

Bringing Bodies Back along the Mekong

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The remains of a lot of the missing are littered across the bottom of the Mekong branches. We had orders that whenever we encountered a floating corpse, we should look to see if it were an American uniform or wearing dog tags and if so, to try to recover it. We couldn't tell most of them, since we all turn black in the heat and so does our clothing. Those we couldn't identify we were to sink with gunfire so the corpses wouldn't wash up on a hamlet beach and spread pestilence. We sank a lot of floaters. The few we did recover had to be roped by a limb and stored on our aft step. We would steam back to base very slowly because the limbs would separate from the bodies at anything other than absolute slow. That's how we recovered a number of 9th ID troops. That's a black part of life on the river. Rotting corpses releasing gas and groaning on the way "home." It gave me a great respect for the supply types who had to bag them and take them up for ID.