

BOB STORCH

USCGC POINT CYPRESS (WPb-82326) – Oct67 to Jul68

Navy Unit Commendation – 1 Apr 68 to 31 Oct 68

March 16, 2021 – Bob Storch E-mail to Bill Carr

Attached are some comments about my tour in Vietnam. Since you said that articles you compile would probably be sent to CGA for use by cadets not familiar with our Vietnam experience, I included more background than I would with someone who was there. Hope this is the kind of thing you were thinking of.

With respect to the Thai gunboat, PGM-12, I believe that is the same one I daisy chained on with Dick Chapman. As I said, I think I was returning to Div11 from R&R via Div 13. For some reason, I want to say the Thai gunboat was covering patrol area 8, but could be wrong there.

Golden Journeys Booklet - 2015

...I received orders to Vietnam. In October, 1967, I reported to Coast Guard Squadron One in the Republic of Vietnam. I served as Commanding Officer of USCGC POINT CYPRESS (WPB-82323), first with Division 13 out of Cat Lo and later with Division 11 out of An Thoi.

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 CYPRESS – 2 Apr 68

December 16, 1967 - "Coast Guard Action in Vietnam" by Paul Scotti 2003 p. 151

The Philippine tug ALYEE towing four barges from Saigon to Cam Ranh Bay came to trouble when whipping seas submerged the last barge. If the captain stopped to get rid of the drag, the tug and other barges would be pulled under, yet he could barely make headway. Three cutters responded to the call with one of those being the PT CYPRESS.

WIKIPEDIA

PT CYPRESS helped with the rescue Philippine tugboat *Alyee* which was threatened by high seas while pulling four barges from Saigon to Cam Ranh Bay on 16 December 1967.

NOTES ON MY TOUR IN VIETNAM

Bob Storch

March 16, 2021

I started my tour in Vietnam with Operation Market Time in late October 1967 as CO, CGC Point Cypress (WPB 82326) assigned to CG Squadron One, Division 13 (one of three CG 82-footer divisions), Vung Tau, Vietnam. Vung Tau is near the central South Vietnamese coast. Division 12 operated from Da Nang, near the North Vietnamese border and Division 11 operated out of An Thoi, near the Cambodian border. I completed my tour in Vietnam as a spare boat crew CO and operations officer of Division 11, An Thoi. Spare boat crew COs replaced regular COs temporarily on patrols when they were not available for some reason.

Operation Market Time had three areas of operation:

- Inshore (river mouths to 20 miles offshore,
- Intermediate zone (20 to 50 miles offshore), and
- Offshore (50 to about 100 miles offshore).

The inshore zone was divided into nine patrol areas. CG's 82 footers could operate independently for 5/6 days without resupply and handled the nasty weather and accompanying heavy monsoon seas much better than the US Navy's smaller swift boats. The Swift boats were usually limited to twenty four-hour patrols. To attain maximum efficiency for Operation Market Time units, as the monsoon seasons shifted, Squadron One and the US Navy routinely redeployed their 82 footers and swift boats so that more 82s would operate in monsoon prone waters and swift boats in calmer areas.

In May 1968, I took Point Cypress to An Thoi, where she was reassigned to Division 11 to follow the monsoon

In Feb 1968 Point Cypress was on patrol in area 6A (I think) southeast of Vung Tau during the Tet Offensive. One night during that patrol, three steel hull trawlers from North Vietnam attempted to smuggle arms and supplies to the Viet Cong and NVA at different locations along the coast of South Vietnam. While not involved in the actual contact with these trawlers, Point Cypress was part of the Market Time picket line that prevented all three trawlers from reaching shore. I believe two were sunk and one turned back.

Daisy chaining was a term used to describe the process by which military personnel and equipment were moved from shore to underway units or unit to unit or to out of the way locations that were difficult to access by other means. People/equipment could theoretically

move from Da Nang in the north to An Thoi in the south and most places in between by daisy chain, although most transfers were relatively local.

The ability to transfer personnel and/or equipment between two 82s that were underway in challenging sea conditions, without damage or injury, was a testament to the ship handling and seamanship skills of the 82-footer crews.

When it came to working with larger ships, the challenges were even greater for the 82. On one patrol, Point Cypress was tasked with delivering a small sampan to one of the Coast Guard 311s that was on its last patrol, so they could deliver it to a state side museum. We rendezvoused with the 311 about 35 miles offshore in heavy seas. Because of the heavy seas, the 311 went dead in the water so they could provide a lee. While I would have preferred to approach with both underway, the 311 CO wanted us to come along side while he was drifting. My policy was that whoever was OD for the watch did the maneuver. In this case it was my 1st Class BM.

As a precaution, our port side 50 caliber machine guns were taken from their mounts and stored and all unnecessary personnel stayed on starboard side forward away from the action. We attempted to come along port side to the 311. The BM approached twice but had to break away because of the speed with which the 311 was drifting. On his third approach, we were able to get a line from the 311, pull alongside, and start the transfer.

However, we began drifting down the 311's starboard side and the BM couldn't get away from the drifting 311. I took the conn and got Cypress away from the 311 but not before her fantail sat down once on our port quarter. Two machine gun mounts on the port side were flattened and the pilot house sustained some damage. No personnel injuries and we still had the sampan!

After checking for additional damage and not finding any, I decided to try the transfer again. This time, I kept the conn and backed Cypress stern first toward the 311 so that I could better control how far we were from the 311. The maneuver worked, sampan delivered, 311 on her way home.

Cypress spent about two weeks alongside repair ship, then returned to patrol duties. Most of the 82-footer COs I worked with were classmates from CGA. To memorialize the incident, I was given a box of Captain Crunch cereal by a thoughtful classmate.

On a little more humorous note, on one patrol in Patrol Area 7, where the water was very shallow near shore due to silt from the river mouths, we were in one of the many unpredictable channels trying get closer to shore to check out some fishing boats. The XO had the watch and called down to advise me that the fathometer wasn't working, "it was reading zero".

I went up to the bridge, assessed the situation and advised him that the fathometer was working fine. We were aground!

No problem, we just backed off the soft bottom. Not uncommon in those areas but also not a situation you wanted to get caught in on an outgoing tide.

USCGC PT CYPRESS

Bob Storch

April 1968

The water along the southeastern coast of South Vietnam was relatively shallow for long distances off shore due to silting produced by various rivers along the coast. It was common for fishermen to build fishing structures (hooches) close in off shore to fish from in addition to from their junks, which frequently operated close to shore as well.

Getting in close to shore for boardings/inspections was challenging due to the limited number of poorly marked, shifting channels. Luckily, the bottom was sandy. It was not uncommon for 82's operating in close to run aground periodically. They were usually able to back off into the channel with little effort.

However, there had been instances in which 82's ran hard aground and had to wait for an incoming tide to lift them off the bottom, a potentially dangerous situation. The coastline in this area was considered enemy held territory but was not a free fire zone. Rules of engagement required permission to fire weapons, except in dire circumstances.

On or about April 2, 1968, USCGC PT CYPRESS was on routine Operation Market Time patrol in operation area 7E along South Vietnam's southeastern coast. PT CYPRESS was operating in a channel inspecting close-in fishing hooches during the afternoon when she was fired on by small arms from shore.

With permission to return fire granted, PT CYPRESS suppressed fire from ashore with 50 cal machine gun and 81 mm mortar fire. Noted several secondary explosions ashore. There were no casualties aboard PT CYPRESS.

After engagement, PT CYPRESS cleared the channel and resumed patrol.

Chap, I thought I knew exactly where the picture I wanted to send you was, but now I can't locate it. I'll keep looking and send if I find it.

Regarding my orders to Port Arthur, I don't remember receiving counsel from you and Bob before submitting my wish sheet, but I do remember saying every time I told the story about how I wound up in Port Arthur that I had thought, "Where else could they send me in the district?", just as you said in your email. In any event, I was a dumb ass for not finding out what other MIOs were in the 8th District. But thanks for trying to save me; I guess I wasn't listening. When I was about to leave PA, I wrote a letter to Bob Storch (I think) saying, "I know it's time to leave, because I'm starting to like it here."

NB: I need to set the record straight about where and how I met my wife. It's a bit of a complex story, the details of which I'll save for another time, but I did not meet her in Port Arthur. We met when we 18 year-old freshmen at the University of Dayton, where I spent a year, and we married in 1991, 31 years later.

Yes, the reserve officer was Clay Drexler. I believe he was the supply officer. He was very competent.

Bill