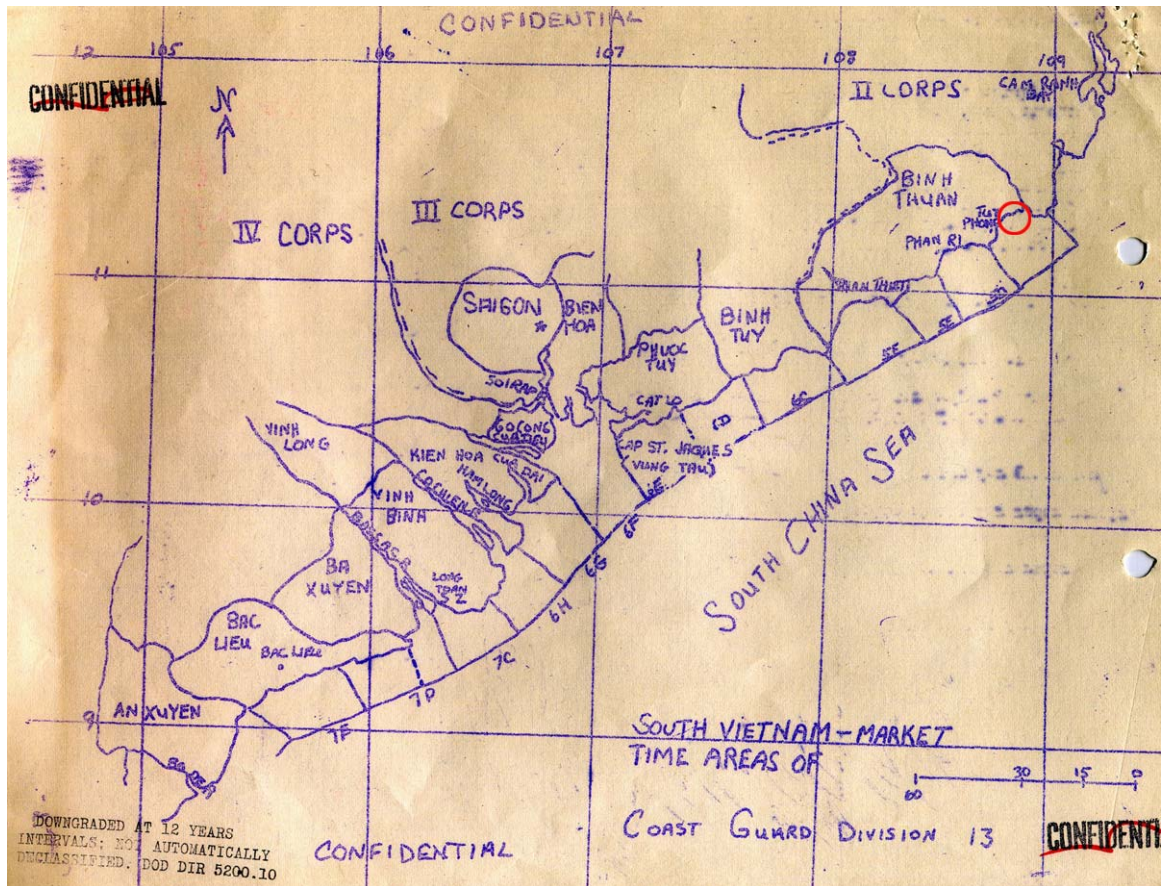


Exceptional Service, Extraordinary Heroism.

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About midnight on January 21, 1969, while returning to its base at Cat Lo, Republic of Vietnam (RVN), after completing a four-day patrol in Operation Market Time operations area 5D, the USCGC *Point Banks* (WPB 82329), an 82-foot Coast Guard patrol boat. Upon completion of the patrol, *Point Banks* changed operational commanders to USCG Division 13. The commander of the *Point Banks*, Lieutenant, junior grade, Jerry Underwood, USCG, received message traffic from the Naval Intelligence Liaison Officer (NILO) at Phan Thiet, Republic of Vietnam that enemy forces had a group of unidentified soldiers surrounded and pinned down by intensive small arms fire and needed immediate evacuation. Underwood, ordered *Point Banks* to maximum speed of about 19 knots, arriving off the approximate position an hour later within (UTM grid position BN 7752) probably north of the village of Tuy Phong.



Red circle indicates approximate location.

The position was an approximate because no one knew the exact location of the soldiers. The relayed report described the trapped soldiers as being on some unidentified promontory. While *Point Banks* was underway to the position, the enemy forces began concentrating their small arms and automatic weapons fire on the trapped soldiers from three sides. The enemy force was estimated to be two platoons of Viet Cong and the allied soldiers' only means of escape was by the sea. For this Dunkirk-style rescue, Underwood asked for volunteers. Gunner's Mate First Class Jerry Goff and Engineman Second Class Larry Villarreal accepted the task and set to their preparations.

Goff took the forward position in the 13-foot 4-inch Boston Whaler and armed with a M-60 machine gun and approximately 2000 rounds of ammunition linked in a

continuous belt. Villarreal took the boat's controls and they departed into the darkness just after 1 A.M.

Naturally, there was high concern for the safety of these men among the *Point Banks'* officers and crew. Underwood also knew the amount of courage it took to undertake this perilous mission. Earlier that year *Point Banks* had, as part of Coast Guard Squadron One, Division 13, been engaged in dozens of gunfire support and interdiction missions. The *Point Banks* crew, just four days earlier while conducting another small boat operation in Market Time Patrol Area 7C, during Operation Sea Lords, surprised ten Viet Cong and Petty Officer Goff took them under fire killing three and wounding two.

As Goff and Villarreal neared the shore the sounds of the Boston Whaler's 35 HP Mercury outboard motor alerted the Viet Cong that a rescue was underway. Just as the Viet Cong waited and fired on Army, Air Force, and Marine rescue helicopters, these enemy forces turned their attention to the approaching small boat. The green tracers of their cross fire cut the darkness and grew into a blistering fire as Goff and Villarreal searched for the location of the ensnared soldiers. The *Point Banks*, about 200 yards off shore, supplied a .50 caliber machine gun barrage adding its red tracers to the profusion of color in the night, but because the location of the soldier on shore or the *Point Banks'* small boat, Underwood directed his gunners to fire high to prevent hitting either group.

The enemy's weapons fire grew in volume and fierceness. At this point, three Navy SWIFT boats, PCF 36, 47 and 68, as well as a U. S. Air Force C-47 "Spooky 61" were requested to give fire support to the Coast Guardsmen's rescue effort. The U. S. Navy PCFs had been asked to make the rescue, but shallow water as well as rocks and other hazards prevented their ability to get to the soldiers.

The PCF's and added more lines of color now punched with the solid red tongue of 20mm fire from "Spooky 61" as well as flicking illumination flares.



However, in the dark, these units could only give fire support to a general area or direction that may or may not have been of use to Goff, Villarreal, or the trapped soldiers. Not knowing the position of the *Point Banks* Boston Whaler caused friendly fire to come dangerously close to the Goff and Villarreal.

The Boston Whaler pushed through the rough seas as they neared the uncertain shore where the Coastguardsmen soon encountered uncharted rocks, shoals and mud flats. Goff, trying to keep the enemy at bay, fired his machine gun toward the flashes of the enemy weapons fire. With his night vision destroyed by the flash of his own machine gun, Goff continued to searching the darkness for sign of a single soldier's flashlight that he had been instructed to find. Goff and Villarreal had hoped the Viet Cong small arms fire would direct him to the soldiers, but the enemy now concentrated its fire on the small boat instead of the soldiers. Tracers ricocheted off the water around them. Arriving at the approximate position, Goff and Villarreal could see the darkened shoreline and saw a small rock jetty-like outcropping instead of the promontory described in an earlier report. To both Coast Guardsmen, the rock outcropping appeared a good point to try to locate the soldiers, but the closeness of the enemy forces in the tree line about 25 yards away meant they would have to act quickly.

Indeed, it was at or near this point Goff and Villarreal encountered not one flashlight signal but several lights. The multiple lights, from the highly exposed position, were also seen by the Viet Cong; providing the enemy with more targets.

With the location known, the Viet Cong turned their searing fire toward the soldiers as well as the small boat. Goff vividly recalls the sound of automatic weapons and AK-47s, and he just “opened up on the incoming locations,” laying down suppression fire that nearly exhausted his ammunition supply before returning to *Point Banks*.

Villarreal also remarked that the incoming, from both friend and foe, came increasingly closer; therefore multiplying the chances of being hit by friend or foe in the dark.

Underwood watched from seaward and related what he saw was the heaviest enemy fire he had seen during his tour in Vietnam and it all seemed to be going toward the area of the rescue.

Buffeted by strong wave action, Villarreal maneuvered the small boat alongside



the outcropping and to the nine frantic Vietnamese Popular Recon soldiers. Goff saw they had lost, or discarded, most of their equipment except rifles and a radio. However, this abandonment of equipment may have assisted the evacuation by keeping their overall load smaller. The nine panic-stricken soldiers rushed the boat and tried to climb in all at once. Goff knowing this number would overload the

small boat and put all in danger. This model Boston Whaler had only about a 1500 pound (including motor and fuel) weight capacity and all nine would certainly have overloaded the boat possibly dooming them all. Goff pulled four of the soldiers into the boat, literally head over heels, and forced the other five back onto the rocks.

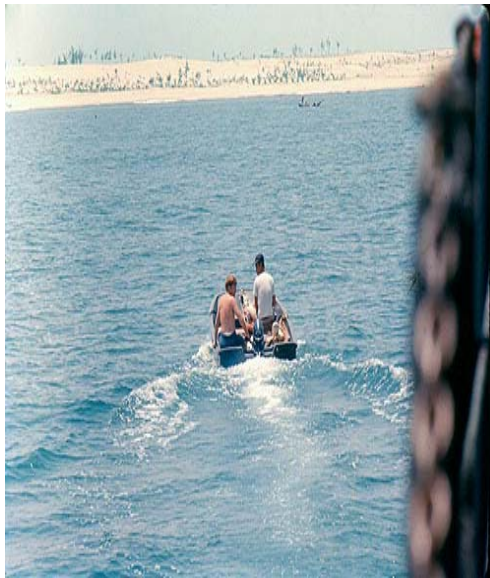
Villarreal situated the men in the boat and worked feverishly to get the now very heavy boat to back from the jetty. Goff covered their withdrawal with his remaining ammunition. It was as if time were suspended, Goff recalled. However, he and Villarreal were too engaged to take time to think. He and Villarreal kept their minds on the job at hand evading rocks, mud flats, growing sea state, the hail of enemy fire, and possibly friendly fire on their return to *Point Banks*. Goff continued firing at the flashes of small arms fire coming from onshore and green tracers followed them to sea.

The two Coastguardsmen arrived at *Point Banks* with the first four soldier about thirty-five to forty minutes after they began their mission. Ltjg. Underwood recalled the small boat returned barely making way because it was full of water and sunk to the gunwales. The four soldiers quickly climbed to the relative safety of *Point Banks*. Goff and Villarreal dewatered the boat while the cutter's crew re-supplied him ammunition for the M60 machine gun.

Although the Boston Whaler is a self-bailing boat, this one was so heavy with six people it could not build enough speed to create the bailing action. The water added more weight and considerably slowed forward speed. A potential problem was discovered only upon on their return; an enemy bullet had nicked the spark plug, less than two feet from Villarreal's position as coxswain. Had the engine stalled they would have been a very stationary target with little hope of immediate recovery.



Sample images to illustrate size and space of the Boston Whaler used by the U. S. Coast Guard in Vietnam.



Underwood knowing the danger was hesitant to ask his men to make a return trip. He allowed them to decide if they would return. They could stay and no one would place any blame on either for not making a second attempt under the, now, known conditions. Both men, Villarreal and Goff, fully aware of the danger involved, told Underwood that there were men left behind and they had to get them out -- or the soldiers would be soon dead. Both agreed they just could not leave them there to a certain death.

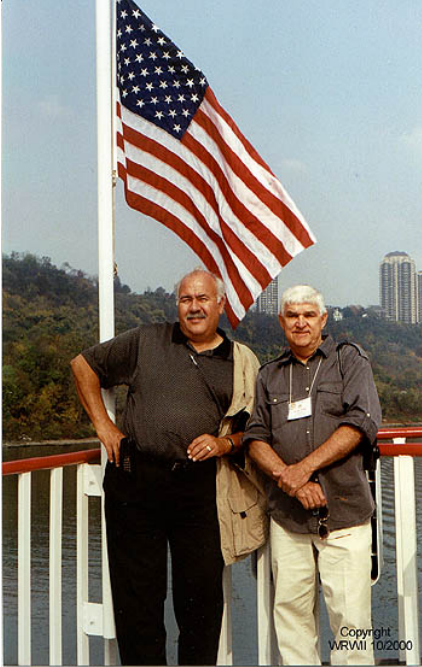
Goff and Villarreal now fully understanding the magnitude of the mission and the threat began their second foray. Their knowledge was well founded as the small boat began drawing near the pick up point they encountered heavier weapons fire than on the first trip; nor had the rough sea and surf abated. The enemy forces were still not certain where the boat was on the water, but knew where it would land to retrieve the remaining soldiers. The jetty became the target of the enemy's deadly weapons fire.

The other patrol boats and aircraft continued to fire their machine guns into that location. The PCFs would eventually fire thirty-nine rounds of 81mm ammunition and 1400 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition into the area. The Point Banks added an additional 2700 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition to the protective fire.

Villarreal guided the small boat back to the end of the jetty where all five remaining soldiers were standing in the water seeking cover from the incoming fire and preparing to be overrun by the enemy forces.

The enemy was not the only danger, Villarreal recalls, "As we got almost there, a wave washed us up on a flat rock and the engine quit when the prop hit the rock." With Goff continuing his machine gun covering fire, Villarreal got out of the boat and single handedly pushed the boat back into the water, he then reentered the boat and, after several attempts, restarted the boat's motor. In the meantime, still under enemy fire, the remaining five soldiers scrambled into the Boston Whaler. The boat then backed into the night and the return transit mirrored the previous one; drawing as intense small arms fire, returning fire, a rough sea and more darkness.

Goff and Villarreal cleared the danger area over in less time than the first rescue mission. Remarkably, for the thousands of rounds of ammunition fired, only one slight casualty occurred. One Vietnamese soldier received a leg wound and *Point Banks* gave



him first aid. *Point Banks* then sailed transferring the soldiers to PCF 47 for transport to a secure facility for treatment and release. The extraordinary heroism displayed by both men to make two separate rescues under the most hazardous conditions presented by both from man and nature. The most horrendous and murderous enemy fire that put their lives at very high risk did not prevent them from saving the lives of nine Allied soldiers. This incident remains one of the more extraordinary and heroic rescues for the Coast Guard

in the history of the Vietnam war.



Mr. Willis Jerry Goff was awarded the Silver Star Medal on April 19, 1969 at Cat Lo, RVN and Mr. Larry D. Villarreal was awarded the Silver Star Medal on February 18, 1969, at Department of Transportation Headquarters in Washington, D. C.; both awards were for extraordinary heroic action while serving in the Republic of Vietnam.



COMMANDER IN CHIEF
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star Medal to

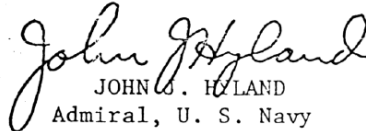
WILLIS J. GOFF
GUNNER'S MATE FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving on board the USCGC POINT BANKS (WPB 82327) on 22 January 1969. When his unit was requested to assist nine South Vietnamese Army personnel who were trapped on a beach promontory by two platoons of Viet Cong aggressors, Petty Officer GOFF volunteered to pilot the POINT BANKS' 14 foot small boat into the beach to rescue the trapped personnel. He made two trips into the beach in heavy surf and was exposed to intense enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire and the additional hazard of close-in gunfire support from three naval patrol units and a C-47 aircraft. The situation was further complicated by darkness and by the fact that the position of the friendly personnel was only generally known. During this time, Petty Officer GOFF also manned his M-60 machine gun and directed accurate fire toward the enemy. With courageous disregard for his own safety, Petty Officer GOFF was able to rescue nine South Vietnamese Army personnel who would have met almost certain death or capture. His outstanding heroism, professionalism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the President


JOHN J. H. LAND

Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander in Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet



COMMANDER IN CHIEF
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET

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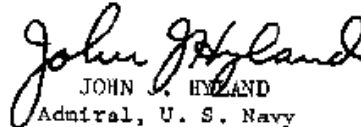
LARRY D. VILLARREAL
ENGINEMAN SECOND CLASS
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Operation MARKET TIME forces in the Republic of Vietnam on 22 January 1969. Petty Officer VILLARREAL was serving aboard the USCGC POINT BANKS (WPB 82327) when his unit was requested to assist nine South Vietnamese Army personnel trapped on a beach by two platoons of Viet Cong. The sea was the only means of escape. Petty Officer VILLARREAL, along with a fellow crewman, volunteered to pilot the POINT BANKS' 14 foot Boston Whaler into the beach to rescue the trapped personnel. Petty Officer VILLARREAL, acting as small boat coxswain, made two trips into the beach in heavy surf while exposed to intense enemy small arms, automatic weapons fire and the additional hazard of close-in gunfire support from three naval patrol units and a C-47 aircraft. The situation was further complicated by darkness and the fact that the position of the friendly personnel was known only generally. At one point during the evacuation the Boston Whaler outboard motor died, but Petty Officer VILLARREAL, with outstanding professionalism and composure under fire, re-started the motor and continued with the rescue. With courageous disregard for his own safety, Petty Officer VILLARREAL and his fellow crew member were able to rescue the trapped personnel. Petty Officer VILLARREAL's heroic action, professionalism, and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the President


JOHN J. ENGLAND

Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander in Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet