



# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78  
NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

THE LTC FRANK J. DALLAS CHAPTER

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 4

APRIL 2015



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Front Sight LIFETIME Diamond Membership**





**Lonny Holmes**  
Sentinel Editor

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

**Gordon Denniston** wrote a story of his service in Vietnam as a helicopter gunship pilot serving with MACV-SOG, CCC in FOB 2, Kontum especially for this issue of the Sentinel. Gordon took many of the photographs for this article while flying his gunship. During his tour he managed to take several hours of 8mm movies of his role in the war. I have seen multiple reels of his films and they would indeed make a nice action movie!

**Jim Duffy** our only chapter member who was an A-Team Commander in Vietnam has begun writing a story for a future edition of the Sentinel. Jim commanded A-109 in Thuong Duc District, Quang Nam Province, I Corps. LTC Duffy as a young Captain was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart in combat actions as the A-Team Commander. Jim began his service as a Green Beret Officer back at Fort Bragg, NC and several of our chapter members have orders and documents signed by Jim while serving there. Small world in the SF Community. Importantly Jim will be holding an A-Team 109 reunion at the National Special Forces Convention in June. We hope Jim will write a piece about this reunion and take photographs of his A-109 team members who attend.

**Kim Holmes**, daughter of **Lonny Holmes**, graduated from the Golden West College Police Academy on Friday, March 20, 2015. Chapter 78 members **Bruce Long**, **Mike Keele**, **Gary MacNamara**, **Brad Welker** and **Lonny Holmes** attended the ceremony. **Terry Cagnolatti** who also spoke with investigators and the academy could not attend due to a prior commitment. Brad, Mike, Gary and Terry strongly supported Kim's application to the college and her subsequent background investigation for employment as a police officer. Kim was hired by the Fountain Valley Police Department in Orange County, CA, three weeks prior to graduation. She was sworn in as a police officer the Monday following graduation. I thank all the members of Chapter 78 who supported her. ♦

**Lonny Holmes**  
D-6067  
Sentinel Editor



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COVER PHOTO: Photo taken by Rex Holloway, McClenny, FL

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# THE PRESIDENTS PAGE



**Bruce Long**  
President SFA 78

## PRESIDENTS COLUMN APRIL 2015

I hope everyone had a GREAT first quarter for 2015, and will get lots of money back from the IRS, but I won't hold my breath.

Anyway, we had our first breakfast / business / Chapter meeting at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club, thanks to **Richard Simonian**. Everyone who attended donated towards a buffet breakfast that was provided, and all of those

proceeds went directly into the Chapter treasury.

During the business meeting I advised that a formal letter was sent to Major Trent and all those concerned, requesting their support for the Military Appreciation Night scheduled for 19 September 2015. Also additional sources for this event were discussed, primarily professional email lists of individuals who could support the event.

The Chapter meeting started a little after 1000 hrs and we only had a total of fourteen (14) members show up for the meeting. My main concern was to resolve issues of who could attend the ROTC programs that are coming up in April and May. As of right now **Kenn Miller** and **Mark Miller** will be the presenters at UCLA on 21 April. **John "Tilt" Meyers** and **Mike Keele** will be the presenters for CSU San Bernardino and Claremont McKenna College on 28 April. **Gary MacNamara** and I will be the presenters at CSU Fullerton scheduled on 6 May. At the writing of this column we are still awaiting word from the Universities regarding who they have selected to receive the ROTC awards consisting of Chapter Coin, Special Forces Medal of Excellence and a Special Forces Certificate designed by **John Joyce**.

**Jim Duffy** made the suggestion of holding a Chapter meeting at Artemis Defense Institute located in the city of Lake Forest. An open discussion was conducted followed by a unanimous vote to hold our 9 May at their location. This will also include breakfast, Chapter meeting and an introduction to their indoor virtual scenario defensive shooting, utilizing Glock 22's. I have been through this course and it's a real an eye opener. The Orange County Sheriff's Office along with other local, State, and Federal agencies have participated in their training. Artemis is also certified by the Bureau State Investigative Services (BSIS) to conduct

CCW Certification. For more information, check out their website [www.artemisdefenseinstitute.com](http://www.artemisdefenseinstitute.com).

As most of you know, the First Special Service Force received the Congressional Gold Medal on 3 February 2015 at the U.S. Capitol Building. A 3" bronze replica medal is available through the US Mint for \$39.95.

Other news includes a Vietnam documentary called *Ride The Thunder*. This documentary is about a South Vietnamese Officer (CPT) who goes through what the North Vietnamese Communist call their "re-education" camp. The documentary also includes a U.S. Marine Officer (CPT) who is his counter-part. This movie will be showing in Westminster at Regency Movie Theater located at 6721 Westminster Blvd in the city of Westminster. The showing is from 27 March through 2 Apr. To see the trailer please visit <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ride-The-Thunder-Film-Project/1452610024999213>

**Lee Martin** our Chapter Secretary has developed an Annual Fund Raising Campaign Form which was passed out to all the present members. By filling out the form you agree to make an annual / monthly contribution to the Chapter — remember this is tax deductible. By the end of our meeting we had over \$2,000.00 in committed donations.

Our next meeting on 11 April will be at the same location as our last meeting, but on their patio located downstairs.

Business meeting starts at 0830 hrs, General Chapter meeting 1000 hrs.

Any questions feel free to call, text or email me. ❖

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

## NEXT CHAPTER 78 MEETING

**April 11th, 2015**

**Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club**  
**1601 Bayside Dr, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625**

**Business meeting at 0830 hrs**  
**General meeting at 1000 hrs**

# CHAPTER MEMBER GARY MACNAMARA TEACHES ROTC CADETS



**Gary MacNamara**

LTC (Ret.) Gary MacNamara, a long supporter of Chapter 78 activities who focused his efforts on weapons instruction for the California State University Fullerton ROTC Cadets Pistol Team which competed in the Second and Third Annual Green Beret Shooters Cup in 2013 and 2014. During the event he operated the “Public Shoot” providing pistol safety, scoring and range control. This year he continues his support of CSUF by teaching academic classes.

To quote Gary, “Cadets, each of you will make your own history and many of you will be associated with those who will make a significant contribution to history,” with these words he began a series of lectures to the CSUF ROTC Cadets last year. As this issue of the Sentinel goes to press Gary mentioned to me that he will be assigned more classes relating to command management and related leadership topics.

The story of how these series of lectures came about is an interesting one. Chapter 78 was interested in hosting a range day for the Senior ROTC cadets to conduct preliminary pistol instruction, then qualification, utilizing the Beretta military pistol, M9. LTC “Mac” was a graduate of the FBI Firearms Instructor Course and had a life long history of competitive rifle and pistol competition at the highest levels both in the military and as a police officer. He then met with the CSUF Professor of Military Science, LTC Mark Walters to discuss the feasibility of such a program. During the course of the conversation LTC Walters mentioned that he was scheduled to give a class on “Mission Command.” Mac had been a military instructor for over ten years teaching U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the Combined Arms Services CAS3 classes for Reserve Forces Schools. Mac taught the class, thus opening the door for further instruction.

After this initial class, Mac volunteered to help the primary military history instructor with future classes. During the 2014 Fall Semester he taught the history of World War II in the European Theater to include North Africa, Sicily, Italy, the Normandy campaigns as well as the “Battle of the Bulge.” Next was a class on World War II in the Pacific, followed by lectures on the Korean War, then Vietnam.

This 2015 Spring Semester, Mac is providing lectures to the cadets on the Mexican American War and the American Civil War. To make his topics interesting and militarily challenging he has

included lectures on the History and Battle Analysis of the North African Battle of Kasserine Pass, which was an early turning point of World War II.

Along the way of developing the initial concept of preliminary pistol training and subsequent qualification, this program has been delayed due to a myriad of technical difficulties. He hopes in the future he and members of Special Forces Association Chapter 78 will have issues worked out and the pistol training come to fruition. ❖



**Gary Macnamara giving lesson to a member of California State University Fullerton ROTC Cadet.**



# Marines on Iwo Jima Luncheon



By John Joyce

On February 23rd, 2015 four members of SFA Chapter 78; President, Bruce Long, Treasurer, John Joyce and members Chris Martin and Sal Sanders attended a luncheon celebrating the Marines who fought for Iwo Jima at the Marriott Hotel in Newport Beach. The luncheon was attended by at least 150 Marines from Camp

Pendleton in Class A's, members of Federal and City Government to include Representative Dana Rohrabacker, the Mayor of Newport Beach, local police and firefighters and several hundred other guests. The highlight of this luncheon was having about 20 of the original Iwo Jima Marines in attendance at the function.

The Marines on Iwo Jima Luncheon was a fundraiser to assist the Marines on Iwo Jima Foundation West to gather funds to place statue of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima at Camp Pendleton, CA. Laura Dietz is the chairman of this nonprofit organization. The original monument in Washington DC was made by sculptor Felix de Weldon in 1945. He also made a second lesser known version which has been in New York City and is now destined for its new home at Camp Pendleton. This is what the foundation is all about, putting a monument like this at the West Coast home of the Marine Corps.

"Iron Mike" Mervosh was the keynote speaker. Iron Mike spoke at length about Iwo Jima and what the Marines fought through to win the island. He was there as a young Private and was promoted continuously until he became his own Company commander because his entire company was killed in action. Iron Mike told stories of the battle and how it came to pass. Iwo Jima, a small 8 mile volcanic island, honeycombed with caves and deep volcanic



Marine Hero, "Iron Mike" Mervosh who retired as a Sergeant Major after serving in WW II, Korea and the Vietnam Wars a keynote speaker



The monument as it sits in New York City

sand was a critical piece in the United States battle toward Japan. The USMC and US Navy planned the attack but were not ready for the amount of resistance the Japanese defenders would put forth. They had severely underestimated the size of the Japanese force. At the beach landing February 19th, 1945, the landing ships were immediately set upon by the Japanese superior firepower and the casualties began to mount. The Marines fought for every inch of the island taking thousands of casualties.

Another Marine, a Corpsman stationed on one of the support ships spoke of the casualties. He said his ship, a fuel tender was converted into a hospital ship when Japanese Kamikaze planes sunk the hospital ship and killed all the doctors and a significant number of wounded. The amount of US wounded and dead was staggering to hear. His personal story was even more moving.

It was an honor to be among these men and hear the sacrifices they made first hand. Their legacy lives on and it was a pleasure to see their fierce love of country and esprit de corps on the faces of the new young Marines in attendance. *God Bless the United States Marines.*

Donations can be sent to help move the monument from New York City to Camp Pendleton in support of the Marines on Iwo Jima West Monument at: <http://marinesoniwojima.com/makeithappen.htm> ❖



Bruce Long, Sal Sanders, John Joyce, Chris Martin.



# GUNSHIP PILOT WITH MACV-SOG SPECIAL FORCES TEAMS INTO LAOS



By Gordon Denniston

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Special Forces and helicopter crews assigned to **Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG)** engaged the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the famous “secret war in Laos.” The “trail” was the

principal supply line used by the NVA to move men, arms and supplies from the Communist North into South Vietnam.

As we know, this “trail” was actually a massive network of roads, camps and storage areas. Cross-border MACV-SOG Special Forces reconnaissance missions were tasked to identify the exact locations of the NVA roads, troop movement, and facilities. Other MACV-SOG missions in Laos had a different objective... they aimed to directly engage the NVA in their own territory.

Generally, each of the three MACV-SOG units (*Command and Control [C&C] North, C&C Central, and C&C South*) were headquartered at a “Forward Operating Base” or FOB, and had three ground components. The reconnaissance teams (RTs or Spike Teams) were usually composed of two or three USSF with 6-12 indigenous troops, usually Montagnards from various tribes. The “Hatchet force” was platoon-sized, usually three USSF with 20-30 indigenous troops. They were intended to be a reaction force to help rescue RTs that were in trouble. But, they were also used to engage in other direct combat actions.

Finally, each FOB had one to four company-sized units that were referred to as “SLAM” or “Hornet force.” These men were recruited mostly from Montagnard tribes and were directly commanded by Special Forces MACV-SOG men. In this respect, MACV-SOG dif-

fered from other Special Forces units such as Mike Force or the A-Team Striker companies. In those units, Special Forces troopers were nominally “advisors,” though in practice USSF usually commanded while in the field. These Hatchet and Hornet force units gave the FOBs a punch for cross-border opportunities.

MACV-SOG operations were largely declassified a few years ago. Indeed the unit was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation in 2001 in a ceremony at Fort Bragg that was well attended by survivors. Many of the MACV-SOG missions have now been publicized and much is now known of the Special Forces men who staffed that organization. Members of MACV-SOG were awarded nine Congressional Medals of Honor and twenty-three Distinguished Service Cross medals.

What is less well known is that the air assets of MACV-SOG were not ad hoc, but were definitively attached to the FOB and at least one of those CMHs was awarded to a helicopter pilot. Gunship and “slick” pilots were based with the Special Forces MACV-SOG troopers. They lived with them, ate with them, and spent nights at the same bar. They were an essential part of the mission planning and debrief sessions, and today the surviving pilots/air crews are welcomed at the Special Forces Association meetings, and many are members of the SOA.

The contributions and organization of the air assets of MACV-SOG has not been widely discussed. Indeed, some SOG Special Forces troopers from Vietnam may not even have been aware that the attached air unit was their direct asset for inserting, protecting and extracting the teams sent cross border.

In II Corp, the principal base for MACV-SOG was at FOB-2 in Kontum, re-named late 1967 as “Command and Control Central” (CCC).



Figure 1 - Ho Chi Minh road and bomb craters (photo, GD, Daphne AL)



Figure 2 - Gunship over MACV-SOG base FOB-2, Kontum, 1967 (photo, Lloyd Adams, Athens AL)



The launch site and mission control for cross-border missions was from the airfield at A-244, the Special Forces Camp located at Dak To. That airfield had the field C&C (command and control) base for SOG.

During the early days of SOG missions most of the Special Forces teams were transported into the enemy area and out again by H-34 helicopters piloted by highly skilled and courageous Vietnamese pilots. Alternatively, on occasion U.S. Air Force helicopters were used for these missions. Later, company sized U.S. Army helicopter units were directly assigned to MACV-SOG.

From the creation of MACV-SOG in 1964, U.S. Army gunships were the principal aerial fire support during insertions and extractions. Backing up the gunship support for the teams, the Air Force provided close air support (CAS) assets for bombing and strafing with A-1E propeller aircraft and jets. The forward air controllers in light planes scouted the area, spotted targets, and coordinated the air support. Over the Ho Chi Minh trail, the volume of NVA anti-aircraft fire was always intense so flying a slow aircraft or helicopter required new tactics and some luck.

In November, 1965, our Helicopter Company, the 119th Aviation Company (also called Assault Helicopter Company or AHC), was organized under TO&E1-77G. The 119th was operational under the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion, 17th Combat Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade, headquartered at Camp Holloway near the town of Pleiku.

The 119th consisted of a Company Headquarters, two Airlift (slicks) Platoons, one Armed Escort (gun) Platoon, a Service Platoon, and other support detachments. The 119th operated and maintained a total of 21 UH-1D (slick) helicopters. These assets were informally known as “the Alligators,” or “Gators.”

There were also 8 UH-1C (gunship) helicopters, known as “the Crocodiles,” or “Crocs,” see informal unit patch at the top of this article. In 1966, the Gators and Crocs were assigned to Special Forces in support of MACV-SOGs operations out of FOB-2.

I arrived in Vietnam on November 11, 1966 and was assigned to the 119th on the same day three Army gunships were shot down near the Cambodian border west of Special Forces camp A-251, Plei Djereng.



Figure 3 – 119th Gary Rogers, H-34 slicks, Viet crew, excellent men (photo, Gary Rogers, Houston TX)

See action report: *Colonel (Ret.) Phil Courts Report*:  
<http://www.vhpa.org/stories/Shootout.pdf>

I soon discovered that I was a replacement for these losses. For my first 6 months in Vietnam, I flew a UH-1C gunship on “normal” missions. During these months, I learned the finer points of tactics and developed skills and accuracy which were essential for survival. Most of the time, I flew the same aircraft and had the same crew members so as a team we became very proficient and accurate.

Life in Pleiku flying “normal” missions changed suddenly when we were instructed to pack our gear and fly to Kontum where I would be briefed after landing. No one in my unit knew where we were going or when we were returning. We were only told that “you are to going to fly for MACV-SOG.”

We quickly discovered that while the “normal” missions in Vietnam could get you killed, flying in Laos was LIKELY to get you killed. I had never experienced the volume and intensity of ground fire in Vietnam that we faced on most missions in Laos. We had gunship tactics that minimized the enemy’s ability to shoot you down, but in Laos we quickly discovered that we needed both discipline and some innovative tactics to nullify their defenses if we were to survive.

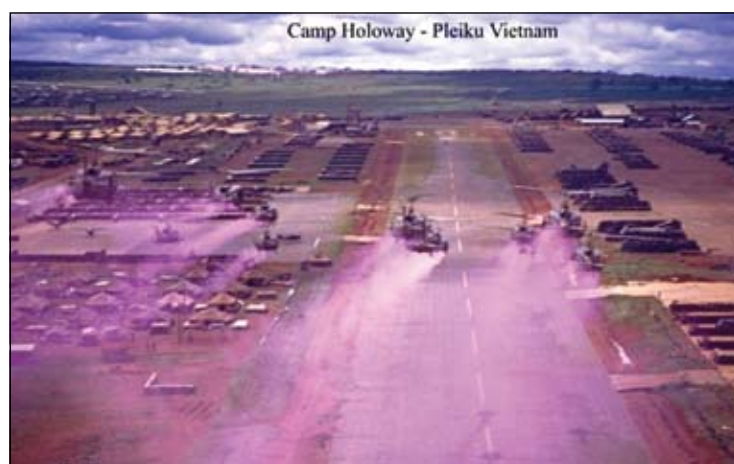


Figure 4 - Camp Holloway, Pleiku (photo, Stephen Pettit, Juliaette, ID)



Figure 5 – “Crocodile 3,” Gordon Denniston and crew, 1967 (photo, GD, Daphne AL)

We had the TEN RULES of the gunship pilot that included simple but logical things such as “don’t fly over the same place twice” or “only fly at tree top level or at very high altitude.” From tree top level to altitude was referred to as “the dead man zone.” In my opinion, it is important to note that modern day special operations core strategies directly evolved from the tactics that were first developed supporting these MACV-SOG Special Forces teams going into Laos. Those missions were flown into an enemy area garrisoned by an abundance of NVA troops that were equipped with everything from AK-47’s and RPG’s to 12.7mm and 37mm anti-aircraft guns.

My job as a gunship pilot was to protect the “slicks,” troop carrier helicopters going in to insert or extract the MACV-SOG teams. We often inserted the teams into bomb craters, open fields, or on the actual trail. The insertion and extraction points were frequently the most dangerous moments of a MACV-SOG mission. These points were always the subject of considerable planning by team members and air assets.

The NVA frequently set up gun emplacements covering the relatively few likely landing areas. Then they would try to ambush the slicks as they were landing. If the insertion helicopters started receiving fire, the gunships would attempt to suppress that fire. If the landing zone (LZ) turned hot, the mission was aborted and we would paste that area hard with gunships, A-1E’s and jets, and those Air Force lads would get “up close and personal.” (Sidenote: A lengthy “john-wall graffiti” poem in FOB-2, “Ode to the Skyraider,” had these lines ... *“Dawn of the day you could see them arrive; With nape on their wings and blood in their eye...”*)

Usually the NVA would wait until the MACV-SOG team was off loaded before they started shooting. Once a team was surrounded and under NVA fire the extractions became much more dangerous.



Figure 6 - A-1E Skyraider in close air support

The H-34’s would be a sitting target while they were trying to on-load the team and many times we lost a slick and were then faced with extracting both the team and the aircrew.

This would start an indescribable spectacle involving flights of helicopters and airplanes all over the sky trying to get our people out. I recall one mission where I was going in on a gun run and an A-1E was diving down out of the clouds to drop bombs on the enemy. We almost had a mid-air collision. The A-1E went over my head and the bombs went under me with one hell of an explosion just to the right side of my aircraft.

In the air we were always in danger, but in truth, the biggest threats were faced on the ground by the Special Forces teams that were often inserted into the center of NVA battalion size units. The small “Spike teams,” usually two-three Americans and six-twelve indigenous troops, were the core function of MACV-SOG and we worked hard for them. But despite their extreme professionalism and bravery, casualties were high.

When we flew support of the Hatchet force teams of several Americans and about thirty indigenous troops, we were sometimes lucky to get the two-three USSF Americans out, and on occasion we lost most or all of the indigenous members of the team. Sometimes a Hatchet force would be inserted as bait. They would engage an NVA battalion size unit of several hundred men who would then become targets for stacked air support, gunships, A-1E Skyraiders, F-100s, and even on occasion, B-52s (!).

At the end of these attritional type battles we usually counted several hundred NVA killed. It was not uncommon for these Hatchet Force teams to successfully take on a ratio of ten NVA to one. It was also not uncommon to insert a team and never hear from them again. Many Special Forces RT team members were wounded multiple times, and the KIA rates were very high. Our losses from the air assets were not on a par with the troops on the ground but were also heavy. Twenty-five percent of my flight class was killed during the first year we were in Vietnam and the 119th lost over 60 pilots and crew members during their Vietnam deployment.



Figure 7 - Spike team loading up on 119th slicks, FOB-2, Kontum, 1967 (photo, GD, Daphne AL)



Although there were bad missions where we lost teams or extracted them with too many killed or wounded, there were occasionally good missions. Here is the story of one of the good missions which involved the insertion of a RT team into a concentrated area of activity.

The team made it in okay and started their search for the headquarters of a NVA regiment in the tri-border area. They searched for several days before they found an unbelievable sight. The NVA had set up office buildings, parade ground, storage buildings, and communications buildings under heavy camouflage that were not visible from the sky.

When I got the call to fly out to their area it was mid-afternoon. We lifted off with our gunships and on the way I had a FM radio conversation with the team leader. He described the situation and said his team was hiding in the bushes very near the buildings. His plan was to just walk into the headquarters building and shoot up the place. He said his team was then going to run down the trail next to the river until they arrived at a sand bar about half a mile away in the middle of the river where the slicks could pick up the team. They had studied the area and planted claymore mines along the trail to cover their escape.

I was dumbfounded when I heard the plan. Who on earth would think this was a good idea? I knew his exact location by homing in on his FM radio. So I told him to let me know when he was ready and I briefed the other gunship. Our plan was to fly in from the direction of the sand bar toward his location and provide fire support during his escape. We could clearly see the trail by the river.

I got the call from the Special Forces leader on the ground that they were ready to attack so I rolled in toward his location. I can only summarize from the after-action briefing. Dressed like indigenous, they simply strolled into the front door of the NVA building and opened up on the NVA general and his staff. They must have killed more than fifteen NVA in a matter of seconds. They then walked calmly out of the building shooting up and killing everything in sight. After that, they made a mad dash for the sand bar.

When I flew in at low level, I could see our team running down the trail toward the river. My GOD!! The trail behind him looked like a riot was in progress. There must have been over one hundred NVA chasing the team. The amazing thing about what I saw was that the NVA soldiers were not shooting at our team. They apparently intended to run the team down and capture, interrogate and then kill them. The NVA considered our SOG men as terrorists so they didn't often take prisoners.

I assure you that when a gunship pilot sees hundreds of enemy troops running after Americans in the open it is a dream come true. The Gatling guns on my aircraft could fire 4,800 rounds per minute, and I had 14 rockets with high explosive heads. Behind me was another gunship with the same firepower. This does not include the firepower of the door gunners who each had about 2,000 rounds.

Our first run rolling in over the fleeing RT was successful with many NVA downed, and then we came around for the second run, mini-guns screaming, rockets flying. Meanwhile the team was running for their lives but the numbers of chasing NVA we could see had been significantly diminished from casualties and others who had apparently just become terrified.



**Figure 8 - 1967 119th preparing to insert MACV-SOG hatchet force (photo, Stephen Pettit, Juliaette ID)**



**Figure 9 - Rocket impact from gunship, 119th, 1967 (photo, Stephen Pettit, Juliaette ID)**



**Figure 10 - Gunship rocket sight (photo, Stephen Pettit, Juliaette ID)**

My second gun run was quite unnerving since the team set off a claymore mine just as I was banking in over the area. My first thought was that my aircraft had blown up, and I was going to crash into the hands of the enemy. But by some miracle we kept flying and continued to lay down fire support.

The Special Forces RT team made it down the trail next to the river and waded across to the sand bar. They were then neatly picked up



**Figure 11 - Gunship mini-gun (photos, GD, Daphne AL)**



**Figure 12 - View through mini-gin sights, outgoing tracers during strafing run over the Ho Chi Minh Trail (photo, GD, Daphne AL)**

by a slick. We had expended all of our ammunition so it was time to go home. As soon as we cleared the Air Force took over and wrecked the entire area. At the end of the day we knew we had delivered a serious blow to the enemy and better, every man made it home without a scratch to celebrate with us at the bar that night.

From my pilot's seat, I controlled the aircraft and my co-pilot fired the mini-guns. As right seat, I fired the 2.75-in rockets (see rocket sight, Figure 10, page 7). We got to be pretty good shots with those rockets and I wouldn't have wanted to face a gunship rocket barrage on the ground. At a distance of about a mile I could hit a 55-gallon oil drum. We were very accurate.

At 4,800 rounds per minute the mini-guns could saturate a target. On our gunships we had two, one mounted on either side, controlled by the co-pilot. Additionally, my door gunners played an important role with their M-60 machineguns that fired 7.62mm. These men were deadly accurate and provided protection to the side and rear of the aircraft.

In Figure 11 above, top-left: loading the ammunition trays for the mini-guns. Top-right: Air Force helicopter gunship supporting us, with a



**Figure 13 - Aerial view of portion of Ho Chi Minh Trail from Croc 3 (photo, GD, Daphne AL)**



**Figure 14 – L- Damaged H-34. R-119th “croc” gunship after mission (photo, GD, Daphne AL)**

mini-gun mounted in the door. Bottom right: mini-gun firing to the right. When the left gun hit the stop, the right gun would point further to the right and the gun would increase the rate of fire from 2,400 rounds a minute to 4,000 rounds per minute.

In 1967, we occasionally did some things only young pilots would do. One such thing was a balancing act, taking pictures with my 8mm movie camera while flying in action. I don't recommend the practice today, but here are two pictures (Figures 12, 13) I extracted from 8mm file taken while on combat missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

In Figure 14, on the left is an inside view of a Vietnamese H-34 that had about one hundred bullet holes in the aircraft but made it home. Several men were killed in this aircraft. This was a mission that went bad when the NVA ambushed the aircraft on landing.

The photo on the right shows the rotor blade belonging to a 119th UH-1C gunship flown by WO Gary Rodgers when he received heavy anti-aircraft fire flying over the trail. He was lucky he survived. If his rotor blade had broken, we would have lost the entire crew.

As gunship pilots we had the responsibility to defend the slicks and the men on the ground. We also flew missions actively searching for enemy positions and would engage the enemy usually with great effect. But of all the missions that I flew during the war, the most challenging and worthwhile were the ones with the Special Forces MACV-SOG people.





Figure 15 - Jerry Shriver

Three of the Special Forces men that come to mind with their respective call signs are: Jerry Shriver (Mad Dog), Lloyd Adams (Snake), and Robert Sprouse (Squirrel). These men deserve to be remembered today.

**Jerry (Mad Dog) Shriver** was a MACV-SOG and Special Forces legend who was KIA'd 24 April 1969. I provided gun cover for his team on several missions. He kept running missions for over two years until the day he was killed. There were several evenings in the bar when Jerry and I discussed tactics. I wanted to understand his tactics and he was interested in ours. Read more: <http://sofrep.com/7716/remembering-special-forces-legend-jerry-shriver/#ixzz3TRkWhSP>

**Lloyd (Snake) Adams** another legend of MACV-SOG, ran countless missions in Laos. He often told me that if you had any chance of surviving you better be a distance runner. The NVA was constantly searching for the teams even, using dogs. When they got on your trail you had better outrun them unless you had a good ambush set up. Lloyd is still with us (amazingly) and he shared his collection of personal photos with me several years ago, some of which are used here.

**Robert Sprouse (Squirrel)** was also a true professional and role model Special Forces MACV-SOG RT 1-0. Here is a quote about him from John Plaster's book: [discussing why the same RT teams were deployed over and over]

*"Afterward, walking from the Tactical Operations Center, I asked Ben, "Why RT Illinois?"*

*The answer was obvious to him. "Look around. How many teams we got combat ready, right now?" Since January 1 our little sixty-man recon company had suffered six Americans killed, and another twenty-two Green Berets wounded — meaning, in three months al-*

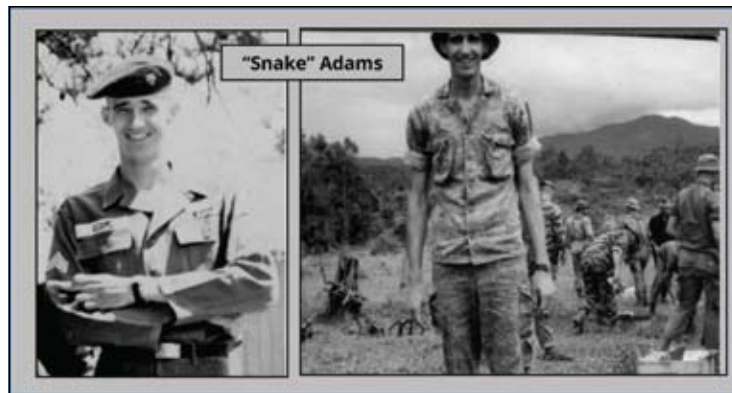


Figure 16 - "Snake" Adams (photo, Lloyd Adams, Athens AL)

*most half our U.S. personnel had become casualties. As a result, the eight or so green teams — those teams up and ready — carried a disproportionate mission load, going out again and again, even though our manning board listed about twenty teams. But why put us back in the same target? ... "Military logic," George offered. "The staffers ask themselves, 'Who knows the area best?' And the answer is, 'The guys that just came out of there.'"*

*"Recon men didn't appreciate that logic.*

*"Bein' run to death" is what RT Wyoming One-Zero Squirrel Sprouse called it, being inserted over and over into the same area, using every tactic and trick you could devise until, eventually, you defied the odds once too often and paid a terrible price. ...the better the One-Zero, the better the team, the more likely you'd be run to death."*

I finished my tour with the 119th in support of MACV-SOG in November, 1967. I returned for a second tour in 1969, though it did not involve MACV-SOG. Today, I have immeasurable respect for the Special Forces troopers who geared up day after day to challenge the communists on their own trail in Laos and Cambodia. As a member of the "Crocodiles," we lived, planned, launched, fought and partied with MACV-SOG Special Forces from FOB-2. I am proud to have played a part in the missions of these legendary troopers. ❖

Gordon Denniston © 2015



Figure 17- Squirrel Sprouse (photo, Lloyd Adams, Athens AL)



Figure 18 - WO Gordon Denniston, "Crocodile 3" 119th AHC, 1967 (photo, GD, Daphne AL)

Gordon Denniston served with the 119th in 1966 and 1967. He returned to Vietnam for a second tour in 1969 and was assigned as General Stillwell's command pilot. Upon DEROS and ETS, he finished his education at the University of Alabama graduating in 1973.

In 1975 he became an instructor, pilot, and test pilot for Bell Helicopter under contract to the Shah's Monarchy of Iran. Escaping Iran (under "extreme" circumstances) after the Ayatollah's revolution, he returned to the U.S. where he became Director of Quality Control for Fairchild Republic, on the build of the A-10 in New York.

From 1984-1993 Gordon was Director of Quality Control for Avco/ Textron in Nashville charged with building the wings for the B-1 and C-5. Since 1993, he has run his own company providing project management services in technology and hospital revenue cycle operations for a number of large hospital corporations.

# SFA CHAPTER 78 MEMBERS OUT AND ABOUT



❶ Richard Simonian and Sal Sanders at the Chapter 78 Meeting on February 14, 2015.

❷ Thad Gembaz, Kenn Miller, John "Tilt" Meyer and Mark Miller at the February Chapter Meeting

❸ Aaron Anderson and John Joyce

❹ Mike Keele, Kimberly Holmes, Brad Welker and LTC Gary MacNamara at Kimberly's Police Academy Graduation. All supported Kim and wrote recommendations for her and were interviewed by the agency.

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