

GARY BAGWELL LETTERS

Mss. 3279

Inventory

Compiled by
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2014

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SUMMARY

Size.	0.3 linear ft.
Geographic locations.	Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, United States
Inclusive dates.	1952-1975
Bulk dates.	1966
Language.	English
Summary.	Personal letters reflect wartime events and the personal experiences of Gary Bagwell, a United States Navy sailor serving on the transport ship, U.S.S. Caddo Parish during the Vietnam War.
Restrictions on access.	If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
Related collections.	Harrison Gary Bagwell Collection, Mss. 2840, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Copyright.	For those materials not in the public domain, copyright is retained by the descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. Copyright law.
Citation.	Gary Bagwell Letters, Mss. 3279, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack locations.	U:218, OS:G

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Gary Bagwell served on the transport ship, U.S.S. Caddo Parish, during the Vietnam War. He was the son of Baton Rouge attorney, Harrison Gary Bagwell, Sr. (1913–1973) and June Sue Ross. His father played a key role in the organization of the Republican Party in Louisiana and, in 1952, was the first Republican candidate to run for Louisiana governor since Reconstruction. Gary's siblings included June, Barry, Janet, Carole, Bonnie, and Mot Bagwell.

U.S.S. Caddo Parish (LST-515) was an LST-491-class tank landing ship built for the United States Navy during World War II. Named for Caddo Parish, Louisiana, she was the only U.S. Naval vessel to bear the name. The ship was re-commissioned "in reserve" in August of 1963. It conducted local operations and made port visits until the summer of 1965. In May of that year, it began hauling cargo and supplies to provide logistical support for the U.S. Army during the Dominican Republic Crisis. In January of 1966, the ship was placed into active commission and deployed to the Western Pacific to conduct logistical support operations in Southeast Asia. During Gary Bagwell's time of service, the U.S.S. Caddo Parish transported munitions and supplies to U.S. military bases Chu Lai, Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa, Vietnam. The ship performed service in Vietnam until transferred to the Republic of the Philippines November 26, 1969, where she served the Philippine Navy RPS Bataan (LT-85). Her final fate is unknown.¹

¹ Selected information on the history of the USS Caddo Parish from: Mobile Riverine Force Association. *History of the USS Caddo Parish*. February 22, 2003. <http://www.mrfa.org/lst515.htm> and Naval History and Heritage Command. (n.d.). *LST-515* Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships: <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/119/lst-515.htm> (accessed April 28, 2014)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

In his letters to family members, Gary Bagwell details his experiences and observations while serving on board the U.S.S. Caddo Parish during the Vietnam War. He describes his duties, daily activities, fellow sailors and officers, and he offers wartime anecdotes. He writes about the tactics of the Viet Cong, and the support they receive from China and North Korea. He provides details of his ship's operations in the combat zones, as well as military engagements. In his letters, Bagwell also expresses his thoughts on the war, with comments on the hardships and tactical difficulties faced by the U. S. military.

The collection begins with letters relating Bagwell's activities while stationed at the U. S. Naval Station at Long Beach, California (Dec. 1965). He describes his activities, weather and fellow sailors. While reporting on his own social activities, he criticizes African American sailors for socializing with white women (Jan. 4, 1966).

In January 1966, he is assigned to the U.S.S. Caddo Parish at Norfolk, Va., where he describes the reconditioning and outfitting the ship for a long tour of duty in Southeast Asia, and he remarks on the constant drilling and training of the crew (Jan.-Feb. 1966). He describes in detail the voyage to Vietnam through the Panama Canal, with stops in Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and Japan (March-June 1966). Bagwell reports that three U. S. ships that were brought into the shipyard at Pearl Harbor had been severely damaged when anchored at Saigon, Vietnam (Feb. 12, 1966).

Once in Vietnam, Bagwell recounts specific events and tells of the dangers in the combat zone. Topics include landing procedures, Viet Cong maneuvers and infiltrators, damage to the ship at Chu Lai (May 12, 1966), American casualties, and disease. He relates the stories of sailors who suffered mental breakdowns (July 24, 1966), and he complains that American supplies are found on the black markets of South Vietnam and Taiwan (Aug. 1966). In addition, Bagwell describes the weather, especially the monsoon, the landscape, and the people and social customs of Vietnam and Taiwan. He expresses his own thoughts on the war, and comments on antiwar protests in the United States, and he mentions protests by Vietnamese civilians against the U. S. presence in Vietnam (June 5, Nov. 10, 1966). He also reports that a collision with another ship at sea caused extensive damage to his ship (Aug.-Sept. 1966).

A letter from the commanding officer of the U.S.S. Caddo Parish informs families of route the ship took from Norfolk, Va., to Vietnam and the activities of his crew (May 17, 1966). A history of his ship accompanies the letter. Other items include a special feature on the Republican Party in Louisiana in the *New Orleans Item* (1952), the *U.S.S. Caddo Parish Plan of the Day* for April 1 and July 25, 1966, and a bicentennial issue of the Navy magazine, *All Hands* (Aug. 1975).

INDEX TERMS

Caddo Parish (transport ship)

Collisions at sea.

Sailors--United States.

Taiwan--Description and travel--20th century.

United States. Navy--History--Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Vietcong.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Naval operations, American.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Personal narratives, American.

Vietnam--Description and travel--20th century.

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents with dates</u>
U:218	1	1-11	Letters, 1965-1966, <i>All Hands</i> , Aug. 1975, <i>U.S.S. Caddo Parish Plan of the Day</i> , April 1, July 25, 1966.
OS:B		1	<i>New Orleans Item</i> special issue, 1952.