

The USS Mullinnix— Its Business Is Destroying

By HAL DRAKE
S&S Staff Correspondent

ABOARD THE DESTROYER MULLINIX, Vietnam — "That guy's got guts," the red-bearded Navy chief said as he focused his binoculars on a lumbering speck. "I'd be out of that SOB and running."

The speck, a North Vietnamese truck or armored vehicle, skittered down the tortured strip of beach like an insect touched by match flame. Explosions crept after it — greyish puffs tinged with reddish sand, blossoms of smoke like lethal shrubbery with a spray of iron thorns.

The five-inch guns on the Mullinnix hurled away more packets of explosive — first the sharp, deafening slam, then the cloud of pungent fume and the small blizzard of seared cork and pulverized cardboard wadding that showered spectators along the rail.

Three-and-a-half miles offshore, 12 miles from a ruined town called Quang Tri, they were coldly moved by the magnified spectacle of impersonally-dealt death.

Sixty enemy soldiers had been moving down the beach in preposterously exposed fashion; 10 were seized up by the blasts, hideously mangled, flung aside.

One olive-colored vehicle was a flickering pyre and another swayed away frantically as the explosions grasped it, finally vanishing behind a sand dune.

A fleet of flimsy sampans was blown away. A coastal fishing village was erased. A laconic voice from the hovering Air Force spotter told it all: "Best shooting I've seen in six weeks. Terrific job. These guys really know how to pound it out."

But there were no cheers, handshakes or satisfied smiles among the youngsters on the Mullinnix, a 3,850-ton destroyer recently called from Norfolk and softer Atlantic Fleet duty to join a procession of warships called The Gunline. Their morale was good, but silent and cohesive — the kind of purposeful spirit common on a smaller ship with small town closeness.

The gunfire mission was little more than trained response. Many had other things to think about. For Ensign Alan Nibbs, who wore khaki cutoffs and a picturesque beard that made him look like Donald Sutherland in M*A*S*H, there was a hasty marriage and a two-day honeymoon — a necessity dictated by sudden orders that took him from the azure Virginia coastline to a beach that has a scrubby frowse of trees and was

clotted by the worst kind of pollution.

Others had trouble erasing images of a leisurely cruise to Vera Cruz, Panama and Curacao — and of sudden and painful goodbyes that were made just a few weeks before they passed their second day on a long line of gray vessels that pounded the shore and targets inland.

Some spoke their mind on sharper issues.

"I'm against this war," said Radioman J.C. Neil E. Tapman of Baltimore. "I don't think we're fighting for American freedom here. But if Nixon says this will get us out, fine. If not, well, we've wasted a few more people. We're all part of this ship and that's what keeps us going. We all trained for this job. Now we're doing it."

He had a beard too. Well-trimmed ones are tolerated, along with spirited opinions of dissent — providing they don't lead to demonstrations or sit-ins on the quarterdeck.

The hysteria of gunfire had shaken the exotic nude on the wardroom wall—the one that replaces a more pallid painting of two sailboats, posted for the benefit of wives and sweethearts when the destroyer is back in Norfolk. Cmdr. James R. Cannon, the captain, poured coffee for visitors and explained this paradoxical age of Aquarius and Zumwalt.

"Well, they're not enthusiastic about being here but they are enthusiastic about going to a new part of the world and being part of this ship. There are no hawks, as such, on board. But if you sit down and ask a man about the war, he might not sound too different from Dr. Spock."

Seaman Apprentice Roger Thornton, who is 19 and comes from Hartford, explained he was proud of the efficient way he and the others in the ship's magazine passed ammunition to gunners, who carried on a war he did not believe in.



Although much language is learned "by ear," the job is so much easier and faster if you have a couple of books around — a phrase book and a translating dictionary, for instance.

With the help of a good book anyone can build a basic vocabulary in only a few hours. And two fellows working together can learn twice as fast. Try it.

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Nixon Targets Give Commanders Freer Air War Decisions

By FRED S. HOFFMAN
WASHINGTON (AP)— U.S. commanders are much freer to make military decisions in this round of the air war against North Vietnam than were their predecessors during the 1965-68 bombing campaign.

President Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird have approved certain types of targets such as petroleum depots, railroads, bridges and MIG jet fields, and have okayed striking military targets anywhere they may be found in North Vietnam.

Acting within this relatively broad authority, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams and other top U.S. commanders may decide which specific sites to hit, how many planes to send, what types of bombs to use, and when to launch the raids.

Thus, as Pentagon sources explain it, Abrams acted within his discretionary power in ordering a big raid last week on a fuel-tank farm on the outskirts of Hanoi.

But Washington still retains the veto. Nixon and Laird could order bombing restricted or halted once again if there were a breakthrough in the diplomatic area, for example.

As a practical matter, Abrams and Adm. John S. McCain, the U.S. Pacific commander, keep the Pentagon informed on bombing plans. But the situation is a far cry from the days when President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara called the air-war shots.

Air Force generals and admirals have contended the unprecedented curbs prevented U.S. air power from being as effective

as they claimed it could have been.

The Johnson-McNamara policy of very gradual bombing escalation and tight control was dictated in large part by a fear that all-out bombing of North Vietnam carried a grave danger of bringing a major confrontation with Russia and Chinese entry into the war.

But Nixon administration officials seem to believe that danger is not great now, if it ever was.

So there is no 10-mile "prohibited" area around Hanoi and Haiphong, as was the case during much of the earlier war phase. And there is no 20-mile-wide bomb-exempt zone along the Chinese border, as there was in the 1965-1968 period.

Since the North Vietnamese launched their offensive in late March, Nixon has gone up the escalation ladder much more quickly than did Johnson.

In some respects, Nixon has gone further, notably ordering the mining of Haiphong and six other North Vietnamese ports. This was a step repeatedly urged by military leaders in the Johnson years, but always rejected on grounds it would provoke the Russians and Chinese.

But in this round U.S. bombers have not attacked some kinds of targets that were permitted by Johnson and McNamara—steel and iron mills, machine works, power plants and other facilities important to North Vietnam's economy as well as its war effort.

This may yet come, particularly the power plants. But the Nixon bombing program is concentrating for now on targets whose destruction might be expected to bring near-term results in South Vietnam.

Pull Pilot From Gulf In Dramatic Rescue

By SPEC. 4
ALLEN SCHAEFER
S&S Staff Correspondent

USS KITTYPHAWK, Yankee Station—Any call that comes over the squawk box in the readyroom of the Big Mothers, a detachment of armored rescue helicopters stationed with the 7th Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin, can mean only one thing—a pilot is down and needs help.

The message that came on the radio last Wednesday morning as Lt. James Spillman and his copilot, Lt. Robert J. Wright, were sipping coffee aboard a forward-cruising destroyer got them into their hulking helicopter and airborne within 15 minutes, heading toward a Navy A7 Corsair pilot from the Constellation downed in the gulf.

Led to the scene by the pilot's radio, the rescue team circled the area as PO3.C. Herbert C. Curry of Kilburn, Ill., dove into the water from the copter, which hovered 10 feet above the surface.

Curry had attached a hoist harness to Comdr. Thomas R. Wilkinson, commanding officer of attack Sq. 147, when an ene-

my shell landed within 15 feet of him.

"At three miles I started to pick up splashes from the guns. When we were over him it seemed like an eternity. As we hovered at 30 feet the shells started bracketing us — first one on our nose, another to starboard and on the other side," said Spillman, a native of Cocoa, Fla.

After the swimmer and pilot were hooked up, the helicopter started to make a wide swing out of the area guided by an escort Corsair that pointed the way with fire from its 20mm cannons. Moments after they picked up air speed, a shell hit where they had been hovering.

Even though they had snatched the pilot, the Big Mother team came very close to losing him again.

"The hoist cable snapped at the moment they pulled him in the aircraft. It was an act of God or something that it didn't snap on the way up. The crewman sort of fell on the commander and they rolled into the aircraft as we banked a turn," said Wright, who lives in Bethesda, Md.

Pacific Stars & Stripes 23
Friday, May 26, 1972



TAIWAN

Linkou	Fri. 1	Sat. 2
Grass Mt.	3	4
Tien Mou	5	6
Tainan	7	8
Ching Chuan Kang	9	10
Taichung	11	12
East-West	13	14

PHILIPPINES

Bamboo Bowl	15	16
Colin Kelly	17	18
John Hay	19	20

TITLES

1. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Paul Newman, Robert Redford (PG)
2. The Racing Scene*, Documentary with James Garner (G)
3. Villa Rides, Yul Brynner, Robert Mitchum (PG)
4. Unman, Wittering and Ziga, David Hamming, Carolyn Seymour (PG)
5. A Gunfight*, Kirk Douglas, Johnny Cash (PG)
6. Marooned, Gregory Peck, Richard Crenna (G)
7. The Abominable Doctor Phibes*, Vincent Price, Joseph Cotten (PG)
8. Viva Maxi, Peter Ustinov, Pamela Tiffin (G)
9. 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Kirk Douglas, James Mason (G)
10. When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth, Victoria Vetri, Robin Hawdon (G)
11. Topaz, John Forsythe, Frederick Stafford (PG)
12. Sudden Terror, Mark Lester, Susan George (PG)
13. The Cat O'Nine Tails*, Karl Malden, Catherine Spaak (PG)
14. Scrooge, Albert Finney, Alec Guinness (G)
15. Giant*, Rock Hudson, Elizabeth Taylor (G)
16. The Night Visitor, Trevor Howard, Max Von Sydow (PG)
17. Evel Knievel*, George Hamilton, Sus Lyon (PG)
18. Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, Gene Wilder, Jack Albertson (G)
19. Adios, Sabata*, Yul Brynner, Dean Reed (PG)
20. Hauser's Memory, David McCallum, Susan Strasberg (PG)