



The U.S. Coast Guard in the Vietnam War

Early in the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces obtained their supplies in many ways and the forces allied with the Republic of South Vietnam had great difficulty stopping the enemy's flow of men, arms and supplies.

In February 1965, U. S. Army helicopter pilot 1LT James Bowers flying a HU-1B Iroquois over Vung Ro Bay near Qui Nhon noticed an "island" moving slowly from one side of the bay to the other. Upon closer observation he saw the island was a carefully camouflaged ship. Air strikes were called in and the vessel was sunk. Intelligence sources determined the ship was North Vietnamese and engaged in supplying enemy forces.

While the U.S. Navy recognized the need for an effective security and surveillance system, it also knew this would be a difficult task with 1,200 miles of coastline to patrol and over 60,000 junks and sampans to control.



In March 1965, the Coastal Surveillance Force was established and began Operation MARKET TIME, so named after the native boats using the waterways for fishing and marketing. This task force provided a single command to integrate sea, air, and land based units and coordinate U.S. Navy, and South Vietnamese naval units.

Soon the Navy recognized the need for Coast Guard units to support this mission and on April 29th, President Lyndon Johnson committed the USCG to service in Vietnam under the Navy Department's operational control and announced the formation of Coast Guard Squadron One (RON ONE). Initially, 47 officers and 198 enlisted were assigned to the newly formed Squadron and on 16 July, Division 12 of Coast Guard Squadron One departed Subic Bay, Philippines for Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam. It arrived on July 20th and began its security and surveillance patrol mission on July 21st. Throughout the war, OPERATION MARKET TIME units stopped many enemy vessels carrying supplies and men. The largest naval engagement of the Vietnam War was on 29 February 1968. Four trawlers attempted to penetrate the barrier. Of these, three were destroyed and the fourth retreated to the north.

The success of this and other operations forced the enemy to rely on the Ho Chi Minh trail to transport supplies. As many of the trawler kills were in southern Vietnam near the Ca Mau peninsula, the enemy had to carry supplies over an extraordinarily long distance.