

# Brown Water Runs Red: My Year as an Advisor to the Vietnamese Navy Junk Force

Bob Andretta



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Those heady days at the Naval Academy in Annapolis just four years earlier now seem so long ago. Here he is, lying face down in a muddy ditch on some remote and forsaken island in the Cua Dai River in Vietnam in the middle of the night. He has been blown off a boat, and is evading capture. Bullets hitting the river water near him as he desperately sought a bit of land, and now whizzing over his head keep him aware that his location is known to his tormentors. He assumes that he will momentarily be dead. He is exhausted, bleeding from wounds, and the mosquitoes seem plentiful enough to carry him away. He can hear the staccato voices of an enemy search party looking for him. He is nearly in tears, wondering if they will simply shoot him, drive a bayonet through his back, or worse, take him captive with years of torture and agony ahead. Within moments they were directly above him. As he holds his breath tightly, he cannot stop his heart from racing wildly. Can they possibly hear that?? He can now even smell them. This surely could be it.

This book recounts that night and the other 365 days that the author spent as a U.S. Navy advisor to the Vietnamese Navy Junk Force. Bob Andretta's assignment in Vietnam turned out to be as dangerous, or even more so, than he had anticipated. For him, it was the best and the worst of experiences. It thrust him into the role more of a Marine than a naval officer. He had to scramble to try to make up for the fact that he really was not prepared or trained like a Marine, notwithstanding the six months at the advisors' school. The combat experiences were astonishing. The violence and the danger were disconcerting. Throughout all those experiences, Bob grew to love the Vietnamese people and the activities he was able to undertake to help them. Looking back now, Bob has no idea why he was allowed to survive when so many other Americans did not come home to live out their lives. But he did, and this is the story of that most interesting, challenging, perplexing, terrifying, gratifying, life-changing year of his life.

"Bob Andretta is that rare individual who combined aggressiveness as a warrior and empathy for the Vietnamese people. As an advisor to the Vietnamese Navy in a remote and dangerous outpost he pursued the war with innovation and vigor. As a human being, he found ways to minimize the impacts of the war on noncombatants. Both qualities frequently led him into dangerous situations. While the U.S. military command was counting bodies, Bob was winning hearts and minds through his self-initiated and compassionate aid to civilians." Doug Burgess, Officer-in-Charge, U.S. Navy Swift Boat

"Bob Andretta has combined his good humor and exceptional writing capability to create one of the great memoirs of the Vietnam War. Coming off tours as a division officer on two guided missile destroyers, he was assigned to the Vietnamese Navy's junk force as an advisor. His vivid portrayals of the pace of life on his base, the sharply defined personalities surrounding him, and the stress of combat all bring his year "in country" to life. Full of insightful, sometimes humorous, and often searing observations, this is a book for anyone interested in a little known piece of the larger Vietnam conflict. Bob's book is a must read!" James R. Stark, RADM, USN (Ret)

"Andretta has written a genuine thriller about his 1969 tour of duty in Vietnam. His descriptions of the events and dangers of warfare on the Cua Dai River are truly memorable. Andretta's concern for his fellow combatants and the Vietnamese people is clearly evident." Colonel (Ret) L. Nick Lacey, USAF

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