

In Tonkin Gulf

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Section D

Action breaks up Maui sailor's routine



UCHIMA, PLATIRO AND RAY with the Tonkin Gulf in the background

By Lyle Nelson

ABOARD THE U.S.S. CARPENTER IN THE TONKIN GULF — Not long ago the destroyer Carpenter slipped in to within 1,000 yards of a sandy South Viet Nam beach and opened up with her two five-inch guns at hidden Viet Cong wearing black pajamas.

Howard J. Platiro of Paia, Maui, went out on deck to watch the action and when he didn't see much he went back into his "office"—a room full of computers, transistors, black boxes, radio and radar gear and put on a pair of earphones. That way he could listen to what people were saying who hopefully knew what was going on.

Platiro won't forget the shore bombardment "because everyone was excited and things weren't so boring."

The boring part for Platiro and the Carpenter is constantly plowing through waters of the Tonkin Gulf between Red China's Hainan Island and North Viet Nam while serving as protective screen for the aircraft carrier Ranger launching air strikes at targets around Hanoi.

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Platiro and two other Island sailors on the Carpenter—Roger Uchima of Honouliuli on the Big Island and Ray Ray of Kahaluu, Oahu—prefer Naval gunfire activity if for no other reason than it: 1. breaks the Tonkin Gulf routine, 2. Gives water-weary sailors a look at the shore even though they didn't get to set foot on the shores where the Viet Cong roam.

"For the first time we got combat pay for the six days we were on shore bombardment," Platiro says.

Lobbing shells also tired Platiro out and life on a rolling destroyer is tiring enough without three days of G. Q. (general quarters) when everyone on the ship mans his battle station without leaving it.

Platiro worked 36 hours non-stop in one stretch because being an electronics technician third class he is the trouble shooter for about 10 different types of black boxes that he can fix. Half of the gear is secret stuff he can't talk about.

"My job always is to keep the gear up," he says "that is, in working order. During shore bombardment there was constant harassment for me and I only got in a few hours sleep at a time."

An observation plane kept the Carpenter zeroed in on the target which Platiro says "was just a sandy wasteland with caves the dive bombers hit."

Still he preferred the big gun play to endless patrolling with Ranger.

The Navy is satisfied with its shore bombardment duties but effectiveness is questionable.

Besides, the Navy's ability to mount a barrage of the intensity that reduced Japanese atolls in World War II is impossible because the battleships and most of the cruisers are only a memory and modern destroyers are loaded down with exotic mis-

sile gear rather than simple, old-fashioned gun barrels.

Where some destroyers in World War II had six five-inch guns, the Carpenter, given a facelifting at the Pearl Harbor Shipyard last year, has only two.

The Carpenter calls Pearl Harbor 'home.' Wives of most of the married crew members on the Carpenter live in the Pearl Harbor area.

The "routine" of the Tonkin Gulf consists of the Carpenter and other destroyers, all with elaborate electronic gear, making a continuous surace, underwater and air wath for any attempt by either North Viet Nam or Red Chia to go after the Ranger and immediately puff up the war

Th Carpenter also rushes

off occasionally on search and rescue assignments to pick up shot down pilots.

Guitar-playing Howard Platiro, with an assist from the Navy and Uncle Sam, thinks he has a future as a civilian electronics engineer.

A Filipino-Caucasian, Platiro grew up in Paia, hung around the pool halls, graduated from Maui High, where he was Junior Prom king, and joined the Navy for an electronics education since he had an aptitude for fixing radios.

He also showed aptitude in the prize fight ring but after three years of campaigning in the 139-pound class at Maui smokers his fight career was abruptly cut short —by a bus, not a knockout.

"I drove mv car into the back of a bus and cut my

chin," he says. "I figured that's it, the end of fighting. I had better hit the books." He has.

After two more years of destroyer life he figures on a four-year ride under the GI bill for an electronics engineering degree from the University of Hawaii, California at Berkeley or Washington State.

He includes Pullman because "after boot camp at San Diego I went up there to see my girl friend," he says, dropping the subject.

Platiro's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Platiro, have moved to 3606 Haleakala Highway, Kahului.

*Uchima is Japanese-Portuguese and was born at Haka-lau and graduated from Hilo High. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Yasuichi Uchima, live on Pua Street in Honou-ma. On the Carpenter Uchima is an unrated hospital corpsman striker. He figures on getting out in July.

Ray Ray is a Filipino-Spanish machinist mate third class with a strange name who grew up in Honolulu, attended McKinley, then moved to Iulu Street in Kahului and graduated from Castle.

He's a throttle man in the engine room, takes commands from the bridge like "full speed ahead," and works on the ship's steam turbines.

Platiro likes being a "tin can" (destroyer) sailor because it gives him a chance to work on more electronics gear than he would on a big ship.

And he doesn't mind the roll. Once the Carpenter tipped 42 degrees and gear he was working on plopped right into his lap.

He sleeps in the air-conditioned radio transmitter room because his sack in the after berthing area near the engines "is hot as hell," he says.

After seven months working in the deck gang, Uchi-

ma jumped at a chance to work in the air-conditioned sick bay.

He says he qualified for hospital corpsman because "I used to sew up dogs who were attacked by wild pigs on the Big Island."

Uchima sleeps on the operating table in the tiny sick bay. He says "I'd rather be on a ship than fighting on the beach like the marines."

He thinks playing a minor role in Tonkin Gulf operations is significant in that "not many men have the chance to be out here."

Most of the surgery done on the Carpenter, Uchima says, is eliminatine' tattoos.

What tattoos have Uchima and the ship's doctor cut off?

"A shark, an eagle" and two worms," Uchima says.



HAWAII

War has many faces.
Not all of them are up



Nelson

front. Lyle Nelson, the Star-Bulletin's veteran military writer, is off to tell about the men

often passed by in the headline news of battle, but without whom the rest could not carry on. This article is the first that will show some of the many ways Hawaii men are helping carry forward the national commitment in Viet Nam.

AND THE MANY FACES OF WAR