A swift boat is 50' long, with a width of 13' 6 1/2" and is made of all welded aluminum alloy, one quarter of an inch thick. The boat displaces 55,000 pounds, and carries 810 gallons of diesel fuel in three thanks, all with draft of only four feet. The boats were rated for a top speed of 25 knots. We were fast enough to get from one place to another rather quickly, and fast enough to out run anything the enemy had.



The first Swift Boats arrived in Vietnam in October 1965; they assumed the duties of coastal patrol. The first Swift Boat lost (PCF4) was on February 4, 1966, from an underwater explosion that killed four of the crew. ◆

John D. Willson

Invasion of the Coconuts



by

Boatswain Mate

John D. Wilson

(This is an actual product for a client. Name changed for this demo. Prepared and edited by PersonalHistoryHelper.com)

Invasion of the Coconuts

The first day of our first patrol (1966) passed by quickly. It was all new to us. Everything we did was interesting. Darkness came fast and with our visual sight down to only a few hundred yards we relied primarily on the radar for our eyes. We knew the VC (Viet Cong) liked to move around at night so we were extra vigilant. The VC had long been known to move stuff from Cambodia into Vietnam via the Gulf of Thailand. We were ready to catch them if they came our way. We spent the entire night patrolling the north end of Phu Quoc Island on the Cambodian Border.

Some time after midnight the radar picked up contacts coming south from the direction of Cambodia. Initially these contacts were weak and intermittent. They were on the Cambodian side of the border. We were not allowed to cross into



Cambodian waters, so we could not investigate. The Cambodians patrolled their side of the border with their coastal gunboats. We did not want to bump into these guys. They had been known to harass Swift Boats.

As these contacts became stronger and continued in our direction Officer in Charge Mr. Russell and I were trying to determine what action we should take. We decided to report that we were tracking radar contacts coming our direction from Cambodia. The center told us to keep a careful track, and when they crossed into Vietnam and we had a visual, we were to report back in.

We stayed up all night at the ready. When they crossed on to our side of the border we would put the challenge to them. If they turned out to be VC we would blast them out of the water.

Eventually they crossed into Vietnam but it was still too dark to make out who they were. Daylight was coming. We waited for more light. When there was enough light we moved to the nearest contacts to get a visual. Nothing. We could see nothing, no sampans, no junks, nothing. All we found were numerous coconuts floating on the surface. Coconuts! Could that be what we were tracking all night?

The answer was yes, we had been tracking coconuts. We were very embarrassed. And worse, we would have to tell these guys what we had been doing all night -- tracking coconuts. Also Mr. Russell would have to report to the Surveillance Center when our patrol was complete.

Lucky for us the word never got out that we had been tracking hostile coconuts all night long. ◆