



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

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

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 5 • MAY 2020



**American Legion Post 760
Adopts LeTourneau's Name**

Diversity Gone Wrong

The Ambush



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From the Editor



Jim Morris
Sentinel Editor

On the airplane to my last Vietnam tour I sat next to a Sp4 who was going back for seconds. He told an interesting story about his first company commander. This guy had commanded the company for the first eleven months of the Sp4's tour, and the company had not lost a man. Then the CO went home and in the last month of the kid's tour the company lost 40 percent killed or wounded. He was adamant about two things. With the first guy it was not search and avoid. They performed their missions; they just did it cleverly and carefully. He insisted the replacement CO was not a dud; he was about average.

So, we may conclude that the Army's insistence that all soldiers with the same primary MOS are essentially clones of each other is pretty much false.

This is especially true in Special Forces, where a lot of what we do is ward politics in primitive societies where personal relationships are everything. Sure, the Americans are the guys with the money and the stuff, but if they don't have good rapport with their counterparts the mission is badly compromised.

In that situation, does it make sense to rotate everybody out every six months, or a year. Sometimes it does, but in many cases it does not. If the team, and especially the team leader, makes a good connection, how does it serve the mission to replace the team. Since 1964 I have contended that the worst enemy of Special Forces is not the other guys, but the joint travel regulations.

Case in point: on my first TDY mission we spent the first four months doing what the previous team had done, which is try to keep one company operating in the AO pretty much all the time. They had usually had two Americans out with each patrol. We modified that, and sent five Americans with each patrol, usually an officer, and one NCO with each platoon. That did wonders for command and control, but essentially we were still wandering around out there until somebody shot at us, then shooting back, which only ran them off. Oh, yeah, we were burning unoccupied villages, with the idea that then the villagers would come in and go to a strategic hamlet, away from VC control. In four months no one did this. We were just ruining the lives of poor people for no good reason.

So the Old Man formulated a new concept of operations. We formed what were essentially Viet Cong cadre teams to make friends with the villages and help them. This worked for the Viet Cong, but it worked even better for us, because we had more resources. We did this for two months and it worked like gangbusters.

The Old Man even made a trip to Saigon to volunteer us to stay there as long as it took. We were all on board with it. Nobody wanted to go home. We wanted to stay and capitalize on our success.

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FRONT COVER: A joint special forces team move together out of a U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey at Melrose Training Range, New Mexico. (Image edited — original image at <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4995894/joint-sf-team-participate-exercise-emerald-warrior-2018>. U.S. Air Force photo/Clayton Cupit)

BACK COVER: Soldiers from the 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command perform small unit tactics at Melrose Training Range. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Clayton Cupit)



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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.





Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

Under normal circumstances we would be gathered as a group at Los Alamitos having breakfast and enjoying each other's fellowship. But, of course, these are not normal circumstances.

We have all encountered and overcome difficult circumstances in the past. For many of us, this is just another bump in the road. But we acknowledge the fact that we have many people looking to us for support and encouragement. And as always, we are up to the task.

We will resume our meetings in the near future. It's still unclear how soon the restrictions will be lifted, but we will give you as much notice as possible. When we do meet again, please remember the reason we belong to this great organization. We all satisfy our own needs to hold onto something in our pasts that defined us for the rest of our lives. But we also benefit from each other's support and encouragement, probably even more so now that many of us are not the young tigers we used to be. So when the next meeting rolls around, if you're tempted to do something other than attending, remember that there is a group of us who will miss those who are absent.

Stay safe. I look forward to being in your company once again very soon. ❖

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

From the Editor continued

The people in Saigon didn't know what he was talking about. The idea that an established team with good rapport with the people could do better than a bunch of guys who were just off the airplane seemed utterly strange to them.

SF has gotten rid of most of the rigidity of the Big Army, but we're still subject to the joint travel regulations. SF has run a lot of successful

missions, but the success ratio would go up with more flexibility in assignments. Guys who know the people they work with, the territory, and the mission, do a lot better than those who just got off the airplane, especially if they volunteer to stay. ❖

Jim Morris
Sentinel Editor



The above photo is Greg Walker and my friend Rob Krott in Iraq as contractors (excerpted from the forward from Rob's book [Save the Last Bullet For Yourself](#)).

Rob Krott is the writer of his generation whose career most closely resembles mine from the previous generation. The differences between our careers say more about history than they do about either of us.

We're both former Special Forces officers. We've both volunteered to fight in foreign wars for little or no money, or, indeed, at our own expense. And we've both written about a bunch of small conflicts on several continents of which the majority of our countrymen seemed entirely oblivious.

The main difference is that almost everybody I fought or wrote about was a proxy of the Soviet Union, whereas Krott has fought or written about a bunch of wars that had no connection whatsoever.

My generation of Special Forces spent all of our time in a revolving door, preparing to go to Vietnam, going to Vietnam, recovering from Vietnam, preparing to go again. In the 10th Special Forces Group Krott learned how to fight anybody anywhere. That's a huge difference.

Here's a story about Krott. Our mutual friend Kenn Miller, took Krott to LAX to put him on a flight for one of his tours of all the world's hellholes. The lady at the airline counter was from Taiwan. She'd been around and had some idea what the deal was. She took one look at Krott's itinerary and started to cry. She begged him not to go. He went.

DIVERSITY GONE WRONG

By Mark Smith, DSC
Major, USA, Retired
Returned American Prisoner Of War

Editor's Note: The following is commentary by a true American hero on an AP piece he read about suicides among Air Force Academy cadets who found their coronavirus restrictions unduly onerous. It says something significant about our current march to diversity.

On 7 April 1972 my friend and boss LTC Richard Schott patted me on the shoulder after he had gotten on the radio to speak of me as we were overrun at Loc Ninh Republic of Vietnam and then he sat down in a swivel chair as I turned back to the radio and blew his own brains all over my shirt and face. This was not preceded by any screams of 'I cannot take this anymore', but he had told me to leave him because with the hole already in his head and more minor wounds he couldn't make an escape & evasion with me. I told him if he stayed everybody stayed and simply face whatever this day brought from the enemy. He then told me that with his wounds and age he would never survive captivity but I just blew him off with some comment about not intending for either of us to get captured. The only thing I could do was ask my dead friend as I shot an NVA coming down the bunker steps; "HOW COULD YOU DO THAT, DICK?"

When I was captured well south of the camp the next day during E&E I had been shot six times during the battle and suffered thirty-two other shrapnel wounds. My lung was perforated and my back was broken at the lumbar spine with 17 pieces of shrapnel left there. I didn't know the extent of that injury until release, and even more data came when the MRI replaced the X-ray. Dick was more than fifteen years older than me when he took his own life but was certainly not an old man (42). When senior people later tried to badmouth his selfless act in trying to save me I set them straight about why I knew he did it, he did it for me.



U.S. Air Force Academy's Class of 2019 Graduation Ceremony in Colorado Springs, CO. (U.S. Air Force photo/Bill Evans)

The reason I recount the above is that I cannot for the life of me understand how young military people and veterans can take their own lives. I still cannot fathom Dick Schott's action that day but I suppose he could somehow justify it in his own mind. My question today has to do with what kind of mental and moral grounding are we giving our youth that brings them to a decision to 'end it all' so to speak? I fear in seeking a religiously and morally neutral military we have created a monster without the underpinnings to just continue on in the face of whatever life has to offer including near certain death at the hands of our enemies

Lieutenant Colonel Dick Schott's life was not sold in battle cheaply but I do not care what kind of personal mental/physical problems our military/cadets face today there is no comparison. These continuous episodes of single and multiple suicides within our military bring into question national morality and simple gauging of mental toughness in our warrior selection process.

BETTER RELOOK YOUR ETHICS AND MORALS AND DETERMINE EXACTLY WHAT HAS BEEN SACRIFICED IN YOUR MARCH TO BEING ALL INCLUSIVE. ♦



From Chapter 78 member Kenn Miller:

Over the years I have managed to remember the sign on the HQ building at the Ft Benning Jump School — and the only person to whom I've mentioned it and who remembered it was Tom Collier.

"And where is the prince who can afford to so cover his country with troops for its defense, as that ten thousand men descending from the clouds, might not in many places do an infinite deal of mischief, before a force could be brought together to repel them?"

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

(That old rogue also pointed out that 500 two man balloons would cost considerably less than a warship.)

American Legion Post 760 Adopts LeTourneau's Name



John S. Meyer

By John S. Meyer

The members of American Legion Post 760 in Oceanside, CA recently voted unanimously to name the post after charter member Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau who died suddenly July 25, 2019 in Texas. LeTourneau, an SFA Chapter 78 member, served three years in the Army during the Vietnam War, completing one tour of duty as a Green Beret in the secret war in SOG conducted far from the conventional war in S. Vietnam, media, Congressional and family knowledge.

Post 760 Commander Chuck Atkinson made that motion because LeTourneau was a charter member of the post formed in early 2019 and "To pay homage to a soldier who served our country valiantly during the Vietnam War in a top secret operation."

When the post was formed in 2019, I called LeTourneau to explain its unique origin and mission: To help fellow veterans, service members and families, to perform community outreach while always moving forward in patriotic efforts to honor our country. LeTourneau's response was quick: "Sign me up, I'm going to be moving out to Southern California to live with my sister soon and I want to be a part of an American Legion post that is proactive, not a post that sits around the bar all day telling lies and war stories. Sign me up." Thus Doug and I became charter members of the new post.

On July 8, 2019, we visited Post 760 in the spacious Veterans Resource Center in the Veterans Association of North (San Diego) County (VANC) at 1617 Mission Ave., in Oceanside, CA. When he walked in he was amazed at what he saw. "It's one thing to see pictures of this building and where Post 760 meets," he said, "but it's another thing to actually see it in full operation and to finally meet Post Commander Chuck (Atkinson). I'm looking forward to being a working member of this post."

A day later, LeTourneau and I drove to San Diego to record a podcast with retired Navy SEAL Lt. Cmdr. Jocko Willink. The interview was an outstanding success. This is the link to that interview: <http://jockopodcast.com/2019/07/17/186-taking-a-secret-war-to-the-enemy-in-vietnam-w-the-frenchman-doug-letourneau/>.

During that day, we also went to Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego to salute fellow SOG Green Beret Jeffrey L. Junkins, who served with us at FOB 1 in Phu Bai and later at CCN in Da Nang. That podcast was posted July 17, 2019. Sadly, one week later,



John Meyer and Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau in a photo taken November 11, 2011, the day Doug received his Purple Heart in Gallatin, TN. (Photo courtesy John Meyer)



LeTourneau suddenly passed away in Texas following a bout with heat exhaustion and a scorpion sting. The stage four bone marrow cancer that he was monitoring closely with the VA, had nothing to do with his sudden passing.

At the first Post 760 meeting after LeTourneau died, I explained that he was an Eagle Boy Scout raised in Van Nuys, CA, where he was president of the Future Farmers of America, competed in intercollegiate rodeos in high school and while attending Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. During those years in rodeo competition, he broke many bones in his body. On September 1, 1967, one day after reading the book *The Green Berets* by Robin Moore, he enlisted in the Army.



Doug at the columbarium for SOG Recon soldier Jeffrey L. Junkins at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on July 9. (Photo courtesy John Meyer)



John and Doug with Jocko Willink in his San Diego recording studio. (Photo courtesy John Meyer)

During his entry physical, the first doctor to examine him late in the day told LeTourneau that because he had no spleen, he couldn't join the Army — LeTourneau lost his spleen in a bicycle accident when he was 12. LeTourneau watched in which file that doctor placed the rejection notice. During the evening, LeTourneau broke into the building, went to the file, found the rejection notice, removed it from the file and returned in the morning, to a different doctor to complete his physical. LeTourneau's removal of the rejection notice went unnoticed and he joined the Army, graduating from Special Forces Training Group in the summer of 1968.

The Mission That Wasn't

I first met LeTourneau in October 1968 at the top secret MACV-SOG compound in Phu Bai, FOB 1. SOG was the eight-year secret war conducted across the fence in Laos, Cambodia and N. Vietnam. That unit sustained the highest casualty rate during the Vietnam War. Letourneau had volunteered to join fellow Green Berets in conducting clandestine top-secret missions far behind enemy lines without conventional artillery or ground support troops. It was the beginning of a long friendship and bond between the skinny 135-pound California cowboy and fellow SOG recon men at FOB 1 and later at CCN in Da Nang.

The year 1968 was a landmark year for the U.S. in Vietnam, it was the year of highest casualties both in conventional forces and among SOG recon teams and Hatchet Force troops. When I reported to FOB 1 in May 1968, there were 30 recon teams listed on base, by October, only a few were fully operational. In the operations across

the fence in Laos, the NVA had more than 40,000 troops plus indentured indigenous personnel forced to support the communists.

At the end of October, LeTourneau joined recon team RT Virginia. He and RT Virginia were the last people to close down FOB 1 in Phu Bai. After arriving at CCN, ST Virginia ran the mission that he was most proud of. It began with a CIA briefing at CCN shortly after the team flew to CCN in Da Nang in Kingbees. The new leader of RT Virginia, Gunther T. Wald, was an E-6. The Frenchman was an E-4.

After arriving at CCN, RT Virginia trained hard for the next three weeks, running all the various drills that made recon teams such formidable adversaries and kept them alive when the shit hit the fan. RT Virginia was now an efficient and effective unit. They were ready for anything.

Or almost anything. What Wald and The Frenchman were not quite ready for was being introduced by the S-3 to a CIA "operative" called "Zolanakus," and told they would be linking up with him somewhere in Laos, deep in the heart of enemy territory, to conduct a little business on behalf of his "Company."

Wald and The Frenchman could only look at one another and metaphorically shrug.

The "business" in question took a curious but definitely interesting turn when Zolanakus handed them a cylindrical device about five inches long. One end was threaded and was obviously meant to be screwed into something, but neither Wald nor The Frenchman had a clue as to what that something was. It looked like the cap to some kind of container. It also looked vaguely familiar.

There was some sort of timing mechanism and a detonation device extending below the cap end. It did not take genius to figure out that whatever this device screwed into was meant to explode.

When Zolanakus told them the something was a 55-gallon drum of fuel, a light went on in The Frenchman's brain. Of course, the cap looked exactly like the ones he had seen a hundred times on oil drums around his father's construction sites.

Zolanakus moved on to describe the rather ingenious resupply operation the North Vietnamese 559th Transport Group had come up with. They were rafting tons of stuff down rivers and navigable streams hidden under the infamous triple-canopy jungle. They had turned these rivers and streams into invisible highways leading to the heart of South Vietnam.

These water routes greatly augmented what the NVA was able to move down the Ho Chi Minh trail, and so far these river operations had escaped attention. They had gone uncontested. But that was about to change, and RT Virginia was going to be the one to deliver Uncle Sam's first serious objection.

To accomplish this, RT Virginia would be inserted deep behind enemy lines. They would then make a clandestine march of several days duration and link up with Zolanakus and his cohorts at a pre-determined time and place. There, they would be given the newfangled, highly secret detonation device. After parting company with The Company representative, they would make their way to the river, find a floating drum, snag it, drag it ashore, unscrew its cap, screw in the detonator, relaunch it, and watch in float merrily, merrily down the stream.

Privately, LeTourneau thought: "Why the hell isn't Mr. Zolanakus doing the dirty work? If he's already there on the ground, if he's that good at his job, then why doesn't he mosey on down to the stream and fish for himself? Why is RT Virginia being dragged into this?" But, being only an E-4 LeTourneau only thought to himself: "Ours is not to reason why."

One thing was certain in his mind, he loved being "on the ground" and "running recon." He loved it more than almost anything he could think of. Not everything, mind you, but almost. He much preferred to be "across the fence" than within the fence of the Da Nang compound. He was not one to be constrained. Or at least not lightly.

The mission departed from the newly-operational "Eagle Mountain" launch site situated within the confines of the 101st Airborne Division's compound just north of Phu Bai. SOG had somehow negotiated (read requisitioned) a small piece of Camp Eagle real-estate for its use, a mini-camp within the much larger camp, a no-go zone that tended to drive the Eagle brass to distraction and which gave a whole new twist to the "Screaming" part of their famous name.

Finally, it was showtime. The six-man team lifted off in two Kingbees and headed west into a sun that was already on its downward, setting arc. With darkness not far off, it was a huge relief when the insertion went without incident. Within ten minutes, the team had moved away from the LZ into a more protected area and LeTourneau gave Covey a "team ok."

RT Virginia was off and running, alone and far from home.



Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau, RT Virginia, Phu Bai
(photo courtesy John Meyer)

As the team members moved in search of an RON site, he placed "toe-popper" mines behind them, methodically noting their exact location in case another recon team should ever come this way again. As an added precaution he sprinkled powered mustard gas around, a little surprise bonus should the NVA employ tracking dogs against them

Once they found a good spot, the team began the settling in process. They would be confined to an area small enough that each man could reach out and touch a fellow team member. They would hunker down like animals in the underbrush and hope no one stumbled across them through some freak accident. Everyone liked the idea of resting, but they were all aware that while RONing a team was in one of its most vulnerable positions. More than one team had been caught by surprise, overrun, and annihilated before they could respond.

LeTourneau crawled out and deployed Claymore mines, making sure the small tab of reflective tape on their backsides could be seen by one of the team members. If the NVA managed to sneak in close enough to turn the mines towards the team, this would be their only clue not to set them off if an attack came.

In addition, he ran a small strand of nylon filament around the entire team, one end of which was attached to an earpiece he placed in his ear. If anything, be it animal or enemy, touched the invisible thread he would immediately know it. He liked to think of it as the world's smallest lifeline.



Doug, center, with Dennis J. Cummings, the Special Operations Association Archivist and director of SOA Living History Project, with John at Doug's home in Gallatin, TN in 2016. (photo courtesy John Meyer)

RON time is dining time. So RT Virginia took turns preparing their individual ready-to-eat rations. This consisted of adding water to a plastic pouch of rice and goody, putting the pouch between your legs or under your arm, and letting nature take its course.

The “indig” had their own specially designed rations of fish, vegetables, and rice. The Americans ate LURPs, or long-range patrol rations, which came in a variety of flavors, such as chicken, beef stew, or chili. Some recon members ranked them from marginal to disgusting on the edibility scale, but LeTourneau, who some thought of as being taste-challenged, liked them all. In fact he was known to scarf up any leftovers that were overlooked

After a long, long night of rotating through periods of light sleep and watchful guard duty, the team broke camp early the next morning and headed off on the first leg of their journey in search of Zolanakus. He had become their very own Kurtz, the mysterious Company man they had been sent to find somewhere in this vast heart of darkness.

Day one rolled on into day two, and then day three. The team spent the hot days advancing through the most difficult terrain they could manage, because that's where they were least likely to encounter the enemy. They would move for no more than ten minutes and then stop and listen for ten. It was the recon routine, the old SOG two-step.

“Pssst, Sgt. Wald”

On the fourth day, as if in some B-grade spy movie, a voice from out of the bush went “Pssst, Sergeant Wald.” And there stood Zolanakus himself, big as life, accompanied by two Montagnards dressed in dark brown khakis. It so caught the team by surprise they didn't know whether to shit, go blind, or whoop it up. Zolanakus may not have appreciated how close he came in that instant to being a former Company man.

But the nearly impossible had happened. RT Virginia had found their man and he was now conferring with Ward in hushed tones and handing over the barrel-buster detonation device. The meeting was a brief one and soon the team was headed for the river.

Within an hour they heard water flowing at the bottom of the mountain they were traversing. The team cautiously made its way down, searching all the while for a good vantage point from which to study and observe.

This, after all, was the officially stated purpose of SOG, and LeTourneau had spent hour upon hour studying and observing trails, paths, supply points, bridges, and anything else the NVA might use to, travel down, travel along, or travel over. He often thought of himself as a lowly paid, government-sponsored voyeur. And he loved it; it was what he was born to do.

Once they could see the river, they immediately spotted dozens of fuel drums floating idly downstream. They looked like giant sea turtles or the backs of big fat seals lazily bobbing in the California surf, not a care in the world. The trick was how to sneak up on one of them, get a grip on it, and manhandle it to shore.

After a brief confab, in which Wald pulled rank and the “Indig” claimed they sank like stones, LeTourneau stripped off all his gear and with his CAR-15 in hand began low crawling towards the riverbank.

The going was slow and hot. He moved along at bug level and at bug speed. The distinctive, putrid smell of jungle rot filled his nostrils, which were more or less right down in it. More than once he thought of Zolanakus, and never in flattering terms. Maybe this was it, Zolanakus thought of himself as “management” and LeTourneau as hired labor. Like at construction sites, there were bosses in white shirts and day laborers in grimy jeans. There was nothing mysterious involved. Zolanakus just didn't want to get dirty.

Once he reached the water, the question of just how to attack a floating fuel drum became more acute. LeTourneau had once competed in rodeos, but this was a horse of a different color. This was aqua-rodeo, with armed spectators ready to pick him off if he made the slightest mistake. He was going to have to do this without benefit of mount, spurs, or rope. It would have to be mano-a-mano, LeTourneau against a barrel. Moreover, it would have to be quick and quiet.

He picked out a barrel close to shore and swam to it. It was slippery and heavy and seemed to have a mind of its own, not unlike a steer that doesn't want to be thrown. LeTourneau could not grip it, or get his arms around it, so he put his shoulder to it and applied all one-hundred and thirty of his dripping wet pounds to it.

He had purposely intercepted the barrel upstream from the team. His plan was to gently edge it towards shore and hopefully have it go aground near where they waited and watched. It was simple

maritime physics, of which he knew next to nothing. But once he overcame its initial inertia, the fuel drum moved slowly towards the bank while continuing to drift downstream.

LeTourneau could hear voices and knew some of the NVA barrel tenders were not far away. It was going to be a close run. He could see Wald in some bushes, the detonator in hand and an anxious look on his face. He knew the rest of the team was keeping a sharp eye out for the NVA who were floating somewhere to the rear of the last of the fuel drums, just minutes behind LeTourneau.

He finally got the drum ashore almost exactly where he wanted and Wald was on it in a flash, unscrewing its cap and replacing it with the CIA detonating device. In less than a minute it was done and they shoved the drum back into the current and it was on its way to join its friends.

By now the enemy voices were louder and sounded more numerous.

The team pulled itself into a tight grouping, weapons facing out like porcupine quills, a lethal little ball of meanness just lying in the weeds and waiting to be messed with. No one moved, except for LeTourneau, who was shaking almost uncontrollably and trying to keep his teeth from chattering. How could he suddenly be so cold in the middle of a jungle, he wondered? And, "Where the hell are the SEALs when you need them?"

As they watched silently, cluster after cluster of drums moved slowly and silently past them, each one accompanied by its own little NVA escort service. Like Huck Finn on his raft, they were drifting leisurely along, laughing and joking, oblivious to the team tracking their every move, unaware of the bomb that bobbed along in front of them.

It took hours for the parade to pass, and by then it was dark. LeTourneau had shivered himself into near exhaustion, so the team moved slowly back up the mountain side to their RON site and settled in. He could finally change into dry clothes, close his eyes, and hallucinate bright visions of hot soup and steaming chocolate.

It took three days of cautious movement to reach the ridge where their extraction LZ was situated. By then the team had been on the ground seven days, longer than any team in recent memory. They were out of food and their water was running low.

Fortunately Covey was waiting and immediately had Kingbees on the way to pull them out.

The team was going to have to come out on "strings," or long ropes that would be lowered down through openings in the jungle canopy. It was not the preferred way to exit. There was always the danger of getting hung up in branches, or having an eye poked out, an arm or leg broken, or being ripped out of the McGuire rig and ending up flat on your ass and in no shape to fight.

Teams did not like "string" extractions, but if it ever came down to "strings" or nothing, well, "strings" always won.

LeTourneau could not see Covey's Cessna O-2, but he could hear it, so he verbally guided it as it made several passes over the team's location. Each time it passed above them, he would call out "Bingo!" over the radio. This gave Covey a pretty precise idea of where the

team was. And with "strings" the helicopter crew needed to know exactly where to drop them.

Again, as if scripted as part of a movie too good to be true, a huge explosion rocked the ground just as the Kingbees approached the opening above the team. The Frenchman immediately threw a smoke grenade to verify their position and the ropes came cascading down to the jungle floor. The team quickly attached themselves and began the delicate ascent up and through the branches.

As they cleared the final layer of canopy, they could see a huge cloud of black smoke billowing up from beyond the mountain ridges they had spent the last three days crossing. It came from the river: mission accomplished.

Being hauled at the end of a rope slung under a helicopter moving at over 90 mph is not a comfortable experience. It's not only very cold and windy, but the ropes cut off blood circulation to the legs and they eventually go numb. Team members had been known to lose their grip and fall out of the rigs.

By time the Kingbees finally found such a spot back across the South Vietnamese border, the legs of the RT Virginia members were so numb they couldn't stand. They had to crawl towards the helicopters while rotor-wash blew pebbles and debris into their faces. At first the crew couldn't figure out what was going on, why the team was crawling when no one was shooting at them, but they soon got the picture and came running out to assist.

RT Virginia arrived back at Da Nang late in the afternoon and there was no one at the LZ to meet them. So they shrugged and lugged their gear on foot to their hootch. Hell of a welcome, they thought, especially after spending the longest time on the ground of any team.

Wald, as team leader, made his way to the operations center to make his report. He returned with the news that initial indications were the fuel depot had been blown sky high, but that it would take several days to confirm this by way of aerial reconnaissance. He said the head-shed had ordered him and LeTourneau not to tell anyone anything about the mission. It was to be as if RT Virginia had taken a leisurely seven-day stroll through the countryside, a little R&R across the fence. If asked, it had been a dry hole. Thus, a short while later, when he ran into fellow recon men John 'Tilt' Meyer and Lynne 'Blackjack' Black, and the recon man he shared a hootch with, Eldon Bargewell, LeTourneau put on a straight face and told them the party line, unable to talk about the satisfaction of seeing smoke on the horizon as the Kingbee pulled RT Virginia out of the target.

A few days later it was confirmed: the fuel depot had been destroyed. Wald and he were shown photographs of what was left of it. Again they were cautioned to say nothing, absolutely nothing at all to anyone about what they had done. If asked by anyone about it, nothing had occurred out there. Nothing. It was to be the mission that wasn't.

The name Zolanakus was never so much as whispered. For all anyone knew he was still out there, up his personal river, and having nightmares about low crawling through mud and bugs to wrestle a 55-gallon drum. ❖

The Ambush

By Jim Morris

There were thirteen of us in the three-quarter-ton truck, myself included. I was the only American. We stopped for lunch at a big Jarai montagnard village on Route 7.

Cowboy asked me to go with him to the house of a friend of his. This longhouse, like all the others, was a split-bamboo and thatch building set off the ground about five feet by large upright logs called t'meh. The floor extended in front of the longhouse proper to make a porch, against which a notched log leaned for stairs. Cowboy scooted up it with ease. I lumbered after him in considerably less agile fashion.

The lady of the house asked us inside and I ducked under the door. The effect inside was very pleasant. From the windows and through the bamboo walls the light filtered softly. The room was not cluttered. A few woven baskets and gourds hung on the walls. There was a square raised section in the middle of the floor that served as a fireplace, the smoke rising to the roof and slowly working its way out of the thatch.

The lady of the house gave us a friendly smile and offered us the floor to sit on. I leaned my AR-15 up in a corner and threw all my gear down beside it. Then I sat crosslegged on the floor. The split bamboo was resilient and pleasant to sit on.

Cowboy leaned his stuff up in the opposite corner and sat down too. He put his cowboy hat and wraparound shades on the floor beside him.

"Where's your friend?" I asked.

"He work in fields now, come back soon."

I started to ask if he was planting or what. Then I realized that Cowboy probably wouldn't know. He had been a soldier since he was twelve and probably hadn't worked a rice field in his life.

Perhaps warrior would be a better term than soldier for Cowboy. He had never been a member of a recognized army. His loyalties were to two things: money and personal friendship. I believed that personal friendship took precedence over money. I never had cause to change that belief.

He had commanded a Special Forces Strike Force Battalion for a year until he found out that being an interpreter paid roughly three times what a Battalion Commander got. He had been an interpreter for a year and a half. Cowboy was twenty-two years old.

He dived down into his pack and brought up a couple of cans of C's and pulled his canteen out of the carrier. "Let's eat," he said.

I got out two small C-ration cans, sliced ham and bread, and the little C-ration can opener. For reasons nobody now on active duty can remember it is called a P-38. The C-rations and a couple of gulps of water made a pretty fair meal.



(Courtesy Capt. D.L. "Pappy" Hicks).

While we were eating, a little boy, about two, came in the door. He was wearing four bracelets on his left arm, and an anklet on each leg, an earring, and a Hopalong Cassidy T-shirt.

I said, "Hi, kid!"

He ran and grabbed his mother's skirts, looking back over his shoulder in apprehension. I guess he'd never seen anybody that big and blond before.

I rooted around in my pack and came up with a can of cookies and cocoa. I got up and opened the can and tried to give it to the kid. He grabbed his mother's skirts again and buried his head in her legs. I gave her two of the cookies and took one for myself. She smiled at me and gave one of the cookies to the kid. He took it and ran off, unsmiling.

I took the little envelope of cocoa and threw it back into my pack. Then I bent back the lid of the can and turned the edges under in a three-way fold, so it can be used as a cup without cutting your fingers on the edges. I gave it to the lady of the house and she smiled and nodded thanks. Later she would probably weave a wicker holder for it and throw away the lid altogether.

I always feel like some kind of condescending jackass giving my castoffs to the yards. But they take the gift as it is intended. They have marvelous dignity and never beg, but offer the hospitality of their homes, their food and their rice wine.

I went back over and sat down. "What time you think we ought to leave?" I asked Cowboy. I was beginning to think his friend wasn't going to show up.

"'Bout four," he replied.

It was one-thirty. "Okay, listen," I said, "I'm going to flake out for a while." I'd been up late the night before writing some kind of screwy report.

I awakened about three-thirty. Cowboy's friend had returned. He had changed into formal attire to meet the Capitaine. He was wearing a loincloth and an old U. S. Army olive-drab dress blouse. I suppose it had been lend-lease to the French and from there to one of the montagnard battalions.

"Bon jour, Monsieur," I said, which almost exhausted my command of the language.

He cut loose a tremendous stream of guttural French, which Cowboy interpreted to mean that he wanted me to join him in some rice wine.

My mind skittered desperately at the prospect, but I assented. It would have been uncourteous to do otherwise.

He brought the jug and sat it on the floor. Then he took out a long straw. We did not drink through the straw, but he siphoned off the ou into a couple of old Bière La Rue bottles.

The stuff tastes like a combination of sugar, water, and vomit. I tried to chug it down at a gulp, not breathing during the process. I couldn't kill it at once, but had to try again. Then I belched and smiled approval.

Naturally he offered more, but I informed him through Cowboy that I had a delicate stomach condition and could not continue.

Then rather more forcefully than was necessary I said, "Let's get started, Cowboy."

His grin was like a baby wolf's. He got up and put on his wraparound shades and his cowboy hat sat down low on his nose. Then he took out that greatest of all Southeast Asian status symbols, a Salem cigarette, and lit it. He held the filter in his teeth, James Dean fashion.

Once he got his image intact we walked out into the sunlight and went down the notched log.

The squad was good, handpicked without regard to rank or unit. Their faces were calm and their eyes were ready.

"Cowboy," I said, "how did you explain these soldiers to the village?"

"I tell them we go hunting."

I looked at Big Stoop with his front teeth out and his thirty-caliber machine gun in his arms. "With that?"

"Oh! They know that the soldier must take what gun he have."

It seemed a poor cover to me, but the montagnards are not used to questioning things. "Okay, let's go."

We went out the bamboo gate and past the long spiked fence, the defensive positions, punji stakes and watchtowers. We turned left to head back toward the rice fields.

Moving through the fields we automatically took up a kind of loose diamond formation, although we still carried our weapons slung. Once across the field we moved into the woods and waited. I unslung my rifle and leaned against a tree. Most of the others did likewise. We faced outward into the trees, weapons ready. I lit a cigarette. After we had waited about ten minutes I asked, "Any idea how soon he come?"

"Maybe ten more minute. He must wait so nobody know we go same."

"Uh huh."

Another cigarette later Cowboy's friend came across the fields carrying a Jarai ax for protective coloration. Once he was in the trees we grinned and shook hands all around again. Then the point man moved out, then Cowboy's friend, Cowboy, me and the rest of the squad.

The way was fairly rough and for the first kilometer I felt it: I had been in camp too long. After that it was fine.

The woods were open and green and the light was golden. We crossed a fair-sized stream, jumping from rock to rock, trying to keep

our feet dry. I missed the last rock, slipped and my right leg went in the water up to the knee, making me feel like a graceless fool in front of the yards. That sort of thing never happened to John Wayne.

Once we showed *The Longest Day* at the camp. We didn't have a Cinemascope lens so everything was pretty narrow, but the yards didn't seem to mind. Cowboy drove out in his old three-quarter-ton truck with his wife and little girl and a few in-laws. About halfway through the picture he turned to me and said, "This John Wayne, he is paratrooper, he is cowboy, he is pilot. What he really do?"

I tried to explain what an actor was, but he didn't grasp the concept. I guess he thought all those flicks were documentaries.

Thinking about something else makes walking go easier. After we had gone about two kilometers Cowboy's friend, the agent, pointed at the ground. I went up to look. There was a small trail, a path really. It was covered with a fine grey gravel and wound along a slight rise through the luminous green wood. It looked like the path I had imagined Hansel and Gretel taking when I was a kid; pretty in the daytime, but dark and scary at night.

"He says every day, almost, one squad VC come by here."

"They come by day or by night?" I asked.

"Sometimes day, sometimes night."

"Does he see them?"



(Courtesy Capt. Larry Dring)

"Sometimes. Sometimes they make greeting."

I thought that was jolly.

"This is not a good place for ambush," Cowboy said.

"True. Let's get back away from the trail and walk along until we find a good place."

Cowboy nodded and gave instructions to the squad in Jarai. It sounded like a bad coughing fit.

Keeping the same order, we set off through the woods, moving parallel to the trail. The country was not good for ambushes. There was no commanding terrain. There was very little cover, but there was tall grass and some trees to hide behind. Finally we found a place that was less ridiculous than the rest, and set up.

Cowboy asked if I wanted to position the squad. "You are Captain. I must do as you order."

"You've set this thing up. As far as I'm concerned you're running the show. If I see something I don't like I'll let you know and we'll work it out."

Then I asked how he planned to set up.

"AR's on flanks. Machine gun in middle. All spread out with maybe five meter between each and get cover."

Aside from the automatic rifles and the machine gun, every man in the squad had either a Grease Gun or an M-2 carbine, all automatic weapons. Cowboy and I had AR-15's. An AR-15 looks like a cross between a Buck Rogers ray gun and a king cobra. It is six pounds plus of sudden death. It was a hell of a lot of firepower for thirteen men. We could take on anything up to a VC platoon with ease. Anything bigger than that was bad trouble.

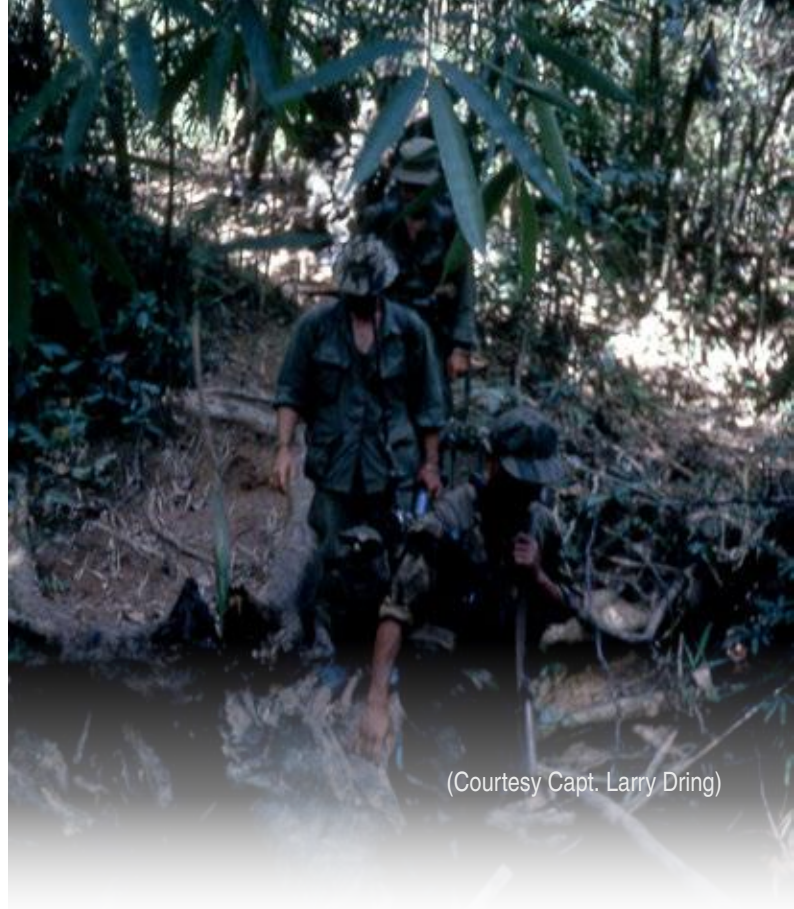
I suggested to Cowboy that he put a one-man outpost out behind us so we wouldn't have any unexpected callers coming in from that way. He agreed.

Cowboy placed each man in position behind the best cover he could find. We were pretty well concealed by some tall grass. I chose a spot by a V-fork tree about fifteen feet from the trail and sat down cross-legged.

I took off my patrol harness and put it on the ground in front of me; then I opened the ammo pouches, took a magazine out of both of them and laid them where they could be reached easily. There were two magazines taped together in a U on the weapon itself, and eight more from the pouches, two hundred rounds in all. Then I unsnapped the snaps on the canteen carrier to avoid making the noise later in the night. The canteen itself was wrapped in a wool sock and would make no metallic noise against its cup when taken out.

Everything was ready. It was five-thirty. I opened a can of peaches with the P-38 and ate them with a dirty plastic spoon from my shirt pocket. By then it was getting dark. I rammed the can into the ground, olive drab side up, so the bright metal of its inside would not show; then turned the selector switch to full automatic and lay the weapon beside me.

You have to sit perfectly still and make no noise. None. So immediately you want a cigarette. You have to cough. Your throat starts to



(Courtesy Capt. Larry Dring)

tickle and your nose itches. Your back aches, then your legs, then your shoulders, then your neck. When you do not react to this, but continue to sit still, the mind casts about for thoughts to amuse itself and pass the hours.

The moon rose to our front.

I started to shake uncontrollably. It was not cold and I was not afraid. It was a flat rush of adrenalin and the sudden knowledge that the ambush would go. I have had the same feeling since, and it has failed, and sometimes I have not had it and scored. But this was the first time and I was sure. Then the shaking passed and my mind was coldly detached.

My aching shoulders were hunkered for a long wait. I did not expect to see anything until three o'clock the next morning. The moon was high now and full and gold in the blue-black sky with the clouds turning to silver. The breeze rose and then died and the black silhouettes of armed men were passing quickly, quietly down the trail.

We were all firing. One faded from my sights. Tracers from the thirty-caliber weapons were ricocheting so high I thought the Cong were sending up flares. I fired up one magazine and then another. I kept firing. We all did. I wanted nothing to live out there. I felt nothing, neither elation nor horror, just the cold astringent calm.

I fired up five magazines before I stopped. Then everybody stopped and I called out, "Cowboy, let's check out the stiff's."

"Yes, sir."

We got up and moved onto the trail. The bodies were lying to the left, to the right, on the trail, cut down running. There were six bodies in all. Three had moved through and got away before we opened up. Later we learned that another died in a village the following morning.

I moved from one dark shape to the other, making sure they were dead. I fired a round into the ground by each man to see if he would move. None did. Cowboy moved beside me, covering.

When I moved up on the last one, he raised up, his arms extended, eyes wide. He had no weapon. I said, “Good, we got a pris—”

Cowboy stitched him up the middle with his AR-15. He didn’t even twitch.

“Goddamn it,” I said, “we could have got some good information from that guy.”

“Sorry,” said Cowboy, “I get, you know, excited.”

Nothing to do but shrug it off. I said, “Get their weapons and packs and we’ll move out”

Cowboy was looking fearfully down the trail. “Maybe better we just get weapons. Must move fast now.”

That sounded okay. When we got a report that the weapons had been picked up, I said, “We’ll come back for the packs tomorrow.” Cowboy didn’t say anything, just moved. He really wanted to get out of there.

We cut straight cross-country through the brush and the creek, moving quietly and taking no known trail. We were back in the village by ten o’clock and the villagers loaned us a half-completed longhouse with a roof on it to sleep in.

I hadn’t brought a poncho because I had expected to be all night in an ambush position and didn’t want to be comfortable and go to sleep.

I flaked out on the bamboo floor with the yards, but it got cold pretty fast and I couldn’t sleep. One of the yards had a spare poncho in the truck. He offered it to me. I declined. He insisted. I rolled up in it and wished for a pillow. Never satisfied.

The next morning we hired some villagers to go with us to carry back the Cong’s packs and equipment.

The bodies still lay across the trail in their black shortie pajamas and their black sandals made from old truck-tire-treads. Rigor mortis had set in and the ants were marching in straight lines across their bodies. They were so stiff we had to cut most of the equipment off.

I wanted to take the stiffes back with the rest of the gear. I figured it would make quite a stir when we kicked them out in front of the Ops Shack. Cowboy pointed out that there was hardly room for thirteen men, all those packs and six stiffes in the back of a three-quarter-ton truck. Besides, it might make some of the boys a little twitchy. I said okay and we left the stiffes on the trail.

Back at the village we gave each of the porters 20 piasters apiece, which is about twenty cents, and Cowboy slipped his buddy, the agent, one thousand in small, old bills when nobody was looking. Then we thanked everybody, shook hands, exchanged smiles, said Bonjour, and Merci, a few times, jumped in the truck and drove off.

There was no rush. We stopped for a beer in Cheo Rea and still made it to camp by noon. ♦



(Courtesy Capt. Larry Dring)

The Ambush: *The Story of the Story*

The Ambush was written in January of 1965, while on convalescent leave from wounds received on 23 December 1964, on my second TDY tour with USASFV in Vietnam. The ambush itself took place on 25 March 1964, on the first tour.

It was my first story in a national magazine, and ran in *Esquire* in the August 1965 issue. Easily the most successful story I ever wrote, it was reprinted in two college English texts, a Japanese magazine, and eventually in both *EAGLE Magazine* and *Soldier of Fortune*. It is the basis of chapter seven of my book *War Story*. It was also reprinted in *Esquire* '65, a promotional volume of the best stuff *Esquire* published that year, between stories by Tennessee Williams and Bruce Jay Friedman, a hot novelist at the time. That is the closest I have ever come to literary respectability.

A snarky introduction in one of the English texts pointed out that Cowboy did more to run the ambush than I did, which was true. My major contribution was to be the guy who hired Cowboy, aka Philippe Drouin, aka Y Kdrowin Mlo. I was also the guy who, after four months of trying to figure out how to build an effective intelligence net in a primitive society created it in one stroke by saying, “Hey, Phil, go hire some spies.” Philippe Drouin was the best jungle fighter I ever met, and, as far as I know the only Montagnard fighter who ever had a book written about him, *The Cowboy* by Daniel Ford.

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THE SECOND WORLD WARS: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won

by Victor Davis Hanson

RESISTANCE OPERATING CONCEPT, SOCEUR and Swedish Defence University,

edited by Otto Fiala



Mike Keele

The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won

Reviewed by Mike Keele

I didn't even know who Victor David Hanson was until I signed up to take a short internet history course on the Second World War, offered on-line by Hillsdale College. I bought the book (\$15.17 at Amazon) knowing my resolve to watch all the lectures would only be half hearted. I also never got around to

taking the quizzes. The book is called *The Second World Wars*, an intriguing play on words to a very complex set of circumstances which lead to the Three Stooges banding together to form the Axis Powers; and FDR, Churchill and Stalin joining together to prove the adage that my enemy's enemy is my friend. France need not apply for admission to that union.

The book was right up my alley. Once I got into it, and with the aid of the Google service on the ol' Android, I was able to follow right along, including the more than adequate supply of fifteen letter words Mr. Hanson sprinkled throughout the three hundred and fifty-odd pages of narrative, plus another one hundred and thirty, or so pages of foot notes.

Every chapter has a different protagonist, and every hero can become a Machiavellian heel. Hanson has a knack for drawing on little known (but well documented) details of the various leaders' motives and shortcomings for getting into such a horrific war. For instance, Hitler, who wanted to rule the world, took a liking to Mussolini, but Mussolini only had aspirations for conquering the small countries surrounding Italy. He could only think in the short term, and found his Army, Navy and pint-sized Air Force way outclassed by the British who were also fighting the other two Axis powers at the same time. Italy couldn't win any of their battles with Great Britain.

All the Axis powers relied heavily on the nineteenth century mode of delivering supplies to the front; mules and horses. But one horse is, well, capable of providing one horsepower. Horses also hauled their cargo at a very limiting speed, and once broken down by fatigue or injury, equines were, if you'll pardon the expression, dead meat.

Hanson plugs many factors into the equation of winning the war as seen from the standpoint of each of the combatants, and it is there that you begin to realize why the Allied Powers had all the components for winning, and the Axis, Japan and Germany, principally, had very little in raw materials to sustain them, while Italy could contribute virtually nothing, save for a couple of hundred thousand troops for the meat grinder that was the Russian front. Industrial might was the bailiwick of the United States, and our industry was never even bombed. We were God's hole card, being the production giant that was able to supply our materiel needs, the needs of the British Empire, Soviet Russia, and to a lesser degree, the free French and Poles. Thank God for natural resources.



If you take on *The Second World Wars*, my advice is to keep your dictionary handy, or, if you're among us enlightened few septuagenarians and beyond who have mastered the use of Google, just have your cell phone handy at all times. ♦

[The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won](#)

By Victor Davis Hanson

Basic Books, 2017

720 pages

Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)

Reviewed by Jon Friberg

SOF News, April 3, 2020

<https://sof.news/uw/review-resistance-operating-concept-roc/>

In 2014 the [Resistance Operating Concept](#) (ROC) began its early stages of development. The Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), commanded by Major General (MG) Mike Repass, began this academic effort. Subsequent SOCEUR commanders and their staffs along with other members of the European special operations community continued the endeavor.

A series of seminars, conferences, and workshops were held to refine the doctrine for unconventional warfare in Europe. The

actions of a resurgent and aggressive Russia made this effort a priority within the European special operations community. The ROC is a concept that will aid Northern and Eastern European countries to deter and resist aggression in Eastern Europe.

These workshops, conferences, and seminars led to the writing of a book entitled ***Resistance Operating Concept***. The chief editor was Otto C. Fiala of SOCEUR. The book was printed and distributed in limited copies by Arkitektkopia in Stockholm, Sweden in late 2019.

In December 2019 the Swedish Defence University and SOCEUR jointly announced the finished product. The editor of SOF News was fortunate to receive a hard bound copy for review. The book is certainly a superb addition to the library of the military academic –

especially one with a keen interest in Unconventional Warfare. It is very professionally done and full of great material about historical and contemporary unconventional warfare topics.

The foreword is provided by Major General Kirk Smith – a former commander of SOCEUR. BG Anders Lofberg, the commander of the Swedish Special Operations Command also provided a foreword. The four chapters are:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Resilience as a Foundation for Resistance
- Chapter 3 – Resistance
- Chapter 4 – Interagency Planning and Preparation

There are ten appendices on the topics of legal considerations, methods of nonviolent resistance, Russian hybrid warfare tactics, Second World War case studies, Cold War resistance case studies, case studies lessons learned, assessing resilience, population interaction with a foreign occupier, government interagency planning, and more. The glossary provides terms, definitions, abbreviation, and acronyms. The book is very documented with 624 endnotes.

A new printing of *Resistance Operating Concept* is currently being done by the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Press at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. This printing is a collaborative work between SOCEUR and JSOU. A digital version of the book (PDF) is available online. (see references below).

The Resistance Operating Concept is being used by European SOF in academic and field environments. In collaboration with SOCEUR and Latvian special operations forces, the Joint Special Operations University conducted a National Resistance Course in Riga, Latvia during December 2019. More than 40 students, the majority from the Zemessardze (Territorial Forces), studied unconventional warfare.

The *Resistance Operating Concept* will be a guiding publication used by European SOF and US SOF for many years to come. It will certainly be integrated into the curriculum of SOF centric courses and schools. It is also a great addition for the military professional's library.

References:

Resistance Operating Concept, SOCEUR and Swedish Defence University, edited by Otto Fiala, 2019, 251 pages.

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“SOCEUR and Resistance Operating Concept”, by John Friberg, SOF News, July 19, 2019.

<https://sof.news/uw/resistance-operating-concept/>

Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Press Publications
<https://jsou.libguides.com/jsoupublications> ❖

The Ambush: The Story of the Story continued

My greatest contribution to the success of this mission was the required coordination with the District Chief. When I told him where we wanted to go he said, “Oh, cannot go there. I have ambushes in that area.”

I knew this cowardly little thief had never posted a night ambush anywhere, but I told him we would accede to his wishes. He lied to me; I lied to him, and we had “coordinated.”

When we left Cowboy said, “We cannot do what he said. No VC there.”

To which I replied, “Fuck him. We’ll go where we want.”

Cowboy said, “Ahhhh!”

When we got back to camp I was wiped, and went down for a nap. I was awakened to be told that Colonel Ted Leonard, the USASFV commander had unexpectedly choppered into our camp, accompanied by Colonel Lam Son, the LLDB commander, and Robin Moore, who was researching *The Green Berets*. We had a great time showing them the packs, diaries, and equipment of the casualties. They were much better equipped than most VC, because they weren’t VC; they were NVA. Colonel Lam Son, leafed through the diaries, and told us that this group, led by a full colonel, had flown into Laos from Hanoi, and walked down the trail to make an assessment for the coming invasion of South Vietnam by the North.

In our initial briefing in country we were told the US had already won the Vietnam War twice. First we beat the South Vietnamese in the VC units, so North Vietnam raised the ante by refilling the depleted ranks of the VC with North Vietnamese “volunteers”. We had resoundingly beat those guys, so now they were getting ready to send North Vietnamese units. I don’t know if my ambush was our first clue that this was going to happen, but it was one of the first.

Robin Moore and I stayed friends until his death in 2008. ❖



Cowboy, SSG Ken Miller, senior commo man, and Nay Phin, 2d Company commander. (Courtesy A-424, 1st SFGA)

