

**Steve Lande**  
**Petty Officer 2nd Class**  
**Torpedoman**  
**U.S. Navy**  
**USS Kearsarge CV-33**

**Gulf of Tonkin**



I think I was eighteen in '65 when I joined after I graduated in May of '65. In November of '65 I joined the Navy Reserve. I went to Reserve meetings every Thursday night for a year. I was only seventeen then, and my parents had to sign my papers. Well, Mom wouldn't sign. After I graduated, I had lost my billfold. So I went up to the Draft Board to get a duplicate draft card. I said, "Well, I'm here. When do you think I'll be drafted?" He said, "When will you be nineteen?" I said, "September." He said, "That's when you'll be drafted"

The following November of '66, I went on my two years of active duty. I enlisted at Fort Des Moines, then went to Chicago Great Lakes Training Center for three months. I gotta brag myself up a little bit. I didn't have any math since general math—Bozo One—in ninth grade. It wasn't required and I wasn't any good at it, so I didn't take it for the rest of my high school. And I just about flunked Bozo One. When I went to this school at Great Lakes, it was lots of math, trigonometry, geometry. I went to school there for three months, and after I graduated, my chief petty officer called me up to his desk, and he had my high school records right there. And he said, "Lande, I don't know how in the hell you did it, but you passed this class with a C average!" And I thought, well, I know how I did it—I actually opened up a book! Also, there was nothing to do at the Great Lakes. I was underage, and the Navy was

just terrible about underage drinking. I couldn't go out and party, so I studied! I wonder what would have happened if I'd done that in high school

I went from there to Key West, Florida to Torpedoman school for three months. Then I went to San Diego, California for three months of Mark 44 Specialist school. I specialized in that one torpedo that was used in the Navy at that time. After San Diego, I went to Long Beach to board the USS Kearsarge aircraft carrier. In August of '67, we left for overseas by way of Hawaii, then to Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin. Then we went for R and R in Yokosuka, Japan. Then back to the Gulf of Tonkin. Then R and R in Sakoku, Japan. Then back to the Gulf of Tonkin.

By that time it was getting on to the end of my tour. We were supposed to have been over there for eight months but we got extended a month. You remember when the North Koreans hijacked the USS Pueblo? Well, we got extended a month and went to North Korea, the Sea of Japan, as a show of force. I think there were two aircraft carriers that went there, and I think there were four destroyers. The funny part was that we were on liberty at Hong Kong about ten o'clock at night, and the Shore Patrol came through to every bar and said everybody on the Kearsarge and accompanying destroyers had to get back to their ship, because they're leaving. And how

that ship made it out of port I don't know. Ten o'clock on liberty night?

Our unit on the aircraft carrier and our destroyers had the job of anti-submarine patrol in Vietnam. There were Russian submarines underneath us all the time. If Russia had decided to get into that war, physically, we'd have been really busy. Two-thirds of the Russian Navy is submarines.

What was life like on the ship? Tight! I lived there for nine months out of a box, my locker. Everything I owned was in there. They slapped four racks on top of each other, pretty close. I don't think I could have done a submarine. We were at sea for forty days one time, and our living compartment was two decks down below the flight deck. You could go for a long time without seeing the sky. But you could, if you wanted to, go up two decks and get out in the fresh air. I don't think you can do that on a submarine. I loved it at sea. Oh, it was beautiful.

The only time I got seasick was when I went on a destroyer in San Francisco on a two-week cruise. The first time away from home, eighteen years old, homesick, seasick—my God, it was terrible. I was on the fantail—back of the boat—throwing up in the middle of the night. The fantail watch came over to me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "If you're sick, go to the head and throw up, because if you fall off this boat, it's gonna be like looking for a needle in a haystack!" That's where I got lucky again, because I got put on the aircraft carrier which is a much bigger ship. It would take a roll once in a while, or you'd go to take a step and the deck would move down an inch or two. But it was much better than the smaller destroyers.

I really liked the Navy. I liked the uniformity of it, and the spit and polish of it, the saluting—I liked all that stuff. You don't have to make decisions on what to wear. Three squares a day. (Sometimes that's how they came out.) The aircraft carriers are noted to have better food. The compartment I was in was air conditioned, where not all of the rest of the ship was. Our department had to be air conditioned because of the films from the torpedoes. So it was really good for me.

About the war itself, me and Nero Lantz had

an argument about it. He was against it. After I was back for a while, and saw movies and read books, and saw the documentaries, I thought it was an economic war. For every nineteen-year-old kid that died over there, CEOs got \$100,000 in their pockets. When I was in Subic Bay, there was a storage for provisions for the war, and there were just stacks and stacks of Jack Daniels whiskey, cereal, toothpaste. I mean, miles, stacks of them. And that was what it was all about, that these companies were just selling. They were making money off that war hand over fist. You look down at that row of Jack Daniels Black Label and it would make your eyes red just looking at it. The regular soldiers never saw any of that. Everything a person would need, just miles and miles, rows, and rows.

Medals? I got the Vietnam ribbon, meritorious unit citation in our group, and then the National Defense ribbon.

I never had any injuries, but on that cruise we had nine people that were killed. A couple of suicides that jumped overboard, and some accidents. We lost an airplane that took off and just went into the ocean. And a helicopter—they were chained to the flight deck, and the flight control people were supposed to unhook the chains on the wheels and then give the pilot the OK to take off. Well, somebody didn't get one of the chains unhooked, and the helicopter went up with a chain on one wheel, so it just flipped over and dropped into the ocean. I think two of them in that deal were killed.



**USS Kearsage CV-33**



We had a drill where we loaded the torpedoes onto airplanes and helicopters. It was two o'clock in the morning and cloudy. It was pitch black up on that flight deck. The only lights you could have on were the lights on the insides of the cockpits of the airplanes and helicopters, and that was just a dim red light. So we went up the middle elevator to the flight deck, and you could feel the wind. You could not see your hand in front of your face. I was looking around, looking for the edge of that ship. It was the scariest part I think I ever had. And then the prop airplanes start firing up—my God, where are those

props? But other times it would be like daylight.

Have you ever seen water when it's like glass? And you see that in the middle of the Pacific Ocean—it's unbelievable. Calm, out flat. You'd think that you'd see waves, constantly, but it was like that several times, like a mirror. I loved that sea. And the water around Hawaii is indescribable. So blue. And the sky's always blue. A hundred and fifty miles out around the island is like a blue I've never seen anywhere else. It's beautiful. I think if I hadn't been married, I would have stayed in.

**Typical Crew Quarters  
On the  
USS Kearsarge**



**Steve Lande**

**USS Kearsarge  
Torpedomen  
Steve Lande  
Back row, 2nd  
from right**