

The gun line was mostly boring waiting interspersed with repetitious firing. The worst missions were "harassment and interdiction" (H&I) firing. It was usually done at night, all night long at thirty minute intervals. These were unobserved (no spotter) gunfire to pump bullets into the jungle where the Vietcong "might" be hiding. We fired a lot of rounds into Elephant Valley while sitting in the harbor at Da Nang. It was supposed to keep the VC awake so they would be tired and lower their morale. If it didn't work on the Viet Cong it sure worked on all of us aboard the ship. What little sleep time we were allowed was now punctuated by the sound of shells being fired all night causing the decks to rattle every few minutes.

We took our only combat casualty one night during H&I fire. A sailor on duty in the 6 inch turret disappeared after he was relieved by the next watch. The ship was rolling in nasty weather, and the turret was trained outboard toward land. It was thought that as he climbed out of the hatch at the rear of the turret he may have slipped and tumbled over the side. In the dark the lookouts would not have seen him go overboard. I remember the rumors that flew about the ship about a man overboard and once again the crew was never given a full explanation or even a confirmation that such an event had actually taken place.



During the month of July, OKLAHOMA CITY fired 2,292 rounds of 5"/38 and 2,597 rounds of 6"/47 projectiles while conducting a total of 76 naval gunfire support missions. The expenditure of such large amounts of ammunition required constant work parties at sea to replace our supplies.

**Ammunition transfers were accomplished pretty much like refueling, but instead of hoses it was pallets of shells and powder that crossed the transfer rigging. Here we were pulling alongside the USS Chara AE-31. Her decks were loaded with**

**pallets of 5 inch and 6 inch projectiles and powder cases. Again, she held her course and speed while we maneuvered alongside.**



**On our fo'c's'l the rearming detail had laid out charged fire hoses and rigged the transfer lines. The rigging passed over a tripod that was raised on top of the six inch gun turret with the cable anchored to the main deck on the port side. Plywood sheets were laid out to protect our nice teak deck. Everyone wore life jackets because even a slight mishap could send a man over the side.**



**Pallets of six inch projectiles started rolling over on a trolley that rode on the transfer cable. The Chara's crew operated winches to control movement, while a man on the Okie Boat gave signals with colored paddles. With this visual coordination between the winch operator on the Chara and the man on the Okie Boat directing the operation the procedure went very smoothly. The pallets were wrestled to a stop as the cables were slackened. Then a hand operated lift, assisted by a shove, was used to move the pallet to the opposite side of the ship. Meanwhile, back aft the Chara was sending over pallets of powder cases. Both**

ships' crews were pretty busy for a while. Ammunition transfers usually took an hour and forty five minutes to two hours.



After the pallets were aboard they were broken down and each projectile and powder case was hand carried to the magazines forward below the turret. Projectiles were loaded forward because they were heavier. The lighter powder cases were loaded aft because they were easier to carry the long distance forward on rolling decks. Each projectile and powder case was transferred down five deck levels to the magazines. Here the crew use slides rigged on the ladders to move the six inch powder cases.



To get the ammo to the appropriate magazine the crew would line up, man by man, from the point of delivery, all the way along the deck and down several levels to the storage area. The shells and powder containers would then be passed along, hand over hand, until they reached their final storage compartment. This was back breaking work that went on for hours and was even worse if your place in line was near a hatch or ladder which required stooping over or balancing on a ladder while handing the ammo to the next poor slave or using a sling to reach the next lower deck. One misstep could result in crushed fingers or sprained wrists.



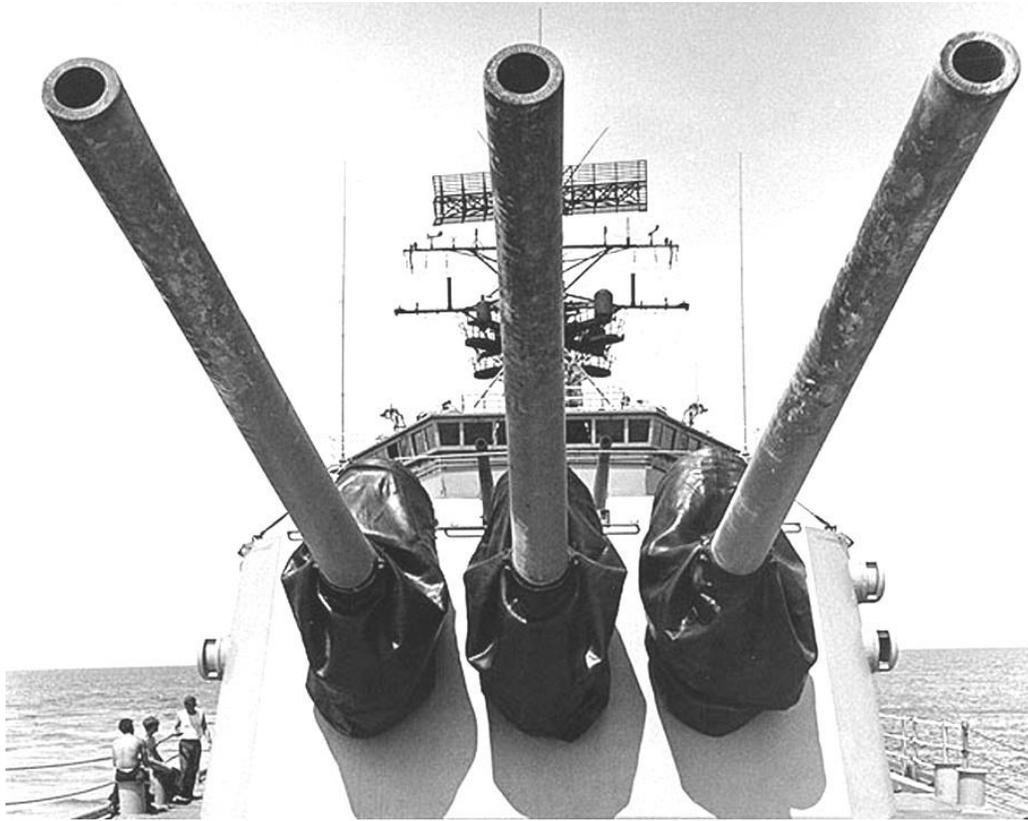
While assigned to one such Ammo work party the ship took a sudden roll causing me to lose my balance and fall from a ladder and crack my knee on the deck below. In great pain I finally limped over to sick bay (infirmary) and because of the seriousness of the injury I was passed off from the enlisted hospital corpsmen to an officer who was an actual doctor. (A word about Navy doctors at the time. While most were very dedicated, knowledgeable physicians, there were inevitably a few who were young and inexperienced or incompetent and couldn't maintain a successful practice in civilian life.) He advised me to just walk it off and keep putting more weight on the leg and suggested exercising the knee to loosen it up.. Yeah, thanks Doc, we can forget the x-ray and ignore the swelling and I'll get back to work.



**During UNREPS we also sent back empty powder cases. After gunfire missions we would save as many of the brass shell cases as we could recover (some might go over the side) and pack them in the same powder cases that we received them in. Prior to UNREPS the cans containing the spent shells were stacked on the missile house. After we received a new load of ammunition we sent the empties back to the ammunition ship. At least, most of them went back. Some became souvenirs - ash trays made from the bases of the six inch powder cases were very popular.**



**We wore out our gun barrels on this cruise.**





During a letter home I recount some of our activity aboard ship.

- June 28 - Refueled at sea, (night) commenced softening up the beach till 4:00 AM, Fired 700 rounds.
- June 29 - (day) rearmed at sea (night) continued firing all night, fired 500 rounds.
- June 30 - (day) pulled within 8,000 yds of Quang Tri, support fire as needed, watched jet and air strikes. (night) ARVN troops within 6 miles of city, continue mission support
- July 1 - Out to sea for Sunday morning rest. rearmed at sea - one man killed aboard other ship due to crushed skull while handling ammo.
- July 2 - lecture on safety methods pertaining to ammo handling, watched air strikes, (night) - ARVN troops in area, 3 miles South, must lighten shore bombardment, commence harassment fire 7 rounds every half hour all night. 22 killed in action.
- July 3 - support missions, (night) NVA launch counter attack against ARVN troops. Attack wiped out by Oklahoma City. Several tanks knocked out, 40 killed, Other cruiser hit.
- July 4 - holiday routine in morning, rearm at sea (night) stop 2nd counterattack, wipeout 2, 130mm guns.
- July 5 - (day) - support missions (night) come in very close for final shelling before ARVN attack
- July 6 - troops enter South side of Quang Tri City.





Several weeks are spent in the completion of gunfire support missions with breaks at sea only long enough for refueling, rearming, and replenishing from other 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet

logistics support ships. This was a long tough cruise followed by three TALOS missile exercises in the Okinawa operation area before making home port again.

By now I had also qualified to receive the country of the "Republic of South Vietnam's" Combat Medal for supporting their war against North Vietnam. This is a separate decoration from the U.S. Vietnam Service Medal and is a foreign decoration which was accepted by congress and the U.S. military in accordance with DOD 1348 C7. Six months of service in support of military operations in the Republic of Vietnam was the normal requirement for such an award.



The Vietnam Campaign Medal, established in 1966, was awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the United States using any of the following criteria:

1. Had served for six months in South Vietnam, or
2. Had served outside the geographical limits of South Vietnam and contributed direct combat support to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces for an aggregate of six months, or
3. Were assigned in Vietnam on January 28, 1973, and who served a minimum of 60 calendar days in Vietnam between January 29 and March 28, 1973, or
4. Did not complete the length of service required but were wounded, captured, or killed in action.

The medal was named the Vietnam Combat Medal by the Republic of South Vietnam but was more commonly described as the Vietnam Campaign Medal by U.S. Naval authorities.

The cloth portion of the medal contains the date 1960 which was the starting date of the war between South and North Vietnam. The ending date was to be added upon victory and completion of the war. South Vietnam's republic was dismantled after it lost the war in 1975 rendering the medal defunct without an ending date ever applied.

## NAVAL ENLISTMENTS

I enlisted in the Naval Reserve at age seventeen with my parent's written permission as required by law. Many of the sailors I served with were just teenagers. Many had enlisted by lying about their age and were under age at time of induction. I worked with one fifteen year old aboard the USS Oklahoma City and it was not uncommon to sail with others who were under the required enlistment age



Examples of the young men who served



When I was seventeen I could not vote and I could not legally drink alcohol. Yet I was expected to maintain all the job duties and responsibilities of men assigned to military service. The Navy had no such problem with age discrimination. Males of all ages worked together in a common mission to defend and serve our country.



“Never send a boy to do a man’s job” , ....Really? During the Vietnam War era, 35% of the Naval enlistees had failed to complete high school. Of the 2,556 Naval servicemen killed during the Vietnam war, 50% of them were under the age of 21.

**July 11, 1972** NVA attack on An Loc is thwarted by South Vietnamese troops aided by B-52 air strikes. From our ship we can see air strike secondary smoke as the bombs explode and can feel vibration of the bombs thru the water over a mile a



**July 19, 1972** South Vietnamese troops begin a major counter-offensive against the NVA in Binh Dinh Province. With U.S. air support; battles end on September 15 and ARVN is successful in recapturing all but the northernmost part of the province Though the peace talks resumed, heavy fighting continued in South Vietnam. A force of 8,000 to 10,000 South Vietnamese troops moved north toward the district capital at Hoi An in the communist controlled Binh Dinh province. The troop movement marked the beginning of a counteroffensive in the coastal province to retake territory lost to the communists in the early days of the Nguyen Hue Offensive. Saigon's forces succeeded in taking Hoi- An two days later, but lost the western half of the city one week after that.

**July 22-27, 1972** While En route to Yokosuka, Japan the ship completes its TALOS missile firing exercises in the Okinawa area.





During one of our test fires a missile failed to fully ignite, (hence the slower speed and ability to photograph) and actually turned back towards the ship before exploding in the sea about a mile away.



We had a small Marine contingent aboard to guard the nuclear weapons systems. They were always having drills which would require them to rush about the ship to respond to a nuclear emergency during a drill. They took great delight in running down the passageway's screaming, "Give Way" and knocking anybody aside that might not have seen them coming.

The Duty Weapons Officer kept the keys to the warhead magazine. **A hatch in the deck in the Special Weapons Office opened to a ladder that descended two decks to another locked hatch in the deck above the warhead magazine. This was alarmed, like all accesses to nuclear weapons spaces. Before we opened the hatch an armed Marine guard was posted at the office door. Only personnel designated by the Captain were allowed into the office when the hatch was open. The Marine was authorized to shoot to kill anyone who tried to enter who was not on the Captain's list and who did not have a photo badge.**

**August 10, 1972 - September 21, 1972** USS OKLAHOMA CITY returned to Yokosuka for a programmed upkeep and maintenance period at the Ship Repair Facility, Yokosuka, Japan. This upkeep period evolved into the second phase of OKLAHOMA CITY's incremental overhaul. Restricted yard availability kept her in Yokosuka until 22 September. The overhaul saw many changes to the internal appearance of the ship as well as overhauling machinery, engines and equipment and refurbishment of the TALOS missile system. Of extreme importance to the welfare and morale of the crew was the complete refurbishment of the crew's mess decks, galley and lounge which turned a previously drab area into a modern efficient dining and lounging area. Commander SEVENTH Fleet received calls by Japanese dignitaries during the overhaul including Mr. FUNADA, Speaker of the Japanese House of Representatives. During this time, [Aug. 23, 1972] the last U.S. combat troops depart Vietnam.



This was also the longest time I spent in Japan and allowed for some immersion into the local culture. Between my last layover in June and now, I had visited both Tokyo and Yokohama and had seen more of Yokosuka as I traveled back and forth to my apartment off base. Japan is a country that you either love or hate. To this day the

debate continues among visitors and military personnel about life in Yokosuka. Some find it a very exciting change in their lives and enjoyed the food and saw the sights while others found the city to be a strange, foreign place and wanted only to return stateside.



Unfortunately, at that time and place in my life I fell into the latter category. I failed to keep an open mind and a sense of patience required to assimilate with the Japanese culture. I refused to travel much or see any of the wonderful tourist and cultural attractions located in the nearby areas. My only memory of Mt. Fuji was seeing its snow

covered peak thrusting through the fog one day as we sailed near the coast of Japan. My letters to home speak of at least three trips to the Tokyo area yet I have very little recall as to the time spent there. I do remember taking a train into the city and feeling claustrophobic from the massive crowds of people everywhere.

I recall the “Pin Chico” parlors which seemed to be on every street. These were gambling devices that dropped steel marbles through a set of pins and obstructions from top to bottom with payouts based on final placement of the tiny balls. People would cram into these places and the flashing lights, noisy bells and clicking of the dropping marbles could be heard from the crowded street.



I saw no sights or attractions while in Tokyo. I stayed holed up in a first class hotel enjoying my quiet room and the luxury of a private bath. I watched a color TV and was fascinated to find that Japanese children's cartoons would have their characters spitting out bright drops of shiny red blood every time they were punched and kicked. I remember seeing a bizarre commercial for Kentucky Fried Chicken with Col. Sanders speaking Japanese. And I remember eating at a real McDonalds that I found in Yokohama and thinking I was in heaven.



. I couldn't read, write or understand the signage or language which hindered my travel and interaction with the Japanese people. The language barrier hampered everything from shopping and dining to sightseeing and travel.



The weather was hot, sticky and humid in the summer and cold, grey and foggy in the winter. One had to learn how to drive on the left side of the road which was quite a challenge for my postal runs around the base and my pedestrian and bicycling skills off base. Travel can be difficult, insular, and challenging. The Japanese are polite, but reserved due to the wide cultural and communication differences.



The actual city of Yokosuka now numbers over 400,000 citizens and even many years ago the streets were crowded, the traffic heavy and building space at a premium, causing structures to be multi layered and crammed next to each other.



The bustling streets were full of strange smells and outdoor “Hibachi” type diners lined the sidewalks as fry cooks whipped up strange batches of mystical food. Fish was the dominant commodity and hung everywhere from lines and racks drying in the sun. Fish odors wafted along the crowded streets.



To find anything even remotely spacious required a walk to one of the many temples or cemeteries sprinkled throughout the city. Even in death one remained crowded as family members were buried in stacks as multiple wooden tomb markers revealed their final resting place.





The east side of the city was mostly occupied by the U.S. Navy but commercial shipping was still an important economic necessity and civilian docks and shipping repair sites were everywhere.





Today's city of Yokosuka is cleaner, safer and quieter than thirty years ago. Much of the downtown area has been rebuilt to include wider, tree lined streets and indoor shopping malls and restaurants. Even the "Honcho" has been cleaned up and resurfaced.