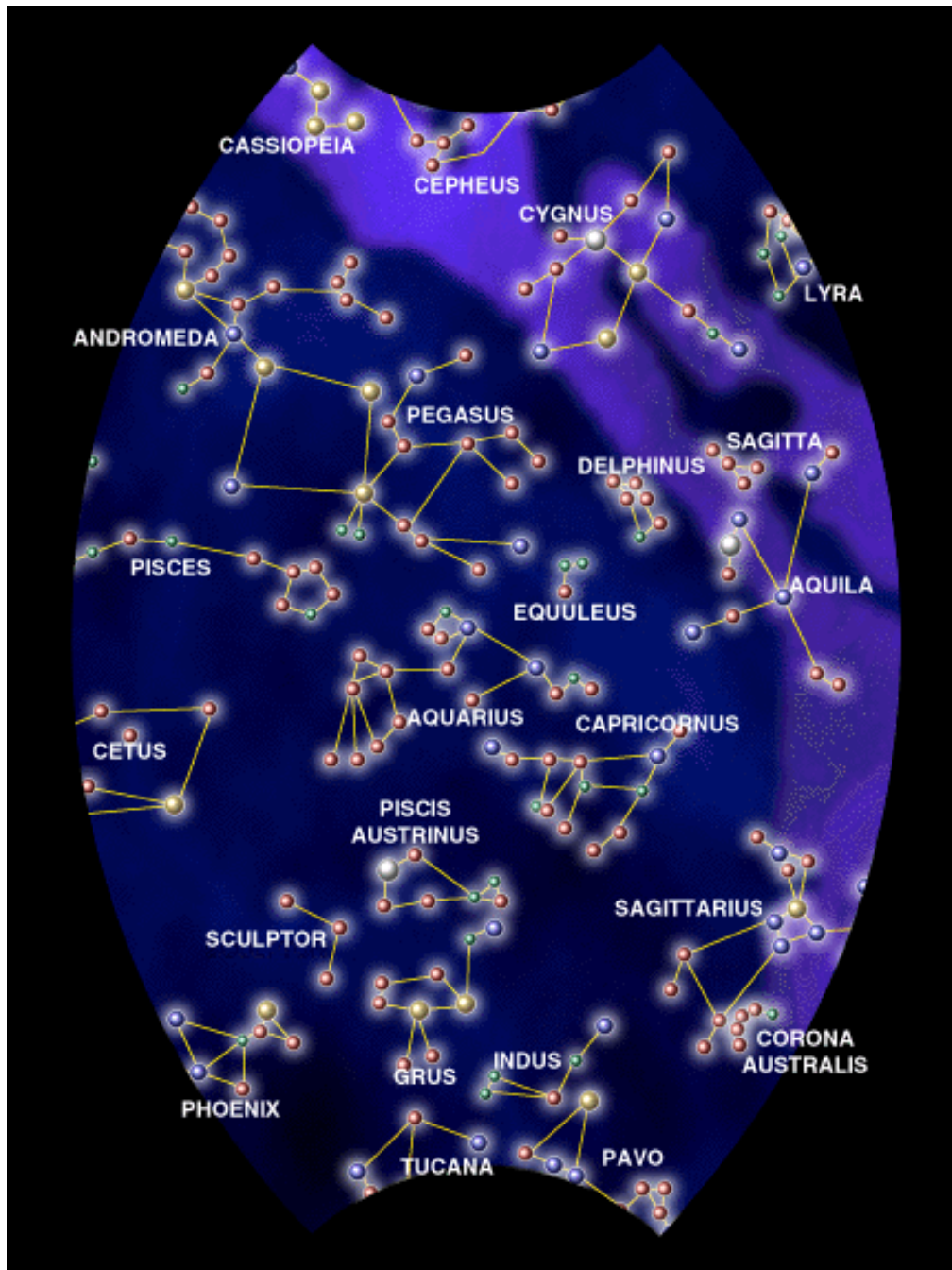


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# HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES

## The First Aquarius Class



## A LETTER TO OUR CLASSMATES

(By the Editorial Team)

The year 2001 is a significantly meaningful one to us. 40 years ago we entered the VN Naval Academy as the 11<sup>th</sup> class of that organization's history, the "First Aquarius" as we were nicknamed.

40 years is a long time. We met then we parted. Most of us, if not all, would like to see each other again, at least one more time. We want to tell the happy and sad stories of our lives and just get the chance to talk to each other once again. The 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2001 and Southern California have been selected as the time and place for this highly anticipated reunion.

We wanted to reunite because we wanted to celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary but we suddenly realized that this may be the last reunion. There might be no more! This yearbook, 'The First Aquarius - 40 Years of Memories', was published for that purpose.

Yes, you can say that this is a yearbook, a directory of the Naval Cadets, class of 1961, a collection of literature and art works, or anything else you want. In essence, it is everything! You will find the history and the activities of the class; from the time we joined the service until now. You will come across the biographies of every classmate, passed away or still alive, in details or in a summary form, and their writings that share with you their feeling and their dreams.

You'll also find the work of many writers. Some of them are distinguished with published books, some are beginning their first steps, and some are writing just because they want to express their overwhelming feelings. In selection, we did not just choose material based on the intellectual value of the article, but paid more attention to the spiritual value of the work - the memory of, and the feeling toward classmates that the author wanted to share. Once in a while, with deep regret, we set aside excellent contributions because they were not related to our class, or they had been published somewhere in the free world. We wrote hilarious stories that happened when we were at the academy. We recalled the nicknames given to us by our classmates, the 'accidents' that they planned, and many more. We believe that we are the closest of friends. And only close friends can share these special feelings.

We have to say that we are ambitious. We do not just want this yearbook to merely be a souvenir of a class reunion. We want this book to be left to our children as an asset so that they understand what their ancestors have accomplished. There is a slim hope that there might be someone who wants to carry out the broken dream of his or her parents. But it is also possible that none of our children will read this book. But we believe that the "good" children will keep it as a family treasure! With that in mind, we are proud to devote all of our efforts to the creation of this yearbook. And we solemnly present it to you.

February 2001  
The Editorial Team

# The First Aquarius Class

## HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES, 1961-2001

(This article is based on the document by Vũ Hữu San, written in the Báo Bình newsletters 15 years ago, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Báo Bình. The Editorial Team also thanks Trần Văn Hoa (Em), Lê Quang Lập, Trần Hữu Bân, Phạm Văn Hưng, and several other friends for lending their valuable image collections.)

In the early 1960s, as the activities of North Vietnamese Communists to annex the South increased, a military career became a way of life for most young Vietnamese men. Literary works like 'The Life of a Pilot' and 'Diary of 40 Days on the Pacific Ocean' deeply influenced the student class, especially students of Mathematics and Science. The Navy and Air Force were the top choices for the young generation at that time to pursue their dreams of sailing the seas or soaring through the skies. In that direction, the Republic of Vietnam Navy (HQ/VNCH) was also developed, and the 11th Class of Naval Cadets was the second class trained with the hope of becoming versatile and effective line officers.

### **Recruitment:**

**May 1961:** The Republic of Vietnam Navy announced on the information systems the recruitment of Naval Cadets (SVSQ/HQ) for the 11th Class. Recruitment slogans were posted in many places in major cities nationwide. The intellectual youth were easily attracted:

- ☐ **An erudite field of study.**
- ☐ **A seafaring life.**
- ☐ **A noble profession.**

The conditions for applying to the Naval Cadet class were as follows: All young men aged 17 to 25, with no criminal record, committed to not getting married during the training period. Good health, a minimum height of 1.58 meters, weight from 47 Kg and above. High school diploma (Level II, in Math (B) or Science (A)), with a University of Science certificate exempted from the exam.

**July 1961:** Nationwide, more than 600 candidates applied. The recruitment exam was scheduled for July 26 and 27, 1961. The exam subjects included Mathematics, Physics, Trigonometry, Vietnamese, and English. The locations were 4 exam rooms at the Saigon Navy Headquarters, 2 exam rooms at Pellerin School, Huế, and one exam room at the Naval Training Center in Nha Trang (TTHL/HQ Nha-Trang). After that, all exams were gathered and sent to Saigon for grading. Initially, the number of students was expected to be similar to the 10th Class, about 50 people. Due to the expanding needs of the Navy, the Joint Armed Forces General Staff ordered to accept up to 80.

At the Đà Nẵng center, 19 candidates passed:

- Hoàng-Đình-Báu
- Lưu-Lương-Cơ
- Hồ-Đắc-Cung
- Trần-Thế-Diệp
- Trương-Quý-Đô
- Phan-Tứ-Hải
- Nguyễn-Xuân-Huy
- Võ-Duy-Kỷ
- Nguyễn-Văn-Lộc
- Vĩnh-Lợi
- Nguyễn-Ngọc-Long
- Trần-Đình-Liệu
- Nguyễn-Ngọc-Luân
- Mai-Quang-Năm
- Trương-Hữu-Quỳnh
- Trương-Văn-Thịnh
- Nguyễn-Văn-Tính
- Nguyễn Tường
- Bùi-Quang-Vinh

At the Nha Trang center, 9 candidates passed:

- Trần-Hữu-Bân
- Lê-Thượng-Chiêu
- Nguyễn-Văn-Cự
- Nguyễn-Tấn-Đơn
- Lê-Kim-Lợi
- Đặng-Vĩnh-Mai
- Võ-Văn-Quột
- Trần-Quang-Thiệu
- Võ-Quang-Thủ

At the Southern centers, 36 civilians, 8 air force veterans, 4 navy veterans, and 3 army veterans, a total of 52 people, passed:

- Nguyễn-A
- Phạm-Duy-Anh
- Nguyễn-Văn-Anh
- Nguyễn-Phú-Bá
- Trần-Ngọc-Bảo
- Võ-Văn-Bảy
- Nguyễn-Hoài-Bích
- Trần-Ngọc-Bích
- Trần-Đình-Bình

- Trần-Đỗ-Cẩm
- Hoàng-Dần
- Đặng-Diệm
- Trương-Văn-Đăng
- Nguyễn-Châu-Giám
- Trần-Trọng-Hải
- Phạm-Văn-Hàm
- Trần-Văn-Hoa-Em
- Lê-Văn-Huê
- Đinh-Mạnh-Hùng
- Phạm-Văn-Hưng
- Nguyễn-Kim-Khánh
- Trần-Hữu-Khánh
- Lý-Anh-Kiệt
- Nguyễn-Xuân-Lang
- Lê Quang-Lập
- Hứa-Hồng-Minh
- Phạm-Văn-Minh
- Lê-Thành-Nam
- Nguyễn-Nghĩa
- Nguyễn-Nguyên
- Nguyễn-Văn-Ơn
- Ngô-Tấn-Quanh
- Lê-Văn-Quý
- Nguyễn-Ngọc-Quyên
- Phạm-Trọng-Quỳnh
- Phạm-Đức-Riễn
- Nguyễn-Thanh-Sắc
- Vũ-Hữu-San
- Dương-Quang-Sang
- Nguyễn-Văn-Tánh
- Nguyễn-Minh-Thành
- Trịnh-Đình-Thiện
- Nguyễn-Ngọc-Thông
- Phan-Thành-Thuận
- Phạm-Văn-Thụy
- Phan-Lạc-Tiếp
- Nguyễn-Cao-Toàn
- Nguyễn-Chí-Toàn
- Vũ-Bá-Trạch
- Trần-Văn-Trung
- Ngô-Xuân-Ý
- Chu-Bá-Yến

About a month later, Petty Officer Hồ-Ngọc-Báu was admitted, bringing the total number of students to 81.

At that time, Captain Hồ Tấn Quyền was the Chief Naval Operations (CNO), Lieutenant Commander Đinh Mạnh Hùng was the Acting Chief of Staff, and Lieutenant Hồ Văn Kỳ-Thoại was the Chief of Personnel/Administration. The 9th Class at Nha Trang had just graduated. The President of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngô Đình Diệm, personally attended the graduation ceremony.

## Enlistment:

**August 1961:** In the latter part of the month, about 70 top-ranked individuals received letters from the Navy Headquarters (BTL/HQ) inviting them to recruitment centers for medical examinations for enlistment. On August 30, 1961, the first group from Saigon arrived at the Nha Trang Naval Training Center (TTHL/HQ) by Landing Ship Medium (LSM).



Together with their peers from the Đà Nẵng and Nha Trang recruitment centers, they were the first naval cadets of the 11th Class. The students were issued uniforms, received beds and cabinets, and had their hair cut short. Their insignia was a black shoulder strap, with a non-commissioned officer's cap, and a single rank salary of Vnd 2,500 (additional allowances for those with families). The black shoulder strap resembled the shape of a submarine, so the cadets humorously called themselves "Submarine Officers."

At that time, the Commanding officer of the Naval Training Center was Lieutenant Commander Vương Hữu Thiệu, Chief of Staff was Lieutenant Du Trí Hùng, Director of Military Training was Lieutenant Mechanical Engineer Đặng Đình Hiệp, and School Principal was Lieutenant Đỗ-Kiểm. All these officers had graduated from France. The list of training instructors is fully detailed in another section of this article.



## Training:

The training program was scheduled for two years and divided into 3 phases: Initial Phase, First Year, and Second Year.

**Phase I (Initial Phase):** This phase lasted more than a quarter, from September 1961 to the end of December 1961, starting after all successful candidates presented, totaling 81 people. The Cadet Company Commander was Phạm Văn Thụy. The three platoon leaders were Nguyễn Văn



Lộc, Hồ Đắc Cung, and Nguyễn Cao Toàn.

During this phase, in academic terms, cadets had to take General Mathematics, Spherical Trigonometry, and First Year University-level Physics classes, along with English and French language classes.

In military terms, cadets were trained in basic military skills, dismantling light weapons, and practicing individual shooting. In terms of professional skills, students began to familiarize themselves with coastal navigation, both theoretical and practical, and visual signaling: flags, lights, and signals. Cadets also learned swimming, rowing, and knot-tying, etc.

Every month, each subject had a proficiency test; any cadet scoring 8 or below was automatically punished with confinement by the Principal of the Officer School, one session per test. Cadets with families were allowed to go home and stay overnight with their families every Wednesday evening. Among them were Nguyễn-A, Trần-Thế-Diệp, Hồ-Ngọc-Báu, Nguyễn-Tấn-Đơn, Nguyễn-Xuân-Lang, Nguyễn-Văn-Tánh, and Trương-Văn-Thịnh.



*Chìm Hòa Bình: Trần Văn Trung*

organized at the end of 1961. About 40 motorized and sail-equipped boats, provided by the Coastal Forces, were on their way from Saigon to the Central region and stopped at Cầu-Đá for the cadets to practice. Leading both 10th Class and 11th Class cadets at that time was Lieutenant Đỗ-Kiểm, along with some Staff and Instructors leading the 11th Class to practice an amphibious operation on Hòn-Tre Island, Nha Trang. The cadets divided into groups of 2 to 4 on each boat. In the early morning, the boats sailed around the islands in Nha Trang Bay, finally landing on the northern beach of Hòn-Tre. The troops were equipped with individual

This phase started with two weeks of rigorous training. Senior cadets subjected new cadets to various challenging tasks quickly and without mercy, to instill absolute obedience, effective

Fortunately, the 11th Class had understanding senior cadets who did not impose excessively harsh tasks. Following this phase, the tradition continued, and the new cadets and senior cadets formed a close 'father-son' relationship (papa/fisto), which remains strong to this day.

The first practice voyage was conducted on the Chương Dương HQ-112 Minesweeper Ship, from Nha Trang to Cam-Ranh, with Lieutenant Đặng Trung Hiếu as the ship commanding officer. A practice amphibious operation was



GARANT M1 rifles, sufficient ammunition, and PRC 10 communication devices for each platoon. After landing, the troops were ordered to set up camp, with each platoon scattered across the hills. The march began at 9 PM that night, moving along a trail to the southern beach. They then trekked through the forest and climbed the mountains all night to reach the target, the Hòn-Tre Lighthouse. The next morning, all cadets boarded boats at the southern shore to return to the training center.

In December 1961, after the first phase's final exam, an ALPHA insignia ceremony for 68 cadets was held during the Christmas event (December 24, 1961) at the Cadet Club. Eleven cadets did not pass but were granted special permission to continue to Phase II (the first year of the

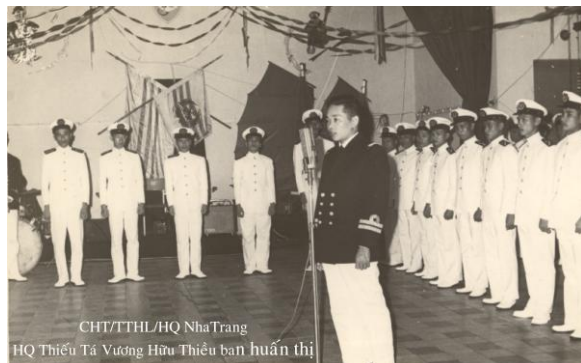


Officer Training Program) a few weeks later. Two cadets were expelled for violating school rules. Seventy-nine cadets officially became cadets (68 initially and 11 later), wearing the Alpha insignia.

The new Cadet Company leader was Dương Quang Sang. The Platoon Leaders were Nguyễn Phú-Bá, Võ Quang-Thủ, and Nguyễn Văn-Tánh. The Culinary Cadet was Trương Văn-Thịnh.

**Phase II (First Year):** About 3 quarters, from January 1962 to September 1962. This phase focused more on specialized and practical training.

The main subjects were Navigation, Coastal Navigation, Electrical Engineering, Meteorology, Two-stroke and Four-stroke Engine Mechanics, Material Strength, Naval Gunnery, Fire Fighting, Communication, Logistics, Maritime Regulations, English, and French.



CHT/TTHL/HQ NhaTrang  
HQ Thiếu Tá Vương Hữu Thiệu ban huấn thị

Additionally, the program emphasized combat fitness. Every three months, cadets went on marches with full gear. Each cadet carried a backpack, individual Garant M1 rifle, totaling about 15 Kg per person. The route began from the Training Center, passing through Chứt, Cầu-Đá, following trails around the mountain to Bình-Tân Cửa-Bé, and returning to the school. There

were also marches extending to Đồng-Đế and back.

In early 1962, the 11th Class visited a detachment of 2 Royal Australian Navy destroyers anchored offshore at Cầu-Đá. These Commonwealth warships also demonstrated launching ASROC (Anti submarine rocket), a highly effective anti-submarine missile.



In 1962, the US submarine USS Queen-Fish visited for cadet training along with some VN warships. The 11th Class was divided into groups of 20 for one day each on the submarine. The submarine and VN warships practiced sub-hunting, diving deep offshore Nha Trang.

The 11th Class practiced cargo transfer offshore Nha Trang on two Landing Ship Mediums (LSM). Lieutenant Nguyễn Hữu Chí and Diệp-Quang-Thủy commanded the ships, alternating to direct the transfer and reception of military equipment during the voyage.

These ships also rehearsed other exercises like surface combat, anti-aircraft, fleet navigation, fire fighting, and offshore refueling. Lieutenant Nguyễn Văn-Thu and Instructors from the Offshore Training School explained the theory, monitored, evaluated, and reviewed the pros and cons after each practice day.



**Phase III (Second Year):** September 1962 final exam of Phase II: Seventy-eight cadets from the 11th Class passed, promoted to Reserve Warrant Officer. One cadet was discharged with the rank of Petty Officer. He later requested discharge, graduated with a Law Degree, and worked in banking.



The 11th Class continued with Phase III of the Officer Training Program. The monthly salary for a single Warrant Officer was Vnd 3,200. Promotion Decree No. 2471/QP/NĐ was signed by Deputy Minister of Defense Nguyễn-Đình-Thuần on December 26, 1962, effective retroactively from October 1, 1962.

The new Cadet Company Commander was Nguyễn Hoài Bích. The Platoon Leaders were Trần Đỗ Cẩm,





Nguyễn Phú Bá, and Trần Quang Thiệu. The Squad Leaders were Trần Trọng Hải, Nguyễn Văn Tánh, Dương Quang Sang, Võ Văn Quột, Hoàng Dân, Vũ Hữu San, Nguyễn A, Vũ Bá Trạch, and Võ Quang Thủ. The Culinary Cadet remained Trương-Văn-Thịnh.

At that time, the second-year cadets were considered official officers with the rank of Warrant Officer. The cadets wore the complete

uniform and insignia of a Naval Officer.

This was a nearly 10-year tradition of the Vietnam Navy, which was later abolished from the 13th Class. The senior cadets continued the tradition of rigorous training, treating junior cadets as strictly as they had been treated themselves.

Professionally, second-year cadets learned new subjects like Boat Theory, Celestial Navigation, Meteorology, Tactical Transport, Electrical Engineering, Diesel Engines, Electronics, Naval Gunnery, Fire Fighting, English, and Political Warfare.



During this phase, cadets practiced transportation and navigation on the Cam-Ranh Transport



Ship, HQ-500, commanded by Lieutenant Nguyễn Ngọc Quỳnh. The voyage started from Nha Trang, stopped at Đà Nẵng, and called at Qui-Nhon, returning to Nha Trang over two weeks. During the voyage, the ship docked at Đà Nẵng, beached at Tiên-Sa, and cadets visited Non-Nước. When visiting Qui Nhon, the 11th Class cadets went ashore and strolled around the city.

The cadets also had the opportunity to visit and dine on the French Navy cruiser Jeanne D'Arc at C  u-Đ  . On this occasion, the school arranged to purchase each student a traditional Saint   tienne sword made in France. The purchase price for this valuable commemorative command sword was only Vnd 2,000 (at that time, an ounce of gold was around Vnd 3,000).



Due to the need for military expansion, the Second Year program was shortened to 7 months instead of one year. The priority for the Vietnam Navy (HQVN) at that time was Line Officers; thus, many mechanical and logistical professional programs were significantly reduced. The entire Steam Engine and Turbine section



was canceled. However, the Officers of the 11th Class never had to deal with these types of machines until their disbandment in 1975.



**January 1963:** Lieutenant Commander Vương Hữu-Thiều was transferred, and Lieutenant Du Trí-Hùng took over the position of Commanding Officer of the Nha Trang Naval Training Center. The graduation exam began in March 1963, and the graduation ceremony was held on April 16, 1963, presided over by General Lê Văn Ty, Chief of the General Staff of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (TTMT/QLVNCH). Sixty-five students graduated with the rank of Ensign.

The valedictorian was Ensign Trần Quang-Thiệu. The diploma was signed by Deputy Minister of Defense Nguyễn Đình-Thuần. The person responsible for drafting at BTL/HQ/PQH was Lieutenant Phạm Ứng-Luật. The salary for a newly graduated single Reserve Ensign was Vnd 4,200.



#### **At Sea:**

**April 1963:** After a short one-week leave, all the new officers, according to the graduation order, were assigned to various warships such as PCE, PC, LST, MSC, LSSL, LSIL, PGM, YOG, AKL... The first campaign, "Sóng Tình Thương" (Wave of Love), in Năm Căn had 11th Class officers participating. Some officers on HQ-8, HQ-9, and HQ-403 participated in establishing sovereignty markers in the Spratly Islands. This was the first significant voyage right after graduation.

## **Voyage:**

**September 1963:** Almost all 11th Class officers had the opportunity to practice on the US 7th Fleet for 4 to 7 weeks. The training voyage included visits to various unfamiliar ports, from Saigon to Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc. Specifically, T. Q. Thiệu and N. H. Bích were selected for the crew to receive two Escort Ships (PCE) HQ-10 and HQ-11 in the United States in November 1963. The warships sailed from Philadelphia, along the Atlantic coast, through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific Ocean, and the International Date Line (180th meridian) back to Vietnam. Along the way, the warships stopped at Florida, Puerto Rico, Panama, San Diego, San Francisco, Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines. This first ocean voyage was the dream journey of all those who joined the Navy, loving the maritime dream.

According to the training program, the Vietnam Navy Command expected the 11th Class Officers to be capable of assuming the responsibility of both Line Officer and/or Mechanical Engineering Officer. After a period of practice, some newly commissioned Ensigns returned to warships and took on the roles of Assistant Chief Engineers, such as Vũ Hữu San, Trương-Văn-Thịnh... Although none of the 11th Class became renowned engineers, their technical knowledge helped them advance significantly in their naval careers later on.

## **Dispersal to Main Units:**

By the end of 1963, some 11th Class Naval Officers (SQHQ/K-11) began leaving the Fleet, volunteering to serve in Coastal Units and Riverine Assault Groups as the war became more intense. SQHQ/K-11 also participated in many naval operations such as Vũng Rô (HQ-04, HQ-08, HQ-404). HQ-04 was particularly commended by the U.S. Navy and was the only warship during the Vietnam War to be awarded the US Navy Unit Commendation at this time. Many 11th Class officers took on the role of liaison officers on U.S. warships patrolling near Vietnamese waters or on coastal surveillance aircraft.



**1964:** Many SQHQ/K-11 joined the Special Operation Naval Force, a fleet of fast PT boats operating in the North Sea, based in Tiên Sa, Đà Nẵng, directly supported by the U.S. K-11 held the record for the number of officers, about 10 people.

In the same year, some SQHQ/K-11 led the Coastal Unit (Duyên Đoàn) were promoted to the ranks of Acting Lieutenant Junior Grade (NC).

## **Important Events:**

**February 1965:** The first 11th Class officer sacrificed his life for the country. Lieutenant Nguyễn Ngọc-Long died in action at a Coastal Unit in Vĩnh Bình province. His name was given to the HQ-230, making Nguyễn Ngọc Long the only 11th Class officer to receive this honor.

**April 1965:** On the 14th, 11th Class Ensigns were promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade (HQ

Trung Úy). A number of those who truly loved military life transferred to the regular service.

**July 1965:** As some 11th Class officers began to take on the role of Commanding officers of smaller units, the Deputy Commanding Officer positions of River Assault Groups and XO positions of Escort Ships (PCE). Those positions were still held by officers from the 8th and 9th Classes. Two 11th Class officers, Đặng Diễm and Vũ-Hữu San, were selected by the Riverine Forces Command to officially take on the Deputy Commanding Officer positions of Riverine Assault Groups 21 and 27, with the rank of Lieutenant.

**February 1966:** A fierce riverine battle occurred at Bà-Rai canal, Mỹ Tho. The enemy suffered heavy losses, but some of our assault boats were also sunk. Officer Trần Ngọc Bảo sacrificed his life for the country on the lead boat. Lieutenant Trần Ngọc Bảo was posthumously awarded the National Honor and Military Merit with a palm leaf branch.

**1967:** The war became more severe. The 11th Class lost two more comrades. In August, Nguyễn Ngọc Thông died in action at Coastal Unit 16, Cổ Lũy, Quảng Ngãi (see Phan Lạc Tiếp's article in this book), and later Võ Văn Quọt died on HQ-231 at Mỏ Cày, Kiến-Hòa.

**May 1967:** Although they had lost comrades, other officers continued to advance rapidly in their naval careers. The year 1967 saw the first "Magister Post Deum" stars appear in the 11th Class. Officers began to assume the role of Commanding Officers of Patrol Boats (PGM, later called Patrol Ships). Their command capabilities at sea started to become evident. A somewhat "strange" comment from the Fleet Commanding Officer at the time might have caused some friction but was accurate in assessing the competence of some officers. Fleet Commanding Officer, Commander Nguyễn Thanh Châu, declared and wrote that: "These officers, who were good in rivers, will have to be good at sea."

**June 1967:** On Armed Forces Day, June 19, 1967, ten 11th Class officers were promoted to Acting Lieutenant.

**January 1968:** Four 11th Class officers were promoted to full Lieutenant during the annual promotion.

**June 1968:** Two 11th Class officers, Vũ Hữu-San and Trần Trọng-Hải, were appointed as Commanding Officers of LSSL (HQ-229) and MSC (HQ-115) respectively, with the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

**November 1968:** The first 11th Class officer led an ocean voyage on HQ-229.

**February 1969:** During the Lunar New Year, the first 11th Class officer, Đặng Diễm, was awarded the 5th Class National Order Medal.

**December 1969:** 11th Class officers began to take on positions with the rank of Commander, such as deputy Department Head at Navy Headquarters.



**January 1970:** At the beginning of the year, seven 11th Class officers were promoted to Acting Lieutenant Commander, with all receiving full rank adjustments on October 1, 1970, according to the annual promotion list.

**May 1970:** Many 11th Class officers participated in border battles. In various roles such as Operation Officers, Ship Commanding Officers, Deputy Commanding Officer, or Unit Commanding Officer from the Fleet, Riverine, or Coastal Regions, 11th Class officers stood side by side on the battlefield in Cambodia.



\*The year 1970 also brought some sad news for the 11th Class: Officer Hoàng Dân was killed while serving in the Frogman Unit, Hồ Đắc Cung died at Coastal Unit Bình Ba, Cam Ranh, and Phạm Đức-Riễn died at the Cam Ranh Naval Training Center.

**February 1971:** 11th Class officers took on the position of Department Head at BTL/HQ, with the rank of Navy Captain.



**February 1972:** They began to assume the role of Commanding Officer of long-range ships with the rank of Commander, such as PCE - HQ-09, HQ -11, and the position of Commanding Officer of Special Task Group (LĐĐN) in coastal regions. Also in 1972, 11th Class officers started taking command of Transport Ships. Lieutenant Commander Đinh Mạnh-Hùng took command of HQ-502, the largest warship in the Transport Fleet.

**October 1972:** One 11th Class officer was promoted to Acting Commander.

**January 1973:** At the beginning of the year, one 11th Class officer was promoted to full Reserve Commander, according to the annual selection. Shortly afterward, Reserve Commander Vũ Hữu San became the Senior Officer Present Afloat. He was sometimes listed high in the seniority list of Ship Commanders (Fleet Command, Senior Captains Roster List).

**August 1973:** One 11th Class officer assumed command of a Patrol Ship (WHEC), with the rank of Commander.

**September 1973:** An 11th Class officer took command of a Radar Picket Destroyer (DER), the most advanced warship of the Republic of Vietnam Navy, with the rank of Captain.

In the same year, officer Hồ Ngọc Bái died in Rừng Lá, on the road from Saigon to Nha Trang.

**January 1974:** Two 11th Class Ship commanding officers, HQ-4 and HQ-5, participated in a naval battle with China in the Paracel Islands.

**June 1974:** Two 11th Class Ship commanding officers were awarded for intercepting a Thai drug smuggling ship. The Tactical Command Officer at sea for this operation was also an 11th Class officer.

**February 1975:** Many 11th Class officers were present in Regions I and II when North Vietnamese Communists launched a general offensive. The 11th Class Commanding officers bore many responsibilities for the evacuation of troops and civilians from Regions I and II to Cam-Ranh, Vũng Tàu, Saigon, or Phú Quốc...



### Evacuation & Exile:



**April 1975:** More than 30 11th Class Naval Officers (SQHQ/K-11) evacuated with the Fleet, used other means, or were in the United States when the Communists forcibly took over South Vietnam. Tens of thousands of compatriots were transported by the Navy to the Philippines and together saluted the national flag for the last time in Subic Bay, removed their uniforms, and lived in exile across the free world. On April 29, 1975, people were either fleeing or staying in a chaotic scene. Those who left lived a sorrowful exile life, while those who stayed faced re-education and

imprisonment.

Aside from Đặng Diệm and Trần Quang-Thiệu, who were studying in the United States at the time, those who left during the loss of the country included: Phạm-Duy-Anh, Trần-Đình-Bình, Trần-Đỗ-Cẩm, Trương-Văn-Đăng, Nguyễn-Châu-Giám, Phan-Tứ-Hải, Đinh-Mạnh-Hùng, Phạm-Văn-Hưng, Nguyễn-Kim-Khánh, Lê-Quang-Lập, Nguyễn-Văn-Lộc, Nguyễn-Ngọc-Luân, Lê-Thành-Nam, Mai-Quang-Nấm, Nguyễn-Nghĩa, Nguyễn-Nguyên, Lê-Văn-Quý, Nguyễn-Ngọc-Quỳnh, Phạm-Trọng-Quỳnh, Trương-Hữu-Quỳnh, Vũ-hữu-San, Nguyễn-Văn-Tánh, Nguyễn-Minh-Thành, Trịnh-Đình-Thiện, Võ-Quang-Thủ, Phạm-Văn-Thụy, Phan-Lạc-Tiếp, Nguyễn-Cao-Toàn, Nguyễn-Chí-Toàn, Vũ-Bá-Trạch, Trần-Văn-Trung, and Chu-Bá-Yến.



Those who stayed and reported for re-education camps included: Nguyễn-A, Nguyễn-Văn-Anh, Nguyễn-Phú-Bá, Trần-Hữu-Bân, Hoàng-Đình-Báu, Võ-Văn-Bảy, Nguyễn-Hoài-Bích, Trần-Ngọc-Bích, Lê-Thượng-Chiêu, Lưu-Lương-Cơ, Nguyễn-Văn-Cự, Trần-Thế-Diệp, Trương-Quý-

Đô, Nguyễn-Tấn-Đôn, Trần-trọng-Hải, Phạm-Văn-Hàm, Trần-Hữu-Khánh, Trần-Văn-Hoa-Em, Lê-Văn-Huê, Nguyễn-Xuân-Huy, Lý-Anh-Kiệt, Võ-Duy-Kỷ, Nguyễn-Xuân-Lang, Trần-Đình-Liệu, Lê-Kim-Lợi, Đặng-Vĩnh-Mai, Hứa-Hồng-Minh, Phạm-Văn-Minh, Nguyễn-Văn-Ôn, Ngô-Tấn-Quanh, Nguyễn-Thành-Sắc, Dương-Quang-Sang, Trương-Văn-Thịnh, Phan-Thành-Thuận, Nguyễn-Văn-Tính, Nguyễn-Tường, Bùi-Quang-Vinh, and Ngô-Xuân-Ý.

Until now, in 2001, after being imprisoned in re-education camps by the Vietnamese Communists, many comrades have fled to find freedom, even sacrificing their lives at sea like Nguyễn Hoài-Bích, Lưu Lương-Cơ, or settling in the United States under the H.O. program since early 1990.

The total number of 81 people includes 11 who sacrificed for their ideals, 3 still in Vietnam, 58 settled in the United States, 5 in Australia (including Ngô Tấn Quanh), 2 in France, 1 in Canada, and 1 possibly in Germany. Forty years ago, we chose the maritime life, now we wander far from our homeland.

### Statistics & Miscellaneous:

**Aquarius Title:** The 11th Class carries the Aquarius title because Aquarius is the 11th zodiac sign from the vernal equinox. When the sun passes through this constellation, around January 21 to February 20, it is the time when southern Europe experiences heavy rains, as if the Angels were pouring water onto the earth. In our country during this season, the North experiences gloomy winter, drizzle, northern wind, rough seas, and many storms. However, in the South, around Phú Quốc, the sea is as calm as a lake.



The number 11 is also significant for the 11th Class. The admission date of August 30 equals 11 ( $3+0+8=11$ ). The valedictorian of the 11th Class went to receive the PCE 11, and later this ship was commanded by many 11th Class officers. Eleven years after the evacuation, the 11th Class had their first reunion in San Jose. This year, 2001, 11 11th Class officers have passed away. The 50th anniversary will be in 2011.

**Noteworthy Records:** Compared to the 10 preceding classes, the 11th Class was the largest, with 81 people including 65 civilians, 8 former Air Force, 5 former Navy, and 3 former Army members. In 1961, the youngest student was 18 years old (born in 1943), and the oldest was 35 years old (born in 1926). However, the educational levels were quite uniform.

The 10th Class had about 45 people. Due to the need to expand the military, the 11th Class size doubled, but the training facilities did not increase. To solve the problem, students' beds were changed to bunk beds. Students slept on the top bunks, the highest beds!

During the graduation exam, 20% did not have enough points to graduate. This is the highest failure rate, a record for Naval, Army, and Air Force schools. Perhaps because the Naval Officers shone the brightest?



In 1972, the Fleet had the most 11th Class officers as ship captains (both offshore and main force types), so many that the Fleet Commanding Officer, Captain Nguyễn-Xuân-Son, remarked: "The Fleet now belongs to the 11th Class."

The number of 11th Class officers serving in the Special Operation Naval Force was also the highest, and naturally, this was the toughest and most resilient force (or the most talkative?).

Another record is that the 11th Class had the most writers, poets, and journalists. Many 11th Class members became famous, published works, or had articles published, such as Phan Lạc Tiếp, Vũ Thát Võ Văn Bảy, Độc-Hành Nguyễn Văn Ôn, Thụy Lữ Phạm Văn Hưng, Tuấn Anh Trần Trọng Hải, Tam Giang Hoàng Đình Báu, Vũ-Quân Vũ Hữu San, Trần Đỗ Cẩm, and Chu Bá-Yến. For homegrown literary and artistic talents, the count is endless. Please refer to this book for more details.



**Post-graduation:** Maritime careers were the initial dream, but many Aquarians continued their academic pursuits, broadening their horizons. While in Vietnam, the 11th Class had Nghĩa, Hàm, and Diễm graduating from Law School and Cẩm graduating from Literature. Two Aquarians graduated from Naval Postgraduate School: Thiệu (B.S. & M.S.) and Diễm (M.S.).

After 1975, in the United States, many Aquarians graduated with B.S./M.S. degrees. Let's mention a few: Bá, Cự, Hùng, Hưng, San, Quí, Thủ, Trạch, Yến, and a few others whose names we cannot remember. Unfortunately, we do not yet have a Ph.D., but the Aquarian descendants have many doctors, scientists, and engineers. Especially the families of Trương Hữu Quýnh, Nguyễn Văn Cự, and Nguyễn Ngọc Luân... have amassed significant academic achievements. Please see the biographies in the 'First Aquarius Cadet List' section.





**Reunions:** Over the past 40 years, the 11th Class has held many reunions. The first was in April 1971 (10 years in the military) at the Saigon Naval Officer's Club.

The Naval Command approved this official reunion and allowed the Psychological Warfare Art Team to entertain.

The homes of friends Yến, Diệp, and Hồng Hoa restaurant on Biên Hòa highway were the next meeting places before the evacuation.

The first reunion abroad in 1986 (25-year-old Aquarius) was the most emotional. More than 20 members, called by T.H. Quỳnh, gathered in San Jose (T.Q. Thiệu's home) for a heartfelt chat.

The furthest distance belonged to Nguyễn Nguyên (from France), and the largest group was Chu Bá Yến's family from Florida.

The night of August 15, 1986, was a sleepless night, and that meeting laid the foundation for subsequent reunions in Southern California (homes of N.N. Luân, P. L. Tiếp, T.Q. Đô, T.V. Hoa).

A fund to help struggling Aquarians still at home land was also established at that time, initially managed by Chu Bá Yến, then transferred to Đặng Diệm, and finally to Vũ Hữu San.

The 30-year Aquarius anniversary, initiated by Vũ Hữu San, was also held in Northern California (N.K. Khánh's restaurant & T.Q. Thiệu's home). This was also a nostalgic meeting. V.H. San reviewed the achievements in helping classmates. The Aquarians reminisced about their maritime dreams, introduced their families, and the achievements of their children. The atmosphere was warm and cheerful. The gathering continued with a meal at Thanh Hiền





restaurant and a trip to San Francisco for those from afar. Nguyễn Ngọc-Quỳnh made a video for this reunion. Except for the joyful days at the military school, due to duty or circumstances, we could never have all the Aquarians gathered, but the longing for

reunion is always there.

**Gratitude:** "Without teachers, you cannot succeed." We would like to conclude this article with a list of teachers, officials, and trainers who guided us during our early days at the military school. We are grateful to you, whether you were the gentleman named 'De', the strict 'Socrates', the cheerful 'Sử Tâm', or the difficult 'Già Rô'.





**List of Teachers, Trainers, and Officials of the First Aquarius Class  
(Rank and position in 1963)**

<b>Rank &amp; Name</b>	<b>Position and Teaching Subjects</b>
Lieutenant Commander Vương Hữu Thiều	Commanding Officer of TTHL/NT Boat Theory
Lieutenant Đur Trí Hùng	Deputy/Acting Commanding Officer Meteorology, Tactical Navigation
Lieutenant Engineer Đặng Đình Hiệp	Director of Military Training Internal Combustion Engines
Lieutenant Đỗ Kiểm	Principal of SVSQ School Navigation Theory
Lieutenant JG Engineer Trần Văn Sơn	Mathematics, Spherical Trigonometry, Electrical Engineering
Lieutenant Nguyễn Dịch Hùng	Physics, Coastal & Offshore Navigation
Lieutenant JG Võ Duy Ninh	Naval Gunnery
Lieutenant JG Vũ Nhân	English, Communication, Electronics
Lieutenant Doctor Tuyết	French
Lieutenant Nguyễn Văn Linh	Political Warfare
Lieutenant JG Mai Mộng Liễn	Practical Navigation
Ensign Nguyễn Văn Giới	Logistics
Mr. Taylor	Practical English
Chief Petty Officer Nguyễn Khánh Long	Radar, Practical Electronics.
Chief Petty Officer Công	Practical Navigation
Chief Petty Officer Thiệu	Practical Mechanics
Petty Officer Cần	Practical Electrical Engineering
Petty Officer Sĩ	Practical Small Boat Operation
Marine Sergeant Minh	Basic Drills, Infantry.
Chief Petty Officer Cúc	Physical Training Instructor
Petty Officer Khải	Physical Training Instructor
Petty Officer Tô Văn Giốc	Physical Training Instructor
Chief Petty Officer Định	Company Supervisor
Chief Petty Officer Tâm	Company Supervisor
Chief Petty Officer Nhi	Company Supervisor
Petty Officer Mai	Company Supervisor

More than forty years have passed. Our memories have faded. If there is anyone we've missed, we ask for your forgiveness.

Editorial Team

## LETTER FROM THE FORMER TEACHER

*Đỗ Kiêm*

Dear former Naval Officers of the First Aquarius Class,

I have finished reading the article on the History and Activities of Class XI and feel deep moved by the concise and rich nature of this invaluable document. I would like to congratulate you all and your families on now having a document that serves as a family tree for your descendants, so they can know that their forefathers led heroic lives in their homeland, Vietnam. I believe this is a very "human" and honest document about the Vietnamese Navy. Hopefully, other Classes will achieve similar successes.

Class XI was the first Class I taught upon my return from studying in the United States. I vividly remember the appearances of each trainee when they were still awkward in their "shorts" uniforms. Some had their shorts reaching their knees while others wore them just below the thighs. I took it upon myself to assess each individual's potential military career through their images, activities, and style. From the day Class XI graduated, I continued to closely follow the growth and development of my beloved "students." I felt profound sorrow at the deaths of Nguyễn Ngọc Long, Trần Ngọc Bảo, Hồ Đắc Cung, Phạm Đức Riễn, etc. I shed tears when Võ Văn Quột sister fainted in my arms upon seeing the mutilated body of her beloved brother. I was outraged when Nguyễn Ngọc Thông's body was stolen by local residents, branded as traitors, at the Coastal Group 16 (Later, I used this incident as an example in discussions about Mỹ Lai at universities hosted by anti-war American professors). Those unfortunate individuals who suffered severe injuries, like Bùi Quang Vinh, whom I took to an American hospital to save his eyesight but unfortunately failed, or Nguyễn Lộc, who was critically injured in the final moments of the nation, and no one cared to honor him. Among my predictions about Class XI's future careers, there were many unexpected events (fate) and some mistakes due to my focus on their prospective military environment.

However, on the whole, I believe that Class XI has advanced significantly, both in military and civilian lives, as I envisioned when they were still cadets. Perhaps they have even exceeded my expectations. Military constraints limit personal development, so when engaging in civilian life, with the resilience built during the war, they have exceeded in harnessing their talents and potential. The success of Class XI in various fields as husbands, fathers, and individuals, stands as undeniable proof of their exceptional human potential.

However, it is deeply unfortunate that we were born at the wrong time. The Communist zealots have taken over our country and have driven many talents away, enriching other lands instead. I fervently hope that, through the "family tree" document of their ancestors' history and activities,



your descendants will gain a deeper understanding of Vietnam and may continue the unfinished mission of their forebears.

Wishing you all success.

*Đỗ Kiêm,*  
Former Principal,  
Naval Cadet Officer School