

RIVER SECTION 544
FPO SAN FRANCISCO 96601

Dear

As the Executive Officer of FBR Section 544 I would like to take this opportunity to acquaint you with the conditions in which your _____ lives.

River Patrol Section 544 is comprised of ten MARK II PBR's, manned and maintained by a total of some 31 men and officers. The MARK II Patrol Boat River (PBR) is the second generation of PBR's. The first, MK I PBR's, were actually a pleasure boat design which closely suited the needs of the Navy for a River Patrol Craft to work in the delta regions of South Vietnam. The MK II PBR is the first design actually meant to be a patrol craft and is quite a improvement over the older MK I's. It is a faster more sturdy design with better hull design features. At high speeds the boat planes or skims across the surface rather than sinking low by the stern as many MK I's do. The boat itself is 31'11" in length and 11'7" in beam and is made of moulded fiberglass. The boat is powered by two diesel engines totaling 400 horsepower, and is propelled by two "water-jet" pumps at a rated speed in excess of 25 knots. Pound for pound the PBR boasts more fire power than any other boat (or ship) in the U.S. Navy. Each boat has a standard armament of three .50 caliber heavy machine guns (two forward and one aft), one M-60 light machine gun, an automatic grenade launcher, two M-79 grenade launchers, three M-16 automatic rifles, one shotgun and a pistol. In addition to these fire arms there is a standard allowance of hand grenades. The boats are not limited to just the standard allowance of fire arms, however, and frequently carry 60 millimeter mortars, rocket launchers, M-16 semi-automatic rifles and flame throwers. All this fire power virtually makes a 31 foot battleship out of a PBR.

Our patrols operate in the Hung Sat Special Zone (which in Vietnamese means "White jungle"), an area of roughly four-hundred square miles, between Saigon and the South China Sea, and through which all merchant shipping must pass to and from Saigon. This shipping represents 60% of the supplies for the war effort and it is immediately clear why this channel, and the area around it must be kept secure. The channel is very narrow and if and if only one ship were sunk in it, all merchant shipping to Saigon would cease until the sunken ship was removed. So far not one ship has been sunk or is to block the channel.

This area is desolate and unproductive. There are few villages in it and very little fresh water. A large portion of the Rung Sat has been defoliated. What vegetation remains is largely mangrove and swamp grass. In the Monsoon Season the Rung Sat is 85% under water. However inhospitable and economically poor this area is, its value must not be underestimated. For that reason four FBI sections, one mine sweeper division, three VN River Assault Divisions, numerous VN large patrol craft, over seven companies of RF/PF VN troops, VN Commandos advised by U.S. Marines, three U.S. Navy Seal Teams, numerous artillery batteries, helicopter gunships, and fixed wing aircraft (jets) are committed to the defense of this four-hundred square miles of mud and canals, with more support available if required.

The accomplishment of our mission and in fact, the mission of the entire free world depends upon the common denominator, the man. Our patrols average over thirteen hours (including transit time) in length, and the FBI is not designed for comfort. Alertness must be maintained during the entire patrol, day or night, often under adverse weather conditions. The work is arduous and the free time is minimal. Because in addition to the regular patrol the men must spend from 1½ to 3 hours in preparing and then securing their boats before and after patrol. Even though this constitutes a daily routine of from 1½ to 17 hrs with time not yet allowed for meals, and leave for four days at a time before a day of relief comes, the men are highly motivated and dedicated. Each man understands the importance of his contribution to the efforts to restore peace to this war-torn country and to preserve freedom for his loved ones at home.

During the twelve month tour in Vietnam each man is entitled to take a five day R & R (transportation paid for) trip, and one seven day leave (space available travel) to any one of several glamorous cities including Hong Kong, Saigon, Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, Manila, and Honolulu. In addition to these breaks in routine each man is entitled to take two three day trips to Vung Tau for "in-country" R & R's. I very much encourage the men to take these opportunities to get away and "recharge his batteries".

Even in this combat environment the welfare and comfort of our men is of paramount importance. The force in Vietnam is the best fed, best clothed, and best supplied the United States has ever put into the field. We are fortunate to have movies and are able to watch Armed Forces Television Network programs. Here at Nha Be we have exchange facilities, sick bay, barber shop and laundry facilities. The barracks are not, by state-side comparison, lavish but they are comfortable and spacious and have recreational facilities provided.

Your young man and his fellow boat crewmembers are doing a magnificent job. I'm sure I join you in the pride felt for these men.

One very important thing that should be mentioned to everyone, and that is, if for any reason an emergency requirement exists that requires the contact or presence of you loved one, go through your local chapter of the American Red Cross. They will handle all verification and make all contact arrangements. It is extremely important that this process be followed otherwise much undue delay and possible complete loss of contact may result. Personal messages, telegrams, or telephone calls will not suffice to meet Red Cross verification requirements.

Please feel free to write me at any time should I possibly be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



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96621