

TOM PENNINGTON

USCGC POINT ARDEN (WPB-82309) - Apr68 to Dec68
Navy Unit Commendation – 1 Jul 68 to 30 Jun 69

USCGC POINT DUME (WPB-82325) – Jan69 to Mar69
Presidential Unit Citation – 6 Dec 68 to 31 Mar 69
Navy Unit Commendation – 1 Jan 69 to 30 Jun 69

Golden Journeys Booklet - 2015

USCG Division 12, 04/68 to 03/69, Da Nang, Vietnam

- Commanding Officer - POINT ARDEN & POINT DUME
- Chief Staff Officer
- Relief CO for various WPBS
- POINT ARDEN overhaul in Yokohama, Japan
- After overhaul, took POINT ARDEN through Typhoon Bess; lost engine in the worst of the storm (USN estimated wind at 85 kts with 35 ft. seas. We almost foundered).

February/March 2012 Alumni Bulletin

...awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in armed conflict against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong communist aggressors from 2 April 1968 to 30 March 1969 during the Vietnam War. He conducted numerous naval gunfire support missions, resulting in the destruction of many Viet Cong junks, sampans and bunkers.

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 ARDEN – 25 Dec 68 and 26 Dec 68

TYPHOON BESS

Tom Pennington

September 2 through 6, 1968 - The Flash message came in 1 September 1968, the day before POINT ARDEN (WPB-82309) left for a patrol from Da Nang, South Vietnam. We headed just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam.

A North Vietnamese trawler, reportedly stuffed with explosives, arms and ammunition, was coming south. We were part of an operation to stop it. Having stuffed the ready boxes with 81mm mortar shells, we scrounged more ammunition and secured it in the main hold. The boat was ready.

Once we were on station, the anticipation of enemy action fast yielded to routine boardings. The patrol area extended from the DMZ to a line about ten miles south of the Cua Viet River. We spent that first day and the next close to the flat, sandy shoreline and more often near the DMZ than usual. A Navy cruiser covered the area farther out.

By morning of the third the placid, weather had yielded to a full overcast of clouds, a rising chop that overlaid the swells and frequent squalls that intensified as the day wore on. In mid-afternoon a call came from a fuel barge coming out of the Cua Viet River. We circled to refuel.

The rain fell so heavily it stung. It flattened the heavy chop and hid the barge until we were within only a few yards. The monsoon season was early. Against the recommendation of our engineer, I decided not to refuel. We'd be lighter for a fight and we could call again as the weather cleared after intercepting the trawler.

Late in the day the sea and wind rose. Without local fishing traffic or coastwise junks we hung around the DMZ. The cruiser that had been our offshore companion was gone. At 0105 on the 4th, Division 12 radioed that the Navy's task force commander was recalling to Da Nang everything afloat in our area. Tropical Storm Bess, not the onset of the monsoon season, was causing the weather.

We didn't know the storm's location or its path. We headed back southeast, parallel to the coastline. A following sea built steadily through the night. As the sea and wind grew rapidly, the boat surfed over and cork screwed with each swell. The port engine began to overheat, requiring frequent stops. The boat slowed as we hunted for a better course. When I arrived on the bridge our Master Chief greeted me with an expression that said "what now?"

We had passed Hue and the storm was worsening. It had developed into a typhoon. We slowed and turned northeast to face the storm, angling into the heavy sea. Still pounding heavily, the

boat wasn't rolling as before. Sea suction came more easily. The Division 12 Operations Officer called to alert us to expect an important call. We waited in the confused sea and tropical, wet warmth of the relatively breezy eye. It's a typhoon's deceptive lull.

The call came through. Elmo Zumwalt, then a Vice Admiral and Commander of US Naval forces in Vietnam (COMNAVFORV) was introduced by his deputy. He talked calmly and briefly, asking how we were doing. I reported we were "riding well" with only minor damage. He said to keep up the good work.

POINT ARDEN continued through the eye on a southeasterly course. I expected to reach Bess' safe semicircle, then eventually turn south and west toward Da Nang. We plowed into a dense, thickening fog. The boat shot up on a powerful high-speed elevator. We hit the storm's most dangerous wall.

A loud buzz broke through the roar. The port engine was down. I could feel the wind shoving hard from starboard. The helmsman shouted "I can't hold it!" The rudder was full over but the glowing compass ticked inexorably to port. We'd lost control despite the push of the starboard engine. I mentally scrambled to respond. A hint sounded in my head in the words of a Seamanship teacher: "rudder effect."

Turning back to the controls I doubled the speed of the starboard engine. It worked. The helmsman responded that he could steer. In less than fifteen minutes we slipped out of the murk.

We still pounded away but we could see ahead. The sea and wind eased. Within a few more minutes we turned south, edging toward a course homeward. The sky brightened.

I never saw the rogue wave that hit from our port side. It was so fast that I was slammed against the starboard bulkhead. Calling "Steady!" to the helmsman, I spun around, facing the clinometer that was mounted on the aft bulkhead. As I turned the scale accelerated beyond fifty degrees and settled at 67.5. We hung there. Crashes from below decks sounded as if the entire galley and all its carefully secured stock had broken loose on the mess deck.

Suddenly, the boat snapped back into its usual recovery.

We pushed West through the night. About 0330, the OOD called and asked for help identifying our first non-weather radar contact. It was Cu Lao Cham Island. We got a good fix and knew we'd be in Da Nang that morning.

When we moored, the Coast Guard Division 12 Commodore, LCDR Neal Nelson, was waiting at the gangway port on our home base, a U.S. Navy support barge (YR 71). LCDR Nelson extended his hand. Not understanding, I heard "welcome back."

Bess had left very few scars: spray had blasted off the top coat of paint in a few spots; the life raft, normally secured on a ledge just forward of and below the bridge, had broken loose but fortuitously wedged against the port lifelines; the starboard whip antenna had snapped in two and the paint locker was a mess, covered in paint.

Slipping out for a few minutes, I called my wife The storm had hit us on her first birthday as a married woman.

Back to work. We had a patrol to finish.

1 NOVEMBER 1967
TASK GROUP 115.1 HEAVY WEATHER BILL

References: (a) PACFLT SUPPLEMENT NR 1 To NWP 50A
(b) NWP 50A, Chapter 18
(c) CTF 115, OP-ORDER 201-67, ANNEX W
(d) COMNAVFORV OP-ORDER 201-67, ANNEX W
(e) Practical Navigator, Bowditch
(f) Knight's Modern Seamanship
(g) COMSEVEN THFKTUBST 3140.1 (Series)
(h) OPNAVINST 3140.32 (Series)
(i) H.O. Publications 118 and 119
(j) COMNAVSUPPACT DABABG NSG 122258Z Oct 67 (NOTAL)
(K) CTF 115 MSG 130245Z Oct 67 (NOTAL)

1. Purpose. The purpose of this bill is twofold:

- a. To amplify existing directives and establish doctrine for TG 115.1.
- b. To assemble, in convenient form, the essentials of the many existing publications dealing with heavy weather.

2. Typhoons. The destructive, tropical systems affecting Vietnam generally form in the vicinity of Truk/Guam and are called typhoons. Their movements are generally westward, gradually curving northward, then passing off to the northeast and dissipating. However, each storm is individual in nature and is fully capable of doing anything but following the general route.

During this typhoon season, which is normally from August through December, typhoons frequently cause extensive damage in Vietnam. Wind within these systems are often 100 knots and occasionally reach 200 knots with winds of 50 knots out to 100 miles from the center. The following data is based on observations at sea, but the careful mariner must utilize all of the information he can obtain and base his actions on the premise that timeliness is of essence.

- a. Approach. During the typhoon season, the following phenomena indicate a change in weather which should be carefully watched.
 1. Interruption of the regular diurnal oscillation of the glass. In the tropics, generally, the high is at 1000 and 2200 local time and the low at 0400 and 1600 local time.
 2. Sudden change in wind direction.
 3. Appearance of a long, slow swell.

4. Appearance of light, feathery plumes of cirrus clouds after the swell begins, fanning out from a white-ish area on the horizon.
 5. Sky becomes densely overcast.
 6. Darkness appears on the horizon in the general direction from which the swells initially approached.
 7. Barometer begins a steady fall.
 8. Seas pick up to heavy swell and wind-driven chop.
- b. Determining the Bearing of the Center. Face the wind and the center will bear about 115 degrees or 10 points to your right. Information on using radar to determine the eye is in reference (a) but certain phenomena may cause the apparent direction of the eye, by radar detection, to be incorrect.
- c. Size. Typhoons range from less than 100 to over 600 miles in diameter. The eye can be from 5 – 40 miles in diameter, with an average of 14 miles.
- d. Determining Distances. The barometer can give an idea of the speed with which the center is approaching. Usually speeds are in the order of between 3 and 18 knots. The accompanying table assumes a ship to be in the path of the storm:

AVERAGE FALL OF BAROMETER (per hour)	DISTANCE FROM CENTER (miles)
0,02 to 0.05	150 – 250
0.06 to 0.08	100 – 150
0.08 to 0.12	80 – 100
0.12 to 0.15	50 - 80

If the wind direction remains steady with increasing speed and a rapidly decreasing pressure, the ship is near or in the path of the storm. If the true wind direction is steady, with decreasing speed and rising pressure, the ship is on the storm's track, but safe behind its center.

e. Determining the Navigable Semi-Circle. : Place yourself on the storm track facing the direction of the storm movement. That portion to your right is as the dangerous semi-circle. If the wind veers, you are in the dangerous portion also, while a backing wind indicates a position in the navigable semi-circle. However, the terms safe and dangerous are relative and in the limited sea space of TG 115.1's responsibility, probably not of too much importance.

f. Classification. A cyclonic wind, working counter-clockwise in the northern hemisphere,, is classified by measurement of maximum sustained winds at the surface as follows:

- Less than 33 knots – tropical depression
- 34 – 63 knots – tropical storm
- More than 64 knots - typhoon

3. Tidal Waves. Although rare, these can wreak tremendous havoc to life and property. Tsunamis are commonly called tidal waves. However, are not caused by the tide, but by seismic disturbance ashore or in the Ocean.

The point directly over the disturbance is called the epi-center which is used as the reference point for predictions of speed. Tsunamis travel at speeds of about 450 miles per hour with 900 miles per hour having been recorded. It is doubtful if much damage occurs at sea unless a ship is directly at the site. Wave heights at sea are seldom more than 1 – 2 feet. It is when the tidal wave reaches shoal water that they can build to of over 50 feet and cause great damage. The most recent tsunami occurred in Alaska in 1964. The tsunami reporting center is based at Honolulu. If a ship cannot make a safe haven upon report of a tsunami, its best course would probably be to seaward expeditiously.

Storm waves, similar to tsunamis in action, are caused by strong onshore winds driving the water up over coastal lowlands.

4. Typhoon of 1944. In December of 1944, the United States Navy, operating 300 miles East of Luzon sustained severe losses at sea, not from the enemy but from the weather. The destroyers HULL, MONAGHAN and SPENCE sent down with nearly all hands. One cruiser, 5 carriers and 3 destroyers received heavy damage. Nineteen other ships were also damaged, 146 planes were lost or damaged and 790 officers and men were lost or killed.

The Commander-In-Chief of the Pacific Fleet at that time, the late Fleet Admiral Minitz, wrote a now-famous letter to the fleet concerning this tragedy. It is a masterpiece of a clear and thoughtful philosophy concerning weather and it is commended to all hands for reading. It can be found in reference (b). A particularly appropriate statement is quoted here.

“The time for taking all measures for a ship’s safety is while still able to do so. Nothing is more dangerous than for a seaman to be grudging in taking precautions lest they turn out to have been unnecessary. Safety at sea for a thousand years has depended on exactly the opposite philosophy.”

5. General Guidelines. As with any other element of seamanship, the proper handling of a ship at sea in heavy weather, cannot ever be reduced to a simple formula. Eternal vigilance will always be the price of safety. However, this does not mean that precautions cannot be taken.

Just as the prudent Officer-of-the-Deck reviews his Rules of the Road prior to getting underway, so the professional seaman should review the available weather information prior to getting underway. The record of disasters from heavy weather at sea is such that a good seaman ought to learn all he can about it. References (a) through (i) all contain valuable information.

The armed forces weather services are very extensive and a vast quantity of information is transmitted by all means. Yet, storm damage to ships at sea still occurs daily throughout the world. Unfortunately, there is no black and white situation. It is a matter of using the same rule that the navigator uses: Use all the equipment and information available; there will be times when no warning will be given. No mariner should ever assume that the absence of a weather warning means that fair winds are in sight.

Often a ship at sea is the first to detect foul weather and such information is always welcomed by higher authority. No one should hesitate to report conditions "because they might be wrong." If you think you detect bad weather, report it. The element of combat and military operations which must be balanced against safety imposes an especially heavy burden on commanding officers of combatant ships. The decision to remain on station or to seek shelter is not an easy one, but timeliness and a mutual exchange of information between the individual at sea and his operational commander is mandatory.

Regular FWC/JWC, Guam reports are received at the Coastal Surveillance Center and CTG 115.1 will relay any information which may affect the mission or safety of Market Time ships. Larger ships must be aware of the smaller craft in their area and all craft should be alert to exchange information. A foundered or battered ship is of little value in carrying out combat operations.

6. Safe Havens. There are no entirely safe havens in the First Coastal District but Danang is the most secure. Chu Lai also offers a degree of security and the lee of the various off-shore islands may be the only "port in the storm."

7. Conditions of Readiness. CTF 115 or higher authority will set appropriate Conditions of Readiness. The following definitions will apply:

Tropical Storms:	Winds associated with closed cyclonic systems of loss intensity then typhoons	34-63 knots
Typhoon:	Winds associated with closed cyclonic systems originating in the tropical western pacific	

The four conditions of readiness and minimum action required for each are contained in reference (c).

8. CSC Watch Officer Action. IAW references (j) and (k) the CSC Watch Officer will receive weather forecast from NAVSUPACT Danang daily at about 0700. This forecast is passed via TTY to CTF 115/CTG 115.2/CTU 115.2.1 utilizing NSA DTG. This forecast will be passed daily to TG 115.1 utilizing the following format: "FLIPFLOP this is ARTOCLE weather forecast follows in 30 seconds, standby to copy." The forecast is broadcast in the blind and a "ROGERT" from units of TG 115.1 is not required.

BILL CARR NOTES:

1. in dangerous semi-circle – wind on stbd bow and make as much headway as possible - hold and run.
2. in navigable semi-circle – wind on stbd quarter – hold course and run
3. on track ahead of center – wind on stbd quarter and run until in navigable semi-circle
4. on track behind center - avoid the center by most practicable route, with due consideration that the storm will eventually curve to the northeastward.

Dear CAPT and Mrs. High,

PENNINGTON 68

Glice and I haven't congratulated you yet on your promotion - it seems a very short time since you were putting three stripes on, and we are very happy to hear of the fourth.

Glice has remained in Miami as a department manager for Jordan Marsh, except for a brief interlude in Hawaii (and very brief, too) in October on R&R. I went to Division 12 in Danang, had the Pt. Gordon and the Pt. James, and I'm now Chief of Staff. With a little luck I may be able to get home ^{in March} almost a month early due to additional officers being ordered in. From there we hope to go to P.G. school in Connecticut, and then for a tour instructing at the Academy.

We hope the season finds you and your family well, and that you have a Merry Christmas.

To wish you many
blessings at Christmas
time and throughout
the coming year

Glice & Tom Pennington

Dear Col. & Mrs. High,

PENNINGTON 67

Thanks for the great letter, and particularly for the class address last. We were amazed that you found time to write, and it almost typifies the superb follow through you've made as our advisers. Glice and I decided to marry before my tour in Vietnam, and we didn't send invitations as a result. Your question on Miami is easily answered - Glice has lived here for four years and likes it. She also thinks my duty here is great despite a heavy SAR and patrol schedule (I'm actually home almost as much as a buyer for her department store), and although she isn't happy that I'm going to Vietnam she understands that it is what I want. She has seen almost a year of the Coast Guard and I think she has been impressed most with the early responsibility officers are given. My orders are to report to Glenside Feb. 26, which will give us a fine honeymoon across the country. Glice is a department manager for Jordan Marsh here, and she has been given a two month leave of absence with a promise of the same job when she comes back, so I think she'll be fine in Miami while I'm gone.

(cont.)

Dear Cdr & Mrs. Nigh,

Congratulations on your many successes since I last heard from you. It looks as if the Coast Guard is trying to keep you in the good South.

I'm sorry that I left the Sebago before I knew of your home in Mobile. I was detached on November first, and had three weeks of glorious leave before coming to Miami to what I think is a splendid job. My tour on the Sebago mushroomed rapidly, and toward the end of it I had my hands full of Gunnery, O.C., ASW, the Exchange, Education and Training - at one crack. I think that was the most enjoyable feature, having plenty to keep me busy, and learning.

I've managed to stay single, and although it's a bit lonely there are also a lot of advantages, especially here in Miami. You can count on me to let you know of impending marriage, but I don't foresee anything,

Pennington '66

To wish you
many blessings at
Christmas time
and throughout the
coming year



at least until after Vietnam.

Please tell that big family of yours Merry Christmas for me - I hope college and school have been going well for them.

Tom Pennington