

Winona, crew take part in Vietnam Action

'The trawler exploded in a ball of flame'

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A graphic description of the Coast Guard Cutter Winona's encounter with the enemy off Vietnam has been made available to the Evening News by Mrs. Irvie W. Lindemuth, a Port Angeles resident, whose husband, LCDR Lindemuth, is aboard the Winona.

The description came in the form of a letter from her husband, a part of which is reproduced here.

"Thursday, 29 February, 1968, the United States Coast Guard Cutter Winona received word to proceed to the vicinity of Con Son Island off the southern tip of South Vietnam to keep a suspicious looking trawler under covert surveillance. Four such trawlers were suspected at the same time. Other Coast Guard ships were detailed to two and Navy aircraft were waiting the fourth. The message which dispatched us closed with the statement: 'This may be your big one.' It was.

"At 1930 (5:30 p.m.) on 29 February we set Condition Yoke. (Condition X-ray is with hatches, doors and valves open as necessary for normal shipboard living. Yoke is with half of the fittings secure and Zebra is with the ship fully secured for battle). At sunset we darkened ship, even turning off the navigational lights. Thus did we proceed to stalk the trawler on radar to quickly detect any move to infiltrate South Vietnam.

"Our night routine went on, including taps . . . for G.Q. (General Quarters, Battle Stations) could sound at any time. At 0100 (3 a.m.) 1 March it did. At that time of night, or at any time, the raucous clang . . . clang . . . clang of that thing has the aspirin and stodgehammer beat, hands down! About three minutes later we were at G.Q. with Condition Zebra set.

"In the engineroom, I received reports from all my spaces and reported to the bridge. 'All engineering spaces manned and ready, maximum speed available.' Elsewhere, men were donning flak jackets and helmets. Manning the five inch 38 gun mount, uncovering the mortars and 50 caliber mounts and breaking out ammunition. Why all this? The trawler was closing the beach. We stalked. At one point the heavily laden trawler hesitated, but then headed on in. It wasn't long until the order came down 'full speed ahead!' Full speed they got.

"At a range of one mile from the vessel our 36 inch search-

darkness. (Complete darkness, as the VC usually utilize sights of waning moon.) But this infiltration had been anticipated.

"We took them by surprise. About six men were observed scurrying around the deck, apparently trying to jettison some cargo. We challenged them once . . . twice . . . three times, all with no response. We were to capture if possible, if not . . . destroy. As a more emphatic challenge we then fired a five inch shell across their bow. Still no response.

"By this time the Winona was 600 yards distant, close enough for the job at hand and rapidly approaching water too shallow for us. As there was no alternative, we opened fire with the .50 caliber machine guns. This fire was immediately returned with small arms and weapons similar to our .50s. With our five inch 38 then in action as well as the .50 calibers, the ensuing battle lasted about 10 minutes, ending as the trawler

exploded in a huge ball of flame, proving beyond a doubt the presence of munitions on board.

"Debris rained down on the Winona; a length of handrail, shrapnel, helmet straps even. Gun stock splinters and other debris were found by other vessels standing by during the encounter, including four 82 foot Coast Guard patrol boats, four 50 foot Navy patrol boats (called Swifties) and the U.S.S. Conflict, a minesweeper.

"No survivors.

"Meanwhile, up the coast all was not idle. The USCGC Anacapa, assisted by a similar group of Navy and Coast Guard craft, had forced their quarry to destroy itself — the USCGC Minnetonka turned her back to seaward . . . and Navy aircraft, five Swifties and three South Vietnamese Navy vessels continued to destroy the last enemy trawler.

"It has been estimated that these four boats would have provided supplies for a good-sized

army for many months. As one message to all units involved said, in part, ' . . . your action will mean the saving of countless American and South Vietnamese lives.'

"No one was injured on the Winona. One man got his sleeve torn. Another was hit on the helmet with a four pound chunk of steel plate. We could hear the bullets hitting the hull of the engineroom which was thick enough to withstand it. The Winona acquired about six holes in and several more dents, but that's all.

"I have mixed emotions about all this. A. I am glad for the victory; B. I am thankful for zero casualties; C. I am saddened by snuffing out of human life, even VC.; D. I am resolved that because of the Communist threat in the world today, this sort of thing must go on, at least for the present; E. I am certain that our country, though not always right, is more right than wrong. May it ever be so."

Red attack thrown back

5 Red Ships Destroyed by Winona

KHE SANH, Vietnam (AP) — More than 500 North Vietnamese soldiers attacked Khe Sanh Combat Base this morning before dawn today. They got to the barbed wire

at forces their big war—th 100-ton loaded wi rifles the coast not vesse snaped. U.S. Ct trawlers ew to es her two issues by U.S. Guard boats, in rom the beach acking overhea One battle on Wino Vietna M. Campbell, And and the Minne relieve five oth

