

U. S. COAST GUARD HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH PROGRAM

The United States Coast Guard in South East Asia

During the Vietnam Conflict

by

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## FOREWORD

In brief, the Coast Guard Historical Monograph Program, of which this publication is the first product, is simply the publishing of worthy historical works by Coast Guardsmen in the field of Coast Guard history. All that is essential for this experimental program's continued success is the willingness of enough Coast Guardsmen to undertake the task of researching and writing a concise narrative of specific segments in the vast treasuretrove of little-known Coast Guard history.

The idea for this program was conceived by Captain B. L. Meaux, U.S. Coast Guard, Chief, Public Affairs Division, Coast Guard Headquarters, in mid-1973. Primarily, his rationale for initiating this program was:

(1) to insure the preservation of as much Coast Guard history as possible in order that no important phase of it may be lost; (2) to stimulate interest in Coast Guard history among Coast Guardsmen, the academic community, and the general public, (3) to attempt to convince many individual Coast Guardsmen that the preservation of Coast Guard history in a narrative form is primarily their responsibility, since no one else can tackle this job with the same sense of identity, interest, or knowledge of the subject; (4) to record the brave deeds and honorable service of past Coast Guardsmen so that they can be compared to current and future performances; and (5) to use history as a means of fostering esprit de corps, as well as building and maintaining Coast Guard traditions.

Donated by Chuck Barrow USAF 91-0010

## PREFACE

This monograph is an unclassified account of the activities of the United States Coast Guard in South East Asia during the Vietnam Conflict.

I would like to acknowledge the cooperation received from the Military Readiness Division at United States Coast Guard Headquarters for allowing me access to certain of their files. The information in this monograph was gleaned from operational and administration reports submitted by the various cutters, field units, and their operational and administrative commanders.

Appreciation is also acknowledged to Captain A. L. Lonsdale, U. S. Coast Guard, Chief, Public Affairs Division, and his Assistant, Commander J. L. Webb, U. S. Coast Guard, for their willingness to continue an experimental program initiated by their predecessors. The encouragement and advice of the U. S. Coast Guard Historian, Mr. Truman R. Strobridge, was most helpful.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

LT. Eugene N. Tulich is a 1965 graduate of the University of Buffalo and a 1967 graduate of Officer Candidate School at Yorktown. LT. Tulich has spent two tours on cutters in Vietnam. His first tour was as Gunnery Officer on the Cutter CAMPBELL and the second tour as Operations Officer on the Cutter MORGENTHAU. Between tours in South East Asia served as a rescue controller in the COMMANDER EASTERN AREA/COAST GUARD DISTRICT THREE Rescue Coordination Center. He is Presently assigned to the Ocean Operations Division at Coast Guard Headquarters.

LT. Tulich was awarded three Navy Commendation Medals with Combat Distinguishing Device, the Combat Action Ribbon, and the Government of Vietnam Staff Service Medal, First Class for his performance in Vietnam.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Early in the war in Vietnam it was obvious that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces were obtaining their supplies in a myriad of ways. The forces allied with the Republic of South Vietnam had no effective means of stopping the enemy infiltration of men, arms and supplies.

During February of 1965, an Army pilot flying over Vung Ro Bay near Qui Nhon noticed an "island" moving slowly from one side of the bay to another. Upon closer observation the "island" was discovered to be a carefully camouflaged ship. Air strikes were called in and the vessel sunk. Intelligence sources determined the ship was of North Vietnamese origin and engaged in rearming enemy forces.

It became imperative to establish a tight security and surveillance system. This would be no easy chore with over 1,200 miles of coastline to patrol and over 60,000 junks and sampans to control. To provide this coverage the Coastal Surveillance Force was established in March of 1965. This task Force provided a single command to integrate sea, air, and land based units and coordinate U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and South Vietnamese naval units. This unique organization was called Market Time after the native sampans and junks utilizing coastal

waterways for fishing, and going to and from the market.

Naval units of the Market Time operation successfully interdicted enemy vessels carrying supplies and personnel. The success of the operation forced the enemy to rely on the Ho Chi Minh trail to transport supplies. As most of the trawler "kills" were in southern Vietnam near the Ca Mau peninsula, the enemy had to carry supplies over an extraordinarily long distance.

## CHAPTER 2

### A TALE OF TWENTY SIX

It was shortly after the February trawler incident that Commander, Naval Forces Vietnam (COMNAVFORV) gave serious thought to maintaining surveillance and patrols in the inland and coastal waters of the Republic of Vietnam. It was not long before the need for Coast Guard units was recognized and on the 16th of April 1965 the Secretary of the Navy requested information on the availability of Coast Guard units from the Secretary of Treasury. Three days later on 19 April, the Commandant of the Coast Guard advised that 82 foot and 40 foot patrol boats were available. Coast Guard representatives were sent to the Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) and again only three days passed before the decision was reached that the Coast Guard would provide seventeen 82 foot patrol boats. In support of the seventeen, the Navy promised the support of two Repair Ships (ARL's). A few days later on the 29th of April, the Secretaries of Defense and Treasury sent a joint memorandum to the President advising him of the proposed deployment. The following day it was announced that Coast Guard Squadron One was being formed. Shortly thereafter on the 6th of May the Coast Guard promulgated an operation order for the deployment of the seventeen and only twelve days later the 17 patrol boats were being loaded as deck cargo on merchant vessels in New York, Norfolk, New



Orleans, Galveston, San Pedro, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Nine days following the loading of the patrol boats, Coast Guard Squadron One was commissioned at Coast Guard Base Alameda. The ceremony took place at 1000 hours, 27 May 1965.

Particular note should be made of the willingness of the Navy to call up its primary back-up force and the preparedness of the Coast Guard to swiftly shift from a peacetime mission to a combat mission.

Initially, total Coast Guard personnel assigned to the newly formed Squadron One numbered 47 officers and 198 enlisted. These Coastguardsmen underwent survival training at Coronado, California, and were instructed by the Coast Guard on such topics as the care and feeding of the 81 mm mortar and the .50 caliber machine gun, and other subjects which included NBC warfare, Damage Control, Navigation and Piloting, Organization, Rules of the Nautical Road, Boarding Procedures and Tactics, Lookout Procedures, Recognition, Combat Indoctrination, Radiotelephone Procedures, Water Survival, Hand to Hand Combat, and the Code of Conduct. Upon completion of the required training, the personnel joined their patrol boats at Subic Bay, Philippine Islands.

On the 12th of June 1965 Coast Guard Squadron One came under the authority of the Navy when it changed operational control to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet. While under the operational control of CINPACFLT the men and patrol boats of Squadron One were given shake-down and refresher training at Subic Bay Naval Base. While the cutters were preparing for the voyage to Vietnam, Squadron One established a liaison office at the Headquarters of Chief, Naval Advisory Group in

Saigon to help smooth the rough waters that were bound to work up. Finally on 15 July, the boats of Coast Guard Division Twelve departed Subic Bay for Da Nang and five days later the patrol boats of Division Eleven sailed for An Thoi in the Gulf of Thailand. Upon arrival at their respective bases they CHOPPED to Commander Task Force 71. They were only under CTF 71 a few days as Commander Task Force 115 (Market Time) was established on 30 July 1965. Five Coastal Surveillance Centers were set up under CTF 115 and located at Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Vung Tau, and An Thoi. These CSC's coordinated the patrols of the RONONE cutters and directed most significant operations.

The cutters lost no time getting on patrol and going about their duties. As there was a great profusion of junks, sampans, and varied other craft a priority system of boarding was instituted. The priority scheme was: first, vessels transitting the area; second, junks fishing or operating in restricted areas; third, fishing boats anchored and not working nets; and fourth, fishing boats working nets. These patrol duties were accomplished by being underway two-thirds of the time in Division 11; and 3 days on patrol followed by 1 day in port with a 5 day respite after 6 patrols in Division 12.

When the cutters were underway they reported to the minesweeper or destroyer escort that was maintaining outer barrier patrol. The outer barrier ships assisted the WPB's with radar and navigational information. In turn, the WPB's provided similar service to Vietnamese Navy Junk Force units that were close inshore. Though the water was too shallow for the cutters to be in close with the VNN junks, they were able to provide gunfire support if necessary.

A few matters required quick rectification. The CGC PT. ORIENT on its first night time patrol near the 17th parallel received mortar and machine gunfire. White cutters are a beautiful sight on a moonlite or flare-lite night, that is, unless you are on the cutter. On the 21st of September, CTF 115 ordered the patrol boats painted grey. An old adage of military life also crept in - the 10% that did not get the word. PT. YOUNG on one of its early patrols received fire from friendly forces. Luckily no one was hurt and immediate steps were taken to preclude further incidents, though we will note a little later there was still that 10% of the 10%.

It was felt that after one month of aggressive patrols there was only about a 10% chance of a junk slipping through the barrier and no chance of a steel hull. Division Eleven in its first month of operation boarded more than 1,100 junks and sampans, inspected over 4,000 Vietnamese craft, and used more than 4,800 man hours to carry out the assigned mission "Stop Sea Infiltration of Weapons and Supplies to the Viet Cong". The heavy patrol schedule of the cutters was complemented by the shore staff working an average of 84 hours a week.

The effectiveness of the patrols hurt the VC and the barrier patrol became both a physical and psychological warfare battle. The VC told the fishermen that the WPB's were driving them from their best fishing grounds just so U.S. fishing boats could be brought in. This may have appeared to be true to the Vietnamese fishermen since frequently the best fishing grounds were in restricted areas and the WPB's did in fact chase them out. To counter this, the Coast Guard, Navy,

and South Vietnamese set up a counter PSYOPS program which included handouts of literature and SVN flags. Medical treatment was given as needed and medevacs to U.S. hospital facilities were common. Of course, an American cannot participate in PSYOPS without dispensing profuse quantities of candy and cigarettes.

Action was always just around the bend or the island and on 19 September 1965 the POINT GLOVER and the POINT MARONE had some. POINT GLOVER was nearly rammed by a 20 foot junk carrying five men, one of whom was subsequently captured along with several small arms, ammunition, papers and clothing. The cutter POINT MARONE was attempting to inspect a 40 foot junk when the junk evaded and opened fire with small arms and grenades. The cutter responded with machine gunfire killing 8 Viet Cong. One VC was captured along with small arms, ammunition, grenades, a lead sealed box, clothing, money, and caulking compound. Besides their normal duties of preventing the infiltration of enemy men and supplies, the WPB's were frequently called upon to provide emergency support for U.S. Special Forces camps. This emergency support consisted of the transportation of personnel, medevacs, and firing urgent Naval Gunfire Support missions.

Even though the performance of the cutters was nothing less than outstanding, there remained a large gap in the forces which had to be filled. Division Twelve in Da Nang covered the East Coast and Division Eleven provided coverage on the West Coast, but no one really protected the vital Southeast Coast. So on the 29th of October, 1965, the Coast Guard, at the request of the Secretary of the Navy, ordered nine additional Coast Guard 82 foot patrol boats detached from normal duties

for deployment to RONONE under CTF 115. The WPB's of Division Thirteen were embarked on 1 December 1965 and the division established on the 12th. The cutters sailed from Subic Bay enroute Vung Tau on 15 February 1966. As Squadron One grew so did the duties of its staff. On 5 November 1965, Commander Coast Guard Squadron One was assigned additional duty with COMUSMACV Joint Staff attached to NAVADVGRP in connection with IV Coastal Zone advisor task. On 15 December, COMCOGARDRONONE was upgraded to a captain (O-6) billet and the position tasked with the additional duty as advisor to CHNAVADVGRP SAIGON for Coast Guard related matters.

The cutter POINT WHITE had not been in-country a month when she started conducting patrols on a VC controlled area of the Soi Rap River. The POINT WHITE used a ruse of steaming out the patrol area and covertly returning to the VC area. Soon she spotted a junk crossing the river and attempted to stop it. The junk opened fire with small arms, including automatic weapons. POINT WHITE returned the fire and rammed the junk throwing the occupants into the water. The cutter's Commanding Officer rescued a survivor who turned out to be a key VC leader of the Rung Sat Secret Zone. During this month of March, 3 WPB's of Division Thirteen accounted for 27 VC killed in action, 7 captured in action, and considerable contraband confiscated.

Activity continued throughout April, 1966 with the Coast Guard Cutter POINT COMFORT being fired upon by a Cambodian patrol in the Gulf of Thailand; the POINT PARTRIDGE capturing a hard core VC Colonel of Engineers; and Coast Guard and Navy personnel fighting a conflagration that destroyed seventy housing units in the village of An Thoi,

Phu Quoc Island.

May started out with the POINT PARTRIDGE capturing a junk containing CHICOM weapons and the POINT GRACE capturing a sampan taking 3 prisoners, rifles and ammunition. On the 19th of the month a significant naval engagement was fought. The POINT GREY was on patrol near the Ca Mau peninsula when she sighted a 120 foot trawler heading on various courses and speeds. Her suspicions were aroused and POINT GREY commenced shadowing the trawler. After observing what appeared to be signal fires on the beach she hailed the vessel, but received no response. The trawler ran aground and POINT GREY personnel attempted to board it. They were prevented from doing so by heavy automatic weapons fire from the beach which resulted in three wounded on board POINT GREY. POINT CYPRESS and U.S. Navy units came to assist. After a determination was made that the trawler could not be salvaged, it was destroyed. U.S. Navy salvage teams recovered a substantial amount of war material. This incident was the largest single known infiltration attempt since the Vung Ro Bay incident of February 1965.

May was also the first birthday of RONONE and during that first year of operations the cutters of Squadron One steamed more than half million miles; were underway over seventy percent of the time; detected 150,000 junks; inspected 30,000 junks; boarded 35,000 junks; accounted for 75 VC KIA/WIA/CIA; arrested hundreds; destroyed sixteen junks and one steel hull; captured enemy weapons and supplies in excess of 100 tons; conducted thirty-five NGFS missions; participated in special operations in support of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces; and conducted an active PSYWAR campaign.

The month of June proved to be as exciting as May. The POINT LEAGUE was on patrol and detected a 98 foot trawler in South Vietnamese waters. The POINT LEAGUE challenged the trawler and was fired upon. The cutter returned the fire and ran the trawler aground. The cutters POINT SLOCUM and POINT HUDSON joined in the fray along with aircraft. A small explosion was observed on the trawler and she was subsequently boarded and captured. After refloating, the trawler was towed to Vung Tau where many tons of war material was removed. Two Coastguardsmen were wounded during the battle.

Little happened during July, 1966 and August started off slowly with routine operations. The POINT ARDEN rescued an LCU from straying over the 17th parallel, a not uncommon occurrence due to the configuration of the coastline. On 11 August 1966 the POINT WELCOME was on patrol near the DMZ when suddenly she was illuminated and then attacked by friendly aircraft. Sustaining several hits in the bridge area, she was also ablaze with a gasoline fire. She attempted to repel the attack while extinguishing the fire. Still under attack she ran aground and was abandoned, but not before all donned life jackets. When other Coast Guard units arrived on scene the Commanding Officer of the POINT WELCOME was dead along with one of his crew. The executive officer, two other crewmen, the Vietnamese liaison, and a Life Magazine reporter were wounded. The POINT WELCOME was refloated and towed to port for repairs.

September was a time for rescues with the Coast Guard saving four of six crewmen from a downed helicopter. The POINT LEAGUE responded to

a distress on the S/S DRAGONLADY. POINT LEAGUE dewatered a flooded compartment, replaced the injured Chief Engineer with a first class engineman and gave general comfort to the seasick officers and the inexperienced crew. October was quiet and November was highlighted by the POINT COMFORT dispersing enemy forces attacking U.S. Special Forces personnel. POINT COMFORT provided NGFS, suppressed enemy fire and evacuated refugees.

The days went routinely until 14 March 1967 when the POINT ELLIS and USN units detected an enemy steel hulled trawler and forced it to beach. The enemy, forced to destroy a precious cargo of mortars, small arms, uniforms and other contraband, was deprived of a large quantity of much needed war material.

The waters around Vietnam were relatively uncharted and so survey vessels were dispatched to conduct hydrographic operations. During these operations in May, 1967 a survey boat from the USS MAURY was hit by enemy fire and was sinking. The POINT KENNEDY went alongside the survey boat to give damage control assistance and simultaneously suppressed enemy fire while skillfully extracting both craft from this precarious position. The same month the Vietnamese liaison and a crewman from the POINT ELLIS went into the water to recover a sailor lost overboard from the USS PRINCETON.

On 15 July 1967, the POINT ORIENT led an attack on an enemy trawler. The trawler, after being taken under fire by the POINT ORIENT and a PCF grounded near a river. The trawler's superstructure was heavily damaged and she was ablaze from stem to stern. Though on fire she did not explode though several minor explosions did take place.



The contents of the trawler were salvaged by USN and ROK units. In addition to trawler killing, Coast Guard patrol boats acted as blockade units to prevent exfiltration, provided NGFS and conducted Harassment and Interdiction missions.

The Coast Guard patrol boats were built for offshore rescue work in adverse weather conditions while their Navy counterpart, the PCF, was not. So well suited to their mission, they frequently remained on station while larger naval units departed. This did not go unnoticed at CTF 115. So in September, 1967, it was decided that seasonal shifts of WPB's were to take place with the WPB's following the monsoons and the PCF's following the sunshine. Though this policy may not have been popular with an occasional Coastguardsman, they still maintained the patrol schedule and fulfilled all their duties.

The 29th of February, 1968 brought the largest naval engagement of the Vietnam war. Four trawlers attempted to penetrate the barrier. Of these, three were destroyed and the fourth beat a retreat to the north. The first attempted to run the barrier in the area near Da Nang. The Coast Guard Cutter ANDROSCOGGIN challenged her and shortly after commenced fire which the enemy infiltrator returned. POINT WELCOME closed in illuminating; with the POINT GREY and a PCF using machine guns. The trawler fired back at the patrol boats, but she beached herself. POINT WELCOME fired 81 mm and the others fired machine guns which silenced the enemy fire. Shortly after 0230 on the 1st of March, the trawler destroyed itself.

Another trawler was destroyed off the Ca Mau peninsula. After numerous hits by gunfire from the CGC WINONA, POINT GRACE, POINT MARONE,

POINT HUDSON, and USN PCF's she burst into flame and subsequently exploded. She disappeared from the radar screens about the same time as the previous one.

About the same time that the second trawler was sounding her death knell a third sounded hers. Caught and beached northeast of Nha Trang, she attempted to return the fire of the Coast Guard and Navy units, but was destroyed after several direct hits from 81 mm mortars.

A fourth trawler was spotted by the Cutter MINNETONKA on outer barrier patrol before the trawler crossed into Vietnamese waters. The trawler turned and left the area.

Near the DMZ was a base at Cua Viet where a LST ramp was located for unloading supplies and ammunition. The POINT ARDEN was at that location on 10 March when a fire started. The chief boatswain's mate from the POINT ARDEN extinguished the fire, secured a 5" rubber hose pumping gasoline and is given probable credit for saving the main ammunition dump. He received shrapnel wounds from a minor explosion that took place.

Between the Cua Viet LST ramp and the next major phase of RONONE history was the conducting of routine operations such as patrol, NGFS, H & I, SAR, arresting draft dodgers and so forth. The POINT ORIENT captured six NVA officers in an infiltration attempt.

A high level decision was made and in January 1969, two Vietnamese Navy lieutenants reported aboard WPB's was the first phase in a transition to Vietnamese control of WPB's. A month later 17 VNN ensigns and 2 more lieutenants reported as part of the turnover. Without a doubt

language and communications did arise but they were quickly overcome. Vietnamese enlisted men phased in, replacing U.S. counterparts and after several fully operational patrols were ready for turnover. On 16 May 1969, the cutters POINT GARNET and POINT LEAGUE were transferred to the Vietnamese Navy in appropriate ceremonies at Saigon and named LE PHUOC DUC and LE VAN NGA respectively.

While transition was taking place the other cutters continued their normal duties. In two boat trips through the surf, the POINT BANKS extracted nine friendlies trapped by the VC. The damage control parties of the POINT CYPRESS and the POINT WHITE saved a PCF from sinking. The POINT WHITE refloated two PCF's that went aground at Ha Tien. While at Ha Tien, crewmen from the cutter repaired an evaporator previously thought unrepairable and gave the forces in Ha Tien their first consistent water supply in more than a year.

Regardless of whatever other activities the cutters were involved in the primary mission was turnover. Included in this turnover process was the training of Vietnamese repair forces. By August the VNN WPB repair crew was able to remove and install overhauled engines in the WPB's unaided except for some American muscle. Problems were inherent in the turnover as personnel reporting were not of the proper pay grade, of insufficient number, and late reporting. But it must be remembered that the VNN was suffering growing pains emerging from primarily a coastal junk force to a modern navy in just a few years.

Boats were constantly being turned over and while a substantial portion of the crew was Vietnamese several significant operations took place. In early 1970 the Cutters POINT JEFFERSON and POINT

PARTRIDGE conducted maximum boarding, search and PSYOPS missions. Three hundred fifteen junks were boarded or inspected, 2 detainees taken, 2,000 people reached, 3,000 bars of soap and 5,000 leaflets distributed along with numerous food items, and medical treatment given to twelve Vietnamese. A few days later the POINT JEFFERSON helped retake an outpost overrun by the VC by giving close support to friendly forces. During May of 1970 the Cutters POINT BANKS and POINT GREY landed a group, detained 16 suspected VC, captured 22 VC/NVA, and killed nine VC. Ten enemy watercraft, 15 offensive structures and 13 other structures were destroyed in the operation.

On 15 August 1970, the last two cutters of the twenty-six, the Cutters POINT MARONE and POINT CYPRESS were transferred to the Vietnamese. The same day RONONE and Coast Guard Division Thirteen were disestablished. A new post of Senior Coast Guard Officer, Vietnam was established as a sub-unit of Commander, Coast Guard South East Asia Section.

## CHAPTER 3

### AND A STORY OF THIRTY

Early in 1967, the Navy forces assigned to Market Time and other operations were being stretched thin. As a result, the Navy requested that the Coast Guard provide five high endurance cutters (WHEC) for duty with the Coastal Surveillance Forces. On 24 April 1967, Coast Guard Squadron Three was formed at Pearl Harbor. Two days later the squadron sailed from Pearl Harbor arriving at Subic Bay on 10 May.

The Cutter BARATARIA left Subic Bay a few days later and on the 22nd of May fired the first WHEC Naval Gunfire Support Mission (NGFS) mission of the war. The HEC's continued their peacetime duties with the Cutter HALF MOON acting as On Scene Commander in the search for survivors from the sunken ship SHINAGAWA MARU. The YAKUTAT took a young girl aboard for in-patient treatment after she sustained a gunshot wound in the leg. Almost immediately the cutters started conducting MEDCAPS, but these will be discussed in a later chapter.

On 1 October 1967, Commander, Task Unit (CTU) 70.8.6 (RONTHREE) consolidated with CTU 70.8.5 (Navy Escort Squadron). The new unit was designated CTU 70.8.5, commanded by the senior Coast Guard officer, and given the additional duty as "Commander, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Seventh Fleet Representative, Subic." Besides the normal squadron

administrative duties, CTU 70.8.5 was also tasked with scheduling, equipment pools, boarding briefings, message handling, yeoman and storekeeper services, casualty report control, material expediting, personnel routing, and so on. An almost immediate result of this consolidation was the decision to include RONTREE cutters in the Senior Officer Present Afloat Administrative (SOPA ADMIN) HONG KONG rotation. Vessels assigned as SOPA ADMIN provided administrative support for other naval units visiting Hong Kong including coordinating arrivals, departures, services and activities, liaison with the Royal Navy authorities, the American Consulate, and SOPA HONG KONG. The BERING STRAIT was the first cutter to perform these duties.

Due to their shallow draft the cutters of Squadron Three were primarily assigned to the Gulf of Thailand. Not long after their arrival they started to provide 5"/38 gunfire support. The primary NGFS aid was given to the village of Song Ong Doc near the Ca Mau peninsula. Song Ong Doc had a small United States Special Forces base and was located in the middle of a VC controlled area. The village was practically adopted by the Coast Guard as we shall see later. Another support measure provided by the high endurance cutters was to supply logistic support to the WPB's and PCF's on patrol. The PCF is a rough riding boat, with few amenities. To allow the PCF to remain on patrol for extended periods two crews were assigned, with the off-duty crew living aboard the outer barrier cutter. Frequently personnel from the cutter replaced the sick, wounded or tired personnel of the PCF.

In order for the high endurance cutters to resupply, they had to either load at one of the support bases or receive it from one of the oilers, ammunition ships, food and stores ships transiting the coastal waters. The latter proved the most feasible and the cutters embarked on a new way of life. Besides, the support ships also carried the mail from home.

On 29 February 1968, the cutters WINONA and ANDROSCOGGIN engaged enemy infiltrating trawlers and destroyed them with the aid of WPB's and Navy units. The MINNETONKA turned back another. These engagements have been previously described in the WPB story.

Providing medical treatment for other military personnel was a constant activity. Wounded U.S. Navy and Army personnel were treated aboard the cutters, along with other friendlies. USN, USCG, and VNN vessels who knew that the cutters carried medical officers would transfer their sick to the cutters for treatment. The ANDROSCOGGIN's medical officer performed four hours of major surgery on a Vietnamese soldier who was wounded by a grenade.

Spring and early summer of 1968 provided action for the cutters CAMPBELL and ANDROSCOGGIN. The ANDROSCOGGIN participated in an amphibious operation conducted by ARVN troops, with other cutters participating in similar operations at later dates. The cutter CAMPBELL was on patrol near the DMZ and came across a derelict junk which she blew up so it would not be a hazard to navigation. A few days later, the PCF 19 which was attached to CAMPBELL was sunk near the Cua Viet river by friendly aircraft. The Cutter POINT DUME recovered the only two

survivors. ANDROSCOGGIN a month later provided emergency damage control assistance to a PCF while ANDROSCOGGIN was providing NGFS. The OWASCO, a few months later, saved a PCF from sinking after it had been hit by enemy fire.

In June 1969, the ANDROSCOGGIN conducted a hydrographic survey of a previously uncharted area. This type of operation became routine with the cutters charting the proper position of lights, islands, and so forth. The Cutter MORGENTHAU frequently transmitted chart corrections and even located an uncharted pinnacle when she struck it. The INGHAM provided a similar chart correction when she grounded.

The Song Ong Doc area was in a constant state of battle and as was mentioned before, frequent assistance was given by the cutters. This is being repeated to accentuate the gravity of the situation and the amount of support given. Eventually, due to the extreme situation a cutter was assigned almost full-time to support of Song Ong Doc especially with NGFS. WINNEBAGO and DALLAS deserve special recognition for all their support. Services were also provided to PCF's making sorties into VC controlled areas. The cutter would provide NGFS, logistics, damage control, and medical support.

At the other end of Vietnam the cutters patrolling near the DMZ had the additional mission of preventing lost vessels from straying over the 17th parallel. Gunfire support was not a prime duty in this area, but on one occasion when an Army post was in danger of being overrun the cutter OWASCO provided illumination while the USS NEW JERSEY provided destructive fire.



On 16 May 1969, the Navy personnel of CTU 70.8.5 were withdrawn. As the duties were only slightly lessened, the Navy provided one officer and six enlisted on TAD to fill in the gap. A month later, the RONTHREE staff worked nearly full-time on salvaging gear from the stricken USS FRANK E. EVANS.

July 1969 proved exciting for the Cutter SPENCER when she caught fire in Sasebo, Japan. The fire damage was not extensive and she was soon underway. The same month SEBAGO extracted 5 ARVN's from an enemy controlled area using a landing party accompanied by the ship's doctor. One hour after extracting the five ARVN's they returned to rescue the spotter pilot who was shot down during the rescue attempt.

The cutters of RONTHREE consisted of pre-world war II and world war II vintage cutters. Though their performance was outstanding they were handicapped by age, partial obsolescence, and relatively low speed. On 1 October 1969 the Cutter HAMILTON arrived in Subic Bay. She was the first of a class of Coast Guard cutters (commissioned 1967) endowed with high speed, improved gunfire control, habitability, and a large flight deck. The flight deck made the cutter extremely versatile allowing helicopters to use the ship for refueling, transferring supplies, transporting personnel, and evacuating wounded. Less than a month after arriving the HAMILTON landed a large twin rotor helicopter. These new cutters felt they were being underutilized and after holding briefings ashore had a substantial jump in activity.

In March of 1970 the SS COLUMBIA EAGLE was taken over by mutineers, the crew set adrift, and the ship taken into Cambodia. The Cutters

MELLON and CHASE participated in the successful resolving of the situation, with CHASE providing transportation for the crew to return.

The Coast Guard cutters appeared to be the constant keepers of the Gulf of Thailand and so gathered considerable knowledge about the area which they would impart to arriving Navy ships when not engaged in NGFS, MEDCAPS, patrol or other duties. As the cutters would normally return to the area after an R & R port, they frequently took in-country personnel with them on these port visits which proved to be a tremendous morale booster for the in-country troops. Vietnamese naval personnel were also taken, and on some trips it was SRO.

We have now returned to the Gulf of Thailand and April 1970 when an ARVN unit was in danger of being overrun. The Cutter DALLAS responded with NGFS providing a path for the ARVN's and routing the enemy. The DALLAS' medical officer treated eight wounded Vietnamese soldiers on board until they could be evacuated to a hospital. During the operation, DALLAS covered the landing and the subsequent extraction of the troops.

It was determined that the Vietnamese Navy should obtain offshore patrol units and the Cutters BERING STRAIT and YAKUTAT were selected. They arrived in Subic Bay in June 1970 with a small cadre of Vietnamese aboard, which was supplemented by another contingent at Subic. The VNN personnel were taught the operations of the ship and soon took over important positions in CIC, Boarding parties, NGFS details, and repair crews. The VNN also performed the external functions of the ship, especially boarding. The VNN officers soon became underway and in-port OOD's. Teams assumed full responsibility for engineering

watches, did the navigation and piloting, and provided all the control and most other positions in the NGFS teams. Their training became apparent when a combined USCG/VNN rescue and assistance party from the YAKUTAT extinguished a serious fire and performed post-fire support on a USN landing ship.

Rumors had been circulating that Song Ong Doc was going to be overrun and in October 1970 the village and base were hit hard by the VC and most of the base destroyed. In November, the base and village moved inland to New Song Ong Doc and Coast Guard support requirements lessened. However, a month later the Cutter RUSH and an Australian destroyer conducted emergency gunfire support for New Song Ong Doc killing 64 of the attackers.

A trawler attempted to infiltrate on the 21st of November 1970. After being hailed to stop, she resisted and was destroyed by gunfire from the Cutters RUSH and SHERMAN, and USN units.

November 1970 saw the Cutters BERING STRAIT and YAKUTAT in Subic Bay being painted gray except for the Coast Guard identification markings. In December, the cutters underwent refresher training with nearly an all Vietnamese crew. After completion of the training, the ships departed for Saigon. There they were turned over to the Vietnamese on 1 January 1971 in a colorful ceremony where the invocation was given by a Navy chaplain and the benediction by a Buddhist monk.

On 28 February 1971, after dropping off a MEDCAP party, the cutter MORGENTHAU struck an uncharted rock pinnacle in the Gulf of Thailand causing extensive underwater damage. After being rowed to Subic Bay,

the Ship Repair Facility had the MORGENTHAU repaired and underway in record time.

The night of 11-12 April 1971 found the Cutters RUSH and MORGENTHAU teamed up with Navy and VNN units to destroy an enemy trawler trying to infiltrate supplies into South Vietnam near the Ca Mau peninsula.

The Cutters CASTLE ROCK and COOK INLET arrived in Subic Bay in July 1971 for eventual turnover to the Vietnamese Navy. The training progressed rapidly, with dual ship exercises taking place in November. To display his confidence in the high state of training the Commodore of RONTREE transferred between the two ships on a highline.

December 1971 saw the COOK INLET as the last Coast Guard cutter on a combat patrol in Vietnamese waters, with a primarily Vietnamese crew. On the 21st of December the final two ships of Coast Guard Squadron Three were transferred to the Vietnamese Navy in Saigon. These two ships then proceeded to Subic Bay in January for refresher training conducted by RONTREE and Navy personnel.

Coast Guard Squadron Three was disestablished on 31 January 1971 ending another chapter of Coast Guard history.

## CHAPTER 4

### PORT SECURITY AND WATERWAYS DETAIL

One of the missions of the Coast Guard is Port Security in United States ports. The Coast Guard is also responsible for the safe loading and unloading of dangerous cargo. It was recognized early in the course of the war in Vietnam, that some sort of port security and dangerous cargo safety was needed. The port of Saigon was just a big disaster waiting to happen. On 4 August 1965, COMUSMACV initiated a request for a Coast Guard Port Security Officer to be assigned on TAD to the Commander, Capitol Military District for the Port of Saigon. The Chief of Naval Operations concurred and forwarded the request to the Commandant of the Coast Guard. The success of the Coast Guard officer sent to Saigon initiated a request from CHNAVADVGRP to CINPAC requesting the billet be made permanent.

The need for experienced explosives handling personnel became more obvious after the demonstrated ability of the Port Security officer. On 17 February 1966, COMUSMACV requested CINCPAC ask the Commandant for two Explosives Loading Detachments consisting of one officer and seven enlisted each. The ELD's were to be highly trained in explosives handling, port security, and be able to instruct others in these duties.

CINPAC forwarded the request to JCS and they in turn had CNO request the Coast Guard to provide them. The Commandant replied in the affirmative on the 8th of March. The two ELD's were sent, with ELD #1 located at Nha Be and ELD #2 at Cam Ranh Bay.

After several months of operation RONONE asked that the senior enlisted be upgraded to either a senior or master chief. It was considered important as the chief petty officer ran into difficulty with senior Army enlisted personnel and frequently was dealing directly on important matters with senior Army officers. The problem was accentuated in that ELD's could stop any US flag vessel from loading or unloading and basically had "carte blanche" to do what they had to to enforce regulations.

The ELD's were somewhat lacking in equipment as they were assigned away from the Coast Guard and attached to the Army's First Logistics Command. However, in the finest Coast Guard traditions they made do with what they had and what they could borrow from the Army. Much of their ability to borrow was due to the high esteem in which they were regarded. Once the word was out that ELD's were in-country, masters of vessels carrying dangerous cargo asked for them. Hairy situations were quite common with US and Vietnamese stevedores due to carelessness, drinking, and smoking, among others. At Duc Pho one-third of the ammunition was lost due to sloppy procedures and it was not uncommon to have ammunition barges with Vietnamese families living aboard cooking with open fires.

Most recommendations of the ELD's were followed including a recommendation of ELD #1 to move operations from Nha Be to Cat Lai in

May 1967. In August Nha Be was hit extremely hard by the VC and had ammunition still been being unloaded there a disaster could have occurred.

A common problem in the handling of ammunition was smoking. The Army military policeman assigned for security were the most common violators though the merchant seamen were not far behind. One Coast Guardsman was assaulted by seamen who did not like being told about not smoking on deck.

In the port of Da Nang, Division Twelve provided an inspection and advisory team for dangerous cargo handling on a not-to-interfere basis with normal duties. Though extremely useful they could not provide the necessary service and in August of 1967 Commander Naval Support Activities Da Nang requested a full-time ELD team. In October a similar request was made by the port authorities in Qui Nhon in the aftermath of a potentially disastrous incident. The latter request was generated when a bomb dropped into an LCM killing the coxwain and one other man. The subsequent explosions would have caused the greatest disaster of the war had not the LCM drifted away from the ammunition ship.

February 1968 provided considerable activity at Cat Lai for ELD #1. An unloading merchant ship took nine rounds of recoilless rifle fire and started to burn. The ELD team charged the hoses and put water on the deck, manned winches and stowed ammunition located on deck, and finally got the Vietnamese stevedores to cover the hatches. A second incident involved a direct hit on an ammunition barge loaded with 81 mm mortar rounds. The barge started to burn and the 1st class engineman

assigned to the ELD boarded the barge. Finding that the fire hoses would not reach he commenced fighting the fire using his bare hands and buckets of water. Six pallets of mortar shells were burned before the fire was extinguished.

The ELD's for Da Nang and Qui Nhon were provided and not long thereafter the Port Security Officer called on the new port commander of Qui Nhon to discuss extremely hazardous conditions at Vung Ro Bay which were noted by the officer-in-charge of ELD #3. Immediate corrective action was taken and several army officers relieved on the spot. A TAD unit was set up for the port of Vung Tau made up of personnel from the other ELD's and so there were now five ELD's in-country.

The ELD's were active in teaching as well as supervising. They taught U.S. Army and Vietnamese boat coxwains how to handle small boats and perform maintenance on outboard motors. The ELD's gave instructions in port fire fighting and pier inspections. They instructed Vietnamese army stevedores in the techniques of blocking and bracing cargo.

In January 1971 the Coast Guard proceeded to train Vietnamese personnel in the safe handling of ammunition. The first eight ARVN officers completed on-the-job training in September. These officers were distributed among the various ELD's to assist in further training of ARVN personnel. The Vietnamese learned quickly and soon took over the bulk of supervising the offloading of ammunition under the supportive eye of ELD personnel. Some masters offered some objections to the arrangement, but these died with the obvious competence of the Vietnamese



ELD teams. Training continued and the Senior Coast Guard Officer, Vietnam presided at a graduation ceremony in Cat Lai for twelve Vietnamese explosive loading specialists in which graduation certificates were provided and a lavish buffet prepared by the wives and girl friends of the graduates.

In early February of 1973, the final retrograde was back-loaded thus effectively ending the role of the Coast Guard Port Security and Waterways Detail.

## CHAPTER 5

### AIDS TO NAVIGATION

The Coast Guard involvement in Vietnam brought with it men trained in the various duties of the Coast Guard. Soon their expertise was exploited and once they became involved they were frequently called upon. Eventually an improvised Aids to Navigation (ATON) advisor billet was established at COMCOGARDACTV which subsequently became permanent.

COMUSMACV requested a buoy tender in early 1966 and the CGC PLANETREE was deployed that spring. Her job was to set petroleum (POL) buoys for offloading fuel. Though requested by MACV it appeared as though the PLANETREE was unexpected. Most things happened by accident or by improvising. Yet with the lack of services, support and other handicaps the PLANETREE was able to set 16 large POL buoys in four Vietnamese ports.

Once the PLANETREE demonstrated its expertise more requests came in such as marking a newly dredged channel, marking coral reefs, positioning mooring buoys, and so forth. The Coast Guardsmen that were trained in Aids to Navigation did attempt to fulfill these requests even under adverse conditions such as setting buoys from an LCM in 6 to 8 foot seas and using such navigational aids as VC tree, grassy

knoll, prominent rock, etc."

As more aids were set, MACV was hoping the Vietnamese lighthouse tender CUU LONG would be able to service the aids. However, the Vietnamese did not have the equipment or personnel for full A to N support of U.S. buoys. A full-time deployment of a Coast Guard tender was requested but this was denied. However, frequent deployments were promised.

In May of 1967, Coast Guard personnel were requested to set some "oil drum" buoys in Vung Tau Harbor. To do this the men of Division Thirteen used a cherry picker on an LCU. However, they were handicapped by the Army using only two small red flags as position markers over a quarter-mile away. The mission proved difficult and the Army replaced the flags with 4' X 8' plyboards nicely painted brown and green to blend into the background.

Army transportation officers were responsible for the harbors and when the CUU LONG entered port they would act as advisors. The Vietnamese were too polite to argue with these Army advisors when they were told to set the buoys in accordance with the U.S. system rather than the Vietnamese system when the advisors became adamant. Considerable time was consumed by buoy tenders switching the buoys to the Vietnamese system.

Besides resetting buoys in the primary harbors, the IRONWOOD relieved and repositioned buoys in the Bassac River in 4 days which compared favorably with the 42 days it took the CUU LONG. The IRONWOOD also confirmed a harbor pilot's suspicion that a sandbar was creeping across Vung Tau harbor by the simple expedient of running aground on it.

August of 1967 brought a request from CINPAC to have the Coast Guard tasked with the interim responsibility for the installation, maintenance and servicing of U.S. sponsored aids in Vietnamese waters until the RVN Directorate of Navigation could assume responsibility. The Coast Guard accepted the mission.

All Coast Guard units in Vietnam assumed the role of Aids to Navigation personnel in addition to their normal duties. They received reports of outages, received requests for new buoys, and conducted surveys to assist in establishing suitable navigation routes. The outages were mainly caused by collisions and target practice by friendly forces using rifles and grenades. Another problem with lighted buoys was the constant replacement of batteries. The Vietnamese found that they could find a better use for batteries in their junks and Coast Guard personnel had to in turn use car batteries as a temporary replacement.

When buoy tenders arrived in Vietnamese they were kept rather busy with a pre-established schedule and work list. However, as soon as it became known that a buoy tender was in the area requests would pour in for services. A tender established a light on a wrecked and beached tug as a vital navigation aid. The tug was also a forward observation post for the VC. The NAVAID was important to naval units operating in the area, used as a target for reference by the Marines, and continued to be used by the VC knowing that the American forces would not destroy such an important navigational mark.

Range markers were a type of aid that tenders often constructed or replaced. The BASSWOOD was to replace one for the fifth time in as many months. A range dayboard was to be installed in the graveyard of a

small village. As the board was being hoisted by a small block and tackle an old man calmly cut the line and walked off with the board. That made the sixth time.

Vietnamese lighthouse service personnel were assigned to temporary duty aboard Coast Guard buoy tenders when the tenders arrived in-country. This relationship was expected to and did foster an unprecedented interest by the Government of Vietnam in Aids to Navigation. Together they reactivated and automated Vietnamese lighthouses, and activated U.S. sponsored lights. While servicing lighthouses and other aids the tenders would also provide services to the local populace such as MEDCAPS.

A timetable was set up for the turnover of responsibility of the aids from the Coast Guard to the Directorate of Navigation. Vietnamese Aids to Navigation Structures (VANS) were constructed under contract to replace aids such as buoys and ease the workload of the single Vietnamese buoy tender. The CUU LONG, however, proved to be the stumbling block in the turnover. She was old, had obsolete engines, insufficient funds, and lacked a master and deck mechanic due to low wages. The latter situation was rectified when the Vietnamese Navy filled the billets. Other deficiencies were corrected with an increase in funds and a reorganization of the Directorate of Navigation to combine the Hydrographic and Lighthouse services.

The turnover started in January of 1972 and the last servicing by a Coast Guard buoy tender took place in the spring of the same year. The Directorate of Navigation assumed responsibility for all aids to navigation in December 1972.

In South East Asia another type of Aid to Navigation was established by the Coast Guard. It was called LORAN (Long Range Aid to Navigation). The purpose of LORAN was to provide a means of electronically aiding the mariner and aviator in an area where surface aids were almost non-existent, the waters relatively uncharted, and the sky frequently overcast due to the monsoons.

## CHAPTER 6

### SHIPPING ADVISOR/MERCHANT MARINE DETAIL

The escalation of the war in Vietnam meant that many supplies had to be transported by ship. Very little of this precious cargo could be carried in Navy vessels and as a result there was a tremendous buildup of merchant vessels under Military Sealift Command (MSTS) contract. The seamen manning these vessels were frequently not of the highest caliber, had considerable money, and could get into trouble both on board and ashore.

The merchant officers and shipping companies complained about the lack of a merchant marine detail and finally in August of 1966 MSTS requested MACV to provide Coast Guard Merchant Marine Detail personnel. In December of the same year a marine inspection officer was assigned to Saigon.

Coast Guard officers assigned to merchant marine details have considerable authority when dealing with merchant vessels and personnel. They have authority to remove sailors from ships, stop a ship from sailing, order violations corrected, among others. To perform his duties well the Coast Guard officer assigned must be a diplomat, a judge, a "dutch" uncle, and have a sense of humor.

Cases investigated by the marine inspection officers included suicide, missing at sea, assaults, marijuana, desertions, failure to join, gross misconduct, stabbings, drownings, pilfering cargo, sodomy, drunk on duty, incompetence, flag desecration, murder, sabotage, expired licenses, violation of statutes and regulations, hard narcotics, malingerers, racial incidents, and verbal abuse to a Coast Guard officer in the performance of his duty. A constant problem was merchant seamen getting into trouble ashore. Though the seamen were mainly able to do it by themselves, they were often the subject of Army discrimination. Complicate this with the authority of the Army military police to arrest them and the Army to courts-martial them and you easily had many problems. Courts-martial was not the normal procedure because of many sticky legal problems. The matter could normally be resolved by the efforts of the shipping advisor or the union representatives. In many cases the seaman voluntarily surrendered his license to avoid prosecution and was repatriated back to CONUS. One man was given a General Courts-martial for murdering a shipmate.

Rather than try to give a full account of the cases handled by the Merchant Marine Detail a few thumbnail sketches should suffice:

- the radio operator who refused to fly from Saigon to Cam Ranh Bay because he was supposed to have had first class jet travel all the way from the Continental United States (CONUS) to his ship. There was no jet service available.
- the voluntary surrender of a license by a 77 year old first mate who could not see other ships close by in daylight.



- relieving the master of a vessel who was intoxicated during ammunition handling
- removing a flag desecrator from his ship
- arranging a military guard for a merchant vessel whose crew had not been paid in several months and were going to leave the ship. In a similar case in 1964, 150 sampans stripped a liberty ship clean within 24 hours of abandonment
- seaman running a "house of ill-repute"
- the abusive seaman with a prosthetic leg who woke up to find it had been thrown overboard
- and many others

The cases described above were routine, but there were others more unusual. In August 1969, the MMD officer received word that a seaman was sailing on an altered license. Upon investigation it was found that he was sailing as Chief Mate on a forged Master's license. In his possession were 21 blank counterfeit Coast Guard merchant marine licenses. He was also wanted by federal and local authorities for larceny of a half a million dollars.

The officer in charge also investigated cases where merchant vessels had been fired upon while transiting the Saigon River and other waterways. Subsequent to the SS COLUMBIA EAGLE mutiny the three MMD officers took testimony from the 24 crewmen that had been put off in lifeboats.

The signing of the peace treaty for Vietnam lessened the amount of U.S. flag merchant vessels arriving in Vietnam. This reduction negated the need for a Merchant Marine Detail and their duties were returned to the United States Consular Missions.

## CHAPTER 7

### SENIOR COAST GUARD OFFICER VIETNAM

The post of Senior Coast Guard Officer Vietnam was established on 15 August 1970 when RONONE was disestablished. The main purpose of the post was to coordinate Coast Guard activities and provide support for the Coast Guardsmen in-country.

His job included arranging for transportation for Coast Guardsmen arriving or departing Vietnam. This included normal rotation tours, R & R flights, emergency leave arrangements, and the returning to CONUS the crewmen relieved from the ships turned over to the Vietnamese.

Other duties included administrative control of most Coast Guard personnel in-country and operational control of the Aids to Navigation detail and all buoy tenders deployed to Vietnam. He served as a liaison to NAVFORV for the turnover of Coast Guard assets when specific turnover personnel were not attached. SCGOV also served on the operations staff of NAVFORV and worked closely with MACV.

He provided delivery service to Coast Guard ships of men and supplies, arranged USO shows, and assisted in Civic Action Projects. SCGOV requested the cutters seek out fellow Coast Guardsmen assigned to various Army bases throughout Vietnam as these men were "suffering from cultural shock by having to live with the Army".

Besides helping the Coast Guard, he also gave aid to the Vietnamese when they needed supplies for the cutters previously turned over. On 11 February 1973 the post of Senior Coast Guard Officer Vietnam was disestablished.

## CHAPTER 8

### MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

#### Coast Guard Exchange Pilots

In April 1968, three Coast Guard helicopter pilots were assigned to the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang. Pilots were assigned there until November, 1972, while their USAF counterparts were assigned to stateside Coast Guard air stations. One of the Coast Guard pilots was killed in a rescue attempt. He was attempting to pick up U.S. personnel and on his second attempt took heavy ground fire, touched down, and his "Jolly Green Giant" burst into flames.

#### Marine Police Advisor

This position was relatively shortlived having existed only for the period 7 May 1970 to 18 March 1971. The duty of the marine police advisor included collecting, preparing, and cataloging a law library of pertinent Vietnamese laws and decrees. These included maritime law, ship inspection regulations, ship licensing, crew licensing, motorboat licensing and inspection, fisheries law, navigation laws, etc. A secondary duty was helping the Vietnamese Marine Police obtain suitable boats.

#### WHEC Turnover Liaison

This position was established in June 1970 to assist in the turnover

of the cutters BERING STRAIT and YAKUTAT to the Vietnamese which was accomplished on 1 January 1971. The post was disestablished on 31 January 1971.

Additional cutters were to be turned over and much of the initial liaison was accomplished by SCGOV, and on 30 September 1971 the position was re-established. After the transfer on 21 December 1971 of the cutters COOK INLET and CASTLE ROCK the position was again disestablished.