



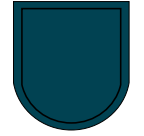
# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 3 • MARCH 2019



SOCOM Inducts Medal of Honor Recipients  
Into the Commando Hall of Honor  
Profile of a Successful Montagnard Emigrant —  
*Escaping Viet Nam: H'Yoanh's Story*  
Loc Ninh — Part One



# SENTINEL

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 3 • MARCH 2019

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**COVER:** CPT Gary M. Rose presented with a commemorative induction plaque by U.S. Army Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, USSOCOM Commander, and Sgt. Maj. Patrick McCauley, USSOCOM Command Sergeant Major at the SOCOM Commando Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony. (Photo by SOCOM photographer)



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**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Sentinel will provide interesting and meaningful information relative to the Special Forces experience — today, yesterday and tomorrow. Articles will be published that were written by knowledgeable authors who will provide objective and accurate accounts of real world experiences.

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## From the Editor



Lonny Holmes  
Sentinel Editor

Finally, after nearly ten years of editing the Sentinel, I get a story that I have dreamed of ever since I left Vietnam and South East Asia after three back-to-back one year tours and an extension; Mike Benges's story of H'Yoanh Buonya and her family, "Profile of a Successful Montagnard Emigrant." It is a story like this that all Green Beret's who served in Vietnam and worked with members of the Montagnards will enjoy and realize that our work with them was NOT in vain! Her story tells of their very difficult time in their long journey to become Americans and be assimilated into our way of life. We may have forgotten but somewhere in our own family history our distant relative's journeyed to America. I look forward and hope that we may have further stories of Montagnard success printed in the Sentinel.

Colonel Paul Longgear's invitation to the **SOCOM Medal of Honor Recognition Dinner**, "How did I get there" was a story in itself. According to Col Longgear:

"I was not on the original guest list but had a justifiable purpose for wanting to be there. A Special Forces soldier that had saved six of my men and myself was being inducted into the SOCOM Commando Hall of Honor. Eugene Ashley was killed during his attempt to save us February 1968. His son, Darrin Ashley was going to be there to receive the honor for his father. Darrin was five years old when his dad was killed and I had never had the opportunity to thank him for what his father did.

"I had been doing a series of interviews with the Special Forces command historians at Fort Bragg so I asked them whom could I contact at MacDill and was given a name in the history department. From the SOCOM history section I was introduced to the protocol section.

"The protocol people were sympathetic but apprehensive. 'Send us a bio so we have something to work with', was their response. I was more than overwhelmed! They sent me a personal invitation.

"My wife and I were put up in the same BOQ as the inductees and had the freedom to tour the post. Everything they did was top shelf. Morale was sky high and the event went off without a hitch. They were so accommodating and professional — it was a great experience. Everything was very professional but it was more like a family reunion than a military event." ♦

Lonny Holmes  
Sentinel Editor

# The President's Page | March 2019



John Stryker Meyer  
President SFA 78

Gentlemen,

Our February 9 meeting was one for the record books, featuring Yvette Benavidez Garcia — daughter of SF MOH Recipient Roy Benavidez, author Eric Blehm who penned the book *Legend* (reviewed in the [July 2015 Sentinel](#)), and Hank Eylicio. On a very personal level, it was also the first meeting of Yvette with Chapter member Lee Martin.

Here's what Yvette wrote that night: "I was fortunate enough to meet the medic, Lee Martin, from the May 2, 1968 mission. Lee told his story about what happened the day my dad almost lost his life by suffocating to death in a body bag. To hear what really happened from the medic who saw it first hand was incredible.

"Lee's story: He said there were a ton of bodies being brought in in body bags. They discovered that several of them were not our soldiers but were NVA. One after another, as they unzipped more and more bags, they kept finding enemy soldiers zipped up. They got to one of the last ones and unzipped it only to find that it was my dad. They didn't recognize him because he had no identification tags on him and he was dressed in fatigues (remember, he wasn't supposed to be on that mission so he wasn't geared up for it). He was in bad shape. His eyes were bloodied and he was caked in mud. They did the "eye lid" test to see if he'd respond to them touching his eyelids. He did not. Then, they noticed that his front teeth were broken and had a hole in them. They saw his tongue wiggling through the teeth. Lee said, 'I knew he was alive because a dead man's tongue doesn't wiggle.' After that, my dad was flown to the states for immediate help. Lee had no idea who my dad was until years later when he had heard of his story.

"Lee Martin saved my dad's life, and ultimately mine. Had my dad not been recognized, he would have suffocated to death. He had about an hour left before he lost all oxygen.

"I have lived for many years with the fact that my life's purpose was sealed on May 2, 1968. Had my dad lost his life on that day, I would have never been born. This is why I help to carry on his legacy! It's my life's purpose."

Our March 9 speaker will be SF officer Mitch Utterback, who served with A/5/19. I met Mitch when he was the official SF liaison with the Bank family after Col Bank reported for duty in the big LZ in the sky. He recently traveled to Iraq as a reporter/videographer, which provides some remarkable stories and surprising insights into Iraq.

If you plan to attend our March meeting, please e-mail VP Don Deatherage at: [drdeathca@gmail.com](mailto:drdeathca@gmail.com). We need an exact headcount. Chapter 78's Special Deputy Assistant to the Treasurer,

Mike Keele, will pick up fines from anyone who attends without a beret or Chapter 78 coin. We will have some unique raffle items. ♦

## Meeting details:

**Time:** 8:30 a.m., March 9, Breakfast will be served.

**Location:** Embassy Suites

**3100 East Frontera, Anaheim, CA 92807**

**(The SE Corner of Hwy 91 & Glassell St.)**

John Stryker Meyer

President, SFA Chapter 78



## A HERITAGE OF VALOR



### Special Operations Medals of Honor\*

Colonel Roger H.C. Donlon .....	5th SFGA
1st Lt Charles Q. Williams.....	5th SFGA
1st Lt George Sisler .....	5th SFGA
Master Sergeant Charles E. Hosking, Jr. ....	5th SFGA
Major Drew D. Dix.....	MACV
Sergeant First Class Fred W. Zabitosky.....	5th SFGA
Specialist Fifth Class John J. Kedenburg.....	5th SFGA
Master Sergeant Jose Rodela.....	5th SFGA
Sergeant First Class William M. Bryant .....	5th SFGA
Staff Sergeant Franklin D. Miller .....	5th SFGA
Sergeant Brian L. Buker.....	5th SFGA
Staff Sergeant Jon R. Cavaiani.....	MAAG
1st Lt Loren D. Hagen.....	MAAG

***\*These are Green Berets previously inducted  
into the Commando Hall of Honor.***



# THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS



## Updates on the Montagnards



Michael D. Bengé

### Profile of a Successful Montagnard Emigrant — *Escaping Viet Nam: H'Yoanh's Story*

By Michael D. Bengé

On April 4, 1975, as the Republic of South Vietnam was crumbling under communist Hanoi's blitzkrieg, George Jacobson, Special Assistant to U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin, met with Montagnard leaders gathered at the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities in Saigon to discuss what the Montagnards should do in the face of the impending crisis. Jacobson suggested that they break up into small guerrilla units, go to the jungle and continue to fight the communists, and said the U.S. would continue to support them. Former Special Forces Master Sergeant Ed Sprague, a Foreign Service Officer, witnessed the meeting. At the time, FULRO (United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races), well-armed with U.S. weapons and promises of more, fielded an army of 10,000 fighters trained by Special Forces. Taking Jacobson's advice, they fled to the jungle.

By war's end in 1975, about 85 percent of the Montagnard villages were either destroyed or abandoned. Of the estimated one million highlanders, between 200,000 and 220,000 had died or were killed including around one-half of their adult male population.

**H'Yoanh Ksor Buonya**, at the age of 16 in 1975, left her home village of Cheo Reo, Phu Bon Province and fled with tens of thousands of other Montagnards to join the FULRO forces in the jungle, hoping to escape persecution by the brutal Vietnamese communist regime. By 1977, the FULRO resistance fighters had run low on ammunition, and by 1979 more than 8,000 of their fighters had died of disease or malnourishment, or been killed or captured. Facing certain death in Vietnam and relentlessly pursued by the communists, FULRO forces were diminished to three depleted battalions. Unknown to them, their avowed leader Y-Bham Enoul and some 150 officers and their families had been executed by the Khmer Rouge during their takeover of Phnom Penh in April 1975.

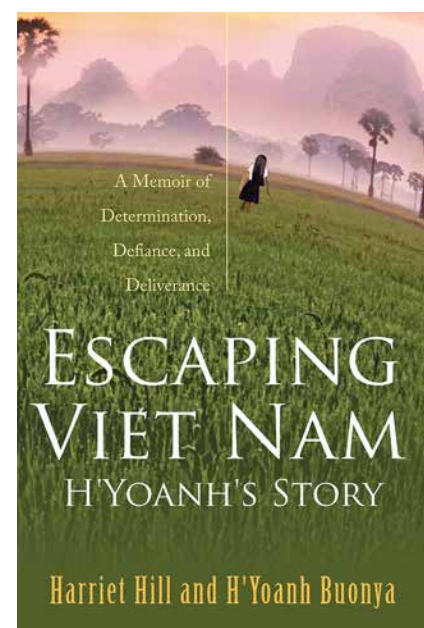


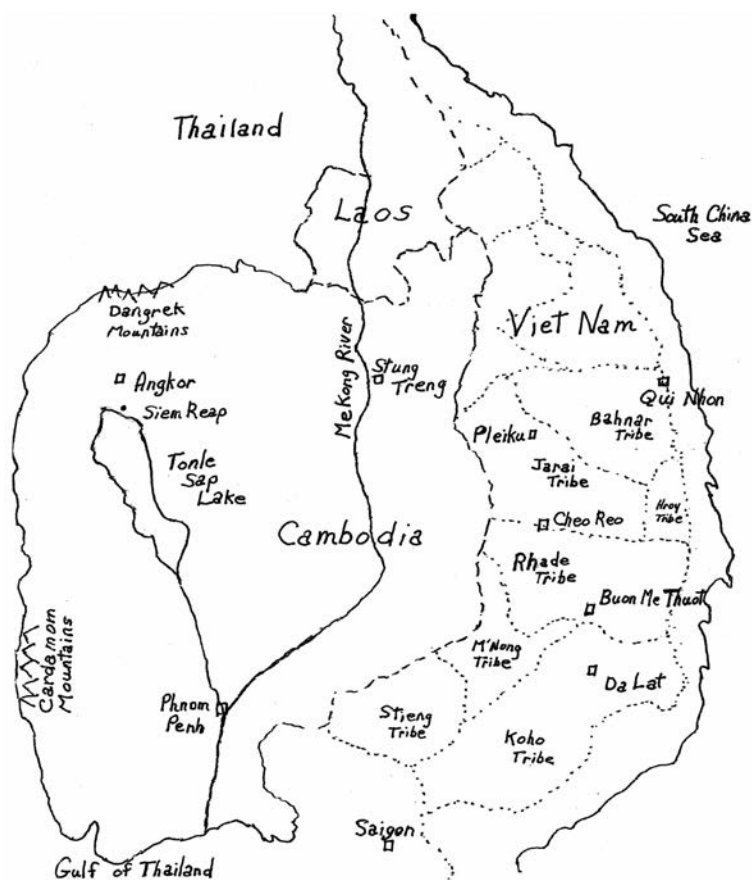
Harriet Hill and H'Yoanh Buonya worked together for three years on their book *Escaping Viet Nam; H'Yoanh's Story* documenting the history of the Montagnards and their struggle for freedom.

Unrelenting pursuit by the Vietnamese communists, occasional betrayal by collaborators, and day-to-day survival were major problems, so FULRO made a command decision to decentralize and split into three independent battalions. H'Yoanh was with the one that decided to negotiate with the Khmer Rouge a "rite of passage" through the northern part of Cambodia under the guise of obtaining

supplies from the Chinese on the Thai border. Often traveling by night, they attached phosphorescent mushrooms to their back packs to lead one another through the treacherous jungles. Malnutrition was rampant, and the Montagnards ate whatever they could find: grubs, ants, and wild yams and leaves that were poisonous unless prepared in a time-consuming special way. They suffered from hordes of blood-sucking leeches and swarms of mosquitoes, from malaria, dysentery and other diseases, and from poisonous snakes — which they ate. They wove their way through fields of landmines, crossed treacherous rivers — even though many were unable to swim — and buried their dead along the way in unmarked graves.

Upon arrival at the Dângrêk Mountain Range, which is shared by Cambodia and Thailand, they found it was the location of the Khmer Rouge headquarters, which was under siege by invading Vietnamese forces. The FULRO group was pressed into service





This hand drawn map shows the areas where various Montagnard tribes were located and where H'Yoanh traveled with other FULRO resistance fighters in their struggle to survive after the end of the Vietnam war.

by the Khmer Rouge to carry supplies and fight the Vietnamese alongside them. During the ordeal, H'Yoanh met her life-partner Y-Jim Buonya and they were married by the battalion's Chaplain. One night during the heat of battle, the Khmer Rouge vanished, which allowed the Montagnards to move to a refugee camp near the Thai border and negotiate the surrender of their weapons. There, H'Yoanh gave birth to a baby girl that she and Y-Jim named Anna. Later they relocated to an international refugee camp inside Thailand. After spending 11 years struggling to survive, the 212 remaining Montagnards were finally resettled in North Carolina in 1986.

With another child on its way, H'Yoanh, Y-Jim and Anna were in the first group of freedom fighters brought to North Carolina, who were assisted in resettlement by U.S. Special Forces (Save the Montagnard People – STMP) and Lutheran Family Services. In 1990, assisted by volunteers from St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Raleigh, Montagnard, and Special Forces communities, they built their own Habitat for Humanity House.

H'Yoanh, Y-Jim and Anna became Naturalized Citizens of the United States. Y-Jim worked four jobs, learned English and earned an associate electrical engineering degree, while H'Yoanh worked numerous jobs and raised five children, four daughters and one son and tended her grandchildren. All of her children either have or are working on college degrees. Anna, their oldest child, born



H'Yoanh and Y-Jim Buonya display a portrait of their family in front of their home in North Carolina — a Habitat for Humanity home which they built themselves. Anna is at the top; Vivian and Y-Jim second from top; H'Yoanh in middle; Maryann (the baby), Ceicile and Jimson across the bottom. The portrait was made in 1999 when Maryann was about a year old. She is now 21 and Anna is 34.

in the jungles of Thailand, graduated from Elon University School of Law and is now a practicing immigration attorney in Arlington, Virginia. She married and recently brought the ninth grandchild — Viktor — into the family. At 60 years old, H'Yoanh now is working on finishing her GED so that she may go to college and get a degree in counseling — her lifelong dream.

H'Yoanh and her family are the epitome of our most loyal Montagnard allies during the Vietnam War who emigrated and have become productive, responsible, contributing, caring citizens of the United States.

In 1990, H'Yoanh met Harriet Hill, one of the church volunteers helping to build the Habitat for Humanity House, and they became devoted friends. Harriet was teaching the former refugees English and helping out with other resettlement and first-time homeowners' issues. In the process, she heard unimaginable stories of heroism and survival. Nineteen years later, Harriet, an author in her own right, worked with H'Yoanh for three years to record the history of the Montagnards and their long struggle for freedom. The result is the book, *Escaping Viet Nam: H'Yoanh's Story*.

The renowned anthropologist Dr. Gerald Hickey noted in one of his five books on the Montagnards that, "...a great many were not killed by bullets or bombs. They perished because their world had been shattered." One Navy veteran commented, "[*Escaping Viet Nam*]... is one of the most amazing and impressive accounts of individual strength and determination that I have ever read. It is so inspiring to read of such individual valor and constant effort against tremendous odds."

All proceeds from the sale of the book go toward H'Yoanh's dream of obtaining a college degree. Books can be purchased at

Continued on page 4



# *BAIT: The Battle of Kham Duc Special Forces Camp* By James D. McLeroy and Gregory W. Sanders



Kenn Miller

By Kenn Miller

The May, 1968, battle of Kham Duc Special Forces Camp and Ngok Tavak five miles to the south, is the least known major battle of the Vietnam War, but this book, McLeroy and Sanders' *BAIT*, should make this important, bloody, and now extremely well documented battle an important focal point for students of that war. On the North Vietnamese

side were two regiments of the NVA 2nd Division and various attached elements. On the allied side were two small detachments of Green Berets and their indigenous CIDG and SOG troops, a Marine Corps artillery battery, a US Army engineer company, infantrymen from the Americal Division, three USAF Combat Controllers, and a huge number of rotary and fixed wing aircraft and crews giving the soldiers on the ground vital air support. Most of those on either side fought with great courage. And many of those on both sides would not leave the Kham Duc and Ngok Tavak area alive.

The word "Bait" in the title of this book refers to the fact that all those on both sides of the fighting were bait in the strategic plans (or perhaps "fantasies") of Le Duan, the actual leader of the North Vietnamese government and military, and General William Westmoreland. The North Vietnamese were hoping for a large victory to be used for propaganda aimed at the American homeland with vivid photos and film footage of many dead and captured Americans in hopes of shaking American resolution. Toward that aim, the North Vietnamese Army had brought along a film and photograph team. General

Westmoreland wanted a mass of North Vietnamese soldiers to be destroyed in a set piece battle. And then there was the so-called "Mini Tet" in the heavily populated coastal areas. The North Vietnamese leaders hoped that such a battle would draw many American and ARVN units away from the coast. Neither side got exactly what it wanted. What happened was almost certainly more terrible than either side had expected.

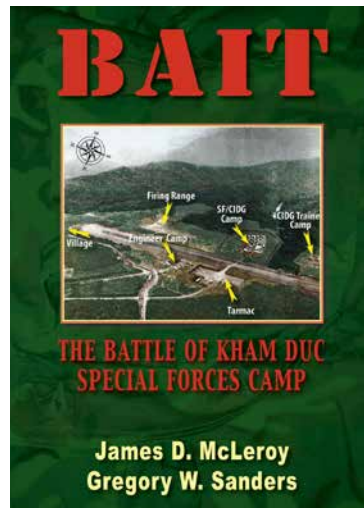
The purpose of this review is not to tell the story of the battle of Kham Duc and Ngok Tavak. All that is in this book itself. This review has only one goal, and that is to encourage people to read this splendid book. Here are a few of the things that make *BAIT* so amazing.

Of course there is the battle. McLeroy played an important part in the battle, but mentions himself only when absolutely necessary — and he does it with a quiet humility rare in first hand accounts of combat. McLeroy and Sanders give us the names and as much information as possible about the many participants of the battle. The authors tell us much about the setting and the history of the area.

Very few American books tell as much about the North Vietnamese military as will be found in *BAIT*. All of the allied forces involved in the battle, on the ground or in the air, get the respect they deserve. There are many subtle points about combat and life in this narrative — especially the importance of listening to those who know what it happening. There are interesting maps, photos,

charts that actually support the narrative.

The writing is clear and excellent. The historical details are included. And both McLeroy and Sanders are former infantry officers with advanced degrees in history, so that the chapter notes, the index, glossary, and sources are abundant and actually worth reading. And that is a rare virtue in any history book. ❖



### *BAIT: The Battle of Kham Duc Special Forces Camp*

by James D. McLeroy and Gregory W. Sanders

294 pages, including notes and index  
Hellgate Press, Ashland, Oregon

## Profile of a Successful Montagnard Emigrant continued

[HarrietHillBooks.com](http://HarrietHillBooks.com) for \$23.90, including sales tax and shipping. Email [harriethill@frontier.com](mailto:harriethill@frontier.com) for signed and personalized copies. The book is also available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). ❖

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### Footnotes:

Only 697 of the FULRO guerilla fighters and their families survived. A second unit of 417 surrendered their weapons to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) forces in

remote northeastern Cambodia in 1992, after 17 years of fighting, and were also resettled in North Carolina. It is thought that the third battalion tried to cross to Thailand through southeastern Laos, but were annihilated by the North Vietnamese Army based there.

Electronic copies of Dr. Gerald Hickey's five books about the Montagnards are available for purchase from Steve Sherman at [sherman1@flash.net](mailto:sherman1@flash.net).

# COPS CORNER



Brad Welker

By Brad Welker

I recently had a conversation with a highly respected retired military officer, a man who served in combat and is a brilliant author. He said inasmuch as the “War on Drugs” is a failure that we should consider legalizing all drugs. I did not have an immediate response as I wanted to take some time to analyze that notion.

This is limited to the use of drugs that are self-prescribed not those that are medically necessary under a Doctor’s care. My biggest concern is the impact it would have on our current lifestyle. Our society has introduced Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) into virtually every arena of life. Endangered species have stopped, delayed, or ended many projects often at the expense of other important undertakings. What would an EIR, if it was clearly objective, reveal?

My view is that of a former street Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) and is skewed by my experiences. Having seen the effects of rampant drug use in communities, I know that criminal activity is tied closely to illegal drug use. What are my concerns for the complete legalization of currently illegal drugs? I am sure there would be huge financial concerns for society and government. I will not even venture into any of those areas. I will only bring up my thoughts from an LEO prospective.

I would like to see an EIR that would address definitively the following areas:

If drugs are legal would it be legal to use them openly in public? Imagine fans using mind-altering drugs at a major sports event or concert. Currently, drug users often hide while they are under the influence to avoid law enforcement contacts. Would they chose now to do so openly?

Would an employer have the right to prohibit an employee from working while under the influence? Imagine an employee using drugs to relieve pain or tension at work. Imagine an assembly line with a percentage of employees who suddenly slow their work pace after drug use.

Could an employer make employees take a drug test at work as a safety precaution?

Would the widespread use of legal drugs impact lawsuits? Would this be a boon to the civil litigation? Imagine the lawsuit against an employer that allowed drug use in the workplace that could be linked to damages to someone? How would employers prevent workers from being under the influence while working to counter-act lawsuits? Anything is possible in Tort Law, a burglar suing his victim because their dog bit him is one current example of how illogical such actions are.

People who currently make a living be making, transporting and selling drugs, who in many cases make large sums of money, would have to find other methods of earning money. What potential impact would occur with this change? Would there have to be a program to retrain such people? Are many likely to turn to other forms of criminality?

Could workers involved with schools, law enforcement, medical treatment and any number of other critical occupations take drugs while working as stress relief?

Would legalization create a health industry problem as more drug users would turn to public health programs to obtain drugs?

Performance Enhancing Drugs (PEDS) are forbidden for use by those competing in many of our major sporting activities. There is great concern that these drugs lead to a wide variety of health problem in the future of anyone who uses them. Other countries have been known to take young children and use PED’s to great superior athletic prowess. Would legalization provide an avenue for young athletes to enhance themselves chemically to achieve prowess?

Scientific research has revealed that drugs often lead to birth defects in future generations. History shows that often drugs originally seen as wonder drugs are often later found to have horrible side effects. The drug Thalidomide given to pregnant women in the 50s and 60s lead to severe birth defects in newborns. Could that tragic event occur again if we legalize all drugs.

The nexus of the illegality of drugs would change from controlling manufacturing, selling, and possessing to controlling when they could be ingested. Alcohol is legal to possess and use, where, when and under what circumstances it can be used are huge law enforcement issues. Those same issues would be found in the legalization of all drugs.

Continued on page 12

*Cops Corner* carries stories related to or about law enforcement. Anyone interested in publishing a story about their experiences is encouraged to contact Chapter 78 Vice President Brad Welker at [wbwelker@gmail.com](mailto:wbwelker@gmail.com).





# SOCOM Inducts Medal of Honor Recipients Into the Commando Hall of Honor



Col (R) Paul Longgear

By Paul Longgear

For a man that loves veterans, especially heroes, the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) ceremony inducting Medal of Honor recipients into their Hall of Honor was like spending an evening in heaven.

My wife and I had the privilege of being invited to MacDill AFB for the Commando Hall of Honor induction on the 29th of January.

Of course the fabulous weather in Florida aided the pleasure of being there. It was in the mid-60s for the three day, two night trip.

The actual ceremony was held at a private club in Tampa that was established in 1916 and looked like something out of an architect's imagination. The hors d'oeuvres were three inch shrimp sitting in tomato juice with a slice of lemon and the wine of one's choice was free. Stronger alcohol was available.

Of the 20 inductees, nine were alive and present. The others paid the ultimate price or had since passed away and were represented by family members. The inductees went from William Donovan who received the MOH in WWI. He was the founder of the Office of Strategic Services later during WWII which eventually became Special Forces. The final inductee was Navy SEAL, Edward Byers (a member of a Rescue Team) in Afghanistan 2012.

SOCOM headquarters promoted an atmosphere of "we are all one family." Every member of the HQ gave all they had for the evening to be a success and it was. There were field grade officers and senior NCOs escorting the inductees and their families. Those serving and being served were from all the services; Navy, Air Force, Marines and Army.

The mission was accomplished without as much as a hiccup. We were bussed the fourteen miles to the grand old private club. To say it was elegant and luxurious would be an understatement. It truly reflected the love and respect that SOCOM has for their heroes.

Free times before and after the actual ceremony were reflective of the camaraderie shared between special operational force mem-



Paul Longgear with CSM Bennie Adkins and SGT Gary Beikirch prior to the induction ceremony.

bers. There was laughter and tears galore as the war stories were shared in impromptu meetings in different sittings.

Five former Green Berets were present for the activities; CSM Bennie Adkins, SFC Melvin Morris, SGT Gary Beikirch, CPT Gary Rose and SSG Ronald Shurer. One living recipient that did not make it was the original Green Beret hero, Roger Donlon, first MOH in Vietnam. Evidently he had some medical issues that prevented him from travelling. ❖



# Commando Hall of Honor Inductees

January 29, 2019

MG William Donovan, United States Army

MajGen Merritt Edson, United States Marine Corps

\*CSM Bennie Adkins, United States Army

BM1 James Williams, United States Navy

SGT Gordon Yntema, United States Army

SFC Eugene Ashley, United States Army

MSG Roy Benavidez, United States Army

Col Williams Jones, United States Air Force

COL Robert Howard, United States Army

Sgt John Levitow, United States Air Force

\*SFC Melvin Morris, United States Army

\*SGT Gary Beikirch, United States Army

CSM Gary Littrell, United States Army

\*CPT Gary M. Rose, United States Army

MSG Gary Gordon, United States Army

SFC Randall Shughart, United States Army

TSgt John Chapman, United States Air Force

SSG Robert Miller, United States Army

\*SSG Ronald Shurer, United States Army

SOCM Edward Byers, United States Navy

\*Green Beret inductees in attendance at the Special Operations Command Commando Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony

Inductees in attendance at the SOCOM Commando Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony were presented with a commemorative induction plaque by U.S. Army Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, USSOCOM commander, and Sgt. Maj. Patrick McCauley, USSOCOM command sergeant major.

Pictured at right, top to bottom:

CSM Bennie Adkins

SFC Melvin Morris

SGT Gary Beikirch

SSG Ronald Shurer



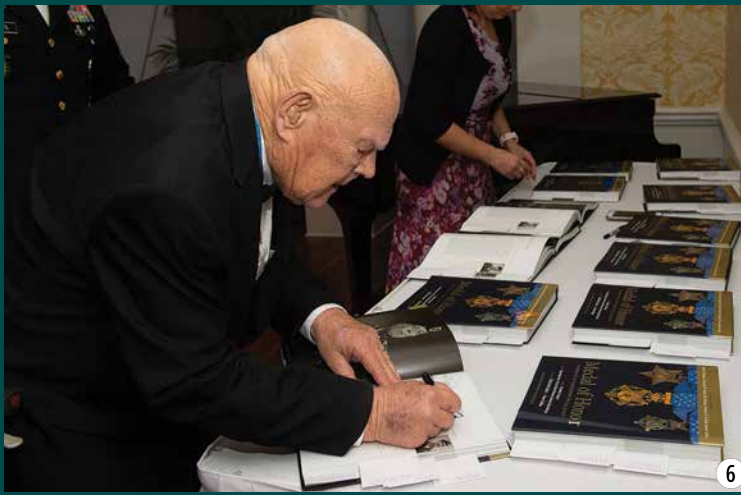




- ❶ Banners displaying the image and citation of each Medal of Honor recipient being inducted into the Commando Hall of Honor were placed in the entrance hall at the Inception Ceremony. Of the twenty inductees, nine were alive and present. Others were represented by family members.
- ❷ CSM Bennie Adkins surveys the entrance hall along with his escorts.

- ❸ Left, 1SG Parrish and, right, SSG Ronald Shurer II stand next to the banner honoring Shurer. SSG Shurer, who saved lives in Afghanistan as an Army medic, is the most recent Medal of Honor recipient.
- ❹ CPT Gary M. Rose enters the building for the Induction Ceremony
- ❺ CPT Gary M. Rose walking through the SOCOM Commando Hall of Honor with a general officer.





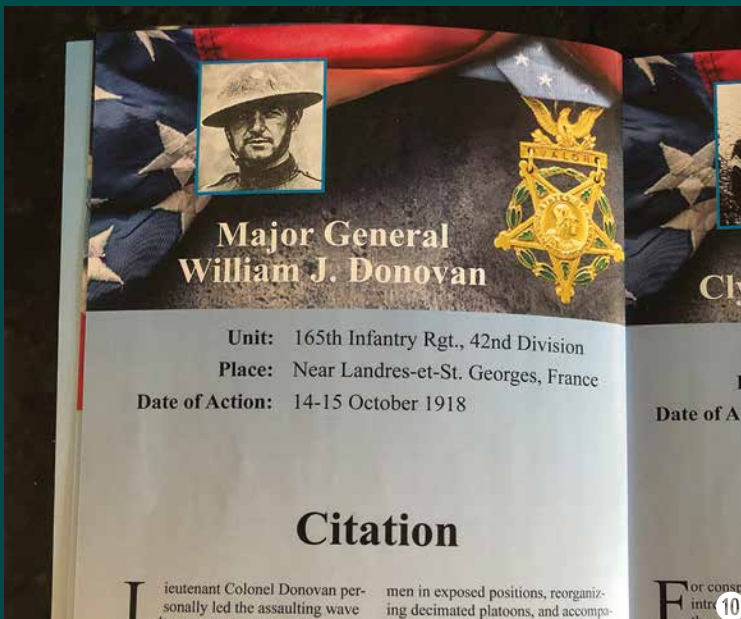
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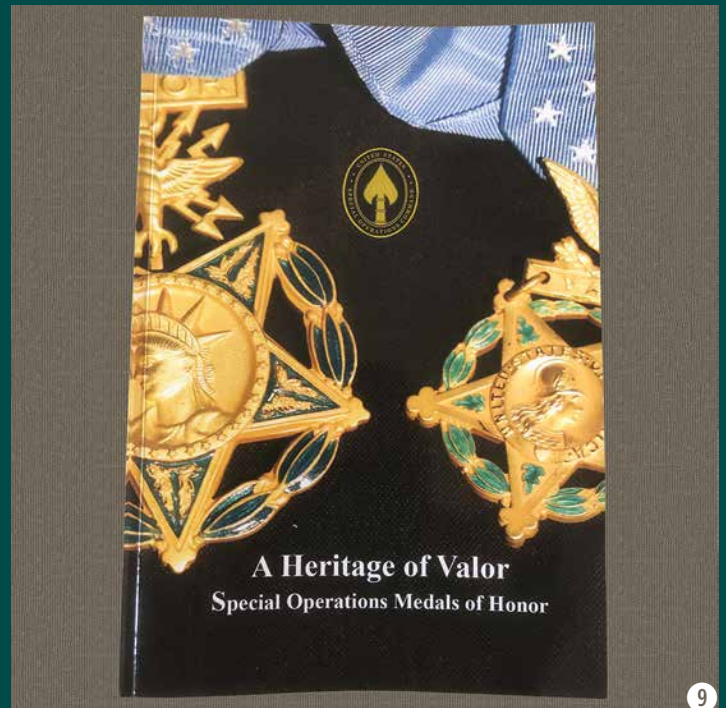
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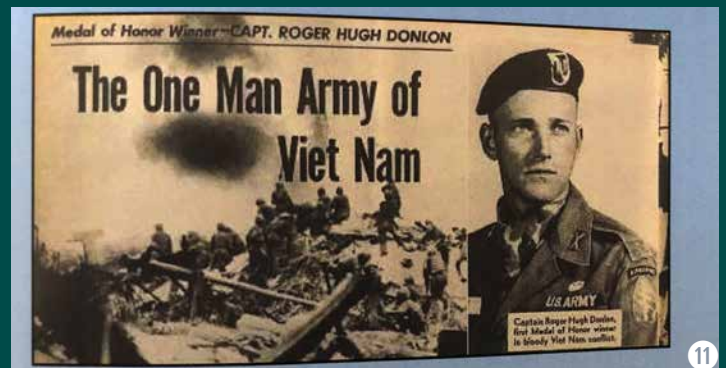
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- 6 Bennie Adkins autographed his page in issues of *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*.
- 7 CSM Bennie Adkins' autographed page.
- 8 The dining room set up for the ceremony's formal dinner.
- 9 *A Heritage of Valor: Special Operations Medals of Honor* by SOCOM's Special Operations Historian documents each Special

- Operations Medal of Honor recipient and their citation.
- 10 The first chapter in *A Heritage of Valor* is for Major General William J. Donovan, founder of the Office of Strategic Services, which eventually became Special Forces.
- 11 A copy of a newspaper clipping from the chapter in *A Heritage of Valor* dedicated to CPT Roger Hugh Donlon.



MacDill AFB • 01/29/19

Commando Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony

# Why Was I There?

By Paul Longgrear

On 8 February 1968, SFC E-7 Eugene Ashley died saving me and six other Green Berets in Vietnam. On 29 January of this year, I had the honor of meeting Darrin Ashley, the only son of SFC Ashley at MacDill AFB in Tampa, FL.

The reason I was there was to give him the story of his dad's heroic death and why he was awarded the Medal of Honor, America's highest award for valor. I had waited 50 years for the opportunity to do this.

Darrin was there to see his dad and other recipients inducted into the Special Operations Command Commando Hall of Honor.

## ***The story as I told it to Darrin Ashley:***

Lang Vei (A-101) was the most northwestern SF camp in South Vietnam. It had been overrun in 1967 and the U.S. government wanted it back up and operational as soon as possible. It was too valuable to abandon.

On 7 February of 68, the 12 man A-Team manning the camp was composed of two officers and 12 enlisted men, along with 250 Bru Montagnards from that area.

## ***Why was I there with my Mobile Strike Force Company (Mike Force)?***

The A-Team needed some added security while rebuilding the camp. At the same time, U.S. Army Vietnam wanted to know what was coming down, the nearby Ho Chi Minh trail into South Vietnam. 12th Company (Mike Force) was made of six American Green Berets and 160 mercenary Hre Montagnards.

## ***2200 Laotians were our biggest headache. Why were they there?***

Elephant was a Laotian army battalion located in Laos a few miles from Lang Vei. It was a useless pawn working for the North Vietnamese government, the U.S. State department and CIA. General Giap, the commander of all the NVA had ordered Elephant to come to Lang Vei or face annihilation. They were accompanied by their families and farm animals.

Our State Department directed that they be assisted by a field grade officer and a four-man medical detachment. They would not remove the Laotians from our location.

All of the civilians were sick and seemed to be seeping fluids from every orifice. There was great concern that disease would break-



**Sergeant First Class  
Eugene Ashley, Jr.**



Patty Longgrear, Paul Longgrear, Darrin Ashley and his wife.

out and spread. The medics were there to treat them and prevent spread of the diseases they carried. We did move them to an alternate site about a mile away.

The four man medical team consisted of: SFC Eugene Ashley, SGT Rich Allen, Sp4 Joel Johnson and Sp4 John Young. Field grade officers were rotated daily.

Their second day at "Old Lang Vei" John Young got captured and disappeared.

Because of all of the confusion trying to deal with the Laos, it was almost two days before anyone knew he was gone.

The battle began on the evening of the 7th of February 1968, with an hour long artillery barrage. They were trying to create as many casualties as possible and cover the sound of the 16 Russian tanks getting into position to be used in the ground assault.

## ***Why were tanks being used?***

This was the first time in the war that the NVA used tanks and why were they attacking a harmless Special Forces camp? Numerous SF camps, including "Old Lang Vei" had been overrun by an Infantry battalion or less.

A few days earlier, the Mike Force was ordered to attack a NVA Bn thought to be holding SP4 Young. As fate would have it, we did not



find Young but we decimated the battalion in a quick raid.

According to an NVA after action report the tanks were to be used, only, in an indirect fire support role against Lang Vei. They were to be used in the ground attack against Khe Sanh Marine combat base.

The ground assault against Lang Vei began around midnight and lasted till about 0315 the next morning. We ran out of anti-tank bullets.

### ***Why did the eight remain in the camp after the battle?***

Eight SF remained in the camp and occupied the Tactical Operations Center to await daybreak. Historically, the NVA always had to abandon any overrun camp because the U.S. shows up at daybreak with superior air support and reinforcements.

This was a different case. The weather prevented air support and reinforcements were not coming. This was the beginning of Tet 1968! Their mission was to destroy everyone and everything from Lang Vei to Saigon.

When SFC Ashley learned that there were 8 men trapped in the TOC and there was no Reaction Force coming to the rescue, he took it upon himself to organize one.

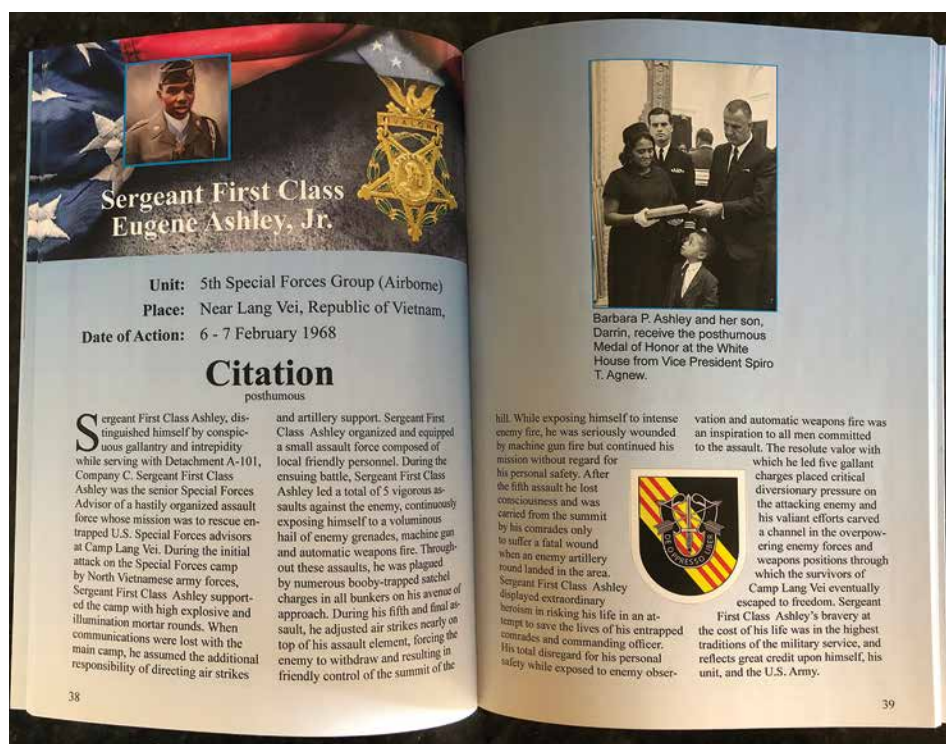
He led five assaults into the camp attempting to get to the TOC. On the 5th assault, about 1500 hours, Eugene Ashley was killed and the other two in the assault force were badly wounded. The assault force had knocked out two machine guns and killed over 25 enemy. They had cut an escape lane through the NVA.

By this time the battle had been going on for about 17 hours. The men inside the TOC had no water to drink nor food to eat, they were all bleeding and almost out of ammunition. Fortunately the weather broke and the Navy A-1s from the Coral Sea were able to fly cover for the defenders as they escaped.

Seven of the eight were able to fight their way to Old Lang Vei where everyone else had gathered. Eventually, all wounded personnel were extracted by an Army Huey. The enemy were ordered out of their ambush sight to the helipad. They began to arrive just as the last Marine helicopters were lifting out the last of the survivors and Laotians.



General Raymond Anthony Thomas III, Darrin Ashley, and Command Sergeant Major Patrick L. McCauley



Sergeant First Class Eugene Ashley Jr.'s Medal of Honor Citation as it appears in *A Heritage of Valor* by SOCOM Special Operations Historians.

There was so much confusion, trying to keep the Laotians from overloading the helicopters, that SFC Ashley's body was accidentally left at the rendezvous point. His remains were recovered three months later when Lang Vei was recaptured.

***Darrin, seven men are alive today because of your dad. He is a bona fide American hero. Thank you for you and your mom's sacrifice.***

Of the 24 Green Berets at Lang Vei, Danny Phillips is still MIA, Gordon Brande, Bill McMurray and Dennis Thompson were POW's for five years and Charlie Lindewald, Kenneth Hannah, James Holt, Earl Burke, Eugene Ashley and James Moreland were KIA. 14 of the original 24 made it out alive on 8 Feb 68. ❖

# Loc Ninh — Part One



John Stryker Meyer

In October 1967, Green Beret medic Lee Martin was still, as he says, “green as grass,” having only been in South Vietnam for two months, and recently assigned to ODA-331 at Loc Ninh, 70 northwest of Saigon and only nine miles from a growing NVA/VC sanctuary across the fence in Cambodia. “I hadn’t seen any real combat to speak of,” Martin said. “I was a medic assigned to A-331 when a medic there was medivaced...Up to

that point, I wanted to get my feet wet on patrols, but because I was the only medic in camp, the CO ordered me to remain in camp.”

What Martin didn’t realize was that intelligence reports had indicated in September 1967 an impending attack was being planned by a large VC/NVA element that had assets, troops and newly arrived enemy 122 mm rockets, along with communist 82 mm and 120 mm mortars teams, from enemy 84A Artillery Regiment, according to the Combat After Action Report filed following the attack.

Outside of the A Camp was a RF/PF (Regional Force Popular Force) CIDG compound. And, the city of Loc Ninh had approximately 10,000, many of whom worked for the French rubber plantation, the Societe des Caoutchoucs d’Extreme-Orient, whose vast forest of trees extended for miles, row after orderly row, across the low hills toward the Cambodian border. One of the missions of A-331 was to keep the lengthy air strip open, for both commercial use and military transports.

Sometime after 1 a.m., on October 29, 1967, A-331 began taking enemy 82 mm mortar rounds and heavy and small arms fire from the northwest. In addition, the nearby village of Hon Quan began receiving mortar fire. In short order the RF/PF CIDG compound began receiving heaving incoming enemy mortar rounds, both 82 mm and 120 mm. Then the NVA/VC forces introduced the defenders to 122 mm rockets which could penetrate several feet of sand bags before detonating. Then the communist forces launched a ground attack on the RF/PF compound. Enemy forces targeted the province chief’s

house to retaliate against him for working with Special Forces team members. In addition, enemy forces opened fire with recoilless rifle rounds — again, directed strictly at the province chief’s home.

“That was the first time that we had RPGs come in over our heads, that was the first time for me...that’s an experience I’ll never forget,” said Martin. “We knew the RF/PF troops were getting hammered, so we were able to stay in radio contact with them during the night, through Sgt. Cattrell, who was with the province chief at that time. We had two radio call signs at that time, Tarzan Cages, Sacked Cages,...you never forget that”

The ground attack on the RF/PF compound was aided by VC agents who opened the front gate to the camp, allowing the VC/NVA attackers to enter the compound, said Martin. “At one point, I believe the province chief called in air strikes on his home there were so many enemy troops around it.”

In addition to the simultaneous attacks on A-331 and RF/PF compound, Loc Ninh A Team had an operation in the field, which initiated contact with communist forces, killing at least 23 VC/NVA troops, according to the AAR. Meanwhile, A-331 received more than 180 mortar rounds and at least 15 RPG-40 rounds inside the camp and outside its perimeter.

“Sometime during the night, we lost radio contact with Sgt. Cantrell,” Martin said. Throughout the attack there were FACs working with Spooky and others tactical air support which aided A-331’s defense of its camp. At first light, the communist forces withdrew from the battlefield as A-331 put together a relief team to retake the RF/PF compound.

“We had six Special Forces soldiers and two CIDG companies that went back to the RF/PF compound to look for Sgt. Cantrell and the province chief,” Martin said. “....We found them hiding inside a sheltered wall, alive and our relief force retook the compound.” An Air Force tech sergeant had been executed by the VC. Martin found his body.

Martin also learned about VC booby traps: “There was a plank across the stream, fortunately, I saw a wire which was attached to a Chicom grenade.”

[Next month: Part two.]

## Cops Corner continued

Would the current use of prescriptions as a precursor for purchasing drugs be retained and used to limit misuse of drugs that have adverse side effects?

How many people who currently avoid the use of illegal drugs would now embrace using them if they were suddenly legal?

There would most likely have to be a control agency. What agency would control the new program? Would it be at the Municipal level or would it be at the Federal level?

The biggest concern and perhaps the most controversial area, would legalization induce a larger proportion of people to become users? Would it create a situation that expanded the number of users?

My intent is to provide questions so that anyone reading this will objectively look at the prospect of the complete legalization of all drugs. There is no doubt there are many other concerns, please feel free to email me regarding this article. ♦



## February 2019 Chapter 78 Meeting Presentation: Guest of Honor — Yvette Benavidez Garcia



Mike Keele

By Mike Keele

Chapter 78 has had a long run of fabulous guest speakers, the latest being Yvette Benavidez Garcia, daughter of Medal of Honor recipient Roy Benavidez. This article could be pages long, if speaking of honors bestowed upon Roy, because he is a legend. He had the highest expectations for himself and for his family, including daughter Yvette who didn't realize Roy was a hero

while she was growing up. To his three kids, Roy was just "dad." He had the highest expectations for his children, so they studied hard and grew up good.

Yvette told us a story that defined Roy's good heart and character. Once, when their mother had gone to the store, the kids were playing and caused enough of a ruckus to interrupt Roy's watching a Benny Hill TV show. Roy lined them up, ordered them to kneel and pray until he said they could get up. This was supposed to be a minute's worth of spiritual contemplation, but Roy became engrossed in the TV show and forgot about the kids. About twenty minutes later, the other kids appointed Yvette as their spokesperson to have the embargo on their fun lifted. When she got Roy's attention, he was surprised and embarrassed. Can you imagine a father apologizing?

Yvette said the first inkling they had that "Dad" was a hero, was about a week prior to the MOH ceremony, when the Secret Service arrived in El Campo; a lot of them. They were everywhere, causing quite a stir with their black suits, starched expressions and wrinkled shirts.

Yvette realized that maybe there was something to Dad's lectures about being the best you can, getting a good education and making the most of yourselves. After The Medal had been presented, Roy, who was retired and living a quiet life, announced that President Reagan had asked him to go on tour around the world, telling his story about being poor, discriminated against and, most of all, resilient and unrelenting in pursuit of your goals. But, he added, not to worry, because the world would tire of his story and he'd be back in a year. Roy's estimated retirement date of one year missed by about sixteen years.

Meanwhile, Roy's hard work inspired Yvette to dig down and apply herself in everything she did. Her dad had always harped on getting a good education and respecting one's teachers. She took all this to heart and became a teacher, right in her home town of El Campo, TX. When Roy passed away in 1998, she began



Guest of honor, Yvette Benavidez Garcia, daughter of Medal of Honor recipient Roy Benavidez. (Photo by Rick Carter)



Lee Martin meeting Yvette Benavidez Garcia for the first time. (Photo by Rick Carter)

to assemble a picture of what it took to succeed through the stories told about Roy by his old comrades. She took Roy's motto of "Never Give Up" and used it for the title of the book she wrote as an example for encouraging young people — particularly the kids of farm workers in El Campo, where little was being said about not giving up.

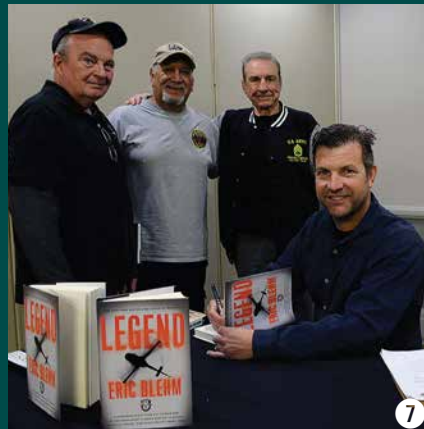
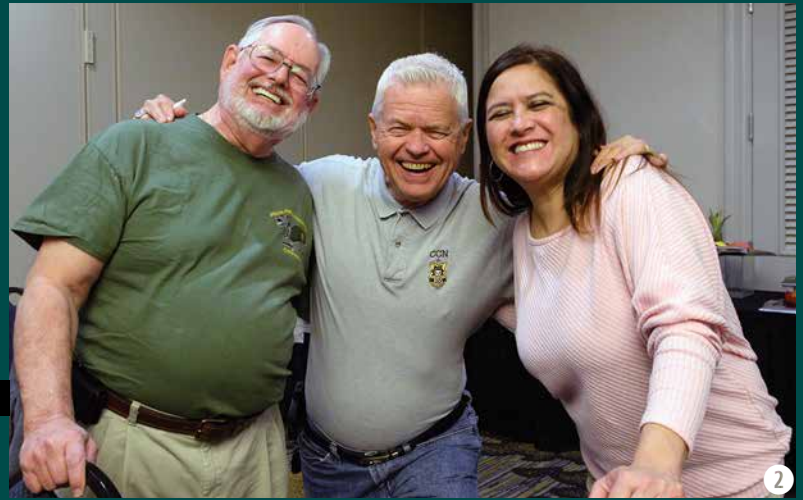
Yvette said the book is still in print and can be purchased through her by emailing her at [yvettebgarcia@gmail.com](mailto:yvettebgarcia@gmail.com)

The books are aimed at kids from the second through the seventh grades.

The highlight of the meeting for Yvette was meeting for the first time Chapter 78 member/SF Medic Lee Martin, who was stationed at Loc Ninh A Team A-331 on May 2, 1968, when the bloodied, muddied body with 58 wounds, including a gaping bayonet gash that open the side of his stomach, landed in a bullet-riddled chopper. Martin was present when they attempted to zip up the body bag Sgt. Benavidez had been placed into.

Chapter member Hank Eylicio also presented an update on the immigration combat zones along the border. See the Chapter 78 minutes for more details on his excellent presentation. ❖

# SFA Chapter 78 February 2019 Meeting (Photos by Rick Carter)



❶ Chapter President John Stryker Meyer, and meeting speakers Eric Blehm, Yvette Benavidez Garcia, and Chapter members Lee Martin and Hank Eylicio.

❷ Lee Martin, John Stryker Meyer and Yvette Benavidez Garcia

❸ Hank Eylicio gave a gripping update on the border.

❹ Lee Martin speaking with Chapter members Terry Cagnolatti, Richard Simonian and Jim Duffy.

❺ Eric and Yvette were presented our exclusive 20th Anniversary coins.

❻ Yvette Benavidez Garcia with her book *Tango Mike Mike: The Story of Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez*, a children's book about her father's life story.

❼ Chapter meeting speaker Eric Blehm, author of *Legend*, with Chapter members Brad Welker, Terry Cagnolatti and Richard Simonian.

❽ Hank Eylicio after his presentation with Chapter members Gary Macnamara, How Miller, Don Gonneville and James Carter.