



# SENTINEL

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

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 6 • JUNE 2020



## **The Bin Ladin Raid Part 1: Legendary Special Operations Aviator Reveals bin Laden Mission Details**

**CSM Bennie Adkins USASF (Ret.) 1934-2020**

**The First Fifty Years**



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VOLUME 11, ISSUE 6 • JUNE 2020



US ARMY SPECIAL  
OPS COMMAND



US ARMY  
JFK SWCS



1ST SF COMMAND



1ST SF GROUP



3RD SF GROUP



5TH SF GROUP



7TH SF GROUP



10TH SF GROUP



19TH SF GROUP



20TH SF GROUP



11TH SF GROUP



12TH SF GROUP

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**FRONT COVER:** CW5 Douglas Englen flying an MH47 in the movie "Act of Valor". (Courtesy 'Act Of Valor'/Alex Quade)

**BACK COVER:** U.S. Army Soldiers from the 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division hook up supplies to the a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter on Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq, during a re-supply mission. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tiffany Dusterhoft) (Released)



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## From the Editor



Jim Morris  
Sentinel Editor

I'm fresh out of wisdom this month. Fortunately Crews McCulloch, whose XO I was on A-424 of the 1st Group in '63-'64 for two months of pre-deployment and six months in Vietnam, is, like the rest of us, trapped in his house with lots of time for quiet reflection. This is not the first time he has saved me when my own wisdom was lacking.

**PRAGMATIC-IDEALIST: Reflections on Life**  
By William Crews McCulloch

Being at home alone for the past two months has given me time to think about many things. I thought of my present life, my family, my friends, and many past experiences in my life. I am a believing Christian. Reflecting on my total life experience, I have concluded, I am a Pragmatic-Idealist, that is how I have lived my life.

Definition: Idealism is the belief that we should adopt moral principles, even if they have negative effects on our lives. Pragmatism, on the other hand, is a rejection of idealism. If the idealist's principles get in the way, the Pragmatist does whatever is deemed as practical, with no concerns for morality.

Based on the above definition: To me, pragmatism and idealism are absolutes. Many believe that being practical (Pragmatic) and having moral principles (Idealism) are in opposition, and therefore, one must choose between the two.

I have a different perspective: To me, pragmatism and idealism are not polar extremes that we must balance or vacillate between. I see them as complimentary components of a single effort. Pragmatism is accepting the realities and limitations of our current circumstances, simply a component of our strategy for moving forward. It is the path, by which, we navigate to the destination, the ideal outcome. Idealism is the quality of the goal or vision. It is the destination and represents what would be possible if our best efforts and intentions are realized. It is conscious planning that mandates we think in terms that are broad and inclusive, taking into consideration our community and, in some cases, even the global and moral implications of our actions. Mere hate or dislike, should never be a consideration. We must reflect on the full impact of our decisions and look beyond short-turn economic gain and self-interest. In many cases we must make instant decisions and none are ideal, so we choose the best of the bad. In my military career, and in business, I have faced this many times.

Our destination does not have to be pragmatic. Only our day-to-day pursuit of the ideal must lean in that direction. Obstacles may come our way. But, we can often achieve more because we set our original sights on the optimum outcome.

Just thinking.

Jim Morris  
Sentinel Editor





Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

Isolation, social distancing, gloves, masks a new world for a whole lot of people. However, for some of us, isolation brings back a whole lot of memories. As most of us remember that while serving on an ODA, Isolation was SOP before any mission. During these situations it was all about Mission Preparation, and being totally isolated for Security reasons.

One of my first real challenges as a brand new SGM was being NCOIC of Isolation Facility (ISOFAC) with five ODA's, and a HALO Team for a total of six ODA's. Isolation during Joint

Rotation Training Center (JRTC) — this was required for all Active, Reserve and National Guard SF Groups, no less than every two years.

The following is what makes up an ISOFAC: Mess facility, S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, Medical Det, and Commo Det, Aviation Det. This will also include a Message center, and the all-important LNO's (liaison NCO's to the ODA's) with two twelve hour shifts, seven days a week.

The coordination of all of this is a daunting task.

As I mentioned before Security, 'Force Protection' the first priority before you can even go Operational. This requires an Advance party to secure necessary facilities. Setting up triple concertina wire, a check point, one way in, and one way out. Now this where it gets a little tricky, and S-2 really has to have their act together. Who's allowed in? A master list has to be prepared in advance, and Security Clearances have to be confirmed, and it never failed, there were always issues. I

remember an incident that we can all relate to; a 1st Lieutenant at the check point DEMANDED Entrance and got so upset when he was denied access, he threw his BERET on the ground and began jumping up and down he was so frustrated. A couple of Sr. NCO's and I just happen to be there during this disturbance, and we all began to laugh. OH Boy!!! did he get upset. He picked up his BERET and stomped off. I later learned he was one of the Active Duty Evaluators from the SF Command whose name and Security Clearance had NOT been verified. Later, my Battalion Commander at the time pulled me aside and told me he didn't think that was very professional on my part, I said, "Yes SIR, and neither was the Lieutenant." He dropped the matter.

The whole point of my rambling is this, I can just imagine what our U.S. Government, State and local Government is going through trying to set up these Isolation facilities that include field hospitals.

Most of you may recall an email that I sent out where a Company was looking for SF people to help setup Isolation facilities who had experience. Oh! to be ten years younger — I would have jumped on it.

I would now like to mention some thoughts on Veterans benefits. Some of us have struggled with the VA, a real problem, especially if you don't get copies or access to your medical records. Yes, I know all our personnel files and medical records are archived back in St Louis, Missouri. But guess what? They are usually incomplete because down at Company level they were not kept updated.

In closing we are hoping to have a Chapter meeting on June 13th at the Joint Forces Training Base, located in the city of Los Alamitos (map and address below). By the time you read this you should have received an email from Don Gonneville VP and future President of SFA Chapter 78.

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

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



## June Chapter Meeting

If you plan to attend the meeting please e-mail VP Don Gonneville at: [don@gonneville.com](mailto:don@gonneville.com), no later than Thursday June 11th, midnight. We need an exact headcount.

**DATE:** June 13, 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)

# CSM Bennie Adkins USASF (Ret.)

## 1934-2020

**Editor's Note:** *Much of the following was taken from a speech delivered by Alex Quade at the official "Portrait of Honor" unveiling held at the Center for American Values on June 23, 2015.*

By Alex Quade

Command Sergeant Major Bennie Adkins, died on April 19, of complications from the coronavirus. He was from Waurika, Oklahoma, and was drafted in 1956. His first Army job was as an Administrative clerk typist, but that wasn't quite what Bennie had in mind, so he went to Airborne School, and volunteered for Special Forces in 1961. He served for more than 13 years, with 7th, 3rd, 6th and 5th Special Forces Groups. While in SF he deployed to the Republic of Vietnam three different times.

For three days in March of 1966, so numerous, and heroic were Bennie Adkins' battlefield exploits in the jungles of Vietnam that when President Obama presented him the Medal of Honor, he started his remarks by saying that there was no way there would be time enough to describe them all. At another point the President paused to say, "You can't make this stuff up."

During those three days in March of 1966 then SFC Bennie Adkins' camp was attacked by a large Viet Cong force. Adkins rushed through intense enemy fire and manned a mortar-position which was receiving direct hits from enemy mortars. Despite being wounded Bennie continued to adjust fire for his camp.

When Bennie learned that several soldiers were wounded near the center of his camp he temporarily turned over the mortar to another soldier, and ran through exploding mortar rounds to drag those soldiers to safety. He even exposed himself to sporadic sniper fire while carrying his wounded buddies to the aid station.

Later, when Adkins and his team came under heavy fire again he maneuvered outside the camp to evacuate a seriously wounded American. Adkins then intentionally became a distraction to draw fire upon himself so the rescue operation could succeed.

When a re-supply air drop landed outside of the camp perimeter, Adkins again moved outside the camp walls to retrieve the much needed supplies. And that was just day-one of those three days in March of 1966.

The next day enemy forces launched their main attack. And within two hours, Bennie Adkins was the only man still firing a mortar. When he was out of rounds he used the recoilless rifle. Despite receiving additional wounds from enemy rounds, which were exploding on his position Adkins kept fighting off intense waves of attacking Viet Cong.

After withdrawing to a communications bunker with other soldiers Bennie Adkins eliminated numerous insurgents with small arms fire. When they started running low on ammo, he ran under fire back to

the mortar pit, gathered more ammo, and then back to the bunker. His team was ordered to evacuate the camp so Adkins and his men destroyed all the signal equipment and classified documents, dug their way out of the rear of the bunker and fought their way out of the camp.

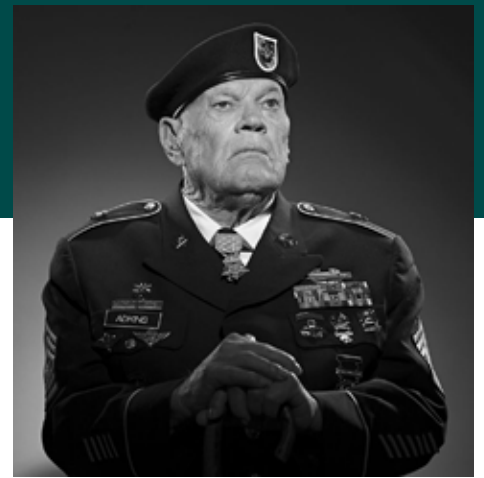
And that's when Murphy's Law kicked in. Bennie was carrying a wounded soldier to the helicopter extraction point when the last helicopter departed without them. So Adkins had to lead his men in evading the enemy until they were finally rescued on that third day in March of 1966.

It's estimated, that Adkins killed between 135 and 175 enemy during those three days of battle and escape, and evasion, while sustaining 18 wounds. Here's what he said about it, "When they treated me for 18-body wounds, someone was looking after me, and at that period of time it was not myself."

When he retired from the Army he built the Adkins Accounting Service in Auburn, Alabama, and became a CEO. He lived in Opelika, Alabama.

His wife of 62 years, Mary, died in 2019. He is survived by three children, Michael Adkins of Opelika, Mary Ann Adkins Blake and W. Keith Adkins, both of Auburn, two brothers, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. His son, Dennis Adkins, died in 1979, and his son, Wayne Adkins, died in 2014. ❖

REST IN PEACE, CSM BENNIE ADKINS. DE OPPRESSO LIBER!

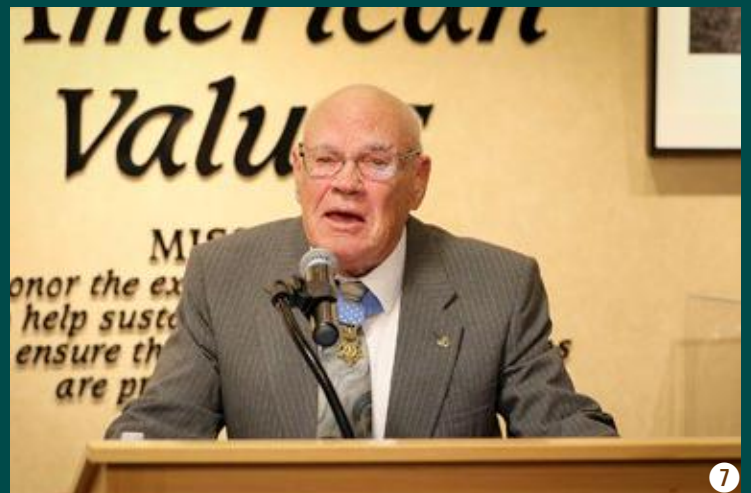


Official "Portrait of Honor" of Bennie G. Adkins, Command Sgt. Maj., Ret.(U.S. Army photo)



President Barack Obama bestows the Medal of Honor to retired Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins. (Photo Credit: U.S. Army)





- ❶ Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie Adkins, shown receiving the Purple Heart while serving in Vietnam. (U.S. Army photo)
- ❷ Then-Sgt. 1st Class Bennie G. Adkins on the day he received the Distinguished Service Cross in 1967. (U.S. Army photo)
- ❸ The official "Portrait of Honor" unveiling event on June 23, 2015 at the Center for American Values for five MOH recipients. Left to right, SF MOH Bennie Adkins, MOH Woody Williams, Event MC Alex Quade, SF MOH Drew Dix, SF MOH Melvin Morris, SF MOH Sal Giunta

- ❹ MOH recipients at the unveiling ceremony.
- ❺ CSM Bennie Adkins unveils his portrait
- ❻ Greeting the audience
- ❼ CSM Bennie Adkins addresses the audience.  
(Photos 3-7 by Bob Sprouse, courtesy Center for American Values/  
Alex Quade)

## WAR ON THE RUN: The Epic Story of Robert Rogers and the Conquest of America's First Frontier by John F. Ross



Kenn Miller

By Kenn Miller

*WAR ON THE RUN: The Epic Story of Robert Rogers and the Conquest of America's First Frontier* by John F. Ross, 576 pages including appendixes, notes, bibliography, and index, etc.

As the length of the title, subtitle, and other (often interesting) attachments might warn a wary reader looking for blood and guts and a good piece or two of genuine military, *WAR*

*ON THE RUN* is not a quick and easy read. But it just might be the thing to amuse and enlighten a military scholar and history buff diverted during a period of quarantine, snow bound cabin fever, or imprisonment.

After all, of the various so-called "Forgotten Wars" in American history, there is none as interesting and important as the French and Indian War that preceded and heavily influenced the War of American Independence, and the fact that our beloved neighbor to the north speaks English somewhat more generally than it speaks French. And then there is the person of Robert Rogers, his tactics, his Rules of Ranging, and both his historical and his legendary military feats. The descriptive term "Harder than woodpecker's lips" may not have been around during the French and Indian War, but Robert Rogers and his Rangers — and their French, French Canadian, and Indian enemies — were some rather hardcore warriors. It may upset certain squeamish 21st Century Canadians that the tribe after which their capitol is named were far from genteel people. In one of the many interesting anecdotes in this vast and deep book, a French Jesuit missionary who comes to soothe and inspect a group of woe-begone Anglo-American and English prisoners gathered around a large fire was horrified to find the Frenchmen's Ottawa allies were celebrating with a cannibal feast. When the kindly Jesuit expressed his horror, one of the Ottawa celebrants, with a face dripping blood and gore, told him in broken but workable French that "Thou have French taste; me Savage, this meat good for me." At least some of the British and Anglo-American's indigenous allies were not much more pristine in their table manners, and treatment of prisoners was harsh and often atrocious on all sides.

Beginning in his youth Rogers had learned a lot from and held high respect for Indians — at least those who were not on the French side. In the best tradition of special operations officers, Rogers' relationship with conventional officers were often rather contentious, and he insisted that his Rangers be recognized as special. One bone of contention was the status of the Indians. Rogers struggled to be allowed to recruit Indians into the Rangers.

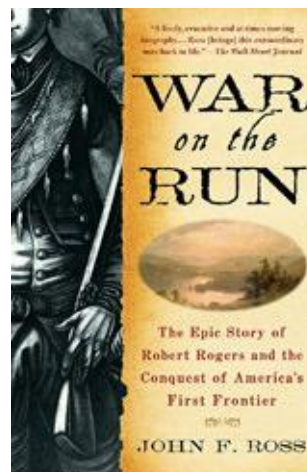
The French and Indian War took place in rugged and dangerous terrain and weather; with cutting winds, fierce rain, trackless forests, icy and driven rivers, swallowing bogs, and deep snow. It was a war

of large armies as well as small unit actions and high casualties on all sides. Like the Vietnam War, it was U.S. Army Long Range Patrol units that led the way for the 75th Rangers.

Rogers' Rangers began as a patrol and company sized reconnaissance and quick raiding organization made up of sometimes rowdy but always eager volunteers. But by the end of the war the organization had expanded to a 12 company force of more than a thousand men capable for special operations on their own or in cooperation with more conventional forces. At the end of the French and Indian War, Rogers and his Rangers and his strike force of Indians, working alongside King George's American army, were instrumental in the invasion of Quebec and the bloodless capture of Montreal that led to the end of the war. Robert Rogers did a little mercenary work in the Carolinas but didn't like it. He participated in the Pontiac Rebellion and then went to England where the more roguish British officers lionized him. While there he wrote some books, including a romanticized novel about Chief Pontiac. He then returned back to America, where he sought a commission in George Washington's army, but was rejected because Washington worried that he might be a British spy. And so Robert Rogers, probably with some bitterness, went back into the service of King George.

Robert Rogers was far from being a superman, nor an invincible combat leader. He certainly wasn't. His Rangers sometimes suffered very heavy casualties and tactical reverses — but then so did his enemies, who were regularly outwitted and defeated. Perhaps his most important, and certainly longest lived contribution to the realm of military special operations were his writings — not just his 28 Rules of Ranging (aka "Standing Orders", "Rules of Order"). familiar to students at the U.S. Army Ranger School and members of U.S. Army Ranger units.

This was supposed to be a book review, and if you are a fanatical history buff, *WAR on the RUN* is well worth your time — lots of it. But Roger Roberts and the French and Indian War are too interesting to fit into even a densely printed 576 page book. ❖



[War on the Run: The Epic Story of Robert Rogers and the Conquest of America's First Frontier](#)

by John F. Ross  
Bantam; 1st Edition edition  
(May 19, 2009)  
576 pages



# Beat the Reaper



## GETTING OLD

By Don Sakal, MMSc, PA-C  
Veteran SF Medic/Instructor 91B2S/18D

Greetings all, SF brother Jim Morris requested I write some medical advice for the elderly. Thanks for having me.

Aging is all about prevention. Let's begin with the high risk election/flu season. Yup, seems elections harvest disease: SARS 2004, Avian 2008, Swine 2010, MERS 2012, Ebola 2014, Zika 2016, Ebola 2018 and Corona 2020. A weird phenomenon; don't you think? Anyway, distance during oral communication is the key if you don't have the appropriate mask, and better yet stay home. We used to say three feet apart between speaking people, but now six feet with CORONA when no appropriate mask.

A generic geriatric multimineral/multivitamin is wise even if you eat healthy. We all know exercise is good, but we need a good supporting skeletal system to do it, and so calcium 1500 mg daily along with vitamin D 800 I.U. daily, as calcium needs the vit-D to be absorbed. The sun penetrates our skin to make vit-D, but society has mostly migrated indoors, and as we get older many do the same. So, 2,000 I.U. vit-D is recommended and even 4,000 I.U. for a while when depressed. Depression is often part of getting older, as we feel less worth and with arthritis and other diseases it's easy to become blue, as growing old is not for sissies. Also, lack of vit-D itself leads to depression, plus vit-D decreases cancer risks, and so be sure to take your vit-D. Note: these are in addition to your daily multivitamin/mineral.

Also, with old age come degenerative joint disease, and any muscle tension/spasm can then more easily exacerbate back/neck pain. So, know that muscle needs magnesium, calcium and potassium. Indeed, some folks may need an additional 400mg of magnesium. Potassium is important for activities, or during diarrhea or vomiting episodes, as we tend to get dehydrated faster with age. Gatorade is a good source of potassium and other things, but diabetics should know that some sport drinks, like Powerade, have 21 grams of sugar.

Some folks may have contraindication for some vitamins, because of medication they are on or underlying disease. For example, vit-K decreases the blood thinner Coumadin/Warfarin and eating too many foods with vit-K can make the medication less effective and then increase risk of stroke. Others may have history of calcium kidney stones and might need to be more careful, but most articles I've read still suggest the RDA dose. Also, sometimes we need cut back on vit-D as in Sarcoid patients, or kidney stones, etc. The internet is a good source to look up contraindications to some vitamins, but I've never seen a daily multivitamin contraindicated in my 40 years of practice.

Eating healthy and regular exercise and stretching is important as we age, but disease often limits such exercise. Sometimes all one can do are isometrics or rubber resistance bands. Exercise like walking will help increase bone production to keep bones hard and good for our cardiovascular, as often old joints can't take running. Avoid carbonated beverage, because the phosphate in them has higher affinity than calcium for bone, and so it weakens your bones. Only in osteoporosis do we use phosphate drugs to build bone when calcium uptake is poor.

Most medical advice for the elderly is on the internet, but we have to take the initiative to read it. However, many folks don't, because of depression or out right "give-up-itis" leading to dopamine imbalance. "Give-up-itis" is not just part of SERE, but can be part of the aging process as well. Above all, know that as we age diseases become more silent! You may not feel a heart attack, but simply have shortness of breath or weakness, dizziness or maybe just not feel right. A bladder infection may simply present as confusion or delirium without pain on voiding. Infection often will not yield a fever, and it may not even increase the white blood cell count, because as we age our autoimmune responses often decrease. Knowing this is prevention in itself, and so if you begin to feel real weird it may be something more significant than you think. And if you have a stroke look at the time, as there are limited time windows we have to get some drugs on board to improve outcome. Be well and Walk in Spirit. ♦



Chapter 78 member John Creel (above center wearing his beret), who began running in 60's, at the 2012 ING Hartford Marathon. He completed his goal of running a marathon in each U.S. state there. He is still running and working on a new goal — completing marathons in each country. (Photo courtesy John Creel)

# The Bin Laden Raid

## Part I: Legendary Special Operations Aviator Reveals bin Laden Mission Details



Alex Quade  
War Correspondent

By Alex Quade

**Editor's Note:** A slightly altered version of this story previously appeared in *Military Times*. This is Part One of the story. Part Two will follow in the July 2020 *Sentinel*.

It was just 30 seconds into the [mission to kill Osama bin Laden](#) in May 2011 when special operations Chinook pilot Chief Warrant Officer 5 Douglas Englen heard the call of “Black Hawk down” come over his radio.

Black Hawk 2’s pilot alerted Englen — the pilot in charge of the [air operation](#) that night — that Black Hawk-1 had just crashed inside the 9/11 mastermind’s Abbottabad compound.

Englen, the air component planner for [Operation Neptune’s Spear](#), was pissed off.

His crew in Chinook-1 and another crew in Chinook-2 had been setting up a refuel site for the two Black Hawks, about 30 miles to the north. But his Chinook immediately went straight to the objective area, to pick up the ground force and the aircrew. Meanwhile, the other Chinook stayed at the refueling site.

“We just went into contingency mode,” said Englen, talking about the raid, and his life, for the first time in an exclusive interview. “Didn’t know the severity — if it was crashed with casualties? If it crashed in civilian area? All we do is minimize our time and get there as quick as possible,” Englen said.

Englen had studied the area around bin Laden’s compound for months. He knew exactly where everything was; he didn’t need a map. When he flew over Abbottabad, it felt as familiar as flying over his hometown of Clarksville, Tennessee.

He could see where the police lights were, where the commotion was happening. Blue police lights don’t show up in night vision goggles, so Englen looked under his goggles to see those blue lights.

From getting the call, Englen was there less than 10 minutes after the aircraft crash. As he came in fast to pick up the ground force and air crew, he saw the downed helicopter.

Just as Englen was about to land, the team master chief told him over the radio to break away. The fuse was ready to blow up the crashed helicopter.

“I was probably 100 feet from the aircraft when it blew up. It pushed our aircraft to the side. I had to actually fly away, make a tight circle and come back in, and land under the mushroom cloud. I landed to the east of the compound, right next to it. I mean like, right next to it,” Englen explained.



CW5 Englen in MH47 about to fly from ship in undisclosed location on classified mission. (Courtesy of Doug Englen)

Before they’d left the States, there were some ground force team members who’d said, “I don’t think we’re going to make it back.”

Englen figured some ground forces were worried because they’d only been read-in two and a half weeks before the mission, and didn’t have the full aspect of what was going on. He’d had months of planning and knew everything about that part of Pakistan and the area around bin Laden’s compound.

He also knew the ground forces had to trust him and the ground force commander.

“We literally just needed them to be on the objective, which they did phenomenally well. But what scared them was: ‘We’re going into this place, what are our odds of making it back?’ I never thought that. I never thought that we weren’t coming back,” Englen said.

Some people may have thought he was being cocky or arrogant, but cockiness was what had earned him the nickname “Stud Muffin” when he first arrived at the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, or SOAR.

Not coming home was never an option.

### BACK HOME

Englen’s wife Tina, his high-school sweetheart, was worried.

“I just knew, *that God knew*, I wasn’t going to be able to raise these kids without Doug,” Tina confided in an interview.

Having four children to keep her mind off the dangerous mission became her saving grace.





The family at Englen's retirement at 160th SOAR in front of the MH47 he's flown. (left to right, daughter Liz, son Chris, Englen, wife Tina, daughter Catheryn, daughter Alex). (Courtesy of Doug Englen)

"They were just as worried. So, if mom was worried, they were worried. If mom wasn't worried, they weren't worried," Tina said.

Tina was raised in the church. Her grandmother always told her that faith would get her through life.

She prayed to God — "Go ahead and take Doug and use him, and do what You need to do. But, I'm going to need him back."

### NIGHT STALKERS DON'T QUIT

Look up the Silver Star citation for CW5 Douglas Englen for that night — the citation is so blandly generic that it looks like he didn't do much. Which is exactly the point. For years, the special operations aviator flew figuratively under people's radar back home, while flying literally under the enemy's radar downrange.

In reality Englen, who just retired as the senior warrant adviser to the secretary of the Army and most decorated aviator in the Army, led the air component for the bin Laden raid, one of the most famous military operations in recent history. 160th SOAR aviators rarely speak about their missions or careers, because the majority is spent supporting Tier 1 operators on covert or clandestine operations.

When most people think of the bin Laden mission, they think of Naval Special Warfare Development Group SEALs and the CIA's Special Activities Division members, shooting its high value target, code named "Geronimo." What they may not realize is the majority of duration of that mission belonged to the special operations aviators.

While the risk was high for the ground forces during the 38 minutes they were actually on the ground at bin Laden's compound, the risk for the helicopters during the rest of almost four hours of flying was extreme. And, of course, one of the MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters crashed.

"We're the ones that are penetrating into a sovereign nation. We're the ones that have to elude the air defense, early warning network.

We're the ones that have to make sure we can get the ground force in, where they need to go. Loiter, for up to an hour, in an area that could shoot you down at any time, they possibly could think it's an aircraft from India," Englen said.

And getting back safely was even more difficult because, by then, the Pakistani military was alerted. "We absolutely can get shot down on the way back, which means we have to evade," Englen said.

Englen is sharing his story for the first time — and possibly the last, since he lives by the "quiet professionals" code, and avoids discussing his life in the shadows. He's only venturing into the light because former CIA Director Leon Panetta and retired Navy Adm. William R. McRaven — the overall commander of the bin Laden mission — encouraged him to, calling him "an American hero."

"He is, without a doubt, the finest Army aviator of our generation. Doug pulled my fat out of the fire more times than I can think of," McRaven said at a speech at Murray State College in February, a month before Englen retired.

"There truly are few people of this 9/11 generation that have been as heroic and as courageous as Doug Englen," McRaven added, without revealing any specifics.

The bin Laden operation is merely one of numerous classified missions he's participated in which the public knows little about.

"I'm telling it to you," he said recently, "because there's never been an accurate air piece conveyed on what happened that night."

Not only was Englen the MH-47 (a special operations version of a Chinook helicopter, a multi-role assault aircraft) pilot, he was also the *flight lead*, which means he's among the top 10 percent of the aviators in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

"That means you're in charge of not just your aircraft, you're in charge of the flight: responsible for the flight planning, execution, and orchestration. Think of it as a music conductor. But, you're also writing the lyrics for the song, playing the song, and you're orchestrating the song," Englen explained.

The 160th is the only rotary wing precision special operations aviation force in the entire Defense Department. It originated after the failed Iran hostage rescue attempt in 1980. The primary reason 160th aviators are "special" is their selection process, realistic training and resourcing. They are the best of the best. They take pride in supporting the elite: working with special operations forces of all branches on classified missions.

Englen always wanted to fly helicopters. As a child, he went to an Air Force Academy football game and crawled all over the helicopter static displays, and was hooked.

He bootstrapped his way up. He saw combat as a crew chief and door gunner during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Then he went to flight school. He was in one of the first helicopters in Bosnia in 1995.

More than 90 percent of Englen's career has involved Tier 1 missions.

Englen has more than 7,000 flight hours. About 4,500 of that was under night vision goggles. In Iraq and Afghanistan alone, he flew more than 2,500 missions. His 34 deployments translate to six years and nine months' worth of combat time downrange, away from his wife Tina and four children.

That number does not include all the other operations and training missions away from home.

### TASK FORCE SWORD

Operation Neptune's Spear was not Englen's first time in Afghanistan. His 160th SOAR air crews had been going after Osama bin Laden since the beginning.



160th SOAR Chinook "Crazy Horse Airlines" Co. Task Force Sword 2001. (Same air crews who fought Haditha, Iraq, 2003.) Doug Englen back row, left, "goofing off", hugging soldier. (Courtesy of Doug Englen)



Englen, left, and retired 160th flight lead Dean Brown. They flew from USS Kitty Hawk during TF Sword. This photo is onboard USS Wasp after classified mission. (Courtesy of Doug Englen)

During the longest helicopter assault in U.S. history, Englen's was the first helicopter into Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, on Oct. 19, 2001.

"The flight lead was left seat, I was his copilot in the right seat," he recalled.

While Task Force Dagger and the Green Beret "Horse Soldiers" flew in from the north, Task Force Sword and the Tier 1 commando elements flew in from the south.

"When we're a top tier, you don't advertise what you do, you don't follow up with what you do, and that's why you don't see books and movies about TF Sword," he explained.

Task Force Sword was a combined, joint interagency special operations task force run by Joint Special Operations Command, to conduct direct action missions in southern Afghanistan. It included special operations forces from the United Kingdom and other government agencies.

While the "Horse Soldiers" made headlines later, little was reported about Task Force Sword missions. Missions like "Objective Rhino" and "Objective Gecko" did make it into the news, however.

Tom DiTomaso, a retired lieutenant colonel and former Army Special Operations Command squadron commander, was at Objective Gecko and praised Englen and the 160th SOAR.

"They continue to be the premier standard for SOF aviation," DiTomaso said. "They are both great pilots and great fighters. I witnessed their commitment to us first-hand in Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Consistently put themselves in harm's way to make sure we are covered on the ground. They are not normal pilots. Trusted them completely. As a commander, there are no others that I would want on an objective."

### RESCUING KARZAI

Only a few days following Objective Gecko, Englen (under a senior flight lead) rescued Hamid Karzai from the Taliban. Karzai later became the president of Afghanistan.

"We flew all the way from the Indian Ocean, off the USS Kitty Hawk, all the way through Pakistan, all the way through Afghanistan. Probably less than a hundred miles from 'Triple Nickel' (Special Forces ODA-555, which along with ODA-595 became known as the 'Horse Soldiers'), and rescued Karzai, because he was surrounded by hundreds of Taliban," Englen said.

His Chinook picked up Karzai, along with members of other governmental agencies, and repatriated him elsewhere within Afghanistan. It was almost a full moon, and Englen incurred 38 bullet holes in his Chinook.

"I used to love the moon," Englen said. "I hate it now. I didn't know if the aircraft was going to hold together, because we still had five hours to fly to get back to the USS Kitty Hawk. It held together, thank God."

### IRAQ

In Iraq, there were also several high-profile missions the public knew little about.

Englen was on nearly every special operations insertion in the two weeks prior to the "Shock and Awe" campaign on March 19, 2003.



Among other missions, he infiltrated Top Tier members, along with British and Australian special operations in Al-Anbar, near the Syrian border, to deal with H-3 and H-2 Air Bases.

"Haditha Dam was a big one. I was leading," Englen said, of one the legendary battles in Army Ranger history.

The 160th brought AH-6 helicopters — the light helicopter gunship based on MH-6 "Little Bird" — and defensive armed penetrators, the MH-60L modified attack helicopter that looks like a Black Hawk, and one Chinook to that firefight.

Englen and a crew of six was flying that one Chinook.

"There's at least a dozen missions that I thought, 'There was no reason why we should have come out of that alive,' " he confided.

Haditha Dam was one of those.

"We rescued the Rangers when they were protecting the road going into Haditha, and a lady suicide bomber, pretending to be pregnant, blew up the checkpoint," Englen said.

Ranger Joe Harosky's friend Russ Ripplettoe was killed in that vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) incident, along with three other Rangers.

"It was a suicide mission," Harosky said. "Vehicle stopped and the woman acted like she was pregnant, feigned that she needed water. Russ was giving her a bottle of water, when the VBIED detonated."

The Rangers never gave the clearance for Englen to come in.

"They said it was too hot, and we just went in anyway. I knew if we spent another minute holding, these Rangers were going to die. So we went in, and I've never seen so many bullets coming our way, hitting us, going over the top of us, below us," Englen said.

Throughout his career, Englen never got scared when bullets hit his aircraft. Instead, he always became angry.

"Take a baseball bat and hit the side of your car — that's what a bullet sounds like inside an aircraft," he said. "It's horrible. And, when it starts ricocheting inside, it's even more horrific. I would just get pissed, because I knew that we had young kids on mini-guns getting scared, and if I got scared, they would freeze. I had to remain calm."

Harosky, the Ranger, was with 3/75th Ranger Regiment and at a blocking position further from the dam.

"TF 160 was truly amazing at Haditha Dam," he said. "Especially their support firing directly into trench lines in front of us that had enemy personnel in them. They would fly in line with the trenches while strafing them."

"The DAPs — defensive air penetrators — were just unleashing. We saved most of the Rangers' lives. Some we didn't, because they were burnt too bad," Englen said.



Englen flying MH47 on training exercise. (Courtesy 160th SOAR; U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher Prows)

"Haditha Dam was one that I knew we were going to get hit, we're going to get hit. I just knew, it's either that, or they're going to die," he added. "I had one of the best special operation aviators ever with me that night without any hesitation in the heat of battle. I owe my life to him, the crew owes their lives to him."

### CHASING SOLEIMANI

During those Iraq War years, Englen was involved in a number of missions supporting operations out of Mission Support Site Fernandez, which was near Baghdad. Those missions involved British special operations and multiple Tier 1 organizations from the U.S. From Samarra to the Yusufiyah triangle, the list of operations the public never knew about was long.

Twice between 2013 and 2016, Englen was in hot pursuit of Iran's Quds Force leader, Gen. Qassem Soleimani. But their order was "capture only."

"It wasn't 'capture or kill,' so if we couldn't guarantee a capture, then we couldn't take it to the next level," Englen said. "But we were minutes behind him and his vehicles in Iraq, and we could've gotten him. But our rules of engagement was, 'capture only.'"

Soleimani was killed in an airstrike at Baghdad Airport this past January.

Though the global special operations never ceased for Englen and his fellow 160th aviators, the one the public always wanted to know about was the famous bin Laden mission.

### UBL

Englen had gone after bin Laden three times prior to Operation Neptune's Spear.

The first time was in Tora Bora in 2001.

"I was not the flight lead," he said. "Al Mack, who has publicly disclosed his name, gets the credit for that. But for me, that was some of the nastiest flying you could think of."

The second time was in the Shigal Valley, northeast of Jalalabad, in 2006.

Englen's MH-47 Chinook was supposed to be the contingency force, but ended up being the primary aircraft to put the first guys in to go running after bin Laden.

"We actually crashed a helicopter," Englen admitted. "It was one of our 160th Black Hawks. They did a great job crash landing and not hurting anybody."

The MH-60 Black Hawks were supposed to fast-rope the assault group onto the rooftop of a mud building.

"So, you can imagine that amount of time, before one Black Hawk, another Black Hawk, a third Black Hawk — in and out — can't make it in there. All of the sudden, 'Hey, we need *you* to put the contingency force, the QRF [quick reaction force], as the primary assault force'," Englen explained.

While Chinooks can be a little slower, in this case his was the only helicopter with the power to hover over that building and drop a rope down so the ground forces could rope onto it.

"Bin Laden was there. He was there, but it took (us) so long to get in," Englen stated. "With the noise in the valley, he had an early warning network, and he was out of there. I'd say, two or three minutes before we got in there. And that's just enough."

(A Pennsylvania National Guard Chinook, CH-47, slung-loaded the crashed MH-60 Black Hawk out of there, so nobody would be the wiser about that nighttime special operation — though some "famous daytime photos" of resupplying the ground troops later went viral. (The photos show a National Guard Chinook with its back wheels on the rooftop of that same mud building "hanging there.")

The third time Englen went after bin Laden was between the Khost Bowl and the Tirah Valley in Afghanistan, right next to Pakistan, in 2008.

"We went after him there, and sure enough, it was another extremely dark night. I mean, he's very savvy, and eluded us once again," Englen said.

They had other attempts against bin Laden.



Another daylight PA NG CH47 resupplying ground troops. Englen's 2nd UBL attempt was at this compound during darkness prior with his MH47. (Courtesy DOD)

"But the administration, from 2008 on, would not allow us to cross the border (into Pakistan) to go get him," Englen said.

Until 2011, when they got the approval to go for Operation Neptune's Spear.

### LEAD UP TO THE UBL RAID

Englen had just trained 160th crews on electronic warfare: deep-insertion attacks against an enemy threat with an air defense network. Their aircraft had just been fitted with new equipment, which he helped certify.

"I was selected because I knew that type of environment very well. Not only that, the ground force commander — I had rescued him numerous times throughout the globe. We already had an extremely close relationship, and trust and loyalty. So they brought me on the team," Englen said.

Due to operational security concerns, only a few people were involved in the planning of that mission.

"We had to keep it down to such a minimum, because we didn't want to leak it out in our own (special operations) community," Englen said. "Plus, we didn't know when we were going to do it. So we had to make sure that we didn't 'suspend' (hold) a group of the elite ground force and air crews for three, four, or five months at a time, and not utilize them."

Those few planners worked for nearly four months at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

"We hung out in the print shop of the CIA because it's a little outside of the main building," he said. That was to alleviate exposure to other individuals of Special Operations Command regularly visiting the agency.

"We didn't want to run into one of them, and have them ask 'What are you guys doing here?'" Englen added.

They did not bring in the rest of the air crew, and the rest of the ground force, until two and a half weeks before they executed the mission.

Every other day, Englen assisted in briefing CIA Director Leon Panetta and Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

He briefed President Barack Obama twice, though McRaven briefed him more than that.

"In the situation room, the vice president approached me with off-topic discussion. I'll admit (it) was very distracting," Englen said.

These were high-level, the overall concept of what the risk and probability was: all the things the president would want to know to make a decision.

"It truly is a decision brief each time, but you have to go through the concepts. Sometimes the president would ask details. Sometimes he would ask, 'Where are you landing?' Sometimes he'd ask, 'How are



you planning on doing that?' Or about the air crew. You'd have to explain that, 'This is our concept, *now*,' Englen recalled.

McRaven would speak 90 percent of the time.

"We really wanted to do this (mission), and make sure we are the absolute professional," Englen said. "That's what Adm. McRaven is, just the true professional, true leader — and here I am getting side-barred with the vice president."

Turns out, Vice President Joe Biden pulled Englen to the side every time to make small-talk. He was genuinely interested in Englen and his family back home.

"He was really concerned, you know, 'You're gone a lot. How's this on the family?' He was asking those types of things, 'How many kids do I have? How long you been in the service,' etc.," said Englen. "They were genuine, thoughtful questions, but were kind of off-topic. Finally I just politely asked him, 'Sir, if you don't mind, I have to pay attention.'"

The plan called for using four aircraft: two Chinooks and two Black Hawks, which are a little bit quieter. They emit a smaller signature from a radar standpoint.

"The use of Black Hawks was to get them (the ground forces) quickly roped into the objective," Englen said. "The Chinooks were the 'smack down force' — the extra assaulters, extra gas in case anything were to happen — like an aircraft crash. That was the No. 1 planned contingency: a Black Hawk crashing."

Once they got the word to proceed with rehearsal, that's when they brought the rest of the ground force and the air crews in.

### MEANWHILE, ON THE HOME FRONT...

Back home, Englen's wife Tina started putting two and two together, because her husband was gone for months during the lead-up. She didn't know who the exact person the special operations aviators were going after, but knew there were three or four targets for which this intense focus was needed.

"I knew this was definitely a little bit different, because of the hours of training, how much he was gone, and how he was 'taken.' I mean, he was taken out of an award ceremony, like, 'You come now.' He looked at me and said, 'Hey you're going to have to catch a ride, I got to go.' I'm like, 'Crap. I've got to find a ride home,'" Tina recalled.

Over the course of his career, and their marriage, Doug Englen never shared much.

"I didn't ask a lot, either. In this community, it's kind of good to be ignorant, because what you don't know, doesn't hurt you. We (the spouses) were always imbued with, 'Just support them,'" Tina said.

Tina didn't know when she'd hear from her husband again, during those busy months away from home. Once, when he'd called to ask how she and their four children were doing, her washing machine was flooding water out their front door.

"I just literally sat down in the middle of the water and talked to him," she recalled, not saying anything about the chaos at home. "We're fine, we're good, everything's great, couldn't be better."

"The fact that I didn't have a washing machine, and I'd have to re-carpet the downstairs, was not important," Tina said.

The fact that her husband had called was.

Living on post at Fort Campbell, home of 160th SOAR, was "always trying," she said. "Everyone (in the special operations community) worried if they didn't hear from their spouses.

"If an aircraft went down, and you didn't hear anything. Or if somebody's husband didn't come home. Somebody was always planning or doing something for those guys. And you just always hoped that you weren't the one that they were planning for," Tina said.

"I knew what he was doing was big. The last thing he said to me was, 'I will not be able to talk to you until I'm back in-country.' So, I just glued myself to the TV, and tried to read between the lines of anything being reported, if I could," Tina said.

Of course, there was no news until Obama made the announcement about Neptune's Spear.

### STERILIZING

"This was a 'do-or-die' type mission," Englen said. "The mission was to 'kill/capture' him. And, if we are shot down, we had to make sure we were sterile."

"Yeah, it's a weird term," he added.

Sterile meant no identification, name tags, unit patches, family photos. No wedding rings. Nothing personal, in case they were taken hostage.

"I had some money on me, and a few cigars for bargaining (with captors), but that was it (besides his M9 pistol and M4 rifle)," Englen said. Their SAR (search and rescue) plan was in effect.

"The thing is, you get into this level of operation, it's not the standard SAR. It's multiple layers of search and rescue and recovery," he added.

Englen and his fellow special operations aircrew went to their helicopters for final checks that they had nothing personal on board. Their wedding rings, and everything else, went into their kit bags to stay behind.

"We have guys that know where our kit bags are at, in case something were to happen," he said.

Many operators wrote letters to be delivered to their loved ones back home, should the worst happen. Englen refused to. He'd never done that throughout his entire career of dangerous missions.

"No, I felt like it was a jinx. Plus, I always felt like it took you out of your frame of mind," he said. "A lot of guys wrote letters. A lot of people asked why I didn't. I just didn't. It wasn't an option to not come home," he added.

Back home, Doug's wife Tina worried, as she had throughout his career. But she refused to think about him getting hurt, and leaving her and their four children.

[Continued on page 17](#)



# The First Fifty Years

By Jim Morris

**Editors Note:** *This story originally appeared in Soldier of Fortune in 2002 as a celebration of Special Forces' first fifty years. Its principle value today is for its summary of the first fifty years of SF.*

In 1939, Aaron Bank spent the summer in Germany. He saw then that America would go to war with the Nazis. When he returned to the U.S. he joined the army. He was 36.

Bank had come from a prominent family in upstate New York, where, as a youth, his accomplishments had been athletic. He made his living as a ski instructor, tennis instructor, gymnastics coach. Being fluent in both French and German, he did this on an international scale. He was in every sense of the term, a man of the world.

So when World War II began and the Office of Strategic Services, our WWII intelligence agency, was formed, Captain Bank was a natural. O.S.S. had two departments, the espionage department and the special operations department. Bank was spec ops.

He trained to head a Jedburgh team. The name Jedburgh was chosen at random from a code book. But the Jeds later reflected that the town of Jedburgh in the Scottish Borders was notorious in the late Middle Ages for the activities of the raiders known as the Border Reivers. The Jeds were trained by British commandos,

wearing green berets, to infiltrate in three-man teams; an American or British officer, an officer from the targeted country (France, Belgium, Holland), and an enlisted radio operator, usually British or American.

His team parachuted into France and operated with local guerrillas, the Maquis, first arming and then training them, doing reconnaissance missions — keeping a very low profile until the Normandy Invasion. Then they went to work, blowing rail lines, conducting ambushes, and assassinating German personnel.



COL Aaron Bank's chain of command photo as 10th Group commander (U.S. Army photo)

Allied Headquarters estimated that the few officers and men of the Jedburgh teams and their Maquis guerrillas were worth a couple of extra divisions. Not a bad investment.

Later, Bank went to Indochina. Shortly after the war, he hitched a ride With Ho Chi Minh from Hanoi to somewhere in the jungle. He pitched Bank for American support. He had fought the Japanese when the French had collaborated. His Viet Minh had been trained and supported by O.S.S. Teams.

Bank recommended to the State Department that the U.S. back Ho. "They probably filed it in File 13," said Bank. Instead they sent a couple of "striped-pants boys" who recommended we go with the French.

Shortly after World War II the O.S.S. was renamed The Central Intelligence Group, later the Central Intelligence Agency. An entirely civilian agency, it had no guerrilla capability.

Bank was the leader of a group of officers, mostly O.S.S. veterans, who remembered what a success the Jeds had been as force multipliers; simple farmers and shopkeepers running daring raids and ambushes, on rage, guts, and a period of training that was scarcely more than an orientation. Bank and his friends thought the U.S. Army should have that capability.

It took until 1952 to get from the drawing board to the activation of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Bank was the 10th's first commander.

## Summer, 2002: Fort Bragg

The lobby of the Four Points Sheraton, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, was filled with middle-aged men with drinks in their hands. There was a broad spectrum resembling, in appearances anyhow, outlaw bikers and their lawyers.

Special Forces insignia was all around, on signs, on t-shirts, on baseball caps. All proclaimed the 50th Anniversary of the Green Berets, an event which had seemed unlikely a half-century before.

For the first 30 years of Special Forces existence conventional generals tried to do away with it. But during the Reagan administration it became obvious that SpecOps was the wave of the future. Since then the Army has only tried to do away with the original spirit of SF, by co-option and dilution.

## God, He Was Bitter

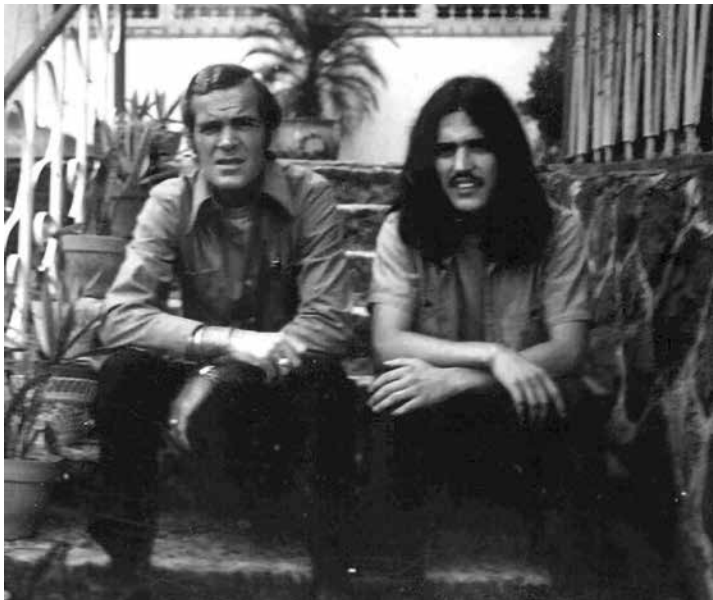
"Jim!" A hand grabbed my arm. I looked into a warm and friendly, but completely unfamiliar, face. When in doubt, read the nametag. "Mark Sprague."

I looked for Mark's face under that curly mop and behind the cookie-duster moustache. "Mark! Jesus, you look different every time I see you."

When I met Mark he was a Jesus-haired hippy. That was in the summer of 1973, in his father's house in Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam. We were all three former SF. Mark had been a medic. His father, Ed Sprague, was a retired Master Sergeant, one of the legendary team sergeants.

Ed was then, the State Department's resident Montagnard expert. His living room was filled with Montagnard memorabilia, plants, and a brass plaque which said, "Special Forces has done so much with





Ed and Mark Sprague at Ed's house in Pleiku in 1973 (Courtesy Jim Morris)

so little for so long that now it is expected to do everything with nothing forever."

I stayed with them a week.

The next time I saw Mark was in Cambridge, Mass., in 1986. He wore a yuppie haircut and a suit to go with it. He was an executive with a software company and was working on a line of videos about the Vietnam War: Air Force, Cav, that sort of thing. Unfortunately, skilled though he was, their producer knew nothing about Vietnam, and it showed. At Mark's suggestion they hired me to produce a video called Vietnam: The Green Berets.

We chatted for a moment and I told him of my great thirst. He said, "Come with me."

He led me to a large room filled with people who had at least one drink in at least one hand. The planners had planned well. There were two bars and tables for about six hundred, and nary a chip, dip, or peanut in sight. These people were dedicated.

I grabbed a beer and joined a table with Mark, Kathleen, his red-haired, big-eyed, extremely funny wife, Mark's mother, Eve, and a pleasant-looking middle-aged couple I didn't know. She looked nice academic. He was dressed like an accountant, but had just a hint of the tolerant smile and crazed glint that some SF men have. They both wore glasses.

Ed had died the previous year, so I — unobtrusively, I hoped — scanned Mrs. Sprague for signs of grief. She's a lovely woman, small, with salt-and-pepper hair, an olive complexion and a face that is both sweet and strong.

She talked and smiled, but there was sadness deep in her eyes. I think they had a great marriage. When Ed used to talk about her it was easy to see how he felt.

The conservatively dressed guy with the glasses, introduced himself, George Dooley.

I knew the name. He'd written a book called The Battle for the Central Highlands.

John Hanscom, then operator of the Green Berets for Human Rights website, told me about George. "I thought he was just another fat-assed staff officer until I found out he'd been an NCO on a really good team."

But he hadn't known it was Ed Sprague's team.

Later, for a group working to get the first 220 Montagnard refugees to North Carolina, Ed agreed to go on the air for the CBS magazine show, West 57th. He told the story of how he had assembled 2,000 of his Montagnards on the beach at Nha Trang and gone to Saigon to arrange transportation. Instead of giving him boats the Embassy threw him out of the country, and let the Yards languish on the shore until the NVA came for them.

God, he was bitter about that.

Another couple joined us. Roger Knight, a buffed retired colonel with white, close-cut hair, in conservative sport clothes — he had been Ed's and George's team leader — and a pretty blonde woman, Betty Boyd. Her husband, Dave, had been on their team. He was killed in '66.

Then George got a thousand-yard stare and said, "I miss the Team Sergeant."

"He's here, you know," said Roger.

"He sends me messages," said Eve. "Any time I find a penny I know it's Ed saying, 'Hi! I love you.' I save them in a jar. I have 72."

After dinner Mark and I adjourned to the men's room. In the lobby a pleasant-looking, bespectacled guy approached Mark and said he had known his father.

"And you're Jim Morris, right?"

I nodded and shook his hand. His nametag read Ken Houy. "I was John Link's best friend in Training Group."

That chilled my heart.

Running up the inside of my right forearm is a 13-inch scar. There's another 5-incher next to it. The small one is the entrance wound and the large one is the exit. I got them trying to save John Link's life.

I failed.

"I showed John's mom where you wrote how bad you felt about that. She said to tell you, you did all you could and not to feel bad about it. Annie Link, from Arkansas. Great woman."

This wasn't the place, or the time, to weep. But it was close.

I looked around. I was in one of a hundred similar conversations. On the surface it looked like a gathering of middle-aged drunks. But at its core, it was Holy.

### The Early Days

Bank and his staff devised an ingenious cellular organization with no reference whatever to conventional organizations of squads, platoons, companies and battalions.

The basic building block of the Special Forces organization was the "A-team," a 12-man super Jedburgh team which could function as a cadre, staff, and university for up to a regiment of guerrillas. The team had two officers, a captain and a first lieutenant. Weapons, communications, demolitions, medics, operations and intelligence,

were all double-slotted. Every man was proficient in his specialty and cross-trained in two others. In theory, every man was fluent in one foreign language and able to limp along in a couple of others. So, on the ground, the A-team could be split in half, or thirds, or quarters, and still function.

Over any number of A-teams would be a B-team, commanded by a major, with full staff sections; administration, intelligence, operations, supply. And over any number of "Bs" a C-team commanded by a lieutenant colonel.

It was doctrine that a captain might deploy an A-team and as it organized more and more guerrillas that captain would be promoted, and his team reconstituted as a B. Then the Special Forces Operational Base (headquarters of a deployed Special Forces Group) would send him some more A-teams, or if those were in short supply maybe just field-commission his senior NCOs.

It was an ingenious organizational scheme. The only problem was that the Army couldn't relate to it. As far as the army was concerned an A-detachment commander was a glorified squad leader, and an SF assignment was dead time. Since an SF assignment was career death anyway, the officers set out to have some fun: like the time Colonel "Mad Jack" Shannon infiltrated eight teams into South Korea, without notifying either the Koreans or the U.S. Eighth Army. He wanted the training to be realistic. He wanted the South Koreans to hunt his teams with live ammo, so they'd take the exercise seriously.

Most of the time when SF soldiers weren't studying Croatian or Urdu, giving inoculations of sterile saline solution to each other, leaving messages in dead drops, disassembling exotic weapons, finding secure cache sites, and writing propaganda leaflets, they were devising ingenious means to infiltrate anywhere. They were all parachutists, and pioneered HALO and HAHO techniques. They were the Army's SCUBA experts, skiers, mountain climbers, experts in jungle and desert survival.

At first there was only one Group, the 10th, and it was oriented toward Europe. It was part of the "Russians-invading-through-the-Fulda-Gap" scenario. As the Russians advanced, teams were to go underground and allow themselves to be overrun in place, with their guerrillas already organized.

Other teams would be dropped into the Iron Curtain countries; Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, to organize resistance. They would rot the Soviet empire from within.

During those days SF had a lot of Eastern Europeans, dispossessed guys from those countries, drawn to enlist in the U.S. army by the Lodge Act, which gave them rapid U.S. citizenship in return for service. Most of them were hot to trot, eager to jump in and free their home countries. For many of them the U.S. was their second, or third, army.

During Korea a lot of SF guys served in UNPIK, United Nations Partisan Infantry — Korea, which infiltrated companies of American led Koreans into North Korea.

## In-And-Out Pec

I was scoping-out the buffet, just checking out the mini-tacos, when a voice called out, "Morris."

Two smiling, thuggish, older men leaned against a window. One was tall and lean, and the other about medium height and solid. It took me a minute to recognize them because I hadn't seen either of them for 34 years. The tall smiler was former First Lieutenant "Sweet Roy" T. Kimbrough, one of the real guys behind Operation Dumbo Drop. The other was Tom Humphus.

The only time I had seen Humphus before I had just dived into a B-52 crater. We were surrounded by two or three battalions of North Vietnamese, and Humphus had ripped open his shirt to see if the bullet which had just hit him in the chest had punctured his heart or a lung.

"In-and-out pec," was the only thing I'd ever heard him say. That was about 10 minutes before Link was killed.

A lot happened that day, and it was all bad.

We talked a bit about Dumbo Drop, and how different the movie was from real life. It was a Disney kids' movie in which the brave Americans overcome frightful obstacles (NVA, elephant turds) to deliver an elephant to their courageous Montagnard allies so they could haul some logs.

In real life that's exactly what happened, except the frightful obstacles were a kind of nightmare bureaucratic goat fuck that might have more accurately been titled *The Three Stooges Do Kafka*.

## Kennedy's Rifles

President Kennedy told the army to develop a guerilla warfare capability, and was told they already had one.

In 1961, he went to Fort Bragg, ostensibly to inspect the 82nd Airborne Division, but primarily to see what Special Forces was all about. The Commanding General of the Special Warfare Center was Lieutenant General (then Brigadier) Bill Yarborough. A quiet, modest, self-effacing man, Bill Yarborough deserves the title of "Mister Airborne" if anybody does. He is the man who, as a first



U.S. Army Special Forces in 1956, wearing their then unofficial green berets. (U.S. Army photo)



lieutenant, designed the original Corcoran jump boots. He designed the WWII jump suit; he designed the wings. And he was the first man out the door on the first combat jump ever made by the U.S. Army — in North Africa in WWII.

Special Forces had already adopted the green beret, but Yarborough's attempt to get it approved by the Pentagon had been rejected because it was "too foreign."

So he sandbagged them. Kennedy's senior military aide, Major General Ted Clifton, had been Yarborough's classmate at West Point. When Kennedy inspected the troops Yarborough was wearing a green beret, and so was everybody else in Group. "They pulled them out of barracks bags; they ordered them from Canada; they got them from the Girl Scouts," says Yarborough.

And before anybody at the Pentagon even knew about this, Clifton had sent Yarborough a letter over Kennedy's signature, describing the Green Beret as a "badge of excellence" in the fight against global Communism.

Well, after the President said the Green Beret was a good thing nobody in the Army hierarchy had the balls to say it wasn't. The Green Beret was officially official.

### Apocalypse Then

There's never been anything like Special Forces in Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) fielded 2,000 Green Berets and they led an army of 50,000 indigenous, comprised of various ethnic minorities who had no love for Saigon, but would — and frequently did — die for their Americans.

The SF reconnaissance units, Delta, Sigma, Omega, CCN, CCC, CCS, produced practically all the strategic intelligence MACV had. Their mission was to gather information, but they frequently had to shoot their way out, or call in airstrikes on enemy installations. They killed roughly 100 enemy for every man they lost, and the enemy had 500 men in the field hunting each of them.

During 1968, their casualty rate was 115 percent. To get in you not only had to volunteer; you had to be invited.

It might be said that Vietnam was the most valuable learning experience the United States Army ever had, that what could not be accomplished in Vietnam by an American army of half a million men was accomplished later in El Salvador by 55 Green Berets.

About Vietnam this must be said, and it applies to all the uniformed services: Soldiers do not win, or lose, wars. Nations do that. Soldiers either accomplish their mission or fail to do so. When you get one-hundred-percent accomplishment of all missions assigned and still "lose" the war, the place to look is in the Oval Office, in the halls of Congress, and in the hearts of the nation, not at the military services.

To lay a defeat on sweaty, leech-bitten kids who fought their heart out is criminal. I would lay that defeat at the feet of those who sent us to fight, and then bailed on us. I would lay it on a Congress that sent the sons of its constituents off to die, but sent only one son of one congressman throughout the entire 10 years. I would lay it on a Congress which pulled out U.S. troops, and then pulled the plug on supplies, dooming the South Vietnamese, who were actually doing pretty well on their own by then.



Ready for patrol in Vietnam (courtesy Jim Morris)

There is a tendency in those who want to log Vietnam as a defeat to look at it in a vacuum, but it did not exist in a vacuum. There were 16 Communist-sponsored, Soviet-inspired insurgencies going on at the same time, and most of them were successfully won, dissolved, or defused by guess who.

I once said to retired Lieutenant Colonel "Pappy" Shelton, the man whose team trained the Bolivian Rangers who got Che Guevara, that a triumph like that must have done wonders for his career. He laughed and said, "If it hadn't been my last assignment before retirement I never would have had the guts to do what I had to do to succeed at it."

### Desert One

Under Kennedy's sponsorship SF had grown to six active-duty Groups, two reserve and two National Guard. After Vietnam this force was drastically reduced. The usual attempt to get rid of SF was made and, as usual, it failed. Then came Desert One.

When the Shah of Iran was overthrown, by the forces of the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was seized and embassy personnel held hostage. When all diplomatic means failed the Defense Department proposed to get them out by commando raid. The raiders were Delta Force, but Delta had no organic transportation. The Pentagon decided to share the wealth; Air Force transports were to be used, and Marine helicopters. None of these people had worked together before, and they didn't have much time to prepare now.

The Air Force was to link the raiders with their Marine choppers in the desert. The choppers formed ice on a long over-water flight going in. Mechanical problems resulted and they wound up with one less flyable chopper than was needed to pull-off the mission. Colonel Charley Beckwith, the ground commander, decided to abort. On exfil, a Marine Sea Stallion helicopter collided with a USAF C-130. Eight men were killed.

The hostages, finally, were freed when President Carter departed and the Reagan administration came in.



Getting indigenous students ready for a jump (DOD photo)

## USSOCOM

The hero of this part of the story is Major General (Ret.) John K. Singlaub, who had destroyed his own career when he said publicly that Carter's decision to remove U.S. Forces from Korea would inevitably lead to a second Korean War. Congress saved the forces in Korea, but that and a couple of other attacks of "hoof-in-mouth" disease, had forced Singlaub's retirement. His problems stemmed from ignorance of the press.

Having studied both French and Japanese at UCLA and being a paratrooper he had joined the O.S.S. as a first lieutenant. In World War II he was a Jed, then went to China to train guerrillas. Most of his career was spent seconded to CIA.

In Korea he commanded the CIA headquarters that oversaw UNPIK. In Vietnam, he commanded SOG. From first lieutenant to major general he had scarcely, in his adult life, spoken to anyone who didn't have a Top Secret security clearance. A couple of "off-the-record" comments in South Korea to reporters who didn't respect his confidence were enough to end his career.

But in the Pentagon he was regarded as little less than a saint.

The Reagan Defense Department was looking for a way to ensure that there would never be another Desert One.

And in his kit, Gen. Jack Singlaub had a plan he had been nurturing for decades which the Reagan administration eventually bought pretty much lock, stock and barrel. They called it the U.S. Special Operations Command. No more jackleg support arrangements. Now SF had the 160th SOAR. It had the Air Force's 1st SOW, all dedicated elite special operations units. It was a whole new world!

The proof of that particular pudding came in Desert Storm when the Special Forces trained two brigades of Kuwaitis for the invasion. Delta took out SCUD launchers galore. Fifth and Third Groups put surveillance hide sites deep into Iraq that sent back valuable real-



The Cyber Protection Brigade — much is the same, much is different. (U.S. Army photo)

time intelligence on Iraqi movements and soil conditions; important info when you're running 60-ton tanks across it.

One measure of how valuable this info was is that an awful lot of the intel the hide site teams were given before they went in turned out to be wrong. Places that were supposed to be uninhabited were crawling with people, tents, barking dogs. Guys who were supposed to be alone in the desert were creeping through villages of tents, at night, popping yapping dogs with silenced .22s, checking-out the scene on their NODs, looking for a clear place to dig in and hide.

A couple of those teams had to shoot their way out on exfil, in the best Vietnam tradition.

But the most important thing Special Forces did, unheralded and unknown to the general public, was to hold the entire coalition together, literally. That coalition was made of Americans, Brits, Saudis, Kuwaitis, Syrians, and others. The Arab coalition countries spoke different dialects, their radios wouldn't net. And frequently, they didn't like each other.

But they all, including the American forces, had SF teams attached. Their radios did net, and they did speak the same language. They coordinated the attack and without them that unmitigated triumph would have been a nightmare of friendly fire casualties.

Yet, in the beginning, Schwartzkopf didn't want them.

## The X-Men

You think being a Green Beret is cool? It is. Being an ex-Green Beret is way cooler. All those great skills, and the opportunities to mold your very own foreign policy.

Consider Dick Meadows using a Canadian passport to get into Iran to recon for Desert One, then going to Colombia with a team to set up the entire drug war program there.





A Special Forces Soldier touches the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Memorial Wall, during the Fallen Warrior Memorial Ceremony, May 24, 2018 at Fort Bragg. (U.S. Army photo/Dillon Heyliger)

Or, consider former Vietnam A-team commander and retired reserve Lt. Col. Bob Brown and his whacko notion that the world was ready for a trade journal for mercenaries. What he has actually produced, in my view, is the Squad Leader's Intelligence Agency. If you want to know why a war is being fought, read the *New York Times*. If you want to know how, and by whom, read *Soldier Of Fortune*.

Check-out the authors with Special Forces backgrounds or connections: myself, John Mullins, Jim Prewitt, Jim Mitchell, Don Bendell, Tilt Meyer, Gordon Rottman, Dave Maurer, Bob Mayer, H. Lee Barnes, George Dooley, and the honoraries like fighter pilot Mark Berent, W.E.B. Griffin, and Pappy Hicks. Calling Pappy Hicks an honorary Green Beret is like calling Chuck Yeager an honorary astronaut.

These and other authors are as real as a heart attack, like Bucky Burruss, or Charley Beckwith, who wrote [Delta Force](#).

At one time, there were two authors on the same reserve A- team; Mark Harrell was the CO and Chuck Sasser was the team sergeant.

Barry Sadler's "[Ballad of the Green Berets](#)" topped the Beatles and the Stones to be the top-selling record of 1966.

In other venues, former deputy director of the FBI, Jules Bonavolonta, was one of the original four Mike Force commanders; Gary Rohen ran recons for SOG and in 2002 commanded the National Emergency Response Task Force for the FBI.

Ken Kelsch has been director of photography for 10 or 12 major feature films.

Richard Carmona, an A-team medic in Vietnam, was Surgeon General of the United States.

All of the above, and numerous others, had their chance, and Special Forces achieved its storied legacy, because Aaron Bank went to Germany during that long-ago summer of 1939. ❖

## The Bin Ladin Raid: Legendary Special Operations Aviator Reveals bin Laden Mission Details Continued

Tina closed her eyes and ears to the possibility and prayed a lot.

"I just knew he was going to come home. Because I really couldn't do it by myself, so I knew he was going to come home," Tina said.

### INFIL

Behind the scenes, there was friction between the Black Hawk crews and the Chinook crews. Englen, being the planner and flight lead (i.e., the boss), had recommended infiltrating first with the Black Hawks. The Chinooks would be there as the backup.

Air crew competitiveness ensued.

"We went back and forth. I said, a different airframe should be first in there, versus myself (Chinook pilot). To be completely unselfish, I'd rather pick the right tool for the ground force, versus it always being myself," Englen explained.

The primary plan was for the Chinooks to give the Black Hawks gas on the ground in Pakistan, out in the middle of nowhere. The Black Hawk crews would "get the glory" of being on the objective for this historic operation getting bin Laden, "which was totally OK."

"They're walking out. And, I'm like, 'Hey, good luck guys. See you when you get back.' And they say, 'Just give us gas, bitches,'" Englen laughed, realizing they had a small chip on their shoulder.

That was the famous last quote of the pilot that crashed that helicopter. ❖

**TO BE CONTINUED... be sure to read the second part of this story in the July 2020 Sentinel.**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reporter Alex Quade covers U.S. special operations forces on combat missions. She's received two national Edward R. Murrow Awards, and the Medal Of Honor Society's Excellence in Journalism Award. [Among her documentaries](#) are "Horse Soldiers of 9/11," narrated by actor Gary Sinise, and "Chinook Down," investigating the fatal shoot-down of a helicopter in Afghanistan. Alex was supposed to be on that helicopter.

Hollywood released a film about Alex's coverage of special operations forces, called "Danger Close." Hachette Books is publishing her upcoming book on Special Forces.

