

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 *family* friendship very jealously, yet we don't ~~have~~ 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.

interested in hearing what you did during all this.

Admiral Nicholson: I was the administrative aide. My job was to screen all the papers that went to Captain Zumwalt and then to Mr. Nitze, and to get the back-up material.

Q: Did you have any special areas of expertise or things that you dealt with?

Admiral Nicholson: No, across the board I was an administrative aide. All paperwork.

Q: Well, you had a crucial job there, because with people as busy as he and the secretary were, somebody had to screen what they were going to see out of all this mass.

Admiral Nicholson: He relied on me to do that. He had confidence in me. We did our daily planning while car pooling home at night and going to work in the early hours of the morning. So when we got in the office, we were ready to go. We lost very little continuity.

Q: How much dealing did you have with Congress in that job?

Admiral Nicholson: I didn't go up there. Zumwalt was very good with Congress. He built up that expertise which helped him when he was CNO. He was very effective on the hill as CNO. And he came in against some tough congressmen. He was always prepared when testifying. He made certain as the executive assistant that Mr. Nitze was well prepared before appearing on the Hill or anywhere else.

Q: Conventional wisdom has it that the seeds of his many people programs as CNO came out of his Vietnam experience and working with young officers and enlisted. Do you see other precursors farther back during the time he was with SecNav?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. He was very much aware and sensitive about the young enlisted and officers who had problems with the Navy establishment. He bent over backwards to see their sides of it and in many cases resolved it to their benefit. He was a superior leader to have in a combat environment. That combat might have been Vietnam, Capitol Hill, or the Pentagon.

In general, he loved the Navy, but his greatest talent was his desire to make ~~everyone~~ ^{he felt} feel ~~they were~~ the most important person in the organization. I saw this in the Brown-Water Navy in Vietnam and in SecNav, and in the CNO tour.

Q: Now, the other side of the coin is that sometimes people can get to a job too soon and not have the requisite experience?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. That was one of the things some of the old-timers resented with Zumwalt—he came up too fast. The saying, "It takes a year to get a year's experience" is true for most of us. However, there are some who are exceptional, and those people should not be held back. Zumwalt was far ahead of his contemporaries. Those who criticized him in most cases were jealous of his insight and ability to persuade. My only complaint about his fast advancement is that the

Navy lost him at too young an age. *Zumwalt was a fast learner. He was much sharper than most senior admirals in his perceptions of what effect a decision would have in the future.*

Q: You mentioned Captain Kidd and Captain Miller. Did you have much personal interchange with them?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes. They are friends.

Q: What are your recollections of them?

Admiral Nicholson: They contributed to this unified effort that went way down to DoD and competed with the Whiz Kids. Kidd, Miller, and Zumwalt worked very closely together. When they were captains in the EA jobs, they were a tough team.* And somebody ought to write a book about that. It could be very humorous, and also interesting. They took on some big tasks: the Navy pay raise, carriers, the use of carrier aircraft in the Laos confrontation. But with these three EAs, you had a pretty good cross section. Kidd and Zumwalt were blackshoes, Miller was an aviator, but they had a pretty good balance on what the Navy should be.**

*EA—executive assistant

**Blackshoes is a slang term referring to surface ship officers, as opposed to naval aviators, who are known as brownshoes.

Q: Admiral McDonald's a very chauvinistic air power man. Did you see much blackshoe-brownshoe controversy?

Admiral Nicholson: No.

Q: One thing that was put forth to provide more balance during that period was the reactivation of heavy cruisers and/or battleships. Admiral McDonald very successfully fought that.

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, and the Marines wanted them for gunfire support. I don't know what his rationale was at the time. I do know we were having a tough time manning our ships. I would guess his reason was not parochial, but related to the difficulty of manning those large ships at a time when reenlistments were low ~~and~~ recruiting was down, *and he had trouble manning the Fleet as it was then.*

Q: Did you have much dealing with the Secretary directly?

Admiral Nicholson: No, not a lot. Once in a while I went in to see him. Zumwalt did that. I dealt strictly with and worked with Bud, although at times I'd sit in on some of their conferences and task force meetings.

Q: Well, anything else from that tour?

Admiral Nicholson: No, no, I can't think of anything. I may think of something as we go on.

Q: Where did you go from there?

Admiral Nicholson: From there I went to command my first destroyer. I took over the Lloyd Thomas, which was a destroyer based in Newport, Rhode Island. We deployed it to the Red Sea and Sixth Fleet. The ship was awarded the Battle Efficiency E for destroyers.

I was assigned to a bonus command as squadron commander of a Dealey-class destroyer escort squadron. These ships had two boilers and a gas turbine engine as back-up propulsion. The squadron had lieutenant commanders as commanding officers who had excelled in their previous at-sea billets as executive officers of destroyers. It was known as a bonus command for them too. All of the officer billets were well-screened. My association with this squadron of commanding officers and their ships' company was an exciting professional experience. The commanding officers were all lieutenant commanders: Al Herberger, Walt Piotti, Jim Stormes, Dick Berry, Tom Emery, Hank Atwood, George Davis. All but one have made flag officer.*

Hank Atwood was expected to make it but didn't. He would have been an excellent Flag officer.

*Rear Admiral Albert J. Herberger, USN; Rear Admiral Walter T. Piotti, Jr., USN; Rear Admiral James G. Storms III, USN; Rear Admiral Richard C. Berry, USN; Commodore Thomas R. M. Emery, USN; Captain Henry C. Atwood, USN (Ret.); Rear Admiral George W. Davis, Jr., USN

I made two deployments with the squadron, most all of it in the Med and northern Europe. The day after I got back from the last deployment, my wife and I were going out on vacation when the phone rang. It was Bud Zumwalt on the line. He said, "You know, we'd planned for you to come back to Washington after your escort squadron job and work for me down here in OP-96. But I want to tell you that I'm leaving this job, and I'm going to Vietnam." He said, "There is a good job in DoD, in the administrative office. I'm sure we can get you in there, or you can come with me."

I said, "Administrative job in DoD. Let me think about it."

So when I hung up, Marilyn said, "Who was that?"

I said, "Bud Zumwalt."

She said, "You're going again."

So while driving to Pennsylvania, we convinced each other that I should go to Vietnam. There was no sense in going to Washington and being miserable in an administrative job. I also felt that I should get into combat at that time in my career.

Vietnam October 1968 - October 1969

Insert in place of pages 40 - 54

Vice Admiral Zumwalt arrived in Vietnam about September 1968. My arrival was the following month October 1968. The Naval Forces in Vietnam at that time were in a defensive and static type of operational concept. This may have been because of fiscal and personnel shortages. The Navy was not operating as an integrated force with the Army and Air Force.

The first thing Zumwalt did upon arrival in-country was to put the "Brown Water" Navy in an offensive mode in support and operating with the Army and Air Force units. He organized the Sea Lord's concept with Capt. Bob Salzer as the "First Sea Lord". He publized this in-country and throughout the "Brown Water Navy" forces. This got every sailor's attention and started the positive contribution of the "Brown Water Navy" in Vietnam. Operations started by patrolling the many rivers and navigable canals in the Delta region. Those forces were made up of the following:

- * Task Force 115 Swift Boats-Anti-Interdiction operations along the east coast of South Vietnam with some penetration into the coastal rivers and canals. Headquarters was located in Cam Rahn Bay.
- * Task Force 116 - PBR river patrol boats in support of assault. They initially operated in the Delta area and along the Bassac River Complex, headquartered at Ben Hoa.
- * Task Force 117 Assault Troop Carry Force Headquarters at Can Tho.
- * Rung Sat. Special Zone PBR's Swift boats/helo's assault craft and OV-10 aircraft headquartered at Na Bhe.

It was not long before it became evident from intelligence that the enemy was using the rivers and canals as highways to transport their war materials into the south and building up caches of ammunitions,

guns & etc. for their Tet offensives. We were convinced that was how they were so successful in the early Tet offensives of 1968.

Zumwalt worked hard at convincing General Abrams that the major threat now in Vietnam was interdiction and that the Navy should concentrate it's efforts in Anti-Interdiction operations.

General Abrams agreed and this started the effective coordinated naval operations with the Army and Air Force in Anti-Interdiction operations. Large caches were discovered along the rivers and canal banks. The Navy PBR and Swift Boat sailors learned how to "call in" and spot artillery and B-52 bombing strikes from their boats. The Navy stopped its partolling of certain waterways and started setting-up water-borne ambushes with some success.

Zumwalt showed me on a map of the Parrott's Beak area where the convergence of the VAM Co Te and VAM Co Dong rivers formed a sling-shot targeted to the north. He named the Brown Water Navy Operations in the Parrott's Beak area, "Giant Slingshot" with headquarters at Ben Luc. This was the beginning of Navy's major role in anti-interdiction. The Barrier Reef operation linked with Giant Slingshot to form a Navy presence along the border of South Vietnam and Cambodia from the Parrott's Beak to CHOW DUC along the Vẽn TE Canal to Ha tien. PBR's, helo minesweepers, assault boats, OV-10 aircraft, army artillery and Air Force strike aircraft all worked together in support of anti-interdiction operations. These operations were highly successful in providing hard material evidence of massive interdiction from the North along trails, rivers and canals into South Vietnam. General Abrams gave credit to Zumwalt for the development and success of the anti-interdiction concept. It was through these operations that future Tet' offensives in 1968-69 were prevented from materializing.

The Navy Seal teams made significant contributions in finding enemy interdiction routes and trails. The seals were dropped behind enemy lines to track and identify enemy interdiction tactics and routes. Naval operations were developed to keep Naval Forces in-country in an anti-interdiction posture, to be flexible enough to react in a timely manner to the enemy's switch from water-borne interdiction to overland interdiction.

When the enemy found they were being confronted in interdiction from the sea or in the coastal rivers and canals, they would shift their routes to over-land and back-again to water borne interdictions when the oppositions dictated a change.

Zumwalt tried to get the US Marines in the Rung SAT Special zone, but was less than successful. The rationale for this could be attributed to the apparent inability to identify a large enough enemy force to commit a marine SLF to the Special Zone.

One of the most exciting and interesting operations was convincing the Army that the Navy needed a base at B^hAN LUC to support anti-interdiction operations in the Parrott's Beak and Barrier Reef areas.

We first sent an LST up the river and anchored it off B^hAN LUC in support of operations. When the Army J-3 saw this large "sky scraper" (LST) sitting in enemy infested territory he came back to headquarters and reported that the Navy was going to get blown out of the water with that skyscraper LST anchored off BEN LUC. Zumwalt's reply was, "he agreed and that is why we must have a permanent base there rather than an LST." Permission was granted to begin building the base but there seemed to be some doubt about finding sand fill in^a rice paddy country of South Vietnam. Once again and so many other times, we had more luck than brilliant planning. They found a large sand bar just 1000 yards down the river from BEN LUC.

When we first arrived in country in 1968, the Navy participated in these weekly briefings only as a spectator. The briefings were structured to tear the in-country ^{war} ~~was~~ up and put it back together again each Saturday. All component commanders attended as did the Ambassador. It took Admiral Zumwalt a couple of "sittings" to quietly encourage General Abrams to include Navy in the presentation. As time went on the Army and Air Force Component commanders became comfortable and solicited Admiral Zumwalt's counsel during these briefings. Sometimes it was humorous when Zumwalt would debate Army component commanders about the allocation of army troops against the enemy. They listened and many times agreed with his basic logic. He had a steel trapped mind when debate was in progress. General Abrams too sought and accepted Zumwalt's counsel and advice.

They became very close professional commanders during my 1968-69 time in country. General Brown, Air Force should also be included in this same relationship.

In general, the Army component commanders paid high tribute to the Brown Water Navy because they brought a new offensive posture into the in-country war in a positive and contributory manner. There are many operations in country where the PBR, Swift Boats and assault boat sailors, seawolf helo's and OV10 aircraft made the difference between defeat and victory in many fire ~~engagements~~ ^{engagements}.

On a personal note. The Admiral's son, Elmo, volunteered to come to Vietnam as a swift boat officer. Regulations at that time would not permit two people in a family in-country unless the family approved. ~~In other words~~, Elmo, Jr. could have avoided Vietnam. Having known Elmo as a young boy, I was not surprised at all, when word came that he was in-country. He joined the Swift Boat Flotilla and soon became a veteran Swift Boat Officer. He was a very positive, intelligent and an aggressive fighting officer. We learned that he was taking extra patrols in combat for other officers on sick leave or R&R. He was well liked by his subordinates and peers. My concern was that he would try to end the war single-handed. I sent word to his operational commander to slow him down. He was a fine tribute to the young men who fought in the in-country war in Vietnam. He was truly a combat professional.

In conclusion:

The Navy in country during 1968-69 was an offensive and contributing force in developing a resistance to enemy interdiction operations in South Vietnam. The Brown Water Navy during that period slowed down the movement of enemy material and people into Vietnam. The Brown Water Navy's presence on the major rivers and canals of South Vietnam curtailed major enemy offensives during that time frame. During the spring and summer of 1969, we developed an operation in the southern most part of South Vietnam called, "Sea Float". The Admiral always felt that the absence of ARVN troops in the NAMCAN/ Human Forest areas presented a haven for the enemy to retreat to and train.

The area that provided the best access to the area was NAMCAN, a deserted village along the CU Long and BoDe rivers. The two rivers cut through the southern tip of South Vietnam on an East and West heading. At NAMCAN, the width of the river was 400 meters with a current of about 7 knots.

My work as Swift Flotilla Commander was pretty dull at headquarters in Can Rahn Bay. I scouted out the Nam Can area and after talking with Bob Powers on the NAVFORV staff about logistic support in the area, I presented the concept to Zumwalt while we were flying by helo to a meeting in MucHoa.

The concept was to get 12 Ammi Pot^hoons, build rocket proof roofs on each one, construct gun pods along the outside perimeters of each ammi and anchor them tied together in the middle of CuLong / BoDe river at Nam Can. We trained about 75 volunteers to man Sea Float and support the floating fire base with a seal team and six swift boats. We brought in a Vietnam LCI as a hospital ship and an American PG gunboat ^{with} 3'50 fire-power. Pacification briefing areas were located in one ammi, living quarters in others, communication van in one, mess hall and two ammi's stored gasoline and fresh water made by our erdalators using water from the river. The concept was to establish a fire base, conduct pacifications in the area and later build up a permanent presence in the area.

Some of the Vietnamese Navy and US Army were apposed to our going into the area because the Vietnamese had been driven out of NamCan five years ago. The US Army and the ARVN refused to support us, so we went it alone and established the base. The US Army senior advisor told me on the third day after installing Sea Float that we would be driven out in thirty days. This made us determined to stay. It was successful because we eliminated the VC tax collectors in the area and made the area safe for fisherman and Vietnamese charcoal operators to work in the area. The lumber and sea life ^{in the area provided} ~~started to~~

^{and good economy and people began to} move back into the area and rebuild NamCan. Later, after I departed Vietnam, the Navy built a permanent base at NamCan similar to the one at BenLuc with an airfield.

Sea Float was a high risk concept that worked. The Seals and Swift boats drove the enemy away permitting the development of the area by the Vietnamese. It was a good example of the US sailor's ingenuity to make something work well when all the odds were against success.

Adm. N.: O kay.

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

Adm. N.: Yes. If you worked with him, you had to become one. If you weren't one, you either joined ^{him} or get out. But he didn't drive you. I got to know him. I rode in a car-pool with him. We both lived out around Annandale.* We would leave in our beat-up old cars. I had an old beat-up Chrysler. We would leave Annandale around 5:30 to a quarter of ~~six~~ ^{6:00} in the morning, ~~six~~ ^{6:00} o'clock sometimes, and we would be at the desk working at 7:00. We had to get ^{the deep work} ~~the~~ lined ^{up for} ~~up~~ when Mr. Nitze came in, ^{before he} ~~he~~ ^{Nitze} ~~he~~ was briefed and talked to in detail. ~~Here are the people you're going to see.~~ ^{the office} Then we would leave there after Mr. Nitze did. So, we'd get home by 8:30 or 9:00 o'clock, and we'd work ~~every~~ ^{but} six days a week, ~~but~~ you didn't realize ~~that~~ ^{it}. He made it exciting, interesting. We'd go in sometimes on Sunday on crisis, ~~sometimes a week~~. You didn't realize it until after you left, ~~and~~ ^{chopch.} I know after two years there I went to sea and ~~attend~~ ^{would go on} a school down in Key West, ~~called~~ ^{just} ~~school~~. The class in the day time and would be over at 4:30. ~~Well,~~ ^{be} at 4:30 that's when you started getting

*Annandale is a town in northern Virginia.

~~busy~~ in the SecNav's office. ~~after finishing class I would be looking for something to~~
~~to do.~~ So, at 4:30 I ~~walked out of class and I'd be walking the~~
~~walk myself~~ going to do now? You know, I found myself going over
~~at the club~~ and having a drink. ~~I said, "It's a minute, I can't do this."~~
~~I said, "I'm going to do something."~~ But yes, he's a workaholic. ~~I know~~
~~I've known~~ workaholics that drive other people. He didn't drive. If you couldn't
follow, no problem; he'd get somebody else, and you'd just be ignored. He
didn't chew you out. He never chewed you out. If you screwed up, I don't
ever remember ~~him bawling me out for a long time.~~ ~~But I remember~~
~~him~~ bawling me out. And, I'm telling you I screwed up many times, many
times. He never showed it. The worst thing in the world was not to do a
~~That was your punishment.~~ top-notch job for him. He was a good leader. ~~One of the best.~~

Q: ~~Did you socialize with the Zumwalt's at all?~~

Adm. N.: A little bit, not much. ~~at that time we didn't.~~ He was, you know
I was a Lieutenant Commander; he was a Captain. They are good friends of
ours, but there wasn't much time for socializing. He worked. And he didn't
socialize much. If he had to go to stuff with Mr. ~~Nitzsche~~ ~~he would go and~~
cut it short. There wasn't much time for that. It was all work and not much
play. But, we're very good friends of ~~him~~ and Mouza. We guard that friend-
ship very jealousy, yet we don't loaf and run around together, but it's the

kind of friendship that's there.

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

Adm. N.: There wasn't time. Professionally ^{they} ~~he~~ did. He isn't much for small talk, and neither is Mr. Nitze. I'm sure right now ^{you} sit down and small talk with Bud Zumwalt, and he'll cut you off in five minutes if you don't have something ^{worthwhile} ~~worth~~ ^{to talk} talking about. Very nicely ^{though} ~~though~~. He wasn't the social type. But, ^{he} did it and did it very well.

I remember, boy I know, in this job they lived in a very austere house up in Annandale, and Mouza entertained. I swear, ^{just about} everybody that got in contact with them in Washington, ^{they} had them out to their house. She didn't have stewards, and the kids pitched in, the children waited on tables. I know one time I sat next to, ~~gosh~~, Bill Mack, a ~~Congressman~~, Mr. Nitze, Mrs. Nitze, and Elmo and Jimmy and the kids all served, and pulled the tables out. ^{*} You had just as well been in the Waldorf-Astoria. They made you feel that way.

Q: ^{You haven't talked} ~~We haven't heard~~ much about your role during this time, and I'd be

*Rear Admiral William P. Mack, USN. Admiral Mack's oral history is in the Naval Institute collection.

interested in hearing what you did during all this.

Adm. N.: Oh, I sharpened the pencils, emptied the ash trays. I was the administrative aide. My job was to screen ^{all} the papers that were to go to Captain Zumwalt and then to Mr. Nitze, and get all the back-up material. I'd ~~call~~ all the people in the bureau to get the back-up material, all the data for the back-up material, put it together. *

Q: Did you have any special areas of expertise ^{or} ~~of~~ things that you dealt with?

Adm. N.: No, across the board, an administrative aide. All paperwork. And, I wasn't really a professional administrator. I was a ship driver, but somehow, and I think because Captain Zumwalt, his patience to put up with me, but we clicked. And we clicked at a time when SecNav's office and OpNav ³ ~~office~~, particularly SecNav's office and the CNO's office, the immediate staff ³ were just racked with this Anderson-Korth exit. ^{When they came up, because} they cleaned them out. And, the only reason I stayed was for some reason or other, ³ Zumwalt's and my chemistry worked and worked very well. I would have been gone like the rest of them. It always worked. We always had good chemistry. I could anticipate a lot that he wanted. Of course ³ you worked at

*The bureau mentioned here was the Bureau of Naval Personnel

**As discussed earlier in the interview, Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., and Secretary of the Navy Fred Korth both left office within a few months of each other in 1963, in part because of fallout from the ill-fated TFX aircraft squabble.

that, and you loved to get it before he did. That was the challenge. And, a lot of times he'd let you think you did it when he did it, which is always good too when things ~~are~~^{were} going bad.

Q: Well, you ~~have~~ had a crucial job there, because with people as busy as he was and the Secretary, somebody has to screen what they are going to see out of all this mass.

Adm. N.: He relied on ~~it~~^{me} quite a bit. He had confidence in me. I think, really, ~~the way~~^{where} we'd do it, we'd ride back home at night, and while we were driving back, we'd plan the next day's work. So, when we got in the next morning, we were ready to go. We lose ~~very~~⁺ little continuity except ~~while~~^{when} we slept. The wives used to joke about it, "Oh, ~~it's~~^{Oh,} good to see you again."

Q: How much ~~dealing~~^{dealing} did you have with Congress in that job?

Adm. N.: Only the paper. I didn't go up there. Bud was very good at that, with ~~Congressmen~~, and he built up that expertise which helped him when he was CNO. He was very effective on ~~the~~⁺ Hill as CNO. And, he came ~~in~~^{against} in some pretty tough times. But, ~~people~~^{congressmen} that have a brain in their head on ~~the~~⁺ Hill recognize him as a great man and respect him. Scoop Jackson ~~is one~~^{*}. They all

Senator Henry M. Jackson (Democrat--Washington).

respect him.

Q: Conventional wisdom has it that the seeds of his many people programs as CNO came out of his Vietnam experience and working with young officers and enlisted. Do you see other precursors farther back during the time he was with the SecNav?

Adm. N.: Yes, I think it even goes back before that, his hump legislation, big on bringing young people up. That's how we started the ^{Mod}MOD squad.* I'll save that for when I get to the ^{Mod}MOD squad area. But, his whole concept of ^HH I think he believed, and it's true today, the average age of our enlisted men ^{is}are 19 years ^{of age}of age. That's the average age of the Navy. The officers, maybe, a year or two over that. It's a young outfit. It has to be a young outfit. If you're in peace time for a long period of time, it's easy to get the old people hanging on. That's why they needed the hump legislation. People hung on, because they weren't being challenged, so, it became old and top-heavy. His concept was you've got to keep it young. They ^{have}had to be young, and the old people have to move out. You know, they have to make room for the young people to progress. If you don't, they are not challenged. You get stymied, and you can't go anywhere. You know, the guy that wants to go, he's going to leave if he can't see himself breaking through..

*The Mod Squad, discussed later in the interview, was a destroyer squadron commanded by Nicholson during Admiral Zumwalt's tenure as CNO. The commanding officers of all the ships in the squadron held a rank one step lower than would be normal for their billets.

Q: Now, the other side of ^{that} that coin is sometimes people can get to a job too soon and not have the requisite experience?

Adm. N.: Yes. That's the thing you've got to play. You have to screen it well. And, that was one of the things sometimes the old-timers sort of resented with Zumwalt. He came too fast. Tom ^{Moorer} Moore made the statement in the ^{Naval} Navy Institute that he didn't have the experience at sea. Well, you know, I kind of didn't care for that too much ^{but} because I think that is a problem; you can get it too fast. And, you have to live. It takes a year to get a year's experience, but you give that up if the man's intelligent and he's got initiative to learn. You know, a man that graduates from college ~~now we're getting philosophical~~ an engineer that graduates from college isn't an engineer at graduation. He learns ~~it~~ on the job. And, CNO's aren't CNO's before they got there. They learn how to be CNO's after they are there. They get all the background and training, but they can't cover the whole ^{gamut.} ~~gamut.~~ There is nobody that gets the experience testifying on ~~the~~ Hill like the CNO does. He may get a little smattering of it, but he doesn't get it ^{until} ~~when~~ he's in the seat. So, I don't think that's such a big thing. The commanding officer of a ship isn't a commanding officer the day he walks on board. He learns it.

*Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN(Ret), former Chief of Naval Operations, quoted in Lieutenant Commander Robert M. Ancell, USNR, "The Path to Four Stars," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1981, page 50.

Q: You mentioned Captain Kidd and Captain Miller. Did you have much personal interchange with them?

Adm. N.: Yes, yes. They ^{were} ~~are~~ old friends. .

Q: What are your recollections of them?

Adm. N.: Oh, well, they contributed to this unified group that took the Navy down to DoD and took on the Whiz Kids. And Kidd and Miller and Zumwalt worked very close together. They've been very controversial after that for years to come, but at that time, of course, they all wanted to be admiral and all should have been admiral, all made admiral, and I think ^{just} about the same time. But, in those jobs when they were ^{captains} ~~captain~~, in those EA jobs they were a good team. And somebody ought to write a book about that. It could be very humorous, and also very serious. They took on some big tasks: ~~The~~ pay raise thing, carriers, ~~Laos~~, the use of carrier aircraft in the Laos confrontation. Heck, the Navy flew most of the missions in Laos. But, with those three EAs you had a pretty good cross section, although Kidd and Zumwalt were ^{on} black shoes, Miller was an aviator, but they had a pretty good balance ^{on} ~~in~~ what the Navy should be. They ran it. And ~~their bosses, Rivero~~, Admiral Rivero was a pretty tough cookie. ^{they} ~~At~~

*EA--executive assistant.

**Blackshoes is a slang term referring to surface ship officers, as opposed to naval aviators, *who are known as blackshoes.*

***Admiral Horacio Rivero, USN, Vice Chief of Naval Operations. Captain Miller was his executive assistant.

Admiral
 McDonald and Mr. Nitze had a lot of trust in him and confidence, and they gave him a pretty free hand.

Q: Admiral McDonald's a very chauvinistic air power man. Did you see much black shoe black shoe brown shoe controversy?

Adm. N.: Oh, a little bit of it came out. But, after you get in to CNO you can't, you realize when you start looking at all the responsibilities you have as CNO, you can't afford to be parochial. The question you have to ask is, I don't know how they are going to fight this war. Now, when you're a young admiral or captain, a and you're out in your carrier running offshore, ~~on ashore,~~ you kind of get the feeling is all you need is give me about 25 of these, and I'll take on anybody." Well, when you get down to Washington and you look at the intelligence that's in front of you and look at the threat at least I felt that way, you've got to have a balanced Navy. And Bud Zumwalt, Miller, and Kidd all three of them believed that. They all had their specialities, but when they got down to the bottom line, you've got to balance that Navy out, because you don't know how the enemy is going to come at you. And Jerry Miller's big on aviation, but he also realizes, too, you can't win it with just the carriers. Now, some people don't believe that about their own speciality. If they are in a the responsibility of the job and of making

decisions, that comes home pretty quick.

Q: One thing that was put forth to provide more balance during that period was the reactivation of heavy cruisers ^{and/or} and battleships. Admiral McDonald very successfully fought that.

Adm. N.: Yes, and the Marines wanted ~~you mean~~ the battleships for close ~~air support~~ and I don't know what his rationale was at the time. I do know we were having a tough time ^{manning} managing our ships. I would guess his reason was not parochial because if you do that, ^{he asks} then you ask the question, "how am I going to man ^{it} ~~it~~ where am I going to get the people?" If you remember one thing about the war in Vietnam which was prior to that, McDonald's time, Laos ^{time}, they started then to cut back the Navy. We never did mobilize. We stayed ^{in a} at peace time budget. So, when you get peace time budget, you're talking about ceilings of people. When you start bringing in a new ship, ^{whether} whether it's a carrier or not and you're having a hard time manning what you've got, I would imagine that's why he fought that. I don't think he fought it because we couldn't use it; he felt he just had priorities.

Q: Did you have much dealing with the Secretary directly?

Adm. N.: No, ~~no~~ ^{not a lot.} once in ~~while~~ ^{went in to} I would see him. Bud did that. He handled that only. It was a good point. If the Secretary ^{was} ~~is~~ misinformed, he'd send for Zumwalt, and he wasn't misinformed very often. No, I dealt strictly with and worked with Bud, although at times I'd ^{sit in on} ~~send out~~ a lot of their ^{conferences} ~~comments~~ because of my job. But, Bud dealt directly with ^{Mr. Nitze.} ~~the chiefs.~~

Q: Well, anything else from that tour?

Adm. N.: No, no, I can't think of anything. I may ^k think of it as we go on.

Q: Well, where did you go from there?

~~Adm. N.: From there, me or with Zumwalt?~~

~~Q: You.~~

Adm. N.: Well, from there I went, ~~lets see, I went~~ to command my first destroyer, and I took over the Lloyd Thomas, which was a destroyer up in Newport, Rhode Island. It was a great tour. I went to the Red Sea. We won the ^{for} battle of efficiency ~~of~~ the fleet. I guess the highlight of that

was I went to the Seychelle Islands, won the E, had good recruiting, had a good time. I learned that from Zumwalt. He used to say ^{if} if you're not having fun doing it, you're doing it wrong," and I always followed that. From there I got what they call a bonus command ^{because} because, I guess, because I'd won the E. They had what they called ~~an escort destroyers, destroyer escorts,~~ ^{escorts.} the Dealey-class destroyers. They build them ^{as} with sort of half of a destroyer. We had two boilers, gas turbine engines as the back^{up}. They were build⁺ for ASW ships.* And, I was selected to be the squadron commander of them. At the time I was selected, most of them were in what they called cadre; they were having a cut^{down} in personnel. We couldn't man all the ships, so they just sat at the pier. Well, now they were going to bring them back, and I was given the job of bringing them back and deploying^{with} them. Well, ~~the~~ ^{just a breakdown} to name a few of the skippers, Walt Piotti is an admiral now; Al Herberger is an admiral; ~~now~~, Tom Emery is a commodore, Jim Storms is an admiral. If I forget one of these guys, they'll shoot me in the legs. Hank Atwood; George Davis, who is an admiral now.*** We had a very unique group. I had seven commands, but this command was one where you just sort of had the people that got together. You talk about ~~camaraderie~~ ^{camaraderie;} to this day we still correspond and are still friends. And, I guess it was because our mission was we had these old broken-down ships and we had to get them ready to deploy. So, we made our first ^{deployment} appointment to the Med and Northern Europe.

*ASW--antisubmarine warfare.

**Rear Admiral Walter T. Pitotti, Jr., USN; Rear Admiral Albert J. Herberger, USN; Commodore Thomas R.M. Emery, USN; Rear Admiral James G. Storms III, USN.

***Captain Henry C. Atwood, USN; Rear Admiral George W. Davis, Jr., USN.

and people were laying bets along the way that we wouldn't get outside the breakwater in Newport ^{that we'd} and get towed back. We broke ^{we} down and fixed it and got it going again. It was a delightful tour. We went to Northern Europe. Then I left that. ~~I came back after my~~, I made two deployments on that thing with most of it at sea, all of it over in the Med. Two Med deployments. And, I came back. The day after I got back, my wife and I were going out on vacation to Pennsylvania and the phone rang. We were packed and ^{walking} going out the door. It was Bud Zumwalt and he said, "You know, we'd planned for you to come back to Washington after your escort squadron job and work for me down here in OP-96 ~~OpNav 96~~, but I want to tell you that I'm leaving this job, I'm going to Vietnam." But he said, "there is a good job down in DoD, down in the administrative office. I'm sure we can get you in down there, or you can come with me."

And, I said, "Administrative louse in DoD. The offices aren't too good." I said, "Let me think about it."

So, when I hung up, Marilyn said, "Who was that?"

I said, "Bud Zumwalt."

She said, "You're going again."

So, all the way driving to Pennsylvania, we convinced each other that I should go to Vietnam, and no sense in going to Washington and being miserable in an administrative job, and I didn't know the guy. So, that's how I got to

Vietnam. I got out there and I'm not sure about this time. I ~~thought~~ ^{before me;} he'd been there maybe a month, it may have only been two weeks. He'd just gotten there. And when I got in there I could see that, man, he was walking the wall. He'd walked into something. I'm sure that they sent him out there as a ~~rear~~ ^{Admiral}, maybe they gave him three stars, yes, they gave him three stars, but my gut feeling is they sent him out there and thinking that old General Abrams would eat him up, and that would be the end of Bud Zumwalt.* And they just didn't know Bud Zumwalt. So when I got out there he was ^{with} livid in this place. The Navy was doing nothing. They were sitting ^{wringing} ~~ringing~~ their hands saying if we only had this, if we only had that, we could really do something. They were reading messages there.

~~The Army, Abrams, I guess Westmoreland was there then, or maybe Abrams had just gotten there. I can't remember. But, anyway, the Army ignored them; they were just sort of floating around in there.~~

So, when I got out there he said, "Dick, I don't know what you're going to do."

Q: What was your rank at this time?

Adm. N.: I was a ~~Commander~~, and I'd just finished my squadron job on my destroyers, so I was, you know, going to be CNO next week.

*General Creighton W. Abrams, U.S. Army, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

He said, "I don't know what your job is going to be, but ~~he said,~~^{thing;}
"look around. I don't know how we're going to do this, ~~but~~ it's a mess out here."

And, the interesting part was here he had Chick Rauch come out and Chick and I arrived almost the same day ~~and we had gone through survivors~~³ training and ~~didn't even know we were going out,~~ we didn't tell each other we were going out. Then we became very good friends. So, Chick and I were sort of unassigned, and Chick is a ~~Captain~~^{*}, a nuclear guy, a delightful man. You've met him?

Q: Yes, I ~~have met~~^{interviewed} him.

Adm. N.: So, we didn't know what the heck we were going to do. He was talking about ~~we've got to build up this Vietnamese Navy;~~³ that's what we've got to do. He said, "I need young people from the high schools, and ~~there was~~^{well} ~~he was awful anxious~~^{he was} all kinds of glitches to get this thing off the ground. What he was doing was trying to get some interest in the staff to get the Vietnamese Navy and ~~our~~^{doing} the U. S. Navy to ~~do~~ something. He said, "I want you guys to look at and see if you can get a program to get young people in the Vietnamese Navy." So, Chick and I, we went to orphanages, high schools; we went all over the place. I tell you this story, ³ because what really came out of it was the

*Captain Charles F. Rauch, USN.

Vietnamization. And, I could see that Chick and I ~~were~~^{weren't} there wasn't enough there for two of us, and so one night I got a call about 11:00 o'clock at night, and I was pretty unhappy with the whole set^{up} because I didn't have something. Here I was an ex-commanding officer just blown to nothing ^{I didn't have a} in the job, and I think he sensed it, too. So, I got a call about 11:00 o'clock at night; he woke me up and said, "Dick, ~~he said~~ "I'd like you to go down and relieve that Navy Captain, my ops officer." He said, "You know, I've been trying to get in to the Abrams Saturday morning brief." And General Abrams every Saturday morning had all the component commanders from Vietnam in to tear the war apart and put it back together ^{again.} Well, before Zumwalt got there, the Navy wasn't even invited to the meeting. Our navy Admiral wasn't invited because he contributed nothing. So, Zumwalt was pushing to get in to that conference. And, he said, General, I'd like the Navy to make a presentation. This was the first presentation. And the Captain he had there wasn't ^{really} coming up with anything. And ^{I hadn't been dealing with it;} I had been out looking at orphanages. And, he said, ~~Why don't you go and~~ I'm sending Howard Kerr ~~Kerr.~~ Howard was his flag sec. "Send Howard down there and the two of you see if you ^{can't} put that briefing together, because ^{we've got} I'm going to give it at ^{8:00} eight o'clock in the morning."

So, we had a lot of intelligence guys there. Neither one of us was versed in this whole area, but it was an operational brief. So, we put some-

*Lieutenant Howard J. Kerr, Jr., USN, who was flag secretary on Admiral Zumwalt's staff. Kerr's oral history covering his period with Zumwalt in Vietnam is in the Naval Institute collection.

~~about 5:00~~
 thing together and ~~by 5 o'clock~~ I said, "God, this thing isn't going to win a Stephen Decatur Award." And, I went over to him and I said, "I'll tell you, Admiral," got him out of breakfast, "you'd better hear this thing before you go. I'm so close to it that, frankly, I don't think you better give it."

He said, "Ah, let's hear it."

So, hell, he's a pretty ^{gitty} ~~great~~ guy. He heard this brief, and it wasn't good. He doctored it up. But his theory was ^{"I want"} ~~he wanted~~ to get in that door. The next one will be better."

We'd been up all night. Anyway, we gave the briefing. Well, ~~from then~~ ^{smoothed} on, from that day on, the Navy brief, we finally got going and straightened it out, and I was in charge of it. At the time, that was probably where Zumwalt really got the eyes of Abrams ^{and} ~~at~~ those component commanders, and Bunker ^{II} Ambassador Bunker was there, Dutch Kerwin, ^{was a} ~~Two~~ Field Force, Victor.* He relieved Julian Ewell, who ^{general} ~~were~~ famous World War II Army ^a ~~men~~. Abrams and the Marine ^{general, Cushman.***} ~~General's name, I've forgotten his name.~~

Q: ~~Was this Walt?~~

~~Adm N.: No, before Walt. Friends of Nixon's.~~

Q: ~~Cushman?~~

*Ellsworth Bunker, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam; Lieutenant General Walter T. Kerwin, Jr., U.S. Army, Commanding General, II Field Force in Vietnam.

**Major General Julian J. Ewell, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Ninth Infantry Division.

***Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., USMC, Commander III Marine Amphibious Force.

~~Adm. N.: Cushman.~~ Every Saturday morning they would take the war apart, I mean the nitty-gritty of it. And it got so that Bud started making contributions to the land war, you know. What happened was ^{he was} getting the Navy into it and this is where and how he found a ^{niche} ~~niche~~ for the Navy.

I took over as operations officer and Chick went ^{for} with the pacification, in that area. He called me in and he said, "We're going to put this brown-water Navy on the offensive." He always believed, and I think he had it ^{there} before he got there through intelligence in Washington before he came here that the ~~Vietnamese were not~~ North Vietnamese were not going to fight an assault type of a war. They were going to do interdiction and they were going to do it until they found a time that they could win it. And the Army didn't believe that. The Army was running around with battalions looking for the enemy. They weren't getting anywhere.

Zumwalt called me in and he said, "We're going to set up an operation up here ⁱⁿ on interdiction."

His concept was that in the Parrot's Beak area, the Northern part, there were two rivers, the ^{Vam} ~~Vam~~ Co Dong and the ^{Vam} ~~Vam~~ Co Tay. * The Parrot's Beak sort of stuck right down between those two. And he said, "We're going to put the boats up and patrol up ^{on} in those rivers and start putting bases." And we started and all we had were Navy kids and PBR boats. I remember one of the first we put in was up in Tra ^{Khuo} ~~Kieu~~ and we walked right across a little

*The Parrot's Beak is the nickname for an area of Cambodia in which the shape of the border between it and Vietnam appears on a map to be in the shape of a parrot's beak.

~~man-made~~ ^{man-made}

~~man-made~~ canal, which was the Cambodian border. ^{You could} I can see it right ~~now~~ ^{there.} And the first day we went up there, we landed this helicopter and the kids, a young lieutenant had built his hootch. So Bud had put some cold beer in ~~the~~ his helicopter. These kids had been living in a crummy area of this river, and they brought out this cold beer, and word spread around. To make it a short story, the concept was we were going to keep a presence on the rivers and canals. Giant Slingshot was the first maneuver. Then he started getting a lot of ~~reaction~~ ^{reaction} from Abrams and the Army staff that we were to support these mobile bases; we had to bring forces up there. We brought an LST up and anchored it in a place called Ben Luc. Well, if you look at the low-level land, you know, and here is a big LST, it's like a sky scraper sitting there and the Army said, "you're going to get that thing blasted out."

Zumwalt had a reason for doing this. He said, "yes, I know." ~~He~~ ^{Now} then ~~said~~ build me a base. ~~And~~ you have to remember, the Navy budget was not a war time budget. Zumwalt had to stay within the Navy budget, which was nothing and he's running a war out there, and he's putting them on the offense, which I thought was just criminal, and so did everybody else. ~~So~~ we got---

Q: You thought what was criminal ~~the~~ the budget or what?

Adm. N.: Not being in a war time budget. They thought it would be over tomorrow.

So, when the Army got concerned about knocking out this LST, and it did have a couple of rocket hits, he said, ^{"Okay?"} ~~okay~~ we'll get rid of the LST, but I need a base at Ben Luc. ^{"Now,"} how in the world are we going to put a base in these rice paddies? and that's all it was ~~was~~ rice paddies. And you talk about the ^{luck.} ~~luck~~ he ^{said,} ~~says~~ well, we'll just get a dredge, and we'll get some sand, and we'll dredge it and build a base. They ^{laughed.} They asked, "where in the world are you going to get sand in Vietnam? There is nothing but mud and rice paddies."

"Well, how do you know?"

Well, that son-of-a-gun, they sent engineers out there, he said, "find some sand."

They found sand a mile and a half from Ben Luc, I said, boy, you ~~must have some inside sources.~~ ^{right in the river.} ~~know, if you would fall in, I said~~ ~~He said,~~ "dumb luck."

So they built the base at Ben Luc. Then we moved across the Van Co Tay with bases, Moc Hoa, and across the Plain of Reeds, there was a canal. So the idea was that we would have from Ha Tien all the way across the Vin Tay canal, Moc Hoa, the Parrot's Beak. So we had Navy presence along the waterways on the Cambodian border. And this is when we started finding the caches, along the rivers. What it boiled down to we would find big shells,

artillery shells stuck in the mud along the river, our SEAL teams would find them, then ~~they would come down~~ and the North Vietnamese would come down in sampans at night, pick up the guns and ammunition and go into Saigon. That's how they did the Tet.* Well, the Army never knew that. The Army didn't know how the Vietnamese got the ammunition for the Tet. What happened was the Army was ignoring the rivers and canals, and they were using the rivers as highways. And, with the brown-water Navy and Zumwalt putting it on the offensive, they found these caches. Then we started finding caches ^{along} the Cambodian border and then Abrams realized that, my God, there is interdiction. What the Vietnamese were doing, they would have, and it goes back into the ^{Sixties,} '60's, that interdiction would come by sea on the trawlers, and then when we'd go over and confront ^{them,} that they would switch to land and come down out of Cambodia and slide across. So, our interdiction, we called them Slingshot, Barrier Reef, and the ^{Vinh Te} ~~Van Tay~~ canal. We used everything from the helicopter minesweepers, we tested those out in the ^{Vinh Te} ~~Van Tay~~ canal. We used anything we could get our hands on. We got a lot of our communications stuff from the Army because the Navy wouldn't give it to us. Then he started to move the assault boats, which you were in in the ^{SEA LORDS} ~~Sea Lord~~ business, we started taking those boats and putting them in interdiction and dedicated the brown-water Navy to interdiction. So, you had the Swift Boats, the 115 people out ^{protecting} to protect the coast with the P-3's and Swift Boats

* Staged during the Tet holiday in early 1968, Tet was a ferocious North Vietnamese-Viet Cong offensive against South Vietnam.

up and down the coast, and then the Slingshot, Barrier Reef, the ^{Vinh Te} ~~Van Tay~~ Canal across the Cambodian border.* The only thing that was left was the Rung Sat, and we'd worked very hard to get the Marines, the ^L SOF to come down and have an operation in the Rung Sat. I don't know how many briefs I ~~gave~~ ^{**} to the Marine staff on why you ought to come down.

Well, the Marines said they would come down ^{if} and we'd dedicate the ^L SOF to it, but you couldn't show us enough targets. They wanted to look for a battalion of ^{NVA, ***} ~~the enemy~~ ^{weren't running}. They don't run around in battalions.

Q: Well, that was the Army's view, too, wasn't it?

A: Well, there was an Army post too?

Admiral Nicholson: That's right.

Adm. N.: That's right. ~~And, the guy, and this is very interesting,~~ I don't know if this is written anywhere, but I was there and I got ~~it~~ ^{this} first hand the day that Bud Zumwalt convinced General Abrams that they weren't running around in battalions, and the day he did it, ~~we were in~~ ^{I was out there} the helicopter every day. I bet there weren't five days in a year ~~we weren't~~ ^{any} out there, that we weren't in a helicopter. And, the trouble was that Zumwalt always wanted to get in a fire fight, because he figured he wasn't going to get shot. One day we had an argument in a helicopter, and I said "You're not going to go down there." The PBR's were down there shooting it up.

*Task Force 115 conducted Operation Market Time, a barrier patrol off the South Vietnam coast in an effort to halt enemy interdiction of supplies into South Vietnam.

**SLF—Special Landing Force.

***PBRs—River patrol boats.

NVA ^{} North Vietnamese Army.

He said, "God, those are our boats! Let's get down there!"

And I said, "We could get shot down there!"

And, he said, "Well, let's get down. We could land on the bow of that PBR there."

I said, "Look, you're not worried about your career, but you're not going to ruin my career. If you get shot, ^ethan I'm going to ruin my ~~naval~~ career. There's no way."

And, we actually argued. So, he says, "O/kay, I'm going to come ^{out} ~~in~~ this helicopter myself without you guys." And one night he did. He slipped out of headquarters and went up on the Cambodian border in a boat. He took his aide and swore him to secrecy, and the two of them went out on ambush and sat in the boat all night on the Cambodian border..

Q: Who was his aide?

Adm. N.: ^{Lew} ~~Lou~~ Glenn.* ^{Khao} Anyway, to get back to this, we were flying up this day to Tra Kieu and went in. ~~Before that Zumwalt realized in using assets,~~ he then got the Army to work with our PBR people, to teach them how to call in artillery, because the boats were getting shot up. We used to patrol rivers, and they were hitting us pretty hard. So, we called that off and we started ambushing like they did. ^{This paid off.} But, the thing that helped us was we

*Lieutenant W. Lewis Glenn, Jr., USN, aide and flag lieutenant.

could call in on the Army frequency and call in artillery, and they would zap them. And the kids got pretty good at that. Then we got very good and we ^{started} ~~start~~ calling in B-52 strikes ^{with the VC as secondary targets.} ~~we'd call~~ ^{If the B-52s didn't have a secondary target,} we'd call in and say, "hey, zap these guys." Well, the PBR kids didn't like that because sometimes it got too close to the drop and those B-52s would ^{really} blow your eardrums ~~drums out~~. But, they were able to do it.

We landed at Tra ^{Khao} ~~Rieu~~ this day and went into this ^{hooch} ~~hutch~~, and this young Navy lieutenant is standing there. He had a map. Standing next to him is an Army major with his ¹⁰ ~~goggles~~ on, his Cobra sitting outside. In this little crummy ^{here} ~~hutch~~, Bud says, "Tell me what you're doing, son."

Well, you'd have thought you were talking to General Stilwell himself. ^{this} ^{that had been} Here is this Navy lieutenant and Army major ^{working out} ~~working out~~ an operation. They knew who their enemy was. They were going to bring the artillery in. The PBRs were going to go up here. He was directing this whole thing. *

Bud Zumwalt walked out of there and he said, "You know, I thought I was running this thing. But, you know something, that's what's wrong with this war. The admirals and generals are trying to run it from their head-quarters ^{around} and these people aren't running in battalions; they're running around in one's and two's. Why don't we let the field ~~and area~~ commanders run the war?"

He got in the helicopter and went back and went in Abrams' ^{office} ~~office~~ and he

*Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, U.S. Army, Commanding General, 24th Corps.

cited this situation. And he said, "They aren't running around in battalions; they aren't even running around in company sizes. What's happening is we have all of this general power, the generals and the admirals running it, and we're running around with our own battalions, and we're not flexible enough."

So, Abrams called a meeting of his component commanders, and he said, "I want you generals to let your field people run this thing. You keep control of it, know what they're doing, tell them what you want, and then get out of it. Let them run it." It was a change over, a massive changeover. It changed the whole concept.

Q: When did that happen?

~~Adm. N.: I'd say about half way through my tour, about 1968, late '68, after the '68 Tet.~~

~~Q: That was in the spring, early '68. You got there in the fall, so--~~

Adm. N.: It must have happened in about, I'd say, ~~May or June~~ April, May, or June of '69.

SEA LORDS

Q: So, ~~Seafords~~ was in full swing?

~~SEA LORDS~~

~~SEA LORDS~~

Adm. N.: ~~Sealords~~, that's right. And ~~Sealords~~ was conceived by ~~I~~ I did leave that out. That's a good story. I ought to talk about that.

Q: Please do.

~~SEA LORDS~~

Adm. N.: ~~Sealords~~ was started, was part of the offensive, ^{put the Navy on the} ~~when they made~~

~~an~~ offensive. He'd got his interdiction set up and now he wanted to get Bob Salzer, ^{*} he liked Salzer very much, and Salzer liked him. ^{*} Salzer had been sitting down there through the ^{Veth} ~~other~~ regime doing nothing, bored to death. ^{**} So, the two of them really clicked. It was interesting because ~~Sealords~~ started shortly after Bud Zumwalt got there. I'd say about three months. I remember he said, "I want you to bring up that guy from the south, what's his name? Salzer. I met him once." He didn't know anybody. He said, "Bring up the component commanders, and we're got to pick somebody to be in charge of this thing."

~~SEA LORDS~~ So he gave a briefing of what he wanted to do. He wanted to set up ~~Sealords~~. ^{gist} The ^{that} gist of it was he wanted the Navy to go on the offensive.

"We're going to cover all these rivers, and all these canals, and search them out and get them." ^{gist} That was the gist of it. "But I need a leader." So, ^{Bud's and} our job, mine and Chick's, during these briefings we were trying to figure out and so was Bud, who were we going to pick for this leader, because we

*Captain Robert S. Salzer, USN, Commander Task Force 117.

**Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, USN, was Commander U.S. Naval Forces Vietnam before Admiral Zumwalt's arrival.

didn't know any of these people. We were all new. We all got there at the same time. So, we finally decided, we felt pretty confident that Bob Salzer, we weren't sure. But, he was the one that seemed to stand out. Well, he was great. A good choice. ^{He} We asked him to take it and he did. From then on, I think, that's when the Navy really got the eyes of the Army ^{that} and we were a part of this team effort, and turned it around. The Navy, I think, helped turn that in-country war around, because we were in the rivers, and were finding out that they were using those rivers as highways. It squelched them from having another Tet.

Okay, enough of that?

Q: ~~Now~~ there was a price to be paid for that in that you had much higher casualty rates than before.

Adm. N.: Oh yes, people were getting killed. And, we were getting a lot of flack from the guys in Washington. In fact, they sent over Vice Admiral Smith out here, who was very upset about this.

Q: From what office?

~~Adm. N.: He was on the West Coast.~~

~~Q: FibPac?~~

Adm. N.: ^{Phib}~~FibPac~~.^{*} The boats were his, the PBR^s and he had responsibility for the maintenance of the boats. Zumwalt was the operational commander. Well, Smith didn't like that, and he was also jealous of Bud. He was an older guy and Bud was a young guy. I remember when he came out there, ^{to me} Bud said, "I know you're busy, but I want you to go with him and stay with him ^{around} take him ~~out~~ and show him all the bases."

Well, I took him everywhere. I took him down with the SEAL^s where the SEAL^s had this one base^{**}, the VC were all around^o, so when you came in the helicopter^{if}, you didn't make a glidepath low, you'd get shot^{***}. So, you came in and dropped. I explained this to him^s that we'd be dropping."

He said, "God, we might get shot here."

I took him up ^{around} on the Cambodian border^s and his aide came up and said, "You know, it would be an awful thing if they captured a three-star admiral."

I said, "Well, we're not going to get captured."

He said, "But, there is the Cambodian border right there."

I said, "Yes, but our kids go up there all the time."

Yes, we got a lot of flack⁽ about that. It's the old thing, either you

*Vice Admiral John Victor Smith, USN, Commander Amphibious Force Pacific Fleet. Admiral Smith's oral history is in the Naval Institute collection.

**SEALs--Navy commandos with special training in underwater swimming.

***VC--Viet Cong.

win it when you get into it, which was the whole concept with him. If you want to win the war, you have to go on the offensive.

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

Adm. N.: Oh, yes. Sure, they were thinking peace time Navy. The CNO I don't know what the story was. We didn't get a war time budget. We scrounged stuff from the Army. God, we used everything possible. We were so hard up for boats that we went out on a program to capture sampans. We captured something like 400 of them, and this area commander called and said, "well, I got 400 of your sampans, what do you want me to do with those?" What we were going to do with them was put sailors, Vietnamese in these boats, and go down and find the enemy. You know, some of the stuff didn't work, but I'll tell you what did work, there were very few kids out there that didn't know Bud Zumwalt. He made a point of it. Every day, we were in a helicopter somewhere. The biggest part was keeping him out of the fire fights. He was a good war time commander. And he worked. But, yes, we were criticized. A lot of people from Washington came out and said, "you're getting our boys killed." You know, we took all the precautions we could, but nevertheless we saw the threat, and it was in the rivers. Abrams was the

first to admit this. I heard him say it at several meetings of the component commanders that Bud Zumwalt and his brown-water navy turned this thing around by getting in the rivers and canals and finding this interdiction and stopping it.

Q: Did you get spot promoted at that point to ^{since this was a captain's} captain billet?

Adm. N.: No, no. My counterpart was a three-star general. No, I spent most of my time as a ~~Commander~~. I made ~~captain~~ about the last two months I was out there on normal selection.

Q: Did this cause any ^{w/}ackwardness in dealing with counterparts from other services?

Adm. N.: Oh, sure, but you know, when you're with Bud Zumwalt he played it with ^{stars} of a four ~~star~~ and you felt you were a three-star. You know, to go back and tell him that I couldn't get in the office, there was just no way, or ~~that a~~ the guy wouldn't talk to me. So, you know, I just didn't bother with it. You know, you had to get in there and you had to talk to him and you had to get information. It got so that ~~after~~ his reputation in the Army was very good. I think Abrams had the biggest vote making Bud CNO as anybody.

probably more than the Navy people. It got so that his reputation, his contribution to the component commanders, I knew all those generals by first name, and I got to meet their counterparts, and they treated me as an equal. But, we supported them, and we worked with that Navy ~~afterwards~~ ^{and Air Forces} General Brown. ~~General Brown was next~~ ^{*} We worked with them very well, and gave more than we received as far as cooperating with them. What they appreciated was that we'd pass off intelligence to them on these rivers that they weren't getting before. And Salzer did a good job of that. He was a key factor. He was very well respected in the Army. Bud brought him around to meet all these people too, and always was consulted, ~~Salzer and~~ ^{Zumwalt}.

Then, about that time, things were going pretty good. We had interdiction and all of our things in. But, one thing that hadn't been complete was he always wanted, Zumwalt and Rectanus, who was the intelligence guy, and I think ^{probably} Bud more than Rectanus, Bud always believed that the ARVN were using the tip of South Vietnam as an ^{R + R center.} ~~arsenal~~. God, we used to go down, fly down in ^{airplane.} ~~to the airport.~~ ^{remember} I know one time we flew up to Bo De and Cua Lon river and conned this pilot into going in low so we could see. They had these barriers up. Well, Bud went back and said, "they're putting barriers in the rivers and that's going to stop my offensive." That's how he got ^{Abe's} ~~Abrams~~ attention. Well, those barriers were fishnets. But, they were barriers and you could not bring

*General George S. Brown, USAF, Commander Seventh Air Force. He was later Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Captain Earl F. Rectanus, USN, the intelligence officer on the ComNavForV staff. ARVN--Army of the Republic of Vietnam. R&R--rest and recreation.

boats up with those barriers across the river. So, he used that to convince Abrams that we ought to get down there. So, Abrams said ^{Okay} ~~okay~~ go ahead. But, he didn't support him. So, we're trying to figure how to get down in there into what they called Nam Can. And, Nam Can was a little city right in the middle of these two rivers, the Bo De and the Cua Lon, and in the middle was a little city called Nam Can. And, they, at one time it was the only area in ~~that, in Vietnam~~ in the southern part of Vietnam that had lumber. The Vietnamese would come in and cut lumber, and they had these charcoal kilns all up and down the river, and they would make charcoal and take it to Saigon and sell it. But, the B-52's used that as a secondary bombing target, so they laid the place flat. Well, there were no Vietnamese around there, around Nam Can. So, one day he called me up and he said, "Would you take over CTF 115?" *

I was, at that time, his operations ^{mine} officer. And, I thought, "God, no." I had been there about 9 months, and we had all of our bases in, and it was getting kind of routine stuff, and I was getting kind of bored.

He said, "Roy Hoffman has got orders, and there is a gap. Would you take up the gap. It will only be about a month you'll be up there."

I said, "Okay."

So, I went up there to ~~Cam Ranh~~ ^{Cam Ranh} Bay and I'm up there. If there is ever an R&R center, boy, that was it. They had an ~~officers~~ ^{officers} club on the beach,

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

and I had a trailer. I'm up there reading messages and I said I can't spend 30 days here. So, I used to get in a helicopter and I'd go down, and I said, "I'd better go down and look at Nam Can." So, I spent a couple of days in the boonies in and out of there. And I finally got, I guess, I'm not sure exactly how this happened, but I think Bob Powers probably can fill in a part of this. Bob was up on the staff in Saigon in logistics. I went up, and I was talking to him about how we could get down in that river in the Bo De and Cua Lon river. And, between the two of us, we came up with ~~this~~ the concept of ammi pontoons, ~~or maybe Bud said it. No, no Bud wasn't in on it.~~ And, I said, I know how we can get into this thing. Let's go down and put a base in Nam Can. He was on his way to Moc Hoa; we were going in a helicopter to Moc Hoa, and I'm telling him this story over the noise of the helicopter. And, I said, "I think we ought to go down there and put a base down there. We'll get ammi pontoons; we'll tie them all together, and put them in the middle of the river. The river is 400 meters wide and the current runs ^{around} ~~about~~ 6 or 7 knots. We'll tie all these ammi pontoons together, and we'll put shock proof roofs on them. We'll train our people; we'll have to take volunteers from all parts of the Navy. We'll take them to ^{Cam Ranh} ~~Cam Ranh~~ Bay and train them how to fire guns, and we'll make it a fire base. We'll put gun emplacements around these ammi pontoons and we'll sit in the middle of the river. We didn't know what was down there, and we had

*Lieutenant Commander Robert C. Powers, USN, was logistics officer on Admiral Zumwalt's staff. Powers has contributed his recollections of this period to the Naval Institute's oral history collection.

visions of R&R centers and everything. And, the Vietnamese said if you go down there, you're going to get knocked out in two weeks because the Vietnamese tried to get down there and they got cleaned out. So, we felt we were going to have a mess. So, we had six swift boats, a platoon of SEALs, and we went and build 11 ammi pontoons and rigged them up in Nha Be, put ~~hutches~~ ^{hooches} on them, and we commandeered a communication trailer and put it on one of the ammi pontoons. One ammi pontoon was for fresh water; one ammi pontoon was fuel for helicopters, ^{hooches} the rest of them were ~~hutches~~ ^{which} and a pacification section that Chick Rauch set up. The concept was that we would take this down in LSDs. Here was an example where we brought LSDs in to Nha Be. If you want to see a sight, ~~an LSD~~ three LSDs going up ~~Nha Be up~~ the Saigon River to Nha Be. We wanted to do it fast before we got blown out of the water with rockets. So, we loaded them in the boat and took them out, put them in the water, towed them in with swift boats, and anchored them in the middle of the river. We ended up with 11 pontoons. We had fresh water made by erdelators, fresh water showers, and we supported ourself, the Navy. There wasn't one ARVN, one Army, nothing. It was supported by six swift boats, ^{and} our Navy helicopters.

Q: ~~The cargo helicopters? The CH-46?~~

No HP

slicks,

Adm. N.: ~~No, they were fighters, like Cobras.~~ They were Navy, but I forget what they called them. I've forgotten. And, we supported that operation with an LST off the coast, anchored off there. ~~And, it was one year.~~ And, with the helicopter anchored off the coast, off of Bo De, we were afraid that it would get hit. ^{We} Had a Vietnamese LCI, which had a medical and dental medical unit on board, Vietnamese manned, LCI. Then we had one of our PGH gun boats. We thought, ~~the second day down there,~~ we got this thing in, got them all tied up, and the second day down the Army general came down with this guy who was the civilian advisor ^{Vann,} ~~Van,~~ a very famous civilian advisor, who got killed in the last part of the war in Vietnam, Mr. ^{Vann} ~~Van,~~ he was the big pacification guy. * They landed down on the ammits and said, who's in charge here?"

I said, "Well, I am."

He said, "Well, this is without a doubt the most foolish operation I've ever seen. You're going to get blown out of this place in one week. Are you aware that the Vietnamese tried to land right over there and got wiped out, all of them?"

I said, "Yep." And I said, "But they're going to have a good fight on their hands."

I couldn't predict how it would be. I was only there for two days.

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

So, nothing happened. Then we started sending out SEALs out ^{and} ^{Swift} in our ~~short~~ boats ~~and~~ going up at night, up the river and sort of landing in the bush and seeing what kind of enemy it was. And, one night ~~they came back~~, the SEALs came back and said, "God, ^{damn} ~~we~~ ^{it} almost had them. I'm sitting there in ambush ^{at night} and I'm looking over, and there's a guy sitting right next to me. I knew we didn't have any Vietnamese SEALs." They had set up in ~~the middle~~ of an enemy ambush, in the middle of it.

What had happened, those guys saved that operation. The reason that thing worked ~~and let me talk~~ -- Zumwalt's concept was he was going to pacify all the natives that came around down there. But, somehow we had to ^{neutralize} ~~neutralize~~ the place, so we had rice in these ^{hooches} ~~hutches~~. So, the Vietnamese would come down, and they would look around, and we'd bring them on board and feed them rice, and we'd talk to them about the war. "Tell us anything you know about it. Do you see any VC or NVA?" That was our intelligence gathering. This went on for several months. Then it dawned on us; the SEALs discovered ~~that~~ what was happening, we learned this from the Vietnamese. ~~the~~ the reason the Vietnamese weren't chopping wood anymore is that they would chop the wood and take it in their sampans and go up the rivers, and on the way would be the VC tax collectors. By the time they got to Saigon, they had no money, lumber, or anything. So, that was very simple. We told the SEALs, let's go and set up an ambush and eliminate the tax

collectors. ^{When we} We eliminated the tax collectors. We had Vietnamese come down from Long Xuyen, up and down the Bassac in droves chopping wood ^{and} ~~in one month~~, we did a study, in one month a wood chopper in Nam Can made more money than a Vietnamese Lieutenant Commander. They had shrimp that big down there. All kind of fish. So, Zumwalt said, "why don't we try to get ~~the Chinese~~, one of these big Chinese merchants in Saigon, take him down there and see if he'll set up a factory or something for this pacification business?"

So, we got this real rich Chinese^{in Saigon}man and took him down there. It was a pretty raunchy place. We kept him on the ammi's. We showed him the fish, beautiful red snappers, shrimp. And he said, "yes, I could set up shop here, but you've got to get rid of the VC first." Well, to make it a short story, Sea Float was successful. * After we got rid of the tax collectors, they started coming back in afterwards. There were a lot of little stories going on about it. But, eventually, and this was after I left, the plan was ~~and~~ it was carried out ~~that~~ that would move ashore. And, once again Zumwalt got a dredge and got sand, only this time he wasn't as lucky. He had to haul his sand from down in some island off the coast there, brought up and they put a base in Nam Can, and the Vietnamese took over.

I'd say in Vietnam, to wind up the Vietnam thing, his big contribution there was interdiction. He sold it to the Army, and the Army believed it.

*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, pages 180-209.

If you get rid of the VC, I'll be back.

And, had the political situation been different, once we licked the interdiction and we wanted to move north, we could have ~~gone~~ moved north. We could have won that war, no doubt about it. I'm not going to analyze why it didn't turn out that way. I don't know, because I left it. Zumwalt left it. Abrams, Zumwalt, and the Air Force General Brown had a team there, and all they needed was somebody to say, "Go get them." And, they were in a position to do it, because they'd stopped the flow of munitions into Vietnam, South Vietnam. The interesting part was that ~~the Navy~~, our Navy kids could call in artillery, call in B-52 strikes. It was a beautiful scene to go aboard one of those PBRs and have a young enlisted man, sometimes ~~an officer, sometimes~~ just a Boatswain's Mate driving that ~~PT boat~~ a PBR and calling in an artillery strike and watch it come in and then they would spot it, and work together. And, I think in Vietnam with Admiral Zumwalt, and he ran the show completely, entirely, very well respected, and he knew almost all the sailors. We had all kinds of special projects going, pacification that Chick will talk about. And, I would say that his insights to that, Chick ~~was~~ probably covered that, he sensed and it goes back to his sensitivity or awareness of how Washington works. He knew how Washington was working while he was out in Vietnam. He knew there was going to be a new president coming in, and you'd better get moving to turn this place over. The Army, Air Force, they were playing the same old ~~game~~ thing. We were prepared to do it. He had us

set up to do it. And the Navy was ahead of them in Vietnamization. I think that Chick probably covered that.

His respect that he got from the Army, Kerwin and Abrams and Brown ^{probably the key thing in helping him get CNO.} out there was ~~one of the healthy things.~~ When he was called back to Washington, ^{think} I don't ^{believed} believe he thought he was going to be CNO. I think he thought he was going to be a four star, say, somewhere instead they asked him to be CNO. He said, "What do you say, ^{You've got} ~~are you going to take it?~~"

I sort of wish he hadn't taken it. I told him that. I said, "You know, you're getting to do it too soon. You should have gone to a four star, and then we would have had you longer." Several people have said that. It was a waste. It went too fast.

Q: Admiral Moorer said that.

Adm. N.: Yes, that's right. Yes, he did. I always felt very bad that Admiral Moorer, I never felt that Admiral Moorer and some of those three stars who were out there in the area didn't support Bud Zumwalt when he was in Vietnam. I think they were sort of hoping that he would step on it. I think they were surprised when he didn't. Then, when he became CNO, those guys, boy, for instance, I used to look at the secret messages. I don't know if he's going to talk about this or not. He may want to ~~delete~~ leave it, I

don't know. ~~I'll take your advise on this.~~ I used to see the secret messages that were sent to Admiral Bringle asking for forces, and they would come back, ^{no} we can't spare them. You know, the support, I thought, in material; he got a lot of lip support, ~~but not~~ ^{a lot of} moral support. And you had to bum things from the Army like the communication terminal, and the Navy should have been supplying that. I don't think they really wanted him to go on the offensive out there, ~~The Navy.~~ It was sort of a pain in the neck for them. They wanted to fly their carriers, and the carriers were a very important thing. But, ~~we~~ we were there. He was put in charge of the blue-water navy, and he wasn't going to sit there and read the messages. That's what it amounted to, and he made a contribution. And, everybody out there ~~in~~ in-country when he was there felt like we were making a contribution. He agonized over every loss of life, every single one, and yet he kept his perspective of what he was doing.

I really want to get the interdiction in ~~tactics~~ ^{General} tactics, Phil Stilwell I know, ~~Ewell~~ ^{Ewell}, Kirwin. And, I think the biggest contribution was he turned them around and showed them that they weren't running around with batalions and convinced them that they had better let the ~~commanders~~ ^{Field} run this war, as he was doing. Interesting time, interesting time.

Q: Could you describe your working relationship with Captain Rectanus, the intelligence officer?

*Vice Admiral William F. Bringle, USN, Commander Seventh Fleet.

Adm. N.: Yes. Very close. Every day we had a brief in operations. First we'd go to the operations brief, a big map. Zumwalt was there every day. We would go over what had happened the night before and what we were going to do in that day's operations ^{or} ~~and what~~ our long-range plans ~~were~~. Then we'd go over to intelligence and they'd brief the intelligence ~~briefing~~. Then we'd get together and plan what we were going to do, Rectanus, Zumwalt, and Salzer. Oh, yes, we didn't move without them.

Q: Admiral Rectanus told me that much more than in ~~any~~ conventional warfare, intelligence drove the problem ^{in that} ~~and~~ situation.

Adm. N.: Oh, yes, true.

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

Adm. N.: Well, because they weren't running around in great big battalions, the intelligence was a little bit here, a little bit there, a little bit here, and you had to put it all together. We had to ^{filch} ~~filter~~ it out of ^{the} ~~a~~ massive of Army intelligence to get it for the Navy. So, we didn't have a lot of forces. We couldn't afford to send the masses in, so we had to rely and decide, ^{okay} ~~or~~ ^{okay}, this is our intelligence, and this is what we're going to hit

today. We couldn't by-guess and by-golly; we just didn't have enough forces to cover it. So, we had to be very selective, and we picked the areas with the best intelligence. I think an example of that, the SEALs worked for me, and I sent one of our more sophisticated SEALs, Kowalski, blond haired Kowalski. He was not the killer-type SEAL; he was a very sophisticated, ^{kid} smart. I said, I want you to go up in the Parrot's Beak with your group. We'll drop you in a helicopter ^{at} tonight. I don't want you to kill anybody. I want you to work up there and find ^{out} how they are coming down. What trail it is. Who's doing what to who. Find out how they are bringing in interdiction. So, he went up and he spent 30 days up there, and we extracted him. He came back with ^{the} story. They were coming, they were North Vietnamese natives who had never been to South Vietnam, and they were coming down out of North Vietnam. They would walk down to the Parrot's Beak, and somebody would come out of the woods and say, "O-kay". Then they would be carrying a gun, the wheel off of an artillery piece, or a shell, one piece, one man at a time. And, somebody would come out of the woods and say, "O-kay, get down here on this river and go down to the end of that stream and turn left, and somebody will meet you down there." Then they would do that and they would drop the piece down and somebody else would take it and cache it somewhere, and that guy would just disappear. They did it by signals at night. They did it all by night, nothing in the daytime. And, that's how

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.

Q: 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?

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 ~~N~~icholson: 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.

they brought this stuff in, piece by piece. Then somebody would assemble the artillery piece down at the end. So, that kind of intelligence we used. And we acted on intelligence. Sometimes it was dry. That's one of the reasons, I think, that Rectanus supported Sea Float. That was an area where we were not getting any intelligence. ~~And it really turned out to be, I don't think,~~ I don't believe now it was an R&R center, but what it turned out to be, we improved the economy of the Vietnamese, by luck.

Q: Well, ^{that when} I think in part what you're saying is 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} ~~you~~ used the term "rifle shot approach," that you were directing your operations as opposed to the shotgun approach of sending out large forces.

Adm. N.: We didn't have the forces to do it. And we used SEALs. God, we used SEALs like the Army used ^S battalions. That, intelligence gathering. We used SEALs to get the tax collectors. We would use SEALs when we were trying to find out who those civilian leaders were, the SEALs were very effective, going behind and getting the chiefs, the civilians and seeing who was ^{Zumwalt} orchestrated that very well. The

intelligence and the operations, very few times did we move without intelligence, very few times. Well, you know, we had to have some reason. So, my theory was, you give me some good intelligence, and I'll act on it, but I'm not going to go out and create anything, and we didn't.

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

Adm. N.: I don't know. A coward. I'm a coward basically, I guess. Yes, I had, I'd say, ^{probably} a pretty good box score there. Well, I guess, I wouldn't want to say that I did that. I think 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. And, you could assess it. Sometimes I missed it. But, at no time did we ever go in with the idea that our percentage was not good. We sort of played poker. We played with a good hand, and we wouldn't go in if we didn't. Now, 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, but we stopped patrolling, and we started ambushing. You know the Americans were patrolling with the big guns, and we were getting kicked around, and so then we started ambushing. I guess we were lucky.

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

They were great in that work in the Parrot's Beak identifying the enemy. They were very good at alerting us to infiltrators' trails and caches. Very heroic in going behind enemy lines and capturing VC for intelligence. We didn't advocate going out and killing, getting KIAs. We weren't interested in that. We were interested in sophisticated work of intelligence gathering. They were clandestines; that was the whole purpose of their mission.

Q: Well, sometimes I think they may have gone beyond the Geneva Convention rules in their interrogations. Did that ever give you any qualms?

Admiral Nicholson: No.

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 *in the evening.*

D.J. 5/2
Q: *A* Wear civilian clothes?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes, we wore civilian clothes at dinner. *During working hours we wore uniforms.*

Q: How old were you in Vietnam?

Admiral Nicholson: I was 45 years old.

Q: As far as planning, how far ahead did you plan when you were operating in Vietnam?

Admiral Nicholson: We had two major concepts. We planned on daily operation and reacted to the enemy. Then we planned our interdiction operation, short and long-term. We set up Giant Slingshot and Barrier Reef, then the Vinh Te Canal operation. The Swift boats patrolled the coasts and major rivers. We had operations in all the major rivers.

There was considerable short and long ^{range} planning for Vietnam which I

was ~~not~~ fully involved ⁱⁿ with. *Our planning would be initiated in most cases upon intelligence of enemy movement.*

Q: Would you say that you generally had enough time to plan things? I got the impression from Admiral Rectanus⁺ there was not always all the staff planning there could have been.

Admiral Nicholson: It was kind of nice that way. You didn't have to go through a lot of opinions. No, we didn't have a lot of time for planning. Sometimes you can over-plan. But you couldn't do that on a big-scale operation. We weren't a big-scale operation. We weren't fighting frontal attacks. We could probe and then pull back. So a lot of our planning was done after we got started, and we'd improvise on it. If you can be flexible and make changes, that's better than going in with a plan and finding out it's too involved to change without excessive loss of life.

Q: Did you have what are known traditionally as contingency plans—if somebody does something, you will react so-and-so?

Admiral Nicholson: Yes.

Q: On aggressiveness of individual boat skippers and so forth, did you ever have the feeling that you were pushing them too hard? Or, on the other hand, holding them back?

Admiral Nicholson: We found incidents where our people in the field became fatigued. In those incidents they would stand down.

Q: Then how would you react? Scale down their operations?

Admiral Nicholson: Stand down some boats for repair and crew rest.