



'Mutiny' Updated

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(Today's column is by Drew Pearson's associate, Jack Anderson.)

Washington.

The Navy is trying to suppress the fantastic story of a real-life Caine Mutiny, closely following the plot of the celebrated Herman Wouk novel. This one happened aboard a radar picket destroyer on combat duty off Vietnam.

The junior officers even kept a "Captain's Madness Log," as in the "Caine Mutiny," to use as evidence against their commanding officer. He is Lt. Cmdr. Marcus Aurelius Arnheiter and the "mutiny" took place aboard the U.S.S. Vance.

The investigative report shows clearly, however, that Arnheiter was no Captain Queeg.

Here is the story the Navy is trying to keep quiet:

A group of young officers had been operating the Vance more like a yacht than a warship until Arnheiter took command a few days before Christmas, 1965. At sea, they enjoyed a leisurely life, including movies every afternoon. At anchor, they went joy riding and water skiing.

Discipline was so relaxed that an enlisted crewman complained to his Congressman: "No one knows or cares what you are doing. You get no recognition for keeping your gear up . . . The officers don't check us; they don't look at our logs. They don't inspect our gear or our spaces."

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This letter got back to Rear Adm. Walter H. Baumberger, then commander of the Cruiser Destroyer Force in the Pacific, who cited it in a notice to all his ships, without mentioning names.

To restore combat efficiency aboard the Vance, Arnheiter was named skipper and he began cracking down. His junior officers chafed under the new discipline. Then the ship was ordered to the war zone, her mission to patrol the coast, intercept Communist contraband and bombard enemy targets on shore.

Arnheiter had the vessel begin patrolling close to the shore, searching the coves and inlets for suspicious junks. He also requested spotter planes to point out shore targets for the ship's three-

inch guns.

The junior officers complained that he was taking unnecessary risks and that they could patrol by radar beyond the barrier reef 20 miles out.

Soon they began to plot against Arnheiter. Once he saw in the ward room an open copy of Herman Wouk's "Caine Mutiny Court Martial," the stage version of the original novel. Three subordinates—Lt. Ray Hardy, the executive officer; Lt. (J.G.) William Generous, the operations officer; and Ensign Louis Belmonte—compiled a long list of petty grievances against Arnheiter, entered by Belmonte in the "Captain's Madness Log."

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The trouble really began when Generous, a Catholic, complained in a letter to a priest, Lt. Richard Osterman, that Arnheiter was compelling all hands to attend Protestant services on the ship's fantail.

Unknown to Arnheiter, Chaplain Osterman registered a complaint with higher authorities. Ensign Belmonte, the lay Catholic leader on board, pressed the charges in complaints to other chaplains.

Investigation developed that the skipper, an Episcopalian, had not been holding Protestant services. Invocations and benedictions were offered, but were taken from the Navy's own booklet of "Prayers at Sea."

The other charges were more petty, including the complaint that Arnheiter had declared candy "unfit for consumption" in order to give it to hungry Vietnamese children.

Prior to these findings, however, Arnheiter was abruptly removed from his command. He was neither informed of the charges against him nor given an opportunity to reply. The admirals acted precipitously out of concern for the ship's morale in a war zone.

But having made their decision, they refused to back down—even after investigation proved the charges to be frivolous.