

U.S.S. EVERETT F. LARSON (DE-320)

FLEET POLY OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO, 94301

South China Sea

June 4, 1969

To LARSON's families,

By the time you read this you will be aware of the fact that our destroyer squadron suffered a tragic loss yesterday. Many of us lost personal friends among the squadron members who did not survive the collision between HMAS MELBOURNE and USS FRANK E. EVANS.


Some of you may wonder why we are out here conducting operations such as Exercise "Sea Spirit". The basic purpose is to train together and develop a capability among the SEATO navies to work together effectively to meet possible threats to our mutual security. This is a worthwhile and necessary objective. However, it must always be borne in mind that while the seaman's profession is an honorable one it is inherently dangerous, even under the best of circumstances. The sea is cruel and unforgiving of human frailty.

You should know that the rescue efforts within our task group were outstanding, and undoubtedly contributed to keeping the number of casualties much lower than might be expected in an accident of this sort. LARSON assisted by putting men aboard to control flooding and repair damage, and thus to keep the stern section of EVANS afloat. While this did not save any lives, it enabled us to later go alongside EVANS in order

to recover personal possessions and valuables, as well as important records. I am proud to say that, to a man, LARSON's crew carried out their duties in an exemplary way. You have every right to be proud of the performance of your men on June 3rd. Their actions were, of course, in accord with the best traditions of the sea.

I know that you all share our sense of sorrow and loss. It is small comfort to those families who have lost husbands, sons, or fathers, but we should remember that those who died in EVANS did so in the service of their country.

Very sincerely,


A. W. BILLING
Commander, U. S. Navy
Commanding Officer

P.S. The following message was received from Rear Admiral Jerome H. KING, Jr., Commander Anti-submarine Warfare Group ONE just as this letter was completed:

"YOUR SALVAGE EFFORTS ON AFTER END OF USS FRANK E. EVANS ON 3 JUNE WERE PERFORMED IN AN OUTSTANDINGLY EFFECTIVE MANNER. THE SPEED, SPIRIT AND COMPETENCE WITH WHICH LARSON RESPONDED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE OCCASION WERE INSPIRING. MY CONGRATULATIONS AND SINCERE WELL DONE TO CAPTAIN AND ENTIRE SHIP'S COMPANY."

My thought is that a comment such as this is always dependent upon the entire crew (that is, the "ship's company") and supports what I wrote above. It should be a source of individual pride to each of you.