

Swift Current

The official publication of the Swift Boat Sailors Association.

III Quarter 2005

Comments & suggestions to-
editor@swiftboats.org

President's Corner

The Nation watched as hurricanes slammed into the Texas/Louisiana border area on the coast. Between Katrina and Rita, the cost in damages alone will be in the billions. The secondary effects will be the lost production of products we all use most days in one way or another. To date, there has been no word on any of our Swifties is affected by the hurricanes.

Director Joe Ponder was admitted to the Gainesville Veterans Affairs Hospital for surgery replacing his left knee in August. While there, Joe suffered a mild heart attack which in turn had his doctors perform cardiac testing. This effort led to the discovery of blockages in his heart. His doctors reported to Rebecca Ponder that Joe's condition was called a widow maker in the medical arena. Joe underwent successful open heart surgery from which he is recovering nicely. Rebecca Ponder thanks everyone for their prayers and cards received.

Presidents Travel #1- On Wednesday August 31st, I traveled to Long Branch, NJ, in the company of Jim Akers. My trip was originally initiated by member Terry Boone. He had been contacted by the widow of Steve Luke BM2 who was KIA on December 6, 1968 in the river. Linda Luke Hurden had located the SBSA while searching the Web. As many know, Steve and I trained together in Coronado. He was a down-to-earth, funny guy. Prior to his being assigned to Friar Tucks' boat in An Thoi, Steve was assigned to PCF 94 (Hal Amerau-OIC) in Cat Lo. Needless to say, hearing from Linda put me in a state of shock. My last communication with her was when I wrote her shortly after Steve's death. After several e-mails and notifica-



tion from Admiral Hoffmann on the passing of Mousa Zumwalt, I elected to go back east, meet Linda, and attend the funeral. As this meeting would be an emotional roller coaster for me, I requested member Jim Akers to accompany me.

In preparation of our meeting, I prepared 6 DVD's for Linda. Three were the documentaries "Be Good, Smile Pretty," "The Last River Run," and the Dedication of the U.S. Navy / Coast Guard Memorial and Small Boat Display. The other three were a multitude of photos of what our crews were doing in Vietnam. I heard later she had viewed all and was most impressed by our dedication to our men of honor.

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"Swift Boat Down"

The story of the sinking of PCF 19 by Jim Steffes, long-term member of the SBSA.

Order your pre-release Hardback copy signed by the author for \$30.00 + \$1.00 S&H = \$31.00 per copy

Send a check or money order and instructions for how you would like each copy signed.

Ken Briggs
SBSA Ship's Store
3227 Fuller St
Philadelphia, PA 19136

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO "SBSA"

- OFFER EXPIRES DEC 15th 2005 -

"Swifts at War"

Virgil Erwin has put together a tribute to all Swift sailors that served and sacrificed on the boats during the time frame 1965 to 1970. It utilizes images from several sources, along with some appropriate music, to present an energetic view of what it was like to live and fight along the rivers and coastline of Vietnam. If you have "been there and done that" then I think you will recognize the experiences that are depicted. Paraphrasing what someone so eloquently stated: "No one hates war as much as a Swift Boat sailor, or understands why it is sometimes necessary"

<http://pcf45.com/swiftsatwar.wmv>



PCF-28 in "Psy-Ops Canal" - Dung Island IV Corps

SBSA's "First Lady" Departs to Join Admiral

A Celebration of the Life of

MRS. MOUZA COUTELAIS-DU-ROCHÉ ZUMWALT *"His Strength"*

January 22, 1922 - August 25, 2005



*United States Naval Academy Chapel
September 3, 2005*

Mrs. Mouza Coutelais-du-Roché Zumwalt

Mouza Coutelais-du-Roché was born in 1922 in Harbin, Manchuria, the only daughter of a Russian mother and French nobleman. Her parents were White Russians who had escaped from Russia in the aftermath of the communist revolution there. However, her family would not completely escape the yoke of totalitarianism as, at the age of ten, she experienced the brutal rule of the Japanese who had invaded Manchuria in 1932. Her ordeal would leave her with a very personal appreciation for the freedoms democracy brings and the costs involved in preserving them.

During World War II, with her mother dying of cancer, Mouza was allowed by the Japanese to take her to the hospital in Shanghai for treatment, but would not allow her father to join her. When her mother died in Shanghai soon after, Mouza was then not permitted by the Japanese to return to Harbin. She would never see her father again.

When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, Mouza remained in Shanghai. On October 1, at a dinner party, fate brought her a dashing Navy officer. Lieutenant (junior grade) Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., having captured a Japanese gunboat prior to the Japanese surrender, had a few days earlier sailed the first ship flying the American flag into Shanghai harbor after the surrender. His capture of the gunboat, his perilous transit up the Yangtze River, his arrival in Shanghai, and his subsequent encounter with the woman of his dreams were all detailed in a 75-page letter he later wrote to his father. In that letter he provided a very moving description of first meeting this beautiful Russian girl, one of four at the dinner party that October evening. For the young Navy officer, it was love at first sight. He asked her to teach him Russian; little did he realize that she would teach him about love and life. A week after meeting Mouza, he proposed; two weeks later, they were married.

The early years in the United States were challenging for Mouza. Unfamiliar with American culture, unfamiliar with the language, having to care for young children alone as her husband embarked upon numerous deployments at sea, she rose to the challenge. As her husband's career took on increased responsibilities, so too did Mouza's. She became very active in counseling and caring for junior wives. Her sensitivity to their problems later became a catalyst in her husband, then the Chief of Naval Operations, issuing one of his famous "Z-Grams" that established the Navy Ombudsman Program and

directed all Navy commands to address the problems and issues that the families of junior Sailors faced.

It was Mouza's faith and love of family that enabled her to overcome some of the greatest tragedies of her life, including the loss of her first-born son, Elmo, in 1988 to cancer. With the loss of her beloved husband 12 years later, Mouza continued to dedicate herself to initiatives he had started. She was active with The Marrow Foundation, which recognized her efforts on its behalf by establishing the Mouza Zumwalt Good Deed Fund to financially assist those donating their bone marrow to save the lives of cancer victims. She participated in teaching high school students in North Carolina about unique aspects of the Vietnam War from the perspective of a wife and mother who had loved ones serving there. She also played a significant role in helping her beloved Russian Orthodox Church in some of its building reconstruction efforts.

Even as the road of Mouza's life came to an end, she continued to teach those around her. The peace of mind, the forgiveness she gave and sought of others, the love and concern she exhibited towards those in her presence were all evidenced by the radiant smile upon her face at her death.

In his 1945 letter to his father, Lt. Zumwalt concluded with a description of his wedding and the words, "We faced the music which continued for another fifteen minutes." Thirty years later when publishing this letter as the first chapter of a book, he added a postscript: "I was wrong. The music never stopped." While the music has stopped for both in this life, perhaps if we listen closely, we will hear the faint refrain of music for them in the next.

Mouza is survived by three adoring children and six grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to:

*Mouza Zumwalt Good Deed Fund
The Marrow Foundation
400 Seventh Street, NW, Suite 206
Washington, DC 20004*

The Marrow Foundation has a web site with additional information for making contributions:

www.themarrowfoundation.org/HELP/financial_contributions.html

SBSA "Sweetheart" Delivers!



We are thrilled to announce
the birth of our daughter

charlotte dorothy

June 30, 2005

7 pounds, 11 ounces

19 1/2 inches

Tracy and Chris Tragos

New SBSA Director Appointed

Following Gary Blinn's resignation from the Board of Directors to pursue many personal matters, the board met via teleconference and appointed Gene Hart (Secretary-Treasurer of the SBSA) to fill out the remainder of Gary's term.

Most members know or know of Gene. He's been a board member in the past and has contributed mightily to the success of the organization over the last 10 years. He's the founder of what many of us know as "Swift Talk," now the association's official mail-reflector. Many, many current members "found" the association through this medium. Gene and his wife Gretchen, live in the Jacksonville area and are proud grandparents!

Welcome back aboard, Gene!

Last Swiftie Retirement Announcement

On 22 April 2006, Commander Lawrence J. Wasikowski, USN will be retiring after nearly 43 years of naval service.

Commander Wasikowski's career has been both long and storied to include service in fourteen pay grades, one Chief's Initiation, four Executive Officer tours, six Commanding Officer/Officer in Charge tours, three Discharges and now one Retirement.

Career chronology highlights:

- Enlisted in the U.S. Navy as a Seaman Recruit, 7 August 1963
- Promoted to Chief Petty Officer, Operations Specialist Chief, 16 October 1975
- Discharged from the Chief Petty Officer ranks for promotion to Chief Warrant Officer 2, 1 April 1978
- Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 4, 1 October 1984
- Discharged From the Chief Warrant Officer ranks for promotion to Limited Duty Officer, Lieutenant Junior Grade, 1 March 1987
- Promoted to Commander, 1 October 2001
- Retires from United States Navy on 22 April 2006

Commander Wasikowski is one of the last US Navy Vietnam veterans still in uniform, having served two tours in the Vietnam theater of operations. This service included nine months with Amphibious Ready Group Bravo conducting troop landings/support and fifteen months with Task Force 115, Commander Coastal Squadron 1, service on Patrol Craft Fast (Swift Boats).

Commander Wasikowski's awards include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Navy Small Craft Badge | Naval and Marine Corps Achievement Medal |
| Combat Action Ribbon | Presidential Unit Citation (2 awards) |
| Navy Unit Commendation (3 awards) | Meritorious Unit Commendation (2 awards) |
| Navy E Ribbon | Naval Reserve Meritorious Service Medal (2 awards) |
| National Defense Service Medal (3 eligible periods) | Vietnam Service Medal (7 campaigns) |
| Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (4 awards) | |
| Armed Forces Reserve Medal (4 awards) | Navy Expert Pistol Medal |
| RVN Gallantry Cross Medal Color with Palm (Individual and Unit) | |
| RVN Civil Actions Medal, First Class with Palm (Individual and Unit) | |
| Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal | Navy Expert Rifleman Medal |

This notice is for planning purposes, as your presence at Commander Wasikowski's retirement will help make this momentous event a success.

Commander Wasikowski's retirement ceremony will take place on Saturday 22 April 2006. The exact time and location of the ceremonies are as yet indeterminate. Once the details have been fixed, follow-up communications will be sent with the actual invitations.

Captain Guenther Feiste, USN
Commanding Officer, VTU 1810G

How About A Helping Hand, Shipmates?

Moving? Send your new Snail-Mail and email addresses to Gene Hart, 3941 Laurelwood Drive Jacksonville, FL 32257-8926. Or email Gene at- ghart@lynx.unf.edu

Save Some Money? Get your Swift Current via the internet and save your association some postage. Send an email to Gene Hart to let him know to add you to the list. Contact Gene- ghart@lynx.unf.edu

Help at the Reunion in San Diego? Email Gene- ghart@lynx.unf.edu and let him know!



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
2000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO
1650
Ser N751/5U930233
22 AUG 2005

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for your continued outstanding and professional efforts in representing our Vietnam veterans.

In my letter to you dated 2 March 2005, I encouraged you and your constituent members to design a commemorative device that recognized the courageous efforts of our "Brown Water Navy" veterans and captured the spirit and historic significance of the period in question.

A review of your commemorative device design has been completed by members of the Department of the Navy's Board of Decorations and Medals, the Navy Uniform Board, the Assistant for Legal and Legislative Matters for the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and members of my office. It has been concluded that since the design you submitted is clearly distinguishable from warfare insignia currently in use by active duty personnel, the DoN has no objection to the design. Therefore, your association may commercially produce this commemorative insignia and all veterans meeting your qualification standards may procure it. However, the U.S. Navy cannot endorse the device due to the fact that the Department of Defense and its service components cannot legally endorse private organizations or their products.

Again, thank you for affording the Navy the opportunity to review your proposed commemorative insignia. Your efforts on behalf of our veterans are greatly appreciated, and I wish you fair winds and following seas as you go forward in your endeavor.

Sincerely,

G. C. NASH
Major General, U.S. Marine Corps
Director, Expeditionary Warfare
Division (N75)

Michael A. Harris
Mobile Riverine Force Association
106 Belleview Drive
Conover, NC 28613-8957

Copy to:
NBDM WASHINGTON DC
PBR Forces Veterans Association Inc.
Swift Boat Sailors Association
OPNAV (N09D, N131U)



COMING SOON TO A SHIP'S STORE NEAR YOU!

Check out the Ship's Store at www.swiftboats.org to know when to order.

The device below has been copyrighted by all three Brown Water Navy organizations. It may be used only as approved by them.



Burke Salsi on left (*again!*), Bob "Phil" Phillips, EN2, PCF 9 and CosDiv 11 staff engineman (from WV); Roy "Mac" McCord, QM2, PCF 10 (wounded badly on PCF-10 in Sept. 69 and earned the Silver Star (from IL), (all three of us went through training together at Coronado), and Ray Bruder, SK2, USS Krishna, (from Pittsburgh, PA) .

September 2, 2005—in Greensboro. All Burke and his wife do is entertain Swifties!

Mini-Reunions In Greensboro, NC

← Two of the guys I served with in Viet Nam on the 12 boat. Names (left to right): Bill "Bulldog" Kelley, QM2 in VN, retired as Navy Commander and Tom "Brown Torpedo" Hovland, Ensign and Lt jg (OinC of PCF 12) in VN, retired as Navy Captain (also an HM1 before being commissioned).

Submitted by- Burke Salsi, RD2 (LPO). Picture was taken on August 27 in Greensboro, NC.



Navy Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward Dies

By Adam Bernstein

WASHINGTON (Washington Post) -- Retired Navy Rear Adm. Norvell G. Ward, 92, who served as a chief of naval forces in the Vietnam War during a period of escalating U.S. involvement, died July 19 in a special care unit of a retirement community in Atlantic Beach, Fla. He had congestive heart failure.

Adm. Ward graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1935 and became a much-honored submariner during World War II. He received the Navy Cross, the highest decoration for valor after the Medal of Honor, as commanding officer of the submarine *Guardfish* for sinking eight Japanese ships on one patrol.

After commanding a submarine squadron that tested the Regulus surface-fired missile, he entered the Polaris nuclear missile program in 1958. He commanded Submarine Squadron 14, the first group of Polaris subs deployed overseas, which provided a breakthrough in long-range nuclear strike capability because the subs could fire underwater.

An expert in strategic planning and war gaming, he was promoted to rear admiral in 1963. Two years later, he arrived in Saigon as chief of the Naval Advisory Group under the U.S. Military Assistance Command and soon after became commander of naval forces in Vietnam.

He oversaw the launch of river patrol boats and played a major role in implementing Operation Market Time, which tried to stop the North Vietnamese from smuggling arms along the coast.

Capable, efficient and utterly unflamboyant, Adm. Ward did not emerge as one of the vibrant personalities of the war. He turned down opportunities for promotion to vice admiral as a gesture to his wife, who had bouts of cancer and from whom he endured long separations while on assignment.

He retired from the Navy in 1973 as commander of the Caribbean Sea frontier and commandant of the 10th Naval District, based in Puerto Rico. He weathered confrontations between the Pentagon and residents over continued use of the island of Culebra as a Navy target range.

Norvell Gardiner Ward was born Dec. 30, 1912, in Indian Head, where his father was a civil service supervisor at the Naval Powder Factory. A graduate

of Henry E. Lackey High School, he received a congressional appointment to the Naval Academy in 1931. He was an all-American lacrosse player during his senior year there.

On Sept. 11, 1942, during one of his five Pacific war patrols aboard the submarine *Seadragon*, he assisted pharmacist's mate Wheeler Lipes in performing a remarkable emergency appendectomy on a seaman. Using only instruments on hand and sitting 120 feet below enemy-held waters in the China Sea, Adm. Ward's job was to place tablespoons in the seaman's side as Lipes cut through layers of muscle.

"I chose him for his coolness and dependability," Lipes told Chicago Daily News reporter George Weller in his Pulitzer Prize-winning account. "He acted as my third and fourth hands."

Adm. Ward won a series of decorations as executive officer on the submarine *Gato* before taking command of the submarine *Guardfish* in May 1943.

>From June 14 to July 31 of that year, he patrolled enemy-controlled waters, engaging in six "well planned and executed" torpedo attacks that sunk eight enemy ships totaling more than 38,000 tons, according to his Navy Cross citation.

He spent the rest of the war as assistant operations officer on the staff of the commander of Pacific submarine forces.

During the Korean War, the admiral asked for command of the destroyer *Yarnall* -- an unusual posting for a submariner at the time but one that gave him operational knowledge of a surface ship.

Besides the Navy Cross, his decorations included the Distinguished Service Medal, three awards of the Silver Star and five awards of the Legion of Merit.

A son, Marine Corps Capt. Alexander K. Ward, died in 1968 from wounds he received in Vietnam.

Survivors include his wife of 68 years, Elizabeth Kearney Ward of Atlantic Beach; three children, Norvell G. Ward Jr. of Dripping Springs, Tex., retired Navy Cmdr. William H. Ward of Tacoma, Wash., and Elizabeth Schafer of New Hartford, N.Y.; two sisters, Ora Ward and Louise Borden, both of Bethesda; 13 grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren.

A Evening On The Cua Dai

I have never recounted this in as much detail before. It sometimes made my heart race as I tried to recall the events. An even more exciting story would be from those on the 101 and 58 and those other boats and crews that came in to help that night.

---Sonny Barber

My memory has faded over the years, but it's difficult to forget the events of March 19, 1969 in what became know as "Ambush Alley" on the Cua Dai river complex south of Da Nang. For 15 hours, Lt. Bob Andretta, QM2 Bill Pfeffer and I were MIA's and, at several points during these anxiety-filled hours, I wasn't sure that we wouldn't be KIAs. This is my recollection of that evening and long night, but there are other parts of this story as well to be told that I did not witness.

The other parts of the story have the real heroes -- crew members such as Ron Wood and others on the 101 and on the 58 who saved the 101 from sinking, returned fire and helped rescue the injured. Other crews also were heroes as they were called in to join the fray, risking their lives to lay down fire many hours that night either hoping to protect us should we still be alive or avenging our possible deaths.

It was in mid March 1969 that my crew was selected to be the first to do a 3-day stint on the Cua Dai River. The tactic used was to stagger the boat patrol schedule so that there was always a fresh crew patrolling with one that had been there for a day or so.

PCF 58 with OIC Lt. Jim Winandy and crew entered the river, relieved another crew and set up a patrol schedule with my boat, PCF 101, already a day or two in the river.

The Swifts in the Cua Dai relied initially on Coastal Group 14, located near the mouth of the Cau Dai River, for a base of operations. We wanted to be careful not to get caught up river when the tide ran out.

In the late afternoon of March 19 after a run to Hoi An City, the 58 boat followed by the 101, headed down river. Not far from the shallow intersection of two Cua Dai tributaries the 58 boat spotted a fishing net partially across the river and stopped to remove it. Lt. Winandy told me to go ahead, so we pushed on and the 58 soon followed.

On board the 101 were several VN Navy personnel and Lt. Bob Andretta from CG 14. Traveling at only a few knots, I indicated to Bill Pfeffer to slow. He

A Evening On The Cua Dai (Cont.)

pulled back on the Morse controls and let the engines idle as the wake began to lift the 101 and carry us across the sand bar. The main river channel was in front of us facing the far bank. We would have turned eastward toward CG 14 from this point.

The 101 dragged bottom briefly and then drifted free. Bill quickly pushed the controls to full throttle and would soon begin the turn toward the Coastal Group near the mouth of the Cua Dai.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash and then heard the explosion. Standing to the left of the pilot's chair, I felt a blast of heat from the main cabin. I turned to look down into the cabin and flames and smoke blasted passed me. Ron Wood on the M-60 in the peak tank opened fire first. Then I heard fire from the twin and aft 50's and from the M-60's on each side of the aft deck.

As acrid, black smoke filled the pilot house, I yelled at Bill to get us out of here. Bill turned the wheel to port, but nothing happened. We were heading straight for the far bank and the enemy crew who were manning the 75mm recoilless rifle that had just pumped its first round amidships of the 101. Bill pulled back on the throttles and they wouldn't respond. My eyes were burning from staring into the blast an instant after the first recoilless rifle round hit the cabin. I later realized that the heat and flames had seared the hair off my eyebrows, arms and the front of my head.

Both doors to the pilot house were closed and smoke filled the space. It was difficult to breathe and to see.

The 101 was now at flank speed with no one at the helm heading for the south bank of the main channel -- right into the fire from the recoilless rifle.

Only seconds had passed since the first round hit. Bill and I moved toward the starboard door and opened it. We had to get away from the heat and smoke coming up from the main cabin. As we looked out the door and aft, flames and smoke were coming from the hole in the boat. The black smoke had engulfed us as we stuck our heads out the door trying to get air. Then seconds later, a second recoilless rifle round hit the boat. The concussion inside the boat was like a giant hand pushing at us both. I fell against Bill who was holding open the door and we both tumbled into the river, in water about four to five feet deep.

When I stood up and wiped the mud and water from my face, I saw the 101 racing straight for the far bank and someone standing at the after helm turning the boat (I later found out it was Ron Wood.) Bob Andretta also was knocked off the port side when the second round hit. He was standing on the catwalk some where along the port side.

We Don't Make These Things Up—Honest!

In a message dated 8/16/2005 11:29:11 A.M. Central Standard Time, marshall@usna.edu writes:

Mr. [Terry] Boone,
My name is BMC(SW) Dave Marshall, and I am currently stationed at NAVSTA Annapolis. I was one of the craftmasters on PCF 104 (which I think was Subase 1) from 1990 * 1993. I am trying to find out some info about the boat. I lost track of it after it was taken out of service around 1994. I know it is now part of the memorial in Coronado. Though I believe 104 was only a training craft if the 5 of diamonds had any significance for the boat. During a refit, we found a battle helmet with a 5 of diamonds in the band that was sealed up in a void in the v-berth. I was wondering if anyone would know the history of it or if it was completely unrelated. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Very Respectfully,
Dave Marshall
BMC(SW) USN
Craftmaster YP 688
Naval Station Annapolis

And more....

Jennifer Scott, Screaming Flea Productions
5950 6th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98109

I work for Screaming Flea Productions, a television production company in Seattle, WA. We are currently putting together a documentary where we share accounts of Vietnam Veterans' experiences with the spiritual or paranormal. I came across the swift boat page in my research, and wanted to contact you as you are the editor of the "Swift Current." I was hoping maybe you may have come across some of these stories **in your tenure as editor, and could** point me in the direction of them. If you have any information you can share with me, either stories you have heard or organizations you think might be able to help, please drop me a line or give me a call.

Thank you so much for your time!

Sincerely,
Jennifer Scott
206.763.3383 x215

A Evening On The Cua Dai (Cont.)

The 58 boat raced passed us so close we could almost touch the hull. We were yelling and screaming, but they didn't notice us. The 58 crew was busy returning fire, heading toward the 101 now streaming smoke from the starboard side.

(Ron managed to get the 101 down river about a half mile and beached it before it sank completely in the channel. Other Swifts came into the river and helped with the salvage operations and the 101 was refloated and moved to the Coastal Group. It was during the offloading and medevac of the injured, crewmember BM2 Pete Peterson and some of the VN Navy personnel, that it was discovered that the three of us were missing. The search and rescue and salvage operations ended about 0300. The March 1969 USNAVFOR VN summary says that a round hit the engine compartment which is inaccurate. Both rounds went in to the main cabin. The 101 had sufficient power such that Ron Wood jerked the engine controls from flank speed ahead to full back in one quick move and took control of the boat. The cables and connections to the pilot house helm and throttle controls were severed by the first round that hit the main cabin near the waterline.)

The three of us stood there, water up to our chests watching the boats' silhouettes shrink in the dimming light of dusk. But with the boats gone, the enemy gunners began to focus on us. Small arms fire crackled and splashes appeared around us. My eyes were still burning from the smoke and my vision was a little blurred. I felt a sting on the left side of my head and I don't know to this day if it was a bullet graze or a scratch from something in the river when I hit head first. But my hand was bloody when I wiped my head. Bill Pfeffer had a deep cut on his left finger and his finger was broken, later swelling around his wedding band.

The shooting continued. We were like targets in an arcade -- no where to run or hide. And we had only a K-bar knife that Bill had strapped on. I had no sidearm, a mistake I never made again on any river patrol.

We had to get away from the fire. I'm not sure how Bob and Bill managed to move back toward the near bank, but I dived down and pulled myself along the bottom using the roots of the trees and plants exposed on the bottom. I would come up frequently and gasp for air and the shots would begin again with splashes all around us.

We finally made it around the bend of the island out of the line of fire. We huddled there for a while, the three of us wondering what we were going to do. One thing was sure; we needed to put some more distance between us and the enemy gun crew. Another island was just 20 or 30 yards away across a channel six to eight feet deep. I was exhausted from the last swim along the river bottom. I was contemplating how I was going to cross the channel when I sensed pain in my left arm. It was then I noticed a half-dollar-sized hole in my left arm. Blood was dripping down mixed with muddy river water.

I can't remember how Bob and Bill covered the distance across the channel, but I pulled off my boots and strung them around my neck. I took off my pants and made a set of water wings just as we'd been taught during the survival swim class at the Swift Training in Coronado. It worked and I made it across. Somehow in our later moves to find a place to hide, I lost my boots and my pants.

We kept low on the banks of this island as the sun set. We heard other Swifts sweeping up and down the main channel with an almost constant barrage. Bob decided to go back around to the side of the island facing the channel to try and get the attention of the Swifts.

Bill and I huddled on the river bank for what seemed like hours, but Bob never returned. He later told us he had to hide because some VC/NVA soldiers were scouting the area, possibly looking for us. While we lay there partly on the bank and partly in the water to keep a low profile, we could hear the Swifts making one run after another firing at the area where the enemy fire had originated. At some point, an AC-47 Spooky (Puff the Magic Dragon) gunship flew around for a while spraying the area with its lights and its tracer rounds. And once in a while tracers would fly back at the aircraft. It was like having a front row seat to Fourth of July fireworks with the muzzle flashes and explosions from the Swifts and this gunship.

A Evening On The Cua Dai (Cont.)

I don't know what time all this subsided, but when it did end, Bill and I realized Bob was not returning. We needed better cover and moved low along the bank until we came to a destroyed fishing bunker, now not much more than a deep depression in the sand.

We found some vegetation and practically made a blanket with several layers that provided some camouflage, but no protection from the bugs and damp night air. We lay there for some time trying not to move, our feet in the water, mine bare because I had lost my boots.

Bill and I spoke little, but I believe we both prayed hard for some divine intervention to help get us out of this predicament. We had no real ideas except that we figured we'd have a chance of getting some attention from friendlies at first light.

Unfortunately, we did get some attention from friendlies -- during darkness -- some group with a 105 howitzer. Perhaps we were spotted moving or else the place where we decided to hide had been a frequent crossing point for VC. At any rate, we heard the thud of the howitzer and a few seconds later, we saw a splash across the river from our position, maybe 75 to 100 yards. Then another thud and another splash, this time closer. A few more rounds went off and then splashes, each closer to us than the next. I can't recall what went through my mind -- terror, the thought of being blown to bits or maybe the fact that we had cheated death by the enemy only to be killed by friendlies! Whoever was using the artillery had obviously targeted this area and had the coordinates down pat as they carefully walked the rounds across the river. I guess our praying helped because the rounds stopped, the last falling maybe 30 or 40 yards away. My heart was now pounding so hard I thought anyone within earshot might detect it.

We went back to just hiding and praying. I know we whispered to each other wondering what might have happened to Bob. The thoughts were chilling.

It seemed like many hours before dawn finally came. We knew it was time to signal for help. There was an RF/PF camp up river, probably the source of the artillery fire. We could see a watch tower from our position and we stood up and began to wave our arms toward it. Someone noticed us because they immediately began shooting at us. I grabbed Bills knife, took off my formerly white skivvies and, with my drawers on the end of the knife, waved my Fruit of the Loom surrender flag. It worked and the shooting stopped.

Then we heard the sound of small engines. It was fishing boats leaving Hoi An and other villages and heading out to sea. We waved at them, but none would come over to us. We found a log and floated out into the channel hoping one of the boats would stop.

As we floated in the channel, we noticed another figure back on the bank also waving. It was Bob and he had persuaded a boat to come over and pick him up.

The boat with Bob aboard approached us and the fishermen and Bob helped us in the rickety craft. We were elated both to be picked up and to see Bob. We had seriously considered the thought that he was dead.

I sat in the boat shivering and thanking God I was alive, that we all were alive. I turned to the fisherman steering the boat and gave him my watch. I remember he smiled and said something and nodded his head.

Within a few minutes, we approached the Coastal Group. Several Swifts were side by side, bows onto the beach. I looked over beyond these boats and there was the 101 lying over on one side. Debris littered the deck and all around. There was a huge hole in the side and what looked like hundreds of wooden pegs plugging as many bullet holes. Many of those were just beneath the starboard door where 15 hours before Bill and I had made an awkward departure. And all around were empty mortar round containers and I don't know how many used up 50-caliber machine gun barrels.

I remember several crewmembers coming up, yelling and grabbing us. It was bedlam for a few minutes. But we were all safe.

We went to the CG for a while and then Bill and I rode back to Da Nang on a Swift. We got some medical attention, a shower and some clean clothes. Bill had to have his wedding band cut off since his finger was so swollen.

A Evening On The Cua Dai (Cont.)

After an uncomfortable night's sleep, my now smaller crew and I were sent out on a patrol the next day to relieve another boat which had gone into the Cua Dai. The 24 boat had been hit by two recoilless rifle rounds while patrolling with PCF 99

Ron Wood received the Silver Star for his actions on March 19. Pete Peterson never returned to my crew after being medevaced. By the end of the long year in VN, only RD3 Larry Linkous remained of my original crew. He and I were the only two U.S. personnel on several VN Navy crew patrols in those waning weeks.

President's Corner (cont'd.)

On my end, it was a learning experience. I never had a real handle our how our young widows suffered with the loss of their husbands, the treatment they received and - more so - the demons that still haunt them today. One very troubling item, loaning a photo & his bronze star citation to a senior veterans post as a demo for a post gold star affair, a member of the committee disappeared with Steve's citation. Today, Linda is a member of the SBSA family. She would enjoy hearing from anyone who served with Steve.



Mousa Zumwalt- The SBSA was notified by Admiral Hoffmann that Mousa had passed away quietly on August 25, 2005. On September 2nd, I departed from Jim & MaryAnn Akers' home enroute to Annapolis, MD. The services for Mousa were held at the Naval Academy Chapel at 0930 on Saturday. It was one of the most moving services I have ever attended. Prior to the services, I introduced myself to James Zumwalt, son, and extended the Swift Boat Sailors Associates condolences. Mousa was buried along side "Her Sailor" Admiral Elmo Zumwalt at the Naval Academy Cemetery. The Board of Directors approved a donation to the Mousa Zumwalt Good Deed Fund, part of The Bone Marrow Foundation.

Brown Water Navy Combatant Crewmen Insignia- At this point most members are aware that the Navy Awards Board and the Chief of Naval Operations have approved our commemorative insignia. A letter of approval was received from Major General G.C. Nash, USMC, Director Expeditionary Warfare Division, Pentagon. To limit the device to our Vietnam boat crews only, the name has been changed to The Vietnam Combatant Craft Crewmen Insignia. Samples have been manufactured and will be inspected by the Task Forces Committee for production approval. This device has been three years in negotiations and, according to Navy, is the first time ever veterans have approached them on an issue such as ours.

President's Corner (cont'd.)

To our crews who paid the price in blood, sweat, and tears—***Wear It With Pride!*** A **BRavo ZULU** to artist **Thomas Nielsen** who worked with the committee to design the insignia. Tom is a member of the Mobile Riverine Force Association.

Special Board of Directors Conference- Due to the destruction, loss of life and displacement of thousands, the officers of the SBSA have approved a contribution to the Navy/Marine Corps Relief Fund of \$5,000. We elected to go with the Navy / Marine Corps Relief to assist the many Navy Families affected by the hurricanes.

Reunion 2007, The wheels have begun to turn setting up for the San Diego Reunion. Presently, "The Chief" and Military Reunion to Remember are in process of locating a hotel on the water front of San Diego Bay. We are trying to stay out of the Mission Valley area.

Very respectfully,
Tommy "Trees" Forrest

Starting All Over Again....?

WASHINGTON (September 22, 2005) -- *News reports about a large anti-war rally in Washington this weekend are deeply troubling to the new national commander of the nation's largest organization of combat veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.*

"Our concern isn't with fellow Americans exercising their First Amendment rights to be heard," said Jim Mueller, the VFW's new commander-in-chief.

"Our concern is how their political protest messages will be perceived by the 2.2 million American military personnel who protect and defend those freedoms daily," he explained. "Our concern is for the millions of military family members who are standing strong at home while their loved ones are in harm's way. And our concern is that these protests will divide America just as they did in the 1960s."

Four decades ago, America turned its back on an entire generation of servicemen and women because the country couldn't disassociate the war from the warrior. Returning troops from Vietnam were told to change into civilian clothes before mustering out because "peace" protesters would assault them verbally and physically. Veterans were made to feel ashamed of their military service because, in the public's eyes, theirs was an unpopular war.

Mueller, a Vietnam veteran from O'Fallon, Mo., said no war is popular --- most especially to those doing the fighting --- and the decision to commit the military is not one that's taken lightly by the White House or Congress.

"Our nation was viciously attacked on Sept. 11, 2001, by armed terrorists who continue to have no political agenda other than to kill as many freedom-loving people as possible," he said.

"I will leave it to the historians to decide whether our actions in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere have made America a safer place," he said, "but one thing I will say, however, is that ours has never been a country to turn the other cheek or one that sits idly by while others suffer. History has proven that America can be your best friend or your worst nightmare; the choice is yours."

All 2.4 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliaries understand there's a price to freedom that only those who have worn the uniform understand. And that America has remained great for 229 years because of the service and sacrifice of generations of ordinary people who donned the uniform of our country and performed extraordinary deeds on behalf of all citizens.

"The political protesters of the '60s didn't end their war and neither will this new generation. They will, however, achieve the same result: they will devastate troop morale," he said.

"Morale means everything on the field of battle, but good morale starts at home, and that's why the VFW is so concerned with this weekend's protest and those that are occurring elsewhere, most notably outside Walter Reed Army Medical Center," he said.

"These protesters need to channel their energies into helping America stay great and not by driving a wedge back into a country that has provided phenomenal support to its military since the first Gulf War."

Swift Boat Veteran's Motorcycle Club



Do you remember the feeling of seeing your relief boat on the horizon or the pride of watching a Swift pass by as it headed out on patrol. Whether or not you knew the crew, you waved, feeling the camaraderie of the shared mission and unknown dangers that lay ahead.

There is a similar feeling when you cruise down the road and you see an approaching biker; it doesn't matter the make of the bike – your sharing a like experience and you acknowledge each other with a "low" five and a nod. The pride in your ride, the rushing wind, the sound of your engine, the passing scenery, the fragrance of God's creation, the freedom, the danger, it's almost like flying, and you are, but just a little closer to the earth.

There are many parallels to riding a motorcycle around the curves and over the hills of a country road to taking a Swift over swells and around the curves of a river. You always conscious of the potential hazard at any turn, but you love the ride.

The Swift Boat Veteran's Motorcycle Club was started for much the same reason. Joining up with a Swift buddy on the road is the closest thing to coming along side another Swift in Nam. You appreciate each other for the skill it takes to ride; for the close calls we've all experienced – and those still waiting around the bend; and the mission doesn't end until you get where you're going.

If you've got a bike larger than a 750cc, and you are a Swift Boat veteran, you qualify to join the club. If you don't have a bike, there is no better time than now to get one. You only live once, so join us as we "live to ride."

We are up to 20 members and we are spread all around the country and the world. Visit our website at www.swiftboatveterans.com and check out the "Then and Now" photos of some of our members. If you are interested in joining, send me an E-mail at: SneskobM2@aol.com.

Above see (R-to-L) David Borden, Jim Collins and Billy Carwile proudly wearing their Swift Boat patches at Rolling Thunder 2005.

Swift Boat Sailors Association Inc.
21128 Hunt Club Drive
Harper Woods, Michigan 48225-1717

***"First U. S. Patrol Craft
In Vietnam"***

