken under fire. Upon completing two firing runs and suppressing enemy fire we were prepared to make a third and final firing run when I discovered my cover boat was not following me. Upon questioning him by radio I discovered he had

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a man overboard. SN Bruce SPIECE, "Swim Call Spiece", as we now call him, had fallen overboard during the last high speed turn. He was recovered with no injuries by the next patrol station under patrol officer "Cool Hand (LTJG) SINCLAIR). No casualties were occurred to personnels or boat and we all informed SN SPIECE, in jest, that he couldn't cut his beret ribbon because he had deserted and was on an unauthorized swim call whils out of uniform. (He removed his flak jacket in the water) "Swim Call SPIECE" was presented his beret with cut ribbon the next day.

The long awaited change in designator from River Section 544 to River Division 593 has not yet occurred and it is uncertain at this writing as to when it will occur. Plans, now call for 1 September, however this is not final, and the mail will reach Nha Be regardless of which address is used. It is advisable to use the River Section 544 address until we receive a final notice.

To those of you just joining the 544 family, Welcome Aboard! Again I remind you to go through the Red Cross to contact your loved one if an emergency exists as any other method of notification causes undue delay.

I am sorry to announce that my Executive Officer/Ops Officer, LT H.J. FEENEY, USN, will be leaving the section about the first week in September. He has done an outstanding job. We wish him smooth sailing in his new job as Officer in Charge of River Section 513 on the Bassac River in the Mekong Delta.

We have received several boxes of summer and childrens type clothing from the friends of our Section CPO, QMC Ted SMITH, and the wife of Boat Captain BMI John KEFIER. We are most appreciative as we pass these out at our monthly MED-CAPS to Ly Nhon.

Please feel free to write to me at any time giving suggestions for these family grams and to ask questions.

Sincerely,

William D. STRAIGHT  
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96621

