

# Typhoon Joan

October 15 & 16, 1970



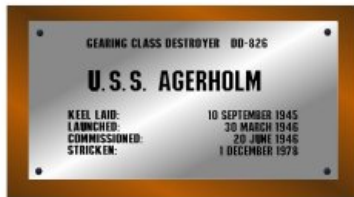
LTjg Rick O'Connell  
Ensign Jim Mottern

# USS Agerholm (DD-826) Commissioned 1946



# USS Agerholm (DD-826)

## FRAM I Modification In 1961



980. BIEDA 2005 NO. 14030

BUILT BY BATH IRON WORKS, BATH ME

### USS AGERHOLM DD 826

DISPLACEMENT: 3520 TONS  
DIMENSIONS: 390.5 FT LENGTH, 40.9 FT BEAM, 19 FT DRAFT  
MAIN MACHINERY: 4 BOILERS, 2 GEARED STEAM TURBINES, 2 SHAFTS, 60,000 SHP, 34 KTS  
ARMAMENT: 4-5 INCH 38 CAL GUNS, 1-8 TUBE ASROC LAUNCHER, 2 TRIPLE TORPEDO TUBE LAUNCHERS, DRONE ASW HELICOPTER  
COMPLEMENT: 14 OFFICERS, 260 ENLISTED MEN

# USS Agerholm (DD-826) In 1970



## Seaworthy But Tired In 1970

- DD-826 was 26 years old, FRAM I Update 1961 (USN mass obsolescence – Anticipated 300 Soviet submarines)
  - 3,500 tons displacement
  - 390 feet length and 41 foot beam
  - Draft 18.5 feet
  - Speed 36 kts (downhill)
  - Compliment ~350 men
- Vietnam War tempo was wearing out ships, crews and families
  - WWII operational draft culture & manpower intensive ships/equipment
  - 6 & 6 deployment cycle (home in bed with moma ~2 months a year)
  - 17,000 to 23,000 USN in Vietnam War zone (2 or 3 CVAs) + ~12,000 “cycling in”
- 1970 Mare Island overhaul cut short because of limited budget
  - 1969 South Pacific grounding required unplanned repairs
  - Incomplete overhaul significantly later impacted engineering equipment

# USS Agerholm Operated Primarily Off Vietnam



## DD-826 Was A Very Reliable NGFS Asset

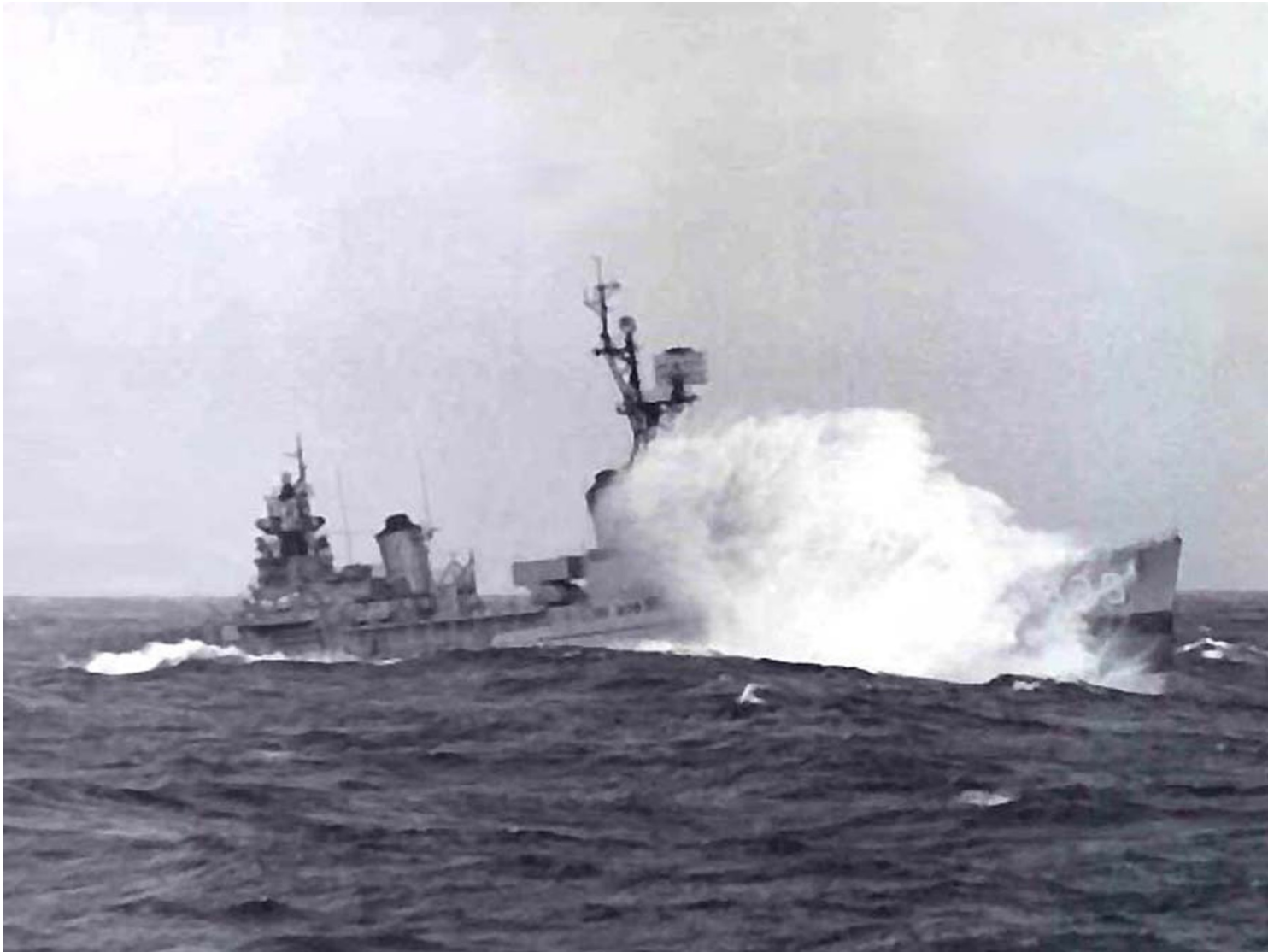


# Good At “Plane Guarding” On Yankee Station USS Midway (CV-41)

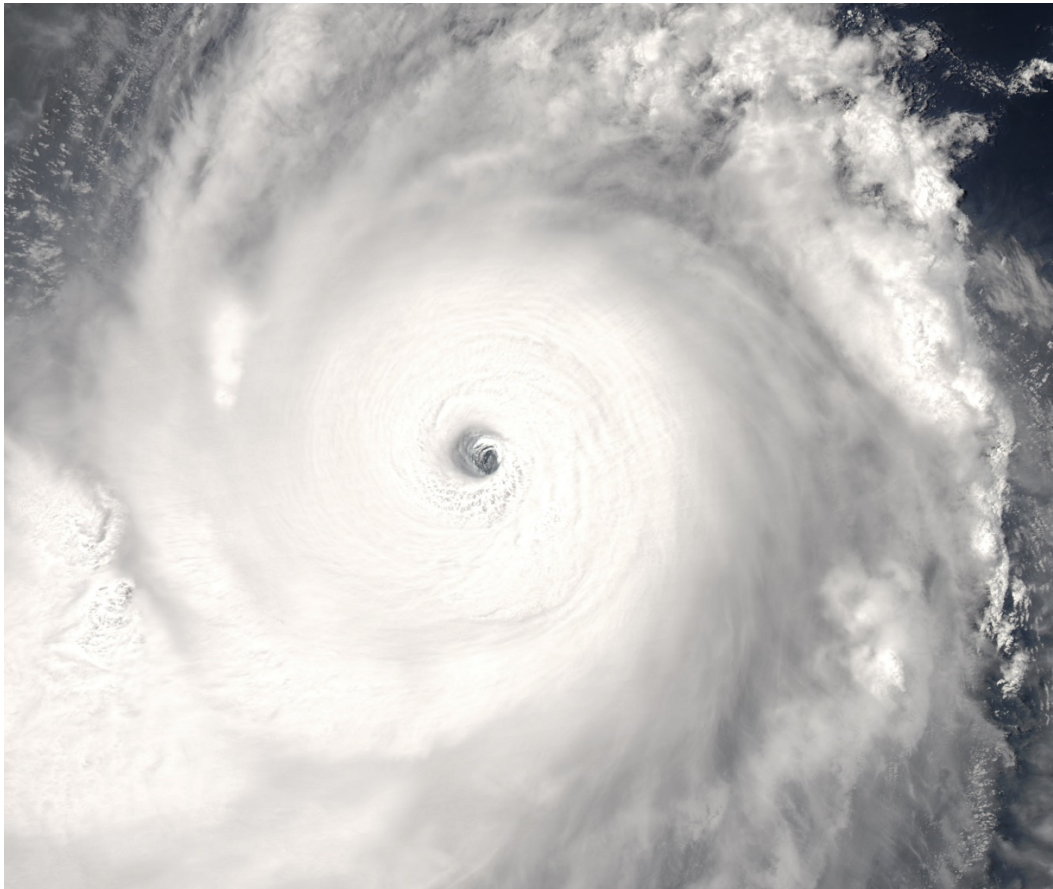




USS Agerholm and Her Crew Were Experienced In Heavy Weather But Typhoon Joan Was Different



# Super Typhoon Joan In 1970 Was Very Different

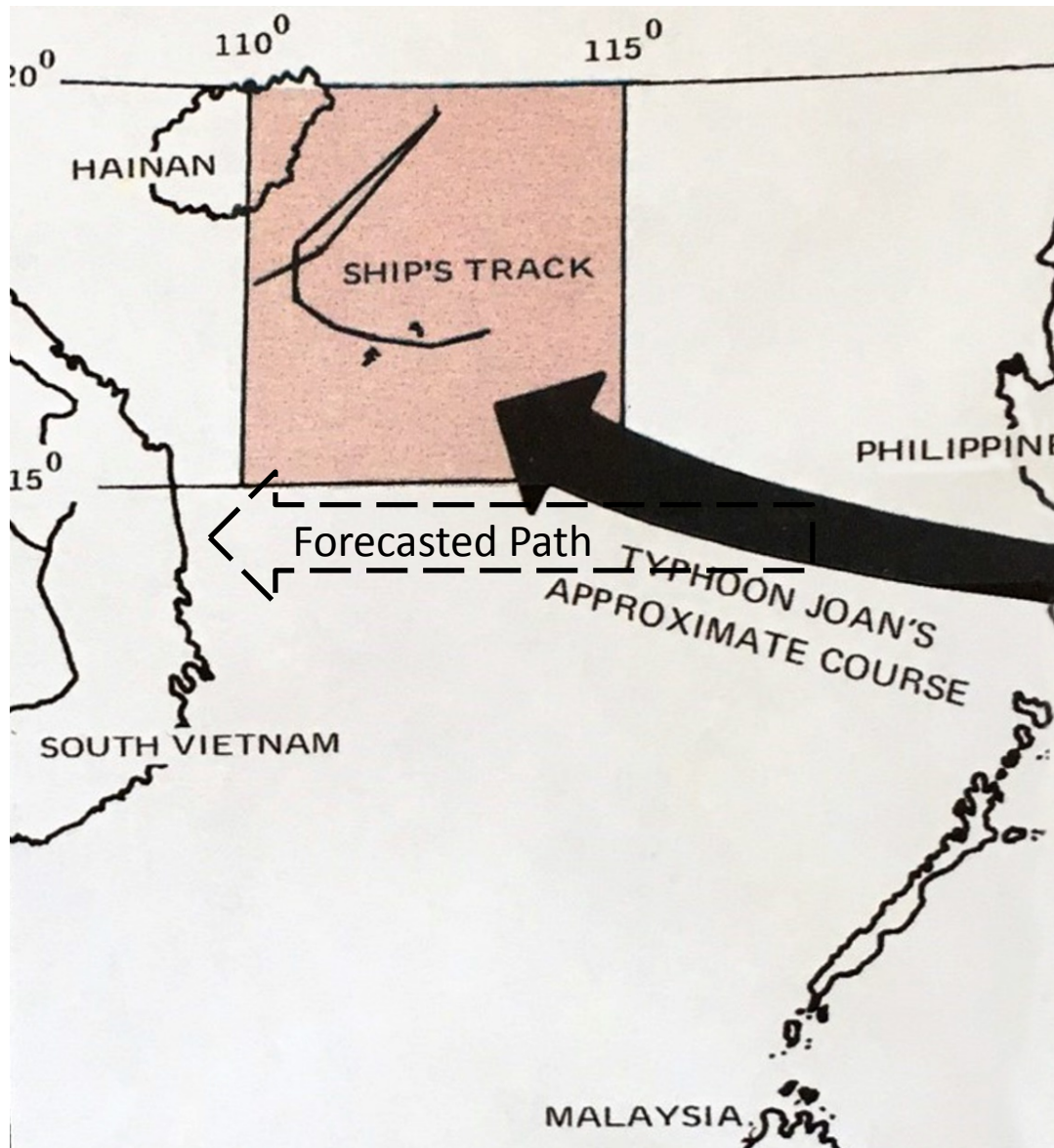


- Largest typhoon in 1970 with 115 MPH winds in the South China Sea (175 MPH before hitting the PI)
- 60 to 80 mile eye diameter
- Wind impact area 250+ miles wide
- 768 people known dead, 193 missing, 1,600 injured & 80,000 made homeless
- Based on 1970 era weather reporting Joan was roughly equivalent to Hurricane Florence that hit the Carolinas in September 2018

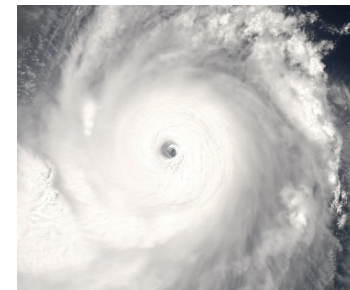
# October 15, 1970 USS Agerholm Was Detached For A Hong Kong R&R Week



# Typhoon Joan Report (200+ Mile Reporting Error)

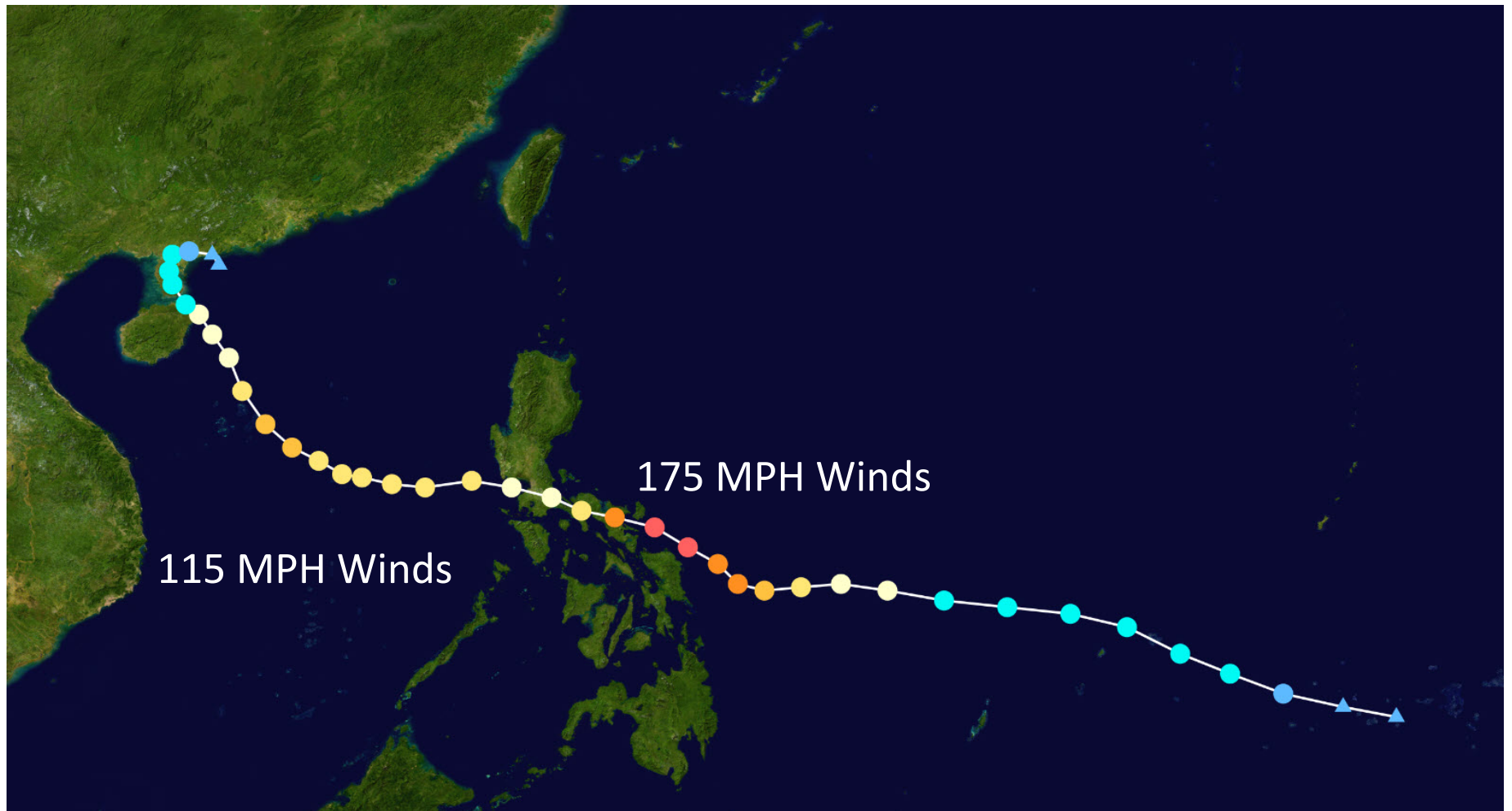


Counter Clockwise  
Spinning Cyclone



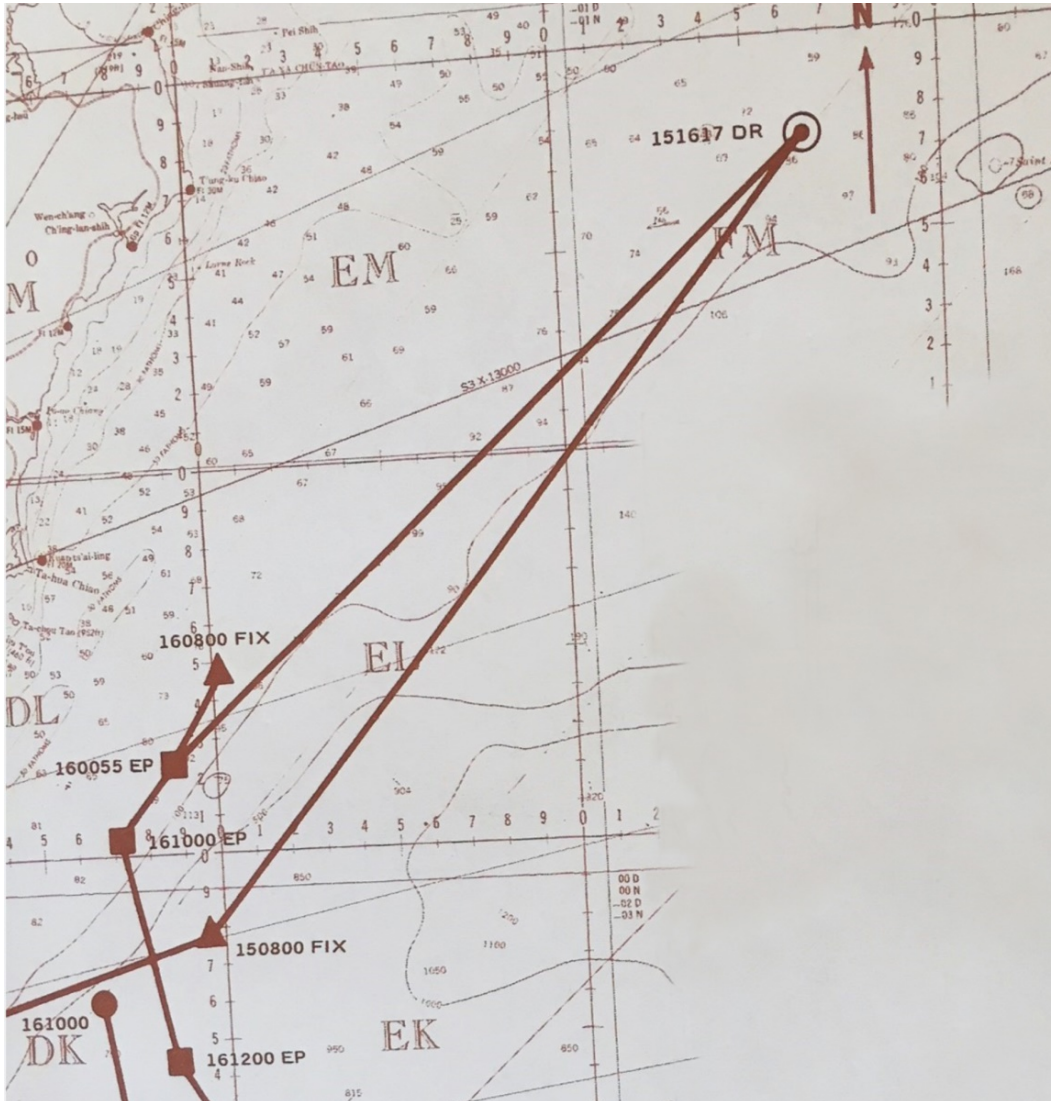
Approximate Size of  
Typhoon Joan To Chart

# Typhoon Joan's Actual Path (Late Reported Turn North)



# 15 October 1970 (Day 1)

## Huge Waves Pounded The Ship



- 0500 rounded Hainan Island setting course for Hong Kong. Found seas thought to be generated by storm off northern China coast
- Seas increased into crashing waves that buried the bow. Ship corkscrewed up out of each wave like a live animal. Waves sometimes over 1<sup>st</sup> stack & threatened to break bridge windows
- Forward officers quarters had to tie yourself into your rack to keep from being thrown on the deck
- 0500 two stanchions torn off deck creating holes **flooding steering engine**
- Boiler fires went out repeatedly due to violent motion & had to be restarted
- Unsecured equipment in the ship was demolished by constant battering
- 1617 reversed course to wait out the high waves
- Howling wind noise and crashing waves required shouting on bridge to be heard
- Joan was about 330 nm ESE (125 degrees)
- 1830 Bang & Chow in the Wardroom

# 16 October 1970 (Morning Day 2)

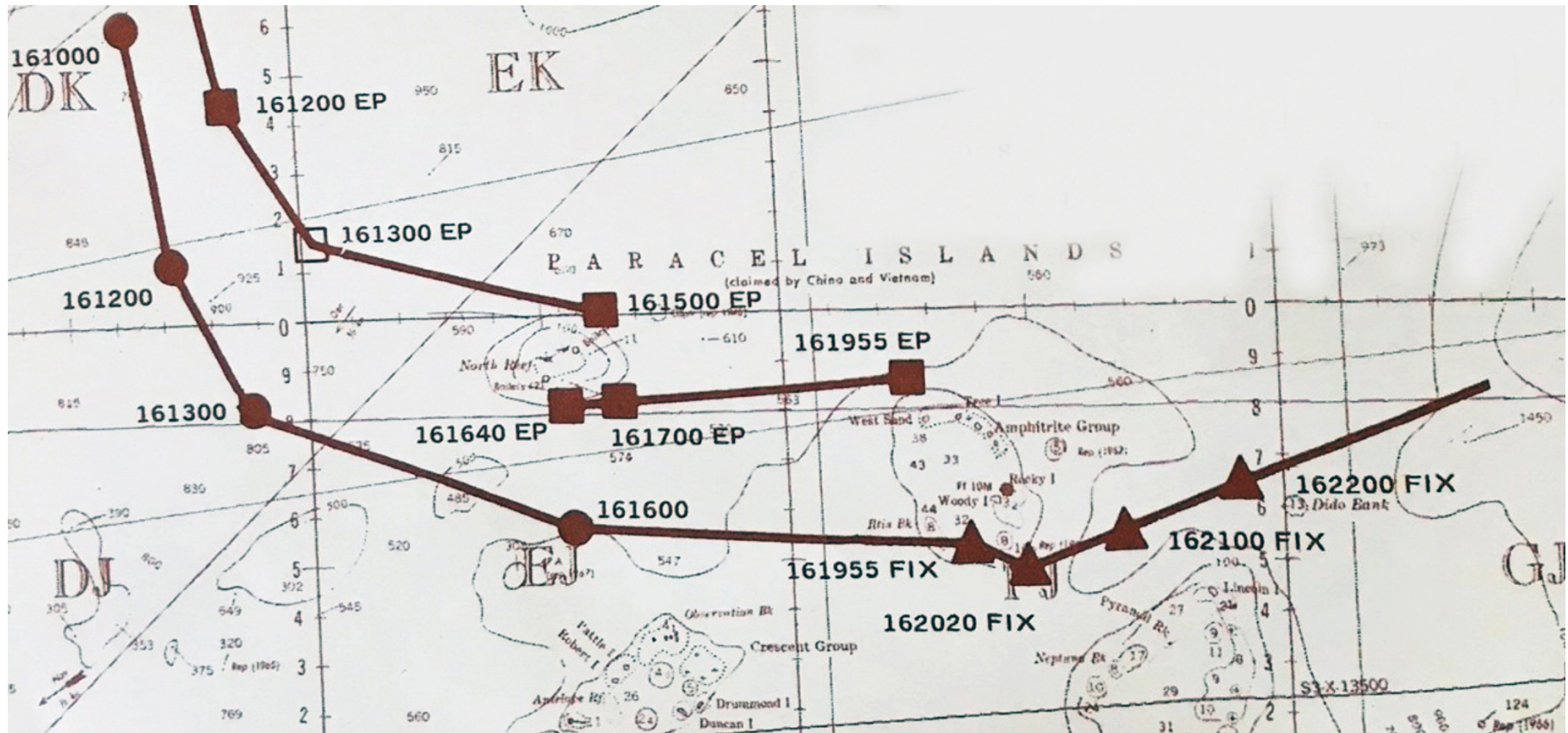
## “Slave Of The Storm”



- Sunrise revealed an endless frightening procession of huge 40+ foot waves (4 building stories) with foaming tops cut off by high winds. Grey partial sunlight, “Norse maelstrom” with 60 foot geysers
- Loss of power (steering motor) due to water causing after steering electrical fire
- 0700 ship pitching heavily in 40 foot waves, winds 65 MPH. Joan now reported **180 miles south coming north directly toward ship**. Agerholm was trapped between China & NV (Gulf of Tonkin).
- 0800 Radar fix on Hainan Island mountains showed that ship had not make headway for hours
- CO decided to turn ship down wind, sent a high frequency flash message to 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet that ship was turning around at 0800. All hands ordered to don life jackets. CO thought ship would roll over (**1<sup>st</sup> life**). Smooth turn helped by surprise 30 foot wave.
- Sudden rogue wave caused the ship to heel ~58 degrees to port. Bridge watch personnel held overhead cable with feet pointing toward the port wing parallel to the deck, JWM stood on bulkhead. Another rogue wave (hand of God) righted the ship immediately before it capsized. (**2<sup>nd</sup> life**) CO surprised
- Winds estimated to be 60 kts (70 MPH) sometimes 80 – 90 MPH
- Steadied on 220 course. Waves threatened “surf boarding” loss of control & broaching (**3<sup>rd</sup> life**). Ship noticeably gained speed as waves rumbled by above the pilot house
- Discovered engine combination was only way to steer ship: stbd ahead standard & port ahead 1/3
- Storm was 110 nm SE moving north toward the ship at 9 kts

# 16 October 1970 (Afternoon Day 2)

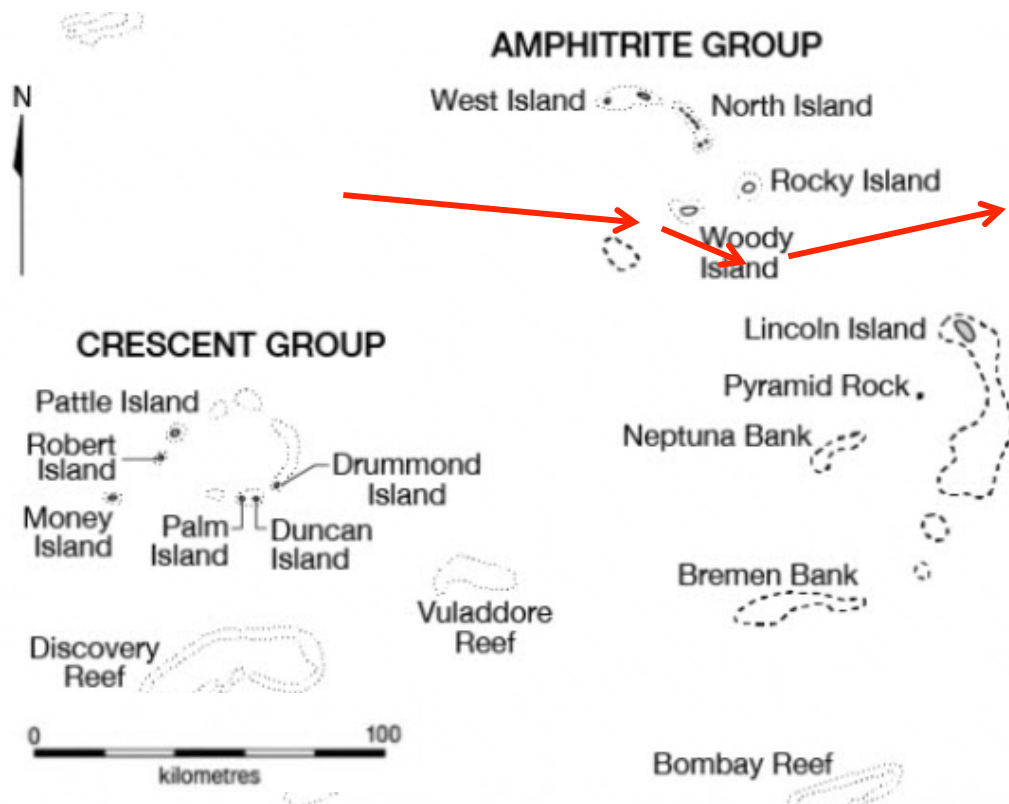
## Woody Island – Lincoln Island Narrow Passage



- No means of navigation for 12 hours & no reliable DR. Wind was slowly shifting ship to south east. Very poor visibility, ship heeled over constant 20 – 30 degrees due to wind
- 1600 storm eye CPA 040 degrees ~65 nm. Seas forced course change to 095 degrees
- Water growing shallower, 1930 faint CBRD contact ahead 16 miles, sent FTG3 to gun director for bearing & range. Woody Island identified eventually identified. CO told navigator that if he saw land or a surf line he would go all head flank to run ship aground in an attempt to save as many men as possible
- Barely able to change course 20 degrees stbd in attempt to avoid Woody Island and its shoals – very difficult because of wind and heavy seas. Passed between Woody & Lincoln Island with little ability to maneuver (4<sup>th</sup> life)

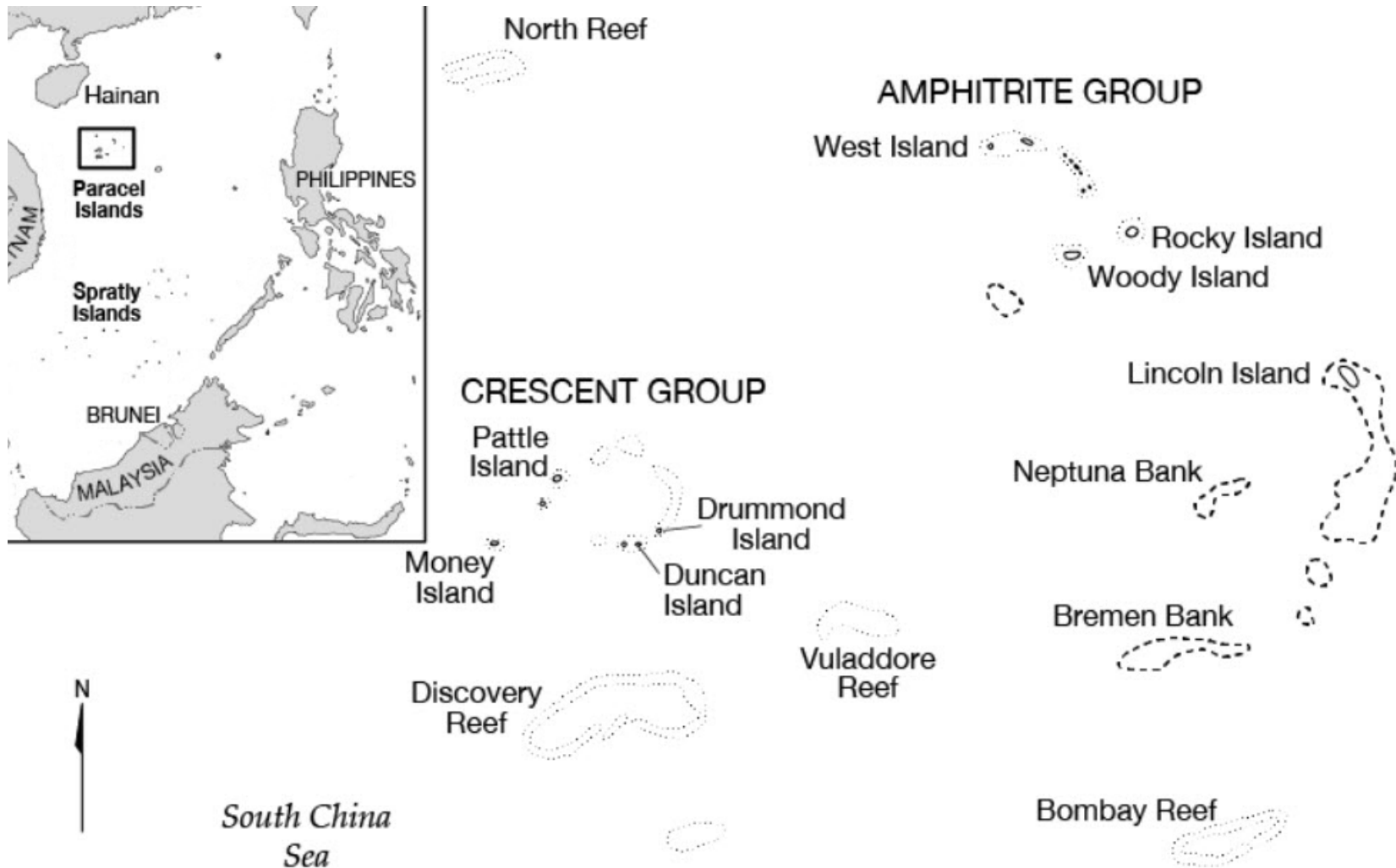


# The Typhoon Drove The Ship Between Woody Island & Lincoln Island (~10 Miles Apart)



- Using 1926 chart
- Water beginning to shallow, 1930 faint CBDR contact 16 miles, sent FTG to gun director for bearing & range. Woody Island suspected.
- **CO told navigator that if he saw land or a surf line he would go all head flank to run ship aground to try to save as many of the crew as possible**
- Changed course 20 degrees stbd to try to avoid Woody Island. Passed between Woody & Lincoln Island with little ability to maneuver (**4<sup>th</sup> life**)
- Once passed Woody & Lincoln Islands seas began to calm down. CO left bridge for 1<sup>st</sup> time in 24 hours.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet had reported USS Agerholm “missing”, sent out P-3 to locate ship or wreckage
- Ship had lost most radio antennas and 2 large inflatable lifeboats

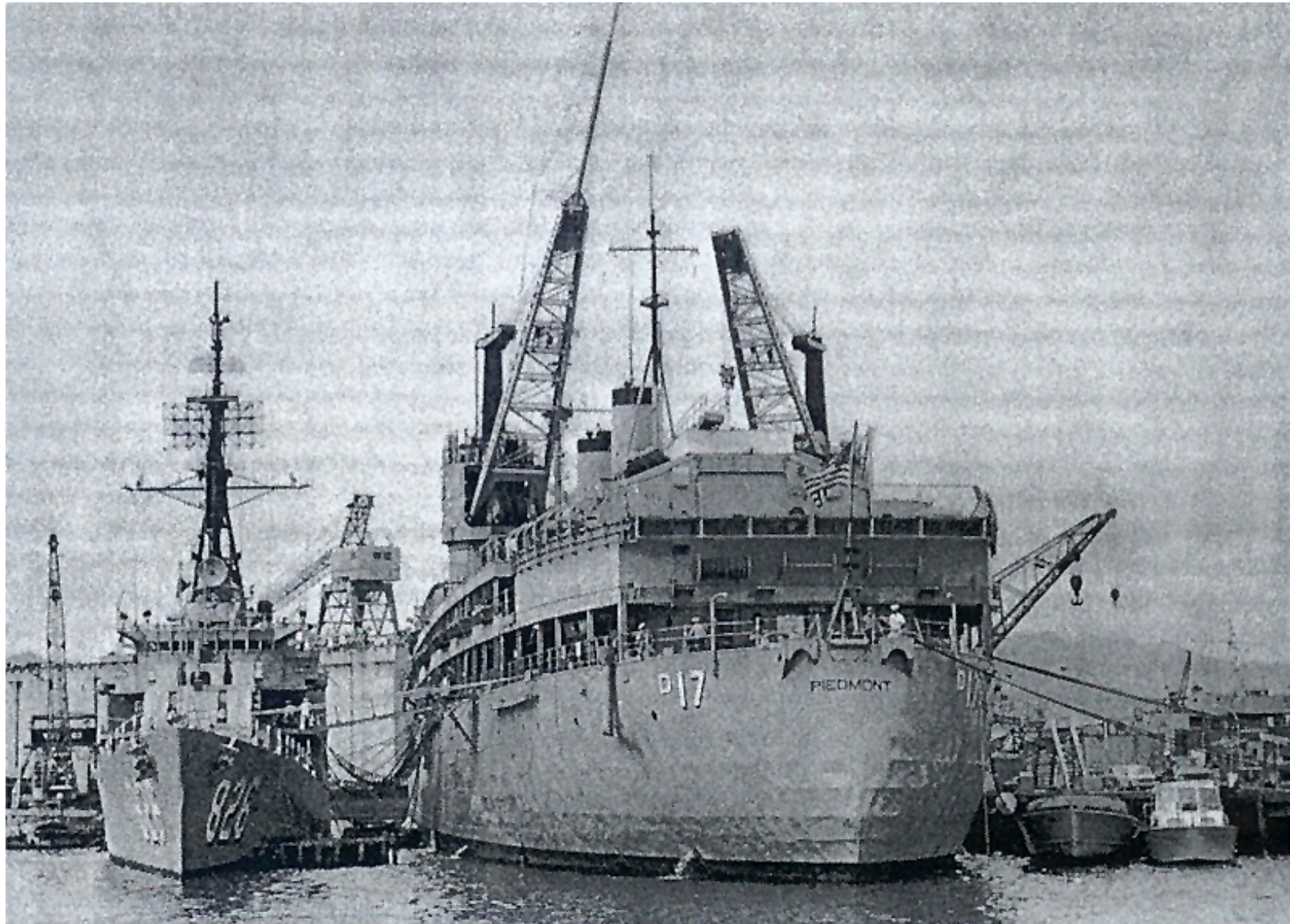
# The Typhoon Drove The Ship Between Woody Island & Lincoln Island (10 Miles Apart)



# Violent Storm Action Threw Unsecured Heavy Equipment & Crew Around



# USS Piedmont (AD-17) Repaired The Ship In Subic



# Typhoon Joan Damage Required Weeks To Repair



- Several sections of port side hull plating had to be replaced. Ship was severely weakened during the storm. Tender inspectors said the ship could have broke into 2 with another day in the storm
- All boiler tubes had to be replaced. Fuel oil leaked into boiler tubes during storm.
- 1<sup>st</sup> stack weakened
- Radio antennas lost or damaged
- 3 inflatable life rafts lost
- Crew was sleep deprived, many had bruises from being thrown about during storm
  
- Boiler room fire started by welder inattention required 2 or 3 more weeks alongside tender

# CDR Frank Taylor Appreciation Gift



# CDR Taylor Thank You

## 12 April 2015



# CDR Frank Taylor Saved USS Agerholm (DD-826) Ablly Assisted By The Crew





# **CDR Taylor Was A Rock**

**His Leadership & ship handling skills saved the lives of the USS Agerholm officers and crew**

- 350 families had husbands and fathers**
- 350 (est) women had Agerholm husbands**
- 2,100 (est.) children and grandchildren had fathers and grandfathers**

Questions?

