

Excerpt from USS Ponchatoula (AO-148) Newsletter
March, 1967

On March 18th, while engaged in operations in the Gulf of Tonkin, we successfully rescued a Naval Aviator who had been shot down by Viet Cong anti-aircraft fire. The pilot, Lt. Robert B. Moore, was picked up unhurt between three and four o'clock in the morning. The rescue was unexpected because we were unaware that a pilot was missing. It was the alertness of two of our lookouts that made the rescue possible and earned the ship a great deal of praise from WESTPAC commanders. Seaman Apprentice Barry E. Litchfield and Seaman Apprentice Gilbert Neuhaus were standing lookout watches on the bridge when they spotted Lt. Moore's flairs off the starboard bow and informed the Officer of the Deck, Lt. Constantine A. Johns. Lt. Moore was pulled from the water some 5 hours after he had been forced to ditch his damaged aircraft. He was returned to the carrier HANCOCK, his home base, the next morning.

The quick action taken by PONCHATOULA in the pilot rescue resulted in four congratulatory messages, parts of which appear below.

FROM: COMSEVENTHFLT
TO: USS PONCHATOULA

THE ALERTNESS DISPLAYED BY PONCHATOULA DURING THE RECENT RESCUE WAS NOTED WITH PLEASURE. SUCH ACTION BY A UNIT FAR REMOVED FROM THE EXPECTED SCENE OF INTEREST CLEARLY SHOWS THAT THIS SHIP EVER READY FOR WHATEVER MAY DEVELOP. WELL DONE.

VADM JOHN J. HIGHLAND

FROM: COMMANDER TASK FORCE 77
TO: USS PONCHATOULA

THE SUPERB DISPLAY OF SKILL AND TEAMWORK EXHIBITED BY RESCUE HELICOPTERS, AIRCRAFT, AND SURFACE UNITS IN RECENT SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORTS WERE OUTSTANDING. THE TENACITY AND FORTITUDE DISPLAYED BY THE PERSONNEL INVOLVED UNDER POOR WEATHER CONDITIONS, RESULTED IN THE RESCUE OF THREE OF THE DOWNED AIRMEN. PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY WAS THE SHARP WATCH ON THE PONCHATOULA. TO ALL INVOLVED IN THIS DIFFICULT RESCUE, MY HEARTFELT THANKS FOR A JOB WELL DONE.

RADM RICHARDSON

FROM: CTF 73
TO: USS PONCHATOULA

THE PONCHATOULA TEAM PLAYED "HEADS UP BALL" IN LOCATING AND RESCUING A COUNTRYMAN IN DISTRESS. THE ALERTNESS OF LOOKOUTS LITCHFIELD AND NEUHAUSIS PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY. WELL DONE.

COMMANDER TASK FORCE 73

FROM: CTG SEVEN SEVEN PT SIX
TO: CTE SEVEN ZERO PT TWO PT ONE PT ONE
INFO: CINCPACFLT
COMSEVENTHFLT
CTF SEVEN SEVEN
COMCARDIV THREE
ALL CVA TG ODRS PACFLT
USS PONCHATOULA

1. ABOARD THE USS HANCOCK IN THE TONKIN GULF, 19 MARCH --- AVIATORS FROM THE ALEMEDA, CALIFORNIA BASED HANCOCK AND CARRIER BASED AIR WING FIVE ATTEMPTED TO PENETRATE THE INCLEMENT WEATHER TODAY TO REACH THEIR TARGETS, BUT WERE UNABLE TO SUCCEED.
2. ALTHOUGH HANCOCK WASN'T ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AIR WAR OVER NORTH VIETNAM, SHE DIS RETURN A FAVOR TO A WELL DESERVED RECIPIENT.
3. "FIGHTINH HANNA" RECEIVED FUEL FROM THE USS PONCHATOULA (AO-148) TODAY. THE SAME SHIP THAT RECENTLY RECOVERED ONE OF HANNA'S AVIATORS AFTER HIS PLANE WENT DOWN IN THE TONKIN GULF.
4. IT IS A TRADITION OF LONG STANDING IN THE NAVY FOR AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER TO SHOW HER APPRECIATION FOR THE RETURNED PILOT BY REWARDING THE BALLER SHIP'S CREW WITHA PRIZE OF ICE CREAM.
5. AFTTER "HANNA" WAS REFULED, THE ICE CREAM WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE AWAITING PONCHATOULA CREW, AT THE SAME TIME, THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE WAS FLASHED TO THE PONCHATOULA:

PERHAPS YOU ARE ALL NOT TOTALLY AWARE OF ONE OF THE TRADITIONS OF NAVAL AIR. WE ALWAYS PROVIDE A SPECIAL PRIZE WHEN A SHOP PICKS UP ONE OF OUR GUYS. PROVIDED TODAY WITH OUR BEST WISHES ICECREAM FOR SAVING MOORE FROM THE FISHES, YOUR EFFORTS WERE GREATLY APPRECIATED INDEED FOR HELPING US OUT WHEN WE WERE IN NEED. FOR THIS HANNA SAYS THANKS FOR THE BEST, THE PONCHATOULA IS TOPS, WHEN PUT TO THE TEST.