

“Not a Good Idea”

In the mid-60s, I found myself off the coast of Vietnam near the DMZ. Due to the Vietnamese military compromising our communications, the U.S. Marines were not getting many kills with the shore fire bombardment missions from the destroyers off the coast of Vietnam.

I was the Chief of Staff/OPS officer of DESRON 22 and selected to go in-country every few days to plan shore fire bombardment missions with the marines. Therefore, the Vietnamese military would not know about it. My usual way of getting from the USS Dupont (DD-841) to Danang or Dong Ha was via helicopter. But if a helo was not available I would “daisy chain” along the coast via “SWIFT” boats or go up the Que Viet River to Dong Ha then fly south to Danang.

On one occasion a swift boat took me from the Dupont to the swift boat base at the south of the Que Viet River and from there I caught a small landing craft to go upriver where Route 1 passed over the river. There I would meet a jeep to take me to the Dong Ha base, bearing in mind we did not control the land between the swift boat base and the marine base in Dong Ha.

It was a good 4 to 6 miles between the two bases and after we had gone up river about 3 to 4 miles, the bos'n saw 8 to 12 Vietnamese walking along the shore. He said we should go over there and check them out. I said, “Not a good idea; some of them are wearing watches and rice farmers do not wear watches!”

Submitted by CAPT Ace Trask, USN RET

“Fun and Games”

When I was C.O. of the USS HOLDER (DD819) in the late 60's, the ship was selected to have an intelligence package (a CONEX lashed down to the DASH-deck) for a MED deployment. It also included eight enlisted and one officer to be assigned to the ship. I was very impressed with the eight enlisted men. Not only could they operate very complex equipment, but they could speak several languages.

One time, using international code flags, I declared a steering problem so we could get real close to a Russian tender to verify if they had a “Flag Officer” onboard. We actually got close enough (less than 50 yards) to get his picture as he was strutting around the flag area in uniform.

Another time, off Libya, we saw a Russian anti-submarine patrol plane dropping sonar buoys to find a submerged submarine. They are usually programmed to sink after being used. Right after he dropped some, we went over and picked several up using an extended boat-hook “jury rig.” But once we got them onboard they were put into a fresh water tank. Now we had to be careful as to what we said because they were sonar buoys and would transmit our conversation. Up until then nobody had been able to get one of them. So it was a “first” for our intelligence community.

We were doing regular TASK GROUP OPS when a Russian intelligence trawler started to snoop on the TASK group. It was a new type of trawler and the intelligence people wanted close-up photos of it. So my ship-fitters rigged up a small board with wires coming out of it; a couple of small pipes, a funnel, etc. We hoisted it up on the yardarm of the after mast and very soon after the trawler took interest in it. He came close aboard to take pictures. While he was doing that we were taking intelligence pictures of him.

Operating off Tunisia on independent ops, we were snooping on a Russian cruiser escorting a damaged sub. In those days if you were 25 miles off the coast garbage was thrown over the side. The bos'n's rigged up a net, an old cargo net, and using the lifeboat falls, we “scooped” up their garbage. After going through it, it was a total waste of time and effort.

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