

ELMO IN SOUTH VIET NAM

Several months after I assumed command of the Naval forces in South Vietnam, I received a letter from the Detailer in the Bureau of Naval Personnel in charge of detailing Lieutenants, Junior Grade. He sent me a copy of an official request which had come in from my son, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Elmo R. Zumwalt, then stationed aboard the U.S.S. Ricketts, a guided missile destroyer in the Atlantic. In this request, my son asked for assignment to Command of Swift Boats in South Vietnam. The Detailer asked me whether, in view of my own presence in Vietnam in Command of All the Naval Forces, I would feel it in appropriate to have my own son under my command. Shortly before the receipt of this letter, his mother and I had received our own information from our son, Elmo, in a letter which outlined his reasons for wanting to serve in that war. These were, first, that he felt a very strong desire prior to departure from the Navy for a civilian career to have served in combat when his country needed him; second, he felt challenged by the need to prove himself worthy in combat; and third, he stated that he would not consider himself to be a worthy son if he had not done everything possible to see wartime service. After consultation, his mother and I decided that there was no ethical way in which we could fail

to honor his concluding plea in that letter which was that we "...do nothing to interfere with his request for wartime duty." We had always tried to honor the decisions made by our children and although my wife felt considerable trepidation in having two of her loved ones in combat simultaneously, and although I did not look with comfort on the problems associated with having ones own son under his command, we concluded that we must not interfere. I, therefore, sent a copy of his letter to the Detailer for his information, along with a note saying that Mrs. Zumwalt and I, in the light of that letter, concluded that there was no reasonable course we could take other than to agree that he should come to South Vietnam.

Elmo was transferred from the Ricketts to the Small Boat School in San Diego and then Mare Island where he learned the trade of rivering and coastal warfare, and arrived in South Vietnam in August of 1969. I took no part in the process of assigning him and by luck of the draw he ended up initially in the I Corps in the northern part of the country where he soon became, along with many other fine young men, highly qualified in the theatre. Not content with this assignment, he volunteered for transfer to the Fourth Corps where swift boats were more frequently engaged in the action in the rivers in an effort to

stop the infiltration of supplies and men from Cambodia. Here again, I did not interfere and he experienced the usual adventures and close calls of those who served in this highly dangerous and very adventuresome segment of the war in South Vietnam. My son, on one occasion, disguised himself in Viet-Cong-type clothing and along with one of the sailors of his crew rode a sampan up the Vinh Te Canal with his swift boat and the balance of the crew trailing him to see whether they couldn't "troll" Viet Cong tax collectors out to stop the sampan. On another occasion, convinced that infiltration was coming across Cambodian border by sampan through one of the small canals that crosses the border and enters the Vinh Te Canal, my son went up this Canal - a body of water too narrow to turn the boat around. In the dead of night in ambush he and his crew caught a convoy of sampans carrying ammunition and rockets into South Vietnam. They destroyed this convoy and delaying orders received from the higher Headquarters to withdraw immediately, proceeded to recover sufficient of the Vietcong ammunition to demonstrate that they had found a lucrative infiltration route. I cite these as examples of the kind of courage and initiative shown by hundreds of our young men, many of whom were less fortunate than my son and did not return or who did so with significant injury.

HISTORY OF THE JOGGING

As a Commander in Washington, assigned as Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, at the age of 37, I began to develop a problem which the doctors diagnosed as a spastic colon as a result of the very long hours, lack of exercise, and high tension of the job environment. It was their feeling that part of my problem was lack of adequate physical exercise. I, thereupon, embarked upon a practice of daily jogging - a practice which I continued daily throughout the rest of my Naval career - which involved running two miles initially in 12 minutes and by the later years in 14 minutes each morning. I found that this brief physical exercise, taken at a time of the day when I could always count on getting it in, six o'clock in the morning, and almost never skipped, provided the necessary compensation from the long hours and high-tension jobs in which I continued to serve and was never again troubled with this spastic phenomenon.