

USS Current (ARS-22)

Our Navy's "Ship of the Year" For 1968

USS CURRENT (ARS-22) is the proud and deserving winner of OUR NAVY's ninth annual "SHIP OF THE YEAR" award! Her commanding officer is Lieutenant Commander George M. Giganti, USN. Our heartiest congratulations to this outstanding ship, her fine and devoted officers and crew!

This exceptional small ship has proved to be a veritable giant in every way. She not only has passed every test of readiness with great distinction; she has by plan and circumstance been faced with a succession of difficult and highly challenging tasks all of which have been completed with skill, ingenuity, thoroughness and success.

CURRENT was nominated separately by TWO top commanders; Rear Admiral Walter V. Combs, USN, Commander Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and Vice Admiral Bernard F. Roeder, USN, Commander, First Fleet. Their nominating letters, which follow leave no doubt regarding their convictions and the wisdom of their choice:

Dear Mr. Watson,

I am most enthusiastic about OUR NAVY's annual "Ship of the Year" award program and, in response to your letter of 1 October, I am especially pleased to nominate the Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet salvage ship USS CURRENT (ARS-22) for this great honor.

This small, 24-year old veteran has earned a well deserved reputation for her exceptional willingness and capabilities in performing all assigned tasks in a superb and thoroughly professional manner. CURRENT's mission requires that she provide salvage, repair, diving and rescue services to the fleet, as well as to commercial ships and craft when circumstances so require. She has been called upon time and again to prove herself in all of these areas, and she has never failed to demonstrate herself as a diligent "workhorse of the fleet." Among a number of extremely capable and high performing ships, it is significant that CURRENT was the first salvage ship in her class to be awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation in recognition of her exceptionally meritorious services in the Southeast Asia area.

Following a highly successful deployment with the U. S. SEVENTH Fleet in 1967, in which CURRENT participated in six major salvage operations, the ship returned to her homeport, Pearl Harbor, only a short time prior to being faced with an unusual salvage operation — one involving a grounded nuclear powered submarine. When USS GUARDFISH (SSN-612) grounded on Christmas Eve at the entrance to Pearl Harbor, CURRENT was the first to answer the call for assistance, getting underway at 2300 local time. The ship played a major role in this successful retraction, which was accomplished over a two-day period, including Christmas, with the assistance of two other Service



LCDR George M. Giganti, USN, commanding officer.

Force salvage ships, USS GRAPPLE (ARS-7) and USS ARIKARA (ATF-98).

Shortly after the GUARDFISH operation, CURRENT again participated in a vital salvage mission resulting from the grounding of SS BEAVER VICTORY, fully loaded with ammunition and bound for Vietnam, which occurred in the vicinity of the explosive anchorage adjacent to the Pearl Harbor entrance. CURRENT played a key role in the successful refloating of this ship, remarkably in an undamaged condition, in a precise and highly professional operation which involved three straight days of round-the-clock effort on the part of the salvage units.

In keeping with the ship's demonstrated proficiency in all areas of readiness, and the exceptional day-to-day performance observed, CURRENT in fiscal year 1968, won the COMSERVPAC Battle Efficiency Award, the "E", for ships of her competitive group for the second consecutive year.

Not to be outdone, the ship's cooks also proved their exceptional interest and competence and were duly recognized for their efforts when CURRENT was singled out as the winner among twenty-one Service Force Pacific ships with small messes in the NEY Award competition for excellence in food service.

Service Force ships do not have time to rest on past laurels. This has been particularly true for CURRENT. Following overhaul, she immediately went to work and attained the highest score received by any U. S. Navy ship over the past two years for refresher training under the Fleet Training Group, Pearl Harbor.

Enroute this past summer to the Western Pacific for

another deployment with the U. S. SEVENTH Fleet, CURRENT was diverted to render assistance to the SS ANDREW JACKSON, which had lost all power and was drifting in the ocean about 1000 miles northeast of Guam. In characteristic fashion, CURRENT arrived on the scene with dispatch and took the disabled ship in tow until later relieved by a commercial ocean-going tug from Japan. More recently, CURRENT again completed a rescue tow in which she delivered the SS LINDENWOOD VICTORY to Yokosuka following engineering casualties to that ship in the typhoon plagued waters east of Taiwan.

CURRENT is presently on station in the vicinity of Danang as the ready duty standby salvage ship. Her presence in this role is vital to the successful prosecution of our effort in that area of Vietnam. Not only is she available for salvage missions that may arise but her divers are also continually employed keeping the offshore POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants) lines open and in good repair. These POL lines are most vital to the war effort.

CURRENT never says no! Whether it be a routine request for a diver to inspect a ship's bottom or a major salvage effort, this ship has always responded in the most positive fashion.

CURRENT is not a very large ship. She does not have much capability to fight, and certainly there isn't much glamour in the very nature of salvage work. However, I am profoundly touched by the unstinting devotion to duty, patriotism and industry on the part of all hands in CURRENT. These men truly understand the importance of their ship and its mission — a mission that is growing from day to day. They have often endured jobs involving strenuous effort and long hours. Their spirit is amazing. They serve as a reminder that regardless of technological advances being made today, man remains the key to success in all ventures.

As you can see from the above, I believe that CURRENT well deserves the plaudits bestowed upon her. However, her story is not unique since it is a story that parallels most of the ships of the Service Force. These unglamorous and often ungainly looking ships are doing their jobs to insure that the "beans, bullets and black oil" of the Service Force are delivered to the mighty Pacific Fleet. CURRENT is my nomination because of that "extra touch" and sparkle she contributes in her performance.

The enclosed messages are indicative of the many congratulatory items received with respect to this fine ship in recent months. Also enclosed are copies of the ship's photograph.

Again, let me thank you and your staff for giving the Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet the opportunity to nominate one of our ships for the Ninth Annual Ship of the Year award.

With all best wishes for your continued success in this fine program.

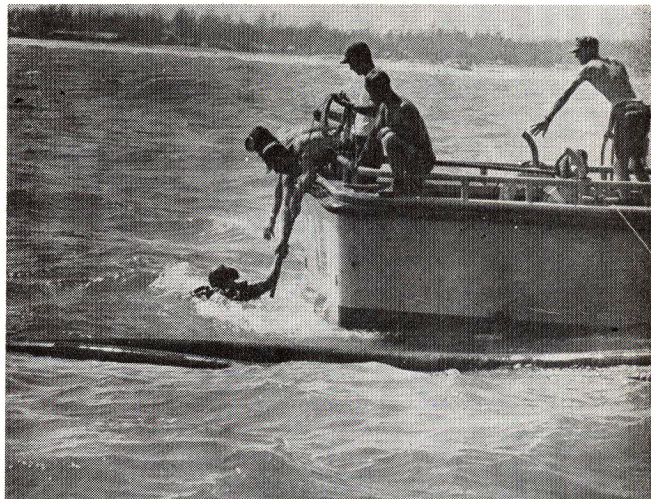
(Signed)
W. V. COMBS
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy

Dear Mr. Watson:

Admiral Roeder is in the Western Pacific at this time



CURRENT divers load their gear on a utility boat in preparation for underwater repair job (below).



Divers go to work on a ruptured refueling line near Tan My, South Vietnam.

and has asked me to forward to you his nomination for the OUR NAVY "Ship of the Year Award."

The selection of one ship from among the hundreds that serve in FIRST Fleet during the year is, as you know, a difficult task. It is frequently true, however, that among the smaller, less glamorous ships of the fleet, outstanding performance by a small number of dedicated, exceptionally competent, and often relatively

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inexperienced officers and men can be found. This is the case this year, and Admiral Roeder nominates USS CURRENT (ARS-22) for OUR NAVY's annual "Ship of the Year Award" program.

By their nature, the operations of a Pacific Fleet salvage ship are frequently unscheduled, often carried out in extremely bad weather, invariably dangerous, and always require exceptional personal skill, endurance, and courage. It is also quite significant that the lives of men and the preservation of valuable ships and cargo are factors in many salvage operations.

During the past year CURRENT completed a highly successful deployment, supporting combat operations in the U. S. SEVENTH Fleet. After an eventful period of operations out of Pearl Harbor, her home port, she is once again in the Western Pacific. She has participated in salvage operations including a grounded nuclear powered submarine, USS GUARDFISH, a grounded ammunition cargo ship, the SS BEAVER VICTORY, and the rescue towing of SS ANDREW JACKSON and the SS LINDENWOOD VICTORY.

USS CURRENT has also distinguished herself by achieving the highest score for refresher training of any Navy ship over the past two years, and has been awarded the Battle Efficiency "E" by Commander Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet for the second consecutive year.

As is apparent, the record of this hard-working ship has indeed been outstanding and bears ample testimony to the performance of each officer and man. In a small

ship such as CURRENT, teamwork by all hands, both in practice and in spirit is, as you know, a matter of great importance. It is clear that, in the big job which this small ship has done, teamwork has been a way of life.

It is a privilege to make this nomination on behalf of Vice Admiral Roeder and we are delighted to have the opportunity to nominate USS CURRENT. This serves also as an opportunity to express our appreciation for the fine contribution OUR NAVY makes in telling the Navy story to its readers.

(signed)

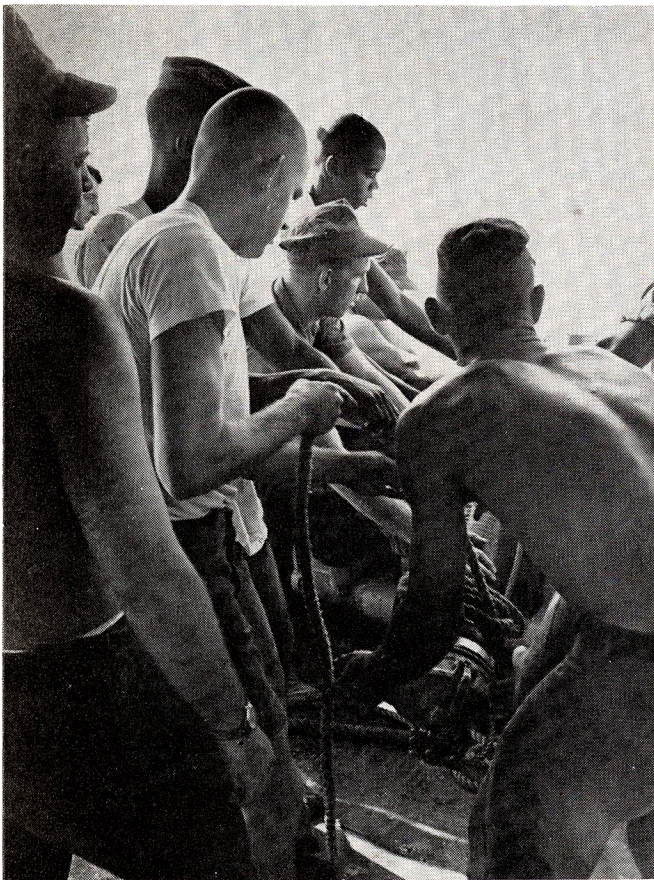
H. STRONG, JR.

Captain, U.S. Navy

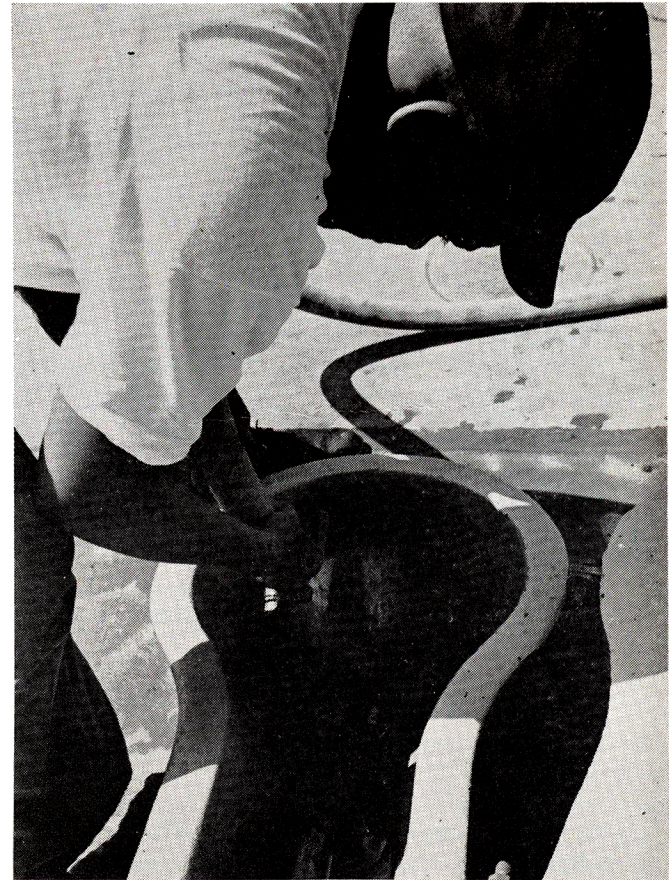
A recent and typical salvage and repair operation was successfully completed by USS CURRENT, ARS-22, on November 13 off the northern coast of the Republic of South Vietnam near Hue.

The operation consisted of replacing a section of a Petroleum Oil Lubricant fueling hose that had been damaged by a "Swift Boat" while refueling. The CURRENT was put in a four point moor alongside the refueling buoys and two divers, using shallow water scuba gear, replaced the damaged section of hose. All totaled the operation took approximately four hours from start to finish.

Three diving officers and eleven enlisted men make up the diving crew. There are two classifications of diver; first and second class. Qualifications for first class diver enable him to work at depths not to exceed 380



Crew members secure one end of ruptured underwater refueling line during repair operation.



John R. Manson, Jr., FN, washes down anchor chain as it is hauled in at conclusion of salvage operation.

feet using a helium-oxygen mixture. Second class divers are restricted to depths of 150 feet. Divers of both classes are thoroughly qualified in the use of underwater welding gear.

The schooling requirement for first class divers is a total of six months and they must be E-4 and above. The second class diver attends eight weeks of schooling and must be an E-3 in order to qualify.

Along with the diving detachment, CURRENT is specially equipped to handle salvage work ranging from sunken hulks to extracting vessels grounded on sandbars and beaches. Special pulling gear, referred to as "beach gear", is the main battery of CURRENT. Six sets make up the "beach gear" equipment with one four ton Eells anchor with each individual set. The Eells anchors are used as mooring objects during beach extraction work. The anchors are designed to embed themselves in the sea floor when pressure is applied at right angles. They in turn set as a stationary mooring.

After all the gear has been placed and the initial pull is started CURRENT can exert a combined force of 390 tons.

Other gear that the CURRENT employs in salvage operations are air compressors, large volume water pumps and welding equipment.

Four crew members out of the 86 officers and enlisted men attached to the CURRENT received achievement medals this year while on deployment. The awards went to Thomas Dooley, BMC; Warren G. Wilson, QMI; Arthur Racette, CWO-4; and Vincente Chargualaf, CSC.

A perusal of CURRENT'S history reveals that during World War II, she participated in salvage operations in the areas of Eniwetok, Kwajalein, Ulithi, Leyte Gulf and Okinawa. The most notable operation was that of the salvaging and towing of the cruiser HOUSTON. Other salvage work included the cruisers RANDOLPH and CANBERRA, and the SS CANADA VICTORY.

The CURRENT took part in both Bikini bomb tests during "Operation Crossroads" by laying buoys, making surveys of the bottom, and placing ships in position as well as making scientific inspections of ships after the test. Later, she conducted diving and salvage operations on the Japanese battleship NAGADA and cruiser SAGODA.

In 1948, the CURRENT was placed out of commission and put in the Pacific Reserve Fleet at San Diego. She was recommissioned in 1951, and served two tours of duty with UN forces in Korea.

During her Korean tours of duty, CURRENT took part in two major salvage operations. First, was the courageous diving work on the sunken fleet tug USS SANSI, working day and night under enemy guns. The second was the gigantic salvage, diving and towing operation on the SS CORNHUSKER MARINER, said to be the largest salvage operation accomplished by the Navy since that of the French luxury liner NORMANDY.

On April 1st 1967 CURRENT arrived off Vung Tau, Vietnam where the RVN Dong Nai Dredge was resting on the bottom in 80 feet of water at the mouth of the Saigon River. Her assignment was to raise the dredge. The 5th of April found CURRENT in a two point



Jack Steffens, PO2, (left) and Robert Cameron, SN, second class divers, stow diving gear following underwater repair job off coast of South Vietnam.

moor over the dredge hard at work. On the 9th of April with the dredge snug under her keel CURRENT was moving to shallow water where the dredge was placed on the bottom in 40 feet of water.

On the 13th of April, she still was hard at work on the dredge, patching tanks in preparation for raising, when she was ordered by COMSEVENTHFLT to proceed immediately to Nha Trang, Vietnam to assist MS AMASTRA, a Shell Oil Tanker of English Registry, that had been mined and a 14 foot hole blown in her side. The AMASTRA was successfully patched and de-watered by CURRENT in 9 days.

On 22 April CURRENT was on her way to Cam Rhan Bay, Vietnam to recover the wreckage of a C-141 Cargo Jet down in 50 feet of water a mile from the end of the runway. After two days of search, and the recovery of one engine, CURRENT was released to proceed to Kaohsiung, Taiwan but she found herself diverted in mid track to Cap Mia, Vietnam for salvage operations on 3 LCM-8's beached on the beach. Operations commenced the 25th of April; two of the LCM-8's proved unsalvageable, but the 3rd was salvaged. The 80 ton LCM-8 was suspended under the keel of CURRENT and carried 80 miles South to Qui Nhon, Vietnam arriving on the 7th of May 1967.

The second week of May found CURRENT underway to Subic Bay for a post salvage operation shipyard availability.

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After eight days in port she again was underway for another salvage operation. The SS MINOT VICTORY was hard aground on the North Reef of the Paracel Islands. On the 23rd of May after off loading cargo and heaving around on eight sets of beach gear CURRENT and other salvage units had pulled the Victory ship off the reef and the Minot Victory was again on her way to Vietnam.

The CURRENT returned to Subic Bay to replace damaged salvage gear and was underway the 26th of May, after two days in port, for Wu Chi, Taiwan with a short stop in Kaohsiung on the way. In Wu Chi the Air Force was laying an off shore pipe line for large fuel tankers and needed CURRENT to pull the pipe-line seaward. After laying a 4,000 foot leg of beach gear the operation was postponed because of difficulties on the beach.

On the 6th of June, from Wu Chi the CURRENT proceeded to Hong Kong for what ended up as being a short two day stop due to an emergency call.

The SS COSMOS TRADER was aground in Vung Tau and the CURRENT was called to her assistance. The ship arrived in Vung Tau on the 20th of June and immediately started retraction efforts. The SS COSMOS TRADER was pulled free on the 21st of June and CURRENT remained for two days to remove a wire that had fouled COSMOS TRADER'S screw. CURRENT then proceeded to Subic Bay.

CURRENT arrived in Subic Bay on the 26th of June and made ready for the long trip home as her then current deployment to WESTPAC was fast coming to a close. CURRENT bid Subic Bay goodbye on the 29th of June and headed for Pearl Harbor with a short stop in Guam for fuel.

Pearl Harbor was a welcome sight on the 20th of July and CURRENT remained in port for rest, relaxation, and a long overdue upkeep. During this period the CURRENT received the 1967 SERPAC Small Mess NEY Award for excellent food preparation and handling.

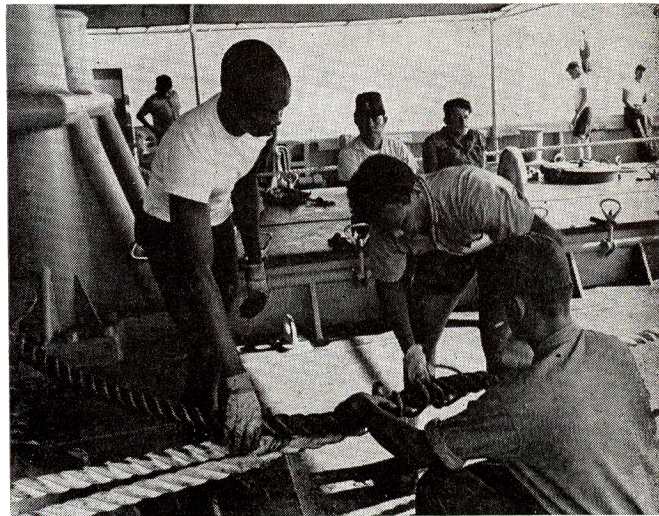
On the 12th of September CURRENT received the PACFLT ARS Battle Efficiency Award for her endeavors during the past fiscal year. On the same date the CURRENT successfully completed her pre-overhaul INSURV Inspection by the SUBINSURV Board.

On the 22 of October the USS CURRENT was awarded a COMSEVENTHFLT citation for her outstanding performance of duty during the period 27 January to 3 July 1967.

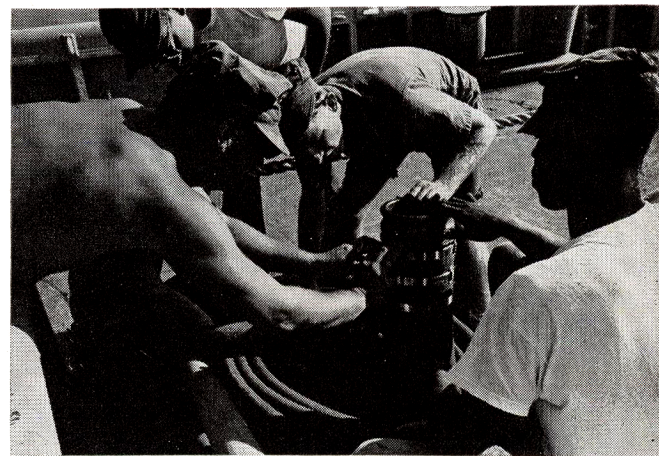
At the end of November, CURRENT conducted diver training in Lahaina, Maui, returning to Pearl Harbor on the 1st of December.

The month of December found CURRENT underway on short notice on four different occasions for various services to the Fleet, the final one being the retraction of the nuclear submarine USS GUARDFISH (SS (N)-612) that went aground 500 yards East of the Pearl Harbor Channel entrance on the 24th of December. The CURRENT successfully completed the operation on the 26th of December and returned to Pearl Harbor for upkeep to await the beginning of the New Year.

CURRENT'S commanding officer is Lieutenant Com-



Joseph Louding, SN, (left) and Glen Rice, BM2, secure tow lines in preparation for diving operations.



CURRENT crew members repair a POL line damaged by a "Swift Boat."

mander George M. GIGANTI, whose salvage experience dates back to 1943. He was attached to the harbor salvage tug RESOLUTE during WW II conducting salvage operations in North Africa, Southern Italy and Southern France. LCDR GIGANTI also served in the seagoing tugs PINOLA, SAMOSET and TAWAKONI.

During his tour of duty as commanding officer of CURRENT, LCDR GIGANTI has been awarded the Navy Commendation Medal and the Navy Achievement Medal for his performance in connection with 8 major salvage operations. He presently has orders as the Prospective Commanding Officer of the new salvage ship USS EDENTOL (ATS-1).

Once again, Our Navy's congratulations to this outstanding ship, her fine officers and crew.

The problem of selecting the First Runner-Up for "Ship of the Year" proved virtually insurmountable, resulting in a tie between the USS KITTYHAWK (CVA-63), commanded during 1968 by Capt. D. C. Davis, USN (until September 30) and by Capt. J. F. Davis, USN (since September 30 and at present), and the BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31), commanded by Capt. T. P. Dankworth, USN. Thus these two outstand-

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ing Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers will share second place honors for the 1968 award. Our warmest congratulations to both!

During the arduous and sustained operating periods of her 1968 Vietnam deployment, during which she served as flagship of Commander Task Force 77, the Navy's attack carrier striking force in the South China Sea, Kitty Hawk aircraft flew over 10,000 combat sorties, participating in more than 180 major strikes, 65 of which were in the heavily defended area around Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam.

While Kitty Hawk's crew members worked around the clock, under unrelenting pressure, her aircraft were credited with destroying or damaging three sites, 17 flak sites, eight radar sites, 74 railroad and highway bridges, 45 POL storage areas, 24 railroad yards, 1,275 trucks, 335 waterborne logistics craft, 79 railroad cars and locomotives, 55 storage areas and buildings and numerous road and rail intersections. During one period she was on Yankee Station for 61 consecutive days. VADM W. F. Bringle, Commander Seventh Fleet, said ". . . Of all the units of the SEVENTH FLEET, Kitty Hawk has been called upon to operate the longest under the most demanding conditions."

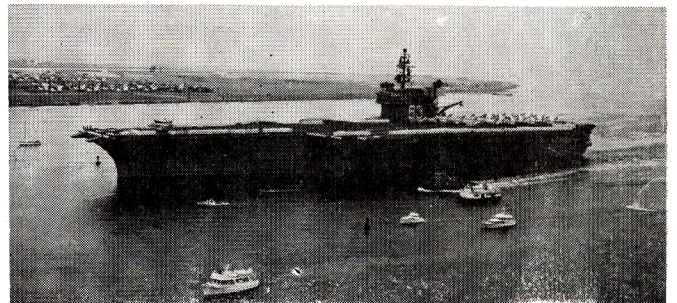
Sharing First Runner-Up honors, BON HOMME RICHARD compiled an equally impressive record during the past 12 months. During an eight and one-half combat cruise she launched the greatest number of combat sorties of any carrier deployed to Southeast Asia.

She and her embarked Attack Carrier Air Wing FIVE led the way in the development of effective night interdiction tactics with A4 type aircraft, and her fighters scored the greatest number of MIG kills of any Navy unit. Although far from the newest or largest carrier in the Navy, while on Yankee Station the officers and men of this outstanding ship again proved that it is the people and not just the hardware that make the difference between routine and outstanding achievement.

In other considerations than combat, BON HOMME RICHARD also has demonstrated her outstanding capabilities. Her competitive scores in fleet exercises have been uniformly excellent. Her reenlistment rate is well above the norm in spite of an arduous schedule.

Second Runner-Up for "Ship of the Year" is the USS CARRONADE (IFS-1), commanded by Lieutenant Commander J. Reese Pritchard, USN. This ship is small but packs a big punch, with eight MK105 rocket launchers and a single 5-inch 38 gun. Of a unique design her mission is to soften up beach-heads before amphibious assaults, her 10-foot draft permitting her to move into very shallow South Vietnamese rivers and shore approaches.

Early in 1968 she began her seventh deployment as a gunfire support unit in Vietnam. Indicative of her effectiveness, during one week in October, in the Da-Nang area, she fired over 3,000 rockets, destroying or damaging 108 heavily fortified enemy structures. On



The USS KITTY HAWK (CVA-63), commanded by Captain J. F. Davis, U.S. Navy.



The USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31), commanded by Captain T. P. Dankworth, U.S. Navy.

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another October day she cleared an area of trench lines and booby traps permitting Korean forces to carry out a sustained ground offensive. On still another day she fired more than 370 rockets, destroying or damaging 29 structures and 34 sampans. In five days, she was credited with the destruction of 88 structures, 27 bunkers and 45 sampans. During the past two years in Vietnam, she has fired over 70,000 rockets and is credited with the destruction of over 7,000 structures.

CARRONADE's accuracy, with the benefit of good spotting, ranges between 96 to 99 per cent. She is capable of saturating landing beaches with her overwhelming rocket fire, thereby destroying opposition from even a well entrenched enemy.

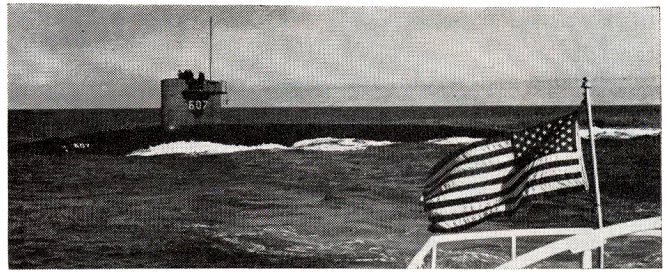
Third Runner-Up honors go to the Atlantic Fleet Submarine Force nominee USS DACE (SSN-607), commanded by Commander Kinnaird R. McKee, USN.

The fact that all of DACE's significant operations are classified prevents detailing or publicizing this fine ship's performance during 1968. However, an indication of her high standing in the esteem of top Atlantic commands and the Chief of Naval Operations is evident in the nominating letters of Vice Admiral A. F. Schade, Commander Submarine Force United States Atlantic Fleet.

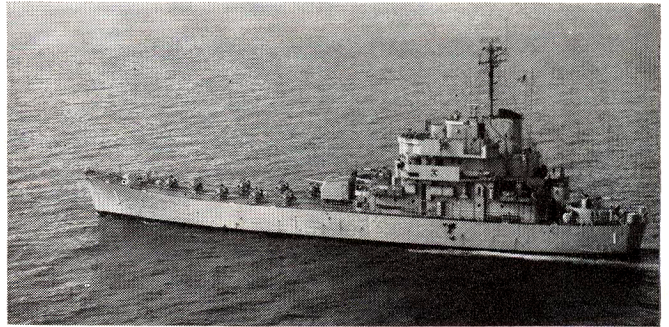
As a result of operations during 1968 the Commanding Officer has been awarded the Legion of Merit (May 10, 1968) and a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit (November 4, 1968). DACE has been awarded the Navy Unit Commendation (August 13, 1968) and has been recommended for, and the Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet has approved, a second Navy Unit Commendation. Good morale and a high esprit de corps go hand-in-hand in DACE.

As in the preceding eight years of this popular competition the runners-up and other contestants will be featured in special OUR NAVY "Ship of the Month" articles each month throughout 1969.

Other ships nominated for the "Ship of the Year" award were: USS GOODRICH (DDR-831) by Commander Sixth Fleet; USS TATTNALL (DDG-19) by Commander Second Fleet; USS PLYMOUTH ROCK (LSD-29) by Commander Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet; USS ABILITY (MSO-519) by Commander Mine



The USS DACE (SSN-607), commanded by Commander Kinnaird R. McKee, U.S. Navy.



The USS CARRONADE (IFS-1), commanded by Commander J. Reese Pritchard, U.S. Navy.

Force, Atlantic Fleet; USS PRESERVER (ARS-8) by Commander Service Force, Atlantic Fleet; USS HAMMERSBERG (DE-1015) by Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Atlantic Fleet; USS AMERICA (CVA-66) by Commander Naval Air Force, Atlantic Fleet; USS LOYALTY (MSO-457) by Commander Mine Force, Pacific Fleet; USS DANIEL BOONE (SSBN-629) by Commander Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet; and USS SAINT PAUL (CA-73) by Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet.

Again, it has been a great honor for OUR NAVY to sponsor this competition and for the ninth year to select the winning U.S. Navy "Ship of the Year". Once again, our heartiest congratulations to the winner, USS CURRENT, to the top runners-up and all the other contestants whose valiant efforts and outstanding performance typify the spirit that makes the U. S. Navy the world's best.

Also, our warmest and most sincere thanks and appreciation to all Fleet, Force and Type commanders for so promptly making their selections and nominations. We know that their task was not an easy one. ✻✻✻

