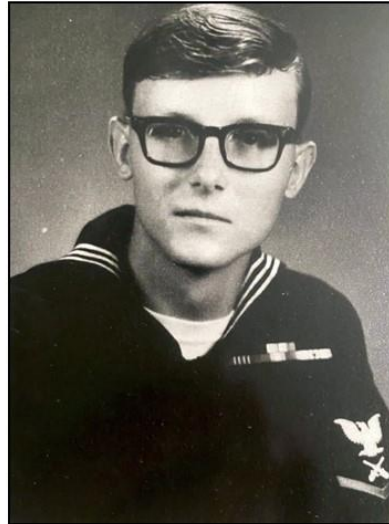


**Gary Peterson**  
**Gunner's Mate 2nd Class**  
**Guided Missile Destroyer**  
**U.S. Navy**  
**USS Berkeley DDG-15**

**Vietnam Coast**



I served from 1967 to 1971, making three tours to Vietnam in 1968, 1970 and 1971. I enlisted after high school, went to Boot Camp in San Diego and received orders to the U.S.S. Berkeley DDG-15, a guided missile destroyer that was home ported out of Long Beach, California. The ship was equipped with two 5 inch gun mounts, a Tartar missile launcher, torpedo tubes, an ASROC (anti-submarine launcher), and two 50 caliber machine guns.

In Vietnam a typical "Westpac" (Western Pacific) tour basically had two types of operation - shelling land and sea targets with the 5 inch guns, or "plane guard" duty, following an aircraft carrier making bombing runs and as a guard and rescue ship picking up downed pilots. Most of my time was spent firing the 5 inch guns.

Being a gunner's mate I was in the gun mount (there were two of us) as it was being fired by radar and computer. Inside the mount it was hot, noisy, and uncomfortable with periods of long hours - day and night. Our targets at sea were enemy ships, barges, junks, trawlers, and sampans. Our land targets were enemy troops, supply dumps, fuel ports, bridges, roads, trails, - anything that would disrupt, limit, or stop the movement of troops or supplies from north to south. Our land spotters were allied forces (usually Marines) or Army and Air Force pilots flying small planes at tree-top level to direct our fire.

The 5" guns had a range of 22,000 yards (12.5 miles). Our ship would typically be a mile or less from shore when firing to cover maximum dis-

tance inland, but, in turn, that also made us an easily reached target. Our destroyers would usually operate in pairs - for sea and land shelling.

I recall late in 1968 while firing inland off the coast of North Vietnam, we received coastal gunfire that was all around us and hit our partner ship injuring two men, gunner's mates, but thankfully no one else was injured. We earned the Combat Action Ribbon but there wasn't any celebrating. For me it had just been daily routine up to then, but being shot at knowing you could be wounded or even killed erased that sense of safety I had being on a ship at sea. We operated in the Tonkin Gulf, North Vietnam, all of South Vietnam and into Cambodia.

To give you a sense of the size of our Destroyer, it was 437 feet long, 46 feet wide and had 354 men aboard. That it was approximately a city block and a half long and the width of a city street. Eating, sleeping, and working spaces were very compact. Privacy was pretty much non-existent. Weather wise most days were hot and humid or raining. Between missions we had our duty station watches and our "set reps" (replenishment at sea) which would be food, fuel or ammo high lined over from supply ships. We received our mail and pay by helicopter. Time off from the gun line (which wasn't very often) was spent on upkeep to the ship, writing letters or playing cards. Swimming was basically out of the question due to sharks and poisonous sea snakes. We would home port out of Subic Bay, Philippines, for repair and supplies. For the occasional R and R we visited Taiwan, Hong Kong, Okinawa, and Japan.

In 1971 we had three South Vietnamese Naval Midshipmen come aboard for six weeks of ship training. Since they were future officers, I personally wasn't in contact with them very much, but when I did encounter them they were always polite and smiling. When a small South Vietnamese boat came along side to pick the midshipmen up, there were fish drying in the sun on the roof of the pilot house, unusual and even kind of funny to us, but just everyday life to them.

I was on the Berkeley for three years and eight months of my four-year enlistment.

After I left the service and returned home, I ran into a bunch of friends that were glad to see me but didn't have much interest in where I had been or what I had done. The seemingly complete indifference to the Vietnam War was amazing to me. I had literally been in Vietnam two weeks before and

no one seemed to care. I guess for me I dealt with that in the same way. I literally tried to shut out the war. I wouldn't watch any news of the war on the TV or listen to it on the radio. I knew people killed there (including my cousin's husband), so it was impossible to completely ignore.

Honestly, I wouldn't change anything about my service. I felt what we were doing to help the South Vietnamese people at that time was the right thing to do. Time for me has a way of "softening" memories, both good and bad. I still have memory flashes of my time in service. I just try to concentrate on the good ones with my shipmates.



**USS Berkeley DDG-15**



**RIM Tartar, USS Berkeley**



**Gun Mount, USS Berkeley**

