



# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78  
NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

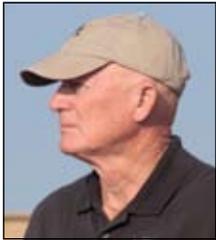
THE LTC FRANK J. DALLAS CHAPTER

## VOLUME 5 ISSUE 7

## JULY 2014



**Presidents Page**  
**The Vietnam Randall**  
**A Christmas Bond Formed On**  
**A Fiery Overseas Hill**  
**In Memoriam – Louis Smith Jr.**



**Lonny Holmes**  
Sentinel Editor

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Chapter member Lou Smith, Jr. passed on May 1 and his Memorial is in this issue. Lou joined our chapter just after its formation and remained active until he moved to Florida to be closer to his family several years ago. He was a member of the original group of SF who formed MACV-SOG FOB-2 in Kontum, Vietnam in 1966. Beginning as a member of RT Dakota he ultimately became it's 1-0 running many operations in Laos.

Jack Williams, a former SF 051B (commo for the young SF) who served in II Corps Vietnam on several border A-Teams including Ben Het, writes a special article for the Sentinel — *The Vietnam Randall*. After discharge from the army he completed his education ultimately graduating with two masters degrees in engineering. He is currently a leading investigator for Federal and private corporations for major catastrophic disasters. In his service Jack carried a Randall knife and in the years since he has become a collector and a U.S. expert on Randalls of the Vietnam era and written extensively regarding these custom knives. His article ties the early history of the Airborne, World War II, and Randall Knife through the formation of Special Forces and the Vietnam War.

In Jack's article he also discusses several other items we carried in Vietnam. This reminds me of a book given to me by the 1997 Junior Class of Marymount High School in Los Angeles; *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien. It is a very good book and I especially recommend the chapter called *Sweetheart Of The Song Tra Bong*. A Special Forces Story. You will enjoy this piece as it brings back many memories of the long ago era! ❖

Lonny Holmes  
Sentinel Editor  
SFA C-78



**Gene Williams, Lonny Holmes, Jack Williams with three Vietnam era Randall Knives.**

## IN THIS ISSUE:

<b>Presidents Page.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Vietnam Randall .....</b>	<b>2-4</b>
<b>A Christmas Bond Formed On A Fiery Overseas Hill.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>In Memoriam – Louis Smith Jr.....</b>	<b>6</b>

**COVER PHOTO:** Essentials for a Green Beret in the Vietnam era by Jack Williams; Randall Knife, Rolex, Colt .45 cal 1911, P-38, Dog Tags, Black Star Sapphire Ring, Beret and cammo uniform.

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# THE PRESIDENTS PAGE



**Bruce Long**  
President SFA 78

## PRESIDENTS COLUMN JULY 2014

Some good news! We were able to move all of our Shooters Cup target materials from the rental facility in Pomona to A Company, 5th Battalion 19th Special Forces Group's storage container, located at Los Alamitos. This was a **BIG** savings in rental costs to the Chapter that we will no longer need to make.

A Company really came through for us — thanks to **SFC Boodaghian** and his staff.

The next Chapter meeting is scheduled to be held at the American Legion Post 291 in Newport Beach on July 12th. Please show your support by attending this meeting.

Discussions for future fund raising will be the main topic.

## UNCLASSIFIED INTEL

Amid all the controversy around the Obama administration's deal for the release of U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, an explosive charge has surfaced that the soldier converted to Islam during his captivity and declared himself a "mujahid," or warrior for Islam.

[In a Fox News exclusive](#), the network reported this new information comes from secret documents prepared by former intelligence officers and operatives who have subcontracted with the Defense Department, based on "a purported eyewitness account."

In a powerful interview, Fox News host Megyn Kelly sat down with six former members of Bergdahl's platoon Thursday to get their reaction to the breaking news and the overall case.

Bergdahl's former platoon leader Evan Buetow said they knew he was trying to find the Taliban, or someone who could speak English to help him communicate with the Taliban.

Kelly asked the veterans about charges from the Obama administration that they were trying to "swift-boat" Bergdahl, with one official referring to them as possible "psychopaths."

"This is not about politics," Buetow said. "This is about the fact that Bergdahl walked away from us, went to try to find the

Taliban, and we know that for a fact. We were all there, and there is not one person you could find who would say that they don't believe that — at least who was there."

All six men agreed that Bergdahl deserted, and all six want to see him court-martialed.

"He needs to answer for what he did," Buetow said.

When asked what they would say to Bergdahl if given the chance, all seemed to be in agreement — they want to know why he turned his back on them.

To be continued. ❖

Bruce D Long  
President  
SGM, SF (Ret)  
SFA Chapter 78

## July Chapter 78 Meeting

**July 12th 1000 hrs  
at the Hut (Yacht Club Bldg)**

**Located just west of the  
American Legion Post 291  
and inside their parking lot.**

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT —  
ATTEND THIS MEETING**

# THE VIETNAM RANDALL



Vietnam — some Special Forces required equipment.

By Jack Williams

It was during the Vietnam War that Special Forces became a legendary household name forevermore tagged as “the Green Berets.”

Training, mind-set, attitude, personal flexibility, adaptability, were the key elements contributing to the successes of Special Forces personnel during Vietnam Era, 1961–1973. Today, the questions that are most common seem to concern the equipment that was used by SF during the war. The all-purpose answer of course is that we used whatever was available. However, regardless of the multiple roles SF filled in Vietnam, there were “must have” personal items. These included a BAR belt, a Rolex watch, a star sapphire ring, and ... a Randall knife.

What is/was it about a Randall knife that caused so many troopers to lay out one-half a month’s pay for a heavy duty blade? The an-



Left, Gen. Gavin suiting up for Market Garden wearing his Randall. Right, General Westmoreland wearing his Randall 1-6

swer probably goes back to WWII when Mr. Bo Randall first began hand-making his highly prized combat blades. Perhaps because of the influence of the General “Slim-Jim” Gavin, CG of the 82nd Airborne who always carried a Randall, these knives rapidly became highly sought after especially by the airborne forces of the time.

During the Korean War, Randall knives were widely popular and cemented their reputation as the premier military combat blade. Because of that reputation and their airborne pedigree, Randall knives immediately became the Special Forces tool of choice upon the creation of the embryonic 77<sup>th</sup> SF in the mid-late 50s.

By the beginning of the Vietnam era, a Randall was already an elite SF status symbol and had been carried by SF troopers around the world. As with the Rolex watch, a Randall said at a glance... *“I appreciate and use only the best regardless of price ... I am Special Forces.”* Thus Special Forces collectively had already made Randall their cult-knife when General Westmoreland, with his own personal airborne pedigree, began ubiquitously packing a Randall whenever he was in the field.

So exactly what type of Randall knives equipped the SF trooper in Vietnam? During the 1960s, Randall offered about 25 different models. But as far Vietnam was concerned; only five models provided the vast majority of the knives carried in country. Let’s examine these five models.

## RANDALL MODEL 1 - ALL PURPOSE FIGHTING KNIFE (APFK), THE FIGHTER

This was the original combat knife designed by Randall in early 1941. It was the knife carried by General Gavin in WWII and General Westmoreland in Vietnam. While the APFK design became more sophisticated over the years, the basic form remains the same today. This was the most commonly ordered combat knife in Randall’s line in WWII and Korea ... and remained highly sought after during Vietnam though its popularity was later eclipsed by the Models 14 and 18.

Generally the APFK came in three different lengths, 6-in, 7-in and 8-in blades. (For reference, all Randall knives are defined by two numbers, model and blade length. Therefore an APFK with an 8-in blade is commonly referred to as a “1-8.”) During the Vietnam era, APFKs were equipped with a wide variety of handles, guards,



Model 1-7 APFK stainless steel, ivory handle

spacers, butt caps, etc. that are of importance to collectors. Here are several Vietnam era model 1s.

Before the Vietnam era, Randall made almost all his knives out of O-1 Swedish carbon tool steel which was famous for edge holding. However, early on in Vietnam, reports from the field noted that tool steel would rust and pit at an amazing rate in that humid environment resulting in a knife that looked like this in one month.



Model 1-7, carbon steel, about 1960, carried in Laos and Vietnam.



Model 1-8, mid 1960s carbon blade with teeth

This led to the explosive popularity of stainless steel as a blade material. Use of stainless steel by Randall increased every year until ultimately about 70 percent of the blades sent to Vietnam were made of that material. Randall stamped his stainless blades with an “S” near the blade stamp. The location of that “S” is important to collectors, but of course we didn’t know about that at the time, and it does not change the usefulness of the knife.

#### RANDALL MODEL 2 – FIGHTING STILETTO

The model 2 is one of Randall’s oldest combat designs based on the famous Sykes Fairbairn design, and was especially popular during Korea. This model was carried in Vietnam but not as frequently encountered because it was less useful for mundane tasks such as making punji stakes, opening rations, digging an emergency hole, etc.

#### RANDALL MODEL 14 - ATTACK

This full-tang, heavy duty almost indestructible knife with its 7 ½-in blade became the combat knife of first choice during the Vietnam era, so much so that it is now regarded as the iconic knife of Viet-

nam. Randall made this knife of either O-1 carbon steel or stainless, and it could be had with the back of the blade equipped with teeth, supposedly to help saw through helicopter skin.

By 1966 the wait time for a Randall made in his Orlando shop was over one year. Therefore, Randall began importing rough-forged Model 14 blades made by Solingen in Germany. His shop then finished those blades, handled and sold them to the GIs going to Vietnam for a cheaper price. These became very popular because of they were less expensive and could be had quickly.

These blades were marked “Solingen” and though they were less expensive than the “Orlando-made” knives during the Vietnam era, they are now highly regarded by collectors. The Randall Solingen blades came with or without teeth, in both carbon and stainless steels, though most were made of stainless.

#### RANDALL MODEL 15 - AIRMAN

The Model 15 is named “the Airman.” With its 5 ½-in blade, it was a shorter, lighter version of the Model 14. Like the 14, this knife had a massive full tang and an indestructible handle. It was extremely strong and could supposedly pry open the canopy of a plane without breaking. The 15 was especially popular with pilots for whom it was designed. Like the Model 14, Solingen-made blades were also imported for this model, both with and without teeth, mostly stainless steel.

#### RANDALL MODEL 18 – ATTACK SURVIVAL

This model was introduced by Randall in 1963 and rapidly became one of the most popular knives ordered by Vietnam bound

Continued on page 4



Model 2-8, carbon steel, late 1960s.



Model 14, Orlando made, carbon steel blade, late 1960s.

## THE VIETNAM RANDALL CONTINUED

troops. The knives used "Orlando-made" and "Solingen-made" blades adapted from models 14 and 15. However the handle of the 18 was made of a hollow tube that could contain survival items such as fish hooks, Dexedrine pills, matches, etc. The grip was left bare so that the owner could wrap it with fish line, leather strips, rope, twine - materials useful in a survival situation. Model 18 knives made during the Vietnam era had the hollow end covered by a rubber cap called a crutch-tip.

Notice that the sheaths for Models 14, 15, and 18 knives of the Vietnam era have rivets of various types. After 1972-73 or so, this sheath construction feature was discontinued. The model 1 and model 2s of the war era usually had a sheath without rivets, but had some other specific identifiable features, as did the knives themselves.

In addition to the change in sheath construction, beginning about 1973, Model 14 and 15 featured a bronze insert lining the thong hole in the handle unlike earlier blades.

A genuine Vietnam era knife is sought after by collectors and prices can be at a premium. As a result, should one desire to purchase an authentic Randall Vietnam era artifact, it would be best to consult with an expert to avoid fakes and con men.

Perhaps because of the amount of equipment carried, the modern soldier seems prefer to carry a folding knife. However, the beauty and usefulness of a newly made Randall fixed blade knife remains a constant.

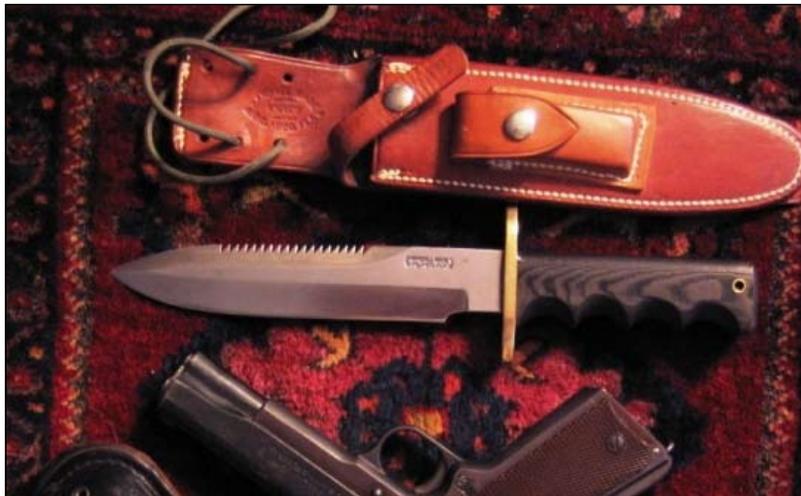
Today, there are swarms of different types of high quality fixed blade knives available. But for those with an appreciation of history, there is only one premiere knife with an unbroken military pedigree stretching back to the dawn of the Airborne and the beginning of Special Forces ... the Randall. ❖



Model 14, Orlando made, stainless steel blade, about 1965. Documented carried by Marine in Vietnam, 1966, and by son in Kuwait, 1991.



Model 14 Solingen stainless with teeth, about 1966



Model 14, Orlando blade, carbon steel, documented 1973. Note brass lined thong hole and sheath sans-rivets.



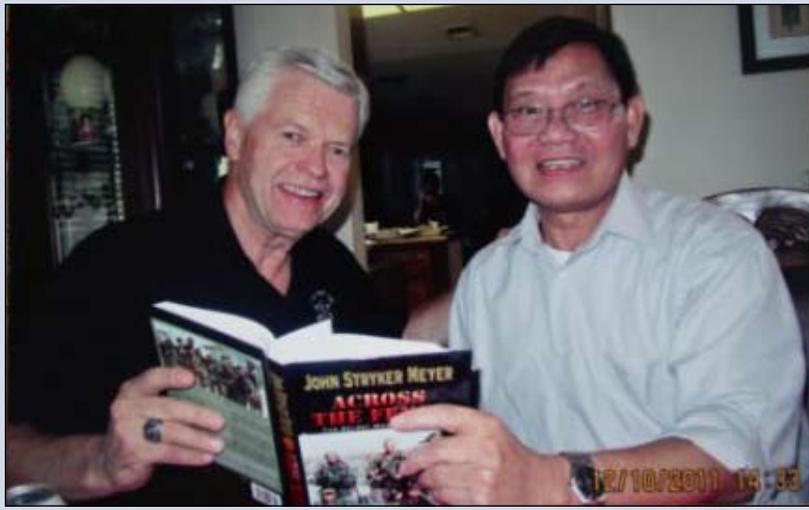
Model 15 stainless blade, about 1964



Model 14 Solingen stainless, 1967, documented MACVsog carried, 1968



Model 18, 7.5 inch stainless blade, about 1967



# A CHRISTMAS BOND FORMED ON A FIERY OVERSEAS HILL

By Jeff Rowe / Orange County Register

As they have every Christmas for 45 years, the thoughts of two men from different sides of the Pacific will converge on a hill on the Laos-Vietnam border.

It's where one saved the life of the other and forged a lifetime bond; brothers in a twilight struggle destined to go wrong for both of their countries.

Then Capt. Nguyen Tuong was a helicopter pilot for the South Vietnamese Air Force; a normal day was ferrying squads of special forces operatives on secret missions and out of hostile areas, including over the Vietnam border into Laos. Getting shot at was a daily occupational hazard.

In late 1968, Tuong was hauling a squad of six commandos – three South Vietnamese and three Americans, one of them Spc. 4th Class John Meyer. Their mission: To find and destroy fuel pipelines supplying North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.

That's what they were doing on Christmas Day in 1968. Tuong had dropped off Meyer and the rest of his squad. They did not find any fuel lines but a North Vietnamese Army unit did find Meyer's squad on a mountain knoll and surrounded them.

North Vietnamese Army soldiers began to set fire to the head-high elephant grass on the hill and were spraying bullets at Meyer and the five others in his squad. A wall of flame was advancing up the hill. If they stayed on the hill, they would be incinerated; if they left the hill, they would be shredded with gunfire.

Just then, Tuong swooped in, practically flying sideways against the mountain, Meyer recalls. He set his Sikorsky CH-34 helicopter down on the knoll, the rotor downdraft holding back the flames but NVA bullets riddling the fuselage. Within seconds, all six had jumped in; Meyer says as they lifted off, the top of the hill burst into flames.

When Tuong returned to base, he counted 30 bullet holes in his helicopter. It was repaired and he flew it again.

As did many friendships born in the Vietnam war, the Tuong-

Meyer comradeship seemed unlikely to survive the American withdrawal. North Vietnam's army had overwhelmed the south; American service men and woman came home to a sullen citizenry. Many American Vietnam-era servicemen and women mentally filed away their wartime experiences and memories; few wanted to know about their experience, nor could they understand friendships forged when life seemed most fragile.

And yet every Christmas, Meyer's thoughts drift back to that knoll on the Vietnam-Laos border, where Tuong saved him and the others.

Tuong came to the United States in 1990, part of the great exodus of South Vietnamese to America after the South fell. But he and Meyer had no idea of each other's whereabouts – or if the other man was still alive.

Through a friend, he found Meyer, who was living in Oceanside. When they finally met again, Tuong says he "almost cried;" Meyer acknowledges coming "pretty close."

"Meyer is really a good guy," Tuong says. "So kind to everyone around him."

Meyer works for Veterans Affordable Housing in Orange; Tuong is an electrical technician who lives in Santa Ana. The two old comrades see each other a few times a year.

Of that Christmas 1968, Tuong says: "I think if my friend is down I have to pick them up." Christmas 1968 was his best ever, he said, because he saved lives that day. On every Christmas since he "always thinks" about that hill in Laos.

On every Christmas since 1968, Meyer says his thoughts "automatically" return to that fiery day on the hill in Laos. "If it had not been for Capt. Tuong, I'm not here," Meyer says. "How do you thank a man for that?" ♦

Contact the writer: Meyer is the author of "Across the Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam," produced by SOG Publishing earlier this year.

Contact the writer: 714-796-7861 or [jrowe@ocregister.com](mailto:jrowe@ocregister.com)

# IN MEMORIAM LOUIS SMITH, JR.

CW2 (Retired) Louis Smith know to many as “Sarge or Smitty” died at the age of 82 on Sunday, May 1, 2014 at the Veterans Hospital in Indianapolis, IN.

Lou attended St. James High School in Pittsburgh, PA, after which he joined the Navy serving during the Korean War on the USS Carpenter, DDK 825. Following the Korean War, he joined the Army, graduating from Jump School in 1953. He then joined the Alaska Airborne Test Platoon in 1954, then spending a period of time in Beppu, Japan on jump status. In 1957, he was assigned to the Chemical Warfare Lab Test Platoon. Returning to Black Rapids, Alaska in 1959, Lou completed the Ski Instructors School. While stationed at Fort Wainwright, Alaska in 1962, he was a member of the sky diving club.

Following Special Forces Qualification and Training (Green Beret), SFC Louis Smith, Jr. as a member of the original group of 33 men formed MACV-SOG FOB-2 in 1966. Lou was assigned to RT Dakota becoming 1-0, and ran many missions in Laos. Following Vietnam Lou was assigned to the SF Underwater Committee as J-Boat skipper.

Louis Smith served 22 years combined military service earning many decorations including two Bronze Stars and a Presidential Unit Citation. He was a member of SFA, SOA, VFW, the Knight of Columbus and the Elks Lodge.

He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Bettye (Barnett) Smith, and children; Lynn (Lee) Mankin of Lebanon, Ind., Michael of Laguna Beach, CA and Lisa Smith of Indianapolis, Ind., four grand children and one great grand child.

Mass of Christian Burial was at 10am Thursday, May 15, 2014 at St. Clement Catholic Church, Booneville, IN. Internment was at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Madison, IN.

