

My Best Forecast

In the summer of 1967, I found myself off the coast of S. Vietnam at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) of North Vietnam. Our mission was to provide naval gunfire support for the 3rd Marine Division in I Corps. The main bases of the marines we supported were Dong Ha, Quaviet and Giolin. We also took on targets of opportunity and supported the U.S. Marines on various missions at the DMZ.

I was a LCDR and the Chief Staff Officer of Destroyer Squadron 22 (DESRON 22), home ported in Norfolk, VA. The staff was onboard the DESRON flag ship USS DuPont (DD914).

Early on we were hit by the shore batteries of N. Vietnam and lost the use of Mount 52, but we still had MT 51 forward and MT 53 aft. The DuPont had 3 gun mounts of 5 inch/54 cal. guns. Our station was just off the coast at the DMZ just south of Cap Lay and Tiger Island, North Vietnam. There were 3 destroyers (DuPont, Robertson, and a FRAM destroyer) assigned to this station.

In the fall of '67 a typhoon was forecast to come right up the center of the South China Sea. The flag onboard the carrier ordered all ships to head south out of the South China Sea to avoid the typhoon. I plotted the forecast path of the typhoon and realized that Cap Lay, N. Vietnam jutted out to the northeast and we would be protected from the high seas. The fetch area from a northeast wind would be very short, being protected by Cap Lay. Therefore, the 3 destroyers should be able to "ride out" the typhoon and to continue supporting the 3rd Mar. Div. We were the only 3 Navy ships in the South China Sea for 5 days. All went well and the marines appreciated our gunfire support.

After the typhoon passed, the admiral of the carrier group sent the commodore of DESRON 22 a "Bravo Zulu". The commodore responded, "His Chief Staff Officer's forecasts are never wrong but he doesn't guarantee them".

In the 5 months we (USS Dupon) were on the "gun line", we shot over 20,000 rounds of 5"/54 ammo at the enemy.

Submitted by CAPT Ace Trask, USN RET