

The Forgotten History;  
The Mining Campaigns of Vietnam 1967-1973.  
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Source:

War Stories Collections, Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University,  
San Angelo, Texas

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1. I would like to recall the history of the Mining Campaigns that were associated with the more notable operations recognized as "Rolling Thunder, "Pocket Money" and the infamous "Linebackers I and II" which were an outgrowth of the "Freedom Train" operations that started on April 5, 1972.

2. The "Rolling Thunder" interdiction efforts of 1967-68, utilizing the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy planes from aircraft carriers off the coast of Vietnam, and mines that were assembled in Subic Bay, Philippines and Guam, were the first attempts at curbing the flow of supplies coming into Vietnam from China and Russia. The Minemen that participated in Rolling Thunder were responsible for the assembly of tens of thousands of DSTs (Destructors) and numerous MK 50 underwater mines that were continually re-seeded during the entire course of the Southeast Asian conflict.

3. The campaigns by the NVN (North Vietnamese) forces had met with considerable success in spite of increased U.S. Navy, Marine and Air Force air support for the SVN (South Vietnamese) forces, including increased air interdiction of B-52 bombing missions against supply routes and military targets in Hanoi and Haiphong, and also naval ship bombardment of coastal supply routes and installations by cruisers and destroyers of the Seventh Fleet.

4. Despite the increased efforts of the combined U.S. military forces, nothing had succeeded in stopping the NVN forces. **Something more was needed!**

5. In preparation for possible mining operations, the Underwater Mine Divisions of naval magazines, Subic Bay Philippines and Guam, Mariana Islands, began to assemble the weapons that would be required to fulfill the most strenuous and testing operations in the history of the U.S. Mine Force since World War II. Operation "Pocket Money" and "Linebacker I" would soon be implemented.

6. The Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (June 30, 1964-July 31, 1968), Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, had continuously advocated the mining of Haiphong. After his retirement in 1968, Admiral Sharp expressed his opinions in his book "Strategy for Defeat", concerning the U.S. policy for conducting the Vietnam war. On the mining, he was quite specific in saying: "**Haven in Haiphong. Of all the things we should have done but did not do, the most important was to neutralize the port of Haiphong. We should have blocked the approaches to the harbor with mines laid by aircraft**". (1)

7. Henry Kissinger in his book "The White House Years" wrote: "**My preferred strategy was the plan first developed by my staff in 1969 and resubmitted by (General) Haig on April 6: the blockade of North Vietnam, to be accomplished by mining.**"

" **...I asked Admiral Moorer about the Joint Chiefs' view of the mining option and when it could be implemented. Moorer was enthusiastic, having repeatedly recommended it in the sixties**". (2)

8. Admiral Moorer, schooled in the strategic and tactical use of mines as a young officer in World War II, was in the unique position of being able to propose, champion, and execute a mining campaign as the senior officer in the U.S. defense establishment.

9. The Department of the Navy, NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND, wrote the following, concerning Admiral Moorer and his part in ending the Vietnam War:

**“Moorer began to exert influence over the direction of the Vietnam War once again in August 1967, when President Johnson appointed him Chief of Naval Operations. Between July 1970 and July 1974, the admiral took on even greater responsibility as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The admiral did not persuade Nixon to slow the pace of the U.S. military withdrawal from Southeast Asia, but he did convince the president to resume bombing and to mine the ports of North Vietnam in the spring of 1972. As a result of these actions, in January 1973 Hanoi agreed to cease hostilities in Southeast Asia. (3)**

10. The mining of Haiphong, which was discussed many times during the long war, was first considered as a possible course of action, in April 1972, as 13 of the 14 known NVN combat divisions invaded South Vietnam.

11. On May 6, 1972, after seven years of direct U.S. participation in the South East Asian conflict and continued attempts by U.S. military authorities to gain permission to cut off the seaborne logistic sinews of North Vietnam's strength, by means of mining, the operations gained presidential approval. On May 8, 1972, President Nixon announced on national television that mines had been laid in the Haiphong ship channel.

12. Never before had there been a war like Vietnam, and likewise never before had there been a need for a decision like the one made on May 8, 1972.

13. President Nixon stated in his book "No More Vietnams": **"When I received the first proposals for bombing North Vietnam from the Pentagon during the first week of May, I hit the ceiling. Their proposals were a timid replay of the Johnson bombing campaign from 1965 through 1968. In a long memorandum to Kissinger, I wrote, 'I cannot emphasize too strongly that I have determined that we should go for broke'. Consequently, I ordered the mining of North Vietnam's ports, including Haiphong Harbor, and the bombing of prime military targets throughout North Vietnam, including those in Hanoi. On May 8, I announced this decision in a national televised address. After describing the NVN invasion, I outlined three options: an immediate withdrawal, a negotiated peace, or a decisive military action to end the war". (4)**

14. Thereafter, for eight months, U.S. forces mined North Vietnamese waters. The main proponent of the mining was Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

15. Initial operations, set in motion by the presidential decision to mine NVN waters, laid thirty-six (36) Mark 52 Mod 2 mines in the Haiphong ship channel. This was the beginning of a mining campaign that planted over 11,000 Mark 36 Destructors and 108, Mark 52 Mod 2 mines over the next eight-month period. On 9 May 1972, the Secretary of Defense dispatched a commendatory

message to Admiral McClain, CINCPAC, and to the Pacific Fleet Naval Commanders who commanded the mining forces:

**"I just talked to the President and he asked me to personally convey to you his admiration and pleasure in the performance of our naval forces today in carrying out a perfectly executed mining mission. I add my own 'Well Done'..."** (5)

16. In reference to Operation "Pocket Money" and the final assessment of the entire eight-month mining campaign; the NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND publication documented the following historical record:

**"It (the mining) is considered to have played a significant role in bringing about an eventual peace arrangement, particularly since it so hampered the enemy's ability to continue receiving war supplies".** (6)

17. Commenting on the mining campaigns, Vice Admiral William P. Mack, then Commander of the Seventh Fleet, was to write later, **"What happened was that all traffic into Vietnam, except across the Chinese border, stopped. Within ten days there was not a missile or shell being fired at us from the beach. The North Vietnamese ran out of ammunition. Just as we said they would."** (7)

18. For the Minemen of the Pacific fleet, the immediate task had been accomplished, but this had not been the first challenge in direct support of the war and, by far, was not the last of our involvement in the mining campaigns of North Vietnam.

19. All through the Vietnam war the Minemen of the Pacific were faced with new challenges, as they pioneered the application and testing of new mines and the modifications of current weapons to fit the ever-changing operational commitments.

20. But, in the early fall of 1972, and during the height of the mining operations, an unexpected event occurred which caused a great burden on the already strained combat support commitment.

21. During the first few weeks of August, a series of extremely strong solar flares caused a fluctuation of the magnetic fields, in and around, South East Asia. The resulting chain of events caused the premature detonation of over 4,000 magnetically sensitive DSTs (Destructors), which were over half of the DSTs planted over the past several years. (8) Consequently, the task of re-seeding the depleted fields was an enormous evolution, which demanded immediate execution and was of the utmost priority. This was an extremely sensitive operation of enormous consequence to the South East Asian Mining campaigns, requiring immediate and decisive action.

I cannot emphasize the tremendous strain that it imposed on the Pacific fleet Minemen, aside from the vast war commitments that were already delegated to the U.S. Mines divisions at that time.

22. Because of the delicate nature of this operation, it was never mentioned in any commendations and remains unrecognized as a vital direct combat support operation, provided specifically by the Minemen of the Pacific. I am sure that President Nixon was aware of the increased pitch in the mining, above and beyond the normal tasks, but I am not convinced that he was aware that we were not recognized for our involvement.

23. In late 1972, as the peace talks with Hanoi stalemated, President Nixon made the decision to re-seed the minefields.

Again quoting from his book, he reflected: **"On December 14, I issued an order to re-seed the mines in Haiphong Harbor, to resume aerial reconnaissance throughout Vietnam, and to bomb military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong complex with B-52s. It was the most difficult decision concerning Vietnam that I made during my entire presidency".** (4)

24. Further in his autobiography President Nixon stated: **"Our most telling operation was the mining of North Vietnam's harbors and the blockade of its coast".** (4)

25. Once again, the Minemen of the Naval Magazines in Subic Bay and Guam were tasked with fulfilling the demands for the vast number of mines required to re-seed Haiphong Harbor and the many deltas of Vietnam. This was the beginning of Linebacker II.

26. The mining campaigns covered a vast area, causing a massive strangle hold on vital enemy supplies. Areas such as Dong Hoi, Quang Khe, Hon La, Thanh Hoa, Cam Pha, Hon Gai, Lach Huyen, and Chanel du Lynx, as well as the Ho Chi Minh trail, were included in the campaigns.

27. As peace negotiations continued, the re-seeding of the minefields proved their worth, as they became the main lever used in the peace negotiations. On 28, Jan 1973, eight months after the mining began and only one month after the re-seeding of the minefields, hostilities with the government of North Vietnam ceased and the mines that remained in their waters began to be swept.

28. During the peace talks, the main stumbling block for acceptance, of a mutual agreement between North and South Vietnam, and the return of our POWs, was the sweeping of the U.S. minefields.

29. In an interview with US World News, (April 14, 1973), Sen. John McCain, (then LCDR McCain) recalled his experience as a POW in Hanoi Hilton prison. **"I admire President Nixon's courage. There may be criticism of him in certain areas—Watergate, for example. But he had to take the most unpopular decisions that I could imagine—the mining, the blockade, the bombing. I know it was very, very difficult for him to do that, but that was the thing that ended the war".** (9)

30. As evidence to distinguish the mining operations from the so-called "blockade", it is a matter of record that "the mining" and "the blockade" referenced by LCDR McCain were one-and-the-same as confirmed in a statement printed in the Stars and Stripes, (May 30, 1972), by VADM William P. Mack, then Commander of the Seventh Fleet. The publication stated that: **"He (Admiral Mack) denied, however, that U.S. warships were involved in a blockade, since they had no orders to stop vessels or to seize them".** (10)

31. The evidence is clear that the mining (blockade) campaigns of 1972 cleared the way for the United States to end it's involvement in South East Asia and finally bring the POWs home. As stated again by Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, **"Thus the plan that had been in existence since the**

early 1960s, the same plan that had been recommended many, many times as a means of causing profound logistical difficulties in North Vietnam, was finally approved ... one is tempted to say a decade too late!" (1)

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- (2) "The White House Years", by Henry Kissinger, Secretary of Defense (1969-1973)
- (3) DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY -- NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE  
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- (4) "No More Vietnams" by President Richard M. Nixon
- (5) Commendatory message on the mining campaigns, 9 May 1972, Secretary of  
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- (6) Naval Aviation Chronology 1970-1980 DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY --  
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HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND, Operation Pocket Money.
- (7) Commendatory message on the mining campaigns, Vice Admiral William P. Mack
- (8) "The Mining of North Vietnam 8, MAY 1972 to 14, JANUARY 1973". (Pg 3-63 thru  
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- (9) US World News report 14 Apr, 1973, interview with LCDR John McCain, ex-POW
- (10) Stars and Stripes, (May 25, 1972), VADM William P. Mack