

THE COAST GUARD IN THE VIETNAM WAR

ON THE SEA, ON THE GROUND, AND IN THE AIR, THE PERSONNEL OF THE USCG PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN AN UNWINNABLE WAR

BY TOM EDWARDS

On 29 April 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson established a “Memorandum of the President.” That document initiated the process of the United States Coast Guard working in conjunction with the United States Navy to prevent communist troops from accessing South Vietnam. The day the Memorandum was signed, Coast Guard Squadron One (RONONE) was established. It consisted of 47 officers and 198 enlisted men. They had received their training in Coronado, California. Less than a week after the establishment of RONONE, six 82-foot USCG cutters were in shipyards for the necessary modifications. Following the yardwork, they were transferred to the Philippines

and subsequently rendezvoused with the escort ship *USS Snohomish County* (LST-1126). The escort enabled the required refueling given the distance from the Philippines to Vietnam.

After five days underway, the crews rested at the South Vietnam base located at Con Son Island in the Gulf of Thailand. The following day, three cutters were on patrol and the other three were relocated to their new home port in An Thoi, a fishing village on the southern tip of Phu Quoc Island, the largest in Vietnam. It is in the Gulf of Thailand. As a *USS Krishna* crew member, I was stationed there for about eight months as a Swift Boat maintenance and repair electrician. USCG cutters arrived in An

Thoi and Da Nang in July 1965. Operation *Market Time* then transferred from task Force 71, a 7th Fleet organization, to Task Force 15, a Military Assistance Command Vietnam organization.

The initial squadron eventually consisted of 26 cutters of the *Point*-class — shallow-water 82-foot patrol boats tasked with patrolling the South Vietnam coastal waters. During their



The Coast Guard was proficient with their 5-inch weapons as can be seen in this direct hit on an enemy shore target.



The 5-inch gun crew aboard USCGC *Pontchartrain* takes a break during a 1971 bombardment of a shore installation.



After nearly a half-century of service (including action in the Vietnam War) the USCGC *Morgenthau* (WHEC0722) was transferred to the Coast Guard of Vietnam. During Operation *Market Time*, the cutter delivered 19 naval gunfire support missions on targets ashore, inspected 627 junks/sampans, and cruised 39,029 patrol miles. She fired 1645 5-inch rounds, destroying 32 structures and a dozen bunkers. In a night surface action, she sank an armed North Vietnamese SL-8 trawler.