

**USAV Page  
Off Cam Ranh Bay AB  
1968**

**Close Encounter at Night!**

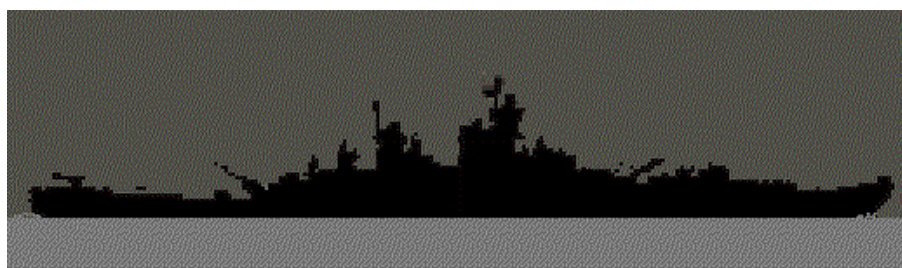
by Kerry Myers  
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Vietnam, 1968, During the USS New Jersey's RVN exploits, I sailed for two years on the USAV Page, a 338-foot beach discharge lighter, functionally similar to a Navy LST. We were a bunch of seagoing dogfaces, as "USS" is the designation given to Navy Ships with Navy Crews, and "USAV" stands for United States Army Vessel. Anyway, we had just delivered a 2,000-ton load of napalm to the Air Force in Phan Rang and were sailing at night toward Cam Ranh Bay AB.

Naval security Regs in force at the time called for all vessels to challenge each other by flashing light signal, day or night, by signaling "What Ship? Where From? Where To? and the "word of the day." Ships unable to answer were immediately reported to Market Time and subject to armed confrontation. Late one night we picked up a radar contact dead ahead and about three miles out began challenging by flashing light. No response. At about two miles out, the skipper called us to *General Quarters*, while continuing to challenge the unidentified and unresponsive vessel. At about one mile out, the skipper spoke quietly to us on the bull horn. "I don't know what we have out here, but let me say again "Fire only on my command."

I was on the foredeck strapped into a 20mm cannon. The skipper maneuvered us to within 75 feet of this huge, totally darkened monster of a vessel. As we passed starboard (right side) to starboard we realized that we had encountered the USS New Jersey preparing for a night fire mission. We never saw them fire. Don't know if we messed up their plan. Glad that our guys were not trigger happy that night.



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