

March 7, 2001

Dr. Ronald B. Frankum, Jr.
Archivist, The Vietnam Archive
Texas Tech University
Special Collections Library, Room 108
Lubbock, TX 79409-1041

Re: Operation Passage to Freedom

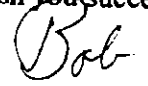
Dear Ron,

I was a Medical Officer on board the USS Consolation (AH-15) in 1954 and 1955. I had been in the Navy since 1947 and held the rank of LT MC USN at that time. We had sailed from San Pedro, CA in August bound for Inchon, Korea when, after leaving Pearl Harbor, we were diverted to Indochina. We anchored in Touraine (sp?) Bay alongside the flagship of the fleet, the name of which I have forgotten. Our mission was to provide medical care for naval personnel involved in the refugee transfer from Haiphong to Saigon. We had no responsibility for nor contact with refugees. During the month that we were there, we had very few patients; but officers of the fleet took advantage of the opportunity to complete their required annual physical exams. Our air-conditioning was a welcome relief from the tropical heat, and I suspect the presence of nurses on board was an added attraction.

We were aware of the events leading to the operation. Although the revolution had succeeded and the diplomats had agreed upon peace terms in Geneva, our area was not considered secure. We were permitted to visit the village only between certain midday hours. A small section of beach had been fenced off and designated for use by naval personnel during limited afternoon hours. A French Foreign Legion detachment was still on duty a few miles away and hosted some of our nurses for dinner one evening. The women reported that their escorts for the trip to and from the post were armed but assured them that tigers were the only danger (they didn't see any).

Obviously, our participation in the operation was minimal, but we were prepared and available if needed. We were proud that our country had arranged for the Navy to provide transportation for people who chose not to remain in the communist north but whose exit by road or train had been blocked by the Hanoi government in violation of the Geneva Accords.

I wish you success in your research. If I can be of any further help, please let me know.


Robert L. Hill, MD