

In the month of June 1954, the negotiations concerning the future of Indochina unfold in Geneva. On the ground, after the fall of Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954, the forces of the Vietminh in North Vietnam maintain very strong pressure, in particular in the Red River Delta, a zone of premier importance.

It is in this climate that is launched one *of* the last significant operations,

The action that is described below is typical *of* those carried out by the dinassauts *of* the Tonkin and sailors that made served in them. The operation that was launched was carried out to save men, and was therefore noble in its intention.

The dinassauts [Naval Riverine Squadrons] engaged were the 3rd from Nam Dinh, the 4th from Ninh Giang, the 12th from Hanoi, as well as two non-divisional craft: the LSSL "Halberd" and the LCT9069, the most powerfully armed of its type.

At this time I was a young sailor of 19 years. My combat post was situated on the forward 40mm canon on LSIL 9029, which was beached, on June 9 1954 at 9 o'clock, to provides fire support some cable-lengths from the entrance to the Bamboo Canal. LCT 9069 is beached at the canal entrance.

On June 7, at the end *of* the morning, part of Dinassaut 12, that had escorted LCT 9069, was located at Hung Yen where it had just rejoined the Nam Dinh river flotilla and the Hung Yen river group. The latter had escorted our LSIL 9029 and the monitor 9202, which are part of the Hanoi river flotilla.

The various boats prepare to rally at their respective bases in Hanoi and Nam Dinh in the evening.

However, the colonel commanding the Hung Yen sector asks for the participation of the boats and craft for an operation to be carried out the next day - June 8 - in order to "aerate" the I lai Yen post, the fall of which is judged to be imminent; and to assure its relief.

The navy agrees to participate in this operation.

The operation is launched on June 8, with the Vietnamese units TDKQ [light infantry battalion] 708 and TDKQ 704, reinforced by Commando 61. The troops move under the protection of the fire of our LSIL 9029 and LCT 9069.

The Vietminh forces, assessed at three battalions, reinforced by the heavy elements of Regiment 64, of Division 320, disperse the TDKQ 708 and 704. The TDKQ flow back to the beaching point, under the protection of Commando 61, who have two dead and three wounded. The TDKQ 704 takes refuge in the Hai Yen post.

Returning to Hung Yen in the evening of June 8, those in charge of the navy meet with the officers of the sector, who are worried by the possible resistance of the TDKQ 704, their lack of food and munitions, and the fact that close to 400 men are now in a post designed for 50.

The sailors propose to attempt the next day a disengagement operation via the Bamboo Canal, using the river craft and aviation support.

"the commander of the operation is Corvette Captain Bourdais, commander of the Hanoi river flotilla, with the acronym "COFLU Hanoi", in our LSIL 9029.

The commander of the assault and transport group is Corvette Captain Pichot de Champfleury, with the acronym "COFLU Ninh Dinh Giang", in LCM 10001.

The plan *of* maneuver is decided in Hai Yen, for the recovery *of* TDKQ 704, using three LCM escorted by four monitors and a command LCM. During this operation, this group must have the close support of LCT 9069, which will be beached, firing onto the banks of the Bamboo Canal.

09h09: Casting off at Vu Diem *of* the craft and of LCT 9069. Our LSIL 9029 takes the rear of the group, and beaches itself on the left. It will harass the located positions occupied by the Vietminh and (in particular) the mortar positions spotted by the Morannes [spotter aircraft].

1 Oh02: The Hai Yen post *of is* reached by the craft after a journey without incident, with violent prophylactic fire against the canal banks.

1 Oh52: Vietminh pressure around the post increases. The craft request fighter support. The post commander demands to be evacuated. The HQ monitor 57 and LCM 9166 carry out a patrol to the north of the post. After a time, the fighters arrive to strafe and rocket the area around the post. The Vietminh advance-

11 h01: The sector commander decides the post evacuation is completed.

11 h06: Casting off of the troop-carrying craft. In front of the post, command LCM 10001 receives a 57mm RCI. round.

The LCM lists heavily in the rear, threatening to sink in an instant. It makes maximum speed to the confluence of the rivers, in an attempt to save the craft, leaving command to LCM 9164. The radio network works very poorly, and LSIL 9029 is not audible.

11h18: Our ISIL 9029 de-beaches. Fire from enemy mortars brackets us. We position ourselves more close to the canal entrance

11h20: The formation of craft is engaged very harshly by the enemy from the south bank. In particular, from the outskirts *of* the village of Tu Cuong, comes fire from heavy weapons: mortars, bazookas, SKZ (rocket launchers).

11h30: LCM 10001 receives a bazooka round, the shrapnel from which kills ensign [enseigne de vasseau] Coffinieres. LCM 9164 receives 3 bazooka rounds, LCM 9166 takes a mortar round that tears to shreds ensign Remand. LCM 9188 is hit by a mortar round, and catches fire. It beaches itself on the orders *of* the LCM 9164, which is again hit by a bazooka round that kills its patron, quartermaster Barbieri. LCM 9199 receives a 57mm RCL round in the front *of* its hold. LCM 9202 moves to assist LCM 9188, but it is hit by a bazooka round in the stern. The HQ monitor 57 takes a burst of 12.7 mm forward of the stern.

11h45: LCM 9176 is hit by two bazooka rounds and all its crew are out of combat, except for the LCM's patron. LCM 9164 comes alongside to help. They resume their journey. The fire, ours and theirs, is of an exceptional intensity. Passing communications is difficult given the noise of the weapons and by continual shooting away of radio antennas by enemy fire. The enemy tire on any craft seen. The sailors return fire, round for round. They return fire at the maximum rate, in order to pass through in force and to extract themselves from the net.

Between 11h30 and 12h00 the fighters arrive and strafe and napalm the banks. The aircraft are 8 Corsairs from the 14th Naval Aviation squadron, 4 Hellcats from the 11th Naval Aviation squadron, and 2 Bearcats of the Airforce. The excessive heat from the napalm is felt on board our craft.

12h00: The order is given to LCM 9202 to evacuate LCM 9188, which is in flames. Ensign Ballif, on board of LCM 9202 notices about fifteen TDKQ who are preparing to give themselves up to the Vietminh. He rushes in and beaches deliberately, blocking the line of fire of the Vietminh machinegun, and embarks the TDKQ. The Vietminh fire ends.

12h05: The craft move out of the Bamboo canal under the protective fire of LCT 9069 that is itself attacked. It de-beaches by using a hammer and chisel to cut the cable of the rear anchor. The fighters intervene efficiently.

12h15: CONFLU Hanoi requests that the fighters sink the wreck of LCM 9188, to prevent the enemy taking it.

12h20: The craft approach LCI 9047 and our LCIL 9029 to hand over their dead and wounded.

Corvette Captain Bourdais, commander of the operation, will write "the conduct of the personnel was above all praise. Lead by Corvette Captain Pichot de Champfleury, the crews and officers showed the highest naval traditions. Upon their return, when the monitors approached the LSIL 9029 to pass over their dead and wounded, they found only volunteers wanting to constitute a rescue group of go to the aid of LCMs 9202 and 9188".

Losses: Naval: 5 dead and 16 wounded, of which 2 are grievously wounded.  
Army: 126 dead and missing.

Enemy: around 500 dead according to the general staff of FTN V

LSIL 9029 had been armed in the US (Seattle) the 24/11/53. It reached Indochina after a long (45 days) and difficult crossing of the Pacific Ocean. This small flat-bottom boat, with a crew of about twenty men, did not have the characteristic suitable for high seas or long distances. We were disconcerted by storm warnings, and the failures of its engines were frequent.

The LSIL is disarmed in October 1955 in Cat Lai (South Vietnam), and I had the privilege to have lived through two events: the arming and disarming of the boat, having been the last member of the original crew present on board. The LSIL acts as the command boat for the last dinassaut in the Tonkin, the 4th. The LSIL will also be the command boat of one of the two last dinassaut in South Vietnam, the 2nd.

In the Tonkin, the embarking of the last troops is carried out at Do Son on 15th May 1955. LCT 9069 embarks the last elements of the Legion, musicians in the lead.

Our LSIL leaves the Tonkin on 19th May 1955, the official dates imposed by the Geneva Accords.

Georges DEMICHELIS