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# 'Somebody Hollered MIG!' Destroyer Crewman Recalls

DANANG, South Vietnam, April 20 (UPI)—"Somebody hollered 'MIG!' and before we could swivel our gun around, the bombs went off and flames started coming through the hatches."

Gunner's Mate 2d Cl. Michael Kesting, 22 years old, described the air-sea battle as he stood on the battered decks of the United States destroyer Higbee.

The ship arrived at Danang today for repairs. She was hit yesterday. The Higbee and seven other United States warships spotted three Soviet-built MIG's in the battle in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The Higbee incident marked some of the heaviest sea action of the war off Vietnam, with Seventh Fleet ships fighting MIG's for the first time, dueling with shore batteries and reporting the sinking of at least three motor torpedo boats and the damaging of two.

The missile frigate Sterett, which with the Higbee was bombarding North Vietnamese

shore batteries, reported shooting down one of the MIG's and sinking two of three suspected patrol boats. A delayed report said that on Monday the destroyer Hamner sank one patrol boat and damaged another.

A spokesman for the United States command denied reports that the light missile cruiser Oklahoma City, flagship of the Seventh Fleet, had been damaged.

"I heard a scream and tried to go down there but couldn't because of the smoke and the fire that was filling the mount. I was really shook up."

The skipper, Comdr. Ronald Zuilkoski, said that the MIG's, in two passes, dropped four bombs. Three of them fell 100 yards short of the ship, he said, and the fourth hit between the barrels of the twin five-inch guns at the rear of the Higbee.

The 41-year-old commander said the 250 crew members and 15 officers of the Higbee wanted to get back

into the war as quickly as possible after the MIG attack.

"About 99.9 per cent of the crew wants to jack up our flag over a new ship and go on out," he said. "But I hope to get the Higbee back out as soon as possible."

Hospital Technician 2d Cl. John O'Brien, 40 years old, led one of the repair parties on the Higbee, a World War II destroyer launched in 1944.

He said the bomb had dropped right on top of the ship's magazine.

"We weren't so much worried about rounds ticking off as we were about what we would lose if the magazine went," he said. "But the crew is alert and wants to go back on the line. We are up for it."

Commander Zuilkoski said that there had been no advance warning of the MIG attack.

"We had just concluded a gunfire mission along with two other destroyers," he said. "The MIG's came up off the port bow. The first

one dropped two bombs, both of which fell short on the left side. They missed by about 100 yards.

"On the second pass—I don't know if it was the same plane or not—two more bombs dropped. One hit 100 yards to the right of us. The other hit between the twin barrels of our five-inch guns on the aft turret."

The bomb went through the deck and hit the ammunition-filled ready-service locker, where some shells for the five-inchers are kept.

A secondary blast set off by the bomb blew the gun turret off and flung it into the sea. Other explosions ripped out a large section of the ship's superstructure at the stern.

Four crewmen were wounded in the bombing runs by the MIG's, but the toll could have been much higher. Commander Zuilkoski said that 12 sailors normally worked in the gun turret, but most had been ordered elsewhere because one of the barrels was jammed.