



37 Years Ago in Faceplate

Operations of the Harbor Clearance Unit-One

Those “Iron Men” of the harbor clearance units are confronted with countless situations which they consider to be “all in a day’s work.”

HCU-ONE performs its duties in the western Pacific where it was commissioned in 1966. Not only does it maintain many roles, but HCU-ONE partakes additionally in such tasks as the repairing or removal of vessels and land construction, which expose it to missions of varying importance.

One mission of great importance was the salvaging of the merchant vessel *Sea Raven* early in the life of HCU-ONE. This operation was successfully undertaken in South Vietnam. This location also set the scene for another extraordinary display of ability for the HCU-ONE. Acting as a unit, it salvaged the *SS Baton Rouge Victory* and its cargo worth over \$500,000. Another concerted effort of the entire unit led to the salvaging of the dredge, *Jamaica Bay*, again in South Vietnam.

However, as in any other job, such formidable accomplishments do not make up the daily routine of HCU-ONE. Rather than efforts stemming from the unit as a whole, subdivisions or “teams”, usually go out on individual missions. These missions not only involve salvaging but also include such duties as changing and cleaning propellers, cleaning sea strainers, extinguishing fires, and repairing salvaged objects of almost infinite descriptions. The types of items include barges, tugboats, fragmented aircraft, destroyed bridges and various mechanical devices.

The importance of teams in the daily work of this elite corps has already been cited. Each team is comprised of men of all abilities, each highly competent in his specialized field and all varying in rank. This kind of “complete” make-up is preferred; enabling the team to function without outside assistance. The goal of each group is to succeed independently.

This is also carried over to the individual member, thus developing each man in skill and character. After completion of an initial plan or approach to a task, each team exerts its independence by utilizing whatever supplies and labor can be mustered locally for the job.

There exists, nevertheless, a central location acting as the hub of all operations, YRST-1, which is a Repair Salvage Tender. The YRST-1 is styled to perform various roles including the repair of equipment, the production of salvage patches and the supply of electrical power. Its crew is also comprised of men of diversified ranks and skills.

To compliment the exceptional background of the men exists an equally commendable line-up of sea vessels available to help them. The craft vary in size to accommodate any mission that could be encountered. Two Heavy-Lift Craft, constructed in Germany during World War II, and which are the largest of their kind in the world, could be termed the backbone of the unit. Their ability is tremendous, with a combined lift potential of 8,600,000 pounds. Despite their ruggedness, the vessels nevertheless provide ample comforts for their crews: air conditioning, excellent food and nightly movies.

Three Light-Lift Craft also join the line-up. Independent operation is their trademark, too, although they are indispensable when a major salvaging mission is to be undertaken in cooperation with the other craft. Their facilities include an A-frame derrick capable of lifting 25 tons, a ballast bow lift of 100 tons, and the equipment for welding, underwater digging, fire extinguishing, and logistic work.

Vessels of lesser magnitude are necessary because of numerous missions which occur not only in the larger bodies of water, but in narrow rivers or other “cramped” working conditions. Falling into this category are four Combat Salvage Boats, considered to be highly competent as backing for the Mobil Riverine Groups, and two Yard Diving Boats. Their maneuverability makes them a popular choice for many jobs.

Another piece of equipment HCU-ONE can be proud of is the Advanced Diving System FOUR (ADS IV) which is classified as

the only fully operational deep diving system owned by the Navy. To a depth of 600 feet, it is very useful in searching and salvaging operations. Important, too, is the fact that it can be airlifted to any location in the world.

The courage, coordination and skill of the men, and the efficiency of the equipment are some of the reasons for the continued success of HCU-ONE. The word courage is not used lightly, either, since even a glance over the extensive list of medals awarded to the Salvors is impressive. Their work can be termed arduous even in “normal” conditions, but the hazards confronted in the violent Vietnamese environment compounds the difficulty of each mission. The hardy Salvors refuse to permit these circumstances to impede their work.

The IRON MEN

It's said the IRON MEN are gone
 And only in sentimental song live on.
 Soft living has taken its toll, they say
 The IRON MEN belong to another day.
 But listen now and I'll tell you true.
 That IRON MEN still wear the Navy blue;
 For when the cry rises to succor and save,
 The Navy Salvor's – the first of the brave.
 Steel ships ripped on a coral reef
 Need steel men to free from grief.
 Ten fathoms below a Diver grows chill,
 Works with his hands, his heart and his will.
 “Bring back my son from his watery grave!
 Raise that boat – a fortune to save!
 Clear that wreck that blocks the port!”
 “CAN DO!” is the Salvors ready retort.
 From the bitter freeze of the Arctic cold,
 To the heartless heat of the tropic fold,
 Wherever tormenting wind and sea are met,
 Fare forth the Salvors with no regret.
 When at last the toilsome deed is done
 And the fearful struggle with sea is won,
 The Salvor sighs a great... AMEN
 And takes his place...with the IRON MEN!

by J. F. Madeo, Jr.
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 Harbor Clearance Unit-1