

## **75. Duty and Recognition (6:05)**

March 10th, 1968, I Corps Vietnam - 0805 hours - Observed fire and secondary explosions from 3rd Marine Battalion Base camp on the Cua Viet River just south of the DMZ. Sounded General Quarters taking Point Arden through high surf into river entrance to provide gun fire support with our five 50 caliber machine guns and mounted 81 mm cannon.

Entering the inlet, was informed by the Marine Base Commander their ammunition staging area on top of their LST ramp was on fire, a result of an NVA mortar attack just minutes before. Fire was in several large 10 foot stacks of ammunition on elevated tarmac area. Burning cloth sand bags were stacked on top of white phosphorus night illumination flares which in turn were on top of 175 mm howitzer artillery rounds all encased in wooden pallets. The burning sand bags were igniting the flares under them which then were popping up and floating down into the stacks all over the tarmac.

The fire was spreading quickly.

Organized LCU, barge and tug Navy personnel to run hose lines up from the river. I dispatched Point Arden crew of four under Chief Boatswain Mate Bill Tugman to protect the main ammunition dump to the rear of the LCU ramp staging area. What I remember....I remember five hours of intense firefighting – each hot hour feeling like days. Three thunderous explosions amidst many, many, many secondary explosions. I could account for two Navy killed in the fire fighting and 30 wounded – four of the 30 were Point Arden crew.

Each of that Point Arden crew did their duty commendably. They followed all commands while at the same time taking matters into their own hands, making decisions that would be their own personal medals of bravery and courage for life. All frightened, and blessed to live, second by precious second. That crew, some of whom are here or represented here today are deserving of this recognition and honor. Each has their own deeply personal story.

Mine started with shouting from the remaining ammo lighter that Geoff, one of their crew, was missing in the ammo stacks. It was clear that no one from that barge was going back to get him.

I started running up the ramp into the stacks, my brain at the same time flashed, “This is stupid. You are going to die.” Before my body could hesitate, it hit me clearly that I had to look for that man. I had to search so I would never have to deal with guilt. Duty, at that precise moment, was defined for me. I searched through those stacks. I didn’t find Geoff.

I think about Geoff often. His name is not on the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

Each of you must prepare yourself today and each day so that you too are able to do your duty. You must insist and help your crew prepare themselves so they too are able to do their duty. And they will do their duty – each and every one of them. Being prepared will allow you to act intelligently and aggressively as did I, my crew, those before us that we honor today and as will you after us.

Heroism is not something for which you train. Rather, what happens, is we are sometimes confronted with extraordinary circumstances. We do our duty and sometimes, some people recognize that as heroism.

When you are called, do your duty with honor and humility and gratitude for having been able to serve and live through that service.

I hope what I experienced 48 years ago in the Cua Viet has today given you credible insight into what is behind our motto of Semper Paratus. Think about It. Live it!

Thank you for this honor for myself and my crew and for those who have served and survived in life or in recent or distant memory. Thank you. God bless America and each and every one of you. (Applause)

**Related Primary Leadership Principles**

Accountability	Field Presence
Active Listening	Followership
Authority of Position	Intellectual Abilities
Character	Military Core Values
Courage	Mission
Decision-Making	Recognition
Drive to Achieve	Responsibility
Effective Use of Resources	Spirituality