

Dear Families and Friends of River Division 593:

Welcome aboard to the new members of RivDiv 593 family. We formed as River Section 544 in May with ten new MK2 FFR's. Since then we have accomplished much and have become well known throughout Task Force 116 units which are all the River Patrol forces in Vietnam numbering some 240 PFR's. On 1 September under a reorganization of the Task Force we became River Division 593. We have 5 officers and 61 enlisted men in the division. Our home base is Nha Be which is located some 14 miles south east of Saigon on the Long Tau River.

Fast procedure has been to publish a familygram once each month. However due to a large personnel turnover in the division requiring extra training duties, our operational, maintenance, and administrative work loads have not allowed us to get a familygram out for some time. With November just finished I would like to tell you of our recent activities and perhaps give you our insight into our way of life here in "Sunny South Vietnam-Fun Capital of the World".

The results of August's Navy wide examination came in during late October, and we were happy to see many of our men advanced. Congratulations are due James Montgomery, now transferred, who passed the CFO test as requirement for the Warrant Officer program, FM3 Turner "Fones" Fediford jr., EN2 Chuck Vance, GMC3 Wayne "Jan" Janousek, EN2 Allen Johnson, GMC3 Albert "John" Johnson, EN2 Terry Simison, GMC2 David "Fugs" Sheffer, EN2 Fred Temple, SM3 Merle "Mr. A" Schlotterback and YN3 Ray "Fonia" Bonomelli. The rates listed are the ones to which the men have been advanced or will be advanced within a few months.

In addition to advancements in rate, 593 has won several combat awards for actions since we formed up in May. To date, we have 2 Silver Stars, 9 Bronze Stars with Combat "V", 11 Purple Hearts and 3 Silver Stars in lieu of a second medal, 8 Navy Commendation Medals with Combat "V" and 5 Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry. We take pride in this impressive list. It is indicative of the spirit and bravery for which PER sailors are known.

Our men (there are no boys here) have captured the following items from the enemy which we proudly display in our office. Four Chinese Communist AK-47 assault rifles, three RFG-2 rocket rounds, three 82 millimeter mortar rounds, several hand grenades, a Russian 122 mm rocket range finder and elevation quadrant, much small arms and automatic weapons ammunition, personal packs, food, and enemy documents.

The men have approximately 25 twelve to fourteen hour patrols per month. It is a rough schedule physically and takes an exceptional man to be able to endure the long hours of boredom and still maintain a sharp edge in order to react to any emergency with an automatic in born two second reaction time. To date since 9 May we have boarded 39,709 river craft for search purposes, we have checked some 84,339 identification cards, and logged a total of 18,853 patrol hours which average out to 103 patrol hours per day.

I hope that the routines of a day and a night patrol is familiar to you now through letters from your man in Nha Pe. For those of you who are not getting regular mail from Vietnam, it may be interesting to go along on a day patrol. Here's a narrative of a typical patrol with the men of 593.

Your reveille is about 0430. After quietly washing and dressing, you head to the chow hall for breakfast. Your meal finished, you get your flak vest, helmet and rain gear and head down to your boat. There are two FER's in each patrol. Today you will be on the lead boat, carrying the patrol officer. The other boat will be your cover boat. It's still pitch dark out, but the sky is clear and dotted by a thousand stars. The "boat snipe" (Engineer), Gunner's Mate and Seaman get their PER ready for the day ahead, testing engines, radios and steering gear, getting ice and C-rations. The two boat captains and patrol officer go to their briefing. The brief is given by one of the division's officers. He has attended the morning briefing in the Rung Sat Tactical Center (TOC) and has been told the up to date situation in the Rung Sat and specific instructions for his stations.

You get underway before 0600. The base is quiet except for the two Navy "Seawolf" helicopters which are just taking off from the helo pad. FBR's from the other sections issue muffled roars as they idle away from the pier.

You have station zero-five today. The area runs from the South China Sea up the Long Tau River to a river intersection called "four corners". The briefing officer was told that there would be four passengers for Can Gio ("Can Joe" to us, "Con Yaw" to the Vietnamese), a village about one klik (kilometer) up the river from the ocean. The passengers are a U.S. Army Captain who is the senior advisor in Can Gio, and three Vietnamese Army petty officers. It's high tide, so there is no problem getting to the pier at the fishing village. As the boats approach, a horde of children overrun the pier voicing the familiar cry "OK baby-san, chop chop", "OK, VC numbah ten, chop chop". As the passengers disembark, you hand out "singum", chewing gum, from the C-rats. Two Vietnamese national police come aboard and you leave Can Gio. The policemen are known as "the twins" because they always work together. You've been with them on station five before and know them to be good men. Once back on the river, the long day of boarding and searching junks begins.

The day progresses quietly, as expected. As merchants ships enter the Long Tau and begin the river passage to Saigon, the patrol officer radios the information to Nha Be. One LST is loaded with troops and equipment and the FBR's stay with it through the station. Your efforts are rewarded when the bigger ship calls you alongside and lowers a carton of ice-cream down to your boat. The ice cream will be a fitting dessert to follow one of the canned banquets in the case of C-rats.

The sound of bombs and artillery remind you constantly that you are in a war zone, but on station five, the biggest worry is the hot sun and the "Vietnamese National Bird", the mosquito.

At 1400, TOC sends a coded message to your patrol. The patrol officer breaks it, and tells his boat captain that they have been directed to go to Tan Thuan Village to "Medevac" a father and his two sons who were wounded by a booby-trap while crabbing. The medevac is a common task to PER sailors, who routinely take sick or wounded civilians and military to medical aid.

In this case, the victims are seriously hurt, so they must be taken to the dispensary at Nha Be and then the Vietnamese hospital in Saigon. The tide is low, so the boat proceed slowly and carefully, with a man on the bow sounding the river with the boathook. There is enough water, however so the FFR's get into the village and pick up their four passengers, the three wounded and the wife and mother of the family. The patients have been bandaged and put on stretchers, and a crowd of Vietnamese helps load them onto the boat. Perhaps the FFR's have earned a few friends for the U.S. and the government of Vietnam.

With the patients safely in the hands of the doctor at Nha Be, the boats return to station for the last few hours of their patrol. The traffic has shifted from the ocean-going cargo and fishing junks common on station five, to the water taxies coming down from Saigon to Can Gio and Vung Tau. These taxies carry an amazing clutter of people and produce. People use hammocks and benches below decks, others sit on the roof amid baskets of vegetables, ducks and chickens, cases of beer and pop and anything else that can be bought in the capital.

Your relief reports on station a little bit after six (1800) and your patrol takes off for Nha Be. A meal, a shower, and maybe some liberty wait at "home". The boat is fast, and the crew is quick to do their post-patrol duties. Today's patrol was routine. What will tomorrow's be like? "Foy, just let Charlie show his face to me!" Maybe we'll be inserting the Vietnamese commandoes tomorrow, or we might find some weapons on one of the junks. Who can say? Another patrol to your credit.

The base here at Nha Be is becoming more civilized with each day. During the past month, we have seen the personnel of Naval Support Activity, Saigon move here from the big city and the base population is over the one thousand mark. Elevation remains at river level. Our roads have been paved, the recreation center is finished and a library is being collected. What more could we wish. Well, it might be nice to be home. Farring that life here is pretty good.

I wrote in a previous letter of our faithful mascot, Bogus K-9. It is now my sad duty to inform you that Bogus is no longer with us. In spite of the shots given him by the vet, he began to develop distemper and we felt it best to send our pup to a new patrol area. His jacket is displayed in our office with the note:

"EOGUS K-9, A COMBAT VETERAN, 19 PATROLS".  
He was a good friend.

The rainy season is at an end now, and barring typhoons, we don't expect to see rain until March or April. With all the sun, it's hard to remember what fall and winter were like back in the States. Our Thanksgiving dinner, featuring lobster, roast beef and Turkey, was a big success but our football games were on TV. Christmas packages have been arriving, and I trust that some have been headed towards you.

That's about it for this familygram. I hope you enjoyed your patrol. If you have any questions, ask your expert over here. Feel free to write me if you wish to know anything more of life over here. I'll try to answer in another familygram.

Once again I'd like to remind you to work through your local chapter of the American Red Cross, if you have to contact your man over here concerning an emergency. The Red Cross is the only official channel for handling such news. A full time Red Cross staff is maintained in Saigon to provide service to servicemen in Vietnam and their families elsewhere.

Remember that we think of you often. Although we may not be the most faithful correspondents, letters mean a lot to us. Help put mail into our mail call. Gifts of summer type clothing for adults and especially children are appreciated. We pass them out to peasants on the rivers and at our Medical Civic Action Program Village. Contact your local Navy Recruiting Station for free mailing.

That's about it for this month. We sincerely wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. With your prayers we will all be home for the holidays next year.

Sincerely,

*William D. Straight*  
William D. STRAIGHT  
LT USN

Commander River Division 593