



GENE BASSET'S Vietnam Sketchbook

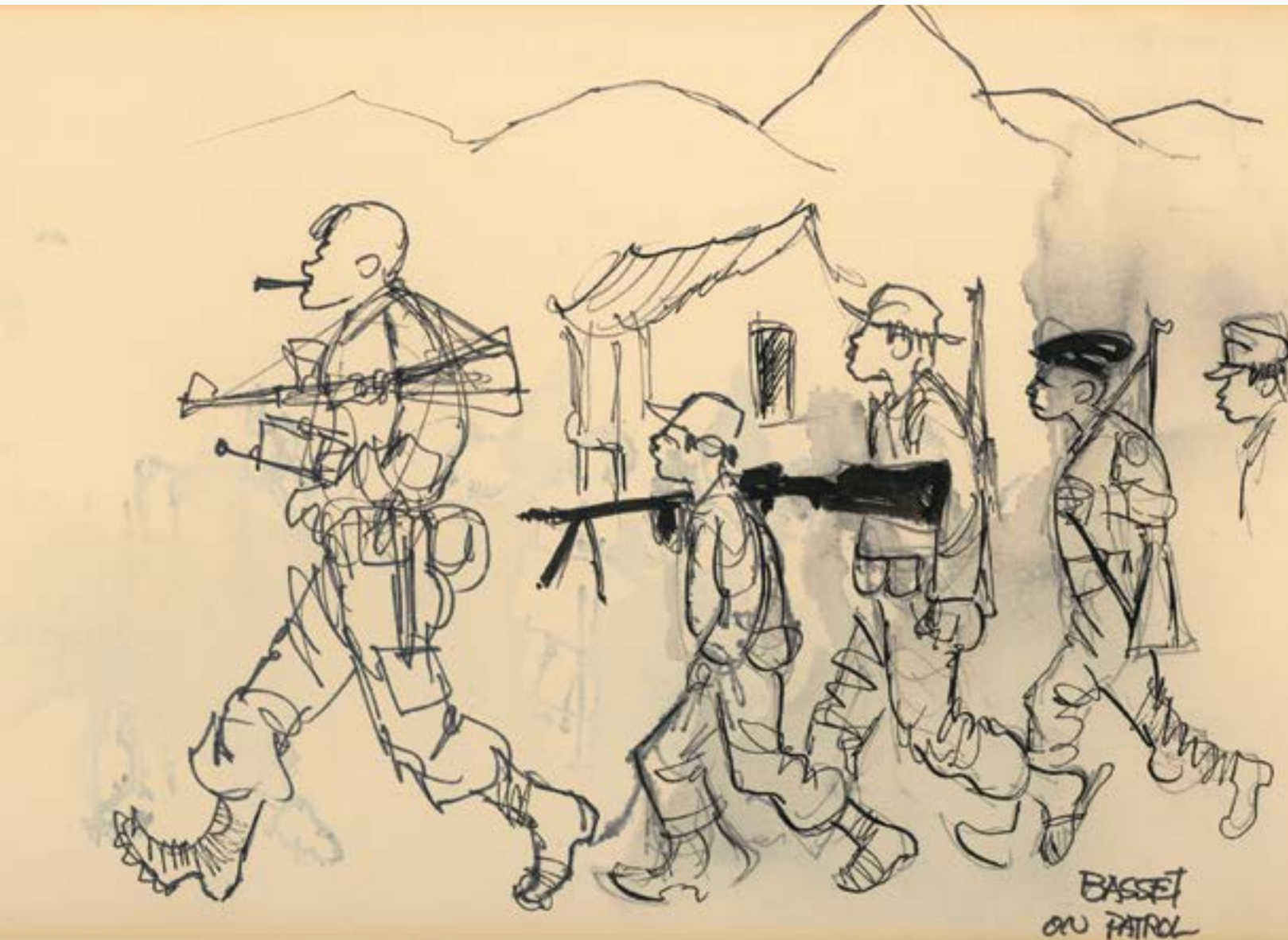
BY K. M. KOSTYAL

◀ **Tell Him to Get Out Before We Torch the Place** In the Montagnard highlands at the Laos-Cambodia-Vietnam border, Basset spent time with a Green Beret patrol. When the patrol was ambushed, the Americans retaliated by burning a village used by the Viet Cong. Here, a Montagnard soldier, under orders from his American commander, warns a family to get out before their home is torched.

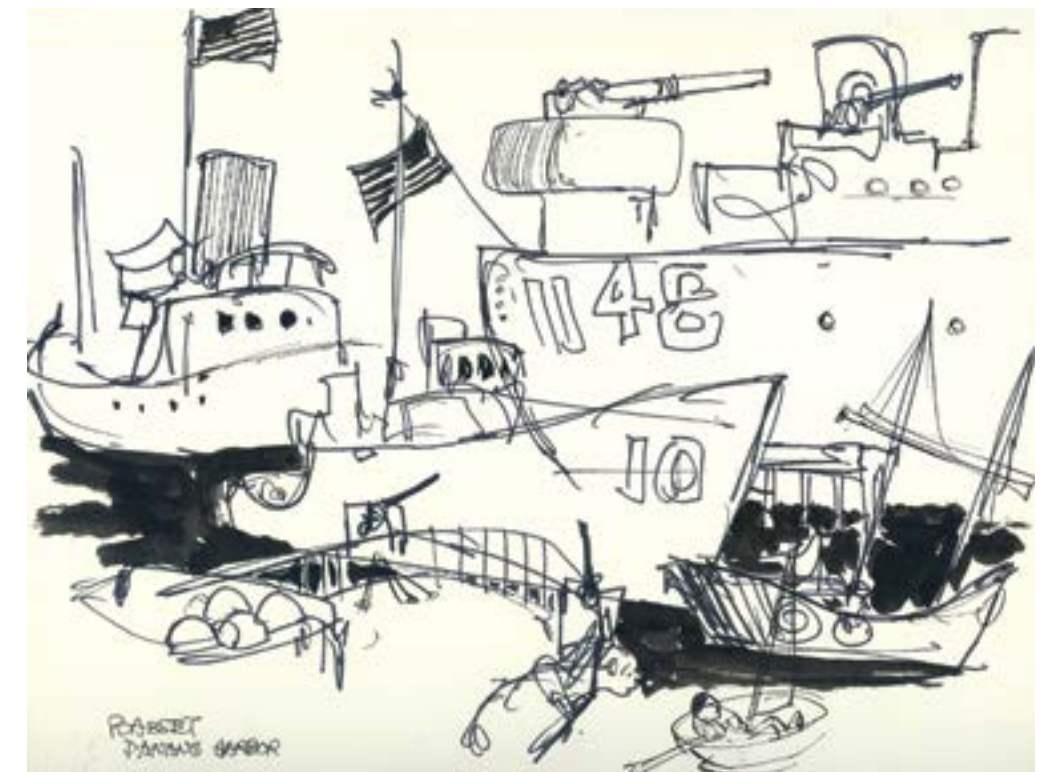
In 1965 Gene Basset shipped out for Vietnam, not as yet another American GI but as a political cartoonist for the Scripps Howard News Service. But like a GI, Basset found out what it meant to come under enemy fire. Despite the danger, or maybe because of it, Basset caught the fever of other great combat artists—from Alfred Waud in the Civil War to Bill Mauldin in World War II. ★ Basset's sketches have the simplicity and elegance of Japanese ink paintings, and he used a similar technique. "Nobody else had done much with spontaneous drawing like this," he says, "at least not in a war setting. They were done in ink, so it was definitely a case of 'first impression.' I couldn't significantly change anything later." ★ The following images are from a new book on his work, *Gene Basset's Vietnam Sketchbook* (Syracuse University Press). With a few stark lines on paper, Basset captures the moments of pathos, absurdity, humor, brutality, and even beauty that occur when cultures collide and everyday life is surrounded by war.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY GENE BASSET

▼ **Follow the Leader** A cigar-puffing, chest-thumping Green Beret sergeant leads a patrol of motley Montagnards. One of them wears sandals, hardly fit for marching much less for protecting against hidden enemy punji sticks.

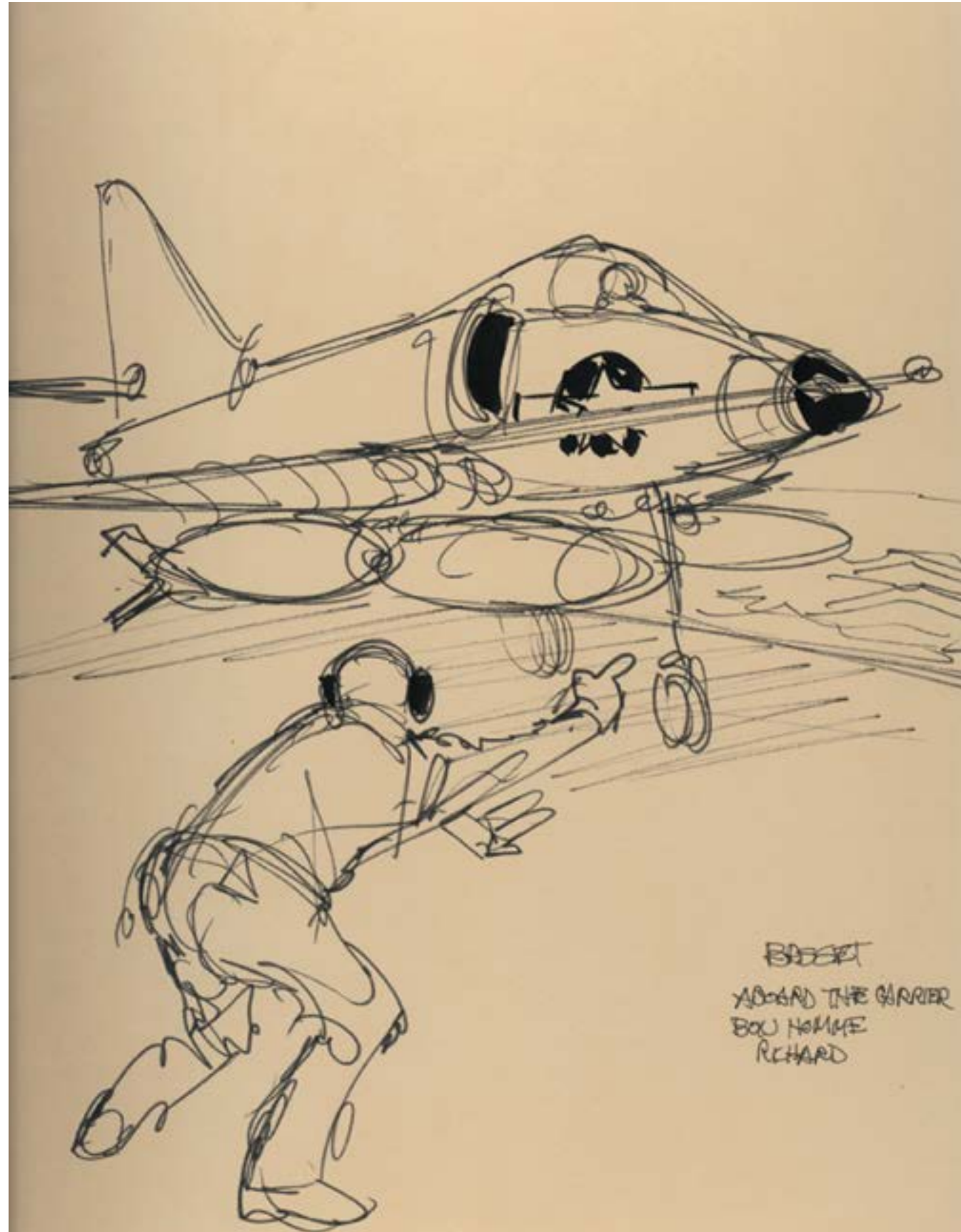


► **Dig for Your Dinner** The leftovers from military base camps in Da Nang made tempting leavings for locals. Here, they scavenge in the refuse for edibles and more tangible items that can be sold in street markets.



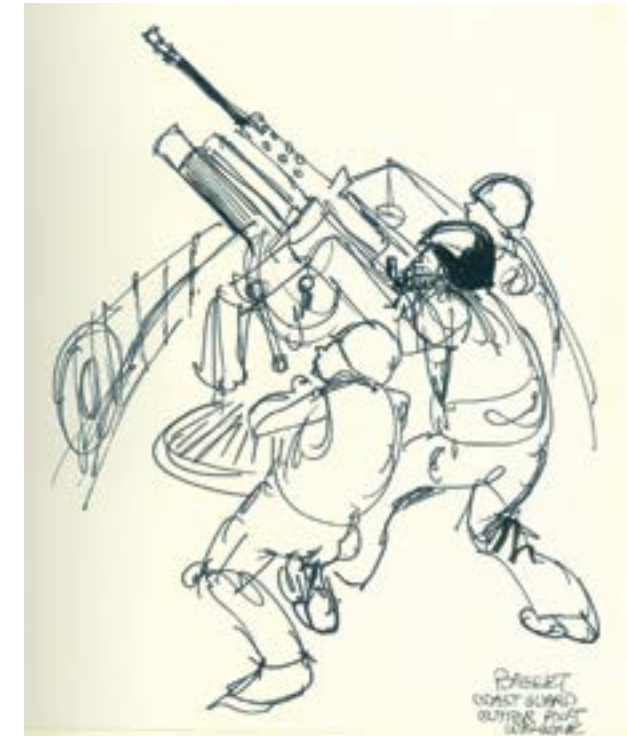
► **Tight Squeeze**
An American warship looms above the junks, rowboats, and smaller U.S. vessels crowding Da Nang Harbor.





◀ **Clear for a Bombing Run up North** An A4 Skyhawk waits for the signal to take off aboard the carrier *Bonhomme Richard* in the South China Sea.

▼ **Waiting for Chopper... One Dead, One Wounded** The Viet Cong ambush on Basset's Green Beret patrol left one Montagnard soldier close to death from a head injury (at left) and an American medic with severe leg wounds (on stretcher). "I dived behind a rock and managed to escape serious injury," Basset recalls, "although one of my sketchbooks bears a bullet hole from the attack."



◀ **Salvo Over the 17th Parallel** Patrolling the coast from Da Nang to the 17th parallel demarcation line between North and South Vietnam, the captain of the Coast Guard cutter *Point Welcome* sends a machine-gun greeting to enemies on the other side of the parallel. Soon enough, they respond in kind. A year later two crewmen die when the cutter came under friendly fire.





▲ **Contraband Inspection**

Vietnamese fishermen are stopped for questioning by American crewmen aboard the *Point Welcome*.

◀ **Night Patrol** Like a sitting, or moving, duck, this patrol boat made night runs up and down tributaries of the Mekong. By flying the South Vietnamese flag, it hoped to draw enemy fire that would reveal Viet Cong positions.

▶ **You #%*! Next Time Don't Forget the #*!@ Beer** Stuck in the highlands, a Green Beret curses the crew of a supply plane for neglecting its beer-run duties, even as the plane fades toward the horizon. Basset felt this cartoon "summed up the war experience well: The routine of killing the enemy, the routine of shooting rats with a crossbow, training the Montagnards, the waiting...and no beer."

