



THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78
NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

THE LTC FRANK J. DALLAS CHAPTER

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 9 SEPTEMBER 2015



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John Creel

**77th Special Forces –
1955- 1957: His Story**

Mark Miller

**Company E, 20th Infantry
(Airborne) (LRP)**



Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

"77th Special Forces Premiers Original Berets" headline of the June 1955 edition of The Psychological Warfare Center Sentinel. "A composite battalion of the 77th sported distinctive green berets at the retirement parade for Major General Joseph P. Cleland, Commander of Fort Bragg and the XVIII Airborne Corps" and Chapter 78 member

John Creel marched along with his fellow group members. This was the first time our "Green Berets" were worn at a formal military function.

MG Cleland had requested Colonel Edson Raff, the 77th Group Commander to have his men wear their distinctive head gear in his retirement parade. Prior to the parade permission to wear the berets had been granted to be "worn during field operations only." LTC A. S. Madding (SF Commanding Officer of FC-2) commanded the battalion of men of the 77th in the parade.

MG Cleland was also the guest speaker at the graduation ceremonies of the Special Forces Orientation Course and stated "I am a strong advocate of Special Forces because of it tremendous potentialities. I do not believe we have even scratched the surface." He also stated "I know of no place where good leadership and good leaders are more absolutely vital than in Special Forces." The general then went on to delineate these qualities officers and leaders must have.

Captain Maurice P. Girard Jr. of FB -11 (SF Team) and Commander of the 77th Honor Guard for General Joseph Cleland presented him with a Green Beret following graduation ceremonies of the Special Forces Orientation Course on June 17.

Thus the long battle for our Berets continued against Department of Army rules and objections. We all know that President John F. Kennedy finally granted us the Green Beret on October 12, 1961. ♦

Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor



Brigadier General William P. Yarborough wore his green beret to greet President John F. Kennedy at the now-historic meeting Fort Bragg on October 12, 1961.

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COVER PHOTO: John Creel holding *The Psychological Warfare Center Sentinel*, circa June 24, 1955. John, a member of the 77th SF, was a participant in the retirement parade referred to in the headline. Photo courtesy Lonny Holmes.

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Funding for publication and printing of the
Special Forces 78 Sentinel is provided by



VETERANS AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM

A program of American Veterans Assistance Group

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Sentinel Graphic Design by Debra Holm/Dinwiddie Holm Graphics

The Sentinel is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command the Special Forces Association or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor, "Sentinel" to dhgraphics@earthlink.net.



THE PRESIDENTS PAGE



Bruce Long
President SFA 78

PRESIDENTS COLUMN SEPTEMBER 2015

On August 15, at approximately 0830 hrs the Chapter conducted a breakfast/business meeting at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club located in Corona Del Mar, CA. The breakfast was buffet style. As usual we all enjoyed the breakfast and camaraderie. It was also announced that Billy Waugh will not be able to attend the October 17 event for A Company.

Tilt Meyer is currently working on another guest speaker. We also discussed the upcoming A Company event and I assured everyone present, this is a done deal. A Company has planned their Administrative weekend drill around the Saturday night activities.

I then advised those present, that all Springfield DX 40's that were in the custody Ammo Brothers, are no longer. I also advised that all monies collected from the raffle has been deposited in our Chapter account.

The Chapter meeting started on time at 1000 hrs. The flag salute was led by **Mark Miller**, SGT of Arms, and followed by the invocation by **Richard Simonian**.

Lee Martin our secretary was unable to attend this month's Chapter meeting. Therefore, I asked **Gary MacNamara** to take the minutes.

John Joyce is still recovering, and is also on a short vacation with his wife. John did send me the monthly treasurer's report, and we currently have \$11,122.54 in our account.

Our guest for today was CPT Bob McCain, who's currently a member of Chapter 3 located in Bangkok, Thailand. Bob lives in Thailand 4-6 months a year with the rest of his time spent in Crestline, CA with his wife. Bob served in Vietnam as an ODA Commander and with Charlie Company 12th SFG in the early 70's to the mid 70's. Bob is a Certified Public Accountant, and is now retired.

We also had three (3) A Company Chapter members. **MSG Boodaghian**, **MSG Foley**, and **SFC Pugh** who just got back from FT Bragg after completing training in Operations and Intelligences (O & I). **SFC Pugh** gave us a quick overview which was greatly

appreciated. During our meeting I received a text msg from **COL Wise** advising he would be unable to attend this meeting due to family issues, but would try and attend in September.

MSG Foley stated that the parachute jump for October 17th as of now is scheduled for TOT 0800 hrs.

A Company recognition night will begin at 1700 hrs.

MSG Boodaghian gave a briefing on A Company's activities. Currently Three (3) ODA's along with an ODB is deployed to Morocco for the next Forty-five (45) days, with future operations expected through-out Europe.

The Chapter will now hold meetings on the 3rd Saturday of the month.

This would allow Chapter members of A Company to attend.

We then conducted the raffle for a large segment of books that were donated by **Thad Gambacz**.

Our Sergeant of Arms **Mark Miller** ended up fining a few Chapter members \$5.00 for NOT having their beret in their possession. ❖

Bruce D Long

President

SFA Chapter 78

SGM, SF (Ret)

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

at the

Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club

1601 Bayside Drive

Corona Del Mar, CA 92625

Business / Breakfast Meeting at 0830 hrs.

General meeting at 1000 hrs

JOHN CREEL

77th Special Forces – 1955- 1957

His Story



Lonny Holmes

By Lonny Holmes

The cover photo of this issue of the Sentinel is Chapter 78 member John Creel holding an original issue of the June 1955 edition of the Fort Bragg Newspaper, The Psychological Warfare Center Sentinel, Volume 1, Number 12. This is a historical issue of the paper in that it officially depicts Special Forces (Green Berets) wearing their distinctive and to become famous headgear, Green Berets. For John Creel this era was to play a major role in his military career and carry through his entire life, by his development of the highest standards and

goals taught to him by his instructors and teammates of the 77th Special Forces.

John Creel was born in 1935 on a farm in rural Covington County, Alabama, just north of the Florida panhandle to Virgie Lee Hartzog Creel and John Hubern Creel, tenant farmers with very little formal education.

In 1944 the Creel family moved to Columbus, GA where jobs were available. Fort Benning, the new "Airborne" center was close by and had an influence on the young boy from Alabama. In high school John took two years of JR ROTC and "loved it." After graduation the U.S. Army Recruiter offered him and enlistment as



Team photo, FA-2, 10th Special Forces Group, Airborne taken August 31, 1957 somewhere inside Flint Kaserne, Bad Toelz, Germany. Team Member's left to right; Sp 5 Joe Brock, Demo. Sgt James D. (Jim) Stride, Weapons, Pfc Frederick (Fritz) Schiller, Radio repair, Capt. Ludwig Faistenhammer, incoming Team leader, Capt. Marshall, outgoing team leader, SFC John R. Fryer, Team Sgt, Joseph Pallat, Medic, Sp5 John L. Creel, Radio operator. Brock, Fryer, Pallat and Creel are still alive and well. John saw Brock in February, 2011 in Myrtle Beach, SC; Fryer in November, 2003 in Bad Toelz and in Las Vegas in June 2004. They regularly exchange emails. John also met Pallat in Bad Toelz in 2003 and again last week in Pasadena. They too exchange emails regularly.

a paratrooper in October 1954 which was what he needed to get out of a dead end textile mill job.

His military career began in Fort Jackson, SC, where John completed both basic and advanced Infantry training. Then to Fort Benning, GA for jump school (Airborne training). Graduating in late April 1955, he once again was recruited, this time to the Special Forces for training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. John and other members of his class who were “recruited” for SF Training left for Fort Bragg the following day on a “long bus ride not really knowing what was in store for us.”

Assigned to FB5 for training their company commander was Captain Wadie J. Rountree a very active and energetic officer who enjoyed leading the new recruits. They were billeted in a area adjacent to the 11th Airborne Division’s 187th Regimental Combat Team, a unit that had special capabilities, that in those days could be mobilized very rapidly (the remainder of the 11th was stationed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky). Because of the rapid growth of the 77th John and his classmates would be moved twice prior to their graduation.

Captain Richard M. Couland and SFC Richard Perkins were his team leaders in training. SFC Lundgren, who previously served in the 10th SFG(A) in Bad Toelz, Germany, was one of John’s primary instructors. Thus began John’s SF training. It was during this early phase he was available along with the rest of his company to participate in the Retirement Parade of Major General Joseph P. Cleland, commander of Fort Bragg and the 18th Airborne Corps, in June 1955. “While we officially wore the green beanies for the first time in public in the parade, we always wore them while in our immediate compound and while in training away from the post.”

The 77th Group Commander, Colonel Edson Raff (who led the paratroopers of the 509th PIR in the first American Combat Jump of WWII on November 7, 1942 in French North Africa), is credited by Lieutenant General William Yarborough as the father of the then controversial Green Beret. Colonel Raff and his cadre set high standards for the training of the new Special Forces to include wearing of the beret. General Cleland specifically requested Colonel Raff’s men wear their Berets for his parade. Again, and maybe for their first public demonstration, Special Forces led the way.

“In the summer of 1955 we began our travels for training first going to Georgia for mountain training, rucksack marches of 10 to 20 miles which we thought was fun... after they were over.” John learned to rappel down sheer cliffs and to rappel with an injured man on a stretcher. One of his chief instructors was SGT Larry Thorne, later to become Major Thorne and a SF DMOR .

After training in Georgia he spent a lot of time at Camp MacCall on training exercises, survival and the equivalent of SERE in 1955. October took him to Camp Carson, Colorado, then to Cheyenne Canyon for defining their mountaineering skills. Then back to north Georgia for more mountain training followed by a move to Camp Hale, Colorado, for pack mule and mountain maneuvering.

Continued on page 6



John Creel's team members from the 10th Special Forces Group, Bad Toelz, Germany, December 1957: Sgt Norbert Weber, Sgt Earl Ramsey, Sp Fritz Schiller, Sgt George Marecek and SFC John Fryer



The 10th Special Forces Group, preparing for training in Bad Toelz, Germany, Spring 1957.



10th Special Forces Group (A) Prop Blast Ceremony. Left, John standing in the door (the metal plates under his hands are electrified causing a shock to the soaking wet participant), and above, John receiving the trophy cup.

MARK MILLER

Company E, 20th Infantry (Airborne) (LRP)



Kenn Miller

By Kenn Miller

During the Vietnam War recon teams from the TO&E Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, Long Range Patrol, and Airborne Ranger (basically different nomenclature for the same units) detachments and companies were often lent out to work for units with which they had no real relationship. This was especially the case with Company E, 20th Infantry (Airborne) (LRP) — which was

later re-designated Company C, 75th Ranger Infantry. SFA Chapter 78's Sergeant at Arms, Mark Miller, was a member of that unit on various missions in support of the 101st Airborne (from which most of the original members of E/20th LRP were drawn, and which had a very active LRRP unit of its own), 1st Field Force (of which E/20 LRP was the only integral ground combat unit), 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the 173rd Airborne, and the 4th Infantry Division. Two of these missions stand out in his memory.

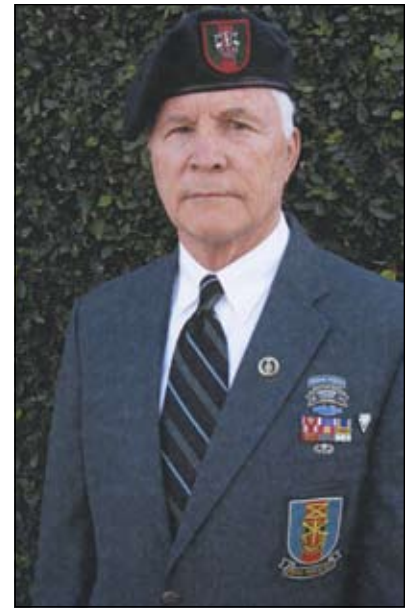
In December, 1967, a six man recon team from the then newly activated E/20 LRP infiltrated a reconnaissance zone near the Bao Loc Special Forces camp and discovered that the area was crawling with North Vietnamese soldiers. The recon team managed to remain uncompromised and to exfiltrate safely to be debriefed. On learning that the recon zone was a hot one, the new platoon leader — a first lieutenant that rumor said was a former SF NCO

who had gone to OCS, been commissioned, then been kicked out of SF — led the platoon back into the area to exploit the enemy situation.

The LRP's were not accustomed to platoon-sized operations, and were not happy with the way the lieutenant was leading the patrol. This lieutenant already had a reputation for being reckless and medal hungry, and he seemed to be breaking most of the rules of patrol procedure, and doing it on purpose to instigate enemy action.

Enemy troops were spotted and the platoon leader called in artillery, and walked it in on the platoon, seriously wounding the platoon sergeant, who was treated by Special Forces qualified medic Mike Kemble, and medevaced via jungle penetrator. The platoon set up a night position, and the next day moved out and discovered tunnels and empty fighting positions. The platoon leader saw and shot two enemy soldiers.

The next day, the lieutenant took point with Sergeant Patrick Henshaw walking his slack as they moved up an inclining trail — uncomfortable for LRP's who knew to stay off trails. Suddenly there



Recon teams loading choppers for insertion RVN

was an explosion and incoming small arms fire from all directions. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured by the enemy fire. But Henshaw was killed and the platoon leader had been blown to pieces by an enemy anti-personnel mine. Eventually a reaction force from the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne arrived, and the LRP platoon, carrying what was left of the lieutenant and Sergeant Henshaw, was able to get out. These were the unit's first KIAs, and most of the men in the platoon were then —and now —unsure whether the team had been working for Special Forces or the 101st Airborne Division.

On 27 February, 1968, SFA Chapter 78 Sergeant of Arms Mark Miller was the Assistant Team Leader (ATL) of a six man recon team operating out of the Plei Djerang SF Camp that was pulled out of the recon zone after contact with an overwhelming enemy force. The next day, the team — augmented by two additional men — was reinserted into the same recon zone. The team moved from the LZ and up a steep incline to set up a line ambush on a high speed trail they'd spotted the day before. Within minutes at least a platoon of North Vietnamese soldiers entered the ambush kill zone. It was too large an element for eight men to take on, but an alert NVA trooper detected the ambush. The LRPs blew their claymores and opened up, Sergeant Miller killing three or four of them. The enemy troops began to flank and attempt to surround the LRPs. The LRPs went into their immediate action drills, and began to move for a predesignated rally point, but the enemy was on them, and in the chaos the team was split. Both elements of the team assumed that the other element had been wiped out. Miller's element repelled several attacks, and Miller shot and killed at least more two enemy. After breaking contact again, the LRPs ran right through the enemy's temporarily empty base camp on their way to the extraction point.

At the extraction LZ, Miller realized that the RTO was missing. With a man missing, under triple canopy jungle, with a large enemy force tracking them, the LRPs were in great danger. Miller set out alone to find the missing RTO, moving through enemy positions, back tracking, and exposing himself to the enemy — taking grenade shrapnel. To this day, Miller is not sure whether the shrapnel was from his grenades or the enemy's. But he did find the missing RTO, injured and immobile and tangled in vegetation. Miller freed the RTO and dragged him back to the LZ. Amazingly, when Miller got there with the RTO the other element of the split team had linked up. Now that the team was united and had a usable radio, they were able to secure the LZ and get extracted.

Sergeant Mark Miller and Specialist Mike Kemble, who had been with the other element, were both put in for the Silver Star. But the LRPs — who had assumed they'd been op-com to the SF at Plei Djerang — were eventually to learn that they'd been under administrative control of the 4th Infantry Division when the Awards & Decorations section at the 4th ID — who had no connection to the operation — approved Kemble's Silver Star and downgraded Mark Miller's award to a Bronze Star with "V" device. Today the disparity in awards between the two LRPs seems to bother Mike



Recon company sign RVN Mark Miller on right.



Sgt Mark Miller at a Special Forces launch site in RVN



SGT Mark A Miller - Team 11 E Company - 20th Infantry ABN Long Range Patrol Op at Tuy Hoa on the Day Before TET 1968.

Kemble more than it does Mark Miller. It's just another example of how such things happen when headquarters pogue for one unit make such decisions about the actions of combat soldiers of another unit. ❖



Brad Welker, back from visiting his son in 5th SF Group, Kentucky, at lunch with John Joyce and "Tilt" Meyer.

JOHN CREEL, 77TH SPECIAL FORCES 1955-1957: HIS STORY CONTINUED

In January 1956 John went to Norfolk, Virginia for submarine training with the exercise proceeding to the ocean, then the beaches off Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. His submarine, the Sea Lion, surfaced in stormy weather and the exercise was to row ashore. The severity of the weather increased and almost all the boats capsized and one man was lost. A quick head count and all SF was accounted for, however one marine was missing. Two days later his body was recovered after washing ashore. The official investigation determined that his weapon had struck his head rendering him unconscious, thus resulting in drowning.

Continuing mountain training he returned to Camp Hale, Colorado for two months on winter mountaineering. John learned cross-country skiing, down hill, and snowshoeing followed by a two week team trekking in the mountains. Many of the SF trainees, including John, had never before seen snow. His team was assigned an area just below the timberline at about the 11,000 foot level of Mt. Elbert (14,431 at the peak). Their first mission was to pull an akio (a sled like device on runners for gear transportation) for the mission equipment and food. Temperatures near zero persisted, quite cold for troops from the south.

Returning to Fort Bragg and continuing training John was selected to attend the XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery Academy Advanced Leaders course in August 1956. He was the "Honor Graduate." Within three months John was promoted to SGT, E-5.



For the rest of 1956 John was involved with his MOS specialty training, 051.63, radio operator. Remember, in those days it required a skill in Morse code and the operation of the Special Forces Radio, the AN/GRC 109. The hand cranked generator was not the friend of teammates.

John Creel was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group (A), to an A-team, FA-2 in early March 1957. On May 29, 1957 John was a participant in the 10th Group's initiation into the Airborne Fraternity – The Prop Blast Ceremony (this ceremony was forbidden by the U.S. Army after the late 1960's due to the extreme hazards to the participants). He spent nearly four years with the 10th, learning German, foreign weapons and continuing to do Cold War training. John met the love of his life in Germany and married Ingrid on July 4, 1959. Captain Richard M. Coupland attended the wedding. John ETS'd and left Germany and the 10th Special Forces in February 1961. He and Ingrid are still a happy couple!

John has kept in touch with his FA-2 team medic, SFC Joseph Pallat, who he last saw in November 2003 in Bad Toelz, Germany at the 50th Anniversary of the deployment of the 10th SFG(A) to Germany. Additionally, John met SFC Perkins in Las Vegas at the Special Forces Reunion in 2004. John has one younger brother who retired from twenty-six years service in the U.S. Army. His father was a member of the U.S. Navy, but was discharged medically.