

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
U. S. S. BENEWAH (APB-35)
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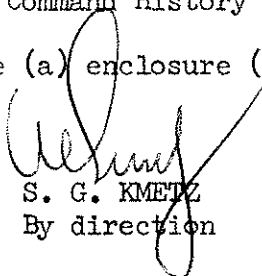
From: Commanding Officer, USS BENEWAH (APB-35)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)

Subj: Command History; submission of

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Encl: (1) USS BENEWAH (APB-35) Command History for 1969

1. In accordance with reference (a) enclosure (1) is submitted.


S. G. KMETZ
By direction

USS BENEWAH (APB-35)
1969 COMMAND HISTORY

JANUARY

The First of January found the BENEWAH and the Mobile Riverine Force in the Song Ham Luong, vicinity of Ben Tre, Republic of Vietnam, conducting interdiction operations with units of the 2nd Brigade, U.S. Army Ninth Infantry Division. On 4 January BENEWAH transited back to the Song Tien Giang near Dong Tam, which had become the base of operations in the Delta for the Mobile Riverine Force. While in the Dong Tam anchorage harassment and interdiction missions were conducted on the South bank employing both 40mm and 3"50's. On 18 January the ship welcomed the Commander, Republic of Philippine Forces Vietnam for a luncheon and tour. 21 January Dong Tam came under rocket and mortar attack from the South bank, which sent the ship to general quarters. BENEWAH fired its guns at the suspected enemy locations with unknown results.

The remainder of the month was spent between My Tho and Dong Tam. No further enemy contact was made. On the 29th of January BENEWAH hosted a RADM, Royal Australian Navy.

FEBRUARY

On the 1st of the month BENEWAH was visited by Vice Admiral ZUMWALT, Commander Naval Forces Vietnam, and the Chief of Naval Operations for the Vietnamese Navy for a luncheon and briefing. On 2 February the MRF made the four hour transit to Ben Tre, where it stayed through the 5th. A US show was given for the men on the flight deck the afternoon of the 5th. 12 February 1000H saw LCDR D.L. SOLOMON relieve LCDR M.A. STOWELL as Commanding Officer of the ship. The remainder of the month was spent between the My Tho, Dong Tam and Ben Tre anchorages, with the MRF providing support to interdiction units of the 2nd Brigade 9th Infantry Division, under the command of COL Hollis RAINVILLE. 24 February saw the 13,000th helo land on the flight deck.

MARCH

Sunday, 2 March, BENEWAH set sail from Dong Tam, destination Sasebo, Japan in accordance with CTF 117 message 251000 FEB 69 for a long awaited restricted availability in the yards. Before leaving she shed the three pontoons along her starboard side, which had been attached for over two years of operation in the Delta. The Commodore and all members of the staff transferred to the USS COLLETON (APB-36), which assumed duties as flagship for CTF 117.

The trip to Sasebo was a long and rather unpleasant journey for most of the crew, who had become accustomed to the smooth waters and warm climate of the Mekong. Mid-way to Sasebo, the temperature dropped sharply from the normal mean reading of 80 degrees experienced in the Delta, to the low 40's. The remainder of the journey was spent in heavy squalls and

occasional snow flurries, with the ship plowing through the rough seas at an ungainly 10 knots. Needless to say, the sight of Sasebo harbor on 12 March was a most welcome relief.

On 20 March the ship entered drydock to begin a planned 4 week period of maintenance and overhaul. Concurrently, the city of Sasebo begun a boom period in its economy, aided by the free-spending of some 180 sailors of the "brown-water-navy" for many of whom the sight of civilization was a long time in coming.

APRIL

The ship remained in drydock through 18 April. During that time the communications and electronic equipment was tested, calibrated and repaired. Number 2 AC generator prime mover was replaced, with two other AC and 3 DC generators being completely overhauled by the efficient yard crew. The hull was sandblasted and given a fresh coat of green paint. Upon completion of these tasks, the locks were flooded on 18 April, watertight integrity checked, and BENEWAH shifted residence to a berth at pier "India 3". 29 April the ship pulled out for an eight hour sea trial.

MAY

At 0700 1 May BENEWAH departed Sasebo for the long trip back to Vietnam. ~~Before~~ leaving Sasebo harbor the ship ran through the degaussing range.

The return trip was in marked contrast to the voyage to Sasebo. Calm seas and fair weather prevailed throughout the entire transit. During the transit the ship test fired all weapons, expending 100 rounds 40mm, 30 rounds 3"50 and 300 rounds 50 caliber. Drilling at general quarters daily brought the ship to combat readiness.

The ship passed Vung Tau light and entered the waters of the Song Tien (MEKONG) River the morning of 9 May. At noon the ship reached the Dong Tam anchorage where she rejoined the Mobile Riverine Force, with the Commodore, CAPT John NOW embarked on the USS COLLETON (APB-36).

Three pontoons were returned to the starboard side the morning of 16 May. Alfa Company, 2nd Brigade Ninth Infantry returned on board. 11 May the ship was visited by the Naval Director of Medicine and Surgery. The Commodore and the MRF staff returned to the ship and BENEWAH resumed her role as flagship of the flotilla, comprised of the USS COLLETON (APB-36), USS MERCER (APB-39) and USS NUECES (APB-40). On 13 May the MRF transited to Ben Tre. 22 May saw John Chaffey, Secretary of the Navy, visit BENEWAH for a luncheon and briefing of riverine operations. 23 May the MRF returned to Dong Tam, where it remained through the month, supporting River Assault Squadron Fifteen and U.S. Army interdiction units.

JUNE

On 1 June NAVFORV, the Deputy Commander Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and the Commanding General 2nd Field Forces visited BENEWAH. 5 June the ship fired 40 rounds 40mm harassment and interdiction fire on the South bank. 6 June Captain Carvel BLAIR relieved Captain John NOW as Commander River Assault Flotilla ONE. 7 June Deputy CINCPACFLT visited the BENEWAH. 10 June the MRF transited to Ben Tre where the following day the flotilla was inspected by COMSERVPAC. 13 June MRF returned to Dong Tam. 22 June Rear Admiral (RET) Daniel GALLERY, author of All Hands, Clear

the Decks, 8 Bells, and other books relating the numerous moments of his naval career, came aboard BENEWAH to gather information for a forthcoming book on the "brown-water-Navy". Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet, VADM HYLAND visited BENEWAH for a briefing 23 June. 24 June, the USS COLLETON left the MRF and Vietnam for decommissioning in Bremerton, Washington. The 14,000th helo landed on the flight deck 26 June. On the last day of the month BENEWAH welcomed the two United States Senators from Alaska, who were touring installations in Vietnam.

JULY

With the announcement of President Nixon's withdrawal plan in Vietnam one of the first units of the initial 25,000 troops scheduled to be cut was the 2nd Brigade, Ninth Infantry, who had worked in conjunction with the MRF since its inception. The MRF transited to Ben Tre 3 July to transfer 2nd Brigade personnel and equipment from the outpost there, and returned to Dong Tam the same day.

6 July was a significant day for the BENEWAH and Mobile Riverine Force. VADM ZUMWALT, General ABRAMS and many other high ranking members of Army and Naval commands in Vietnam came aboard BENEWAH for an award ceremony in which the MRF received the Presidential Unit Citation for its role in the 1968 Tet offensive. Also, COL RAINVILLE accepted the Joint Army-Navy Distinguished Service Medal on behalf of the 2nd Brigade. During the ceremony all units of the MRF made an impressive sight as they passed in review by the BENEWAH.

14 July all units of 2nd Brigade Ninth Infantry left the MRF for flights returning them to the United States. 22 June Submarine Forces Pacific paid a brief visit to BENEWAH. 25 June the MRF transited to the My Tho anchorage and returned 2 days later. 31 July BENEWAH fired 160 rounds 40mm harassment and interdiction fire on the South bank near Dong Tam.

AUGUST

With the scheduled inactivation of the USS MERCER and USS NUECES, it became obvious that the Mobile Riverine Force would soon cease to exist. Concurrently, troop reduction planning in Vietnam had an immediate impact on the staff of RIVFLOTONE, with 75% of the current staff scheduled to leave in late August. The MRF made the move to the My Tho anchorage during the first week of the month where it remained 2 days and returned to Dong Tam. 10 August Amphibious Training Pacific visited the MRF. 15 August saw the USS NUECES depart the MRF for minor repairs in Vung Tau. 18 August the USS MERCER pulled out to join the NUECES in Vung Tau where they would embark on the Pacific transit for decommissioning in the States. 19 August at 0019H Dong Tam went on Red alert having received incoming rockets. BENEWAH commenced fire on the reported sight of launching, expending 11 rounds 3"50 and 21 rounds 40mm, with a 3 minute reaction time. Harassment and interdiction fire continued at 0035, with BENEWAH expending 240 rounds on the South bank over a period of two hours.

23 August the ship got underway for Nha Be, RVN to transfer members of staff who were scheduled to depart for the U.S. the following day. The transit to Nha Be, a suburb of Saigon, took over 12 hours, with the ship stopping in Vung Tau to detach the pontoons, which would be brought up by tug. A pilot was taken aboard to navigate the ship through the winding Soirap River running through the Rung Sat special Zone.

The ship remained in Nha Be until the 25th, when it got underway for her new area of operation in the Vam Co River, vicinity of the French Fort to support River Assault Squadron 15 and 6th of the 31st Army Infantry Division. Commodore BLAIR and a small staff remained aboard to take command of this new fighting unit known as the Riverine Strike Group. The Commodore also assumed the duties of Senior Naval Advisor to Vietnamese Task Force 211, based in Dong Tam.

SEPTEMBER

The month of September was a rather quiet one for Riverine Strike Group. BENEWAH and embarked units deployed in the Song Vam Co, vicinity of Xom Ba Thay in support of operation "Giant Slingshot". 16 September, Rear Admiral FITZPATRICK, Commander of Naval Communications, visited the ship for a briefing on current operations and communications status. 25 September, BENEWAH transited to Nha Be to take on fresh provisions and provide two days of liberty for the crew. 27 September the ship sailed back to the Vam Co to resume her support of river operations in the vicinity of Xom Tram.

OCTOBER

The relatively slow tempo of operations continued through October. While the ASPB's and ATC's inserted troops of the 6th of the 31st Army Infantry Divisions for nightly sweeps inland from the Vam Co, additional units of River Assault Squadron 15 contributed support to Giant Slingshot further upriver. On 1 October, RADM LONG visited Commodore BLAIR, who by now was spending nearly half his time in the U Minh Forest supervising the development of ATF 211. In between visits on the 10th and 27th to Nha Be for liberty and resupply, BENEWAH twice fired harassment and interdiction missions into the Rung Sat Special Zone. These gunfire support operations on 14 and 25 October were among the final blows against the formerly Viet Cong controlled region virtually on the outskirts of Saigon.

NOVEMBER

November brought to an end the amphibious operations on the Vam Co and Soirap River. On 2 November, BENEWAH completed her final harassment and interdiction mission in the Rung Sat. Following the historic 15,000th safe helicopter landing on 5 November and a visit by Commander Amphibious Forces Pacific, VADM SMITH on 9 November, BENEWAH bade farewell to the last of the embarked army personnel ending an era of joint Army-Navy operations that had begun in the early days of the Mobile Riverine Forces and marked one of the most successful phases of the war in Vietnam. Proceeding across a stretch of the South China Sea and up the Mekong River, BENEWAH arrived in Dong Tam on 12 November and commenced preparations for the debarkation of Commander Riverine Strike Group. On the 16th Commodore BLAIR hauled down his flag and BENEWAH proceeded to An Long on the Upper Mekong to begin her support mission of Tran Hung Dao and Barrier Reef operations. Operating with PBR Divisions 514 and 592, River Assault Division 152, and mine Division 113, BENEWAH entered a period of counter-infiltration operations focusing on the Grand and Vinh Te Canals, in which she was to participate for the next month.