

DAVID HYSON, SEAMAN USS KIRK – '75 RESCUE

David Hyson: My name is David Hyson. My last name is spelled H-Y-S-O-N. Where I currently live?

Producer: Where do you live now?

David Hyson: I live in Rockfield, Maryland.

Producer: What was your tour in the service, branch and tour and year?

David Hyson: I was in the US Navy. I went into the US Navy on September 21st of 1972 shortly after I turned 18 years old. I was discharged from the Navy in July of 1976. I was discharged about 2 to 3 months early because there was an early dismissal program if I was going to be going into college, and so I was going into college and so I had an early dismissal.

Producer: [inaudible 00:00:47]

David Hyson: I grew in Baltimore, Maryland. In Parkfield section of Baltimore, Maryland. How I ended up in the navy, my father was in the Navy. So, I decided that I really didn't know what I wanted to do after I graduated from high school so the best thing for me to do would likely be to spend some time in the military to get my head together you might say. Then, I knew by the time I got out of the military I'd probably know what I wanted to do. That was being an accountant. Well I knew that I could be involved in it. That's the reason why I joined the US Navy because I knew if I had a good chance of not being involved in conflict would probably be the Navy because the Navy was off shore at that point. The Air Force was still involved and the Army was still involved and the Marines were still involved but the Navy was a little bit more arms- length involvement. You know maybe just shelling for support and things like that.

I went in the like at the tail end of the Vietnam War. In 1973 when they had the peace agreement with North Vietnam, that was 1973 I think, and so at that point I still had 3 more years to serve but we all thought the war was over in 1973.

First ship and only ship I ever served on was the USS Kirk. Shortly after getting out of boot camp, I went to military school which was in Great Lake, Illinois. I studied to be a shipboard electrician. Then, I went to the

USS Kirk which was stationed in Long Beach, California. In the process of going out there or getting on board the ship, the ship was in dry dock in Long Beach, had just been commissioned on the 9th of September of 1972, and was relocated out to Long Beach to undergo the installation of a hanger deck because the ship was going to be getting a helicopter. So, the hanger deck was installed and the ship set back out to sea again and then took up home port in San Diego, California. That's how I ended up on the USS Kirk.

The very first cruise that the USS Kirk went on was about I believe in 1973. I don't remember the exact dates but that particular cruise we first headed out. We hit Hawaii, then we hit Guam, then we hit Manila. Then we hit the Philippines because the Philippines is basically our overseas home port. We hit a lot of places: the Philippines, Singapore, Honk Kong. We even did Pakistan on that trip but we spent I think over a month, maybe 2 months in the Indian Ocean, and so that was a lot of where we spent our time, cruising the Indian Ocean and then just guarding the Indian Ocean. We were an escort ship, and so the ship that we escorted was the USS Kitty Hawk. That was with us in the Indian Ocean. We were on a frigate.

Producer: For people who don't know this Navy nomenclature, what kind of ship is that?

David Hyson: The ship itself is about 300 feet long. It has a crew of about 250. Originally, the ship was called the destroyer escort but I think in 1973 or 1974 all of the escorts were re-titled to fleet frigate so no longer were there any designation as destroyer escort. Destroyer Escort is a little bit smaller than a regular destroyer, didn't have as much maneuverability as a regular destroyer because the Knox class ship which we were on board only had a single screw in the back of the ship which inhibited some of its maneuverability. Where as most of the destroyers had 2 screws where especially when you're pulling into port ...

Producer: These are the propellers?

David Hyson: These are the propellers at the back of the ship. When you have 2 propellers you can reverse one and the other, and you have great maneuverability when you're pulling into tight quarters like if you're pulling up to a war for something. When you only have one screw, then you have to be very careful because you've lost a lot of your maneuverability. The captain of our ship took a lot of pride in being able to pull in fast, and been back down really fast. He was very a good parker, you might say.

Producer: Was it a fast ship?

David Hyson: It was not one of the fastest ships in the fleet.

Producer: Did they have what they call fast frigates?

David Hyson: They called it a fast frigate but it was not as fast as some of the destroyers were. Our top speed was 31 knots, in comparison to the Kitty Hawk which was the air craft carrier we were with top speed was almost 50 knots. If there was a serious situation where the Kitty Hawk took off at top speed, we would not be able to keep up with it. We had a 5 inch 54 which shoots a 5 inch shell, and that was on the front of the ship. We had torpedo launchers. We had depth charges. That was basically it. If we needed machine gun support, we could manually attach machine guns to the top of the ship but other than that when I was on board the ship, it didn't really have a lot of fire power. It's main thing was we had a [inaudible 00:07:06] helicopter on board that could carry torpedoes.

Oh, let me explain one more thing. We did have asroc on board the ship which was basically a torpedo, a rocket fired torpedo. If we had ... the main purpose of the ship was anti-submarine warfare so if we were cruising with another ship and in this case it was the Kitty Hawk, we would be able to know if there were enemy submarines in the area. We had incredible some of the state of the art sonar systems on board our ship. If you look underneath of our ship, the front of our ship had a large balloon you might say underneath the surf of the ship which was a large sonar system. The helicopter itself would be able to launch what was called sonobuoys into the water and then drop down microphones into the water to listen for submarines that might be in the area. So if we needed to, we could fire either a rocket propelled torpedo or the helicopter could drop torpedoes into the vicinity of submarines.

It did not see much action in Vietnam. As a matter fact we never fired a single shell on the land of Vietnam. The only time that the ship even cruised off the coast of Vietnam was in April and May of 1975. That was the time that the evacuation of South Vietnam. It was interesting because a lot of the places that we pulled into were Navy towns. Towns that are set up where there was a Navy presence and a lot of the business was done with the US Navy. Like I said our main port of call was the Philippines, and it was Subic Bay. Subic Bay because it did not have a very good reputation. It was a bar town, and so a lot of the Navy men would hang out in the local bars and avail themselves of the local entertainment. (laughs) Yes and no. Well, I grew up as a Christian so it was a temptation you might say, so it wasn't exactly heaven.

We didn't really hear anything directly through the news. We heard things on board ship because at that point the ship received instructions to head over to Vietnam. We stopped into Cambodia first before we actually went to Vietnam. There was an operation in Cambodia called Operation Eagle Pull, that was pulling out advisors and various people out of Cambodia. So, we didn't actually pull anybody on board our ship but there were a couple of ships there, and we were one of the support ships that was there. From that point, we went over to Vietnam to be involved in the Operation Frequent Wind which was the operation where the Navy fleet would launch helicopters into South Vietnam to pull out our embassy personnel and other hand picked people who were either South Vietnamese or civilians that were working there that needed to come out that were in jeopardy of losing their lives basically if the North Vietnamese were able to come in. It was I think the 7th fleet US Navy, and so we were just cruising off the coast of South Vietnam at that point.

Producer: Operation Frequent Wind this rescue operation?

David Hyson: I don't know the exact count but it was somewhere between 50 and 55 ships. These were all military ships, so it's not including merchant marine because there were also merchant marine ships involved which were taking refugees also.

Producer: This would include some air craft carriers?

David Hyson: Air craft carriers, amphibious assault ships, destroyers, the whole flotilla of ships. Basically, our ship was not supposed to take any refugees. Our ship was only there for support in case we were ever engaged by the North Vietnamese. We were supposed to protect the rest of the fleet from the North Vietnamese along with some other destroyers.

Producer: How did this happen? How did you even learn about it?

David Hyson: Well, we learned about it first when Richard Armitage came aboard our ship.

Producer: Who is he?

David Hyson: Richard Armitage at that point was working for the CIA. Some people might know him at a later point when in 1993 when there was the first Gulf War, he was the Assistant Secretary of Defense working for Collin Powell. Some people might know him from that but at that point he was working for the CIA and it was his job to either scuttle the South Vietnamese Navy or try to rescue the South Vietnamese ships. So, he had

an agreement with Captain Kim Do who was at that point in charge of the South Vietnamese Navy. They made an arrangement to get as many of the ships out of the port as possible and to rendezvous with a ship from the US Navy, at that point they didn't say what the ship was but it was the USS Kirk, to try to get these shipped out of the hands of the North Vietnamese. If any ships were not able to be taken out of South Vietnam, they were supposed to be destroyed or scuttled at that point. So that's how the South Vietnamese Navy got out to ... I forgot the name that they are.

Producer: [inaudible 00:13:48]

David Hyson: The [inaudible 00:13:50] point. It was very close because the fall of Saigon was I believe on the 29th of April, and that was when the helicopters started coming out of South Vietnam. It was really interesting because early in the morning when we came out because I worked on the flight deck because I was part of the air crew at that point. When I came out on the flight deck in the morning, a lot of people were coming onto the flight deck because we were hearing rumors of helicopters. So when we came out on the flight deck we looked up into the sky and the sky was filled with helicopters. At this point, they were mainly marine helicopters and it looked like a swarm of bees because there were so many helicopters in the air. I had never seen anything like it. As the marine helicopters flew by, in the distance you could see another swarm of helicopters and they were all Huey helicopters which from what I understand were not supposed to be a part of the initial air lift but those South Vietnamese that had access to helicopters, they knew that South Vietnam was falling and they did what they had to do. They took their helicopter, followed the marines to sea hoping that they would be able to find a place of refuge on board one of the ships where the marine helicopters were headed.

The marines that were originally part of the airlift were US Marines, and they were flying Marine helicopters. They were the ones that were going to the embassy and various places in South Vietnam, and picking up designated people to fly out of South Vietnam. But like I said, the Huey helicopters were part of the South Vietnamese Army Air force, and so they were coming out on their own. Our captain made the decision that we were going ... because we had a small flight deck. We had our own helicopter. We had a small flight deck, and we decided that we were going to try to take on a helicopter from this group to alleviate some of the stress which the larger ships were taking. So we landed. So we had someone on board ship who spoke rudimentary Vietnamese, and he started announcing on the radio ship 1087 land here. One helicopter,

Huey helicopter made an approach to the ship and we have a person who's responsible for helping to land helicopters. His name was Joe McCullen. He helped land this helicopter by being the signal man on the flight deck. The helicopter landed. We unloaded about 15 refugees. Then, before we knew it there were about 2 or 3 other helicopters that were coming into approach from the back of the ship. We did not have any place to land these helicopters. That was when our captain said "throw it off the side". So, we started throwing helicopters off the side of our ship.

It was kind of fun. I was back there helping to push the helicopters off the ship, and these helicopters did not have wheels like the helicopter we have on board our ship. It just had 2 skids. We had to wiggle it back and forth because our flight deck had a very abrasive type of a surface so that when our helicopter would land, it wouldn't slide. But for the huey helicopters, we had to lift up the tail and scoot it from side to side, and bring it off to the edge and then finally lift up the tail and it would fall over the side into the water. Each helicopter that landed on our ship, that where we didn't have a place to put it, we would throw it off the side.

Producer: And we're just dumping them, but then I guess there was really no option.

David Hyson: There was no option because there were so many people that were trying to flee South Vietnam. The captain's decision was based on okay what's more important, the helicopter or the people. The people were much more important, and they needed to be rescued and so we threw the helicopters ... I don't even believe our captain got permission to throw them off. He just did it.

Producer: Do you remember approximately the total number that went over board?

David Hyson: I believe we threw 13 helicopters off the side of our ship. Yes.

That was the largest helicopter that the South Vietnamese had, and it was a double rotor helicopter. If it had tried to land on board our ship, it would have made impact with the ship. So, it flew around our ship several times I think trying to decide if it could land on board our ship. That was when the pilot decided that it was impossible, so there was a communication went back and forth basically through hand signals between the people on our flight deck and the captain of the helicopter. They decided that the best thing to do would be to hover over the fan tail, and bring the side of the helicopter down because people would jump out of the side of the helicopter into the arms of a couple crew

mates that were on the fan tail, and that's how the people would be rescued. So that's what happened. The helicopter flew over the back of the ship. There were a couple of crew men that were at the back of the ship, and there was a baby that was dropped out of the helicopter and some small children and adults. I think we did have one injury where someone broke their leg but other than that it was actually pretty safe operation where everybody got off the helicopter.

But then the helicopter itself could not land on board our ship so then it went off the side of the ship and brought it's wheels down into the water. It hovered there for a little while and people were looking at it trying to figure out what was going on. At that point the pilot inside the helicopter was taking off his flight uniform because he was going to jump into the water. He took off his flight uniform, so all he left on was his underwear basically, and as he turned the controls that operated the helicopter as he pushed the helicopter to the right, the rotors came over, made impact with the water and he had jumped out of the helicopter to the left. The helicopter, all the blades hit, and there was an enormous explosion. You could hear it. They were about 300 yards off of the side of the ship. So, the helicopter blew up and then the pilot came back up to the surface of the water, and our little boat went off to pick him and brought him back to the ship. All he had left was some underwear. That was all he had left (laughs).

It was. It was. We all thought that some of the debris might come back and hit the ship or something like that, so as the helicopter did hit the water, we all took some cover behind either a door on board the ship or something like that. But none of the debris actually came back far enough to hit the ship so everybody was pretty safe. Well, we had a couple more helicopters land on board the ship but later that night ... I believe it was that night. We had communication that we were supposed to go up to the USS Blue Ridge which was the command ship for the operation and take on board a passenger, and the passenger was Richard Armitage. Richard Armitage met in the officers' quarters with the rest of the officers.

Unfortunately, I'm not an officer so I was not involved in that meeting but apparently in the meeting they decided that the USS Kirk was picked to go back to Con Son Island because the very next day there was going to be a rendezvous there with what was left of the South Vietnamese Navy. He did say and it was not something that was officially sanctioned by the US government. It was something that they did on their own where there was an agreement between captain Kim Do and Richard Armitage. It was almost like an unspoken agreement that Captain Kim Do was going to tell

the captains of the ships that they were allowed to bring family members. Well they brought family members, next door neighbors, anybody that they knew they brought out to the ships and they loaded those ships up. There was 33 ships in their estimating. Some of those ships were small. They weren't all US military ships. There were fishing ships, and some commercial ships that came out with them also. Amongst those 33 ships there was probably close to 33,000 people on them. There was a lot of people.

There was a sense of fear because the North Vietnamese has steadily been coming down the coast into South Vietnam, and they were taking the strategic cities along the way. They had reports that as the North Vietnamese were moving into these cities, there was a lot of executions basically that were taking place in these cities of South Vietnamese military and people like that. So, there was a lot of fear and a lot of information that the people in Saigon knew that there was a possibility that they were not going to be spared, that they were going to be casualties of the war. They could either stay and wait for it, or they could try to get out.

Producer: All these ships suddenly rendezvoused at this point, what did you see?

David Hyson: Well, when we showed up in the morning at Con Son island, it was like a parking lot because all of these ships had anchored out at Con Son Island waiting for the USS Kirk to come and get them ready to make a voyage to the Philippines. Some of the ships were sea worthy. Some of them were not. There was one ship which was actually taking on water and sinking, actively sinking. So it was decided that it was going to unload all of its passengers onto another of the Vietnamese ships, and so they actually put wooden planks between the two ships and had people walking across these planks to get off of the sinking ship onto the other ship. There was actually an incident at that time that happened where one of the South Vietnamese officers or military was somewhat excited and he ran across the plank and knocked a young lady off into the water who drowned right there, was crushed between the two ships. Another member of the South Vietnamese Navy, pulled out a pistol and shot this person who caused this to happen. He died, fell into the water, and at that point there wasn't any more commotion. The exit of all the people coming off the ship took place in a controlled manner but it was very unfortunate that it happened. At this point, the Kirk ...

Producer: I'm assume you witnessed this?

David Hyson: We were probably 1000 yards from the incident, so we were in ... it was happening while we were there. Yes. It looked like they were all ... it looked like bleachers at a stadium where you look up and you see line and lines and lines of people because on board the ship you have the main deck and then you have the different levels of the ship that goes up. At each level of the ship you might have a walk way on the outside of the ship, and so as you looked at the ship you would have the entire main deck covered with people and as you looked your way up the ship, the next level you'd see people on the walkways then you'd see people on the next level of the walkways. So as large as the ship was, the impression was that it was completely covered with people. You knew however many people there were on top the ship, there were as many people below the decks of the ship also.

Producer: [inaudible 00:27:06] I mean that these were the cruise quarters though right? Was there room for them down below?

David Hyson: There was only enough room for as many people as they could fit. The reason why people were above the deck was because they couldn't fit below the deck. So, there were so many people there probably wasn't any more room on board the ships for any more people. Some of these ships were maybe ... the military ships maybe were meant for a crew of maybe 200 people and 300 people, and there might have been 2000 people on the ships so that's 10 times more than they were actually made to hold. The daytime temperature was about 105 degrees.

Producer: I wouldn't want to be ... I'd rather be at least up on the dock or on the deck where I'd get a breeze than down in that whole.

David Hyson: Although the sun, there was no clouds in the sky so the sun was beating down on the ships also. So the surface ... and then the surface decks of the ships heat up also, so people were having problems with dehydration because there was not a lot of clean drinking water to go around on board these ships. There was not much food to eat on board these ships. The ships barely could operate on their own propulsion systems let alone have drinking water, or clean drinking you might say, or food, or medical supplies, or anything like that for the people.

Well the fact is they were alive. I believe there was only a couple people that lost their lives on the cruise, on the transport over to the Philippines but what we did as USS Kirk, at the flotilla got underway is we had two corpsmen on board the ship. Our corpsmen started making rounds to all of these ships to supply medical supplies, to see if there were any sick people on board the ships. After a couple days at sea, a couple of other

ships joined us also because it was too large of a job for just one ship, so a couple of other US navy ships joined us and with the compliment of their corpsmen and our corpsmen, they basically made rounds amongst all these ships to hand out medicine. Some of the main things that the people were suffering from was dysentery and conjunctivitis which affected their eyes and so they were handing out medications for dysentery and conjunctivitis. They were handing out diapers for babies and various things like that.

Our ship itself, we ran out of medical supplies fairly quickly. So, we were actually getting replenished from the Philippines. There were aircraft that were flying overhead that were dropping replenishment of medical supplies and diapers and things like that into the water on the side of our ship in 55 gallon drums. So, we would send our boat out to pick up these 55 gallon drums so that we could replenish our medical supplies. That's how we were able to get around to all these ships and have supplies to help them. Like I said the majority of the sickness was dysentery and conjunctivitis.

Producer: You've got all these, 33000 that just seems incredible that you're going to keep these people alive even for a week.

David Hyson: Some of the water that they received, some of the ships did have their own water when they left port but some of the ships didn't have much water. We were moving some of the water off of our ship onto some of these other ships because when you're at sea, you have these alienation units on board your ship which basically turns salt water into drinking water. We would move some of our water onto some of these ships in either directly through a hose or there was one thing that they were doing is they were filling up shells. We had empty shell casings from our 5 inch 54 gun, and so were filling up our shell casings with water and transporting water over to these other ships. We had lots of rice and that was mainly what we were able to transport to them as far as food goes, rice. So we got some replenishments while we were at sea. Pallets and pallets and pallets of rice, and so we would transport the rice over to the ships. During this entire time, we were moving rice back and forth to these ships and so a lot of the people on board these ships the only thing that they had while they were in transit was rice and water.

We did. There was a supply ship that we had to rendezvous with. We took on lots and lot of rice. But as soon as we got it on board, we were moving to the other ships. So, we ran out of our own rice fairly quickly. We had to take it on board from some transport ships that came by.

They go where ever they could. Usually this for a lot of men, it was off the side of the ship. For the women, they set up little portable latrines basically with buckets and curtain. Some of the ships had working facilities. Most of the ships did not. So the ships themselves were, they had a lot of refuse. I don't know what you want to call it, on board of the surfaces of the decks of the ship. So we had to a couple of times during our cruise, we had to hose down the sides of some of these ships in order to clean them off.

Producer: You'd have everybody go to the [inaudible 00:33:30] and hose off the ...

David Hyson: Yes. Hose off the other side of the ship, then we'd hose off the other side of their ship. So that was basically the only way we could help them out, keep their decks clean. We did have pregnant ladies and our captain asked that when our corpsmen went around on the medical rounds to not only ask if there were sick people but also ask if there were any pregnant women. There were some pregnant women, and so the pregnant women were allowed to come back on board our ship. One section of the ship which was where the chief petty officers section was, where they had their own lounge area and their own sleeping quarters, that was turned into the pregnancy ward. The families of the pregnant mothers and the mothers themselves and the children if there were any, they moved into the chief petty officer quarters and that was where the maternity ward was set up.

Producer: Any babies born?

David Hyson: Born on board our ship, although one of women on board our ship said was so impressed with the care that she received while she was on board our ship, she said that she was going to name her baby after the Kirk. So, her daughter which was ... Kirk is actually a boy's name so she named her daughter middle name Kirk. When her daughter grew up and said "why is my name a boy's name". That was when the mother explained to her the story of the USS Kirk.

I didn't personally see any pets. I don't know if the captain saw any pets but there was no pets on board our ship, and I do not know what happened to the pets that were on the refugee ships. That were several [inaudible 00:35:22]. He was that kind of a guy.

Producer: What was the general morale among the crew on the Kirk?

David Hyson: I think we all felt a sense of pride. We all knew that we were doing what we could to rescue people from a really horrible situation. We knew that

it was a very historic event. We knew that we would like the story to get out. Obviously the story didn't get out for a long time but I think we had a sense of pride that we were helping to save a lot of people. A lot of them were and I think that out of the amount of people, we had close to 33,000 people on this flotilla, so it's been estimated that probably 25% of the people that came out in this couple of days there came out on the flotilla.

The weather was great and it was said that the voyage from Vietnam to the Philippines, the ocean was very cooperative. The ocean itself was like glass. It was calm. There was hardly any waves in the ocean at all. Some of these ships that were going with us were not very sea worthy, and if there was any storm or there was any larger waves on the sea some of these ships may have been lost. There was absolutely ... the ocean was calm completely during the entire trip. I believe that it was a gift from God that these people were saved and the ocean was completely cooperative.

The ship which was about 7 knots.

Producer: Which is 5 miles an hour?

David Hyson: Slow.

Producer: Something like that.

David Hyson: A bicycle could ride that pace easily.

Producer: So how did you ... what was your job during that 7 days of that travel?

David Hyson: On board ship I was working on the flight deck, and so we had some of the helicopters that had remained on board our ship that we hadn't pushed off the side of the ship. But I worked on a lot of the details that we were doing on board ship which was loading up boats with supplies, rice, medical supplies, and so there were a lot of work details that were taking place on board the ship where we just needed to keep this flotilla moving. Part of the operation of keeping the flotilla moving was keeping our little whale boats, our little boats going back and forth between the ships with medical supplies, food, water, whatever the ships needed and so we were constantly on board our ship servicing these small boats that were going back and forth to the larger ships that were part of the refugees. I was 20 years old. Yes.

Producer: I guess from your 2 years earlier in Parkfield this had to be kind of almost of a ... I'm using the expression from the time "a mind blowing" experience.

David Hyson: It was. Definitely. I knew that it would be something that I would always remember, highlight in my life. It always has been, looking back upon it it was always one of the most important times of my life. I'm really fortunate and blessed to have been apart of it.

Producer: Have you ever encountered some of the Vietnamese refugees who were on those boats?

David Hyson: Interestingly enough I go to a doctor's office in Wheaton, Maryland. When I switched medical plans, the first doctor that I got when I was there, her parents were part of the flotilla that was rescued by the USS Kirk. When I first started talking to her I knew she was Vietnamese. I asked her if she had any experience ... knew about the escape from South Vietnam. She said her parents escaped at the fall of Saigon. So I gave her a copy of a movie that was made called "The Lucky Few", and her parents were able to say that they were one of those ships that the USS Kirk escorted. So now we helped her parents, and now the daughter of ... their daughter was my doctor.

There was some fear that the North Vietnamese would try to come out to intercept us. There was actually no intervention by the North Vietnamese when we were on Con Son Island, and as we left Con Son Island there was no intervention for us going across the ocean to the Philippines. There was though when we got to the Philippines, there was somewhat of a problem there because at that point, Marcos was the President. The Philippines had officially recognized the North Vietnamese government, and the North Vietnamese had requested that he not accept the South Vietnamese navy and asked them to send the South Vietnamese navy back to Vietnam. We didn't want to send them back to Vietnam, so there was actually a lot of discussion going back and forth between our captain, Richard Armitage, and the US Ambassador to the Philippines before a decision was made on how they were going to be able to get the flotilla of ships into the Philippines where Marcos would say they could come in. They had an official ceremony on board each one of these ships where they lowered the Vietnamese flag and raised the US flag over each ship officially recognized as US ships at that point. Marcos, the president of the Philippines, allowed them into Subic Bay.

Producer: Now I understand there was a sad moment.

David Hyson: The child was being treated for pneumonia. So our corpsmen gave them the pediatric dose of penicillin to combat the pneumonia. The child was actually improving but as the child was feeding, the child breathed in some of the formula, died fairly rapidly. I guess through an infection that was subsequent to that, and the child died. Our captain decided that we were going to have an at sea funeral because they couldn't go into the Philippines with the child's body. They had a full military funeral on board our ship, the USS Kirk, and played Taps. There was a gentleman on board our ship named Don Cox who played the trumpet, so he played Taps. Then the child itself was buried at sea.

Producer: Particularly the fact that he gave this child a full military funeral

David Hyson: Military funeral

Producer: At sea

David Hyson: Right. It was sad because the child had escaped South Vietnam but never made it to freedom. Well they did make it to the Philippines to Subic Bay. That was somewhat of a staging area. After leaving the Philippines, they went to Guam which was the second staging area. At Guam, there were several camps in Guam that were set up, tent cities you might say. As people basically were willing to sponsor the Vietnamese, then they were released to come to the United States. There were several relocation camps here in the US. One of them was Camp Pendleton, a Marine Base in Southern California.

Once the flotilla was in motion, as far as I know, there was no more helicopters coming out. There was one situation before we got to Con Son Island where a marine helicopter went down off the side of our ship because it didn't have any place to land, and it had actually run out of fuel. It was probably the last helicopter out of South Vietnam. When it auto rotated down into the water, we were able to send a boat out to rescue the two pilots but that was the last helicopter that I actually saw. During the escort of the ships back to the Philippines, I didn't see any more helicopters coming out of Vietnam. The ships were fairly spread out and so just viewing being able to see the other ships from the flight deck, you could see a couple of the ships but you couldn't see all the ships because they were fairly spread out. From our flight deck, I could only see a handful of ships.

I got out of the Navy in 1976, so at that point that was April of 1975. At that point, I was a 3rd class petty officer. I was a jet engine mechanic. When we got back to port later that year, I got my orders to leave the

ship and I was stationed on North Island which was part of Coronado Island, San Diego on the naval air base there. My job there was to rebuild jet engines, so that's where I stayed during my last couple of months while I was in the military.

Producer: So I can't imagine anything ever matched the USS Kirk adventure.

David Hyson: Nothing did during my time in the service. I found it really ... I was so happy or fortunate you might say to have had this part of my navy career. A lot of people would go into the Navy for 4 years and not a whole lot of things would happen. They would serve their tour and then they would leave the military. But I think my tour in the service was highlighted by this opportunity to go to Vietnam and to help to rescue all these people.

Producer: Ever been back?

David Hyson: I've never been back to the Vietnam area. I want to go back one day but as of this point I have not.

Producer: Well, Dave I want to thank you for sharing this story. It's something obviously to be very proud of. One of the ... as I keep referring to it as one of the silver linings of that dark cloud of the fall of Saigon and Vietnam in 75.

David Hyson: Absolutely.

Producer: Thank you for sharing and thank you for what you did over there.

David Hyson: Thank you.