Voiceover: This program is sponsored by the United States Naval Institute.
(Theme music)
Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.
(Applause)
Williams: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with editor Edward J. Marolda discussing his book, *Combat at Close Quarters: An Illustrated History of the US Navy in the Vietnam War.* I'm your host Jay Williams, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. It's sponsored by the US Naval Institute. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. The enormous scale of land operations in the Vietnam War and the focus of the news media on land campaigns often leads us to forget that America's direct military involvement in Vietnam was significantly escalated by the result of a conflict at sea. In August 1964 evidence suggested that North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked two US Navy destroyers, the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy, patrolling near their coast in the Gulf of Tonkin. This prompted the United States to immediately rapidly ramp up its involvement on the Vietnamese Peninsula. Throughout the Vietnam War the US Navy played a major role in important combat missions, including air operations, coastal surveillance, surface gun fire support, and logistics. With a total of 1.8 million sailors serving in Southeast Asia during the conflict, the navy provided the US Military with key strategic support to conduct extensive campaigns both from the air and on land by controlling the seas, by direct attack, and by standing as a constant reminder of American military might. In the edited collection, *Combat at Close Quarters*, Dr. Edward Marolda brings together four renowned historians, Norman Polmar, R. Blake Dunnavent, John Darrell Sherwood, and Richard A. Mobley, who interpret the US Navy's major combat operations and intelligence initiatives in Southeast Asia including the leadership of Vice Admiral Elmo Zumwalt Jr., Operation Linebacker--the bombing and mining campaign against Hanoi--and intelligence efforts from the Gulf of Tonkin incidents to the end of the war. Featuring over 200 images drawn from the navy archives as well as private collections, the book is a stunningly illustrated and deeply informative overview of the navy's major contributions to one of the most important and complex conflicts in American history. Dr. Edward J. Marolda served as the acting director of naval history and senior historian of the navy. In 2017 the Naval Historical Foundation honored him with its Commodore Dudley W. Knox Naval History Lifetime Achievement Award. He has authored, coauthored, or edited nine works on the US Navy's experience in Vietnam, interviewed important military leaders in support of the US Naval Institute's Oral History Program, and taught courses on the Vietnam War and the Cold War at Georgetown University. He holds degrees in history from Pennsylvania Military College, Georgetown University, and George Washington University. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Edward J. Marolda back to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.
(Applause)
Marolda: Thank you for that gracious introduction. It's a pleasure to be here tonight. And I want to thank the Pritzker Military Museum and Library for sponsoring other historians, military historians. It's an important part of the historiographical story of this country. The military is part and parcel of what we do and what we have done. So I really appreciate the support they lend to that. Many of us Americans know about the Vietnam War through the television screen or the movie screen. There's a vivid picture of soldiers slogging through the rice paddies in *Deer Hunter* or *Platoon,* of marines fighting their

way through the city of Hue in 1968 during the Tet Offensive. And in Ken Burns' recent documentary--I'm sure most of you have seen that--the most focus is on the army and the marine. Now, they took the most casualties, so that's a logical approach, but my point tonight is to make the observation that the US Navy was every bit as important as the other services in the conduct, the execution, and the outcome of the Vietnam War. In fact the navy was involved way back, way back when. If you go back to August of 1950--now this is before you think the Vietnam War began--we were supporting the French, but we went over there with advisors. The first US Naval advisors went to South Vietnam in August of 1950. And the very end of that episode of the US Navy's involvement was in April of 1975, the evacuations of Pan Am Pan and Saigon. A twenty-five-year period. During the war itself, the US Navy lost 2,565 sailors. 229,000 sailors served in the combat theater throughout the war. This was a significant major effort. Eleven years before the marines landed at Da Nang in March of 1965, the navy was already involved in operations off Vietnam or in Southeast Asia. Even during the French Indochina war, '50 to '54, the US Navy was there because President Eisenhower at one point considered coming to the aid of the French who were battling the Viet Minh at a place called Dien Bien Phu. And there was even consideration of using nuclear weapons. Well, we had aircraft carriers that had nuclear-armed aircraft standing by. Well, it never happened. But the 7th Fleet, the major fleet we have out there in the Pacific was out there at that point. At the end of the French Indochina War we had a massive migration of peoples from Northern and Southern Vietnam. Well, a number of those people in Northern Vietnam decided they did not want to live under the Ho Chi Minh regime, the communist regime, and they needed assistance. In fact it was part of the Geneva Agreement of July 1954 that whomever wanted to move to whatever zone--the north where the communists were in control or the south where the non-communists were in control. So there was movement back and forth. The US Navy mounted a massive seaborne effort to bring whomever wanted to leave North Vietnam to Southern Vietnam. This was called the Passage to Freedom. That took place in 1954 and '55. Here's a sailor with Vietnamese. We had babies on board the ships that were born on board the ships. It was quite a cultural shock for many of the Vietnamese and for our sailors as well. During the 1950s and 60s--in fact throughout that period, we would deploy naval task forces into the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand and elsewhere, to make--have a presence if you will, to exert some influence on developments ashore. And the naval advisors, as I mentioned, August of 1950—from that point on we had naval advisors helping to develop a Vietnam Navy, VNN, the abbreviation. And in the early 1960s we had some very fired-up young naval advisors. They had heard President John F. Kennedy in his inaugural speech say that we need to fight for--pay any price--a new generation. He called for a new generation to pay any price, bear any burden for freedom. A lot of young folks, myself included, were inspired by that message by our president. One in particular young officer was Lieutenant Dale Meyerkord, a naval advisor who was assigned to a South Vietnamese river assault group in the Mekong Delta. Well, he was really inspired to go out there and win the cause--to hold back the communists was his feeling--and help the South Vietnamese people to develop their country. He was a brave young man. In fact he adopted the radio call sign of horn blower, from the 19th century fictitious Royal Navy commander Horn Blower. He went out to the people, and he delivered goods to the people. He brought medical care to the people, but he was also a fearless warrior. He was involved in some thirty different combat operations with his South Vietnamese unit. He won the Navy Cross for one of those operations, his exploits. Unfortunately he was killed, and he was the first US Naval officer to die in combat in South Vietnam. Others were there long before the marines came ashore or even the army came ashore. The Navy Nurse Corps was involved.

Lieutenant Commander Bobbi Hovis--she had served in the Korean War as a flight nurse. Well, she went to South Vietnam in late 1963. Not a good time to be in South Vietnam because you had coups against the government. President Xiem was the government, head of the government. And there was a coups in 1963 that ultimately dethroned him, and he and his brother were killed. Well, she was there for that, and her hotel was pockmarked with gunfire. She had tank fire going off. She had all kinds of military action in the streets. Rounds were hitting wherever she--close to here. She was not hit fortunately. Others were not so lucky. Anne Reynolds and three other navy nurses were injured in terrorist attacks in the end of 1964, for which they earned--here's a picture of Lieutenant Meyerkord on the right on one of his river assault boats. Here's Anne Reynolds, navy nurse, and as I mentioned three others who were awarded Purple Hearts for their bravery under fire. And they were wounded. Throughout the war 425 navy nurses served in Vietnam in station hospitals ashore in Saigon or Da Nang or onboard hospital ships, sanctuary, and repose. There's a curiosity with the women in Vietnam as far as the navy. Other than the navy nurses, the navy leadership would only allow two non-nurse women to be in Vietnam at any one time, which was strange 'cause the other services had hundreds of women who served there. Some folks, including the head of the nurse corps--a female--was opposed to women being in combat situations, so that's how that resulted. The Tonkin Gulf incident of August 1964, many people see as the real start of the big unit war, and there's good support for that. To give you some of the detail, on the 2nd of August, the USS Maddox, a destroyer, was patrolling along the coast of North Vietnam. It was gathering intelligence, which sips and planes do all the time, but there was another mission as well, which was to apply subtle pressure against the North Vietnamese regime so that they would sense the American firepower was about to come on to them and they would back away from supporting the Viet Cong in Southern Vietnam. So they were along the coast. Three North Vietnamese PT boats came out, fired torpedoes, fired deck guns, one round of which hit Maddox. It's now in the Navy Museum in Washington D.C. in three pieces. Other than that they didn't hit the ship, and the ship went to the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin. Well, President Johnson was really baffled. Who would dare attack the US Navy on the ocean, you know, wide ocean open--wide-open ocean? And so he sent Turner Joy back with Maddox two nights later. Again--now they reported being under attack, and there's often some confusion about whether this whole thing was a fake or not. There is no doubt of the 2nd of August. We have images of the PT boats. We have the bullet, as I mentioned. There's intelligence that was gathered. The trouble is, the second incident on the 4th of August--me included--many historians thought for many years there had been an attack. The evidence is now compelling there was no North Vietnamese attack on the 4th of August. But Johnson and company didn't know that, and so he launched a retaliatory air strike on North Vietnam on the 5th of August. The national security agency—they're more in the news now than they used to be--but they initially reported there had been a second attack. When they realized they goofed, they had to walk back the cat. Well, you don't tell the President of the United States, "Oops, sorry, we screwed up," but that's in effect what happened. So anyway, the attack went off. So this was the first major strike against North Vietnam. More importantly, because most of us believed--the Congress passed it unanimously, the Senate with only two votes dissenting, the support of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which basically gave President Johnson the wherewithal to fight the war in Southeast Asia. So the--and this was a period of great escalation. We were trying to put pressure on North Vietnam. The destroyer was one aspect of that. We also supported South Vietnamese boats to run up to North Vietnam, bombard targets ashore. This was called Operation 34 Alpha. So the North Vietnamese were ticked off at these PT boats, which they couldn't catch. But they could catch the Maddox; that's why they came out

after it. So beginning in--none of this was working. If anything the north was more determined to support the Viet Cong in the South in this period they started sending troops down in larger units. So as part of this escalatory approach and this type of combat or strategic theory was all the rage in Washington during this period. Political scientists and others love the term “graduated escalation”. So we don’t have to nuke North Vietnam. We just apply a little pressure, bomb some targets way in the South, move up a little higher, and sooner or later Uncle Ho will cry uncle. Uncle Ho never cried uncle. So he got to a certain point--well, what’s the next step? The next step was to launch a major systematic air campaign against North Vietnam. It’s called Operation Rolling Thunder. You get the message here: Rolling Thunder, the lightening will come after. For this campaign, it was a navy air force operation and the marine cops was involved as well. For a while they were operating sort of together, but it didn’t work out quite well. So admiral--the commander in chief of the Pacific decided we're gonna give this--we're gonna break it up into root packages, they were called. You can see on the screen, root packages 6A and 6B. Well, one went to the General Westmoreland from south Vietnam with air force aircraft. The navy was responsible for 2, 3, 4, and 6B, obviously closer to the water. The air force had 5 and 6A. This was a division of labor, and it lasted throughout the war basically. One aspect--and these were aircraft carriers was the navy’s part in this, from a position in the Gulf of Tonkin called Yankee Station, navy carriers--for most of the war you had either three or four carriers operating from Yankee Station launching one hundred plane strikes into north Vietnam called Alpha Strikes. You had fighters, attack aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, electronic intelligence gathering, all kinds of aircraft doing these alpha strikes. The guy in charge--think back, I mentioned was Ulysses S. Grant Sharp. Yes, one of his descendants was Ulysses S. Grant, or one of his long-lost relatives. Now he was theoretically in charge of all US Military Forces in the vast Pacific, including Southeast Asia. But in reality he wanted to focus on the air war. He was a navy air--a natural. But the reality of the situation throughout the Vietnam War was the bombing operations, the targeting, the execution orders came from Washington. President Johnson was not about to give up control of these operations to the military. He and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and other civilians would gather every Tuesday for lunch, where they would go down the list the military provide and select targets. Johnson once boasted that the military couldn’t bomb an outhouse without his permission. So they control the air war from Washington. They at first faced a North Vietnamese air defense that was anything but robust. This was a fairly rural country. But it didn’t take long before the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China was shipping in all kinds of war materials. By the end of Rolling Thunder there was some 8,000 anti-aircraft weapons in North Vietnam. 150 MIG aircraft jet fighters, forty surface-to-air missile sites. And this is interesting because the navy intelligence picked up these missile batteries being built much like the Cuban Missile Crisis, and they wanted to take them out before the missiles were operational. And the word from Washington was, "No, don't do that. You might kill some Soviet advisors on these--working these systems." So they waited until they were all set up and started shooting down our planes, they authorized them to be struck. Another factor was the People's Republic of China. Unlike in Korea where the Chinese came from China into Northern Korean and then attacked us, in Vietnam they were basically already there. They had told Ho Chi Minh and his government even before the war, "If the Americans cause you any trouble, we've got your back." And they did. So during the war some 320,000 Chinese People’s Liberation Army soldiers served in Northern Vietnam. They manned the anti-aircraft guns, they repaired roads and bridges that we were bombing, built fortifications, and freed up that many North Vietnamese troops to go south and fight. Very significant support. One of the things our guys had to do to go after these SAM

sites was called Operation Iron Hand, where we would try to find where the missile batteries were, and we would launch strike missiles, anti-radar--we'd go for the radars. Once you knock out the radar, the missiles are unguided. Very dangerous work. And a young man who earned the Medal of Honor was Estocin. He repeatedly went after these sites and was very successful until the last mission. He paid with his life for that. Another unfortunate occurrence in the naval air war against North Vietnam were aircraft carrier fires. This is a very--carriers were loaded with ammunition and fuel, and you've got planes taking off and landing all the time. Well, on three separate occasions: in 1966, the Oriskany had a fire. In 1967 the Forestall suffered a fire. In 1969 the Enterprise suffered a--206 sailors died during these fires. Aircraft were destroyed, and in the case of Forestall it had to go back to get repaired. They were all back in operation after a period, but still, the most losses the navy suffered in the air war were these fires. Another aspect of the air war was the search and rescue capability. You had pilots getting shot down into northern Vietnam, into Laos, into the Gulf of Tonkin. So the search and rescue forces the navy had--we had ships that would do this. We had helicopters that would fly inland or pick people up out of the water. Very--we valued life, and obviously. So we went after these folks and brought many of them out. One really dramatic episode--and some of you have probably heard about it--but a young lieutenant named Dieter Dengler was shot down in Laos in 1966. He was in captivity with other prisoners including a few Americans. They tried several escape attempts. They finally succeeded. He and another American headed out for the jungle. The other guy was attacked by villagers and killed. He still got away. And he was for about a month out in the jungle. He was just about ready to give up. He was dehydrated. And he laid on a big rock, and here comes an American helicopter overhead, and he was rescued. So it was a close thing. That's Admiral Sharp, the Commander in Chief Pacific. Here's a MIG-21, the first line Soviet-made aircraft given to the North Vietnamese. These are surface-to-air missile batteries. You can see the missile launchers on their pads. There's the Forestall fire. The navy learned a lesson from the Forestall. We had some guys who were spraying water onto the fire. Others were spraying foam. Well, both of those neutralized each other. So after, they came out with a film that was used as a training device for many years afterward to show here's what you don't do. So the navy learned from that experience. Here's Dieter Dengler after his return to humanity. You can tell he's really sunburned and dehydrated and very thin. If you want to see a movie about that--some of you may have already--but it's called *Rescue Dawn* with Christian Bale as the actor. It's a fine movie. In the entire Vietnam War 160 naval personnel were captured and returned. Nine men died in captivity. You know some of the names--James Stockdale, the vice presidential candidate a few years back, Senator Jeremiah Denton from Alabama, John McCain in the news of late. Another very interesting POW was Seaman Apprentice Douglas Hegdahl. He was a young sailor--I think he was petty officer third class--and he was on board a ship, the USS Canberra, and he was told when the ship fires they don't want anybody on deck. Well, like all young sailors, he disobeyed orders, went up on deck. The guns fired, Hegdahl gets knocked overboard and treads water for about a half hour. He's finally picked up and brought to North Vietnam in captivity. Well once he got there to the Hanoi Hilton, what it was called, most of the POWs were officers. Well, here's this young enlisted guy, and so the Vietnamese thought, "Oh, we'll make propaganda here because he's part of the proletariat, the working class." And so they started to interrogate him, but he played dumb. He played so dumb that after a while that the North Vietnamese dismissed him and said-- they called him the incredibly stupid one. But he was not stupid. Young Hegdahl memorized the names of 256 POWs, all their data, when they went down, that they were alive, and to the tune of "Old McDonald Had a Farm". He had a great memory, but he needed some device to remember the information. At one

point the Vietnamese wanted to release him, give him early release. He said, "No way. Unless everybody else gets out, I'm not going." But the officers in charge of him said, “You’ve got to go 'cause you’ve got all this information in your head. You’ve got to get back and let people know who's here alive, who's not." So he did that. He was a boon to naval intelligence. Great story. Well, the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign came to an end. In March of--31st of March 1968, President Johnson of course went on TV and said I will not run for reelection, number one. Number two, I want to talk to the Vietnamese so I’m gonna stop bombing below the 91th parallel of Vietnam. But the Rolling Thunder campaign continued to the end of October but in a diminished state. The Rolling Thunder campaign was a failure. We made it very difficult and very painful for the enemy to transport troops and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to South Vietnam, but we did not stop that flow. Also one of the objects was to pressure North Vietnam to give up its support for the Viet Cong. That didn’t work as well. Now here's an example. Here's Hegdahl sweeping. They let him sweep the courtyard. In the meantime when they weren’t looking, he was putting sand in the gas tanks of vehicles that were on the compound. So he was quite a hero. Here's an example of what I'm trying to--you can’t see it very well, but in the upper right-hand corner there's a rain that has just disgorged a large troop of North Vietnamese troops. They’re walking down this road heading for South Vietnam. Well, if you look all around, you see the results of our bombing campaigns. Big holes in the rice paddies. Does that stop this troop from moving? And if by chance a bomb hit a road they would patch it up in no time. That sort of speaks to the difficulty of that. Okay, the other aspect of going into South Vietnam--the navy mounted a coastal patrol of the 1,200-mile coastline of South Vietnam. It was the navy, the Vietnam navy, and the US Coast Guard was there in strength. For quite a while both the navy and the army said there is not infiltration by sea. But in February of 1965 their heads were turned around because South Vietnamese and US advisors found a hundred-ton North Vietnamese trawler pulled up on the beach in Central Vietnam disgorging weapons and ammo and the rest of it. At that point they said, “Yeah, there is infiltration by sea.” As we now know two years before that the North Vietnam had really been pumping stuff into the south by sea. So this coastal patrol, which was called Operation Market Time--initially they had some tough going, but eventually it was very effective. Of the fifty North Vietnamese trawlers that tried to get though, either they were spotted and aborted their mission, went back to North Vietnam, or kept on coming and got bombed and got to the beach. Only two really got their cargos through. A classic mission of coastal patrol happened late in the war in 1972, when the USS Sculpin--now you don’t hear of submarines in the Vietnam War. But here’s a good example. Sculpin was an attack submarine, and we had trouble tracking these trawlers coming from North Vietnam all the way down to the Mekong Delta. So how about a submarine? They’ve got a periscope. They’re not gonna be spotted. Sure enough Sculpin tracked this trawler coming through from North Vietnam down through the South China Sea all the way around to the Mekong Delta unseen. The North Vietnamese did not know they were being spotted. Well as the ship decided they would go forth, they went for the shore, the Sculpin radioed, "Come out and get 'em." And the US and Vietnamese ships came out and sank it. This was the coastal patrol, which as I said as very effective. Unfortunately the enemy had a plan B. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was really plus-ed up to carry the traffic south, and the North Vietnamese and the Chinese convinced the government of Cambodia to open the port of Sihanoukville to their merchant ships. So these ships would come to Sihanoukville, unload military arms, and with the connivance of the Cambodian government, they would then go to the Vietnamese border and the Viet Cong would take charge of the munitions. For years the CIA said, "Nah, nah, that's not happening." The navy and the other military were saying, “Yeah, it is happening.” So

that's coastal patrol. The river patrol--now many of you probably remember *Apocalypse Now* with a river patrol boat going up the Mekong River with a guy water skiing on the back. Well, for years when I used to say when I gave talks, "Well this is ridiculous. They're in a war; they weren't water skiing." Well, I have since talked to a lot of PBR sailors saying, "Yes we used to go water skiing on occasion. Not all the time, but it happened." The rive patrol force was very important to the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta is basically a waterway, when you've got canals, rivers, mangrove swamps. There's only one road, Route 4. So it's basically a water environment critical for transportation, for movement. So the navy went in there and established in 1966 Task Force 116 doing Operation Game Warden. The PBRs thirty-two-foot patrol boats armed with 50 caliber machine guns, 60mm machine guns, grenade launchers 40mm, and a radar. And usually in pairs of two they'd go up and down the rivers patrolling sectors, stopping the Vietnamese to see if they had proper papers. Here is a trawler that has been sunk trying to get ashore with war materials. Here's the Mekong Delta. It's probably hard to see on this map, but there are many waterways throughout this whole area. Here's a river patrol boat, a PBR, doing what they did, which was inspecting sampans at juncs for contraband, any arms, weapons, checking papers, the rest of it. They controlled the major rivers, so the Mekong Delta. In additions to the PBRs you had helicopters. They're called the Sea Wolves Squadron. You could not go along these rivers with foliage coming down to the water without air support. You would be sitting ducks all the time. So these Sea Wolves helicopters were a critical part of that. The object was to interdict the enemy who was trying to move supplies and reinforcements. One particular fellow in charge here--and here's an example of how young enlisted sailors really get to be in command of important operations. A boatswains mate First Class James Williams was one such. He was in charge of a two-boat section. And they were going along the river, they spotted a sampan, fire at them and go into this cove. Well, he went right into the cove after them and discovered there was a hornet's nest of Viet Cong unloading boats, going across the river, whatnot. Instead of stopping and turning around and going back, he just went full-speed ahead. He and the other boat right through the concentration. They were knocking people out of boats; of course they're firing in all directions. He gets to the their end. He comes back, and they do it again. He calls in air support. When the air support arrived, they went in a third time. So they destroyed some fifty enemy craft and who knows how many they killed. For that exploit James Williams was awarded the Medal of Honor. Here's President Johnson putting the medal around his neck. And Johnson had a comment. He said, "Great going, sailor, but you sure have a thick neck." The next force in the Mekong Delta was an army/navy affair. Those of you who have studied your history, you know that during the civil war you had navy vessels, iron clads, on the Mississippi River working with General Grant and his forces. In fact I just finished a biography of General Grant. They worked hand in glove very successfully. Well, General Westmoreland thought, "Gee, wouldn't it be neat if we did something similar in the Mekong Delta?" Called on the army and the navy to supply the boats and the sailors and the troops. So it's called the Mobile Riverine Force, the MRF. Two brigades of the 9th infantry division--that was Westmoreland's division in WWII, so he had an affinity for that unit. They supplied two brigades of infantry. The navy supplied monitors. Here's a monitor. This is the battleship of the MRF if you will. All kinds of 40mm weapons, 50 calibers, grenade launchers, mortars. There were also armored troop carriers. These are all landing craft from WWII that were armored and covered over and put lots of weapons on. Now the object of the Mobile Riverine Force was not to pacify, not to win hearts and minds. It was to surround, with the help of the army, main force Viet Cong units and destroy those units. And when they were first in battle 1967 they destroyed a lot of enemy units. Here's a very grim picture of

the result of one of their operations. The--if you want to get a graphic image of what the Mobile Riverine Force soldiers and sailors did, on Netflix there is a program called *Brothers at War*, which is a number of soldiers basically, but they talk about the navy as well. It's a pretty good documentary on what happened there. During 1968 when all of South Vietnam exploded with the enemy attacking just about every city in South Vietnam, the Mobile Riverine Force was instrumental in retaking just every one of those large population centers in the Mekong Delta—My Tho, Can Tho, Binh Long, and Ben Tre. The--now that was earlier in the war. When you get to 1968--this is after Tet--the army was not particularly happy with what the navy was doing to support the war effort. So they got a new commander in as commander naval forces Vietnam. His name was Vice Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. He was a different breed of cat. First of all he got together with General Abrams, who was in charge after Westmoreland, and he and Abrams got along famously. Abrams said, "Look I want the navy to start really doing more. What can you do?" Well, here is Admiral Zumwalt. He was a very striking figure. He was brave as all get-out. He was shot at many times. Whenever a base would be hit, he'd be there the next morning on a helicopter to see how the guys are doing. Real people person. Well, he decided we're gonna take a different approach. Instead of just having the PBRs go up and down those big rivers, 'cause the enemy is going through the little rivers, we're gonna put barriers up on the Cambodian border, one PBR after another with air support and other support. That's number one. Number two, we're gonna go into the deep Mekong Delta, areas that had long been Viet Cong strongholds, and we're gonna disrupt life for them there. And he did that. It's called the Sealord's Campaign, Southeast Asia Lake Ocean River Delta Strategy. Very effective that year, but there was some factors that helped him out. Number one, the Viet Cong had been hurt badly during Tet. They suffered many losses, so they're kind of on their back foot. That was the height of American naval power in South Vietnam. We had 38,000 sailors there plus all their boats and whatnot. Plus he was--Abrams thought Vietnamization--turning the war over to the Vietnamese--was very important, as did the secretary of defense, Lare. And Zumwalt started picking up on that, so he started doing the same thing, turning the war over to the Vietnam Navy. He turned over hundreds of navy PBRs, monitors, armored troop carries, swift boats and the rest. It's called accelerated turnover to the Vietnamese. Now here's an example. And swift boats had been used on the coastal patrol. Well, the coastal patrol didn't need them anymore. The coastal patrol was effective. So he said, "You're going into the rivers. And these swift boats went into the deep Mekong Rivers. You see that boat out front, PCF94? Guess who's boat that is.
Audience member: John Kerry.
Marolda: John Kerry, that's correct. He--he won a Silver Star, couple of Purple Hearts. He was there for four months in Vietnam. And Zumwalt's very innovative the way he did things. He said, "We can't put any bases up. There's no solid ground that's not taken up already by a Vietnamese town. We're gonna put these barges out there in the middle of the river." It's called Operation Sea Float. So you've got ammunition barges, birthing and messing barges, everything you could need. And you'd think, aren't they vulnerable to enemy attack? They would have been if the guys weren't throwing grenades in the water all the time. And the current was very swift there, so they never really sustained a major attack. He also did another accomplishment. This is called the Rung Sat Special Zone, otherwise known as the forest of assassins. It's a swampy mangrove area between the South China Sea and Saigon. Now Saigon was the major port for supplying all of Southern Vietnam. Critical, critical place. If the enemy had been able to interdict that forty-five-mile river through the swamp, it would have been a different story. Took a long time. We had minesweeping boats that were sunk. We had ambushes on merchant ships. We had seventeen merchant sailors killed. A lot of navy people were killed, but

eventually by 1968 we had secured that Rung Sat Zone. So it was a success. Here's a turnover of boats to the Vietnam Navy. PBRs. okay, the last segment I want to talk about, and it's one of the chapters in the book *Combat at Close Quarters*, is naval intelligence. Now a lot of what had been written about naval intelligence by my coauthor Richard Mobley--he's been in the intelligence world for quite a while--a lot of this stuff was not unclassified until very recently. So a lot of these are new insights about the contribution of naval intelligence. I mentioned the Maddox and the Turner Joy episode in 1964. Well, we had photo decryptors onboard the Maddox, and they were listening in on the radios to North Vietnamese transitions. They were--everybody in the whole Pacific command knew that those three PT boats were coming out to attack. The intelligence was that good and the timely. So that was one aspect. You had these guys on board some of the ships and also at shore bases in the Philippines and elsewhere. Here's another aspect of naval intelligence. This is a naval photoreconnaissance plane. If you look at the bottom of the aircraft you see all those windows. Those are for cameras, and they would take images of North Vietnam and bring them back to the ship to these guys, photo interpreters, PIs. They would pour over miles and miles of this photographic imagery to locate enemy defenses and the rest. Here's another aspect that's little known. You remember the Pueblo was attacked, seized by the North Koreans in 1968. Well this, the ship, the Jamestown and the Oxford, two similar ships were off Vietnam during much of the war gathering intelligence of enemy radio transmissions and the rest. Here's a fellow that--oh, and I should mention SEALs. We normally think of SEALs as the TV show--they want to blow stuff up. But their primary mission in Vietnam was to gather intelligence, and from a very local level. Find out who the Viet Cong leaders were, the tax collectors. So the SEALs went out and did intelligence. A very famous well-deserved hero I think of the intelligence community is a fellow named Jack Graf. Here's his image He was called a NILO, naval intelligence liaison officer. Many of the provinces that had water would have a NILO assigned to it to gather intelligence. Well he was--he didn't do it the benign way. He didn't sit back in the headquarters. He at one point was in an observation aircraft just for the ride. The pilot got shot and was unconscious. He took over control of the aircraft and landed it. He had no license, but he was just a brave guy, and he did that. Well, he went up in another plane a year later. This time the plane was shot down. He was captured, but he still fought on because he made an escape, he got out, he made it to a river and jumped in, was swimming away, but either he drowned or he was shot. But he died in the line of duty. So the navy's intelligence community was vital to naval operations in the war, saving lives and the rest. The final episode--remember Rolling Thunder ended on the 31st of October 1968, and we had a hiatus there. Well, in 1972 when North Vietnam launched its massive Easter offensive into South Vietnam, one of the responses was they restarted the air campaign. Now it's called the Linebacker campaign. And one of the navy's major contributions was to mine the harbors of North Vietnam. Now the navy had been, not screaming, but calling for that from the very beginning of the war. "Why do you let these Soviet freighters go back and forth into Vietnam delivering surface-to-air missiles? Put a blockade." Well, the Johnson Administration would not do that for fear of who knows what, fear of the Soviet Union. Finally President Nixon told Admiral Moore, naval officer--in fact, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Here's your shot. You guys have been calling for that for years. Mine the harbors." Which he did. I remember as a young historian of naval history sitting in a little cubbyhole eating my yogurt for lunch, and right next to me was an office that was given to Admiral Radford, a former naval officer, four-star admiral. He got a call from President Nixon, and all I could tell, "Yes, sir, my full support. Give 'em hell." So that was the mining--a ship did not enter or leave North Vietnamese harbors for the rest of the war. Very effective use of naval power. The navy had also learned during the Rolling Thunder

campaign things to improve on, including weaponry. We had a lot of what were called iron bombs, just bombs with a fuse--you drop it, it hits. But we went into what's--we're all familiar with it now, precision-guided munitions. One shot into one target, and that's it. And that began in this Linebacker period, the campaign. And one of the --the Thanh Hoa Bridge--it's in North Vietnam--was impervious to American bombs. The air force, the navy went at it many times unsuccessfully. It stood or it was repaired. PGNs finally took it down in 1972. Another thing that they had learned was MIG engagements. During Rolling Thunder it was like a two-to-one ratio. We'd knock down two MIGS; we'd lose one of our own. Well, as you--if you saw Tom Cruise you kwon that the Top Gun School was started at Miramar Naval Air Station in California. The Top Gun graduates came out of there into Linebacker, and the ration went to twelve to one. Much improved. The navy's first--well, the war's first aces, and they were navy guys, Randy Cunningham and Willy Driscoll, his back-seater. They shot down five aircraft. Cunningham, despite this exploit--some of you probably know--he went on to be a congressman from California, ran afoul of the law. So he's got two sides to his story. During the entire air war in Southeast Asia from beginning to end we had seventeen aircraft carriers that did ninety different cruises back to Vietnam, including the nuclear powered Enterprise. Two thirds of all the officers who died were aviators, and that included sixty-seven air wing commanders and executive officers. So these are the leaders. They're right up front, and they were taking the hits. The remains of sixty-two naval personnel are missing in action to this day. Their remains have not been returned. And the navy lost 854 aircraft to all causes--accidents, combat, and the rest. But the Linebacker Campaign, in addition to improving the navy's--the way it functioned, the air force Linebacker Campaign and the B52s were a big part of that as you know--it did not win the war. It enabled us to compel the North Vietnamese to finally seriously negotiate. So they basically said, "Okay, you can go." We got our POWs back, and that was like one of the prime considerations. But that was it. The 27th of January 1973, the Paris Agreement. That was--now some have argued that if we had attacked North Vietnam in 1965 the way we did in 1972, we could have won the war. It was entirely different in 1972 from '65. In 1972 you had the Soviets and the Chinese at each other's throats. They were actually--in '69 they actually fought up on river between the two countries. They wanted the war basically--let's end it. It's time. And the North Vietnamese, they realized that they were gonna lose Soviet and Chinese support if they continued to fight, so they were inclined to do it. None of that existed in 1965. They all were in it for the long haul. So in summary--oh, and the very last, I want to show you the--here's Cunningham on the left, Driscoll to his left. That's Secretary of the Navy John Warner on the left, and Admiral Zumwalt who went from being head of the navy in Vietnam to being head of the whole navy in Washington. Here's the pioneer contender, the Military Seal of Command. And I should make mention that, here's another accomplishment of the US Navy. The US Military Seal of Command which brought all the--something like 100,000 troops, ninety-five percent of all the fuel, ammunitions, heavy construction material in the war came by sea. And they did this for like eight years. 7,000 miles form the United States. That's a prodigious logistical effort, a real accomplishment. Alright, so that was it, and the 7th Fleet showed up again in April of 1975 along with military seal of command to withdraw the refugees and American personnel. In sum, the US Navy was a major factor in the Vietnam War. The sailors uniformly showed bravery, dedication to duty, and perseverance in the face of great adversity. Thank you.

(Applause)

1: It's my understanding that Admiral Zumwalt many years after the war had great regret about Agent Orange. Were navy planes involved in the delivery of that, and was there any controversy during the war about--or suspicions about Agent Orange?

Marolda: No navy planes dropped Agent Orange. It was an air force operation. But anyone on the ground was subject to Agent Orange exposure. In fact Admiral Zumwalt's son, who was a swift boat lieutenant down in the Mekong Delta along with John Kerry--he got cancer, and he died ultimately. And both the father and the son ascribed that to Agent Orange exposure. And there's--Admiral Zumwalt wrote a biography, an autobiography after the war called *On Watch*, and then he did another one called *My Father, My Son* about his son and his experiences with Agent Orange. Now they were both convinced that he might have been killed years earlier if he couldn't have defoliated or if there had been no defoliation of the Mekong region where they were operating, because heavily vegetated--you had vegetation coming right down to the water. They needed that to clear away that vegetation, or they would have been sitting ducks more than they were. So he said it had to be done. At the time you might have had some specialists who were saying, "This stuff might be toxic," but I don't think it had worked its way through a general appreciation by the government. I may be wrong, but that's my take on it.
(Applause)
Williams: Thank you to Dr. Edward J. Marolda for an outstanding discussion and to the US Naval Institute for sponsoring this program. The book is *Combat at Close Quarters: An Illustrated History of the US Navy in the Vietnam War,* and it is published by the Naval Institute Press. To learn more about the US Naval Institute, visit usni.org. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.
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