

ROGER RUFÉ

USCGC POINT GARNET (WPB-82310) – Feb68 to Apr69

Presidential Unit Citation – 6 Dec 68 to 31 Mar 69

Navy Unit Commendation – 1 Apr 68 to 31 Oct 68

Navy Unit Commendation – 1 Nov 68 to 31 Dec 68

May 4, 2021 – Walt Viglienzzone E-mail to Bill Carr

From Larzelere's book "The Coast Guard at War", page 231, Rog is quoted as saying, "We got no special training for the turnover. They just told us what they had in mind...I worked hard before the Vietnamese got there to prepare my crew. I told them, 'These aren't the most squared-away sailors, but we're going to have to work with what we got. And we're going to have to be sensitive to their differences.'"

May 4, 2021 – Roger Rufe E-mail to Bill Carr

...I departed Vietnam on May 1, 1969...as best I can remember, Rod relieved me a few days prior to that and turned over PT GARNET in Saigon on 16 May...I was in country from 1 Feb 68 to 1 May 69...all 15 months as CO PT GARNET. But I also had R&R's in Hong Kong and Bangkok as well as a 3 week shipyard availability in Sasebo. So, when not afloat, I got the grand tour of Asia. PRICELESS!

February 3, 2016 – Roger Rufe E-mail to Bill Norris

The rest of the story.... I was CO, PT GARNET from Feb 68 to April 69. I extended my one-year tour so i could make the turnover of PT GARNET as one of the first 2 WPBs, along with PT LEAGUE to be transferred to the VN Navy.

When the transfer date was delayed to May, Rod relieved me for the last month and he and Bill transferred the two boats in a ceremony in Saigon in May. Rod may have more to offer on the last month's OPS but my memories of my last couple of patrols with an all VNN crew was attempting to develop a taste for nuoc mam.

Golden Journeys Booklet – 2015

...had a 15 month combat tour in Vietnam as commanding officer of USCGC POINT GARNET (WPB-82310).

Coast Guard Awards and Medals Board – List of CG Units Coming Under Hostile Fire

August 30, 2004

Encl. (16) to COMDTINST 650.25b MEDALS AND AWARDS MANUAL

POINT GARNET – 15 Mar 68, 24 Sep 68, 21 Oct 68, 8 Nov 69, 20 Jan 69 and 15 Apr 69

October 1968 – Coast Guard Division Thirteen Newsletter

The GARNET did not waste any time getting back in shape after her yard period in Japan for her mission in Market Time. She was operating in a southern area closing the beach to take a sampan under fire in VC territory. Suddenly, the GARNET was on the receiving end of automatic weapons fire close aboard from the beach. She immediately returned fire with her .50cal machine guns and 81mm mortar suppressing the enemy fire and damaging the sampan.

WIKIPEDIA

On 16 May 1969 at Saigon Navy Base, PT GARNET was the second Squadron One cutter that was turned over to the Republic of Vietnam Navy as part of the Vietnamization of the war effort and she was recommissioned as RVNS Lê Văn Ngà (HQ-701).

VIETNAM MEMORIES

Roger Rufe

May 2021

Most of the excitement of my Squadron One Vietnam tour came at the beginning and at the end. It began when I was on leave after departing CAPE WASH in Monterey, California and prior to pre-Vietnam SERE training. On Christmas Eve 1967, I was wounded in a drive-by shooting outside my boyhood home on Long Island. I spent a week in the hospital but, with no permanent damage, was able to report for SERE training on time.

My flight in country was interrupted by the start of the Tet Offensive on 31 January 1968 which included an attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. TSN was closed to all traffic so our inbound flight was diverted to Tokyo for an unexpected overnight. When we arrived the next day to a devastated Air Base, I was told that there were still no scheduled flights but I could walk the flight line and try to hitch a ride on anything flying to Cat Lo where I was to report for Squadron One assignment. Anything turned out to be a small WWII era cargo plane loaded with bags of rice. There were no seats other than the one for the pilot so I sat on the rice.

My one overnight in Cat Lo was spent with the base under attack. The next morning I rode a daisy chain of 82WPBs to rendezvous with An Thoi based POINT GARNET on patrol in the Gulf of Thailand. Despite the rocky start to my VN tour, I thought it was good karma when I first sighted POINT GARNET and saw that her hull number was 82310.....CAPE WASH was 95310.

I quickly relieved Mike Meehan (CGA (64) so he could jump on the WPB that delivered me for his return daisy chain to Cat Lo and back to CONUS. We resumed patrol off the Cau Mau peninsula and POINT GARNET became my home for the next 15 months.

After about 4 months operating out of Division 11 in An Thoi on Phu Quoc Island, we sailed to Danang for temporary assignment to Division 12 pending further transfer to Sasebo, Japan for a 3 week overhaul. We were delayed there awaiting sea lift so we pulled one Div 12 patrol. My classmate, Division 12 experienced Gerry McGill, was aboard for local knowledge and to ensure I didn't get lost or do anything stupid.

Returning from Sasebo, POINT GARNET was assigned to Division 13 in Cat Lo where classmate Paul Blayne was the Division Ops Officer. He was aboard POINT GARNET for our first Div 13 patrol to assist with familiarization. He helpfully introduced us to "Sand Dune Sam". Paul was followed in the Ops job by classmates Carl Helman and later Walt Viglienze. So, for the entirety on my time in Div 13, my immediate boss was a classmate. I am grateful to all three for helping me navigate my frequent screw ups.

Toward the end of my tour, classmate Bill Norris' boat, POINT LEAGUE and my POINT GARNET were selected as the first 2 WPBs to be turned over to the VN Navy as part of the "Vietnamization" program. All was proceeding fairly smoothly until about the midpoint of the transition when we were half VN and half US crew. After a gunfire support mission, 2 of the VN crew got in a squabble about replenishing the ready service locker and one stabbed the other with his rigging knife.

I did what first aid I could for the sucking chest wound and called in a DUSTOFF to medevac the patient. Thankfully this was the only blood spilled aboard POINT GARNET during my tour. My last patrol was with an all VN crew after which classmate Rod Wilburn relieved me when I departed on 1 May 1969 at the end of my 15 month tour. Rod had POINT GARNET for a patrol or two then took her to the formal turnover ceremony on 16 May in Saigon.

My tour in Squadron One in Vietnam was relatively uneventful and I was blessed with a great boat and competent, dedicated shipmates. Most memorable was Master Chief Boatswains Mate Donald Horsley, surely one of the saltiest and most capable seaman ever to wear Coast Guard blue. He served for 44 years and USCGC HORSLEY is named in his honor.

I served in all three divisions, conducted 47 Market Time combat patrols, sailed the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea from Thailand to the DMZ, spent 3 weeks in Sasebo and had R&R trips to Hong Kong and Bangkok. Oh, and a mandated 2 day "cooling off" in-country R&R in Vung Tau (but that's another story).

While I had some concerns with the way the war was conducted, I was and remain proud of how our service answered the call and fought with "honor, respect and devotion to duty". And it was a privilege to be reunited with, serve alongside and be supported by so many of my Coast Guard Academy classmates.

First Turnovers

USCGC Point Garnet (WPB 82310) and USCGC Point League (WPB 82304) were selected for the 15-week pilot turnover program. Until turnover began, cutter crews had limited experience working with Vietnamese Navy personnel. A single Vietnamese liaison petty officer had been assigned to patrolling cutters. Language and cultural differences were important factors, affecting the success of turnovers. Rear Adm. Roger T. Rufe was a Lt. (jg) when he commanded Point Garnet in 1969. He said, "We got no special training [for turnover]. They just told us what they had in mind.... I worked hard with my crew before the Vietnamese got there to prepare them. I told them, "These aren't the most squared-away sailors, but we're going to have to work with what we've got. And we're going to have to be sensitive to their differences."

On 3 February 1969, VNN lieutenants reported aboard the two cutters at Cat Lo. Prospective commanding officers immediately relieved cutter executive officers and assumed their duties; relieved Coast Guard officers were transferred to staff assignments ashore. WPBs had a total of thirteen bunks for a crew of eleven; Vietnamese replacements used spare bunks, reporting aboard two at a time. As they were trained, two Coast Guardsmen came ashore and two more Vietnamese reported aboard.

The small size of cutter crews made effective training essential for continued operations. During turnover, WPBs continued to serve as regular components of Market Time operations, boarding and inspecting fishing vessels, providing gunfire support, and conducting SEALORDS operations. Everyone aboard had to be able to do his job manning stations, working on equipment, and standing watches. Joint communications were arranged with VNN and USN coastal surveillance centers so turnover cutters could communicate on both Vietnamese and U.S. radio circuits.

Training progressed rapidly with pilot WPBs achieving full VNN crews - only the Coast Guard commanding officers remained aboard until 15 April 1969. In evaluating his Vietnamese crew, Rufe said, "Capabilities were mixed. Lieutenant Sang was articulate and spoke excellent English. He was well-educated and from an upper-class family and was a reasonably competent seaman and seemed to know what he was doing. Some senior petty officers were good, too. But there were some who weren't so good."

Before cutters were turned over, operational readiness inspections (ORIS) were conducted to determine if VNN crews were ready to operate independently. LCDR D Gatto, Commander, Coast Guard Division 13, reported in his monthly summary, "A joint USCG, USN, and VNN team evaluated each as it performed underway general quarters, fire, collision, abandon ship, and damage-control drills. These drills were conducted entirely by the Vietnamese crew. Point Garnet was given an evaluation of 'good' while Point League was given an overall evaluation of 'very good.' The performance in the ORIs was a concrete demonstration that the Vietnamese Navy has the ability and expertise to properly operate WPBs.

pp. 231 & 232 , "The Coast Guard at War", 1997 By Alex Larzelere