

## FORWARD

Sunday afternoon, April 16, 1967, a scene of sorrow, tears, disbelief, AND joy, enthusiasm, and expectancy. As the Gresham pulled away from the dock at Government Island we were truly heading into the unknown. Not since WWII had a major cutter left its home port heading to war. The only thing that seemed logical was the band playing "Semper Paratus," for when we received the call we were ready.

The beginning was about six weeks before. Five officers returned from San Francisco knowing the mission and trying to maintain security, then came the shipyard availability ahead of schedule, air conditioners installed (this was not an Alaska patrol), 81 mm mortars, M16 rifles and grenades, new communications equipment, and finally the official word, Vietnam. The U.S. Navy was in need of assistance, and of course, as in past wars, the Coast Guard answered the call. There was no look of fear or anxiety among the crew only a noticeable grimness, a look of meanness, the sort of look John Wayne had storming a beach.

Getting volunteers to make the trip was something to behold, the short timers almost crying because they couldn't go, Andy Zankich, Dan MacMillan coming back to their home from soft duty, we could have sailed with 500 men. We were something special.

Fellow Coast Guardsmen envied the crew of the Gresham right up to the day we sailed. The big White Dragon of the Sea reached its first stop enroute Vietnam, Pearl Harbor, there we assumed command of the newly formed Squadron three. Being flagship of the first group of Vietnam-bound cutters made us the real heroes of the deployment. Then after assuring the returning Navy tin cans that they could rest easy in Pearl Harbor, we left for the Philippines. It was the CGC Gresham all the way, first in replenishment at sea, first in target practice (we were born defenders of the Stars and Stripes and we know it), and first in navigation, why we ran circles around the other four ships. Each man was eager to break in the new M16, and they were all experts, killers if you may. The 81 mm mortar and 5-inch gun teams were all wearing the familiar snarl on their faces as they waited for the General Quarters alarm to sound. The war was drawing closer, but still no signs of fear crept aboard the GRESHAM. We were as ready as we would ever be. The Philippines, our last stop before sailing into the unknown, was welcomed by the now battle ready troops of the Coast Guard. We mixed right in with the returning Navy veterans, again assuring them that it was practically over. Now the day came and the GRESHAM left the Philippines due west. In two days it was war. . . . Last minute drills, checking out systems, briefing the boarding and lowering teams. Still the grim faces of the fighting men showed no signs of fear . . . we were ready. "Bring on the enemy!"