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## Echoes of the Mekong

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## 138 Naval War College Review

In addition to cost and utility, there also should have been more discussion about who should make what decisions in the horizontal C2 environment that DBK will create. For example, can a Marine battalion commander ashore call for Navy-launched cruise missile strikes against a command and control node that is directing an enemy force approaching his position from beyond the range of his organic sensors and weapons? If he cannot, does he really need DBK? If he can, how will targets and weapons be prioritized? (It will presumably not be by who requests them first.) When achieved, DBK will encourage more decentralized control of weapons increasingly lethal due to their precision, which will stress the hierarchical structure of the military and raise new questions about who controls what forces in such an environment. Also, in every essay there is an underlying assumption that DBK is to be discussed only in terms of maneuver warfare in an overseas arena, as opposed to asymmetric threats of terrorism by information warfare attacks against the Americans inside the continental United States. While the case presented for the advantages of DBK is compelling, it is one premised on extrapolation from current capabilities, and it is made through intuitive, anecdotal accounts.

Clearly Johnson and Libicki did not intend this book to be a reference for defense planners but an introduction to a general audience about an emerging concept of warfare. As an introduction to the issues this work succeeds, because it is nontechnical and relatively short. That makes it easy for the uninitiated to assimilate and develop an

interest in DBK and better understand how it should be used.

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Huchthausen, Peter, and Nguyen Thi Lung. *Echoes of the Mekong*. Baltimore, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1996. 165pp. \$24.95

This slender but handsome volume is remarkable for its dual recollections of the Vietnam War on the part of a Vietnamese woman and an American naval veteran.

The two had originally been thrown together in 1967 on the Mekong River, near My Tho. Lieutenant Peter Huchthausen's patrol boat had rescued Nguyen Thi Lung when her leg was blown off by the irresponsible test-fire of an American monitor (armored river gunboat) into a populated area. Now a retired captain, Huchthausen traces Lung's initial medical evacuation, his crewmen's regular kindness to the child, and his part in the American response to the Tet Offensive as commander of his own river patrol boat (PBR) squadron. Finally, Huchthausen outlines the role he played almost twenty years later as sponsor to Lung, now a woman with her own daughter, during the long, chancy process of their immigration to the United States.

Huchthausen's narrative shows American riverine sailors both as occasional blundering racists and

(more often) as compassionate warriors. In my own observation, both parts of this dual characterization were sometimes true. Poor naval fire discipline (such as that of the American monitors discussed by the author) no doubt wounded or killed dozens of noncombatants. Yet it is also true that typical PBR sailors were often capable of great compassion toward the Vietnamese who lived along the river, both in individual acts of kindness and in collective rescue missions, like the disastrous one near Sa Dec, which Huchthausen describes. In that mission, three of his sailors died and several others were severely wounded attempting to carry thirty South Vietnamese aboard their two PBRs down a canal and away from a beleaguered outpost.

This is an honest memoir of an officer who was very proud of his own unit but was often astonished by the callousness of other American forces, including a couple of casually monstrous U.S. advisors to the secretive "Phoenix" program.

Lung's story is very different and perhaps even more interesting. For many months this reviewer personally served in the same waters that Lung so deeply loved. Until reading this book I had never quite understood the daily predicament of the Vietnamese who lived along the Mekong, the people we in the PBRs met and "talked" with every single day. One night, when Nguyen Thi Lung was nine years old, dreaming of her very first trip alone to the market, she was awakened by a propagandistic night visit by efficient, black-clothed Vietcong guerrillas, who, while eliciting the villagers' cooperation, incidentally killed a young village boy and brutalized the village head. Then, in the morning,

en route to the market, Lung loses her leg to "friendly" American fire. Her simple personal history is compelling. Besides suffering her wound, amputation, and the death of family members, she endured the terrifying Tet advances, which overran her school's compound in My Tho. Because of her rescue by the Americans, for years after the war she had to hide from the vengeful, brutal victors. Only the kindness shown her in the postwar period by other hunted Vietnamese (especially one man who similarly treasured his past relationship with the Americans) enabled her to survive and eventually get to the United States. The help of Huchthausen and a reporter named Sylvana Foa (who wrote a brief foreword for the book) was also important.

Both Huchthausen's graphic, brief portraits of PBR engagements and (more unusually) Lung's account of her own troubles make this an engaging book. Though both are apparently amateur writers, for the most part they avoid moralizing and the use of clichés but simply tell their stories. The key to this book's freshness is the respective naiveté of its main characters. In the end, the two seem to have retained something of their innocence despite all their fearful experiences—a characteristic somewhat unusual in personal narratives about this tragic war.

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