

U.S.S. HARNETT COUNTY (LST-821)

FLEET POST OFFICE

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96601

IN REPLY REFER TO:

LST821/WPA:cy

5750

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REGISTERED AIR MAIL

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From: Commanding Officer, USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST 821)

To: Director of Naval History

Subj: Command History for 1969; submission of (U)

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12A

Encl: (1) Chronology of outstanding events

(2) Basic narrative

(3) Documentary annexes

(4) GIANT SLINGSHOT standing orders

(5) OPERATION SEARCHTURN standing orders

(6) Welcome aboard USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST 821)

(7) Picture LCDR F. M. KIRK, Jr., Commanding Officer USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST 821)

(8) Picture USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST 821)

1. (U) In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (8) are submitted.



F. M. KIRK, Jr.

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CINCPACFLT

COMLANSHIPFLOT ONE

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CHRONOLOGY OF OUTSTANDING EVENTS

1 Jan Anchored in anchorage XS617756, Vam Co Dong River, immediately South of the Ben Luc bridge, Republic of Vietnam. The ship is moored to a steel I-beam tripod in the river channel.

5 Jan During a strong ebb flow, the metal pilings collapsed setting the ship adrift. The ship reanchored with the bow anchor upstream and the stern anchor downstream.

23 Jan Commander Naval Forces Vietnam and Commander River Patrol Force Vietnam arrived on board to make an awards presentation to members of RIVDIV 593.

2 Feb Commander Naval Forces Vietnam arrived on board for a visit.

22 Feb RAID 71 composed of seven VNN ASPB's, four VNN Tango boats, and one VNN Monitor boat came alongside. This marked a new support role for HARNETT COUNTY: Accelerated Turnover of Assets to the Vietnamese (ACTOV) transition support.

23 Feb General Quarters sounded at 0211H.

The ship was visited by RADM JACKSON (CINCPACFLT Maintenance Officer) and COMNAVFORV Maintenance Officer.

General Quarters sounded at 2249H.

27 Feb Conducted Naval Gunfire Support Mission (NGFS).

1 Mar Conducted NGFS.

3 Mar General Quarters sounded at 0006H in response to 107MM rocket attack on WESTERN EAGLE dredge located 1000 yards to the South. Served as a WESTERN EAGLE receiving station for wounded personnel until MEDEVAC arrived.

Commander Naval Forces Vietnam visited the ship.

Conducted experiment to rid the western bank of the Vam Co Dong of nippa palm. The ship sprayed diesel oil on the bank and was followed by a "Zippo" to ignite the oil. Results were poor because depth of the spray was insufficient and the nippa palm was green.

4 Mar Conducted NGFS.

GROUP-4

Downgraded at 3 year intervals;
Declassified after 12 years

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5 Mar Conducted NGFS.

6 Mar Deck sentry spotted two lines extending from the area of the starboard screw guard toward the east bank. Investigation revealed a dummy flotation mine consisting of two mud filled, five gallon drums and flotation logs.

Conducted NGFS.

7 Mar Ship was visited by Commander Naval Forces Vietnam.

Conducted NGFS.

9 Mar Conducted NGFS.

10 Mar Conducted NGFS.

12 Mar General Quarters sounded at 2257H.

Conducted NGFS.

13 Mar Conducted NGFS.

General Quarters sounded at 2300H.

14 Mar Conducted NGFS.

General Quarters sounded at 2205H.

15 Mar At 0045H ship was hit port side at frame 35, main deck, by 107MM rocket fired from the west bank. Projectile passed through the wardroom, pantry, and the Captain's anteroom. The warhead detonated upon hitting the wardroom air conditioner. Extensive damage to the wardroom. Personnel casualties were: HM1 Harrison J. THOMSON, USN, 761 02 70, with several fragmentation wounds, HM3 Michael T. HOBLIN, USNR, B96 10 74, with several fragmentation wounds, TN Reynaldo D. ASBAN, USN, B89 04 38, with slight fragmentation wounds, and Robert FOERSTERN, civilian technical assistant from Naval Research Development Unit Vietnam with several fragmentation wounds. Damage was quickly investigated and brought under control.

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15 Mar

MEDEVAC helicopter evacuated THOMSON, HOBLIN, and FOERNSTERN to Third Field Hospital at 0115H.

General Quarters sounded at 2010H.

16 Mar

Conducted NGFS.

17 Mar

General Quarters sounded at 0225H.

18 Mar

Conducted NGFS.

19 Mar

Conducted NGFS.

21 Mar

General Quarters sounded at 2121H.

Conducted NGFS.

22 Mar

General Quarters sounded at 2141H.

23 Mar

General Quarters sounded at 2319H. Observed movement on the west bank at 2359H in the same area from which the ship was attacked on 15 March.

24 Mar

Commenced firing M-16 and M-79 grenade launchers from the bridge at the movement on the west bank.

0200H, the ship was hit on the starboard amidships boat boom by a 107MM rocket fired from the west bank. Shrapnel damaged an RVN ASPB (HQ5112) and ruptured two barrels of lube oil(9250). SN VO VAN HAN, 6556A701H51, VNN, died from shrapnel wounds: SN Allen G. BATES, USNR, B38 23 23, received shrapnel wounds, and BM3 David MORRIS, USNR, B33 11 39, received shrapnel wounds. Both USN personnel were treated and returned to duty.

At 0423H the starboard deck sentry, SN Robert K. O'BRIEN, USN, B11 94 12, suffered a bullet wound in the right knee when his .45 caliber pistol accidentally discharged. O'BRIEN MEDEVAC'ed to the Third Field Hospital, condition good.

The ship was visited by Commander Naval Forces, Vietnam.

25 Mar

Conducted NGFS.

26 Mar

General Quarters sounded at 0345H when the WESTERN EAGLE dredge located 2500 yards to the south came under attack.

Conducted NGFS.

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27 Mar General Quarters sounded at 2020H.
Conducted NGFS.

28 Mar Conducted NGFS.

30 Mar General Quarters sounded at 0129H.
Conducted NGFS.

31 Mar Scrambled two PBR's and vectored Navy SEAWOLF helicopters
to coordinates XS631712, upon discovery of enemy bunker.
Conducted NGFS.

1 Apr Conducted NGFS.

2 Apr Conducted NGFS.

3 Apr Conducted NGFS.

4 Apr Commander Naval Forces Vietnam arrived on board for
memorial services for LCDR Carl J. PETERSON, USN,
(CTU 194.9.0) who was killed in action.
Conducted NGFS.

6 Apr Conducted NGFS.

7 Apr The Honorable John TOWER, U.S. Senator from Texas and
Commander Naval Forces Vietnam arrived on board for a
visit.
Conducted NGFS.

8 Apr Conducted NGFS.
General Quarters sounded at 2105H.

9 Apr General Quarters sounded at 2033H.

10 Apr Conducted NGFS.

11 Apr Conducted NGFS.

12 Apr Conducted NGFS.

13 Apr Conducted NGFS.
General Quarter sounded at 2108H.

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14 Apr Conducted NGFS.

15 Apr Conducted NGFS.

16 Apr Conducted NGFS.

BM2 Ralph C. MUNSEY, USN, 686 34 59, Boat Captain for MSM 17 was lost overboard when a TNT block exploded. The body was not recovered and he was presumed dead. GMG3 David L. STARK, USN, 917 41 40, received shrapnel wounds, prognosis good.

17 Apr Conducted NGFS.

18 Apr Conducted NGFS.

19 Apr Conducted NGFS.

20 Apr Conducted NGFS.

21 Apr Conducted NGFS.

22 Apr Conducted NGFS.

23 Apr Conducted NGFS.

General Quarters sounded at 2256H. Class ALFA fire in compartment B-302-AE (Gyro Room). Fire was immediately under control and overhauled. No material damage.

24 Apr Conducted NGFS.

General Quarters sounded at 1525H. Class CHARLIE fire in number 2 AC generator room. Firemain above the switchboard ruptured causing considerable damage. Fire immediately brought under control. Switchboard was later restored to full operation.

25 Apr Conducted NGFS.

26 Apr Conducted NGFS.

1 May Relieved on station by YR 9. Underway from station on the Vam Co Dong River, RVN, enroute to SRF Yokosuka, Japan, for overhaul period.

Anchored in the Soirap River, Nha Be, RVN, to offload PBR engines.

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2 May Underway for Vung Tau, RVN.
Moored to the Long Pier at Vung Tau, RVN.
Shifted anchorage from Long Pier to Buoy Number 9 in Vung Tau harbor, RVN.

6 May Underway for SRF, Yokosuka, Japan.

17 May Arrived Tokyo Wan, Yokosuka, Japan. Commenced offloading ammunition in preparation for overhaul.

19 May Moored outboard of USS PARK COUNTY (LST 1077).

19 May Shifted moorage to Pier 3.

29 May Shifted moorage to Drydock 4.

6 Jul Shifted moorage to Pier 6, Berth 6.

11 Jul Commenced ready for sea trials.

17 Jul Commander Landing Ship Flotilla ONE, Commodore PEREZ, conducted a personnel inspection onboard USS HARNETT COUNTY.

18 Jul COMLANSHIPFLOT ONE conducted administrative inspection.

25 Jul Underway for Vung Tau, RVN.

6 Aug Beached at LST slip number 2, Vung Tau, Republic of Vietnam, and commenced loading ammunition, mail and supplies.

7 Aug General Quarters sounded at 0718H for Transit of the Soirap River to Nha Be, RVN.
Anchored the Soirap River, Nha Be, RVN, to take on fuel and water from YW 128.

8 Aug Underway for Vung Tau, RVN.
Anchored in Vung Tau Harbor, RVN, to pick up personnel.
Underway for Binh Thuy, RVN, to embark HA(L) 3 DET 8.

9 Aug Anchored in Bassac River, Binh Thuy, RVN.
Embarked HA(L) 3 DET 8

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9 Aug Underway for station in the Gulf of Thailand, offshore Rach Gia, RVN.

11 Aug Anchored grid posit VS740150, Gulf of Thailand, off-shore Rach Gia, RVN. Assumed support of Task Group 194.3 and RIVDIV's 513 and 553.

13 Aug Launched SEAWOLF helicopter 331 on a scramble two at 0617H. After about fifteen seconds in the air the helicopter crashed about 200 yards off the starboard beam at lat 10° - 45'N, Long 104° - 47.8'E, and sank in three fathoms of water. The ship's LCVP Number 1 was patrolling at the time and immediately went to the scene to recover survivors while the bridge illuminated the area. SEAWOLF helicopter 319 circled overhead having taken off before 331. Three of the crew were recovered: the pilot, LTJG John E. MANN; the co-pilot, LTJG Bud BARNES; and door gunner AO3 M. M. COLEMAN. AO3 COLEMAN suffered cuts about the mouth and fracture of the right leg. He was evacuated to the 29th Evacuation Center, Binh Thuy. Mount 81 began to fire illumination mortar rounds to assist in the search for the missing man, AMH3 Richard L. BROWN.

The search continued the rest of the morning and day with no success. The ship's LCVP's began to grapple in an attempt to hook the downed helicopter.

14 Aug Continued to search for the wreckage. EOD team from Saigon came out to assist in diving operations. Ship's LCVP Number 1 located the wreckage at 1640H. With divers securing the lifting straps, the ship's cargo boom was used to bring aboard rotor, rotor assembly, and transmission. Recovery operations ceased due to darkness.

15 Aug The remainder of the helicopter was brought aboard at 1433H. The body of AMH3 Richard L. BROWN, USNR, B81 31 61 was removed from the wreckage.

17 Aug At 2027H HARNETT COUNTY became the first ship of her class to record 5,000 accident free landings. LCDR Dennis W. STREY, OinC of HA(L) 3 DET 8, co-pilot LTJG Robert FOSTER, and crewmen AO2 Jim TRUEX, AN Mike TIMOTHY, and AO3 Chuck HART landed their SEAWOLF UH-1B helicopter on HARNETT COUNTY's flight deck after a night interdiction mission. After securing from flight quarters the landing was celebrated on board with a huge cake appropriately decorated with the number "5,000".

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ENCLOSURE

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31 Aug Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for INREP with USS NIAGRA FALLS (AFS 3). Returned to station.

1 Sept During heavy seas with winds gusts to 45 knots, PBR 102, a Mark I hull, attached to RIVDIV 513 swamped and capsized alongside. Additional lines were secured to the boat to hold it alongside.

2 Sept Continued high winds and seas precluded recovery operations and at 1145H, PBR 102 began to break up and eventually sank. The wreckage was marked by buoys.

5 Sept Received ammunition and PBR parts from USS BRULE (AKL 28).

6 Sept Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, to make repairs to the whip winch for the 10 ton boom with technical assistance from USS TUTUILA (ARG 4).

8 Sept Returned to station in the Gulf of Thailand.

10 Sept Commander Task Force 116, Captain FAULK, visited HARNETT COUNTY.

15 Sept At 2200H during a Scramble two, Seawolf 302 crashed about 500 yards from ship after lift off. The ship's boats and PBR's searched the crash site recovering two pilots. Illumination was provided by search lights, pop flares, and 81MM mortar. Additional air and boat units were provided by USS GARRETT COUNTY (LST 836). Personnel casualties included the pilot, LTJG Kenneth J. LOWE, 722939, who suffered lacerations, a broken leg, and broken arm; LTJG Robert M. FOSTER, 730617, who suffered lacerations and a broken leg. The two crewmen are still missing.

16 Sept Divers recovered the bodies of the two missing crewmen; AT1 Robert J. ARNOLD, USN, 696 93 45 and AO3 Stephen A. JOHNSON, USN, B83 60 42. Recovery operations were halted in the late afternoon due to adverse sea and wind conditions.

17 Sept Retrieved the wreckage of SEAWOLF 302.

18 Sept Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for INREP with USS NIAGRA FALLS (AFS 3). Jettisoned the wreckage of SEAWOLF 302 and returned to station.

21 Sept Received ammunition and PBR supplies from the USS BRULE (AKL 28).

2 Oct Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for VERTREP with USS WHITE PLAINS (AFS 4). Returned to station.

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Commander Landing Ship Flotilla ONE, Commodore E. H. ELLIS, visited the ship.

Received diesel fuel from the tanker MS SHINSUI MARU.

20 Oct

Received supplies from USS MARK (AKL 12).

24 Oct

Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for BOATREP with USS MARS (AFS 1). Returned to station.

29 Oct

Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, to make repairs to the hook winch for the 10 ton cargo boom with technical assistance from USS TUTUILA (ARG 4).

30 Oct

Returned to station.

31 Oct

Received supplies from USS MARK (AKL 12).

11 Nov

Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for VERTREP with USS WHITE PLAINS (AFS 4). Returned to station.

13 Nov

LT Francis Marion KIRK, Jr., USN, 647688/1100, Prospective Commanding Officer reported aboard.

15 Nov

Received diesel fuel from the tanker ANGKOR.

17 Nov

LCDR Kenneth J. WARDEN, USN, was relieved by LT Francis M. KIRK, Jr., USN, as Commanding Officer, USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST 821).

25 Nov

Received ammunition and cargo from USS BRULE (AKL 28).

30 Nov

Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN for VERTREP with USS NIAGRA FALLS (AFS 3). Returned to station.

7 Dec

Received diesel fuel from MS SHINSUI MARU.

17 Dec

Underway for An Thoi, Phu Quoc Island, RVN, for VERTREP with USS MARS (AFS 1). Returned to station.

21 Dec

Received ammunition and cargo from USS MARK (AKL 12).

29 Dec

CTU 115.4.1 embarked with a group of five PCF's.

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BASIC NARRATIVE

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1. Mission and Function of Command

HARNETT COUNTY is one of four uniquely outfitted LST's operating as part of OPERATION GAMEWARDEN on the rivers and shallow coastal waters of South Vietnam. Recommissioned in 1966 as a PBR/Helo support LST, she is homeported in San Diego, California. HARNETT COUNTY's primary functions are:

- a. Logistic support of embarked river/coastal patrol sections and light attack helicopter detachments.
- b. Maintenance and repair of PBR's.
- c. Messing and berthing of embarked personnel.
- d. Naval Operations Center for coordination of surveillance efforts by river/coastal patrol units.

HARNETT COUNTY also serves as:

- a. Communications relay station.
- b. Radar surveillance unit.
- c. Interim medical facility for the treatment of wounded personnel.
- d. Staging center for SEAL teams and other special warfare operations.
- e. Mobile gunfire support platform equipped to provide harrassment and interdiction and/or direct call fire for all friendly forces within the assigned area of operation.
- f. Transshipment and limited storage point for food, fuel, spare parts, and ammunition consigned to advance tactical support bases ashore.

2. Emarked Units

The following operational units were assigned to and supported by HARNETT COUNTY during 1969:

River Division

593	on board 1 Jan	disembarked 10 Feb
574	on board 10 Feb	disembarked 1 May
571	embarked 10 Feb	disembarked 1 May
553	embarked 29 Oct	on board 31 Dec

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Downgraded at 3 year intervals;
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<u>Mine Division 113</u>	on board 1 Jan	disembarked 1 May
<u>HA(L) 3 DET 8</u>	embarked 9 Aug	on board 31 Dec
<u>CTU 115.4.1</u>	embarked 29 Dec	on board 31 Dec
<u>RAID 71-VNN</u>	embarked 22 Feb	disembarked 1 May

The beginning of 1969 found HARNETT COUNTY intricately involved in OPERATION GIANT SLINGSHOT. The ship had been anchored in the Vam Co Dong River at Ben Luc since 13 December 1968. Never had a ship of any great size ventured to transit this comparatively narrow estuary. The river was to prove itself inhospitable but tamable. Almost every step taken by HARNETT COUNTY during the first four months of 1969 was going to be a "first".

HARNETT COUNTY's location required some revision and general tightening up of night security. A tether ring was attached to the bow anchor chain and the stern anchor cable. A boat was patrolling in a random pattern at all times with grappeling hooks and a chain drag. The boat crews wore steel pots, flak jackets, were armed and threw concussion grenades randomly. All topside watch personnel were armed and wore steel pots and flak jackets. Deck security patrol was doubled from one to two men each with a high intensity flash light. The watch in mounts 41 and 46 played their spot lights on the river constantly. All deck watch personnel were authorized to fire at any object floating in the water. Search lights were installed on the 01 level forward, and constantly illuminated the river banks as did the search lights on the bridge. 50 caliber machine guns were mounted just aft of each searchlight. A starlight scope was placed on top of the conning station and another was added later at the crow's nest. This latter one allowed the lookout to see beyond Ben Luc village into rice patties and swamp area -- a favorite rendezvous point for the VC. If there was a barge alongside an extra sentry was added to stand a watch there.

The month of January passed quietly, with the ship's force kept busy repairing RIVDIV 593's boats. The end of the month saw a visit from VADM ZUMWALT, Commander Naval Forces Vietnam. This was to be the first of many visits from VADM ZUMWALT to HARNETT COUNTY while she was attached to GIANT SLINGSHOT.

RAID 71 embarked on HARNETT COUNTY on 22 February to mark the beginning of the ACTOV program. The ship provided fuel & limited technical assistance for the unit. During February HARNETT COUNTY began providing Naval Gunfire Support for various units on the beach. These would either be direct call in support of specific action or harassment and interdiction missions. The latter was fired into favorite staging areas or rendezvous points with no fixed timetable for conducting these missions.

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March proved to be the busiest and most exciting month of the year. Although we knew there were a number of enemy troops in the area and were prepared for incidents, the attack on the WESTERN EAGLE dredge brought the close reality of SLINGSHOT into sharp focus. The scream and impact of the rockets so close to home was not unlike the first contact made in a football game-- we became more alert but less anxious. We immediately went to General Quarters and handled the wounded for MEDEVAC purposes.

A constant source of danger to the ship was the dense growth of nippa palm, especially deep along the western bank of the Vam Co Dong. The undergrowth provided excellent cover for any surprise attack and the marshy ground was a convenient storage place for VC rockets and/or satchel charges. Early in March the ship tried to burn the cane out by spraying diesel oil and igniting it. This was followed by a "Zippo", flame throwing boat, but results were poor. The growth was just a little too green and hearty to be burned out, it would take attention of a more personal nature to combat the cane. Thus began "Chop Chop". Almost daily the ship would muster a ten-man working party with an officer in charge to head into the nippa palm and cut it back. On one expedition several 107MM rockets were found and an EOD disposal team was called to unearth them. The "Chop Chop" detail proved to be the only reasonable means of denying the enemy this natural cover.

On March 6 an alert deck sentry sighted two lines extending from under the fantail to the east bank. A dummy flotation mine was found attached to the starboard screw guard. It seems normal procedure for the VC to test the perimeter defense before using an actual charge. The perimeter was penetrated but the watch was also alert in spotting the lines. It is assumed that the matter was so quickly spotted that the enemy felt it a bad gamble to try again.

The Ides of March is probably the most memorable day in the history of HARNETT COUNTY. At 0045 we took a 107MM rocket in the wardroom. Damage Control Central, at the time located in the engineering officer's stateroom, was effectively knocked out although none of the personnel were injured. Repair III immediately took effective control. The warhead detonated in the air conditioner and this single fact probably saved the lives of the four personnel who were in the wardroom at the time. The wardroom was demolished. Cooling water from the air conditioner quickly spread through officer's country and even reached the mess decks before the line was isolated. Although there was no fire, smoke hampered repair party operations. Three ships company personnel were wounded: HM1 THOMSON, HM3 HOBLIN, and TN ASBAN, the latter receiving only slight fragmentation wounds. A civilian from the Naval Research Development Unit Vietnam, Robert FORENSTERN, was seriously wounded. The wounded were MEDEVAC'ed within thirty minutes of the explosion.

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The ship was again alerted on 23 March that an attack could be expected. At 0200 on 24 March, several 107MM rockets were fired from the west bank. Only one hit was taken and that was on the starboard amidships boat boom. A VNN sailor on a boat below was killed. SN Allen G. BATES and BM3 David MORRIS both received minor shrapnel wounds. Two hours later the ship's starboard side deck sentry, SN Robert K. O'BRIEN, accidentally discharged his .45 and wounded himself in the right knee. An investigation showed that the weapon had actually jammed and O'BRIEN, in a nervous state, had caused the weapon to fire.

The remainder of March was marked by much Naval Gunfire Support and spending almost every night at General Quarters. Ship's force spent a total of 78 hours at GQ during March.

April saw two embarked personnel killed in action: LCDR Carl J. PETERSON (CTU 194.9.0) was killed on 2 April and BM2 Ralph C. MUNSEY died on 16 April. A memorial service for LCDR PETERSON was attended by VADM ZUMWALT, Commander Naval Forces Vietnam.

HARNETT COUNTY conducted Naval Gunfire Support on all but five days in April with a record expenditure of 8,119, 40MM shells.

The Honorable John TOWER, U.S. Senator from Texas, accompanied by Commander Naval Forces Vietnam visited the ship on 7 April. Senator TOWER was most impressed with the tough and vital job being performed by HARNETT COUNTY.

The ship experienced two fires on consecutive days in April. The first on 23 April in the gyro room was caused by a shirt that had been hung too close to one of the generator exhaust pipes. There was no damage and the fire was immediately controlled. The second fire on 24 April was more serious. A fire-main ruptured over the switchboard in the number 2 A.C. generator room. Again repair party response was quick and effective. The electricians put in many long hours restoring the board to operating status.

It was a tired but proud HARNETT COUNTY that was relieved on station on 1 May by YR 9. After six months on station the ship was not without her troubles. It took us six days to get out of Vietnam due to generator problems. The ship was underway from Vung Tau on 6 May and after a trouble free passage arrived in Yokosuka, Japan, on 17 May.

HARNETT COUNTY spent 56 days at SRF Yokosuka for her first overhaul period. For most of the period, the ship's force was working seven days a week from 0600 to 2000. It was this ship's force experience that the Japanese were clean, efficient workers who made it a habit to police their area of responsibility at the end of each work day. During the overhaul the hull was completely sandblasted and repainted. Many of the ship's force personnel were able to attend various refresher courses such as firefighting school, DC school and PMS school.

The ship left Japan on 25 July and arrived in Vung Tau, Vietnam, on 7 August. While underway the officers and crew underwent refresher training. We spent four days transiting to several ports in Vietnam to take on fuel and water and to embark HAL 3 DET 8.

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The ship took up station in the Gulf of Thailand, offshore Rach Gia, on 11 August. The first of two tragedies struck two days later. While on an early morning scramble, SEAWOLF helicopter 331 crashed about 200 yards off the starboard beam. It was dark and the weather was rough, with no horizon. A quick response by the ship's ready lifeboat resulted in the recovery of the two pilots, LTJG John MANN and LTJG Bud BARNES, and one of the crew, AO3 M. M. COLEMAN. The body of the other crewmember, AMH3 Richard BROWN, was recovered with the wreckage of the plane on 15 August. Rough seas hampered rescue operations. An EOD team from Saigon was sent to help the ships LCVP's in the search. The second crash on 15 September was almost identical in nature with somewhat similar weather conditions. Both crewmen, AT1 Robert J. ARNOLD, and ATN3 Stephen A. JOHNSON were killed. The pilots, LTJG Kenneth J. LOWE and LTJG Robert M. FOSTER were seriously injured and both were MEDEVAC'ed. The wreckage was not raised until 17 September although the bodies of ARNOLD and JOHNSON were removed a day earlier. The result of these two incidents was an experiment in providing artificial illumination of the horizon to help prevent disorientation on particularly dark nights. The ship's gunners fired two rounds of 81MM mortar illumination off the beam of the ship and in the direction of launch. The results were an excellent horizon that allowed safe launching on even the darkest of nights.

On 17 August, HARNETT COUNTY became the first of her class LST to log 5,000 accident free helicopter landings. The landing was celebrated by a huge cake with the number 5000.

Since taking station on 9 August, the ship had been experiencing intermittent heavy seas. On the night of 1 September a Mark 1 PBR (Hull #102) swamped and capsized alongside. Winds were at or just below gale force with seas of 8 to 12 feet. Although additional lines were secured, the boat could not be saved and sunk on 2 September. The wreckage was marked with buoys but these did not survive the rough weather either. The search continued until the first week of October with negative results. New policy was instituted for bad weather--PBR's would seek shelter at their ATSB's on the canals of Kien Giang Province.

For the duration of HARNETT COUNTY's participation in OPERATION SEARCHTURN, we received most of our support from the AFS's. These replenishments with USS MARS (AFS 1), USS NIAGARA FALLS (AFS 3) and USS WHITE PLAINS (AFS 4) necessitated a short trip to An Thoi off Phu Quoc Island. Also located at An Thoi was the USS TUTUILA (ARG 4) who served as our repair ship. The "TUT" rendered outstanding services and support for HARNETT COUNTY. Smaller amounts of supplies were brought to the ship on station by USS BRULE (AKL 28) and USS MARK (AKL 12). We also refueled on station from several small tankers.

On 29 October RIVDIV 553 embarked on HARNETT COUNTY. This move necessitated several runs by the ship's LCVP into Kien Son, 553's ATSB, for the purpose of moving supplies. Kien Son was maintained and kept constantly manned. This

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presented some interesting problems on Thanksgiving and Christmas. The Supply Department of HARNETT COUNTY along with HA(L) 3 DET 8 flew turkey dinners with all the trimmings to the happy sailors.

On 17 November, LCDR Kenneth J. WARDEN was relieved as Commanding Officer by LT F. M. KIRK, Jr.

In late December HARNETT COUNTY took on yet another task, that of supporting a group of PCF's. CTU 115.4.1 with 5 PCF's embarked on 29 December and it was not unusual to have five PCF's breasted out port side aft.

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Operational Statistics

(1) Number of helo recoveries in 1969	1,548
(2) Number of helo recoveries to date	5,808
(3) Number of times underway	73
(4) PBR patrols conducted	1,624
(5) Helo patrols conducted	432
(6) MEDIVAC (dust off)	68
(7) Helicopter Scrambles	63
(8) TTY Traffic	
(a) Incoming	22,134
(b) Outgoing	14,161
(c) Total	36,295
(9) Ammunition Expended	
(a) HARNETT COUNTY	
81MM illumination	957
45 caliber	1,052
Pop flares	226
40MM White Star	32
40MM HE-I-T	16,119
5.56MM	38,895
50 caliber	600
12 gauge shotgun	0
(b) <u>Embarked Units</u>	
50 caliber	153,700
45 caliber	550
38 caliber	800
7.62MM	498,390
5.56MM	61,470
40MM grenades	26,264
60MM mortar	210
Offensive grenades	8,107
Pop flares	3,928
40MM White Star	0
Smoke grenades	344
12 gauge shotgun	2,161
TNT blocks	13,387

Annex A

Enclosure (3)