



# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78  
NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

THE LTC FRANK J. DALLAS CHAPTER

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## Presidents Page

Navy Corpsman Saves SF Lives  
During Sapper Attack

A-trekking We Will Go

2015 ROTC recipients of the  
Special Forces Association Award

The Siege of Thuong Duc  
DET A-109 – April thru June 1970

Memorial Day 2015, Washington DC

SFA Chapter 78 May 2015 Meeting



Lonny Holmes  
Sentinel Editor

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

In this issue the chapter has the good fortune to have an original article from Jim Duffy about a combat siege of his A-Team in Vietnam. Jim is the only member of our chapter who was a "Team Commander" and he led his men through difficult combat toward the end of the "Vietnam War." What Jim then a Captain who retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, does not say was that he was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart. I can assure you he has many stories he can share with us in the future. Since his retirement and joining SFA C-78 Jim has continued to lead.

Jim Duffy is a past president of our chapter who has continued to dedicate his resources and energy to support many chapter endeavors. During the three years we held the *Green Beret Shooters Cup* Jim handled many administrative details and most importantly garnered through a huge effort the vast majority of corporate support and prizes for the competitors. Most recently he organized the May 2015 chapter meeting and shooting event at Artemis. A "Tip of the Beret" to Jim.

I returned to Washington, D.C. for the Memorial Day celebration and was joined by the Williams brothers, Bob Shaffer and Gordon Denniston. For the first time our wives attended. In the future they will continue to be a part of our Memorial Day celebration since they enjoyed the events and drew our friendship closer. As usual the civilian and military attendance was huge and the motorcyclists of "Rolling Thunder" were the keynote event with their parade. Access to the Vietnam "Wall" to pay our respects was slow with the large number of visitors from all over the world. I would invite any chapter members to observe the celebration next year.

Bob Shaffer is currently preparing an article for the Sentinel on his tour in Vietnam as a SF First Lieutenant at A-251. Bob has also continued to serve our country for the past forty years. ♦

Jack Williams,  
Gene Williams  
and Gordon  
Denniston at the  
Vietnam Veterans  
Memorial Wall



## IN THIS ISSUE:

Presidents Page .....	1
Navy Corpsman Saves SF Lives During Sapper Attack ...	2
A-trekking We Will Go .....	3
2015 ROTC Recipients of the Special Forces Association Award .....	3
The Siege of Thuong Duc DET A-109 – April thru June 1970.....	4
Memorial Day 2015, Washington DC .....	9
SFA Chapter 78 May 2015 Meeting.....	10

**COVER PHOTO:** Chapter 78 members and Artemis Defense Institute Instructors: Brett Parker, Kyle Greenen and Aaron Jone.  
Photo by Lonny Holmes.

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D-6067

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# THE PRESIDENTS PAGE



**Bruce Long**  
President SFA 78

## PRESIDENTS COLUMN June 2015

For you Chapter members that did not attend our last meeting, you really missed out on a good time.

As most of you know, as stated in last month's Sentinel, we held our Chapter meeting at Artemis Defence Institute located in the city of Lake Forest. Our meeting started at 1000 hrs and concluded at approx. 1100 hrs. Lunch was at this location and was paid

for by the Chapter. At the conclusion of lunch a safety briefing was conducted by Sandy Lieberman. Sandy, along with her husband, own and operate ADI ([www.artemisdefenseinstitute.com](http://www.artemisdefenseinstitute.com)).

We then moved to the practice shooting range where we were issued Glock 22's, holsters, magazine pouch and one extra magazine. The Glocks are modified for laser indoor shooting with a CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge in the grip for recoil. You then had a choice of paper or steel targets to practice on. After honing our shooting skills, we then moved to the 360 Degree virtual simulator where different scenarios were presented. This was really an eye opener to all of us as we all react differently when put under stressful situations such as; shoot or don't shoot.

**Richard Simonian** was very impressed and has agreed through his Santiago Corporation and Chapter 78 to set up a corporate account with ADI which will allow Chapter members to participate in their varied training programs, and should be up and running by June, 2015.

All of our ROTC commitments for 2015 have been met.

**Tilt Meyer** and **Mike Keele** will be providing pictures and articles

to the *DROP* magazine which should be a big improvement as the Chapter has not supplied any pictures or updates for the last two or three issues.

It's off to the annual SFA convention in Portland, Oregon which runs from June 4th through the 10th. As of right now it looks like only **Jim Duffy** and I will be attending. I hope to bring back some goodies that I can share with all of my Chapter members in July.

Our next Chapter meeting will be July 11th at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club located at 1601 Bayside Drive Corona Del Mar, CA 92625. We are dark in June for the SFA convention. ♦

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



MEMORIAL DAY 2015, WASHINGTON D.C.

## NEXT CHAPTER 78 MEETING

NOTE: NO JUNE MEETING DUE TO SFA CONVENTION

**July 11, 2015**

**at the Bahai Corinthian Yacht Club in Corona Del Mar**

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

# Navy Corpsman Saves SF Lives During Sapper Attack



By John Stryker "Tilt" Meyer

Sometimes during hellacious battles heroes ride in on white horses to save the day.

Sometimes quiet, unassuming heroes ride into the hell storm of battle in a Navy ambulance, combating tenacious enemy sappers while saving American

and indigenous lives.

At midnight Aug. 22, 1968, Hospital Corpsman Third Class Henry Valentino (Val) Santo ended a 12-hour shift at NSA Naval Hospital, Da Nang, across Highway 1, east of MAAG 16.

At that time, NSA Naval Hospital, Da Nang was the largest casualty facility in Vietnam, and according to Santo, possibly the world. By the end of 1968 more than 13,500 casualties would be brought to the facility and treated during the peak year of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, with the highest number of personnel in country at 543,000. As a Navy Corpsman, Santo's assignment in Receiving 1 was to give life-saving medical treatment, prepare patients for surgical intervention and provide evacuation and triage in the field.

Exhausted, Santo and a fellow corpsman grabbed cold beers and casually walked over to a bunker on the eastern perimeter that faced east toward the South China Sea.

"I forget the exact time, but it was a beautiful night until the shit hit the fan south of us," Santo told SOFREP in a recent interview. "We were used to MAAG 16 getting mortared and rocketed every night, but this was different.... We knew there was a Green Beret compound down by Marble Mountain, but that's about all we knew. I had been in there once or twice. I knew they had the songs "Spooky" and "Brown-Eyed Girl" in the club's jukebox. That's about it."

The eruption of violence at FOB 4 was sudden and violent. Santo and his drinking partner quickly scrambled off of the bunker because tracers -- both green (from enemy weapons) and red (from U.S. troops) -- were flying over their bunker when a box ambulance pulled up and the driver yelled to Santo: "Val, they need you."

Having turned 20 on Valentine's Day in 1968, Santo dashed over to the armory, picked up an M-16, two bandoliers of ammunition, a vest, and a helmet in addition to a pistol that he carried in a shoulder holster.

When the driver pulled up to the FOB 4 gate on the northwestern corner of the compound, "we were told we couldn't come in," Santo said. "My driver said, 'We're medics. We're here on orders. Open up.'"

They drove straight to the Dispensary, but no one was

there. The medics on duty were out searching for casualties so they headed toward the Motor Pool.

Within a minute, Santo and the driver were pinned down in a firefight with NVA sappers who fired at the ambulance. "I slammed a magazine in my M-16. The enemy at that location was suppressed and eliminated through a combined effort of several SF (Special Forces) men. The fact of the matter is I was no hero. I was just there to help save lives and not lose mine in the process."

They continued over to the Motor Pool where Santo and the stretcher bearer were separated. The stretcher bearer went with two Green Berets in the Navy ambulance while Santo jumped on the back of an Army Jeep that was rigged to carry stretchers. There were two Green Berets up front and two, heavily-armed indigenous troops riding on its hood.

## Ride Into Hell

Without hesitation the Green Beret driver turned toward the unsecured part of FOB 4 looking for casualties.

They came under enemy fire.

They eliminated the enemy, jumped back on the Jeep and found wounded American and indigenous troops who needed medical attention.

Continued on page 8



Henry Valentino "Val" Santo, Navy Corpsman who aided MACV-SOG wounded



# A-trekking We Will Go



By Mike Keele

Ah, Spring, a time of gentle showers, cool weather and soft breezes. Dude! What are you thinking? This is So Cal, where it don't rain, it's in the 90's and the Santa Ana winds are tipping 65 mph. The bright spot in this for

Ch. 78, is that it's ROTC awards time. The opportunity to present certificates of achievement to two worthy cadets at this year's Claremont McKenna College Banquet fell to noted author and Green Beret J. Stryker Meyer and his stubby sidekick, Mike Keele, a cavalryman by trade, and celebrated crew chief (celebrated at the bar by Spike Team members, one and all). But that's for later.

## Rancho Remembers Veterans

Our first sortie of the day was to Rancho Cucamonga High School in beautiful Rancho Cucamonga, CA. On April 28, 2015, they held their 8th annual Rancho Remembers Veterans celebration. You may remember hearing on the old Jack Benny TV show, "attention, all passengers getting off in Cuc-a-monga, watch your step, we do not land there." So, at the direction of the smartly dressed students guiding us to our parking place, we alighted from our Maxwell, amid a chorus of congratulations from our new-found friends, for joining in as they honored veterans. I joined my two best buddies and protectors of freedom, John S. Meyer, known as "Tilt," and noted author Kenn Miller, a veteran of the 101st Airborne's LRRP's.

Having heard my praise of the event for several years, Tilt and Kenn were giddy with anticipation and delight upon seeing the reception committee, a chorus of beautiful young ladies, all dressed to the nines, applauding and cheering. We hugged every one we could. Each of us was escorted by an equally beautiful young lady, who got us to the correct table for our credentials. They then took us to our seats.

Our mission went into full swing with the Posting of the Colors, the National Anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance. We were being honored by these 11th graders, who were completing their high school history requirements. The first group of three included a young man and two young ladies. Polite beyond belief, and way beyond expectation, they had prepared questions for us to answer, which led to various stories and explanations of military service — a few war stories thrown in for good measure.

Forty five minutes was too short a time to get to really know each student, but we had a changing of the guard at that point, and another three, fine, well dressed young adults approached and introduced themselves. During that second period, we were served lunch and got on with our questions and answers. Each student left the conversation with my recollections and personal information. I received a letter from one of last year's students, thanking me for my suggestion that he join the Army, not the Air Force. He misquoted me, though. I said "the Air Force slept in beds and drank warm milk," while he thought I said they slept in warm beds and drank milk.

There were almost 300 vets there this year and the program was as well organized as ever. The kids were a delight, inspiring Tilt and Kenn to agree that America's future is brighter than we had thought. We rendezvoused with our other Brother, 18-D Beret Medic Lee Martin, who was there, but was lost in the crowd. He failed to make it to the pickup zone after stumbling upon some other 5th Gp. guys. We concluded that the program founders, Aaron Bishop and Robert Sanchez should get medals for the service they are doing for these youngsters.

## 2015 ROTC Awards

On April 28, 2015, The awards ceremony for Military Sciences took place at Claremont McKenna College. More than forty awards were given out, with John "Tilt" Meyer and Mike Keele making the presentations to two deserving juniors, Nicholas Garcia and Frank Lentulo. The awards were presented after an excellent buffet dinner, which Tilt, thoroughly enjoyed, while Keele merely picked at his food, until desert was served. ♦

## Chapter 78 congratulates the 2015 ROTC recipients of the Special Forces Association Award.



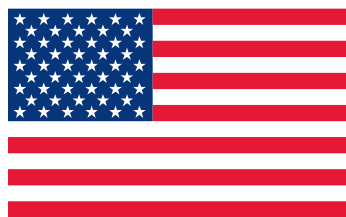
Mike Keele, Cadet Nicholis Garcia (CSU San Bernardino), Cadet Frank Lentulo (Claremont McKenna College), and John Stryker Meyer at the April, 2015 awards ceremony at Claremont McKenna College.



LTC Gary MacNamara with Cadet Myeongeun Chong at CSU Fullerton

Awards were also received by (not pictured) Cadet Joshua Park (USC) and Cadet Robert Burns (UCLA)

# THE SIEGE OF THUONG DUC



## DET A-109

### April thru June 1970



LTC Jim Duffy, (retired)

By CPT Jim Duffy, DET CO A-109 Thuong Duc

A-109 Thuong Duc camp was in Quang Nam Province, South Vietnam. It was a spread-out area built to monitor and assess enemy activity that moved in to South Vietnam off of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Complex between the rural areas of the west and the more populated coastal plain in I Corps. The camp lay

southwest of Da Nang and was placed there to help protect it from an attack from the west. Additionally, it was positioned in a key river valley that enabled its patrols to monitor critical enemy activity. It was the northernmost Special Forces A camp since the closing of A-101 Mai Loc.

The first night of the siege in April 1970 began with a well-orchestrated NVA attempt to overrun the camp. The initial assault began at approximately 4 a.m. and lasted several hours, severely testing the camp's inner and outer defensive positions. Only through a strong reaction by A Team members and the indigenous troops, the NVA sappers were stopped about 200 meters from Duffy's command bunker.

During this morning attack, the deadly claymore mines stopped the sappers dead in their tracks, which was a key turning point in that assault. I remember an NVA sapper Lieutenant who was cut in half amongst the dozens of other dead enemy soldiers laying on the ground. The advance was way too close for my taste. Fortunately, the camp perimeter multiple was reestablished after numerous attacks were neutralized.

When I went back to the C Team for a debriefing I was told that the intelligence officers knew ahead of time about the attack but had failed to tell me because they thought I "didn't have the need to know." Well, you can very well imagine how that conversation went. Two days later the 403rd SOD (including ASA men who spoke Vietnamese) arrived giving us much more intelligence. They did a fantastic job and definitely saved lots of lives in the camp throughout the rest of the siege with their timely reports and ability to listen to enemy soldiers planning the next attacks.

I was told by Gary Lamberty, of 5th Group's 403rd SOD, that they had 44 men from ASA doing "Radio Research" along with a detachment of mostly SF qualified operators. Lamberty told me they used various electronic means to gather and disseminate intelligence to both the teams where we were located and to higher echelons. They frequently operated in two-man teams, which would go anywhere the 5th Group went, including the A Teams, Mike Forces, Special Projects, and at SOG radio relays sites along the border.

They also suffered through the attacks on A-109 where an estimated 4000 incoming rounds hit the camp, of which about a thousand hit the first several days. The 122mm rockets were by far the scariest. Thankfully, concreted bunkers and a deep trench system offered good protection and saved lives. One estimate during the siege was that 25,000 NVA troops were in Thuong Duc's area of operation. Other estimates put them at over 10,000 troops, which included a battalion of sappers and a rocket battalion.

Ron Huegel was a corporal in the Marine Corps serving as a Field Radio Operator (MOS 2531) with 1st Force Reconnaissance which was concentrating its reconnaissance assets mostly to the west and southwest of Da Nang. He manned a radio relay site inside A-109 for the Marine recon elements in the field. Huegel and Marine Cpl. Phil "Flip" Clark rotated duty at the 1st Force Recon area called "South Fifty."

Huegel told me that the camp received a volley of at least six 122mm rockets three times a day, in addition to harassment fire from 82 mm mortars fired from a plateau across the river from the camp, and from multiple other areas, and B-40 RPG's and recoilless rifle fire at various times throughout the day. On 3 June the enemy scored a direct hit on his bunker. Ron told me that he and Flip escaped with only minor scratches and a loud ringing in their ears because the bunkers had been well built by American SeaBees – the best in the business of bunker construction.

At that time A-109 was a first priority for Tactical Air and Marine Artillery support in I Corps. For example, when our intel told us that an NVA Battalion was massed for an assault on our camp, we were able to plan for the attack. At one time





Aerial view of Special Forces Camp Thuong Duc, A-109, 1970. Purple smoke visible on helipad, right. Photo courtesy Jim Duffy

there were 12 air strikes waiting to come in. Many C-119 “SPOOKY” and C-130 “SPECTRE” missions surprised a few NVA units with the 20 - 37 mm red dragon fire.

That NVA battalion was devastated, virtually wiped out. However, the siege didn’t end.

Meanwhile, multiple C-123, C-130 and CV-2 Caribou LOLEX missions provided necessary food and ammo to A-109. The trick was to recover the contents without getting killed. Fortunately, despite a number of attempts everyone escaped injury. Incoming choppers had 10 seconds to land and take off on a designated bunker to avoid incoming fire.

During the spring 1970 siege, the camp was repeatedly receiving NVA 82 mm mortar fire from the plateau. I spoke with Dai Uy Diep, my SF Vietnamese counterpart, about sending a force up there to try and stop it. I advised him that it would have to be an entirely Vietnamese operation as all members of the American team had been going 24/7 and needed some recovery time.

He agreed and ordered a CIDG recon platoon up to the plateau. We monitored the operation closely and provided fire support as needed to cover their retreat. As I recall, the recon platoon, despite being outnumbered, inflicted heavy NVA casualties and damage to the mortars while returning unscathed. This is just one example of the courage, skill

and determination of the indigenous troops who served with us at A-109

As I write this report, some of the events remain vivid in my mind, because while it’s been 45 years, some aspects of that two-month siege have faded from my memory. But here are a few snippets that I remember:

- An 82mm mortar hit our team house with several of us inside;
- Our outhouse was hit by an errant eight-inch artillery shell;
- A Seabee was killed by an 82mm mortar round;
- During one of the frontal assaults that included artillery and rocket fire into the camp, I remember a 75 recoil-less rifle round just missing my head as I was ducking for cover and hitting the ground — I can still hear that round today whizzing past my head;
- The multiple ground attacks seemed endless.



LTC Jim Duffy, then Captain of Special Forces A Team, A-109, Vietnam



Members of Special Forces A-Team, A-109, Captain Jim Duffy on left. Photo courtesy Jim Duffy

And during the siege the NVA pulled some psy ops on us. For example an English-speaking NVA troop came up on our FM radio frequency using our call sign and said, “Tonight you die.” Fortunately, he was wrong.

It’s funny now, but one night during a break in the action I fell asleep on top of a case of TNT wired with a timed detonator. Fortunately, it wasn’t my time to go. On another occasion, the NVA were again hammering our perimeter and the FAC couldn’t pick up where we needed Tac Air to direct its ordinance against the NVA, so I fired an M-79 flare round into the NVA. The FAC pilot followed that flare with gun runs that blunted another horrific attack by the NVA.

And there were strange circumstances too, such as how I used an American early version of the ‘night sniper rifle’, a Remington rifle equipped with a Starlight Scope, on several occasions to eliminate NVA during assaults on the camp. At the time this was the most technically advanced piece of sniper equipment available to Special Forces.

As any combat soldier will tell you, there were comical moments during the siege also:

One of my funniest memories during the siege occurred when everyone was sleep deprived. I decided to catch up on some sleep but remained fully dressed and ready to go. I was lying on my bed in the bunker I shared with Intel Sergeant Gerald Blais and I had just thrown a blanket over me when I heard something and saw an outline of some-

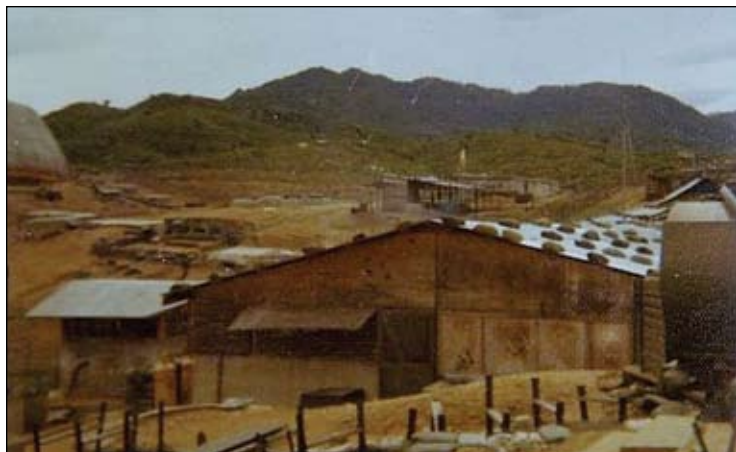
one standing over me. As I was ready to draw my pistol, there was a strange sound and I quickly realized that Blais was standing there just finishing up pissing on me. He but-toned up, turned around and went back to his bunk without a word. He had been sleep walking and got up to go the bathroom. I never said anything to Blais but Ski (Team Sergeant Gerald Adamski) and I had a big laugh about it.

On another night my counterpart’s German Shepard bit me in the leg.

Finally, around June 30 I mentioned to Ski that maybe, just maybe, we could look forward to packing our bags. The siege ended June 30, 1970 with one last round hitting the camp. Little did I know at the time that I would be leaving earlier than anticipated. I was suddenly medivaced after the siege, just as I was getting ready to request to extend my tour of duty in Vietnam and take an R & R to Australia. From the field hospital I went to Japan and later to Walter Reed. I spent the next year recovering from the almost deadly affects of staph septicemia that had been unknowingly been infecting me for several months due to a prior wound. Because I was so suddenly medivaced, many of the team members went years assuming that I died from wounds suffered in combat.

I had many positive experiences during my tour of duty at A-109. That assignment was the most rewarding personally and professionally out of my 23-year Army career. It was





A-109 Teamhouse. Photo courtesy Jim Duffy



Thuong Duc mortar pit. – 81mm Mortar. Photo courtesy Jim Duffy



A-109 Camp Command Bunker. Photo courtesy Jim Duffy

by far the best assignment in the U.S. Army to have the privilege to serve on a Detachment “A” team for any Special Forces soldier. The opportunity to serve with a team of American and Vietnamese professional soldiers under very challenging circumstances was truly unique. In retrospect, I remain awestruck by the required skills and depth of understanding it takes by everyone on the team to make the primary mission a success. The fact that all detachment team members survived the siege made that tour of duty by far the best memory of all.

During the siege Detachment A-109 consisted of the following team members:

CPT Jim Duffy, Detachment CO; ILT John Wiegner, XO; 1LT Renard Marable, CAPO; MSGT Gerald Adamski, Team Sergeant; SFC Gerald Blais, Intel; SFC Ernie Russi, Commo Chief; SSGT David Cook, Heavy Weapons NCO; SGT Greg Biela, Weapons & CAPO NCO; SFC Henry Ray Smith, Medic; SGT Tim Harlan, DEMO/ENG; SGT Ken Hernasy, Asst Heavy Weapons; SP/4 John Runstrom, Commo;

I would be remiss not to mention my counterpart Dai UY Diep. He was exceptional in his leadership, knowledge, wise counsel, loyalty and courage. It was an honor to serve with him.

This article is dedicated to Detachment A-109, U.S. Army Special Forces and Vietnamese Special Forces members, as well as the camp CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) soldiers and our interpreters. Likewise, the 1st Mobile Strike Force, B-55 Mike Force, the 1st Force Recon, 403rd SOD, U.S. Air Force pilots, Marine Corps and Navy aviators, and the Seabees. All served with such great skill, honor, loyalty and courage.

Sadly, in August 1974 Thuong Duc fell and defending South Vietnamese troops were massacred and overrun by NVA forces.

*[Editor’s Note, courtesy of John S. Meyer. “During the SFA Reunion in Orlando in 2011, I shared an amazing moment with Jim Duffy. He was talking to former A-109 team member Greg Biela, recounting how in 2005, Biela approached Duffy for the first time since 1970 and said, ‘You’re dead,’ assuming that Duffy had died from combat wounds inflicted before and during the siege. He was detailing how amazed and happy he was that Duffy was still above terra firma. As Biela told the story, a Mike Force Green Beret who fought during that battle, approached Duffy with shock and amazement in his voice and eyes: “You’re alive. We (team members from A-109) all thought you died.’ Duffy and Biela assured the Mike Force troop that Duffy was still alive and well.]* ♦

# NAVY CORPSMAN SAVES SF LIVES DURING SAPPER ATTACK CONTINUED

"We found guys wounded," Santo said. "We patched them up best we could and took them back to the Dispensary, which now had casualties flooding in while the SF medics triaged the worst ones."

During the initial part of the early morning, Santo remembers jumping into what appeared to be a slit trench after coming under enemy fire again.

"I'll never forget it," he said. "One guy was wearing his Green Beret and a T-shirt and the other guy had on a white cowboy hat. One of them said, 'Hey, look at what just dropped in.' Then they went back to firing illumination rounds. They never missed a beat."

Because that early morning's events were so traumatic, with endless life-threatening scenarios unfolding instantly while tending to as many wounded as possible, Santo said most of the early hours of Aug. 23, 1968 were a blur for Santo and remain as such to this day. "We didn't have time to reflect on what we did day to day," he said. "We just did it."

Looking back, a few instances stand out vividly from the devastating attack.

At one point during the darkness of early morning, Santo was treating a wounded Green Beret sergeant who had suffered a gunshot wound to the top of his shoulder.

Santo was standing behind the bare-chested sergeant when a tremendous, explosion ripped through the darkness. The enemy had blown up an LPG tank that provided propane to the entire compound.

"It was more than 100 yards away, but the radiant heat from it gave the sergeant first and second-degree burns across his chest and any skin that was facing in that direction," he said.

Santo's face "looked like [he] had an instant sun tan in the morning" while his moustache, eye brows and some hair were singed. "What was truly remarkable about that soldier was all he wanted was from me was to patch him up so he could return to the fight. He was still pissed that the enemy had attacked his camp."

Sometime during the night he came across two wounded Green Berets carrying one of their fellow S.F. men on a make-shift litter. "Both men had been wounded, both qualified to be medically evacuated, but both refused to leave. They loaded their wounded comrade onto the Jeep and left to continue the search for more wounded comrades."

In another case, Santo said, "I remember helping two other wounded Green Berets as they worked on a soldier with a nasty head wound. After we worked on the head wound I told them they should take him to the Dispensary and get treated. They said 'no, we're here until we retake the camp.'"

"I didn't stick around to debate with them. I was a 20-year-old kid, only in country two months and I wasn't about to argue with two combat-hardened, wounded Green Berets."

## Forty-Three-Year Mystery

Sometime later in the morning of Aug. 23rd, Santo hitched a ride back to the NSA Naval Hospital in Da Nang with an ambulance full of casualties. He had been awake treating wounded American service members and indigenous troops for the better part of 36 straight hours and he was beat.

Santo found a six-inch-wide bench, laid down and fell into a deep sleep.

"My night at FOB 4 ended with a bucket of water in the face," Santo said. "They said, 'Hey, wake up. We got a lot of work to do' as choppers were bringing in additional casualties from the Marine Corps. I went right to work triaging the wounded Marines as well as the men from FOB 4."

Santo went back to his daily labor as a Hospital Corpsman Third Class doing everything from triaging, surgery preparation, going to hot LZs to pick up and evacuate wounded troops, to working with UDT personnel recovering dead bodies from the South China Sea that didn't surface following attacks on Navy sea craft of various sizes and shapes.

He returned to the United States, graduated from college, served on the Costa Mesa, CA, Fire Department for 31 years before becoming a state fire marshal, and today is working as a consultant to various fire agencies across the country.

Around 2010 or 2011, Santo read a March 1994 Soldier of Fortune magazine story headlined: "NVA Through The Wire."

"Heck, before that article, I only knew that there was a Green Beret compound, I didn't know anything about FOB 4, top secret missions or anything."

"After rereading the article several times, I became curious," said Santo. "How many Green Berets survived that night? Are there any around today?"

He went to the Internet, did some research and learned about the Special Operations Association which holds an annual reunion in Las Vegas. The SOA was formed by Special Forces soldiers who ran SOG missions. Its membership today includes Green Berets, SEALs, Marine Corps Force Recon, Air Force Pararescuemen, and airmen from the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force who supported the SOG missions throughout the eight-year war across the fence in N. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the Vietnam War.

In 2011, Santo drove from his home in Southern California to Las Vegas for the SOA's 35th annual reunion at The Orleans Hotel and Casino. He walked into the hospitality room, introduced himself to a few folks and asked if anyone from FOB 4 was present.





# MEMORIAL DAY 2015, WASHINGTON DC



1 Gordon Denniston, Denise Denniston, Gene Williams, Lonny Holmes, Nilda Holmes, Jack Williams, Karen Williams, and Bob Shaffer in front of the Three Servicemen statue at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

2 Rolling Thunder Parade, Memorial Day 2015, Washington, D.C. U.S.A.

3 A man sits inside a bamboo cage, representing a prisoner of war as he is pulled on a trailer during Rolling Thunder 2015



Within a few minutes he met a few Green Berets who had served at FOB 4 during 1968 and he asked if anyone was present during Aug. 23, 1968. "It was funny, don't get me wrong, I'm no hero or anything, but I said to the first guy, I was there that night. And, quite naturally, the first thing he said was there were no Navy guys there."

However, after a few minutes, he was introduced to Watkins, Robert J. "Spider" Parks and Joe "Pigpen" Conlon. Within a matter of minutes, it became clear that all of them, with the exception of Parks, were there during that hectic, frantic night.

As they compared notes about that horrific night, Santo began to talk about some of the Green Berets whom he remembered helping, but never learned their names nor their fates. Then he mentioned the sergeant who had suffered a head wound.

When he discussed helping two wounded Green Berets assist with the head wound, Watkins told Santo that he helped to save the life of Sergeant First Class Robert L. Scully. A medic, Scully was seriously wounded by a grenade while treating wounded soldiers.

Watkins said, "I remember him, because he and the other Navy man were among the few men who were in uniform, wearing a helmet, vest, boots, and fatigues. Most of us simply

rolled out of bed when the explosions and gunfire started and went to war. We didn't have time to get dressed."

"You know, having Val there showed me that we weren't forgotten by the field hospital that night. That meant a lot. Who knows how many Special Forces troops and indigenous personnel they saved that night."

"One thing for sure, when the shooting begins the inter-service rivalry stuff ends. We were all Americans fighting a common enemy. That night, we stood against a brutal, well-planned communist attack."

Conlon added, "That night was insane, surreal. I never realized Navy Corpsmen helped us that night. But, after we talked to Val, it all came together. He put his life on the line for the Green Berets that night when he could have chosen to simply roll over and go to sleep in his barracks. That takes guts."

"I'm no hero, I was just doing my job that night," said Santo. "That night was one of the most stressful experiences of my life." When the sun rose on August 23rd, "We ended our time at FOB 4 with an assault on an enemy-occupied bunker, which was situated along the water line. Once the bunker was neutralized and the enemy killed, we returned to the triage area to transport the large number of our casualties to the nearby hospitals." ♦



# SFA CHAPTER 78 MAY 2015 MEETING



① The Artemis Defense Institute, May 2015 meeting site

② Gary MacNamara "Ready on the Firing Line!"

③ Richard Simonian

④ Terry Cagnolatti

⑤ Target Analysis

⑥ Brett Parker (Artemis Instructor), John "Tilt" Meyer and Gary MacNamara

⑦ Tom Redfern speaking to Mike Keele on shooting techniques

⑧ Post shooting – target analysis

⑨ Brad Welker "...well that's the way it is!"

⑩ Jim Duffy