

December 1, 1986

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Dear Admiral Zumwalt.

Many years have passed since I last saw you at my headquarters at Anhoi in 1971. I was back in Saigon by 1973 and served there as deputy Chief of Staff for Operations until the day we left Vietnam. During our exodus and all those years after, I did not try to get in touch with you fearing that might disturb you or bring back souvenirs that are not desirable. I have been thinking a lot about all the US navymen, I have had opportunity to work with, particularly you, the highest ranking US naval officer I had known and been closed to through our combined operations: Sealord, Seafloat, Giant Slingshot, Market time... However the unfair treatment of the American VN war Veterans by the American public made me feel like I should not stir up these troubled times.

But your recent appearance on the TV and your book "My father, My son" have prompted me to write these few lines to you. I want to assure you that my respect and my admiration for the ex-Commander of the US Brown Navy in Vietnam are still high and intact. I had always thought of you that way and your book confirmed it. My father had always taught me to value and respect that rare sense of honor and duty in a leader who would put his family and his personal life behind his country, even know that his sensibility and his profound love of his family would make him suffer more than anyone else. We all know that you must have suffered of what had happened to your son. But to me it is the sublime sufferance of a hero. And like the "Wolf" of Alfred de Musset which "...after having done its duty to the pack, it lay down suffering silently, without crying or moaning.."

I also would like to express my deep sympathy to your son. I still remember vividly that young and daring PCF captain who rode his boat on the infamous Cua Lon river as he would do with his bike around the block. I also still remember one day while visiting us at Namcan, you asked me to slow him down in his high risk bravery. "Captain Kiem, talk to him, he might listen to you". I had always been contemptuous of our high ranking Generals who used their power and connections to shield their children from combat positions and here was a three star American admiral, whose role was only to help us and he sent his own son in that deadly area of Dam Doi! You had my respect ever since. As co-commander of Seafloat, I knew how vulnerable were our PCF and our Yabuta junks. When you asked me to talk to the young Elmo, I fully realized and appreciated the dilemma of a commander and father. I have seen a great man in you and I was not surprised when you made CNO of the USN a few year later.

Now, I think that you may like to know what happened to us and how we are faring in our second country (we were granted American citizenship in 1981). Well, we are settled down here in Louisiana since 1975. The first few years were rough but thank God we pulled through somewhat. I am now a nuclear engineer working for the Louisiana Power & Light company. I just got my 10 year pin last month. I can hardly believe it. Time passed by so fast. My wife is also working, she has been with a local bank for almost 10 years too. You might still remember that little lady who served you champagne at my promotion party at Anthoi. She has shown a much stronger woman than I thought. My eldest son is a doctor in medicines. He graduated from Louisiana Medical school and now is doing his internship at Irvine Hospital in Los Angeles. He was married last June and it was a big event for our family. Our second son and our eldest daughter are in college and the two little daughters are leaving high school and junior high next year. This community had been a great help to us. It really had coached us through this traumatic experience and before we knew it we are in the mainstream and alive again.

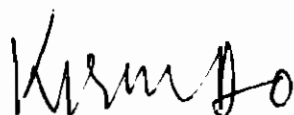
We left Saigon at the last moment in the night of 29th April 1975. Somehow in that incredible chaos, I was separated from my family for more than two months. During those two months, believe me, I was at the bottom of my life. While looking for my family and working long hours as assistant to the camp commander, I still had ample time to think about our fate, the human condition and all of its vanities. "Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas (vanity of vanities, and all is vanity). I had come to grasp this thought that no matter what we have done or accomplished, no matter who we are or who we think we are, we are only "...a bubble in the ocean of misery, a flotsam on the beach of human illusion.." (from an old vietnamese poem). However, thank to the very nature of our existence which in itself is HIS image, we are given the option and the ability to be a thinking flotsam, and a self-conscious bubble. With our faith in Him we can move and act beyond our frailty. This is really great because it allows us to have a very meaningful life. With all the ups and downs that could happen to us we have the strength to spring back and keep going where our duty and honor call us. We can make our life ten times richer, ten times greater where people could only see misfortune and misery.

You probably are wondering why I sent your book with this letter; I would appreciate very much that you autograph it and send it back to me. I want to keep it in my family library as a special reminder to all the future generations of the Do family, that their forefather had known a great man in America when he arrived here.

My wife is joining me in sending our salutation and love to you and Mrs. Zumwalt and our best wishes for a quick recovery to the young Elmo Zumwalt III.

Sincerely,

FR: CAPTAIN KIEM DO VNN





E. R. ZUMWALT, JR.
ADMIRAL, U. S. NAVY (RET.)

15 December 1986

Captain Kiem Do Vnn

Dear Captain Kiem:

How wonderful it was to receive your letter of December 1 and to get the exciting report on how successful you have all been in getting ahead in your new country. Yours is a truly inspirational story. It is a great credit to all of you and one that should inspire a lot of other people.

Both son Elmo and I recall our respective associations with you and are deeply proud to have been able to autograph your book which is coming back to you under separate cover.

I hope that if you ever get to Washington, you will give me a call and I will certainly do the same if I get down your way.

In the interim, all of my family joins me in sending all best wishes for a happy holiday season to you and your wonderful family.

Sincerely,

E. R. Zumwalt, Jr.

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bc. 4 children
Mrs Z'
Gretli & Jim
Saralee & Dick