



UNITED STATES NAVAL INSTITUTE
ANNAPOLIS MARYLAND 21402

27 June 1985

JUL 2 1985

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (Ret.)
1500 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Dear Admiral Zumwalt,

Enclosed are copies of the interview transcripts from Captain Glenn and Admiral Nicholson. The latter still needs to be retyped in the smooth. Admiral Nicholson rewrote virtually the entire transcript by hand, and the enclosed version is essentially a "smooth rough" which still needs a bit more smoothing before we do the final version.

In looking over the first two interviews that you and I did, I found that the first was more in keeping with the normal practices of oral history because you told it rather than reading portions of it as you did in the second. If I could suggest a happy medium for upcoming interviews it would be that you use notes for what you want to say but not read per se.

I look forward to seeing you next Wednesday, 3 July, to resume our series of interviews. Now that the Milwaukee phase is over, I hope we'll be able to have interviews more frequently now and make steady progress in discussing your career.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Stillwell
Director of Oral History

Enclosures:

Interview with Rear Admiral Richard E. Nicholson, U.S. Navy (Retired)

Place: Admiral Nicholson's office, Virginia National Bank, Norfolk

Date: Wednesday, 8 June 1983

Subject: Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired)

Interviewer: Paul Stillwell

Q: Admiral, would you begin please by describing how you got to the billet with the Secretary of the Navy and your first encounters with Admiral Zumwalt.

Admiral Nicholson: In 1963, I was the executive officer of the destroyer USS Beale, home-ported in Norfolk. During the first year of that tour, I received orders to report to the Secretary of the Navy for an interview. Shortly after the interview, I received orders to report to the Secretary of the Navy as his special assistant. At that time, 1963, Mr. Fred Korth was Secretary of the Navy. In November 1963, Mr. Nitze succeeded Mr. Korth as SecNav and appointed Captain Zumwalt to be his executive assistant and aide.* In six months, I was assigned as administrative aide. My first meeting with Captain Zumwalt was at this time.

*Fred Korth was Secretary of the Navy from 4 January 1962 through 1 November 1963; his successor, Paul H. Nitze, was SecNav from 29 November 1963 through 30 June 1967.

The connecting of the SecNav's office with the CNO's office through an adjoining door complemented the unified working relationship between Admiral David McDonald and Mr. Nitze.* This relationship was soon recognized in DoD to the full benefit of the Navy.** The DoD people were met in the decision-making process with a CNO/SecNav unified position. This reduced the opportunities for the DoD people to make unilateral Navy decisions. Zumwalt orchestrated this through the CNO and VCNO and their respective staffs (Captain Ike Kidd and Captain Jerry Miller).*** Captain Zumwalt was aware of the necessity for a unified Navy position of the CNO and SecNav on all decisions in DoD. He was directly involved in developing this environment for the concept and implementing it throughout the Secretariat.

*Admiral David L. McDonald, USN, was Chief of Naval Operations from 1 August 1963 through 1 August 1967.

**DoD—Department of the Navy.

***Captain Isaac C. Kidd, Jr., USN, was executive assistant to Admiral McDonald; Captain Gerald E. Miller, USN, was executive assistant to Admiral Horacio Rivero, USN, Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

One of the initial programs started by Captain Zumwalt was a study of Bureau of Naval Personnel problems and organizations; it later became the Alford Board. It consisted of naval officers and civilians as a study group, chaired by Rear Admiral Alford.* Captain Zumwalt was the initiator of the study of personnel problems as they related to pay and benefits for all Navy personnel. His main concern for this study was to gather the facts that would justify a pay raise for the Navy. There were other organizational areas also included in the study's objectives, but the pay concept was the major issue, as I recall.

The Alford Board made recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy regarding pay and allowances and other organizational pay matters. It was the first step in recognizing and justifying an across-the-board pay increase for naval personnel and later pro pay for the technical rates.** It was during the postwar period when the military was effectively being cut in pay and allowances, because there was no growth in those areas to keep pace with inflation. Captain Zumwalt began the process of showing the critical need for a pay raise for all Navy personnel.

*Rear Admiral John M. Alford, USN.

**Pro pay--short for proficiency pay given to individuals, such as technicians, with special skills required by the Navy.

He at first could not convince Mr. Nitze that it was justified. However, after many briefings of facts, he was successful in showing Mr. Nitze the need for a Navy pay raise request.

Mr. Nitze then met once a week for several weeks to convince Mr. McNamara that the Navy needed a pay raise, or it would lose the highly trained technicians to the industrial complex.* At this same time, Mendel Rivers was having difficulty getting a military pay bill approved on the Hill.** It became apparent that DoD could not approve a pay raise just for the Navy. The combination of the Navy pay and allowances request, along with an across-the-board military pay bill advocated by Mendel Rivers contributed considerably to the first major pay raise for the military since World War II.

*Robert S. McNamara was U.S. Secretary of Defense from 1961 through 1968.

**Representative L. Mendel Rivers (Democrat--South Carolina).

(There is no page 5 in this retyped version.)

Q: So you're saying that Captain Zumwalt originated the concept of pro pay?

Admiral Nicholson: He originated the first major pay raise for all military, which later supported the need for pro pay.

Q: There had been friction between the previous SecNav and CNO, which is why Admiral Anderson served only two years.* Was there a deliberate attempt to move over in the other direction to avoid that?

*Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., served as Chief of Naval Operations from 1 August 1961 to 1 August 1963.

Admiral Nicholson: When Nitze/Zumwalt came into the Secretariat, they made sure there was not going to be an environment of indecision or friction between them. It was a very good working team. You have to give credit to those three executive assistants—Miller, Kidd, and Zumwalt—who were very powerful captains, very competent captains, and hard-chargers. But they did pull together, even though the three of them were different types of personalities. They didn't always agree initially, but when they finally ironed it out, the final line was one position.

I think one of the things in Admiral Zumwalt's tour as executive assistant to Mr. Nitze is that up until then, the Defense Department was known as "Whiz Kids' haven"—Enthoven, McNamara, etc.* The Navy before that was not heavy on the systems analysis studies that were coming from DoD. The Navy, really in OpNav, didn't know how ^{to}
^

*Alain Enthoven was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis from 1961 to 1965. "Whiz Kids" was a nickname for relatively young men, such as Enthoven, working for Secretary McNamara.

cope with them, because they had little experience in the field.* When Zumwalt came in, he started the concept of the Office of Program Appraisal, OPA. Admiral Draper Kauffman was the first director of it.** It was Zumwalt's concept that this group would be made up of top-notch officers, brought in to review and generate studies to answer the questions that Enthoven's Whiz Kids asked. This opened up many new concepts. For one, it brought the Secretary of the Navy up to speed on what was being asked of him down in Defense. When Mr. Nitze went to DoD, he had the answers to most of the questions the Whiz Kids posed. OPA also generated new ideas and studies to stay ahead of DoD. This started the Navy putting qualified officers in Defense positions. Before, we would send people to Defense with no military/political background, and they were ineffective there. We were way behind in that. The Army always had qualified, experienced people in certain positions in DoD. I think a good example of that was in Joe Califano's office. Joe Califano was first the special counsel to Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance.*** In his office was a young, hard-charging officer who had been a professional in the military/political bureaucracy for most of his career--a guy by the name of Lieutenant Colonel Al Haig.**** We didn't have a Navy representative in the Califano office. So Admiral Zumwalt screened

*OpNavy--the large, extended staff of the Chief of Naval Operations.

**Rear Admiral Draper K. Kauffman, USN. Admiral Kauffman's Naval Institute oral history discusses his tour as director of OPA.

***Joseph A. Califano, Jr., was general counsel when Cyrus R. Vance was Secretary of the Army. When Vance became Deputy Secretary of Defense in 1964, Califano moved with him and became Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense.

****Lieutenant Colonel Alexander M. Haig, Jr., AUS, later became White House chief of staff, a four-star general as NATO commander in Europe; and Secretary of State in the Reagan Administration.

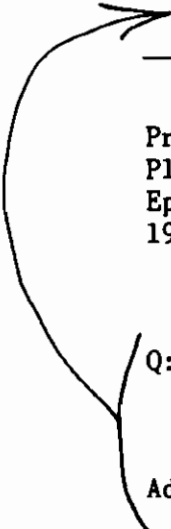
Q: So the OPA was more or less a response to the PPBS that McNamara had put in.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes and presidential memos. OpNav tried, but they were not staffed for it. OpNav would review the presidential memos for the CNO, and then they would be reviewed and studied by OPA for SecNav approval and endorsement.

*PPBS—Planning, Programming and Budgeting System. For more on the PPBS, see Commander Gordon G. Riggle, USN, "Looking to the Long Run," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1980, pages 60-65.

Q: What was the relationship between OPA and the Director of Navy Program Planning, which was a three-star billet?*

Admiral Nicholson: OPA would work in mutual support with Program Planning, but OPA would have the last review prior to a subject being presented to SecNav. OPA would prepare the Secretary's input to DoD.



*OP-090 was the designation of the three-star Director of Navy Program Planning; under him was OP-90, the Director of the General Planning and Programming Division, a two-star admiral. Vice Admiral Ephraim P. Holmes, USN, served as OP-090 from July 1964 through June 1967.

Q: Did OPA take sort of a devil's advocate approach on Navy programs?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any specific cases that you could use as examples?

Admiral Nicholson: They made contributions to pay and benefits studies and memos. They did analysis work on force levels, budget inputs, /weapon system deployments. There are far more studies done by OPA than I can recall at this time.

Q: Admiral Zumwalt has the reputation of being a systems analysis man. Is that something that grew out of his tenure with SecNav, or did he bring that to the job?

Admiral Nicholson: He just has a natural ability for it--a highly intelligent man. I don't know the definition of a systems analyst, but anything that Zumwalt wants to get involved in, he usually does pretty well in it. He is a highly intelligent man who can motivate others to work beyond their abilities and like doing it.

Q: What I'm driving at is that systems analysis is a specific discipline beyond sheer intelligence. I'm wondering if he brought that background to the job or developed it as part of the reorganization of the SecNav's office.

Admiral Nicholson: I think he brought it with him. He had a lot of duty in the bureau. In fact, as a commander he was an executive assistant to the Under Secretary for Manpower.* He's a guy that really came up and said, "You better get this hump legislation going; you're top-heavy in the Navy now at the higher ranks." He can speak to this better than I can, and I wasn't there at the time; I only got this from others. He was responsible, although a lot of people try to take credit for it; he was the commander with the pencil who came up to Noel Gayler, who was then EA to SecNav and said, "We're top-heavy in rank because of the spillover of World War II.** The only way to fix it is through legislation." A very controversial subject. It was successfully accomplished.

Q: He wrote an article about that in the Proceedings, and the ironic thing is that he, of all people, surmounted that hump.***

*In the late 1950s, Commander Zumwalt served as executive assistant and senior aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Personnel and Reserve Forces).

**Captain Noel A.M. Gayler, USN, was executive assistant to Secretary of the Navy Thomas S. Gates, Jr., from 1957 to 1959.

***Commander E.R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN, "Beyond the Hump," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, July 1959, pages 59-65. As explained in the article, a great number of officers were commissioned between 1942 and 1945 for wartime service, so that the number of officers in those four year groups would have normally been spread over 13 year groups. Unless an appreciable number of officers in the hump were retired early after being passed over, they would clog the system and keep deserving juniors from moving up. Zumwalt himself, commissioned in 1942, was part of the hump, but he obviously did not suffer early retirement because of that condition.

Q: What was the perception of Enthovenⁱⁿ within the Navy?

Admiral Nicholson: I think~~he~~ was looked upon as a very bright man who was a college professor and came to work in the Defense Department. His background was not in a military environment.

Q: A typical sort of reaction from senior officers was, "I can tell things from my 30 years' experience that your studies can't show." Was there any resentment from these senior officers toward the group of young outsiders?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, there naturally was some opposition to the academic/analysis type of thinking. That's why the Navy assigned Stan Turner and other officers in Enthoven's office--in order to get a naval viewpoint.

Q: Was this in part an effort to educate the outsiders?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, it was an effort to have a military input and thinking in the analysis environment.

(There are no pages 16 or 17 in this retyped version.)

Q: Can you discuss any cases concerning hardware in which Captain Zumwalt got involved during this period?

Admiral Nicholson: You may wish to verify this with Admiral Zumwalt, but to the best of my knowledge, Nitze/Zumwalt began a dialogue in DoD and laid shipbuilding criteria to begin work to rebuild⁴ our aging Navy. When Zumwalt was the director of ops analysis as a rear admiral, he was responsible for the study that proved the F-111 was not suitable for the Navy and that the F-14 was a proper substitute.* You may want to verify that.

The USS Carl Vinson, I believe, was approved in Zumwalt's CNO tour, and so were some amphibious lift ships. I'm sure the Oliver Hazard Perry class was approved during his tour. He and Nitze worked hard in DoD and on Capitol Hill to get legislation moving on bloc obsolescence of the ships in the fleet.**

*The F-111 was an aircraft which Secretary of Defense McNamara intended to serve the needs of both the Navy and AirForce. The Navy version did not prove to be suitable for carrier use, and its Phoenix weapon system was transplanted to the successful F-14 fighter.

**Bloc obsolescence of the many Navy ships built during World War II was a parallel, in a sense, to the hump situation for naval officers. Large numbers of them came to the end of their useful service lives about the same time and so had to be replaced.

Q: ~~XX~~ What involvement did the two of them have in the destroyer program?

Admiral Nicholson: The Sea Hawk was a concept for an all-purpose ASW platform that was started and dropped in the early 1960s. Then, during the Nitze/Zumwalt days, it developed into another concept which became the Spruance class.

Q: One ship that didn't get off the ground in that era was the FDL, which was sort of the equivalent of what we now have for the Rapid Deployment Force, floating warehouses?* What were the ramifications of that in the SecNav's office?

Admiral Nicholson: I believe that was started with the second director of OPA, Tom Davies, who relieved Draper Kauffman.** The ^{FDL}concept, as I remember, was to position the logistical support forces in various combat areas to support deployed forces. It was not approved at that time. It was felt that ammunition and other equipment, if positioned in other countries, posed a problem for security reasons. The main thing was that it was considered by some as being hawkish--that we wanted to build bases all over the world. I think that's why it failed.

*The FDL was to be a forward-deployed logistics ship, but the version proposed in the 1960s was unable to obtain congressional support and thus was not built.

**Rear Admiral Thomas D. Davies, USN.

Q: Captain Zumwalt came to Secretary Nitze's attention for his strategic thinking, and that's when he first brought him in with international security affairs. What strategic manifestations did you see from Zumwalt during that period?

Admiral Nicholson: Captain Zumwalt as Mr. Nitze's executive assistant was exceptionally effective in developing concepts and strategy long before the requirement was recognized. He wrote a speech for Nitze on the subject of Antisubmarine Warfare which really was the groundwork and organization for a new 3-star billet in the Navy. It was developed to pull together all ASW hardware and operating procedures under one department. The admiral was later known as the ASW ^{Czar} CZAR, Vice Admiral Martell.*

Zumwalt was very effective at keeping Nitze briefed on concepts not quite conceived or developed in DoD but later proven to be of major interest to the Navy. He was always working to get shipbuilding programs started in DoD in the 1963-64 period.

*Vice Admiral Charles B. Martell, USN

There are no pp. 22, 23, and 24 in this retyped version.

Q: Vietnam was just heating up during this period when Zumwalt was with the Secretary. Was he involved in the formulation of the Navy's strategy for that?

Admiral Nicholson: I can't recall any specific area, but I am sure Admiral Zumwalt can.

There is no page 26 in this retyped version.

Q: What about his working routine? He has been described many times as a workaholic. Did you see that during this period?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. If you worked with him, you had to become one, too. If you weren't one, you either became one or quit. But he didn't drive you. You always felt like you were the big contributor and this encouraged you to perform sometimes beyond your capabilities.

Q: Did you socialize with the Zumwalts at all?

Admiral Nicholson: A little bit, not much. We considered the Zumwalts close friends, but there wasn't much time for socializing. We worked. And he didn't socialize much. We guard the Zumwalt friendship very jealously, yet we don't loaf and run around together, but it's the

kind of friendship that's there. It doesn't have to be rejuvenated with constant involvement.

Q: Well, did many people get close to him when he was so involved in all these things?

Admiral Nicholson: There wasn't time. Professionally, they did. He isn't much for small talk. If you small talk with Bud Zumwalt, he'll cut you off very nicely if you don't have something worthwhile to talk about. He wasn't the social type. But he did it and did it very well when required.

They lived in a very austere house in Annandale, and Mouza entertained.* They didn't have stewards. The Zumwalt children pitched in and waited on tables during parties. They made you feel you were dining in the Waldorf-Astoria. When they moved into the CNO quarters, there was lots of help, but the homey atmosphere was still there.

Q: You haven't talked much about your role during this time, and I'd be

*Annandale is a town in northern Virginia.

There were two rivers, the Van Co Dong and the Van Co Tay, that formed a slingshot "V" aimed at the Parrot's Beak. From this impression on a map of the area, Zumwalt named it Giant Slingshot. It consisted eventually of PBR boats patrolling the two rivers. * These patrols proved through their contacts with the enemy that the rivers were being used as highways to transport weapons and people into South Vietnam to conduct their ^{Tet} ~~TET~~ ^{**} offenses. The Slingshot operation grew into all operations of interdiction where assault boats, helos, and PBRs were used to cover the area. A base at BenLuc was built from sand dredged about 20,000 yards from the BenLuc area "Slingshot". Navy men joined up with Army troops and their artillery weapons to lay a hard blow to the enemy infiltration in the area. Slingshot was one of the most successful operations the Brown-Water Navy conducted. It highlighted the fact that infiltration was the enemy's tactic and that the rivers were the highways to South Vietnam (Saigon) for their offenses. In time, the operation became a classic example, a combat commander's dream--the Navy operating in the rivers in coordination with Army troops and their artillery and the Air Force bombing called in for strikes on enemy concentrations. The Brown-Water Navy boat people were trained and eventually acquired the expertise to spot and call in artillery fire and air bombing on enemy concentrations near the river banks. All of this was done by young officers of the three services. It was through the Slingshot operation that General Abrams Zumwalt's insistence that the enemy was not moving in large numbers (battalions)

* PBRs -- river patrol boats
 ** Staged during the Tet holiday in early 1968. Tet was a ferocious North Vietnamese & Viet Cong offensive against South Vietnam.

but in small striking groups less than company size or as small as individuals carrying weapons down trails and rivers to be cached and later used in an offensive against South Vietnam. From the Slingshot operations, infiltration/interdiction became the concentrated effort of the Brown-Water Navy. Small boat bases were established at Moc Hoa, Tra Cu^{Khu}, Chow Duc, and Ha-Tien. This permitted a Brown-Water Navy presence along the Cambodian border from Ben Luc through the Vinh Te^{Tc} canal. When it became apparent that ammunition/weapon caches were discovered by the Navy boat people along the rivers and canals, the Army began to move into the infiltration business in that area. Large caches were uncovered, as well as valuable enemy intelligence exposing their transport routes and cache locations.

Infiltration operations were set up from Ben Luc (Giant Slingshot), Barrier Reef (over the northern part of the Plain of Reeds to Chow Duc and through the Vinh Te Canal to Ha-Tien).

The use of helicopters and OV-10 aircraft changed the effectiveness of infiltrating most positively. The coordination of helo and OV-10 operations with Brown-Water Navy boats was highly effective. Finally, assault boats from the south, swift boats, PBRs, helos, OV-10s, and P-3s—anything we could get—were brought into interdiction operations throughout the country. The coordination between Navy, Air Force, and Army opened the eyes of many who felt that parochialism would be a stumbling block in combat in Vietnam. It proved to be a false speculation. Admiral Zumwalt was instrumental in pulling it all together. General Abrams made it known officially to everyone that the Navy interdiction operations ~~were~~ responsible for slowing infiltration into South Vietnam during the 1968-69 time frame were: Slingshot, Barrier Reef, ⁱVinh Te Canal, which was in some areas of the Cambodian border. The swift boats, PGMs, and P-3s operated along the coasts to detect and destroy infiltration forces. The operations on the Rung Sat ^{with} ~~was~~ mostly search and destroy and interdictions along the river.

There are no pp. 48 and 49 in this retyped version.

We had placed a division of PBRs at a village near the Cambodian border called Tra Khuo. One day Admiral Zumwalt and myself flew into Tra Khuo ^{1h} ~~at~~ meet with the Navy lieutenant in charge. When we arrived, the Navy lieutenant, an army major, and members of their group were having a meeting in their hooch. The Navy lieutenant was describing on a map on the side of the hooch wall how their combined Navy/Army operations were going to work the area. After it was over, Admiral Zumwalt said to me, "I thought I was running this show." He flew back to General Abrams and related the meeting to him. Abrams' reaction was to call all his component commanders in to tell them that the enemy was not running around in battalions or company sizes, but in very small groups. He told his generals to let their field people run their operations, just the plan and . This was a major change in the land war in South Vietnam.

There ^{is} ~~are~~ no pp. 51 and ² ~~52~~ in this retyped version.

The Sea Lord operations started before the interdiction operations. They started shortly after Zumwalt arrived in-country. It was Zumwalt's intention to put the Brown-Water or in-country Navy into an offensive environment.

He selected Captain Bob Salzer as the Sea Lord Commander. It was a good selection because Salzer was anxious to do something and took the challenge. Sea Lord was an assault type operation to drive the Viet Cong out of the area in and around the Can Tho and Bassac River areas. It was a success and in about six months it became feasible to move Sea Lord ships and people into the interdiction operation, which proved to be effective.

The main objective of Sea Lords was to have one operational commander in charge of Brown-Water operation in-country.

There are no pp. 53 and 54 in this retyped version.

Q: Do you think there was a general failure by those back in the United States to appreciate what was happening out there?

Admiral Nicholson: They were thinking peacetime Navy in the states. We didn't get a wartime or mobilization budget. We scrounged stuff from the Army. We were so hard up for boats that we went out on a program to capture sampans. We captured something like 400 of them. We planned to put Vietnamese sailors in the sampans and seek out the enemy along the small shallow canals. You know, some of the stuff did work. The Navy in Washington was very much involved in carrier operations in Laos and North Vietnam. The Brown-Water Navy was not considered a major Navy operation.

7. 56
Q: Did you get spot promoted at that point since this was a captain's billet?

Admiral Nicholson: No. My counterpart was a three-star general. No, I spent most of my time as a commander. I made captain my last two months in-country. I was not spot promoted.

Q: Did this cause awkwardness in dealing with counterparts from other services?

Admiral Nicholson: Some, but not to any serious degree. Zumwalt had gained the respect of most of the Army generals and their staffs, so it made our relationships with others easy. If there were problems with Army staffs that we couldn't resolve, they knew Abrams would get a call from Admiral Zumwalt.

The interdiction operations were established and started to become routine in coping with infiltration problems. Admiral Zumwalt asked me if I would relieve CTF/115 until his relief arrived in about 30 days. I went to Cam Ranh Bay and relieved Roy Hoffman as CTF/115.* The command had the responsibility of all interdiction operations along the coast of Vietnam. It commanded all Swift boat and P-3 operations.

*CTF 115—Commander Task Force 115, the billet held until then by Captain Roy F. Hoffman, USN.

There is no p. 58 in this retyped version.

I was impressed with the width of the Bo De and Cua Lon rivers in the Nam Cam area. They were joined and provided a waterway across the southern tip of South Vietnam.

I returned to Saigon en route to my base in Cam Ranh Bay and met with Bob Powers.* We discussed the various options of logistically operating in the Nam Cam area. Eventually we concluded that ammi pontoons, tied together and moored in the widest part of the river of Nam Cam, would provide an operating base. If I remember, the river at Nam Cam was about 400 meters wide with currents around 6 or 7 knots. I proposed the entire concept to Admiral Zumwalt. He approved it, but asked if I could have it in place in about 30 days. It took longer than 30 days, but not more than 60 days, as I recall.

We assembled about 11 pontoons in Na Be and made them rocket proof on the roofs. We built barrack type housing on the ammis and trained about 40 sailor volunteers how to operate automatic weapons from the ammi's pontoons.

We had three LSDs come up the Saigon river into Na Be and load out the ammi for Nam Cam. The ammi were in the river in tandem and a fine base was established in the middle of the river at Nam Cam on the ammis. It was supported by 40 Navy volunteers, a squadron of swift boats, one SEAL platoon, one U.S. PGM Navy Sea Wolf helo, and one Vietnam-manned LCI with medical and dental facilities. We named the base "Sea Float." A pacification team was put on board Sea Float to work with Vietnam people in the area. Most of them were fishermen. Through our efforts in

*Lieut. Col. Commander Robert C. Powers, 2nd was logistics officer on Admiral Zumwalt's staff. Powers had been involved in the reconstruction of this island to the North Vietnamese and the U.S. Navy.

pacification and their associations, we learned that the Vietnamese had given up lumber/charcoal business because the Viet Cong tax collectors would take all their money while they were en route to Saigon to sell their charcoal. It became a very bad business venture. We put our SEALs to work in the river leading from Nam Cam to Saigon to locate the tax collectors. After their elimination from the tax collecting business, Nam Cam became a thriving lumber/charcoal and fishing area. In about a year of operation of Sea Float, a lumber/charcoal operator made twice the salary of a Vietnamese Lieutenant Commander Navy man. Later on, Sea Float was moved ashore at Nam Cam and became a Vietnamese Naval Base with a landing strip. The logistics support for Sea Float was directed by Bob Powers. Sea Float was successful in spite of the non-support of the Army and Mr. Vann*, the Army Special Advisor. Its success can be attributed to Navy people with a defined mission. The SEAL team working with Swift boats, PGM, and Sea Wolf helos were the offensive weapons that literally neutralized the area and permitted pacification. In about a year, after I left the country, Sea Float was moved ashore at Nam Cam, an air strip was laid, and the Vietnamese operated a base at Nam Cam. **

*John Paul Vann, a former Army lieutenant colonel who resigned from the service to become a civilian advisor.

**For more on Sea Float and other topics discussed in this section, see Commander R. L. Schreadley, USN, "The Naval War in Vietnam, 1950-1970," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, May 1971, pp. 180-209.

There are no pp. 60-63 in this retyped version.

The infiltration and interdiction problems were very asset¹ consuming operations. The most effective way to deal with it was to get to the origin of the material before ~~they were~~ spread out into the roads and rivers of Vietnam.

By 1969, the Brown-Water Navy in Vietnam became an effective offensive force in interdiction. The reason for this effectiveness was due in part to the cooperative and close friendship between Abrams, General Brown of the Air Force, and Zumwalt. These men insisted on and supported a unified team effort. This was realized down through the chain of their commands. There are many accounts of a PBR coming under enemy fire from the beach and the PBR skipper calling in Army artillery on the enemy while exchanging fire with the enemy from the boat. Another type of fire fight is a Navy boat calling in ⁱⁿ Army slicks (helo) or Army Cobra helo to hit the enemy along river banks. In one incident, a PBR boat got in trouble in Slingshot but could not raise his artillery support or any other air. A B-52 picked up his May Day and asked him if he needed help. The PBR skipper said yes and make it fast. He later said he had mixed emotions after being so close to the B-52 bombs going off in the nearby area. There were many great fighters in Vietnam who were there not because they liked it, but because they believed it was their responsibility to carry out the expected requirements of their profession.

There are no pp. 65 or 66 in this retyped version.

Q: Could you describe your working relationship with Captain Rectanus?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. Every day we had a briefing. First we'd go to the operations center with the staff and the admiral. We would brief what had happened the night before and what we were going to do in that day's operations or our long-range plans. Then we'd go over to intelligence, and they'd brief the intelligence. Then we'd get together and plan what we were going to do, Rectanus, Zumwalt, myself, and staffs.

Q: Rectanus told me that, much more than in conventional warfare, intelligence drove the problem in that situation.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes.

Q: In what respect? How would you describe that?

Admiral Nicholson: There were no "front lines" as we knew them in past wars. The intelligence was a little bit here, a little bit there, and you had to put it all together. We had to filch it out of the mass of Army intelligence to get it for the Navy. Our naval intelligence in the field was minimal. We couldn't afford to devote large assets to gather Navy intelligence, so we had to rely on Army intelligence and what Navy intelligence we could gather. Rectanus built up the Navy intelligence network to a point where we were less dependent

Nicholson - 67 cont'd

upon the Army. He (Rectanus) was a very exacting and detailed manager of intelligence. We worked close in all of our operations because we needed each other's input and assets.

We had to be very selective and pick the areas we thought would generate timely and accurate intelligence. For example, we sent one of our more sophisticated SEALs, Lieutenant Ted Grabowski, into the Parrot's Beak. He and his teams were dropped from a helicopter at night. He was instructed to go undetected and determine the trails/routes that they were using to infiltrate South Vietnam in the Parrot's Beak area. His team worked the area for 30 days. He related after extraction that the infiltrators were North Vietnamese natives who had never been to South Vietnam, and were coming down out of North Vietnam. They would walk down into the Parrot's Beak area, and somebody would come out of the woods and direct them to their next stop, where someone would meet and direct them further. Some would carry a wheel for an artillery piece, another would carry a ^{shell} ~~shall~~, and another would carry articles that made up an offensive force. They would then store their articles in caches along the borders and on the banks of the rivers for pick-up by soldiers. They did it by signals at night. That is how they were able to carry off their Tet offensives in South Vietnam.

They brought this stuff in, piece by piece. Then somebody would assemble the artillery piece. That kind of intelligence was very useful to us and we reacted. That's one of the reasons Rectanus supported Sea Float. That had been an area where we were not getting any intelligence until Sea Float.

Q: Well, I think in part what you're saying is that when you've got a war where there is no front line and you're not trying to achieve a territorial victory, you have to go where you see targets. And he used the term "rifle shot approach," that you were directing your operations as opposed to the shotgun approach of sending out large forces.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Rectanus said you were very good at assessing the probable risk in a particular situation. How did you develop that talent?

Admiral Nicholson: I don't know. I had, probably, a pretty good box score there. I listened to a lot of my people out in the field who would tell me what the situation was, and I'd go out in the field too. We didn't sit around in Saigon much. Sometimes I missed it. But at no time did we ever go into an operation unless our percentage for success was good. We played with a good hand. Some people say that's hogwash, because you went up and down those rivers and you didn't know what was on the beach. And that's true. Early in 1968 we patrolled the major rivers and some canals, but it didn't take us long to realize we were sitting ducks, so we stopped patrolling and started ambushing or staking out along the rivers and canals. These operations were effective in detecting infiltrations on the river and caches along the river banks.

O: How would you assess this probability? Would you say, "If six people are likely to get killed, we'll do this, but if it's seven, we won't?" How would you work it?

Admiral Nicholson: We wouldn't work it on the numbers. We would look and see, why do we want to go in there? What is the objective? We were after infiltrations and caches. We weren't after KIA; that wasn't our business.* So we wouldn't go in to get kills. We didn't have the forces to do that. But what we wanted to do was find out where they were cached. If there was a big concentration of enemy, we didn't take them on. We'd call in the artillery or air, because we didn't have the forces to do it. The assault forces conducted assault operations in IV Corps but we soon converted their forces into interdiction.

*KIA—killed in action, the infamous "body counts" that became one means of measuring amount of action against the enemy.

I felt like we were spinning our wheels in assaults because the enemy in 68 and 69 were around in large numbers. So that's when we decided to move those assets to interdiction.

Q: How much of the operational planning was Admiral Zumwalt's and how much was Commander Nicholson's?

Admiral Nicholson: He'd give me the concept of what he wanted to do. The admiral was always involved. Rectanus and I would try to beat him to the punch on an operation. We hated to have him tell us that we should do something. He created that enthusiasm throughout the staff. The admiral was always working to have the Navy contribute to the overall land operations. Sea Float was my special project. It supported what he wanted to do in the Nam Cam area. Admiral Zumwalt let you run your shop. He would contribute to it in as much detail as he thought was necessary, but you always felt you were running the show. He had all of us working far beyond our capabilities and we liked it. I thought I carried my share of the load.

Q: Do you have a feeling now, in retrospect, that maybe you got so wrapped up in it that you didn't really have a true perspective on it?

Admiral Nicholson: We had a true perspective on the interdiction and infiltration ops. The political side of it we didn't, and shouldn't, have had. I wasn't convinced we should have been in Vietnam, but it was my profession to be in a war if the government directed it.

Q: Was there ever any thought of taking direct action against Sihanoukville, where this stuff was coming in by sea?*

Admiral Nicholson: We had the swift boats and the P-3s to patrol the coast, but we did not strike into Cambodia. It was off limits.

*Sihanoukville was Cambodia's principle port, since renamed Kompong Som.

Q: You talked about Washington's propensity to run the war. I would imagine you had less interference than the Army people and the Seventh Fleet.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. We were not bothered by them as much as the Army and Seventh Fleet.

Q: Well, being ignored had both its bad side and its good side. The bad side was you didn't get enough support.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, that's right. The good side was that we ran our own war, but always in support of the land war.

Q: How much were you able to bring the Vietnamese Navy into this?

Admiral Nicholson: Very much. We were ahead, I think--this is going to sound kind of vain--but we were ahead of the Army and the Air Force in getting the Vietnamese Navy ready to take over. Admiral Zumwalt and Commodore Chon worked hard on this.* Admiral Zumwalt really bent over backwards to make sure we brought them into it. Even to the point where Sea Float operation was a combined operation. Some of their officers didn't want to do it because they had been run out of that area years before.

*Commodore Tran Van Chon, South Vietnam's Chief of Naval Operations.

Q: Until you got there, the three task forces, 115 and 116 and 117, had been sort of separate entities. How did you go about putting those together so that there was a unified concept?

Admiral Nicholson: Well, SEA LORDS did that. That was the whole concept of SEA LORDS. The reason they called it SEA LORDS was to pull things together and establish objectives and then go on the offensive in support of the land war.

Q: How much involvement did you have with the U.S. Coast Guard units?

Admiral Nicholson: Very much. They played a big role in the WHECs.*
We used them out on the coast in patrols.

Q: Well the small ones too, the WPBs, were there.**

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, we used those up in the rivers with the
Swifts and also close-in searching trawlers. They were very good,
as were our PGMs.***

*WHECs—high endurance cutters
**WPBs—83-foot patrol boats
***PGMs—Navy patrol gunboats

There is no p. 79 in this retyped version.

Q: Would you say more about the operations of the SEALs? They have been sort of unheralded in the Vietnam War.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. Rectanus probably talked about this.

Q: Only in passing.

Admiral Nicholson: We used the SEALs; at first, in 1968, they were all in Saigon and not doing much because they had no objectives. We sent them out to the task forces—SEAL groups to 115, 116, and 117. They proved very good intelligence gatherers. The VC* who defected were the Kit Carson scouts. They were very good at identifying people who would make good Carson scouts. They also trained Vietnamese in SEAL operations. They were outstanding in Sea Float. They helped make Sea Float a success.

*VC—Viet Cong

Q: How did a blue-water guy like you adjust to this far different environment?

Admiral Nicholson: I'm flexible. It was my job. The only time I had it maybe a little rough was when I was doing Sea Float, and even then we had fresh water down there and food. When you're around Zumwalt, you're busy all the time. So you don't have time to think about how bad it is or how tired you are, because he's just an interesting guy to be around. It's never dull or boring.

Q: You described one of your days when you were with SecNav. How was a day when you were with Zumwalt in Vietnam?

Admiral Nicholson: The day would start with breakfast, and the staff all lived at headquarters. We had breakfast together. So breakfast was working. We'd eat, and I'd brief him generally on what happened last night. Then we'd go over at about 8:00 o'clock and have the operations brief, which would take an hour or an hour and a half. Then we'd go right into the intelligence brief. Then we would have a meeting if we were decided on an operation. We'd sit down, the three of us, and plan how we were going to do it. In the afternoon we'd get in the helicopter and go out and visit some base, or go see the results of some fire fight. We were in a helicopter every day, seven days a week. We worked seven days a week, and the only break we would have would be a volley ball game, then lunch. One day we cancelled the volleyball, and somebody came by on a motor scooter and threw a hand grenade over the fence onto the volleyball court. We'd have a big dinner and usually went back to work.

Did you
Q: wear civilian clothes?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, we wore civilian clothes at dinner.

No Page 54