

USS BLUE AND USS COLLETT RETURN



USS BLUE (DD-744)



USS COLLETT (DD-730)

Two veteran destroyers arrived in Long Beach Monday after completing a two-year tour of overseas duty in the Far East. USS Collett (DD-730) and USS Blue (DD-744), homeported in Yokosuka, Japan throughout their deployment, are tied up at Long Beach Naval Station pier 15.

During their deployment, both ships were assigned a variety of missions in the combat zone off the coast of North and South Vietnam, including plane guarding for attack aircraft carriers, naval gunfire support for American, Republic of Vietnam and Republic of Korea ground forces in South Vietnam, and Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. While assigned SAR duties, Blue and Collett were credited with the rescue of 11 downed airmen.

Another primary assignment of the two ships was Operation Sea Dragon, the interdiction of North Vietnamese waterborne logistics craft attempting to infiltrate South Vietnam with arms and material. During these missions, military targets along the North Vietnamese coast such as petroleum storage areas, radar installations, supply lines and coastal defense sites were also taken under attack.

While assigned to Sea Dragon forces, both Collett and Blue operated with the two Royal Australian Navy guided-missile destroyers HMAS Hobart and HMAS Perth. Although both Collett and Blue were taken under heavy enemy fire while on Sea Dragon, neither ship suffered any personnel casualties or serious material damage.

Blue and Collett are the last two ships of Destroyer Squadron Nine to return from two years of continuous service in the Western Pacific. Destroyer Squadron Nine, the "En Garde" squadron, is now homeported in Long Beach under the command of Capt. James M. Mason.

The two destroyers are returned to California via the Southern Hemisphere. Both ships visited Brisbane, Australia in late August. Collett then steamed southeast across the Tasman Sea to Wellington, the capitol of New Zealand, while Blue went north to Auckland.

During five-day port calls in each city, open house was held and over eight thousand visitors flocked aboard the two American warships.

As they returned to Long Beach, crew members of both ships "can look back on a job well done for the Seventh Fleet, followed by interesting visits to the homes of America's English-Speaking allies 'down under'," said Collett commander Cdr. John R. Kearney of Oakland. Blue is commanded by Cdr. Harold W. Bademan of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.