

# Operation: PBR Rescue

## Patrol Boat, Riverine 31RP7116 The Brownwater Navy, Vietnam

### *The Veterans Garage*

Preserving Military History

#### Introduction:

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During the Vietnam War, sailors of the U.S. Navy braved over 3,000 nautical miles of perilous rivers and canals threading the landscape of Vietnam. The River Patrol Force was established on 18 December 1965, and for the remaining years of the war, Navy patrol boats were a common sight on the waters of Vietnam. Their mission was broad and covered a number of contingencies. The infrastructure of Vietnam was devoid of superhighways and sophisticated rail systems, thus waterways served as a primary means of transportation. Control of the waterways was crucial. The primary mission of the River Patrol Force was to intercept and interdict Communist supplies being smuggled from the North. Additionally, they delivered and supported land forces (including Navy SEALs) and engaged North Vietnamese forces ashore with onboard weaponry.

The sailors who served in the Brown Water Navy endured unique forms of hardship and danger. Small craft such as PBR's (River Patrol Boats, see sketch above) made their way deep into inland waterways, surrounded on both sides by impenetrable jungle. Gunfire could erupt from the dense forests along the shore at any time, often from cleverly concealed enemy positions just yards away. These lightly armored patrol boats were built for speed, and offered little protection to their crews. Vietnamese sampans and small craft were intercepted on a daily basis and search for contraband materials – always a tense and potentially dangerous situation.

Sailors of the Brown Water Navy also battled the natural environment of Vietnam, enduring punishing heat and pounding monsoons. They contended with shallow, narrow waterways, whose constantly changing waters overflowed and flooded during the monsoon season. And of course, like all who serve, they spent many a lonely day, thinking about a home on the other side of the world.

## More About PBRs

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Patrol Boat, Riverine or PBR, is the United States Navy designation for a small rigid-hulled patrol boat used in the Vietnam War from March 1966 until the end of 1972. They were deployed in a force that grew to 250 boats, the most common craft in the River Patrol Force, Task Force 116, and were used to stop and search river traffic in areas such as the Mekong Delta, the Rung Sat Special Zone, the Saigon River and in I Corps, in the area assigned to Task Force Clearwater, in an attempt to disrupt weapons shipments. In this role they frequently became involved in firefights with enemy soldiers on boats and on the shore, were used to insert and extract Navy SEAL teams, and were employed by the United States Army's 458th Transportation Company, known as the 458th Seatigers.

## Design

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The PBR was a versatile boat with a fiberglass hull and water jet drive which enabled it to operate in shallow, weed-choked rivers. It drew only two feet of water fully loaded. The drives could be pivoted to reverse direction, turn the boat in its own length, or come to a stop from full speed in a few boat lengths.

The PBR was manufactured in two versions, the first with 31 foot length and 10 foot, 7 inch beam. **The Mark II** version 32 feet (9.8 m) long and one foot wider beam had improved drives to reduce fouling and aluminum gunwales to resist wear.

## Crew

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The PBR was usually manned by a four-man crew. Typically, a First Class Petty Officer served as boat captain, with a gunner's mate, an engineman and a seaman on board. Each crewman was cross-trained in each other's job in the event one became unable to carry out his duties. Generally, PBRs operated in pairs under the command of a patrol officer who rode on one of the boats.

## Power

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The boats were powered by dual 180 hp (115 kW) Detroit Diesel 6V53N engines with Jacuzzi Brothers pump-jet drives. The boats reached top speeds of 28.5 knots (53 km/h 32 mph).

## Armament

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Typical armament configuration included twin M2HB .50 caliber (12.7 mm) machine guns forward in a rotating shielded tub, a single rear M60, one or two 7.62 mm light machine guns mounted on the port and starboard sides, and a Mk 19 grenade launcher. There was also a full complement of M16 rifles, shotguns, .45 ACP handguns, and hand grenades. Some had a "piggyback" arrangement, a .50 cal machine gun on top of an 81mm mortar; others had a bow-mounted Mk16 Mod 4 Colt 20 mm automatic cannon, derived from the AN/M3 version of the Hispano-Suiza HS.404 and also found on the LCMs and PBRs.[6]

What the boats possessed in heavy firepower they lacked in armor or shielding. Although the .50 cal machine guns had some ceramic armor shielding and the Coxswain's flat had some quarter inch thick steel armor plate, the boats were designed to rely on rapid acceleration, maneuverability, and speed to get out of tight situations.

## PBR 7116

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Built in January 1972, by United Boat Builders in Bellingham Washington, PBR 7116s initial service is unclear. At some point, she served as a Navy Pilot Rescue Boat and after decommissioning was transferred to an Ohio Water Rescue Service until approximately 2010.

Retired Navy Captain (PBRs Vietnam) John McClurg purchased the boat as salvage. His goal was to facilitate the restoration and operation of this iconic Navy Vessel. The Boat was transferred to Chicago for restoration by a non-profit organization. Unfortunately, they were unable to begin the restoration for several years, eventually the boat was reported missing.

In 2018, Captain McClurg engaged John Lynn (PI), who in turn contacted The Veterans Garage regarding locating his 'missing' boat. A friend suggested that Mr. Lynn contact Joe Werner at The Veterans Garage. Purely by chance, Joe Werner had seen the boat a year prior, and following a hunch was able to establish her whereabouts and transport her to The Veterans Garage facility for safe storage. The success of the initial "Rescue" led to discussions about restoration. The Veterans Garage offered it's services to help get PBR7116 back on the water.

# John McClurg (USN Retired)

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Born in Shelby, Ohio September of 1943. Lived in Mansfield, Ohio, until fourteen then moved to Dad's farm in eastern Kentucky. Completed High School, then College at the University of Kentucky, Lexington.

Joined the Navy in February 1968, and attended OCS at Newport, RI. Upon graduation from OCS in Newport, John volunteered as a River Patrol Officer for PBR's in Vietnam. Completed a 6 week boat course at NIOTC at Mare Island in Vallejo, CA in the fall of 1968 and SERE school at Whidby Island, Washington. John also attended Naval Amphibious School at Coronado, CA and later Vietnamese Language training.

John got orders to Binh Thuy, Vietnam with COMRIVPATFLOT Five Staff. On the staff of COMRIVPATFLOT Five at Binh Thuy, John served as Patrol Officer for River Division 513, Naval Watch Officer, and Tactical Watch Officer for the Naval Operations Center. He later was assigned to the USS Harnett County on the Basaac River to serve as the Naval Watch Center Officer. John was reassigned to Rach Gia as the Naval Operations Center Watch Officer. His last duty station was at Duc Hoa with the 25th Infantry Division as the Naval Liaison Element. After a year in country, John received orders to Naval Indoctrination School as the Head of the Organization Department. From there he was ordered to:

CINCPACFLT Staff

- Maintenance Officer, Ship Activation, Maintenance, and Repair Facility (SAMAR 14-1) at Pearl Harbor,
- Operations Officer, Commander Naval Reserve Group Command 1-4,
- Repair Officer Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard 121, Naval Logistics Group Pacific Staff, COMTHIRDFLT Det 120, Commander Destroyer Squadron 9, CINCPAC J1, Camp Smith, HI
- CO NR Ship Intermediate Maintenance Activity, Norfolk, VA
- CO NR Unit, USS Mullinix (DD944)
- CO NR Commander US Naval Forces central Command, Det 120
- CO Naval Reserve Construction Battalion Det 1220, Huntington, WV.

While attached to CINCPAC J1 Division, John was assigned to do a manpower survey of JUMAG Philippines in Manila. While there, he met and married his wife from Angelos City in November 1988. John has three living children from that marriage, Janel Elaine, Sean Patrick, and Kristan Ashley. His youngest son, Brian Allen, was killed on his 16th birthday and is buried on the family farm in KY.

John attended college at Knox College in Galesburg, IL, University of RI in Providence, Cornell University in Ithaca, NY and University of KY, Lexington, where he graduated with a BS in Animal Science Nutrition. He also attended the Naval War College in Newport, RI and the National Defense University. John also served as an instructor at Naval Reserve Officer School, Honolulu, HI.

John's military awards are as follows:

- NAVY & MARINE CORPS COMMENDATION MEDAL W/ COMBAT 'V'
- COMBAT ACTION RIBBON
- PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (3 awards)
- NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION (2 awards)
- MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION
- NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL
- VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL W/STAR
- NAVAL RESERVE MEDAL
- ARMED FORCES RESERVE MEDAL

- REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM GALLANTRY CROSS
- REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM CIVIL ACTIONS UNIT CITATION FIRST CLASS W/PALM,
- REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM CAMPAIGN MEDAL (6 awards)
- NAVY EXPERT RIFLE
- NAVY EXPERT PISTOL MEDALS.

After retirement from the Naval reserve with over 26 years of service, John worked for the US Army Corps of Engineers as a staff Appraiser, county supervisor for Farmers Home Administration, and National Park Service as a Supervisory appraiser and retired from the National Park Service in the year 2000 with 38 years total creditable federal service.

## Patches

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Black Beret Patch



COMRIVPATFLOT5  
Sleeve Patch



River Section Division 513  
Sleeve Patch

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## The Veterans Garage

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The Veterans Garage (aka TVG) is an Illinois 501(c)3 non-profit corporation founded in 2006 and Incorporated in 2017 by Joseph (Joe) Werner. The purpose and mission of The Veterans Garage is to acquire, restore, operate and maintain historic Military Vehicles and Equipment. TVG is an all volunteer organization with NO paid employees. There are no dues or membership fees – and open to the Public. To date, TVG has assisted in the restoration, repair or maintenance of over two dozen various Military Vehicles and Equipment.

In addition to:

- ❖ 4 – WWII M5 Anti-Tank 3” Guns
- ❖ 1 – Nike Hercules Missile
- ❖ 1 - 40mm Twin Bofors Anti-Aircraft Gun
- ❖ 1 – 3” Naval Deck Gun



## A NEW Mission:

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To preserve the legacy and history of the Brown Water Navy of Vietnam. The complete restoration and operation of PBR7116 offers a meaningful and engaging experience that recognizes the sacrifices, courage, and valor of all military veterans. It fosters a thorough understanding of the Vietnam Era; including, the political, historical, social, cultural and military aspects of the Vietnam War. By maintaining and preserving the Mark II Patrol Boat River (PBR) in operational condition, it will allow people (both military and civilian) to experience firsthand the thrill of working and riding on an operational PBR. PBR 7116 will be open to the public so everyone can have the opportunity to see first-hand and ride on a unique piece of Vietnam history. Specific dates will be reserved for veterans to take a ride and leave their ill feelings behind with the river. By riding, touching and experiencing, one of the few remaining PBRs, veterans suffering from PTSD will find peace and comfort on the water aboard our PBR.

## Base of Operations:

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**Restoration** – PBR 7116 will take place at *The Veterans Garage* in Posen, IL (A south Chicago Suburb).

**Operation** – Once the restoration is completed, PBR7116 will operate in Summer throughout the Chicagoland Area. Chicago Harbors, Navy Pier, Cal- Sag Channel and periodic tours to other nearby locations. Off Season – PBR7116 will be stored indoors for Public Display throughout the year at *The Veterans Garage* along with several other Historic Military Vehicles, Equipment and Artifacts.

## Scope of Work

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Having sat for nearly seven years exposed and unprotected from the elements and simply the age of PBR 7116, a complete restoration is necessary. Also, in order to be permitted to carry passengers, strict regulations set by the US Coast Guard must be adhered to.

### As a result, the scope of work includes:

- Complete dismantlement of all components – down to the fiberglass hull.
- Stripping of all paint (interior and exterior)
- Removal and replacement of all flotation foam
- New fiberglass overlay (3 coats) interior and exterior
- New paint – interior and exterior
- Complete rebuild of both engines and jet pump drives
- Removal and replacement of fuel cells
- Completely new plumbing and electrical
- Acquisition, repair and installation of missing components
- And much more.....

**When completed, PBR7116 will once again take to the waters and proudly represent of ALL of the men and women of America's Armed Forces – especially those who served The Brown Water Navy.**

