

Preface

Very often most of the crew had NO idea of what we were doing on the gunline. Infrequently, the CO would get on the 1MC and describe a recent action and mention the number of bunkers taken out or the KLAs [enemy casualties] we got. Most of the rest of the time we just did our assigned tasks leaving the actual details of what was going on to the wardroom [the officers on board]. This is one of the reasons I would really like to have detailed ship's histories of the Benner and the Robison. I've always wondered what the ribbons I earned actually mean.

I suppose an interested sailor could have gone up to CIC [the ship's combat information center] and poked around a bit to find out more information or could have tried to find out from a shipmate in the know, but I don't think this happened very much. I did hear the gunner's mates talk from time to time about the number and kind of shells fired that day. But that's about it.

—Coauthor Richard Mathews, STGCS(SW), USN Retired, recalling his service as a mid-grade sonar technician aboard the destroyer USS *Benner* (DD-807), and guided-missile destroyer USS *Robison* (DDG-12) during the Vietnam War.

Photo Preface-1



5-inch/54 guns of the destroyer USS *Mullinnix* (DD-944) fire at enemy positions in South Vietnam, both day and night, 30 October 1966.
National Archives photograph #USN 1118703

Two hundred sixty-nine U.S. Navy warships served at various times on the ‘gunline’ during the Vietnam War. Among this armada of Seventh Fleet units were the battleship *New Jersey*, 10 cruisers, 208 destroyers, and 50 destroyer escorts. A breakdown of these fleet units by ship class is provided in the table. Almost all of the ships remained under the direct control of the Seventh Fleet while deployed to the war zone off Vietnam. A few destroyers and destroyer escorts were assigned at times to Operation MARKET TIME, a coastal surveillance force of ships and aircraft established to interdict the smuggling by sea of arms and munitions to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

**U.S. Navy Battleship, Cruiser, Destroyer, and Destroyer Escort Classes
(1 battleship, 10 cruisers, 208 destroyers, and 50 destroyer escorts)**

Battleship/Cruiser Classes	#Ships	Destroyer Classes	#Ships
<i>Iowa</i> -class BB	1	<i>Allen M. Sumner</i> -class DD	34
<i>Baltimore</i> -class CA/CAG	4	<i>Fletcher</i> -class DD	30
<i>Cleveland</i> -class CLG	4	<i>Forrest Sherman</i> -class DD	16
<i>Des Moines</i> -class CA	1	<i>Gearing</i> -class DD	87
<i>Long Beach</i> -class CGN	1		
		Destroyer Escort Classes	
		(3 guided missile DEGs)	
Guided Missile Destroyer Classes			
<i>Bainbridge</i> -class DLGN	1	<i>Bronstein</i> -class DE	1
<i>Truxton</i> -class DLGN	1	<i>Brooke</i> -class DEG	3
<i>Belknap</i> -class DLG	9	<i>Claud Jones</i> -class DE	4
<i>Charles F. Adams</i> -class DDG	15	<i>Courtney</i> -class DE	4
<i>Farragut</i> -class DLG	7	<i>Edsall</i> -class DER	14
<i>Leahy</i> -class DLG	7	<i>Garcia</i> -class DE	5
<i>Mitscher</i> -class DDG	1	<i>Knox</i> -class DE	19

BB:	battleship	DD:	destroyer
CA:	heavy cruiser	DE:	destroyer escort
CAG:	guided-missile heavy cruiser	DEG:	guided-missile ocean escort
CGN:	nuclear-powered cruiser	DER:	radar picket destroyer escort
CLG:	guided-missile light cruiser		
DDG:	guided-missile destroyer		
DLG:	destroyer leader		
DLGN:	nuclear-powered destroyer leader		

The table does not include other Market Time units that were occasionally called upon to conduct naval gunfire support missions. These included Navy fast patrol craft (“Swift boats”) and Coast Guard cutters armed with 81mm mortars, and Navy ocean minesweepers with 40mm guns. Such action usually resulted from a requirement to provide urgent gunfire support to a friendly unit under attack. Infrequently,

Market Time vessels were assigned pre-planned gunfire missions in support of ground operations near the coast.¹

Map Preface-1



I, II, III, and IV Corps Tactical Zones, Republic of Vietnam

RAN DESTROYERS ON THE GUNLINE

The Royal Australian Navy provided a destroyer on a rotational basis to the Seventh Fleet for service on the gunline—four in total from March 1967 to September 1971. The destroyers carried out naval gunfire support in all four of the Corps Tactical Zones (identified on the preceding map and discussed later in the book).²

Photo Preface-2



Aboard the guided missile destroyer HMAS *Hobart*, Vice Adm. John J. Hyland, USN (commander U.S. Seventh Fleet) is welcomed by Rear Adm. Richard I. Peek, RAN (commander of the Australian Fleet). Both flag officers were visiting the *Hobart* on the occasion of the first Australian warship to serve with the USN during the Vietnam War. Australian War Memorial photograph NAVY13307

The first RAN destroyers to deploy to Vietnam were the *Charles F. Adams*-class guided missile destroyers HMAS *Hobart*, *Perth*, and *Brisbane*. Armed with two 5-inch/54 caliber gun mounts that fired a 76-lb high-explosive projectile, they were capable of firing 40 rounds per minute at targets out to and beyond fourteen nautical miles in most conditions.

The *Daring*-class destroyer *Vendetta* also served on the gunline. Her six 4.5-inch guns were capable of providing accurate and rapid fire to nine nautical miles at a rate of 16 rounds per gun per minute.³

HMAS *Hobart* and *Perth* were also actively involved in Operation SEA DRAGON—the bombardment of North Vietnamese military targets and interdiction of supply routes and logistic craft along the coast of North Vietnam. These operations, extending from the Demilitarized Zone northward to the Red River Delta, lasted from April 1967 until suspended in November 1968. The two destroyers came under fire on a number of occasions. *Perth* was hit once during her first deployment and *Hobart* suffered two killed and seven wounded when she was mistakenly hit by missiles fired from a U.S. Air Force jet aircraft. *Hobart* was awarded a U.S. Navy Unit Commendation in recognition of her exemplary service in Vietnam; *Perth* earned both the U.S. Navy Unit Commendation and the U.S. Meritorious Unit Commendation.⁴

OVERVIEW OF NAVAL GUNFIRE SUPPORT (NGFS)

Naval gunfire support (NGFS), also known as shore bombardment, is the use of naval artillery to provide fire support for amphibious assault and other troops ashore operating within their range. Naval gunfire can be direct or indirect. When targets are visible from the ship, naval guns are able to put out a rapid, accurate volume of direct fire on such targets. The ship lays its guns directly on the target, and conducts its own firing and spotting procedures. When targets are not visible from the ship, ground or air observation of the fall of shot is necessary for adjustment. Ships can deliver accurate, effective fire on “indirect fire” targets through the use of ground or air observers.⁵

The mobility of ships permit flexibility in the employment of naval gunfire, by offering a wide choice in the selection of firing positions for the execution of fire missions. At one extreme, the battleship *New Jersey* was able to conduct shore bombardment behind armor plate while evading enemy fire by maneuver. At the other end of the spectrum, shallow draft, gunfire support vessels could move in closer to shore, or even inshore, and engage enemy defenses at short range.⁶

The selection of ships for a particular mission was often determined by their guns. In Vietnam, the 16-inch guns of the *New Jersey*, and 8-inch guns of the heavy cruiser *St. Paul*, were ideal for use against enemy batteries, heavy fortifications, and installations for which destruction and penetration were desired. Their greater ranges also made them excellent deep supporting weapons. The rapid rate of fire and relatively small pattern size of the 5-inch guns of the smaller cruisers and

destroyers were well suited for the neutralization and destruction of most targets in close support of friendly troops.⁷

Photo Preface-3



The destroyer USS *Theodore E. Chandler* (DD-717) prepares to direct gunfire at enemy targets ashore. A Navy spotter, flying tandem in an Army “bird dog” will call and control the mission over Vietnam. Photo taken 20 November 1966. National Archives photograph #USN 1119104

The above guidelines pertained to prearranged gunfire missions, those planned prior to an amphibious landing or to support an attack ashore to cover known or suspected enemy troops or installations. In the case of “Targets of Opportunity” or an urgent “Call Fire,” the ship most suited or, in some cases, the only one available, would employ its heaviest caliber guns. Troops under attack were undoubtedly grateful for the 3-inch gunfire of a destroyer escort, at relatively modest ranges. Target of opportunity fire was delivered on targets, the location of

which previously was unsuspected or unknown. Urgent calls for fire, resulted from friendly forces requesting fire on a specific target(s)—normally enemy forces in close proximity.⁸

The tactical purposes of naval gunfire included: supporting fires, close and deep; counterbattery fire; harassing fire; and interdiction fire. Close supporting fires were normally in immediate support of ground troops ashore. Deep supporting fires were delivered to supplement close supporting fires by neutralizing in the rear, reserves, weapons, and command and control, and communication systems. Counterbattery fire was used to neutralize or destroy enemy batteries. Harassing fire was undertaken to interfere with enemy rest and recuperation, the repair of equipment/installations, and replenishment of food, water, and ammunition. Interdiction fire was employed to deny the enemy use of particular areas, routes of approach, and transport functions.⁹

Before leaving this primer on NGFS, an overview of gun projectiles is in order. The below types of projectiles were, however, not common to every size and type of naval gun:

- High capacity (HC): Designed especially for use in shore bombardment, by providing a relatively high-explosive content at the expense of armor-piercing qualities. HC was effective for both neutralization and destruction.
- Anti-aircraft common (AAC): Large high-explosive (HE) content and an expansive bursting radius (35 to 50 yards).
- Armor piercing (AP): Designed to pierce armor plate before detonating, through the use of a base-detonating delay-action fuze, a heavy nose, and a relatively small HE-content for the weight of the shell.
- Common (C): Compromise between high-capacity and armor-piercing projectiles with respect to bursting charge and penetrative ability.
- White phosphorous (WP): Designed for screening but also offered substantial incendiary and anti-personnel capabilities against exposed troops.
- Illuminating (Ill): Used for illumination at night in order to assist in adjustment of fire of both naval guns and troop weapons, to facilitate friendly troop activities, and to render infiltration by the enemy more difficult.¹⁰

U.S. NAVY PERSONAL AND UNIT AWARDS



Readers eager to find out more about a particular warship that served on the gunline between 1965-1973, may refer to Appendix A. The lengthy table lists all 269 ships in alphabetical order, with an associated summary of the numbers of Combat Action Ribbons, Navy Unit Commendations, and Meritorious Unit Commendations earned during this period. Nearly all are for Vietnam service. There are exceptions, however, since some ships engaged in other notable activities.

The 312-foot, 1900-ton destroyer escort USS *McMorris* (DE-1036) was one such exception. Powered by four Fairbanks-Morse diesel engines to a modest top speed of only a little over 20 knots, her armament was equally modest, two 3-inch/50 single-barrel, rapid fire mounts, and two trainable Mk 32 torpedo tube mounts. She, and the other three *Claud Jones*-class DEs, served in Vietnam, but only she received unit awards. In addition to being the ‘first’ destroyer escort to fire shore bombardment in support of troops in South Vietnam, *McMorris* received a Meritorious Unit Commendation for Spring & Summer 1970 & April-May 1972. The MUC was for special operations unrelated to Vietnam service.¹¹

Photo Preface-4



Destroyer escort USS *McMorris* (DE-1036) off Oahu, Hawaii, 10 March 1972; she is displaying “Spooky” electronics arrays fitted in this class of DE. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 82940

The Meritorious Unit Commendation was established by the Secretary of the Navy on 17 July 1967. It was awarded to units which distinguished themselves by either valorous or meritorious achievement considered outstanding, but to a lesser degree than required for the Navy Unit Commendation. The MUC could be awarded for qualifying actions or achievement either in combat or noncombat situations.

The more prestigious Navy Unit Commendation, dating back to its inception in 1944, was awarded to qualifying units that distinguished themselves by outstanding heroism in combat against a hostile foreign force or for extremely meritorious service not involving combat but in support of military operations.

The Combat Action Ribbon, a military decoration of even higher precedence, was instituted on 17 February 1969. Qualifying Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard personnel must have been in a ground or surface combat fire-fight, or action during which they were under enemy fire, and their performance under fire must have been satisfactory. Initially, the ribbon was for service in combat from 1 March 1961 and thereafter. On 5 October 1999, the award was made retroactive to 7 December 1941.

TOP TWENTY-SIX WARSHIPS BASED ON NUMBERS OF COMBAT ACTION RIBBONS EARNED (1965-1973)

The table below identifies the twenty-six cruisers and destroyers that received the most combat action ribbons for Vietnam duty, which may promote vigorous discussion among some readers. Many good and true sailors believe that their ship was the best among its peer group, based on quantifiable and/or personal criteria. A former *Joseph Strauss* sailor might argue that she was the “top gun,” if you consider ship size versus combat action—it being the only “tin can” among the top six ships. Cruiser sailors could assert that their heavier guns put more “hot steel” on target, and *Stoddard* sailors could highlight that their World War II vintage *Fletcher*-class DD earned eleven combat action ribbons—surely a more notable achievement.

Lest some believe that such loyalty, decades later, does not exist, I offer the following. Coauthor Mathews, upon seeing that the *Robison* had made the list, quickly asserted that *Benner* (the other destroyer he served aboard on the gunline) was equally deserving.

The dates in the following table reflect when the ships were originally commissioned. Some ships were later decommissioned for conversion, and recommissioned before being placed back in service.

**Twenty-six Cruisers and Destroyers that received the
most Combat Action Ribbons in the Vietnam War**

CR	MUC	NUC	Ship/Commissioning Date	Ship Class
21	1	2	<i>Newport News</i> (CA-148) 29 Jan 49	<i>Des Moines</i>
16	1	1	<i>Joseph Strauss</i> (DDG-16) 20 Apr 63	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
14	4	1	<i>St. Paul</i> (CA-73) 17 Feb 45	<i>Baltimore</i>
14		2	<i>Boston</i> (CA-69/CAG-1) 30 Jun 43	<i>Baltimore</i>
13	2	1	<i>Oklahoma City</i> (CLG-5) 22 Dec 44	<i>Cleveland</i>
11	2		<i>Canberra</i> (CAG-2) 14 Oct 43	<i>Baltimore</i>
11		2	<i>Stoddard</i> (DD-566) 15 Apr 44	<i>Fletcher</i>
9	2	1	<i>Berkeley</i> (DDG-15) 7 Feb 62	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
9		2	<i>Providence</i> (CLG-6) 15 May 45	<i>Cleveland</i>
9	2		<i>Benjamin Stoddert</i> (DDG-22) 21 Mar 63	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
9	1	1	<i>Turner Joy</i> (DD-951) 3 Aug 59	<i>Forrest Sherman</i>
8	3	2	<i>Edson</i> (DD-946) 3 Apr 59	<i>Forrest Sherman</i>
8	3	1	<i>Ozbourne</i> (DD-846) 5 Mar 46	<i>Gearing</i>
8	3		<i>Hull</i> (DD-945) 3 Jul 58	<i>Forrest Sherman</i>
8	3		<i>Morton</i> (DD-948) 26 May 59	<i>Forrest Sherman</i>
8	2	1	<i>Goldsborough</i> (DDG-20) 9 Nov 63	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
8	2		<i>Allen M. Sumner</i> (DD-692) 26 Jan 44	<i>Allen M. Sumner</i>
8		2	<i>Waddell</i> (DDG-24) 28 Aug 64	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
8		1	<i>Blue</i> (DD-744) 20 Mar 44	<i>Allen M. Sumner</i>
8	1	1	<i>Hollister</i> (DD-788) 29 Mar 46	<i>Gearing</i>
7	3	1	<i>Cochrane</i> (DDG-21) 21 Mar 63	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
7	2	1	<i>Hamner</i> (DD-718) 12 Jul 46	<i>Gearing</i>
7	1		<i>Bausell</i> (DD-845) 7 Feb 46	<i>Gearing</i>
7	1		<i>Buchanan</i> (DDG-14) 7 Feb 62	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
7	1	1	<i>Robison</i> (DDG-12) 28 Oct 61	<i>Charles F. Adams</i>
7			<i>Ingersoll</i> (DD-652) 17 Aug 43	<i>Fletcher</i> ²
250	40	24		

Many of the combat action ribbons received by these and other ships were earned off the coast of North Vietnam dueling enemy shore batteries during Operations SEA DRAGON (April 1967-November 1968) and FREEDOM TRAIN/LINEBACKER (March-October 1972). The others were for duty on the gunline off South Vietnam, and for less frequent actions which occurred while assigned to other duties, including the escort of aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf.

Although the book's title generally refers to shore bombardment by the battleship *New Jersey*, cruisers, destroyers and destroyer escorts off Vietnam; other Seventh Fleet tasks were also carried out by destroyers and destroyer escorts, in particular. These included Taiwanese Strait patrol duty, and assignment to Task Force 130 (Manned Spacecraft Recovery Force Pacific) for the recovery of Apollo astronauts and their

space capsules. The term “on the gunline” originally referred to shore bombardment assignments off South Vietnam. Later, as noted above, this fleet shorthand was also associated with a ship participation in Operations Sea Dragon and Freedom Train/Linebacker.

It must be highlighted that the number of ships, 269, cited by the authors as having served “on the gunline” could easily be contested by Vietnam veterans. As previously noted, some smaller Navy and Coast Guard ships and craft assigned to Operation MARKET TIME were infrequently called upon to provide naval gunfire in defense of friendly ground troops under attack. Moreover, some units, such as the Inshore Fire Support Ship USS *Carronade* (LFR-1), served on the gunline in addition to more common participation in inshore operations. It could also be argued that some nuclear- and conventionally-powered missile cruisers included in the 269 total ships, did not serve on the gunline at all—their primary duty being to screen carriers in the Tonkin Gulf by functioning as PIRAZ ships.



Popular jacket patches among sailors that served in Vietnam (Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club) and on Market Time operations

AIRCRAFT CARRIERS RELOCATED SHOREWARD

With the commencement in February 1965 of Operation ROLLING THUNDER (the large-scale sustained bombing of North Vietnam), participating aircraft carriers operated from a location in the Gulf of Tonkin designated ‘Yankee Station.’ Initially Yankee Station was about 400 miles off the coast of North Vietnam, in part to keep the carriers beyond the range of North Vietnamese aircraft. This distance required long over-water flights, many needing mid-air refueling, and greatly restricted the number of sorties flown per day.¹³

The solution was to move Yankee Station closer to the intended targets, about 150 miles offshore. However, the new location made the carriers vulnerable to air attack, and it became very important for the task force commander to know if there were any hostile aircraft mixed in with friendly air traffic. An air defense concept, termed Positive

Identification Radar Advisory Zone (PIRAZ), was established, which called for stationing ships about 30 miles off the mainland to attain radar coverage of the air space over North Vietnam.¹⁴

The PIRAZ ships were to be positioned between the land targets and carriers to monitor and keep track of all air traffic in the area. In addition to being armed with surface-to-air missile systems, these ships would be under the protective umbrella of the carrier's fighter aircraft, and could call in an interceptor at any time. Additionally, because of the possibility of North Vietnamese torpedo boats so close to the mainland, each PIRAZ ship was to have an accompanying destroyer, termed a 'shotgun,' as added protection against these threats.¹⁵

NEW TECHNOLOGY MOSTLY SUCCESSFUL, BUT...

In 1956, the heavy cruisers USS *Canberra* and *Boston* were fitted with Terrier surface-to-air missile systems, replacing their after triple 8-inch gun turrets. The high-angle guns of the U.S. Navy's cruisers and destroyers, putting out a concentrated barrage of fire, had been sufficient against piston-engined aircraft. However, newly introduced highspeed Soviet jet aircraft, armed with missiles, presented a threat that even the most sophisticated gunfire control system could not meet.¹⁶

However, Terrier missiles required considerable magazine space, making the system unsuitable for smaller ships. Consequently, the smaller Tartar missile was developed and began going to sea in 1960 aboard *Charles F. Adams*-class destroyers. The earlier Terriers and Tartars had a range of around 10 nautical miles, with a later Terrier design increasing to 20 nautical miles. To provide longer range or 'area defense' against air attacks, the 60-nautical-mile-range Talos was later fielded and fitted in a number of cruisers. The nuclear-powered cruiser USS *Long Beach* was credited with using Talos to destroy two Soviet-built MiG fighter aircraft off North Vietnam in 1968.¹⁷

One embarrassment in newly fielded technology was DASH. This small helicopter was developed to find Soviet submarines acquired on sonar and attack them with torpedoes before the subs could close the ship employing it to within range of their anti-ship weapons. A number of destroyers were modified to carry two small radio-controlled, unmanned Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopters with the addition of a hangar and flight deck. Despite extensive trials, which included using some helicopters for spotting gunfire, the DASH system did not prove reliable. There were a number of reasons for this, one was that the helicopter, once airborne, was susceptible to jamming of its radio control system.¹⁸

Mathews remembers witnessing aboard the destroyer *Benner*, the loss of one of her diminutive helicopters:

I remember Lt. (jg) Tracy at the small control panel of our DASH drone ASW helicopter one day. With his hand on the joystick he watched the bird fly off the ship. He turned it and then turned it back and it headed for the horizon. Then a look of panic came across his face. "It won't come back, it won't come back!" We watched as it disappeared from view and I believe he said, "One hundred and eighty thousand dollars!" His hand was still on the joystick!

Photo Preface-5



A drone anti-submarine helicopter (DASH) under the control of Lt. (jg) Mark S. Barg, aboard the USS *Nicholas* (DD-449), off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii, 10 February 1965. National Archives photograph #USN 1111342

Within three years of extensive fleet deployment, more than half of the DASH helicopters were out of operation. Aboard the USS *George L. MacKenzie* (DD-836), her hangar and landing deck were neither sizable enough, nor strongly built enough, to service manned aircraft after this occurred, so the destroyer suddenly had a fine movie theater.¹⁹

ODE TO DESTROYERS AND SAILORS GENERALLY



*A destroyer is a lovely ship,
Probably the nicest fighting ship of all.*

Battleships are a little like steel cities or great factories of destruction. Aircraft carriers are floating flying fields. Even cruisers are big pieces of machinery, but a destroyer is all boat.

In the beautiful clean lines of her, in her speed and roughness, in curious gallantry, she is completely a ship, in the old sense.

—John Steinbeck



USS *Lloyd Thomas* (DD-764) Western Pacific 1972 Cruise book

There is a certain blend of courage, integrity, character, and principle which have no satisfactory dictionary name but has been called different things at different times in different countries. Our American name for it is "guts."

—Louis Adamic (1899-1951)

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.

—Thomas Huxley

I never found naval men at a loss. Tell them to do anything that is not impossible, and depend on it, they will do it ... their manner of life creates in them a self reliance, which you seldom find in men of other professions.

—The Duke of Wellington 1769

Photo Preface-6



Navy Recruiting Poster by Howard Chandler Christy, issued in 1917.
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 63193-A-KN

“Tin can” (destroyer) sailors are a special breed, one that takes great pride in their ships and vocation. One public display of such pride could be witnessed in the late 1970s at Norfolk, Virginia, when a particular destroyer was in port. Walking down the pier, one’s eyes were drawn to the ship’s ASROC launcher, adorned with a painting of a famous 1917

Navy recruiting poster. The associated modified slogan read, “If I were a man, I’d ride a FRAM.”

By the early 1960s, vast numbers of *Fletcher*-, *Allen M. Sumner*-, and *Gearing*-class destroyers built during World War II were in dire need of repair and modernization. Fiscal restraints made the construction of an entire new fleet impractical, so selected hulls were extensively modified under the FRAM (Fleet Repair and Modernization) program. Sailors called the modified destroyers “FRAM cans,” “can” being a contraction of “tin can,” Navy jargon for a destroyer or destroyer escort.

In a representative modernization of one *Gearing*-class destroyer, the *George K. MacKenzie*’s “upper works” were stripped at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and rebuilt along different lines using lighter weight materials. One of her three 5-inch turrets and all secondary anti-aircraft armament disappeared; her torpedo tubes amidships were replaced by ASROC (an anti-submarine rocket-launcher); and two triple-torpedo tubes were added to the 01 level, forward of the remodeled bridge. Gone were her antiquated anti-submarine weapons (“K” guns, hedgehog batteries, and “roller racks” of “ash cans”) which destroyers had carried since World War I. A hangar and raised platform dominated the waist of the ship, providing facilities for two DASH helicopters.²⁰

With apologies to cruiser sailors, the bulk of this book is devoted to describing operations of “tin cans,” destroyers and destroyer escorts. There is a chapter dedicated to the battleship *New Jersey*, and another to the Inshore Fire Support Ship *Carronade*, because of the uniqueness of these ships. However, by virtue of their sheer numbers, the “cans” warrant the most attention. Unfortunately, even within this category, it is only possible to provide details for a sampling of the destroyers and destroyer escorts that served on the gunline. Hopefully, readers will take solace in the fact that the crews of many ships shared similar experiences on the gunline and during liberty port visits. It’s the authors hope that the backdrop presented herein will help bring to the fore fond memories of sailing the deep and of runs ashore with shipmates.

To this end, the postscript provides a pictorial of shipboard life and scenes from common liberty ports. The photographs used are from ships’ cruise books. Although many are of low quality, taken with low cost cameras available to average sailors, they reflect that period of time. Not surprisingly, the photographs in the cruise books of admirals’ flagships were of much higher quality, suggesting they were taken by photographer’s mates. Some of the photographs were of viewscapes and other features of liberty ports not typically visited by Seventh Fleet ships.

To illustrate a few of the differences between fleet flagships and a destroyer or destroyer escort, the authors offer two photographs of the USS *St. Paul*, the Navy's last all gun heavy cruiser, and one of Mathews enjoying some solitude in his "rack," the one place a sailor could call his own aboard the USS *Benning*, a *Gearing*-class destroyer.

Photo Preface-7



Personnel of different departments facing off in a tug-of-war aboard the *St. Paul* (CA-73). Capt. Hugh Good Nott, her commanding officer, is serving as the referee. Nott had been a chief quartermaster on submarines in World War II, before receiving an officer's commission in 1945. He previously commanded the submarines *Stickleback* (SS-415) and *Grayback* (SS-574), and the repair ship *Delta* (AR-9).
Courtesy of Capt. Robert J. Kermen, USNR (Retired)

Photo Preface-8



Admirals' flagships like the USS *St. Paul* offered amenities not available on the much smaller destroyers. The heavy cruiser had a full band which played during under way replenishments at sea, as well as at ship's functions, such as barbecues on the fantail. Courtesy of Capt. Robert J. Kermen, USNR (Retired)

Photo Preface-9



Sonar Technician Third Class Richard Mathews enjoying some "rack time" aboard the USS *Benner* (DD-807), circa 1969-1970. Courtesy of STGCS(SW) Richard Mathews, USN (Retired)

FROM OUR AUSSIE FRIENDS

The following poems, published in HMAS *Perth's* onboard newspaper, were provided compliments of Commodore Hector Donohue, AM RAN (Retired)

I THOUGHT I SAW A WBLC

I thought I saw a WBLC [North Vietnamese water borne logistics craft],
A bearing down on me,
Instead it was a fishing junk,
A heading out to sea.
Then suddenly, as it went past,
Its sides came down you see,
Exposed a flaming aperture
A pointing straight at me.
It opened up its guns at us
But we were quick to learn,
We opened up our throttles wide
And did a big “U” turn
Now the gunboat was fast
But not a patch on us,
The term I think applicable,
We left him in our dust.
Then came the Gunnery Officer’s turn,
To make his claim for fame,
To show them some true marksmanship
And give the *Perth* a name
Alack, alas it came to pass
We never were to fire.
As we were supposed to open up,
The Gun Plot caught on fire.
The moral of this story is
Ever so plain to see,
If you sight a WBLC
For God’s sake head to sea.

—Anonymous, *Perth Pundit*, Dec 1967

The following verse in a subsequent *Perth* Pundit caused a few laughs:

Wrap me up in my flak jacket and helmet
And send me deep down below.
Where the bombs and shrapnel can't reach me,
In the frig flat, where all the cowards go.
Anonymous, *Perth Pundit* Dec 1967
(“frig flat” is an Aussie term for a ship’s refrigerator flat which is located
low down in the ship.)

If we wished, we could tune our transistor radios to Radio Hanoi, especially during the night hours, and have a laugh whilst listening to Hanoi Hannah spread disinformation (propaganda) about the war. Her subsequent account of the action on 18 October 1967 would have the listener believe: “The brave gunners of the People’s Republic of North Vietnam had badly damaged the Australian ship *Perth* and killed many of its sailors. Go home Australian sailors: this immoral and illegal war is not in your interests.” Of course, this was an open invitation for one of our resident poets to pen the following:

Hanoi Hannah so they say,
Claims that we are all from Long Bay
And we’ve been freed out here on bail
Rather than sit back there in jail.
Well maybe most of us have fears,
But at least we are all volunteers,
And believe in what we’re fighting for,
Although we often curse this war.

—Anonymous, *Perth Pundit* February 1968