

# Vietnam and a Nuclear Incident

Michael Krause USNA--63

I have read all the submissions by classmates you have posted on the RVN site. The reports are very interesting and obviously, we have a lot of heroes in our class. It is tragic that we lost some, but this project will help preserve their sacrifices for their classmates and others who visit the site. I am very proud to be a part of their legacies.

I thought I'd share my experiences with you and the others, although having been primarily aboard destroyers for my brief 6 years-3 months & 26 day Navy career.

Upon graduation, I reported to USS MAHAN (DLG-11) in San Diego. My first assignment was as Deck Division Office and I was shuffled off to RPS School which was a concern given the stories about RPS Custodians in Leavenworth! MAHAN left for WESTPAC in October 1963 along with USS ORISKANY (CVA-34) and USS KING (DLG-10) and we returned the following March. These three ships were the only NTDS ships in the Pacific fleet and usually cruised together. That cruise was relatively calm with two to three weeks at sea followed by port visits to Hong Kong, Yokosuka, Sasebo and Subic Bay. However, we did spend time in the Gulf on plane guard with ORISKANY and KING. Following our return to CONUS, we went into the yards at Long Beach from June through October 1964 to have our Terrier Missile Fire Control systems upgraded and some other repairs and updates. We went through underway training the first half of 1965 and left for WESTPAC in October 1965. On this cruise, we spent all our at sea periods on plane guard on YANKEE Station and had a couple of NGFS missions in I Corps. We were primarily a Air Intercept Control ship having height finding RADAR and several AIC controllers on board.

We returned to San Diego in March of 1966 and I received orders to Destroyer School for the class entering in June through December. I received orders to USS OZBOURN (DD-846) home-ported in Yokosuka reporting on board in January 1967 as Weapons

Officer. As I recall, Paul Tobin was the only other classmate in my Destroyer School class. Paul was also on the MAHAN's sister ship USS KING (DLG-10) also stationed in San Diego.

OZBOURN spent most of its time on Sea Dragon in the Tonkin Gulf off North Viet Nam. We were one of a couple FRAM I ships equipped with Snoopy, a system that used our drone helicopters equipped with TV cameras for spotting NGFS. As a result, we were able to conduct firing missions inland in enemy territory in the north, primarily hitting targets along Highway 1 and targets of opportunity without using NGLO spotters. The Snoopy system worked fairly well, but we lost several drones through mechanical failure and one confirmed casualty due to enemy fire. One of the creative things we did was arm the drones with hand grenades to drop on personnel and other targets. The grenades fit perfectly into and were secured with the pins pulled in 81 MM Mortar shipping tubes that were held in place by the bomb racks. Probably not the most effective weapon, but a lot of fun.

During Sea Dragon missions, we were fired at by shore batteries several times with one direct hit in the after crew's after berthing compartment adjacent to the Mount 52 Upper Handling Room. The armor piercing shell exploded in the berthing space and killed two of the men handling ammo.

OZBOURN was also involved in the PUEBLO incident. We were designated to steam into Wonson harbor, slip the PUEBLO's mooring and tow her out to sea. Lucky for me and the entire crew, the mission was cancelled. Intelligence reported that the Gooks had eight inch guns protecting the entrance to the harbor! We spent over 60 days in the Sea of Japan, which is the coldest place on earth.

Probably the most interesting incident in my Navy career occurred 25 March 1967 at the DMZ during an amphibious operation. As it turned out, it was (apparently) the first and only incident of a nuclear weapon being damaged in combat.

It was interesting how I was contacted by the author of Broken Arrow

II, Mike Maggelet, a retired USAF LCOL. He was writing a book on nuclear accidents and incidents from 1945 through 2010. I got a call at home one afternoon in the fall of 2010 from LCOL Maggelet who asked if I was the Weapons Officer on the OZBOURN during "the incident"! He assured me that everything concerning the incident had been declassified, but was incredulous that not much was available from his research about the "real story". I briefly related my recollections and after a short discussion, I agreed to write them up for him. The manuscript is attached along with some photos and a copy of a redacted letter mentioning it on White House letterhead if you care to consider it/them of interest and want to include it on the website. (See attached below)

Here's the info on the book:

Broken Arrow - Vol II - A Disclosure of U.S., Soviet, and British Nuclear Weapon Incidents and Accidents, 1945-2008

Nov 21, 2010 by Michael H. Maggelet and James C. Oskins

The preceding is the sum of my active duty, but I did remain in the reserves for ten additional years and attained the rank of CDR. Give me a call or email if you have any questions. Congratulations on this very worthwhile addition to the Class' legacy.

-----

**USS OZBOURN (DD-846)**  
**25 March 1967 Nuclear Incident**

**BACKGROUND:**

The USS OZBOURN (DD-846) or the "OZ", as the crew referred to her, was a Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization Version I (FRAM-I) Gearing Class DD with twin 5"/38 cal. mounts, one fore and another aft on the main deck. She also carried two Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopters (DASH); six MK 44 torpedo tubes; and an Anti-Submarine Rocket (ASROC) launcher with eight cells. Payloads for ASROC were either MK-44 acoustic homing torpedoes or Rocket Thrown Depth Charges (RTDC) armed with MK-44 nuclear warheads. The DASH could carry either a MK-44 torpedo or an MK-44 Depth Charge. The ASROC launcher cells were normally loaded with four RTDCs in the center four cells and the four MK 44 torpedoes in the outboard cells. The OZ was unique as she carried DASH drones called "Snoopy" fitted with TV cameras used as an observation platform for shore bombardment on Sea Dragon operations in North Viet Nam. The drone was tracked by the MK 37 RADAR so we knew the observer's location. The drone's gyro compass provided the Observer Target Line (OTL). When the OTL was combined with the known location of the drone, the MK-1A Gun Fire Control System (GFCS) was able to compute the Gun Target Line (GTL) to targets identified by Snoopy. It was effective but we lost several drones throughout the deployment due to enemy fire and crashes. We had even rigged drones to drop hand grenades from their weapons racks. On the date of the incident, I was a Lieutenant USN serving as Weapons Officer aboard the OZ. The OZ was home-ported in Yokosuka, Japan in Destroyer Division 92 and was the Division Commander's flag ship. During our deployment the OZ participated in several counter battery incidents with North Vietnamese batteries and was hit twice – this incident and another on 4 December 1967 when two men were killed. My memory of the incident remains clear after 43 years. The following is drawn from my personal experiences and are accurate to the best of my recollection. I never saw an official report of the incident, and if there is one, perhaps these recollections can be confirmed as fact. There was a mention of the

incident in *Stars & Stripes* when the 4 December engagement was reported as follows:

*“Last March 25 the Ozbourn was hit while operating just south of the Demilitarized Zone. The ship suffered minor damage in the earlier shelling, but no casualties”*

### **25 MARCH 1967**

At the time of the incident, a Casualty Report (CASREPT) had been issued for two of the ASROC launcher's eight cells. The inoperative cells were two of the four center cells where we carried the RTDCs. As a result, we had removed the RTDC's from the CASREPT cells and stored them in the ASROC magazine located on the 01 level, port side. Inside the magazine were nine ASROC cradles, three tiers of three cradles stacked one on top of the other. Each cradle could accommodate either a fully assembled RTDC or ASROC torpedo of un-mounted MK-44 torpedoes or MK-44 nuclear warheads. When configured with rockets, they were stored with the rocket motors nozzles forward and the weapons pointing aft. The forward bulkhead of the magazine was fitted with nine blowout ports with manhole-like steel covers aligned with each weapons' rocket motor. These hatches were hinged at the top with a shear pin on the bottom designed to open and release gasses from the magazine in the event of a rocket motor ignition and close after the ignition was complete. The RTDCs from the CASREPT cells were stored in the top two cradles closest to the outboard port bulkhead of the magazine.

We arrived off the Cua Viet River at the DMZ about midnight Friday 24 March 1967 to assume our assigned gunfire support area in preparation for an amphibious operation. There were three gunfire support areas and we were assigned to the northernmost one. There were several other ships in the area including a LPH involved in the operation. As we approached our assigned area, our plan was to anchor since a ship at anchor provides the best solution for Naval Gunfire Support (NGFS) missions. Our assigned area was a triangle with the leg parallel to the beach about 3000 yards long and 1200 yards offshore. The apex of the triangle was to the east (seaward) and the other two legs were about the same length.

I was on the foc'sle with the Anchor Detail when we dropped the anchor that evening. After the anchor was set but before the detail secured, the Commanding Officer joined me on the foc'sle. I vividly

recall us discussing the situation and me saying, "Captain, that's North Viet Nam about 1200 yards over there". After a brief discussion, we decided to get underway again and steam throughout the night in the assigned area. We were at Readiness Condition II with Mount 51, the forward gun mount, manned. We steamed back and forth all night on the leg paralleling the beach at 3 knots reversing course 180° every half hour on the hour and half hour. Since the steam requirements were minimal at 3 knots, we had cut back to one boiler to conserve fuel but limited our speed and maneuvering capabilities.

The next morning when I went out on deck, there was a low hanging fog or topical inversion just above the water; there was little or no breeze; and the water's surface was like glass. My guess is that the red aircraft warning lights located on the masthead were above the inversion and visible throughout the night from the shore. The enemy probably watched these lights all night and marked the positions where we turned every half hour.

The Captain had scheduled a Department Head meeting in his sea cabin just behind the bridge for 0800 Saturday morning 25 March. Those present included the Chief Engineer, Supply Officer, Operations Officer, the Captain; the Executive Officer and me. We were crammed into the Captains sea cabin just behind the bridge. I sat on the "shit can", the Captain in his chair at his desk, the rest were sitting on his bunk or standing wherever they could. The first topic discussed was coincidentally Damage Control, and the Damage Control Assistant (DCA) was Officer of the Deck (OOD) on the bridge. Almost exactly as the Captain started the meeting at 0800 we were at the northern end of the leg getting ready to turn south when we heard a loud "clattering" sound, not really an explosion. Although I am not positive, this may have been an air burst or the round may have detonated when it hit the water. The hull was not penetrated, but I believe what we heard was shrapnel hitting the hull above the waterline just aft of the port bow where the Chiefs' quarters were located. Someone remarked, "What was that?" This was followed by, "We must be testing the .50 cal machine guns". We had one Browning M2 50 cal. machine gun mounted port and starboard on the 02 level astern of the bridge wings. The Gunners Mates test fired them at 0800 each morning. I recall saying, "That's not the 50's!"

The second round hit the exterior bulkhead, port-side near the Destroyer Squadron Nine insignia on the 01 level, destroying the MK 37 Radar. The MK 37 RADAR provided ranging and direction information to the gunfire control system for laying the guns for AA and surface targets. As a result, the guns and director had to shift to manual control without the ability to measure range to any target. The Paint Locker was located directly below the MK 37 room on the main deck. Several seamen were at the Paint Locker drawing supplies for work assignments when the second round hit the just above them. Fortunately, no one was hurt as they were protected from shrapnel by the overhang.

The ASROC sentry on the 01 level amidships where the ASROC launcher was located heard the commotion and ran toward the port side ladder leading to the main deck to see what was going on. At about that time, a third round passed between the lifelines and in front of the sentry and aft of the door to the passageway to the MK 37 room and Radio Central on the 01 level. The sentry immediately turned around and ran aft toward the ASROC magazine. The next round hit the magazine's port side bulkhead. The detonation ignited the rocket motor and destroyed the MK 44 RTDC warhead in the uppermost rack. The sentry turned around and ran forward, stumbling down the ladder to the main deck and suffered some very minor scrapes and bruises.

We were now at General Quarters (GQ) and the OOD the ship was in a turn to starboard. The fire rooms were bringing on more boilers as our speed and maneuvering capabilities were limited with only one boiler on line. We immediately went into counter-battery mode and went to my station in Combat Information Center (CIC). The Gunnery Officer was already in his Condition II and GQ station as Director Officer. Due to the loss of power and the destruction of the MK 37 system and concomitantly the entire Gunfire Control System, the director and guns were being operated manually. This meant that the Gunnery Mates (Pointers and Trainers) had to elevate and train both gun mounts and director manually, a very slow process. The fact that we were maneuvering with only oral commands to the guns from the director compounded the situation. The ship's counter battery was less than effective and some rounds landed near the support ships to seaward of our location.

As Weapons officer, I had possession of the magazine keys which were kept in the safe in my stateroom directly below the ASROC magazine. Once we ascertained what the situation was in the ASROC magazine, I went to my stateroom to get the keys so the DC party could enter the magazine to fight the fire. I was unaware of the extent of the damage, but suspected the worse. As I was trying to open my safe using my flashlight in a dark smoke filled stateroom with water dripping from the 01 level above, I thought to myself, "I could be vaporized any second". By the time I arrived back on the 01 level, the DC Party had broken through the door on the after bulkhead of the magazine and was fighting the fire. Fire hoses were also directed into the magazine through the open blow-out hatch. All this happened in a matter of a couple of minutes.

The blow-out hatch operated as designed, except for the fact that the hinge-pin also sheared. As a result, the hatch took off like a Frisbee; hit the deck on the port side 01 level near the ASROC launcher; bounced off the deck and wound up on the 03 level near the flag bag on the signal bridge. Had it hit someone, it would have been deadly.

By the time I entered the magazine, the fire was out. I am not sure if the MK 44 warhead's high explosive exploded or was simply ruptured or experienced a low grade detonation. When I entered the magazine I saw the weapons core with its stainless steel tritium gas bottle attached by a short piece of tubing lying on the deck. There was some high explosive from the warhead spread around the deck as well, some of which had obviously burned. The rocket motor of the RTDC in the lower cradle did not ignite, although I believe the RTDC suffered some shrapnel damage. The RTDC was still strapped securely in its cradle.

Later that day, several EOD types came aboard from one of the carriers and began dismantling the damaged weapons. We proceeded to Subic Bay, arriving Monday morning where the weapons were off-loaded and the Ships Repair Facility in Subic repaired some of the battle damage. I believe shortly after the incident, all nuclear warheads were removed from ASROC capable ships in the combat zone. We also heard that President Johnson and his advisors went to GQ in the White House and tracked the situation closely.

All the events described above occurred in a relatively short period of time. It is hard to imagine the unintended consequences, political and otherwise had the weapon detonated. The safety features built into the warhead obviously worked. It is a credit to the training and professionalism of the crew that the ship was not lost and I thank them that I am here today to relate my experience.

++++  
++++

Michael S. Krause is a graduate of the US Naval Academy, Class of 1963. He served as First Lieutenant, Gunnery Officer and Terrier Missile Officer in USS MAHAN (DLG-11) from 1963 to 1966. He attended Destroyer School at Newport, RI in 1966 and served as Weapons Officer in USS OZBOURN (DD-846) 1967 -1968. He was a Project Officer at DEPCOMOPTEVFORPAC in 1968-1969 when he resigned and joined the reserves where he attained the rank of Commander.



MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

✓  
3

~~SECRET~~

March 25, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROSTOW

SUBJECT: [redacted] Destroyers Patrolling  
Offshore North Vietnam

3.3(b)(4),(5)  
6.2(a)

The attached report [redacted] aboard the [redacted] which was caused by offshore mortar fire from North Vietnam raises sharply the question of why U. S. destroyers on these patrols [redacted]

3.3(b)(4),(5)  
6.2(a)

Although in this case no serious problem resulted from the North Vietnam attack, I can foresee the possibility of a misleading news report in the event the circumstances of this attack leak to the press.

[redacted]

3.3(b)(4),(5)  
6.2(a)

I called this report to the attention of Ben Read who spoke to Mr. Katzenbach. Katzenbach expects to discuss this question with Mr. Vance today.

BKS

Bromley Smith

~~SECRET~~

SANTIZED  
Authority NLS/RAC 09-110  
By Cbm, NARA, Date 12-12-10

COPY LEJ LIBRARY

~~SECRET~~



THE JOINT STAFF

THE NATIONAL MILITARY COMMAND CENTER  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

3a

25 March 1967  
9:30 AM EST

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Report of Nuclear Incident

1. At 241918 EST the [redacted], operating approximately 4,000 yards offshore east of the DMZ, was hit by what was estimated to be three rounds of mortar fire. [redacted] was conducting a Naval Gunfire Support patrol for BEACON HILL I operations and was not firing a mission at the time of the attack. [redacted] opened range and fired 78 rounds of counterbattery fire with unknown effect. The mortar ceased firing at [redacted] when the range to the beach was about 7,800 yards.

2. Results of this attack were two direct hits in the ASROC (anti-submarine rocket) magazine and the third in the radar room. One Rocket Thrown Depth Charge (RTDC) motor ignited. The magazine was flooded and the fire extinguished. [redacted]

[redacted] Eighteen torpedoes with conventional warheads were also stored in the magazine. All of the weapons in the magazine were damaged to varying degrees from shrapnel holes in fins to heat and water damage. There was no apparent damage to [redacted] No personnel were injured.

3. CINCPAC has directed an investigation to determine if any [redacted] received damage. [redacted]

Copies to:  
WHITE HOUSE  
SECDEF  
DEPSECDEF  
CJCS  
DJS  
J-30  
J-31  
J-32  
J-33  
NWSE

CMC  
AFCP  
CSA  
CNO  
DDO  
ADDO  
DIA Rep  
NSA Rep  
CIA Rep  
State Rep  
PA Rep  
CCOC

*[Signature]*  
H. J. TRUM III  
Rear Admiral, USN  
Deputy Director for  
Operations (NMCC)

SANITIZED  
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5  
By *[initials]* NLJ/RAC 09-111 appeal  
NARA, Date 3-31-11

E.O. 13526  
3.3(b)(4)(5)  
6.2(a)

~~SECRET~~

COPY LBI LIBRARY