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To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

IN REFERENCE TO Vietnam Veteran Vic Campbell

Verify Service - USS O'Callahan (DE-1051) Vietnam

I served in USS O'Callahan (DE-1051) from 1972 to 1975 as an MM3 in "R" Division. I arrived as the ship refitted for its second deployment to Vietnam. After a period of refit and retraining the crew, the ship made a third deployment to Vietnam, departing in October and lasting through the end of the war in late January 1973. It returned to San Diego at the end of March that year.

Our shipmate, Vic Campbell, served as our Communications Officer during this deployment. From my position in the "R" Division, I would occasionally see Mr. Campbell, especially if our watch duties coincided in port. Our total ship's complement consisted of approximately 190 enlisted personnel and 16 officers, with several additional crew and officers added during this deployment to support our new (at the time) helicopter capability. The helicopter was designed for anti-submarine warfare, but it proved to be a valuable logistical support tool in Vietnam. It was used a few times as a scout and spotting platform for gunfire missions.

Our ship was designed to serve primarily as the protective escort and defensive support for battle groups with Aircraft Carriers and as a gunfire support platform for troops ashore. We never operated with a Carrier but were almost exclusively used to support South Vietnamese troops ashore with naval gunfire support in the region of the DMZ, specifically near the mouth of the Cua Viet River, an artery for enemy supply.

In this area, the Navy assigned the name "Point Allison" and designated five or six gunfire support stations a couple of miles apart up and down the coast. Ships were rotated between the stations based on the need for firepower, fuel and supply situations, and technical capacities. "P," "Q," "R," "S," and "T" were the stations, with "P" (Papa) being the most northern and most likely to receive counterbattery from the hills near the DMZ. Each of these positions was a "box" that the ships stayed in, making "gunfire" runs to the beach at slow speeds (approximately 2 or 3 knots). The slow speed created a "moving enemy target" that was easier to track for accuracy using radar navigation and analog computers. The slow speed also made our ship a promising target, both in the moonlight and during the day.

The gulf was relatively shallow in this region, characterized by a coastal “shelf” extending from the beach and the river's outflow. The water in this region was typically brown. At one point, we accumulated sand in our shaft bearings and had to spend a few days repairing them in the dry dock in Sasebo, Japan. We did not discover that the bearings were damaged until we were leaving the port, which had been drydocked for other reasons, and we had to return to fix the corroded shaft bearings. We made our fresh water from the local source, using the heat of our boilers. So **we drank Tonkin Water and Cua Viet River water whenever we were in the area.**

On several instances, our bombardment of coastal and river boats released large numbers of rice bags and other cargo into the river and the gulf. These were always considered hazards to navigation, but also potential threats with the ability to camouflage swimming sappers that might reach us with a mine or other weapon. When nearby, these bags were usually fired on with our machine gun to destroy them.

For one two-week period before Christmas, we were taken off the “gunline” and sent to assist USS Bainbridge near Haiphong Harbor, where we would stand by to help with Search and Rescue (SAR) for the Linebacker II campaign to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. Sadly, none of the dozen B-52s shot down, or any of the Navy planes lost, were able to get over water before they crashed. After that mission, we were sent BACK to the “gunline.” There were brief trips to Subic Bay, P.I., or Kaohsiung, Taiwan, for supplies and gun barrel replacement, but we always returned to the “gunline.”

Our ship used JP4 fuel. The helo used JP5. (Today's ships do not have boilers but use gas turbines just like a jet airplane - so they only have to carry one kind of fuel for the ship AND the aircraft -- JP5). Our ship logs will show that we experienced a fuel leak in our freshwater system for about a week due to a microcrack between the water and fuel tanks. The crack occurred because of excessive gunfire from our two 5”54 gun mounts. The consistent recoil was stressful to the metal bulkheads throughout the ship. We ran out of canned drinks within a day of discovering our fresh water was contaminated. We made a quick trip to Subic Bay (probably a standard logistical run anyway) and had the tanks examined and re-sealed. For at least a week, everything we drank and showered in was contaminated with JP5, which also left us smelling a bit like diesel.

AFTER the ceasefire of January 27, we no longer fired our guns. We were assigned to the Northern Gulf to direct shipping AWAY from the minefields, which could only be addressed once mine-sweep ships could be brought into the area. On release from Vietnam waters, we stopped in Yokosuka, Japan, and crossed the Pacific via Midway and Hawaii to return to San Diego. While there are other incidents and port calls in the ship's history, I hope the material here will help OUR SHIPMATE, Ltjg, Vic Campbell, **verify our proximity to the Cua Viet River and its waters.**

Sincerely,

Gene J. Mazza, MM3, “R” Division, USS O’Callahan (DE1051) 1972-1975