

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month



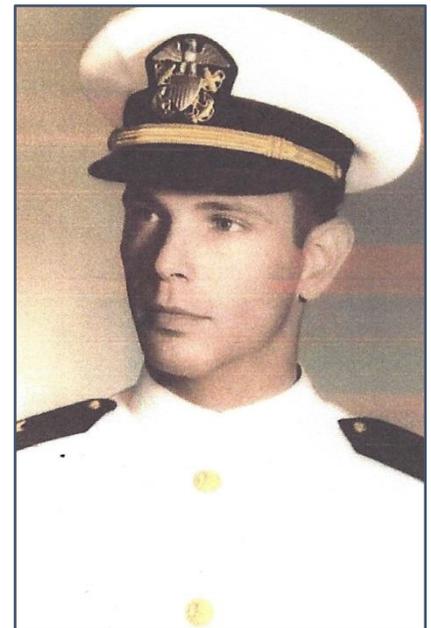
April 2018



David Gildehaus

United States Navy

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St. Louis-Jefferson
Chapter



David enlisted in the United States Navy in April, 1963, during his last semester of college, with orders to go to Officer Candidate School (OCS) following graduation. He attended OCS in Newport, Rhode Island, from September, 1963, to April, 1964. After OCS graduation, he was sent to Communication School in San Diego, California, for three months. He was then assigned to the *USS Eldorado (AGC-11)* as the Custodian of Classified Publications and Equipment. On his flight to the base in the Philippines, he was assigned courier duty for a large amount of classified information with an armed guard. Some material was delivered at a stop in Guam. Once aboard the *Eldorado*, he reported as a line officer, assigned to the security of communication between United States ships, aircraft, and land based forces. He spent approximately 18 months patrolling off the coast of Vietnam as a Secret Message Control Officer, authenticating codes which changed sometimes on an hourly basis.

In September, 1965, he boarded his new assignment, the *USS America (CVA-66)* via jet from Guantanamo—his first carrier landing. Instead of being sent to Vietnam as originally planned, the *USS America* went on a goodwill tour in the Mediterranean, entertaining local VIPs aboard the ship. Upon leaving for the first of two Mediterranean tours, he was appointed the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade. Less than a month later, his security clearance was upgraded to Classified Information Officer for Top Secret and Emergency Action Message Authentication Systems. The *America* had a nuclear armed jet on standby, and he and only one other officer had access to the nuclear codes.

David smiled as he described the living and work conditions aboard the *USS Eldorado*. It was the beginning of the Vietnam War and they did not have a supply chain set up for war. Supplies were flown into Hanoi and they had one supply ship to deliver a pallet of food, medicine, cigarettes, etc.

They would run out of food—they even ate rice that had weevils in it—toothpaste, toilet paper, tobacco—everything! Since David did not smoke, he would store his cigarette ration and use them as barter when supplies began to run out. The servicemen sacrificed more than their safety. When the Chief Master at Arms was almost out of snuff, the Admiral sent out a message to the Pacific Command to fly it out, along with cigarettes, or there would be a mutiny!

The ship was not air conditioned-not even the officers' quarters-and the World War II metal construction made it extremely hot. Equipment would get overheated, quit and need repair. They would have swim call, but David's duties and responsibilities did not allow him to jump in and cool off. He worked four hours on, four hours off, getting three and one-half hours of sleep a night while on watch in the Vietnam waters.

Once the *Eldorado* got caught in Okinawa Bay in a typhoon, was rammed by another ship just above the water line, and patch work was done so they could cruise back to the Vietnam coast to patrol. He saw a sailor's body cut in half by a large cable. They were in the Gulf of Tonkin and had a confrontation with Viet Cong torpedo boats, a situation he described as confusing because they had not gone on war footing until then. They spent an extra three months off Vietnam when their relief ship broke down across the Pacific.

After the *USS Eldorado*, David got more sleep aboard the aircraft carrier on his two goodwill Mediterranean tours, but that is not the experience he talked about. He was disappointed when the *USS America*, brand new and undergoing sea trials in Cuba, was not headed to the Vietnam Theatre as originally planned. David seemed to relish his memories of service and sacrifice although it sounded uncomfortable, tense, and dangerous.

David was awarded the National Defense Medal and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for Vietnam Area Operations. He was discharged into the active Navy Reserve in April, 1967, and appointed the rank of Lieutenant in November, 1967.

David is a graduate of the University of Missouri Agricultural Engineering School. His civilian career included work at Ralston Purina and work as a building inspector.

David is a husband, father of three daughters, and a grandfather. He is active in his church, on the Cemetery Board and a member of the choir for 40 years. He is still a boy scout, serving 48 years with the same troop. He served as a pack leader for cub scouts for two years and is on the Eagle Review Board. He is a member of the Big Game Hunters and Outdoors Unlimited.

St. Louis-Jefferson Daughters very proudly honor and recognize David Gildehaus as Patriot of the Month and extend to him their deepest appreciation and gratitude for his very dedicated, patriotic service to our great nation.