



▲ CAPT Herbert E. Reichert, CO USS *Sterett* during Dong Hoi battle.

said CAPT Reichert. *Oklahoma City* and *Lloyd Thomas* had already started an easterly course toward the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin, with *Higbee* following, protected by *Sterett*.

At the end of the battle, in a personal message to CAPT Reichert, *Sterett* was commended by ADM B. A. Clarey, then Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet. "I have been following your action out there since early this morning," he messaged the ship's officers and men, "and I am tremendously impressed by your quick response in the multi-threat environment."

*Higbee* also had words of praise for *Sterett*: "You will always have an honored spot close to our hearts. You were magnificent, and the sight of your Terriers making the kill was a tremendous boost to our morale. Words will never be able to express the feelings of pride we felt."

At the time of the action, *Higbee* was steaming at 33 knots. The bomb damage to her fantail did not result in a serious casualty to her screws, and after it she proceeded at 12 knots to Danang and from there to Subic Bay for repairs. En route, she radioed her Squadron Commander "Request permission to make an engineering economy

▼ LCDR Michael Cornforth



run." Said LCDR Cornforth with admiration, "They showed a lot of poise and guts."

*Higbee* returned to complete her tour in the Gulf of Tonkin, minus an after gun mount. Now in the Naval Reserve Fleet, she is assigned to DESRON 37 and homeported at Portland, Ore. *Lloyd Thomas* was transferred to Taiwan, China, on 30 October 1972. *Oklahoma City*, which air evacuated *Higbee's* injured, continues operations as part of the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific. *Sterett* is now assigned to COMCRUDESGRU THREE.

After every naval engagement, participants recall anecdotes, providing an epilogue. A few of the many:

- *Sterett* had been fighting with only one of her two missile fire control systems operable; the second system was CASREPped for lack of spare TR tubes. At the end of the Battle off Dong Hoi, *Sterett's* Supply Officer, LCDR James Robinson, sent a message to the Supply Systems Command, titled "Increased Pucker Factor," citing the concern for future engagements without a back-up fire control system. The tubes, which had been originally ordered three weeks earlier, arrived aboard within two days.

- Prior to the battle, *Sterett* experienced difficulties with her NTDS computer program, which were soon ironed out by civilian experts who had been flown aboard. The 2½-hour battle apparently unnerved the civilian technicians (who are not required to be in combat conditions) and they requested permission to transfer to a ship that would return them to Subic. The following day, *Sterett* rearmed alongside an AE and effected the transfer. About two weeks later the civilians were back aboard. They had been transferred from ship to ship in the Gulf of Tonkin—which at that time was described as chaotic. The technicians were still unnerved and one was heard to mutter "How did we we get back here again!"

- One crewman, who should have been nervous, wasn't. Earlier, he had been assigned to the carrier *Constellation*, had participated in a pierside anti-war demonstration and was transferred to *Sterett*. His new duty in the *Sterett* was in the Weapons Department. When the action off Dong Hoi was over and the ship was withdrawing, he called up his chief over the JCT circuit and excitedly demanded, "What are we leaving for? We still have 23 missiles!" He was now a believer.

- The Chief of Naval Operations, then ADM Elmo R. Zumwalt, described the Dong Hoi battle as an "outstanding combat action." He messaged the ship's officers and crew, "Your ability to expeditiously engage and suppress the enemy demonstrates high individual professionalism and team coordination that will be difficult to surpass."

- CAPT Reichert, who retired last month, completing 32 years service, said of the battle: "The commanding officer who attempts to run a one-man show will lose his ship. Teamwork, practice and trust are paramount. I am mighty proud of that ship and of the fact that all hands were ready and did their duty."

- *Sterett's* total "kill" score for the deployment, which ended in her homeport of San Diego on 8 August 1972, included six MiG 21's (some of which were air control intercepts), two MiG 17's, and two PT boats destroyed. In addition, six U.S. Navy and Air Force fighter pilots who had been shot down and ditched over the Gulf of Tonkin were rescued by *Sterett*.