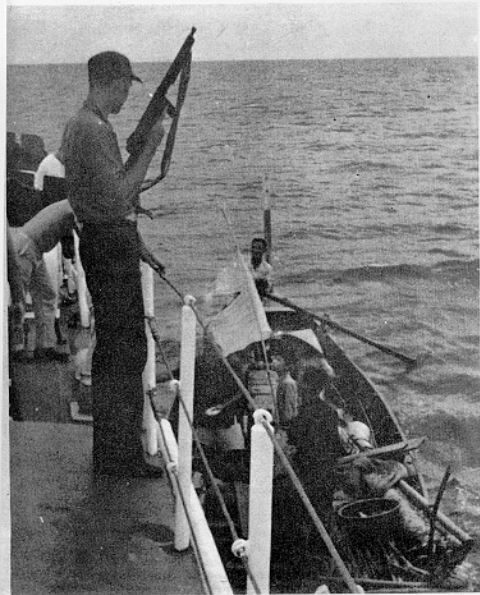




The Coast Guard's first combat in South Vietnamese waters took place on Wednesday, Aug. 25. Its locale was about a mile from An Thoi, a town on Phu Quoc Island. The vessels engaged were the USCG Point Comfort, from Alameda, two other 82-footers—the Point Clear, of San Pedro, and the Point Mast, of Long Beach—along with the Navy's USS Whilhotte. They bombarded a Viet Cong staging area in an action in which 70 rounds of 81mm mortar shells were laid down with such nicety there was no return fire. Above, one of the 70 is being fired from the Point Comfort by Chief Boatswain's Mate Greene F. Treat. The gun loader at left is Commissaryman 2ndlc Lee Roy Bradshaw, Jr. The ammo passer at right

is Gunner's Mate 2ndlc Edward J. Hanson. What the Viet Cong casualties were was officially termed unknown, but since An Thoi is the place from which the Coastal Surveillance Force operates, unannounced would be a better term. In any event, the Guardsmen are far from having it that easy as a regular thing. As they patrol the shores, an attack may come at any moment and with a speed that would be appalling except that the crews are trained for just that sort of thing. As witness the scene below in which empty .50 calibre machinegun cartridges start to litter the deck as a seaman of the USCG Point Orient, based at Danang, directs a stream of answering fire at a Viet Cong coastal landing point.





While motorized junks and sampan-like craft are seemingly most effective in supplying arms and materiel to the Viet Cong, an enormous amount of this sort of cargo is carried by what appear to be simple fishermen in boats that look as if they couldn't conceal anything of consequence. But what they may carry is considerable, as will be seen further on. As to the way in which they carry it, that can be most damaging if the Guardsmen fail to take nothing for granted. As one Guardsman wrote recently to a friend at the Government Island base, when a seemingly harmless junk, only slightly larger than the one at left, was coming along side, "A VC threw a concussion grenade at Chief J--i on the 81mm mount and knocked him down. When he came up, he came up shooting and lobbed 600 .50 cal. rounds into the junk, killing most of the VC and sinking it. It had two bodies in it when it was brought aboard. . . . They were pretty messy." For reasons like that, as one looks down into these native craft from the decks of a cutter, as an officer of the USCG Point Orient is doing below, nothing is taken for granted and there is no relaxation of vigilance. The craft has to be boarded and searched.

