

Publication: Virginian Pilot; Date: Jun 13, 2008; Section: Hampton Roads; Page Number: B3

what's in a name? | Norfolk

uss gonzalez



Alfredo Gonzalez earned the Medal of Honor at the Battle of Hue.

When 19-year-old Alfredo Gonzalez enlisted in the Marine Corps in June 1965, he was just a small-town Texas boy. After serving two tours in Vietnam and giving his life to save his fellow Marines, he was a hero. A hero whose name and legacy live on through the Norfolk-based destroyer Gonzalez and its crew.

Sgt. Alfredo "Freddy" Gonzalez was the only U.S. troop to earn the Medal of Honor for giving his life during the Battle of Hue in Vietnam. As a platoon commander, he risked his safety to help injured Marines, destroy hostile positions and lead his men through the attack. Despite injuries of his own, he exposed himself to heavy fire in order to destroy enemy rocket positions for the safety of his troops.

He died on Feb. 4, 1968, from wounds suffered in the battle.

Gonzalez was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1969. In 1996, the Navy commissioned the destroyer Gonzalez in his honor.

The ship is in the Mediterranean now, conducting maritime security operations with NATO. Recently, the crew held a number of events to commemorate the ship's namesake as well as naval events from World War II.

On May 18, the ship sailed alongside the cruiser Hue City as a tribute to Gonzalez. On Memorial Day, the crew again honored him by reading aloud his Medal of Honor citation.

Last week, to mark the 66th anniversary of the Battle of Midway, the crew posed for retro World War II photos, held a cookout and swim call, and staged a 1940s ward-room dinner for the officers.

Gonzalez Cmdr. Brian Fort said it was important for him to engage his sailors in history.

"I was looking for some kind of way that we could get history and heritage involved in what we did," said Fort, who took command of the Gonzalez in February. "It gives me the opportunity to really let the sailors enjoy the historical aspect of what we do and really



The Norfolk-based destroyer Gonzalez and the cruiser Hue City rendezvous in the Mediterranean as a tribute to a Vietnam War hero.

COURTESY OF NAVY

realize that what we're doing out there will be historic to someone else one day."

The activities were a first for many of the sailors and an opportunity to take a break during the crew's six-month deployment. They will return home in August.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Mona Healey, who helped organize the activities, said they helped boost crew morale and bring

everyone together.

Ship photographer Petty Officer 2nd Class Patrick Horgan agreed.

"Never had I ever had an experience like that before," he said. "Everyone had a really nice time and it was a chance to take a break and see all that we had accomplished up to that point."

Gonzalez's commander and crew still keep

in touch with Freddy Gonzalez's mother, 78-year-old Dolia Gonzalez, sending regular letters and photos to her in Edinburg, Texas.

"It's like a family for me," she said. "I lost one boy and I've got hundreds of boys now."

Kathy Adams, (757) 446-2583, kathy.adams@pilotonline.com

have . idea f featur

Have you a street, neighbor a place c somethin else arot Hampton Roads ar wondere where th name ca from? Se us your i Contact Bernade Kinlaw, bernade.kinlaw@pilotonline.com.

next week

Margare Booker I Chesape

online

See a sli show of aboard t Gonzalez: PilotOnli com.

By KATHY ADAMS | The Virginian-Pilot