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MY FATHER, MY SON



ADMIRAL ELMO ZUMWALT, JR.

and

LIEUTENANT ELMO ZUMWALT III

with

John Pekkanen



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FROM ELMO ZUMWALT:

To Kathy, Maya, and Russell,
whom I love more than life.

To Ken Norton and Bob Crosby,
and all the others who did not make it.

To my fellow crew members on the PCF 35.

To Vietnam veterans and cancer patients
who continue to battle.

You all have my respect and admiration.

FROM ADMIRAL ZUMWALT:

To my daughter Mouzetta,
who gave bravely to save Elmo.

To the brave brown-water Navy men,
who under my command fell in battle.

To those who from Vietnam's lingering effects
join them daily.

And to their parents, wives, and children,
whose anguish I share.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FROM ELMO R. ZUMWALT III:

I was able to tell this story because of the help and support from a number of people. They were always there when I needed them, and are why I have made it to this point.

Dr. Francis M. Counselman, my late father-in-law, taught me many things, especially never to take heated debate too seriously. I also want to single out Jim and Betty Caldwell, my second parents, who have helped me in every way possible for as long as I can remember. Others who understood what we went through and stood by us are: Robert and Sandy Quinn; Whiting and Denise Shuford; Bob Barrett; Kitty Ostrom; Betty McDonald; Donald and Kathryn McCoy; Lynda Miller; Michael Coppola, M.D.; Walter Anderson; Dona Weakley; Lynn Pekkanen; Butch Barton; Lucy and Kelly Ray; Melissa Mendoza; Jennifer Morrell; Sister Cele Gorman; the McCoy, Weaver, Wiggins, Cleveland, and Raper law firm; and the therapists who helped Russell at Children's Orthopedic Hospital in Seattle, Washington.

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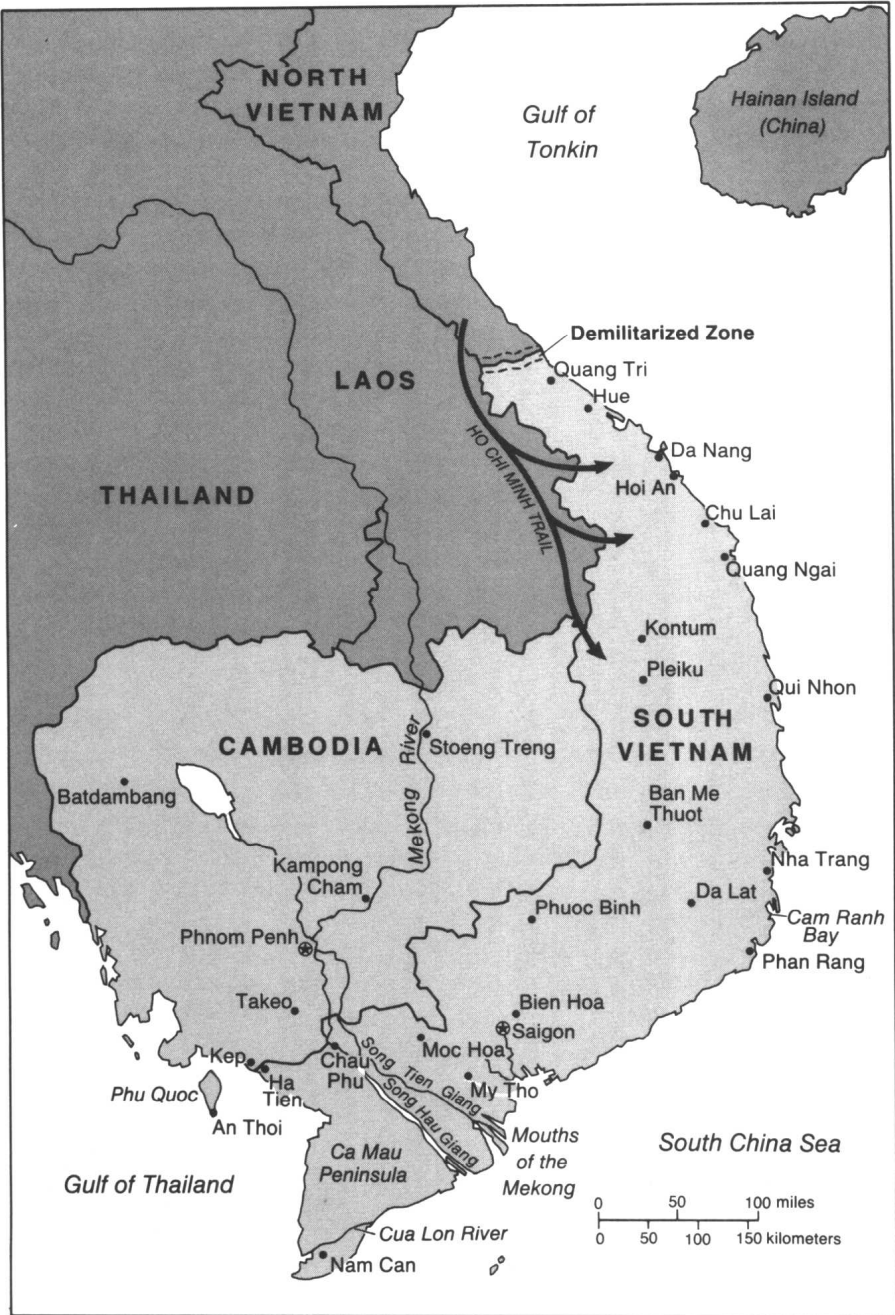
FROM ADMIRAL ELMO R. ZUMWALT, JR.:

We received tremendous support in a host of ways from many

friends, some of whom we had not met until they stepped forward to help. Included among them are those acknowledged by my son and co-author, Elmo. In addition, I wish to single out:

The members of my immediate family who among them saw to it that Elmo never took his chemotherapy alone; Rear Admiral Bill Narva for his medical support; Rose Narva and Deborah Szekely for granting Elmo and Kathy interludes of improved quality of life during our travail; Rear Admiral Bill Thompson for easing my grief and paving the way for the Seattle interlude; Lenny Seliger for her love and administrative support to all the Zumwalts during three difficult years; Bob and Sara Bateman, whose friendship and caring attention smoothed our path during our stay in Seattle; Dr. Bob LaGarde of the Washington State Education Department, whose professional judgment established superb special education for my grandson Russell; the law firm of Ferguson and Burdell, whose partners and staff made it possible for me to carry on my work in Seattle; and finally, Dawn Stuchel, who, despite the loss of her husband from cancer, went to the aid of others and was a constant source of support for the Zumwalts in Seattle.

South Vietnam and Cambodia, 1968



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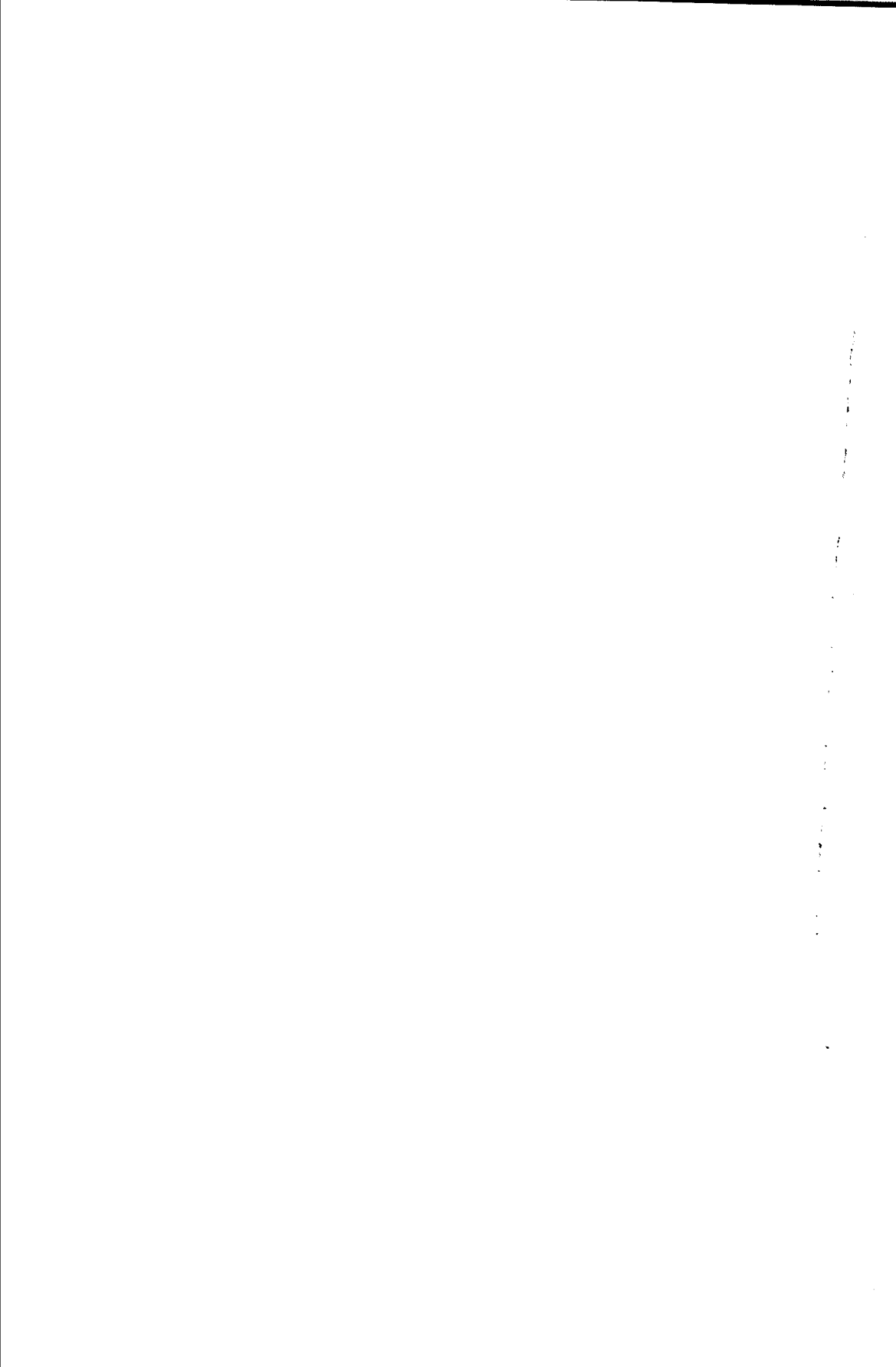
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MY FATHER,
MY SON



PROLOGUE

April 1985. It is almost ten years to the day that Saigon fell, ending a war, but the chapter on its casualties has not been finished.

Elmo Zumwalt III leans forward in his chair as the bright afternoon sun sends its warm rays through the windows of his home. He begins to tell the story of a childhood friend's illness, but his voice catches. He pauses for a moment and tries to continue but he cannot.

His father, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr., moves his hand to his son's knee and gently squeezes it.

"That memory is still painful for Elmo," he says.

The Admiral picks up his son's story in mid-sentence and completes it.

They always know when the other is in trouble, and they have always been there to help.

When Elmo was younger, he fought in the war in Vietnam. He commanded a swift boat that patrolled the rivers in South Vietnam where the dense, green jungle hid snipers who preyed on the American crews. This jungle was systematically stripped bare by the Agent Orange mists sprayed from American airplanes.

Elmo is now thirty-eight and a lawyer in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and he has two forms of cancer. His eight-year-old son, Elmo Russell Zumwalt IV, whom they call Russell, is plagued by a severe learning disability.

Elmo believes his exposure to Agent Orange is responsible for the cancers and Russell's brain dysfunction. Many other Vietnam veterans and their children suffer similar fates and have come to the same conclusion.

Admiral Zumwalt, whose friends call him Bud, was the com-

mander of the American in-country naval forces in South Vietnam. He was the one who ordered the Agent Orange defoliation to protect his son Elmo and every other man who fought under him in the river war. Bud is a proud and honest man and he accepts responsibility for those orders and their consequences.

Every war exacts a price, and now three generations of Zumwalts are paying an especially heavy one. Linked by more than just blood and name, they are also bound by a deep and abiding father-and-son love. Now more than at any other time in their lives, they are helping each other.

What you are about to read is the story of these two men. It is told in their own words and, at times, with the help of their family, those who served with them in Vietnam, and the people who know and love them.

JOHN PEKKANEN
Bethesda, Maryland

Growing Up



ONE

JOHN PEKKANEN:

This is the story of an extraordinary American family named Zumwalt. Four generations of the male members are named Elmo, and I have the pleasure and privilege of knowing three. I have not known the Zumwalts long, but I have grown very close to them. They are a family of honor, candor, humor, and great humanity. These qualities are combined with a tireless and devoted love for one another.

This portion of the family history begins in a small California farming town called Tulare, in the San Joaquin Valley. The first Elmo Zumwalt and his wife Frances were both doctors and raised four children, Saralee, Elmo Junior, Bruce Craig, and Jim.

“After the birth of Bruce Craig,” Elmo Junior recalls, “Mom wanted to be at home more so she moved her pediatric practice from the office she shared with Dad into our home to spend more time with us. She was a pretty woman with dark, curly hair and had come from very hard times. When she was a small baby in Vermont both of her French Canadian parents, who were also doctors, died in a small-pox epidemic. She was later adopted by a family that moved to Los Angeles, where Mom grew up. They encouraged her to become a doctor, apparently to follow in the tradition of her parents. A cheerful, outgoing woman, she encouraged me and my siblings to read good books and to aspire. She and Dad had a loving relationship. Every night Dad came home from work they held one another in a long, lingering embrace while we kids pounded on them to get their attention.”

The Zumwalts were comfortable, but not wealthy in those days.

“Dad never dunned a patient for a payment. During the Depression many people he attended could not pay,” Elmo Junior remembers. “Sometimes instead of money they would give us a dozen eggs, or a chicken or maybe a basket of tomatoes from their garden. Dad was a gentle, joyful man who loved his work and his family. I can remember when I was only five or six he gave up golf because he was spending six days a week in his practice, and the seventh on the golf course, which didn’t give him much time with the children. He loved golf, but he loved us more, and quit the game with no regrets—which I think shows you the kind of man he was.”

The Zumwalts enjoyed an almost idyllic life together. Elmo Junior picked up the nickname Bud when little Saralee fumbled the pronunciation of “brother,” instead coming up with “budda.” Each child survived its own share of scrapes. Bud told me how close his family was.

“Sundays were always family days. My dad had been born in Tulare, where his father had grown up. After completing his education, my grandfather had moved to nearby Richmond, where he was a high school principal. He was one of eleven children, so there was family all around the Tulare area. One of my dad’s aunts had six children and was the local matriarch. Her home became our gathering place. On almost every Sunday, the whole clan would meet there for dinner and games of baseball, touch football, and horseshoes. I always had the sense of being deeply loved and trusted by my parents.”

However in 1932, when Bud was twelve, the first of several tragedies befell the Zumwalts. One day his brother Bruce Craig just gave up on a football game and went home in tears. The next day he was in the hospital with what the doctors thought was polio, but when his condition worsened over the next few days, he was transferred to a hospital in Los Angeles. While Bruce Craig’s parents were with him in Los Angeles, Bud and Jim stayed with a neighbor named Fred Hopkins. A few nights later the telephone rang.

“The next morning Fred took Jim and me hunting,” Bud recalls, “and when we were out in the fields, he called me aside and said, ‘Bud, I want you to know that your brother Bruce Craig died last night.’ I began to cry and I can still remember being angry at my little

brother Jim because he didn't cry. I shouted at him. 'Don't you understand? Bruce is dead. He's dead!' I was twelve years old at the time, but Jim was only seven and did not understand what that meant. It turned out that Bruce Craig had tubercular meningitis, which was incurable in those days. My parents always felt especially bad about losing him because even though they were doctors they could not do anything to prevent his death."

Bud's mother had wanted him to follow in the footsteps of his parents and become a doctor. But both his parents believed Bud needed discipline. Although he was on his high school debating team, played tackle on the football team, and was an Eagle Scout and his class valedictorian, he was kind of wild. He ran with the kids who broke windows on Halloween and played "touch" with their cars at eighty miles an hour. One time he even ended up in court for throwing eggs at a hitchhiker from a passing car and was sentenced to do his family's housework for two months.

Bud's father hoped Bud would attend West Point. He had been in the Army medical corps in World War I and valued his military service, and thought his son would also benefit from it.

A wealthy oilman named P. M. Longan came to Tulare and changed those plans a bit. He captivated Bud's imagination with his adventures of going to sea. Another young man was hooked by the lure of the Navy. In 1939, eighteen-year-old Bud Zumwalt was awarded Senator Hiram Johnson's appointment to Annapolis and the small-town boy was about to fulfill his father's dreams. The second tragedy to affect the Zumwalts almost put an end to that dream.

ADMIRAL:

Just a short time before Bruce Craig became ill in 1932, my mother had been scheduled to go to San Francisco to have a breast lump examined. But because of my brother's illness and death, six months passed before she returned to San Francisco and actually underwent the biopsy, which revealed cancer. She had a mastectomy, but she was never the same happy woman she had been before her cancer, and Bruce Craig's death.