



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78
The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 4 • APRIL 2020



Spectres Save RT Idaho in Laos

**Special Forces Medic Honored
by Dog Lab Classmates**

**Congratulations, 10SFG Spouse Lesha Schardt!
"Alex Quade Special Forces Scholarship" Recipient**



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From the Editor



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FRONT COVER: Army Sgt. 1st Class Cory Christiansen, a member of the Para-Commandos, U.S. Special Operations Command's parachute team, jumps out of an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft over Nellis Air Force Base, NV. (Air Force Airman 1st Class Dwane Young)

BACK COVER: A Marine descends after jumping out of an aircraft during parachute operations in Okinawa, Japan. (Marine Corps Cpl. Kallahan Morris)




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Funding for the SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel is provided by



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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 at jimmorris31@gmail.com.



Jim Morris
Sentinel Editor

SF THROUGH THE AGES

Special Forces is 68 years old now, three generations and change. And just as the society as a whole has experienced generational change so has Special Forces. The unit and the mission draw the same types of guys. The basic type is a dedicated warrior, smarter than average, someone who likes a challenge and an adventure. Also required is a capacity for deep friendship, and two things which would appear contradictory, a sense of honor, and a taste for larceny.

Some requirements change over time, but I think the GT (IQ) requirements are still the same as those for OCS. If an operator is not an officer it's because he either doesn't want to be or hasn't gotten around to it yet. Group is not a place where a young officer can feel intellectually superior to his NCOs, because he probably isn't.

I've met a few of those guys who joined Group when it was first activated, including our own Richard Simonian. My closest friend of those guys was Major Mike Williams, who, RIFed after Korea, rejected the corporalcy he was offered and went on to be a major in two more armies, Mike Hoare's 5 Commando in the Congo, and Grey's Scouts in Rhodesia. Mike was not typical of those guys because he was not typical of anything. He spoke five languages, was licensed to fly multi-engine aircraft commercially, and to master 500-ton ocean going vessels. He called me in a rage because the Texas Boxing Commission would not let him fight a four-round exhibition to celebrate his 65th birthday. To this day I think he was the toughest man I ever met.

The early SF had two types, those who got in combat and those who did not. Those who did not were terrific technically, and had a marvelous cynical sense of humor about life. Those who saw combat, usually with UNPIK, developed a darker view.

That darker view eventually came to permeate the Vietnam generation. We played leap frog in and out of a war that nobody wanted us to win, at least not by doing any of the things that would have won it, which were, you know, not good PR.

The big change, attributable to our own MG Jack Singlaub, was USASOC. Special Forces went from being red-headed stepchildren to fair-haired boys. In the old days you were there because you loved the life and believed in the mission. Which is to say that in the old days nobody was risk averse or mealy-mouthed. These days, well, some are.

I haven't really had an opportunity to evaluate the post-Vietnam SF. I know some of those guys, and respect and admire them tremendously. There are a lot more guys wearing Ranger tabs now than there were in the '60s, which may or may not be a good thing. The Ranger and SF tabs are both marks of military excellence, but not necessarily the same kind of excellence. Making an army out of stone age tribesmen is a different skill than mounting a small unit raid against a specific target. Fortunately most can do both, but this requires switching mind-sets from mission to mission.

But really things have not changed that much. SF guys still walk the same, as though they expected to be opposed, but not stopped. ❖

Jim Morris
Sentinel Editor



Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

What a month! As most of you know I canceled the March Chapter meeting in an abundance of caution. Only after consulting with my VP Don Gonneville, did I finally make the decision. Plus, I had a couple of RSVP's canceled for health reasons. COVID-19 has become a pandemic situation all over the world. Most of our Chapter Members are over 65 years of age, and several have underlying health conditions.

I think most of you would agree, better safe than sorry, as the situation is going to get worse, before it gets better.

For our March meeting I had made a reservation at the Billeting facility that's located in the same building as Fiddlers Green. My thought was to arrive Friday afternoon for any final coordination, and to make sure everything was in place by Saturday morning.

I canceled our reservation at the Fiddlers Green Pub, and made a new reservation for April 11 (subject to change depending on the COVID-19 situation). Same time same location.

Which brings up another topic.

If anyone wants to come in early, like Friday afternoon, and spend the night in the Billeting facility let me know, as I can make reservations. I know How Miller and his wife Nancy come all the way from Goleta. Normally you would need a Military I.D. card showing that you are retired. However, I've worked out an agreement with the Billeting manager that as long as rooms are available, they will waive the I.D. card requirement. Cost is \$75.00 a night. I might add, these rooms are very nice. Check in time is 1300 Hrs. The Pub is open for lunch and dinner.

As always contact me with any questions or concerns.

Please feel free to contact me anytime with questions or concerns. ❖

Bruce D. Long
President, SFA Chapter 78
SGM, SF (Ret)
De Oppresso Liber

April Chapter Meeting

Planning to attend our April 11th meeting? If so please e-mail **VP Don Gonneville** at: don@gonneville.com, no later than Thursday April 9th, midnight. We need an exact headcount.

DATE: April 11, 2020

TIME: Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

LOCATION: The Pub at Fiddlers Green

ADDRESS: [4745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19](#)
[Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176](#)
(Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos)



Special Forces Medic Honored by Dog Lab Classmates



How Miller

By How Miller

On 10 June, 1970 Special Forces Medic Steven Spiers was killed on a patrol with Project Delta. 50 years later those of his Dog Lab classmates who knew him best, and were able to attend, paid tribute to Steve in his home town of Lexington, Mass.

After visiting his gravesite, we visited the Revolutionary War battlefield monument, the Battle Green in Lexington, which cannot have failed to influence him growing up. Later we went to the Massachusetts Vietnam War Memorial in Worcester to see Steve's name carved in granite along with all the others who left Massachusetts and lost their lives in Vietnam. Other of his fellow classmates who wished to come included Medal of Honor recipient Gary Beikirck, who had to cancel to attend his daughter's surgery. ❖



Salute to Spiers, left to right, medics Howard Miller, Terrence Payne, Richard Pellerin, Edison Seel, Larry Sykes, David Suhl. (Photo courtesy How Miller)



Viewing Steven Spiers name in granite at Massachusetts Vietnam Memorial in Worcester. (Photo courtesy How Miller)



Chapter 78 member John S. Meyer recently spoke at a gathering of UCLA ROTC cadets. Pictured above gathered with some Air Force ROTC cadets afterwards. (Photo courtesy John Meyer)



Chapter 78 member John S. Meyer recently visited the Chapter's senior, distinguished member Ret. MG John K. Singlaub at his Franklin, TN home, along with fellow SOG Recon team leader George "The Troll" Sternberg. During the visit Sternberg presented Singlaub with a copy of Volume XI of *MACV SOG* series produced by SOG Historian/Collector Jason Hardy. The photo on the cover features Sternberg in his full regalia as a member of ST Oregon, where he and Mike Tucker took turns being the team leader. (Photo courtesy John Meyer)



CONGRATULATIONS, 10th SFG Spouse Lesha Schardt! “Alex Quade Special Forces Scholarship” Recipient

From War Reporter Alex Quade
Honorary SFA Member (National/Lifetime)

Please join me in congratulating Lesha Schardt! The 10th Special Forces Group spouse is the first recipient of the scholarship I set up with The American College of Financial Services. The full ride/no-strings attached scholarship is specifically for an SF NCO or their spouse — active duty or veteran.

Lesha is AWESOME! Her husband Bryan is an 18-Echo in 4th Battalion, who has deployed multiple times. She epitomizes the SF spirit of “getting it done” — between raising five sons (ages 10 months to 10 years) and running a small business — she still wants to give back to the military community.

This was a global candidate search — info went out to SOF community worldwide. I’m thrilled that the Board of Directors at The American College of Financial Services coincidentally chose someone from the Special Forces Group I’ve spent the most time covering on combat ops downrange.

(I loved how Lesha found out about my scholarship: Bryan gave her the information from word that had gone out at 10th SFG. So, this was definitely a family & community effort!)

Check out her lovely thank you letter (in photos below). And, here’s the OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE:

“...Lesha Schardt has been a military spouse for the past 11 years. In that time, she, her husband, Special Forces Sergeant First Class Bryan Schardt, and their five boys have moved to Germany, North Carolina and now Colorado. Still very much in the busy years of raising their

children, Lesha is looking ahead at what she’ll do once her kids are all school-aged.

“I love the Armed Forces,” Lesha says. “And I’ve been thinking about what I want to do, and that is provide financial services to military families. I want to be able to be the person that someone can come to, and feel confident that I’ll help.”

Lesha sees this as an opportunity to focus on building her skill set for this new career. “I don’t like not knowing things,” she says. “I feel a sense of accomplishment when I’m studying something new.”

Lesha is diving into the Chartered Financial Consultant designation, which will provide her with a comprehensive financial planning education, and will give her the knowledge and skills to give back to others. “I want to lighten other’s burden in any possible way I can,” Lesha says. We’re proud to know her, and we’re thankful for Bryan’s service. Congratulations!

This scholarship is possible through the generosity of War Reporter Alex Quade, who wanted to give back to the community of Special Forces she’s covered in combat, and as always, The Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company.” ❖



Dear Alex Quade,

I am honored to be one of the recipients of the “Alex Quade Special Forces Scholarship”. Thanks to your generous support I will be able to help my family and others without putting a financial burden on my family. As a wife to a Special Forces soldier, I have been able to support him through all of the deployments and special learning opportunities that have come about and I am an avid proponent of my husband taking any class that is available to him. It was very exciting to learn about the scholarship you have put in place and how it is not just for the soldiers, but for their family as well.

It has been 11 years since I have attended formal schooling and had been pondering what I could do when all of my children started school. I have five boys, ranging in age from nine months to ten years old, and knew that now was the time to really focus on my future employment instead of waiting to start when my littlest went to school. The information about your scholarship with the American College of Financial Services couldn’t have come to my attention at a more perfect time!

Thank you for this amazing opportunity that truly will be a blessing in my life, especially considering the lifestyle of a military family! Your generosity and thoughtfulness in developing this scholarship does not go unnoticed.

Sincerely,
Lesha Schardt



Spectres Save RT Idaho in Laos



This is an inspection of RT Idaho in April 1969 at CCN Headquarters in Da Nang by Lt. Gen. Richard Stilwell, commander of I Corps. RT Idaho was expanded for a special mission into northern Laos. This is the way the team would look before boarding the helicopters to be inserted into a target. From left: Col. Jack “The Iceman” Isler — wearing the green beret, Lt. Gen. Richard Stilwell, John S. Meyer, Son, Sau, Hiep, Lynne M. Black Jr., Doc Fontenberry, Hung, Capt. Michael O’Byrne, Sgt. Douglas “The Frenchman” LeTourneau and Cau. (Photo courtesy of John S. Meyer).



Photo taken at 46th Special Forces Grp. headquarters in NKP Air Force Base in Thailand, one day before launching into mission. From left, RT Idaho One Zero John S. Meyer and Launch Site Commander Maj. Bill Shelton, who was the last commanding officer at FOB 1 before it closed. (Photo courtesy of John S. Meyer)



John S. Meyer

Editor’s Note: Fifty years ago, RT Idaho ran a memorable mission deep into Laos where Spectre gun ships covered the team against thousands of enemy soldiers.

By John S. Meyer

Flying east into southern Laos in the late afternoon of 8 February 1970, I was jarred awake by the frantic voice of my assistant team leader, John C. Ingles, shouting over the rotor noise, “We’re going in. The SOBs didn’t wake us up.”

The SOBs in question were the flight crew of the Sikorsky HH-3s bringing us into our LZ. As I snapped out of my snooze, I looked out the starboard door just as we flew over two startled Laotian farmers, a woman, and two water buffalo. The big chopper then hopped over a hedgerow and landed in an adjacent field as Ingles and I frantically awakened the rest of RT Idaho.

I was mad as hell. It was bad enough that they hadn’t bothered to alert us as we approached the target area, but now they were compounding that faux pas by flying too close to indigenous farmers and then depositing us in the middle of an open field far from our primary LZ, and farther yet from the bridge that was the primary objective of our mission. Our intended LZ, the one we had carefully selected and planned for, was situated near the top of a ridge line some distance away. Furthermore, because we were being inserted into the AO in the afternoon, rather than in the morning as planned, getting dumped in a valley full of NVA was ludicrous. This was no way to begin a mission. Had I been more alert, or less pissed, I would have protested vigorously and refused to dismount the chopper. However, because I was fed up with the bullshit of camp life and several weeks of frustration, I simply wanted to get on the ground and get away. After all, this was our job; I enjoyed it.

This particular mission was a simple one, at least on paper. By early 1970 the brass had become aware of something new and rather creative on the part of the NVA: underwater bridges. These were being put in place at strategic spots along the Ho Chi Minh Trail where it ran through Laos. From the air it would appear as though the trails were interrupted by water, in some places several feet deep, yet it was apparent that the trucks heading south were crossing the streams with ease. A closer review of aerial photographs, however, revealed that the ever-inventive NVA had come up with an underwater struc-



RT Idaho One-One John C. Ingles stands in front of the RT Idaho team hootch in the CCN Recon Company area in March 1970. With Ingles, from left, Grenadier Tuan, Interpreter Hoanh, Do Ti Quang, Chau, Cau and Vo. (Photo courtesy of John S. Meyer)

ture that could support heavy trucking while remaining unobservable from the air. It was a devilishly clever idea, and well executed.

One bridge in particular, about 35 kilometers southwest of the A Shau Valley in southern Laos, had excited the special interest of the Saigon brass, a group with a known tendency to get excited about such developments. Intelligence reports said the bridge was an engineering marvel, so the boys at the top wanted to know more about it, and they wanted to know as soon as possible. ASAP seemed to be the default time frame in which they sought information, their motto being: "Nothing is impossible if you don't have to do it yourself."

Problems From the Start

But there were problems from the start. Bad weather in South Vietnam kept the team grounded at the Camp Eagle launch site in Phu Bai. And there were also two major concerns regarding the Area of Operations itself: first, this particular branch of the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex was very heavily traveled; and, second, the normally thick jungle vegetation recon teams relied on for survival was unusually sparse on most of the surrounding hills and in the valley, with only a few scattered areas of thicker growth to give cover.

The ever thoughtful brass got around the bad weather in South Vietnam by employing their standard tactic, they flew RT Idaho to Thailand to be launched out of Nakhon Phanom. We made the flight in a Blackbird, a camouflaged C-123 that carried no insignia or obvious identifying markers on it. When we landed in Thailand a blue Air Force van, complete with curtains and blacked-out windows, backed up to the plane and drove us to the 46th Special Forces Company compound.

To get around the thin vegetation problem, our plan was to move at night and during dim early morning hours. It was for this reason we had requested to be inserted at first light. After a quick briefing in which we'd made our concerns and desires known, the commanding officer, Major Bill Shelton, confirmed there would be an 0700 launch using CH-3s the next day.



Sgt. John C. Ingles stands in front of RT Idaho team hootch in March 1970 in CCN Recon Company Da Nang. (Photo courtesy of John S. Meyer)

There were, as was so often the case, complications, and again as usual they went forever unexplained. Shit just seemed to happen. The result of these mystery occurrences was we did not launch until 1300. After two hours of eastward flight time, we touched down briefly for refueling at a CIA-operated camp high atop an isolated mountain range. During the initial leg of the journey, the helicopters had leveled off at about 8,000 feet, which meant it was colder than the proverbial well-digger's shovel, so cold we had to wrap ourselves in blankets offered us by the Air Force crew.

During the second leg of the flight, we all succumbed to a bad case of grogginess because we had stayed up throughout the night playing Vietnamese poker, an intricate and challenging affair wherein four players hold three separate hands each – two five-card hands and one three-card hand. Needless to say, it demands a strenuous concentration that can leave a body exhausted. When we'd asked him, the door gunner hadn't known how much longer the flight might last, so we'd all opted to crap out and get a little rest. I hadn't wakened until Ingles shook my shoulder in time for me to look out the door at the startled farmers.

As the wheels touched the ground, I was the first one out the door, followed closely by Ingles, Sau, Tuan, Chau and Son. I jumped out of the chopper with my rucksack hanging from one arm, my web



Members of a pararescue team leave an HH-3E Jolly Green Giant helicopter to begin a search and rescue mission during Exercise Patriot Coyote. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Staff Sgt. Steve McGill)



The pointman for this mission was Son, right, standing with previous RT Idaho Interpreter Hiep at Phu Bai in late 1968. (Photo courtesy of John S. Meyer)

gear draped over the other, and my CAR-15 dangling from my neck. I did not present what one would call the ideal image of a recon man. None of us did. In fact the entire team was left huddled on the LZ in various degrees of disarray as the HH-3 powered off, obligingly showering us with dirt, dust and debris as if in some kind of disparaging commentary on our professionalism. Well, their performance had been none too stellar either.

Before the dust settled we got our act together and ran like hell to the nearest hedgerow traversing the gently rolling slope. We were several clicks south of our target, which was situated at the end of an expansive valley with enormous mountains forming its east and west flanks. We were somewhere east of the main trail. Intelligence reports claimed as many as 200 trucks moved along it nightly. Given the rather undisguised nature of our arrival, we knew it was only a matter of time before hundreds of NVA troops, trackers and dogs would be pouring down that road looking for us.

After crossing the hedgerow, I split the team. I advised the tail gunners of each element to cover all our tracks and to occasionally blanket the ground with black pepper or powdered mace to thwart any dogs the NVA might set loose to hunt us. Ingles went east and I went west before heading north in parallel order, always in sight of each other. As we moved north, we ran into another hedgerow, moved through it and continued north down the slope. We moved as quickly as possible. There was no “walk 10 minutes, wait 10 minutes.” But as we moved along I couldn’t help but marvel at the stunning and serene beauty of this distant Laotian valley. Lush as it was, surrounded by lofty and picturesque mountains, it presented numerous vistas American tourists would pay big bucks to see.

Breakneck Speed

But ours was no tourist jaunt. Furthermore, it was very unsettling to be moving through this beautiful valley in broad daylight at, what for

a recon team, passed for breakneck speed. It was not a comfortable way to proceed. We took no breaks, not wanting to spend a moment longer than necessary in such an exposed position. Darkness was closing in fast. The team reformed itself and started heading west, descending into another small valley. Once we crossed a narrow, rocky stream we then began climbing the steep western face of the valley. Because the area was wide open, and the vegetation so thin, the team spread out and moved abreast. As we progressed everyone covered his tracks and laid down more powdered mace.

We moved straight up the hill about 50 meters, staying in the scant grass as much as we could. I wanted to get as far away from the LZ as possible, although I didn’t fool myself into believing this had much of a chance of confusing an alert enemy. On this side of the valley there were three fingers of land extending down the mountain and onto the valley floor. The vegetation on each finger was more abundant than what we had been passing through. As we headed up the first hill, or finger, we skirted the denser concentrations of brush before dipping down into the hollow separating it from the next finger of land. We then maneuvered around this second finger with its dense jungle growth flowing into the grassy floor of the valley like a flattened, dark-green funnel.

By now, we were out of breath. The grueling climb with all our combat gear was starting to wear on us, and each additional step seemed to bring an increase in the steepness of the incline. It was growing painfully clear that those periodic volleyball games we had played back at camp weren’t sufficient physical training. However, any thoughts of letting personal pain slow us down were not so subtly overridden by the noises we could hear north of us. The menacing sounds made us forget our dry throats, heaving lungs, pained knees and aching backs. The enemy was out there and the game, as they say, was on; the forces might not yet be joined, but a fight

was in the offing. This pressing fact rendered marginal any concern for stealth. The deadly SOG version of hide and seek was about to begin, it was almost dark, and we had not yet selected our RON. We needed desperately to get ourselves hidden.

Sau, my Vietnamese team leader, was on point. I was behind him as we moved past the tip of the second finger of jungle before turning west and proceeding up the steep mountain. Sau spotted an immense thicket of thorny vines and underbrush that had a shroud of double canopy of jungle over it. The thicket spread up the side of a steep hill. The incline was at least 40 degrees and presented a serious challenge. "VC no find us here," Sau whispered.

One by one, we burrowed deeply into the forbidding thicket. No sooner had Son and Chau sat down than Sau hissed and told them to get their asses up and move farther up the hill, deeper into the tangle of bushes. Complete darkness was only moments away as Sau drove all of us forward, forcing us to forgo the pain of thorns, wait-a-minute vines, and jagged stones in order to penetrate as deeply as possible into the protective undergrowth.

Finally Sau was satisfied. Everyone settled down and tried to get as comfortable as was possible on a 40-degree slope. It was so bad we had to tie ourselves to trees to keep from rolling down. Instead of assuming our normal circular defensive position, we formed a line running up the hill, with each man alternating the direction in which he faced. Our biggest concern was having the NVA come up this finger of land from either our north or south flanks, or both. The eastern tip of the finger was too far down the hill to worry about. Sau crept out and placed a claymore facing north and returned to our position, moving in the dark like a cat, barely making any sounds at all. Meanwhile, the NVA were noisily moving about at the northern end of the valley.

In my mind there were three pressing unknowns at this stage of the unfolding contest: had we gotten far enough away from the LZ; had the farmers who saw us land hightailed it or had they stayed to watch our movements and report them to the NVA; would the dogs who were surely out there find our tracks?

At around 2200 we heard numerous trucks on the main road. In just a few minutes several had driven slowly south past our RON. Once they reached the open valley fields, they stopped and began disembarking troops. Once out of the trucks, it sounded as though the enemy soldiers were heading south, toward the LZ, and away from us. This was encouraging news. At midnight I made a routine communications check with one of the airborne command ships, not speaking a word but just squeezing the transmit key on the radio once, breaking squelch, as we called it. The airborne controller acknowledged our existence, which was another bit of reassuring news.

Spoonful of Mace and Pepper

The happy times were spoiled when we heard the barking of tracking dogs. It sounded as though they had crossed the main road and were advancing toward us, past the last hedgerow we had encountered, but it didn't sound as if the dogs had picked up our scent. As we quietly savored our continuing good luck, we heard a growling howl of pain. Evidently one of the dogs had gotten a snootful of mace and pepper. There would be no more tracking for him tonight.

Around 0100 we heard enemy troops moving north on the road. While on the east side, someone opened fire with a few AK-47 bursts. The distinctive bark of the Russian-made weapon jarred us into full alert. How long would they keep it up? In which direction would they move? As we sat in inky darkness, a darkness so complete I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, it sounded as though they were making their way north.

A bit later we could hear NVA soldiers searching the first finger of land we'd crossed. They were on both sides of it, moving through the same grass we had traveled through. It didn't take long before we had enemy troops on both sides of us. As dense as our cover was, we could see the flickering light from the lamps the NVA carried. As the enemy soldiers began probing the bottom tip of the finger we were on, vehicle activity on the road picked up noticeably. This gave us a very uneasy feeling. Had Sau not driven us on, the NVA might well have spotted us. But, as it was, we were ensconced so deep in that god-awful thicket that the one enemy soldier who approached our position hesitated and then gave up, defeated by the thorny vegetation. We could almost feel him thinking better of it and deciding to return to his comrades. Little did he appreciate how close to death he'd come, what with five CAR-15s and an M-79 aimed in his direction.

Slowly the NVA troops tired of their frustrating and uncomfortable search and called it off. RT Idaho could finally release the collective breath it had been holding. The danger was not gone, not by a long shot, but briefly retired from the field of play. As we waited in the dark, my mind flashed back to other nights when RT Idaho had played hide and seek with the enemy. One in particular stood out, the night an NVA soldier had crawled up to our perimeter, reached out, touched my boot, and audibly gasped. Fortunately, he did nothing more than quietly back away, moving only when the wind stirred the tree leaves.

At first light, Sau climbed a tree, so high I couldn't see him from the ground, where he observed enemy troops along the main road. He said the trucks we'd seen before were no longer visible, but the soldiers remained out there. They were beginning to set fires in order to cook breakfast. Our situation was precarious and our options limited. We couldn't move north, south, or east, which left us one choice. Not wanting to spend another day and night tied to trees on the side of a hill, we opted for the obvious and moved out in a westerly direction.

For the rest of the day we climbed the side of the steep mountain. At first we were forced to crawl on all fours through the thick vegetation; but eventually we broke out of it, only to be confronted by huge rock formations. We were under the cover of fairly dense double- or triple-canopied jungle. By midmorning the rock formations had yielded to a sheer rock face. Now we had to go straight up, inching our way along the solid rock like bugs. Several times the rock face was so steep we had to tie together the 6-foot strands of rope we used for our Swiss seats to make a rope long enough to advance up to the next level of rocks. This meant we had to take off our web gear and rucksacks and hoist each piece up one at a time. The process was painfully slow. The only good news during this climb was the fact that the NVA were not on our tail. Hell, a mountain goat would have been hard-pressed to follow us.

By 1200 we were dead tired and took a much-needed break. There was no option but to string the team out precariously in an irregular,

vertical line of march. Moving through the jungle, especially for me, a large gangly American, was especially difficult. Clawing our way straight up a mountain in full combat gear was downright exhausting. But as some clever wag once said, "Necessity's a mother." After we'd rested a bit, we hit it again. As always, the cat-like Sau led the way up the rock, with Tuan helping other team members to the next perch. Once everyone had attained a given level, it started all over again. Ever onward, ever upward.

Mountaintop Paradise

Just as last light was fading to darkness, we reached the top of the mountain. I was physically beat. My pants were torn and my hands, knees, and legs were covered with cuts, scrapes, and bruises. We were a mess. We set up our RON quickly and took turns eating rations before settling into the night watch rotations. After the previous night's RON, this mountaintop site was paradise. We could see enemy trucks moving south, but did nothing about it. We were almost too tired to think, an extremely dangerous condition to be in on the ground. Rest was what we needed, not confrontation. I maintained absolute radio silence, not only because I had little of consequence to report, but because I wanted to reach our objective, the underwater bridge, and be able to report our mission accomplished. Call it pride, but I wanted to break silence with a burst of good news. Sau took the first watch, while each of the other team members fell asleep immediately.

When morning came, we awoke to a beautiful sunrise and found that we were atop an unbelievably gorgeous Laotian mountain range. Scenic wonders abounded and it was nearly impossible to imagine we were in the midst of a war and being stalked like animals. After a good night's sleep, with only one shift on watch, I felt as though I was literally on top of the world. The aches, cuts and pains from the previous day's climb faded to insignificance as I gazed out at the stunning Southeast Asian panorama.

The radio jolted me back into reality. Yes, we were on a beautiful mountaintop and yes, we had gotten there by virtue of a hellacious climb and yes, we were being sought by people who wanted to kill us, but in the shriveled minds at HQ all they were concerned about was how it was we'd managed to move only 100 meters on the map. Fuck me to tears. This confirmed, if confirmation was really necessary, that no one in Saigon or Da Nang could read a map. Or worse, they had not the slightest idea of, or appreciation for, what it meant to be on the ground. For them, it was all about words on paper, markers on a map, pieces on a chessboard. They had no way of translating any of it into anything approaching reality. When the shit really hit the fan, when a team's very existence was at stake, the best advice they could offer was "break contact and continue mission."

Covey showed up and I gave him a quick mirror flash so he could get a firm fix on our location. I told him that we were going to head north along side the ridgeline, explaining that we had to abandon the original concept of staying in the valley due to intense enemy activity. I said I thought the ridgeline had enough vegetation to cover our movement toward our objective.

The next few hours were the most spectacular ones I had ever spent on the ground in any AO. Moving north along the ridgeline, we began gradually descending, often encountering one beautiful new vista after another. The mountain atmosphere sparked fond mem-

ories of skiing in the Rockies and hiking, without a gun, along the Presidential Range in New Hampshire's White Mountains. Around 1200 we found an area overrun with thousands of wild orchids in full, spectacular bloom. Back home, each plant would be worth \$5 to \$50. My mind flashed back to the Elenewski brothers in Trenton, where I had worked part time during high school and college. They specialized in breeding orchids, magnificent specimens, and I thought of John Elenewski and how he would gladly give his left arm for wild orchids like these. There were surely ones here he'd never seen. We decided to break in the field and soon everyone, with the exception of Sau, was in the middle of them and acting like a delighted child, picking the flowers and sticking them in their hair, teeth, behind their ears, or in the button holes of their fatigues. It was like a spontaneous outburst of happiness, and while it was somewhat foolish, it was also refreshing. I think we all felt better for it.

After another communications check with Covey, we moved out, continuing down the gentle slope and staying on or near the ridgeline, avoiding being observed by anyone in the valley. We were still sore from yesterday's brutal climb, so we didn't push too hard. In the back of my mind I knew we were still more than 3 kilometers away from the bridge.

Steep Drop into Heavy Jungle

Around 1400, we came to an open expanse that was relatively flat and maybe 400 meters in length. On the far side, the hill took a steep drop into heavy jungle, which would give us good cover for the remaining daylight hours and provide a good RON site. The problem was the sides of the mountains that dropped away to the east and west of the open area were too steep to walk on, so there was no way to get around it. Sau didn't want to cross the exposed area until after dark. Nonetheless, and against Sau's wishes, we crossed, keeping as near as we could to its western edge. Once around it, we circled toward the east, all the while walking stooped over in order to avoid being seen by anyone who might be looking for us from the valley floor.

When we came to a narrow strip of land that headed down from the hill, I signaled Ingles and Chau to scout ahead while the rest of us remained in place. Chau was 16 years old. He'd been on the team nearly two years, ever since Spider Parks had helped rebuild it in May 1968. Chau's sensitive ears heard the NVA moving up the mountain. He warned Ingles with hand signals and the two of them abruptly stopped moving with the enemy less than 10 meters away. Ingles quietly broke squelch on his URC-10 emergency radio several times, alerting me to the danger. The rest of us were about 50 meters away.

The shit was about to hit the fan. Because we were so far removed from all air support, there was no time to waste, none at all. We needed all the jump we could get on things, so I quickly contacted a nearby OV-10 Bronco and declared a Prairie Fire Emergency, setting in motion the string of responses that could save our lives and get us out. As I radioed the Bronco, Sau moved silently down the hill to assist Chau and Ingles. Once the Bronco had relayed my Prairie Fire Emergency to the operations center, he turned toward our location. While I was talking to the pilot, Chau, Sau and Ingles sprang a hastily arranged ambush on the startled enemy troops. When their point man was less than a meter away, Chau hit him with a full-au-



Above is an A-1 Skyraider, tail number 665 flying over Southeast Asia in 1970. Air Force pilots flew it supporting SOG missions in Laos. This particular A-1 Skyraider is still flying today out of the Tennessee Museum of Aviation in Sevierville, TN. It has appeared in [June 2018](#) edition of the *Sentinel*. (Photo courtesy of Don Engebretsen, a former A-1 Air Force pilot who flew missions supporting SOG recon teams in Laos.)

tomatic burst from his CAR-15, blowing him backward. Chau, Sau and Ingles then hit the remaining enemy soldiers so hard and fast they didn't have time to fire a single return shot. Ingles threw a hand grenade down the hill to discourage anyone who might be around. Meantime, Son, Tuan and I received sniper fire from the south, from the same hill we had just moved down a short while before. Tuan very quickly suppressed the annoying fire with three accurately placed rounds from his M-79 grenade launcher.

Two Bits of Bad News

As the fight began to unfold, I took stock of the situation. We were on the northern end of a relatively flat open area. I could see animal trails running across it through the high grass, with steep drops to the east and west. To the south was a large mountain that also had an animal trail. There weren't too many places for us to go.

Within minutes of the Bronco's arrival, the pilot had spotted us. He said he could see more enemy activity north of us along the hill Ingles and Sau were on. He made a run on the enemy concentrations, firing his rockets into their position. Then he said, somewhat laconically, "I've got two bits of bad news for you: first, Nam is socked in. No assets can launch from there to extract you, which means Thailand assets, which means at least three hours before the birds arrive on station. Second, to your south there are approximately a dozen troops about 800 meters out and moving towards you. I think you'd better sit tight until we get some help."

By 1430, a Covey aircraft replaced the Bronco and repeated the "sit-tight" suggestion. He agreed the eastern and western faces of the mountain were too steep to descend. He also confirmed the NVA were coming at us from the south and north. They were clearly visible

as they moved cautiously through the sparse vegetation. For the next half-hour the enemy troops tried to locate us. To discourage them, I directed several A-1E Skyraider gun runs south of our position. I had the team in what might be called a disciplined defensive mode, firing only when an enemy soldier was near enough to pose a real threat. Sau went back down the north side of the hill and rigged a booby-trapped claymore as a welcome for anyone who came that way.

A 12.7mm enemy gun in the valley opened fire on the A-1Es. I was sitting on the east side looking down on the valley floor. Sau, Chau and Ingles secured the northern slope, while Son and Tuan had taken the western side. This gave Tuan a commanding range of fire with his M-79. After making another gun run, the A-1E pilot told me he was pissed because the enemy gunner was coming too close to him and his wingman. He wanted to nail him ASAP. I gave the pilot what I thought were clear verbal directions to where the enemy gunner was located, but he couldn't find him. So I told him simply to watch the ground and follow my tracers. At that, I fired a short burst toward a clump of trees in the valley that were maybe 500 meters away. The pilot had no trouble seeing where my tracers hit. "Thanks, partner," he said in his slow, southern drawl, and then rolled in for the kill.

It was the most beautiful napalm dive I'd ever seen. The pilot came out of the sky, pointing straight down, his engine screaming. It reminded me of dive bombers I'd seen on the television series *Victory At Sea*. I really thought I was watching a World War II movie. Because I was so high up the mountain, I was looking down on the Skyraider when, at the absolute last second, he released a napalm canister and pulled out of his gutsy dive. It was a perfect strike. The impact generated a secondary explosion, which was probably the



A left side view of a HH-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter assigned to the 55th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service. (Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan by Scene Camera Operator Staff Sgt. Steve Mcgill)

gunner's spare ammo going off around him. Black, oily smoke billowed up. There was not a whisper of sound from the former gun emplacement. For the next three hours I directed airstrike after airstrike around our position and in the valley.

At 1730 hours we heard the very welcome sound of the HH-3s coming our way. As they approached in the distance, the NVA pushed up from the north and hit Sau's claymore. Farther south of us another machine gun opened up from the valley. As I gave Covey the compass heading to its position, I caught sight of an enemy soldier climbing into a tree about 100 meters away. He had handed his RPG launcher to a nearby comrade while he got into position. It was clear he was looking for RT Idaho or hoping to nail an Air Force chopper. I was too far away to shout an alert to the other team members. For the first time in my 16 months of running missions, I extended the collapsible stock of my CAR-15. Normally it remained compressed to minimize the length of the weapon, but now I wanted it extended to help stabilize my aim. Once I was ready, I carefully put the NVA soldier in my gun sight.

In that fleeting moment I felt like God. I had the power of life and death concentrated in my fingertip. As I grounded my elbow to steady my arm, I found myself silently hoping the NVA troop would be unable to find the team and simply climb back down the tree. He didn't see either me or my CAR-15. In a troubling way it seemed unfair, or unsportsmanlike. But war is not designed to be a sporting contest. If the situation were reversed, I had little doubt what he would opt to do. Although these reflections took less than a moment to form, they caused deep soul-searching on my part. I found myself recalling my third-grade Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Myrtle Reichert, and her treatment of the Ten Commandments, especially the one that proclaims Thou Shalt Not Kill. Hell, if I had met this treed soldier on the streets of Hanoi,

without guns and beyond the rhetoric of politicians, we'd probably be able to find lots of common ground between us, and dozens of purely human things to talk about. But that could not be, not now, not at this given moment. Also in my mind was the knowledge he would receive a medal if he ever managed to kill me or one of my team members.

My Personal NVA

As I watched and reflected, his comrade reached up and handed him the rocket launcher. I could tell it was unloaded. What I had come to think of as my personal NVA moved a little farther up the tree, craning his neck to find us. From the corner of my eye I could see Son move toward Sau, and at that very moment someone passed up a round for the RPG. I still refused to yield to the inevitable. I continued to hold on to the stubborn hope that he would abandon his cause, climb down the damned tree, and walk away. Instead he fitted the round onto the end of the launcher. Still I watched. Still I waited, even after he'd put the weapon to his shoulder. As he nestled his neck against it and began to take careful aim toward us, I leveled my sight on his head. I pulled the trigger. A single, yet timeless shot. He dropped from the tree, out of sight, but not out of my mind.

Seconds later one of the approaching HH-3 pilots broke into my reverie by commenting somewhat frantically on the heavy ground fire he was taking from the mountains south of our position. There was a moment's hesitation before he sadly announced, "I think we have some mechanical problems; we're going home." We could see the helicopters and they looked fine to us. They were less than 2 kilometers out when they turned and disappeared into the fading sun. Our morale sank as they vanished. After cursing our lack of good luck and the pilot, I told the team to take a nap. It was going to be a long night. Covey reported he had called for more extraction assets and had requested Spectre coverage, but he had received no definite word on

when or if the help would arrive. With that cheerful news still in the air, Ingles and Sau maintained a watch while the rest of us slept.

Around 1930, Ingles roused me. "Wake up. You're not going to believe this shit!" As I came round, he was pointing south up the mountainside. From about 30 meters from our perimeter, and as far as we could see, there were dozens and dozens of lanterns bouncing and swinging along. Each lantern was carried by an enemy soldier, and between each lantern were many more soldiers. The same scene was unfolding north of us. The NVA were coming up the hill en masse. We could see at least a dozen trucks unloading hundreds of NVA troops in the valley. Also across the valley and up on the plateau to the east. There were hundreds of lights moving everywhere, like swarming fireflies flitting around in the night. In a smaller valley west of us, more lights still. More NVA. More trouble. Just more, more, and more of everything we did not want to see. I felt the tremendous weight of just how small RT Idaho was, how terribly isolated and alone we were, how incredibly vulnerable.

All of a sudden I found myself praying.

For reasons only He understands, my prayer was answered, as a few minutes later the first Spectre C-130 gunship arrived on target with its two 20mm cannons and four 7.62mm Miniguns ready for action. This awesome array of weaponry could be made to form a magic link with my emergency strobe light. Once that link was established, the gunner could dance the incredible firepower of his four Miniguns (24,000 rounds per minute total) within 5 feet of us. It was wondrous; it was miraculous; it could save us.

On this particular night, however, we were faced with a highly unusual, if not unique, problem. The pilot circling over us reported he couldn't pick out the team's strobe light because there were so many other lights surrounding us. The myriad lanterns must have made the dark earth look like a pin cushion illuminated from within. "No problem," I said. "I'll turn off mine. You get the rest. Hit the ridgeline west of the valley first. Give me a minute to put my team on the safe side of the mountain." I quickly moved the team back to the ridgeline where Ingles, Sau and Chau had earlier ambushed the NVA.

The Spectre commenced to put on an amazing display of firepower. Once again we gave thanks for being on the right side of the fight, the one that had Uncle Sam's Air Force and Spectre on its team. After ripping up scores of bodies, and carving out large patches of empty darkness on the ridgeline, the Spectre directed his deadly fire into the valley. More lanterns were snuffed out and the darkness spread like a stain as lights and lives were extinguished. RT Idaho remained unscathed. At some point, the NVA still standing finally got the message: they doused their remaining lights.

The Spectre crew finally expended all of its ordnance and the pilot apologized for running out of ammo. Before he left, however, he asked me to turn a strobe light back on so he could get a solid fix on our position. Tuan stuck his strobe into the breech of his M-79 in order to eliminate any lateral reflections, pointed the barrel toward Spectre, and turned it on. "I've got no problem locking in on your position now," said the pilot. "You're on the ridge. We can see heavy enemy activity south of your location. More trucks in the valley and on the mountains east of the valley. Don't go anywhere," he quipped.

The next Spectre arrived seconds later. He quickly locked on to our strobe and worked the southern slope with a vengeance, marching his guns right up the trail to the top of the ridge and beyond our line of sight. Then he worked the valley and the eastern mountain ridge. A third Spectre arrived and worked our southern perimeter again, systematically walking its fiery lead up the mountain. Around us there was no longer any light, above us no moon, no stars. The only sound was the roar of the C-130 overhead. In the absolute darkness he could not be seen until his guns opened up. Then tongues of fire seemed to erupt out of nowhere, like spontaneously generated bolts of lightening, and the outlines of Spectre's fuselage would appear in brief flashes as a pale and ghostly silhouette, an airborne grim reaper.

Dragging Away the Dead

When Spectre moved to other targets, we could hear the enemy dragging away his dead. During the lull between the third and fourth Spectre, Sau and Chau crawled out and placed two claymores south of our position. They crawled noiselessly through the thin grass which was about 5 feet tall. At 0045, Sau said some NVA were in the grass about 20 meters south of us. A few minutes later, he blew the claymores. We all instinctively flinched. For some reason claymores always sounded more thunderous at night and caught you by surprise. After the dust settled, we again heard NVA troops dragging away bodies. They never spoke. We heard no cries of pain. Their silent execution of grim duty was at once eerie and admirable. Jesus, they were tough. They fought hard and died hard.

At 0130, Sau again said he heard the enemy crawling toward us from the south. I threw a grenade and the crawling stopped, soon to be replaced by dragging noises. Then it was Chau who said he heard them. This time, Sau gave me a couple of rocks to throw. I heaved the first one and heard rapidly retreating footsteps. I threw the second rock and Sau reported hearing more hastily retreating footsteps. How many were there out there? We couldn't tell. Meanwhile, Chau said he heard more activity to the north and asked for permission to fire a claymore. Sau and I nodded our approval. In seconds he detonated it.

Shortly before the next Spectre arrived, I moved the team away from the edge of the slope and into the high grass as Sau placed one more claymore down the northern slope. In short order, Spectre locked in on our strobe light. He reported that cloud cover was beginning to roll into the AO. When Spectre then dropped illumination flares over us, Sau's eyes turned as big as large pizza tins. NVA troops were within five meters of us, all of about 15 feet. Blinded by intense white light, they could not immediately make us out as we nestled in the high grass. But this was of little real consolation. They would spot us soon enough.

I whispered into the radio, asking Spectre just how close he could bring the ordnance to my strobe light. "As close as you want it," he first replied.

"I want it five feet in front of my southern perimeter," I responded.

"Well," he hesitated, "I can't bring it any closer than 25 meters from your perimeter unless you're willing to accept responsibility for any casualties we may accidentally inflict. We have to record you saying it." I wanted to scream, "you dumb fucking idiot, they're five meters

away and you're quoting regulations to me?! Just kill the fuckers before they kill us!" Instead, and feeling like a complete fool, I whispered that I was fully willing to accept responsibility for any and all casualties that may or may not result from his efforts to save our lives.

I followed up this ridiculous "hold harmless" declaration in the loudest whisper that I could muster, "Now bring it in as tight as you can to the light. I'm holding it up now. Move south from my light. I'll take my chances with you." The gun crew finally opened fire and their fusillade cracked over our heads. The ground in front of us erupted as thousands of rounds ripped into it, kicking up stones and dirt and tossing NVA soldiers around like rag dolls. Again Spectre slowly marched his stuff southward from our strobe light, moving up the ridge. Spectre's accuracy, despite its working at an altitude of 1,500 feet, was absolutely extraordinary. Between bursts of fire, he dropped more flares. This time the illumination revealed no movement south of us. Instead Chau gleefully reported there were "beaucoup dead VC." With the south quiet, Spectre started on the northern flank and marched his fire down the finger of land. When I reported hearing more trucks in the valley, the gun crews pounded them into silence.

Another Spectre circled us and laid down its deadly ring of fire, again bringing it to within five feet of our strobe light. Somewhere around 0400, some early morning fog and haze moved in as the last Spectre moved out. As a parting gesture he dropped every last flare he had with him. The fog and haze lent a heightened eeriness to the scene around us. The illumination also helped keep the enemy momentarily at bay.

Once Spectre was gone, the NVA started moving toward us once more from the south, only this time with a real vengeance. Spectre had killed a lot of their comrades and they were in no mood to back off. But we managed to hold them off by employing what we called our "guess-whether-I'm-throwing-a-grenade-or-not" tactic, which had a way of making almost any enemy think twice. We abstained from firing our weapons because the muzzle flashes would have marked our position too clearly for the RPG gunners who had fired several inaccurate rounds at us during the night. Fortunately they hadn't come very close. We played these deadly games with the enemy until sunrise. At one point we broke a major thrust by tossing a white phosphorus grenade, one of the most fearsome things I know of. We couldn't see them, but we could smell burning flesh.

Around 0630 hours, we heard an NVA officer or senior NCO calling roll in the distance. It appeared few people answered him. We noticed for the first time that the five-foot-tall grass around us had been chopped down a couple of feet by the Spectre's gunfire. As we prepared ourselves to face another wave attack, Chau and Ingles returned to the northern slope and set another booby-trapped claymore, while Sau low-crawled south through the sparse grass to place one in that direction. In a gutsy move, he carried nothing but his CAR-15 and a few magazines of ammunition. When he returned, he smiled at me as if reading my thoughts and said, "No sweat."

No More Spectres

As the sun finally burned off the fog, we worked tactical air strikes with Phantoms and Skyraiders. A couple of machine gun positions opened fire and hit one of the A-1Es. A Phantom blew one of the gun crews to hell with a 500-pound bomb. The A-1E knocked out the

second one minutes after it opened fire. The aircraft were receiving lots of small-arms fire from the southern peak across from us. This harassing fire kept up even after I directed several gun runs at the hidden troops. Because there were no more Spectre aircraft to call on, I continued working with a pair of A-1Es, having them make run after run. I could talk directly to the lead pilot and he and his wingman executed my every request or direction flawlessly. Damn, you had to love those A-1E pilots.

Finally, we could hear in the distance the sweet, sweet sound of approaching helicopters, big HH-3s churning their way our way. It was time to pull out all the stops. I used every available support aircraft, F-4s and A1-Es, to raise hell and suppress enemy fire. As they roared in with guns blazing, we could see the HH-3s tagging along in their wake. I told Covey to have the HH-3 gun crews focus their fire on our southern perimeter and we'd handle the northern side. I also requested they land as close as possible to the north slope and not pay any attention to the claymore explosions we'd be setting off. I didn't want to spook these guys off.

Instead, they landed down hill from us in the center of an open area and very near where Sau had placed his claymore. Before we made our move toward the helicopter, Sau signaled me that we should shoot the NVA bodies we encountered lying on the ground between us and the LZ. At first this kind of stunned me, but of course he was right. After all we had been through, we didn't need people rising from the dead and taking aim at us as we departed.

Ingles led the way, as I remained behind for security. Sau, who was close on his heels, paused just long enough to recover his claymore before boarding the chopper. Every one of the team, once aboard, immediately went to the starboard window or faced out the tailgate and began firing on full automatic as the HH-3 revved up to full power. I was last to leave, and before heading for the LZ I set off the last claymore we had out on the northern perimeter. Then I ran like hell, bent over like a cripple and cursing the prop wash that tried hard to push me backward. As I made my dash, I remember being surprised at not seeing a single dead body, although I passed a slew of blood trails and saw lots of dark, wet stains on the ground.

The second I was through its door, the HH-3 lifted off the ground. There was nothing but sporadic small-arms fire coming at us, and in the end the extraction was a relatively calm one. It seemed as if the enemy was dispirited and just going through the motions. I had a feeling they wanted us out of the AO as badly as we wanted to leave. Nonetheless, we all continued firing on full automatic. We also launched at least one M-79 round and, as we gained altitude, I dropped my last hand grenade into the underbrush. A little something for someone, I hoped.

Then, just as suddenly and miraculously, all gunfire ceased. The only sound was that of the churning Sikorsky HH-3 engines and increasingly cold air rushing through the aircraft. I looked over my shoulder, toward Sau, who was retrieving the warm Air Force blankets for the long ride to NKP. When I made eye contact with him, he gave me that quick nod of his and a slight smile.

We made it again. ❖

GUNNING FOR HO: Vietnam Stories by H. Lee Barnes

SURPRISE, KILL, VANISH: The Secret History of CIA Paramilitary Armies, Operators, and Assassins by Annie Jacobsen



Kenn Miller

Gunning For Ho

Reviewed by Kenn Miller

GUNNING FOR HO may be hard to find. It's usually available on Amazon, and with luck copies might be found in good used book stores. And if any SFA Chapter member wants to borrow my copy, let me know, and treat it with great respect, for it is a great read. Unlike most of the fiction books by Vietnam War veterans, this is not a novel. It

is a collection of seven extremely outstanding short stories. They are not particularly short nor long, but each story is long enough to draw the reader in, and short enough to never bog the reader down. Lee Barnes, who served on an A detachment at Tra Bong in I Corps, is a writer of great imagination, variety, empathy, observation, wit, whim, and humor.

From "A Lovely Day in the A Shau Valley," the first and most whimsical (and perhaps both the funniest and saddest) to the last of the stories, partly set at Fort Bragg, these stories are unlike any other Vietnam War fiction I've ever read.

If I had a pistol held to my head by some thug demanding that I announce my favorite of these stories or die, I'd have to try to aggressively disarm the thug, and if I failed at that and survived, I'd challenge

him to read just one random paragraph of any page from this book before shooting me. And if he took the challenge and started to read, chances are the distracted thug would be so lost in the story it would be easy to gently take his pistol as he became absorbed in the story — regardless of which page of which story he might have chosen — and then I'd take back my book, shoot him in both hands, and walk away with his pistol.

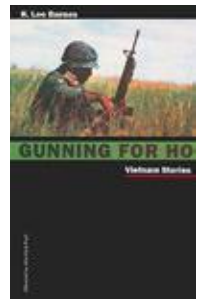
Of course, that is not exactly a situation I will likely encounter, nor is that an act of self protection I would be likely to survive. But I sure would be in a fix if I was seriously forced to chose a favorite from the stories in *Gunning For Ho*. They are each individual and individually excellent.

Gunning For Ho is the best short story compilation I can recommend with which to pass time on an airplane or in a long line at the DMV. And as a long read, you can't beat going story by story straight through from "A Lovely Day in the A Shau Valley" to "Stonehands and the Tigress," "The Cat in the Cage," "A Return, Plateau Lands," "Tunnel Rat," and last but not least, "Gunning for Ho." ❖

[Gunning For Ho: Vietnam Stories](#)

by H. Lee Barnes

University of Nevada Press, Reno & Las Vegas, 1991
176 pages



Mike Keele

Surprise, Kill, Vanish

Reviewed by Mike Keele

Annie Jacobsen's most recent book release, *SURPRISE, KILL, VANISH: The Secret History of CIA Paramilitary Armies, Operators, and Assassins* is a fascinating journey through the years of America's clandestine army starting with WWII, when the OSS was created to train men and women to fill the roles of spies, and air lifted into enemy held countries like

France, Yugoslavia, China, and even Vietnam. Part of the training included making proficient the man (or woman) for all seasons, who, when dropped into a foreign country, became, a supply officer, communications conduit, intelligence gatherer, and assassin.

The Jedburghs of WWII were one such unit, with many successful operations to their credit, and many of their number lost with no record of their fate. Operations on D-Day and beyond in France were vital to the intelligence gathering needs of the ground troops who needed to know what was afoot beyond enemy lines.

Oddly, the OSS was disbanded at the end of WWII, and with the onset of the cold war, the Central Intelligence Agency was created, employing many of the OSS operators who had worked behind the lines during the World War. In 1952, the U.S. Army created the Special

Forces, culled together from Rangers, infantrymen, OSS operatives and some soldiers recruited from the ranks of our former enemies.

"Surprise, Kill, Vanish" was the motto of the OSS and was a teaching mantra for the CIA generation of spies and recon teams that had to move silently and undetected in enemy areas, where the best gauge of a successful mission was getting in, securing the targeted intelligence and getting back to friendly lines undetected.

Surprise, Kill, Vanish has as its protagonist Billy Waugh, who became an SF legend during the Secret War in Vietnam. After retiring from the regular Army Billy hooked up with the CIA, and spent a great deal of time searching for and then surveilling Osama Bin Laden during his early years, before he got into knocking down skyscrapers full of innocent people. He had actually done enough dirty deeds by the time Billy caught up with him to justify whacking his evil ass, but the American president at that time cut him a lifetime of slack.

My only apprehension about picking up *Surprise, Kill, Vanish* is that it will keep you occupied until it has been read cover to cover. Enjoy. ❖

[Surprise, Kill, Vanish](#)

By Annie Jacobsen

Little, Brown and Company, 2019
560 pages

