

*The USS Meyerkord, to be launched next year, is named after a graduate of the Class of 1960, the first Naval officer to be killed in combat in Viet Nam*

The USS MEYERKORD now under construction will be a ship with a purpose—not in the manner of River Assault Group 23 on which the man for whom it is named met his death, but on the high seas where—after it is commissioned next year—it will patrol a course in the way of all destroyer escorts, keeping watch for enemy submarines and safeguarding convoys. This powerful and versatile ship is reminiscent of the man whose living service was devoted to freeing waterways of danger in far off Viet Nam—the first U.S. Naval officer to die in combat there and a 1960 graduate of the University of Missouri.

It was typical of a day in the Mekong River Delta for Lt. Harold Dale Meyerkord, USNR, to be poised for duty that began, in his own words, “as soon as the light goes, so will our patrols.” Then RAG 23 took off in shallow draft patrol crafts, commanded by a Vietnamese lieutenant with the helpful advice of the American Naval officers aboard. Senior Advisor to this River Force was Lt. Meyerkord, whose job in this “hide and seek war” plied on the thousands of miles of waterway in a country 9,000 miles from his hometown of St. Louis, Mo., was to keep the waters free of mines, to safeguard villages along the shore, and to fight the Viet Cong infiltrating everywhere. This is not an easy task, when mines may be relaid as soon as a boat has passed, when every hut must be searched, and when ambush from the jungled shoreline is a constant hazard.

To train men by example, stepping into the total blackness of a hut, finger on the trigger; to offer reassurance when fear is constant to a people who can only feel the stability if language is a barrier; to lessen the tension with laughter; to show raw nerve in the face of danger takes a real “man.” Such a man was epitomized in the person of Lt. Meyerkord of whom the late Dickey Chapelle wrote in the February, 1966, issue of *National Geographic* when reporting the “Water War in



Lt. Harold Dale Meyerkord, USNR

## A Destroyer

Viet Nam” published after her own death on the fighting front.

Death came to Lt. Meyerkord, too, after she had accompanied him on one of his riverboat stories. March 16, 1965, was similar to the multiple other days he had spent since transferring to this particular group on January 13. Caught on his boat in a heavy ambush, he was wounded by the first fusillade from the Viet Cong, and returned enemy fire at point-blank range until a second bullet killed him.

“BY HIS SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP, initiative and courage, Lt. Meyerkord contributed greatly to the United States effort in Viet Nam and upheld the highest traditions of the Naval Service,” said Secretary of the Navy, Paul H. Nitze, in announcing that his name had been selected for the DE-1058 of the Knox class, to be



Lt. Meyerkord, standing top left, and another U.S. Naval Advisor, aboard a River Force boat patrolling in the Mekong Delta. The rivers serve as roadways of the jungle and are vital for access, communications and as marketways for rice produced inland.—Official U.S. Navy photo.

LCDR Tom Wooten, left, and Lt. Meyerkord assigned to River Assault Group 23, one of seven divisions of the South Vietnamese River Force which are manned by Vietnamese and advised by U.S. Navymen.—Official U.S. Navy photo.



## to Honor a Missouri Navy Hero

built in San Pedro, Calif., and launched in mid-1967. He is the second American to be killed in action in Viet Nam to be so honored.

His selection followed the posthumous award of the Navy Cross—highest Naval recognition—and the Air Medal for prior service in which he completed twenty missions in support of the Vietnamese against communist guerilla action, in low-level reconnaissance flights under enemy fire to secure intelligence data. He also held two Purple Hearts.

Meyerkord was commissioned June 10, 1960, after completing U.S. Navy Officer Candidate School at Newport, R. I., serving thereafter for four years on board the cruiser USS Los Angeles and the destroyer Duncan before reporting to the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Viet Nam, July, 1964. In early service in Viet Nam he was instrumental in turning defeat into

victory when aboard a command boat that reconnoitered ahead of friendly forces, discovered a Viet Cong canal block, and set up a shore post to direct artillery fire, air strikes and medical evacuation. Again in January, after transfer to the small boat force, he led a flotilla to success when its Vietnamese commander was wounded. His final heroic action was again the result of riding the lead boat to direct operations and set an example for Vietnamese Naval personnel.

Meyerkord is survived by his wife, the former Jane Schmidt, who received her B.S. in education from the University of Missouri, also in 1960; a young daughter, Lynne, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harold E. Meyerkord, all of St. Louis. He was graduated from Riverview Gardens High School in 1955 and received a bachelor of science degree from Missouri in political science.

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