



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

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

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2020

Nick: “SOG’s Secret Agent Man”

**The Bin Ladin Raid
Part 2: Legendary Special Operations
Aviator Reveals bin Laden Mission Details**

**One Hundred and
One Soldierly Thoughts**



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VOLUME 11, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2020

From the Editor



Jim Morris
Sentinel Editor

So here we are, in the middle of not one, but two national crises. One is the Coronavirus lockdown and two is the George Floyd protests.

Both sides of the George Floyd protests seem to have fallen into one of the more stupid attitude errors that humanity is prone to, the delusion that all your problems will be solved if only somebody else cleans up their act. Experience has shown that there is only one act that humans have the ability to clean up, and that is their own.

Example: When I moved to LA I had one friend here besides Kenn Miller, a black man, Shea LeMone. Shea was an author and when I edited books in New York, I succeeded in finding him a publisher. He was forever grateful and we became close. Two incidents when he was a kid in Philadelphia had influenced his life in profound ways. He and some friends, when they were eight or nine, had formed a social club as an alternative to gang violence, and before the end of the first day they found themselves defending their turf. In that neighborhood they wouldn't let them be anything but a gang. Until his mama ran off the other kids. They dissolved the "club" and just stayed friends.

The other thing that happened was in high school, at a dance where he danced with some white girls. Some of the white guys took exception to that and waited to beat him up after the dance. Some of the other black guys lined up with him, but what he never forgot was that some white guys lined up with them too.

In all the time I knew him he never complained of being hassled by white cops or white anybody else. He was a big coffee-colored guy who had dreadlocks down to the middle of his back and usually wore a dashiki. But he greeted everybody with a big smile, and as far as I know he was never hassled by anybody.

On the other side, if you're a hammer everything looks like a nail. Most of the people that cops deal with are lawbreakers, and if you never see any black people unless they're breaking the law you tend to assume all blacks are lawbreakers.

My late wife, Myrna, long before I met her, had dated an LAPD captain. They met when they were both sergeants in the Air Force Reserve. This guy had actually joined his local parent-teacher's association primarily so he could deal with normal people who were not criminals. But he never beat it. Finally she broke up with him because he constantly wanted to know who called her, who she met. He was a policeman and never got over his innate suspicion of, well, everybody.

She had a friend when I met her, a black woman whose father, a dentist, was head of the dental program at UCLA. He was constantly stopped by police in the neighborhood he lived in, while driving a BMW and wearing a suit and tie. He got real tired of it.

I don't know that any fajjigling with the rules of engagement will result in better relations between the black community and the police. But I do know that any attempts to clean up somebody else's act are doomed to failure. ♦

Jim Morris, *Sentinel* Editor

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FRONT COVER: U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Beals, Command Sgt. Maj. of the 1st Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division applies camouflage in preparation for movement to the field. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Thomas Mort)



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From the President | July 2020



Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

We did it!!! Had our first chapter meeting in FOUR months, a big success. Thirty members along with one guest were in attendance at our first meeting at our new location.

My wife Geri and I arrived on Friday and stayed at the billeting facility located in the same building where our chapter meeting was to be held. I wasn't taking any chances of something going wrong. I wanted to make sure everything was a GO!

Also, **How Miller** and his wife Nancy came in early as they drive all the way from Santa Barbara to attend meetings.

Please remember, if anyone wishes to spend the night before a meeting let me know. The cost is only \$75.00.

On Saturday June 13th the chapter meeting was held in the Colonial Banquet Room (see the Chapter meeting photos on page 18) which holds over one hundred people comfortably. Therefore, social distancing was NOT an issue. Our breakfast was served in individual Styrofoam boxes so as to comply with COVID19 (AKA Chinese Flu) State Regulations. Out of our membership, we had only one person come down with a mild case of the Chinese Flu, and he has made a complete recovery.

Our guest speaker was **SFC Ken Atkinson** S-3 NCOIC for A/5/19 and a Chapter member. Ken also brought a guest. LT Reza Muhammad,

formally with the Afghan National Army, and assigned to a commando group where he served for five years. Because LT Reza spoke English, he became a civilian contractor, and was eventually assigned to ODA 9513 from November 2016 through May 2017, and became good friends with Ken. In March 2019 while serving with an 10th SFG (Airborne), LT Reza was wounded four times, hip, leg, ankle, stomach.

After recovering from his wounds, LT Reza was able to immigrate to the United States, after being sponsored by an Afghan family. LT Reza now lives in Orange, and is attending a local College. He was presented with a chapter coin.

Ken also brought the Chapter up to speed on the latest activities of A Company. A Company minus, was activated during the demonstrations and riots in CA. Two Quick Reaction Teams (QRT) were formed by rear detachment personal. They have subsequently been deactivated.

Currently there are four ODA's deployed to Eastern Europe for Operation Atlantic Resolve. These ODA's are basically conducting FID Missions. The ODA's and ODB should be returning sometime in late August of this year.

A Company along with SOD (North) have temporally moved out of buildings 58 and 59, and are co-located in buildings 6 and 7, east of Fiddlers Green and along the flight line.

Next meeting will be at the same location on July 11th — 0800 hrs Breakfast. Meeting to start at 0830 hrs.

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

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



LT Reza Muhammad was SFC Ken Atkinson's guest at the June Chapter meeting, where he shared his story with the group. (photo by How Miller)

July Chapter Meeting

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

DATE: July 9, 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)

The Bin Ladin Raid: Part 2

Legendary Special Operations Aviator Reveals bin Laden Mission Details

By Alex Quade

Editors Note: A slightly altered version of this story previously appeared in *Military Times*. [Part 1 of this story can be read in the June 2020 issue of the Sentinel.](#)

INTO PAKISTAN

Black Hawks Lead and Chalk-2, with the small surgical force, flew out from Jalalabad 45 minutes ahead of the Chinooks, since they were “flying along the route.” Chinooks Chalk-1 and 2, with the “smack down force,” basically flew straight to the refuel rendezvous site inside Pakistan.

Crossing into Pakistan was emotional for everyone.

“You know, it’s almost like there’s a road sign, ‘Stop, take a picture of *Welcome to Pakistan*.’ Even the crew members in the back, were like, ‘We’re in, right? Pakistan?’ And I’m like, ‘Yep,’” Englen said.

The deeper they flew into Pakistan, the more it felt like “metropolis United States,” with power lines, towers, cultural lighting. The contrast was stark: they were in a completely different country, much more prosperous than Afghanistan.

“You could see lights coming off and on,” said Englen. “You could tell that we are waking up Pakistan, because this is not normal. An aircraft flying at roughly 11:30 to midnight is not normal, because they (Pakistan military aircraft) don’t play at night as much as we do. In fact, at all, sometimes.”

While the local populace was aware something was up (and began tweeting and calling 911), the special operations aviators weren’t getting indications that the Pakistani military or the Air Force was keen on what they were doing.

“But, it’s paramilitary, so we just knew that eventually they would. We made it to the objective without really causing too much of a ruckus over the 911 calls. (But,) once we crashed the aircraft, within the first 30 seconds of the mission, then that’s when we really woke up that entire valley,” Englen said.

ON THE OBJECTIVE

Hearing “Black Hawk down” over the radio changed everything.

Englen’s single Chinook raced across Abbottabad to pick up the ground force and air crew, arriving within 10 minutes of the call.

As he landed under the mushroom cloud of the exploding Black Hawk, the flight lead and planner was pissed off.

“I think crashing a helicopter on one of the most important missions



Englen documents his last flight in the Army. This photo shows inside the back of a MH47 and the space for the maneuver of ground forces and equipment. (Courtesy Doug Englen)

of our generation, and later being asked by the director of the CIA (Leon Panetta), ‘Why the hell did you crash?’ I think that’s enough said,” Englen stated.

“It was hotter than expected for the MH-60 crews, and it had more fuel than expected. And they’re throwing on more last minute ground force. So, that (Black Hawk) crew — that had the famous last words to my two MH-47 (Chinook) crews before leaving Jalalabad of, ‘Just get us gas, bitches’ — had miscalculated, and came into that courtyard and lost effective lift,” Englen explained.

“Now, in retrospect, we could have done it with two Chinooks, the entirety. And more than likely — I don’t want to ever second-guess anybody — but in this condition, we would not have crashed, because we (the Chinooks) have the lift,” Englen said.

On the objective, his crew chiefs on the ramp, hopped out to do a head count.

“They’ve got to get the headcount right, to make sure (we’ve) got the right amount of fuel. Plus, remember, we had people already on board, and this 800-gallon fuel tank inside. So there wasn’t a whole lot of space (on board),” Englen explained.

While they were loading up inside, the Chinook was vulnerable.

“There’s nobody to protect us (the aircraft and crew) while we’re on the ground. Ever. When we’re on the ground, it’s just us,” he said.

"So just hit the stop watch."

They were on the ground for probably a minute and a half. It sounds like nothing. But for special operations aviators of the 160th, that's an eternity.

"We like to be 10 to 15 seconds. Because, I mean, how long does it take operators to run on the back of a Chinook? That's how long it should take," Englen said. "But when they're having to deal with grabbing things and carrying things (like bin Laden's body bag, and everything seized from the compound), it changes everything."

The mini-gunners, or door gunners, were scanning. They kept an eye on their sector. They saw civilians from the neighborhood around the compound come in from the right side towards the commotion, and kept an eye on them.

"It's a little bit different of an environment. There is no 'enemy' in Pakistan, other than those that were inside the compound. So, even if we were shot at, it would be hard to even return fire. Not this type of objective. The rules of engagement are much different (than Afghanistan)," Englen explained.

"Ok, we're loading the last guys," the crew chiefs communicated with Englen, who started pulling a little bit of pitch.

"I had to anticipate and load the engines. Because I knew we were going to be extremely heavy," Englen explained.

Turbine engines are running at a constant speed — about 6,000 rpm (revolutions per minute). If they are loaded too quickly, they can bog down a little bit.

As soon as the last ground force was on the aircraft, the crew chiefs came in right behind them and ramped up.

"When we pulled out, I yanked the guts out of the engines and we were at max power. I mean, we were at the maximum weight that the aircraft could hold," Englen explained.

EXFIL

Englen's Chinook headed back to Jalalabad, Afghanistan, while the remaining Black Hawk (Chalk-2) headed to the refuel site about 30 miles north of Abbottabad.

The other Chinook had set up prior to the Black Hawk coming in, shutting the aircraft down and running the fuel hoses out.

"So, that's time for the Chinook to get there, time to shut down, time to refuel, close up the refuel hoses, start the aircraft and head out. It takes a little bit of time," Englen said.

That meant they were sitting on the ground vulnerable inside a sovereign nation, after invading its airspace and assaulting a compound. The Chinook was on the ground for probably 20 to 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, Englen's lone Chinook on its way back was engaged three times by a Pakistani F-16. Because he'd anticipated and planned for that, he was able to defeat and evade the fighter jet.

"It was as an electronic fight. A missile never left the rail. So I was able to evade him electronically. That's all I'll say. But, he was searching and hunting for me, and three times came very close to

actually launching a missile," Englen said.

He'd done that before with other fighter jets on other missions.

"That's why we were picked for this mission. And, I was one of the few who trained 160th crews how to do that," he added.

Regardless, they were still jinking and jiving, flying nap-of-the-earth.

"We pulled every technique and tactic out of the book. And it worked," he said.

The risk was different, depending on who you asked.

On the actual bin Laden compound, the risk to the ground force was high (which is why comparisons were made to it being like "just another night in Afghanistan," where operations occur multiple times a night).

While the risk to the airframes was fairly low on the objective, it was extremely high during the other nearly four hours of flying.

"It was not typical. That risk would be typical of the early days of Iraq, when we had air defense and we had to use electronic warfare tactics," he said.

Nevertheless, crossing back into Afghanistan was an unusually good feeling.

"We felt safe," Englen said, "Which is a totally weird thing to say about (a war zone) in Afghanistan."

EXHUMING UBL

As soon as they landed at Jalalabad, a C-130 transported the team and Englen to Bagram Air Base to help exhume the body of Osama bin Laden.

"Take it out of the body bag, inspect and take samples and things like that, to verify," he clarified.

They put him back in the bag, and took it out to the Marine MV-22 Ospreys.

"We had a gunny sergeant who was pissed off like you wouldn't believe. Because they were out there running — full rotors turning for like two hours waiting for us," Englen said.

The Marine air crew hadn't been read into what they were doing there, or where they were going. As Englen and ground force members brought the body bag out to them, they expressed some frustration.

He tried yelling at me, you know, just, 'What the F, why are we here, what's going on?'" Englen recalled.

Englen just put his hand on that Marine gunny sergeant, and pointed at the body bag.

"'You know who that is?' I said. And, he looked at me, and I go, 'That's Number One.' And there, he just snapped a salute, immediately changed his tone," Englen said.

The Osprey air crew immediately pulled the ramp up, and off they went. They flew with an escort, all the way up to the USS Carl Vinson and buried bin Laden in the North Arabian Sea.

BREAKING NEWS

Stateside, there had been speculation about the delay between the time all the TV networks broke into prime time programming — with the surprise announcement that Obama would be addressing the nation shortly — and the president actually walking to the podium, nearly an hour later.

Many speculated that the delay was because most of the media were at the White House Correspondents Dinner, and it took time to assemble them back at the anchor desks. There were even reports of some media members being slightly tipsy from the party as they reported the breaking news.

In reality, that delay was because the special operators were reveling at Bagram.

"I'm one of the ones who wrote the report that delayed Obama by about 45 minutes," Englen admitted.

Oops.

"That's because I was joking around, we were high-fiving and celebrating, and so was the ground force commander," said Englen. "Then a senior officer looked over and says, 'Hey, jackasses. The president's waiting on your executive summary.'"

He had kept the details in the executive summary regarding their special operations air piece to a minimum, careful about providing contextual data.

Minutes after they finished the report, Obama walked down that famous hallway in the White House to the podium to tell the world the news: The United States had conducted a raid to kill Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaida.

PROM NIGHT

Back home at Fort Campbell, it was high school prom night for Englen's daughter.

Englen's wife Tina had just opened up a bottle of red wine, and sat down to watch "CSI" on TV, to relax from all the prom drama that day.

"Remember how dramatic you were at 16, 17 years old? So, I've got this teenager, going over-the-top that her hair wasn't going (right), huge Cinderella dress wasn't going, shoes were horrible, 'I look fat,' 'everything sucks,' and on and on," Tina sighed.

The couple's son Chris had come down from their local college to fill "the dad role," since Englen couldn't be there. He'd pinned his sister's corsage on, and was there to support her before driving back to his dorm.

One of Tina's girlfriends had come over to see about going out for dinner before the teenagers headed out for all the prom parties on post.

"She told my daughter, 'Do not go out and

drink, and make your mom work harder tonight. Your mom doesn't need it.' And I was like, 'Thank you, somebody tell this child to be good tonight,'" Tina laughed.

Before he'd left, Englen had told Tina, "Stay local. Don't go anywhere, be home, just stay home."

Tina had put their other two children to bed, and was hoping for a minute of calmness before her daughter came home from prom. She'd literally just sat down when the news bulletin interrupted "CSI."

"Mom, mom, mom!" Tina's son called immediately from college.

"Chris, I got to go. I don't know what's going on," Tina replied.

"Is this dad, is this dad?" he asked.

"I don't, I don't know, let me..." Tina hung up, because the live feed picture of the White House with the empty podium came on. Anchors and reporters filled time on air waiting for the president to come out. She thought she heard someone say there was a concern about a helicopter down.

Her son called back.

"I just said, 'Stop calling me, I need to watch TV. When I know something, y'all will know something, give me a minute.' And he just was crying on the other end of the phone, 'This is our dad, this is my dad, this is my dad.' All I could say was: 'I know, baby. Maybe. Let me figure it out.'"

Chris had his whole dorm floor watching the TV in the common areas.

All the prom parties at Fort Campbell High School stopped. Everybody focused to what was happening on TV.



Englen shows daughter Alex the MH47 cockpit simulator at NASA Ames Research Center. Englen teaches pilots vertical lift, tiltrotor and coaxial there. (Courtesy of Doug Englen)

"We just sat there and watched TV, like the rest of you," Tina said. "As I'm sitting there watching the television, trying to figure out where Doug is, what's going down — I'm worried: 'Am I going to get a knock on the door,' (from a uniformed officer and the chaplain)?" Tina shared.

They lived on post, and everyone was excited. People outside were running up and down the street with air horns.

"I had gone out to see who was shooting the horns off, and I couldn't tell if my phone was ringing or not. I came running back in, knocked my knee on the door, about fell into my living room, and sure enough, my phone was ringing. It was Doug," Tina shared.

All she heard between the ruckus outside, was: "I love you, everything's good, and I'm coming home."

Englen was the only one able to call home.

Right after Englen dropped the body off with the Marines so they could fly it up to the Carl Vinson and had written his executive summary report, he received approval to run inside real quick to call his wife.

They'd been together since meeting in high school in 1987. He knew she and their four children would be stressed.

"I knew it was prom, and when this hit the news, they'd connect the dots. But the news, 'There is a helicopter crash,' they'd think the worst. A quick phone call just to hear my voice, and tell them everyone's OK, I knew that was all that was needed," Englen said.

"It was enough," Tina confided. "We didn't even get to say good-bye, the phone had disconnected. Probably 20 seconds later, the announcement came from the White House that he was killed, bin Laden. Obama was there in the hallway, saying it."

Neighbors came over, asking if she'd heard from her husband, since news had spread of a helicopter down.

"In our (160th SOAR) community, the first thing is, is everybody OK," Tina said.

Her daughter came home, worried, from prom in her huge ball gown. She wanted to be with her family to see what was going on.

"She knew I had heard from her dad, so I said, 'Go. There's nothing you can do, there's nothing you can change. This is your prom night, go. Go have fun, I'll see you later.' So she went back out," Tina recalled.

But, not before telling her mother, "Why the hell did I want a Cinderella dress? I couldn't move in it. I couldn't get in and out of the car."

STRANGENESS BACK HOME

Two days after arriving home, Englen was at Jiffy Lube with Tina, getting an oil change. On the TV in the tiny lobby waiting room, the news was all about the killing of bin Laden. Three gentlemen waiting, in their mid-20s, were absolutely convinced it was a conspiracy.

"I'm just sitting there, smiling, because they thought that it never happened. They thought it was just a publicity stunt for propaganda, for campaigning for Obama. They thought Obama staged it, like putting that on the news to boost his numbers," Englen laughed.

Tina looked at her husband.

"They have no idea, do they?" She'd whispered to him.

"No. And I'm not here to explain it to them," he'd chuckled.

While Englen was amused, Tina was bothered. She'd heard one of the men saying: "The soldiers that took part in this (conspiracy), should be shot, too."

"They made a comment like that, and you know, I'm sitting there in this little, tiny waiting room, and I can't believe that guy thinks that. And, that he thinks what my husband did, is horrible," Tina recalled.

THE AFTERMATH

In the days that followed, Englen smirked at the media coverage. Especially when random helicopter pilots and aviation consultants offered their expertise on what they thought happened on the mission.

Almost all of the news coverage was about the SEALs, which he was perfectly fine with. Folks really did not need to know about what special operations aviators do — period.

Some of the officials who'd been in the White House Situation Room during the operation later released details from the intelligence side, and some of what the SEALs had done.

For instance, former Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor John Brennan, said that the ground forces had been "met with a great deal of resistance," and bin Laden had used a woman as a human shield.

"But nobody — probably because my executive summary was so vague — there was no contextual data to say, 'Here's what happened on the air side,'" Englen speculated.

He was relieved details about his 160th SOAR's air piece never really got out.

PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

Three days after the Jiffy Lube incident, President Obama came to Fort Campbell to congratulate everyone on that operation. No family members were allowed.

"Nothing very glamorous at all. There's really no pictures, either," Englen said. Then again, the 160th SOAR, like the rest of the special operations community, is accustomed to having their award ceremonies behind closed doors, so information about sensitive missions doesn't get out.

"He (Obama) told me, 'We need to keep you around.' And, all 24 ground forces that were on the objective that night made me an honorary member of their team. They basically said, 'If you weren't there, it would've been different.' So it made me feel good," Englen shared.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, and Adm. McRaven told him they were putting him in for the Distinguished Service Cross since he was responsible for the entire air piece. The rest of the air crew would receive Silver Stars. But Englen turned it down.

"I volunteered for that. But we all crossed that border. We all flew at the same time. Those crews took no less risk than I did," Englen told



Englen shows his grandson 160th SOAR helicopters at Ft. Campbell, Memorial Day 2019 (Courtesy Doug Englen)



At left, Congressman Mark Green (former 160th BN Surgeon) and Englen. Green gave Englen the idea to run for office. (Courtesy Doug Englen)

them. So, he was awarded that Silver Star with that non-descript citation for that operation, along with the rest of the air crew.

"I just kept a low profile, just morphed back into the ranks. Some asked, 'Where've you been the last several months?' In fact, nobody even within the unit (160th SOAR), really knew about it afterwards," Englen added.

MORE HONORS

Four months later, Englen received his second Silver Star (for that same year) in Afghanistan.

This time his Chinook was in a huge firefight rescuing 7th Special Forces Group ODA-7223 in Panjway after it hit an IED. Their Navy EOD tech lost his leg and needed medical evacuation. But daylight was upon them and the firefight was too hot for the MedEvac to fly in, and there was no close-air support.

"I couldn't wait any longer," Englen said. So he and another Chinook went in with the risky approval from a 160th BN commander at Bagram.

"We went through about 8,000 rounds of mini-gun fire protecting the Chinook on the ground, trying to pick up the injured EOD guy. Killed probably 30 or 35 insurgents. We got shot at with absolutely everything: RPGs, RPK, AKs. That day, they missed," he added.

THE ONLY EASY DAY WAS YESTERDAY

In the nine years since Operation Neptune's Spear, Englen lived with a healthy sense of paranoia about potential threat to his family, while still flying missions in war zones.

"We worried that we were going to be on al-Qaida's top 10 list because of this, just as if we would look for them," he said.

"Look what happened with Extortion 17 (most of the 38 people on board the fatal Chinook shot down in Afghanistan were special operators). That was a 'stake a claim,' so there's always a target for certain individuals, so we stay quiet. Right now, I'm just telling you

the story, because there's never been an air piece conveyed on what happened that night," Englen reiterated.

He also read the books released by two former SEAL Team members on the raid.

"They really didn't talk about the air piece. I think if they did talk about the air piece, we (160th SOAR) would have come out and said, 'No, they're completely wrong. We're not telling you how it's wrong, just that it's wrong,'" he said.

As most military families can attest, transitioning out of the service is a big adjustment.

"Keeping this house was always my job. You know, I didn't put an ad in the paper to hire somebody to join me in running it, so it's odd to have Doug home," Tina chuckled.

Sometimes, she'd forget he was back, since he'd been absent so often in their marriage.

"When he started being here, I was eating dinner without him. He'd walk in the door, and say, 'What we having for dinner?' And I'm like, 'Uh, whoops, I've already eaten. Sorry, just not used to you here,'" Tina admitted.

"I know he has the same feelings, because all of a sudden, he'll say, 'I think I'm going to the gym,' and I'll go, 'Oh, you've had too much of me, gotcha,'" Tina laughed.

It was also a bit shocking for Tina, when attending her husband's retirement functions, to hear he'd been shot at.

"We would go to these awards events and I was like, 'You did what?' Now, he's very good at warning me ahead, so I'm not shell-shocked in front of everybody, and trying to keep on a smiley face," Tina shared.

"I didn't know any of that, really, during the whole all of those deployments. I didn't ask, he didn't tell," she added.

NEW MISSION

That is, until now.

After retiring earlier this month, Englen donated the small U.S. flag from his body armor to the 9/11 Museum at Ground Zero in New York. He wore it on all of his more than 2,500 missions, including the bin Laden mission.

He contemplated going back to flying, until his friend Congressman Mark Green (who'd been an Army special operations flight surgeon with the 160th) said, "Why don't you take on a new mission?"

Englen sought the counsel of Panetta and McRaven, who encouraged him to run for local office in his home state of Tennessee.

So he threw his hat into the ring as a Republican running for Tennessee State Senate District 22.



Englen at 9-11 Museum donating his body armor flag patch worn on more than 2,500 missions, including the UBL op. (Courtesy Doug Englen)

It was a little bit of a surprise to his wife.

"I thought retirement would be the time for us to take some walks and spend some time together. But, I'm on board because I love him," Tina laughed.

However, being in the public eye will be a huge change for them. Plus, in the SOF community, there's always criticism against any operator who talks about their former career. Especially if it appears to be for personal or financial gain.

"I asked them (McRaven and Panetta), saying, 'This is what I'm considering doing.' And they're like, 'It's wonderful. Why are you worried about them (the SOF community)?' And I said, 'Well, because I don't want them to think I'm being egotistical, or cynical, or trying to make money off this,'" Englen explained.

McRaven looked at him and grinned.

"You realize, by you being concerned and asking that question, you know you're not," they'd said.

With their blessing, he's shared here the story of the air component side of the bin Laden mission, and his experiences which personify all SOF warriors and their unconventional work.

Once, then done.

"I want my experiences to explain who I am, so people know they can believe in me. Then transition to getting work done for my com-



Englen at 160th SOAR Compound, Ft. Campbell, March 2020. (Courtesy Doug Englen)

munity," Englen said. "The things the military and especially SOF taught me — I'll use to problem-solve some of the issues in the state that I live in."

"I reached every level in the Army, so I must do it — take on this new mission. That's what's motivating me. I want to serve the people."

The 160th SOAR's motto, "Night Stalkers Don't Quit," still applies to Douglas Englen.

He is to be inducted into the Army Aviation Hall of Fame later this year. ♦

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.

Nick: “SOG’s Secret Agent Man”



John S. Meyer

It was Saturday afternoon on April 30, 2011 when more than a dozen Green Beret veterans and several hundred people gathered at Whitley’s Funeral Home in Kannapolis, N.C., to bid final farewell to Green Beret SFC Donald Monroe Shue. On November 3, 1969, Shue was one of three Green Berets on RT Maryland who were overrun by communist forces in Laos. All three Americans assigned to the top secret Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group,

or simply SOG, were listed as MIA for 41 years. At the end of April, his remains arrived in North Carolina.

On this day, comrades-in-arms, family and friends gathered to pay final respects to Shue and his family, after a huge public welcome home event in neighboring Concord, N.C., complete with a motorcycle procession led by fellow Green Berets from the Special Operations Association Riders that stretched for more than nine miles with citizens standing along every street and overpass from downtown to the funeral home. It was an amazing event for the Kannapolis-born Shue and his family.

At one point in the gathering, then-recently retired Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell — who served two tours of duty in SOG, where he earned the Distinguished Service Cross, approached fellow SOG recon man Doug “The Frenchman” LeTourneau and me, and pointed to a nattily attired gentleman who was on a bent knee talking to Shue’s sister Betty S. Jones in reverential tones. Bargewell asked LeTourneau, “Who the hell is that?” pointing to the gentleman.

Without missing a beat, LeTourneau quickly replied: “Don’t tell anyone. That’s SOG’s top secret agent.” Bargewell, who during nearly 40 years of service in the Army spent most of those years in highly classified units from the Rangers to the elite Delta Project, knew about every secret project in the government and responded, “WTF!? How come I never heard about him?”

LeTourneau couldn’t resist teasing his long-time friend and highly respected general: “You know how it is in top secret operations, if we told you, we’d have to shoot you.” Then the kidding stopped and LeTourneau quickly laid out how Nick Di Benedetto, then-62, and recently retired as an auditor with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), where he oversaw more than 800 employees in five offices spread throughout central and south Italy had arrived in Kannapolis.

Di Benedetto’s journey to the funeral home began during the summer of 1966 in Kannapolis, where he had breakfast at a narrow restaurant that had a long bar and serving area. He had arrived in the United States a few weeks earlier to stay with an American family. On that morning in 1966, Di Benedetto was standing looking



Nick Di Benedetto, in Rome, Italy, in 2009, speaking at his retirement dinner for PricewaterhouseCoopers. (Courtesy Nick Di Benedetto)

at a bulletin board in the restaurant when a young man approached him and introduced himself as Donnie Shue. “I always remembered his last name because, even though my English was broken at that time, I teased him about misspelling his last name.... We talked for several minutes. He was extremely kind to a complete, total stranger,” Di Benedetto said.

They met again in that narrow restaurant the following day and at some point the topic of Vietnam came up. “I remember asking him about what he thought about the war in Vietnam, that was so far away from Kannapolis, North Carolina. I don’t recall exactly what he said, but I do remember that he had a strange smile on his face. We spoke briefly and bid fond adieu, returning to our lives.” That encounter with Shue stuck with Di Benedetto over the years.

Thirty plus years later, Di Benedetto went to the Virtual Wall website and decided to type in Shue’s name. “I must admit, when I typed his name in I had hoped it wouldn’t come up. When it came up, I was heartbroken. Saddened beyond words. During that sad day, I made a vow to myself that I would never forget the men, like Donnie who served America in that war, in that deadly secret war.” He purchased a POW/MIA bracelet with Shue’s name on it. He wore it faithfully everyday as his responsibilities at PwC grew requiring international travel



Sgt. First Class Donald Monroe Shue
(U.S. Army photo)

as well as meetings at the five PcW offices he oversaw in Rome, Florence, Naples, Palermo and Bari.

Being an avid reader of history with a strong sense of admiration for the United States — his grandfather worked in the U.S. for 10 years before WWII erupted, he read military history books and began to learn about SOG. By early 2008, he had purchased my non-fiction book *On The Ground – The Secret War in Vietnam*, which mentioned the November 3, 1969 mission in Laos when Shue's team, RT Maryland was overrun by communist soldiers. Shue and his teammates Bill Brown and Gunther Wald were never heard from again.

On October 14, 2008, I received my first e-mail of introduction from Nick where he expressed his appreciation of SOG's unique place in history and he had many questions about RT Maryland. Over the following weeks we exchanged many e-mails. And, finally I received a phone call from Nick. We spoke for quite a while before I realized that he was calling from Rome, Italy – not Rome, GA.

Over the next few months, we developed a friendship as he asked deep, knowledgeable questions about SOG. By the spring of 2009, we had exchanged e-mails on everything from RT Maryland to our family history to new SOG books hitting the market place such as *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* by Lynne M. Black Jr. As all of this unfolded I gave LeTourneau updates on Di Benedetto and how he wanted to meet Black, LeTourneau, Bargewell and other SOG recon legends and was contemplating attending our annual reunion in Las Vegas of the Special Operations Association, formed by SOG recon men after the war.

On November 16, 2009, things became much more interesting when Di Benedetto casually mentioned in an e-mail: "...I just finished corresponding with a travel agency in Laos."

Four days later, I received an email with an itinerary that took him from Rome to Dubai, to Bangkok and finally to Vientiane, Laos, with plans to helicopter into Salavan Province with the hope of being able to land on the exact location in Laos where the SOG Forward Air Controller last observed RT Maryland, as the team was setting up its RON (Rest Over Night) on November 2, 1969.

Over the next 20 days Di Benedetto worked with Laotian authorities to visit that site in the jungle and a nearby village Ban Chakenvy Tai (he later learned that its name had been changed to Koung Ban Kong). Later he was authorized to build a water line from the Nam Xe Kong River into the village in an attempt to spend enough time there to make friends with some old people who might have had some knowledge of what happened that fatal night and perhaps provide information useful to tracking the remains of those men. In between he had to return to Rome to work in his fledgling international consulting business.

Then, on December 14, 2009 I received this e-mail: "SITREP: I called you twice on your mobile and once on your (land line) from the very spot where RT Maryland was attacked..." He picked up three stones and some soil from that spot in Laos to bring them back to Rome.

I called LeTourneau, filled him in on Di Benedetto's latest report from Laos and he responded, "Nick is SOG's secret agent man. I can't believe he made it to the RON."



Nick Di Benedetto stands next to Laotian Village Chief Chandai Tapsavanh who asked Di Benedetto if he could have a building constructed in his village for religious services, instead of putting in a water line. Di Benedetto agreed, paid for its construction and mailed a metal plaque to be placed on it honoring Shue. (Courtesy Nick Di Benedetto)



From his helicopter Di Benedetto photographed the site where RT Maryland was last spotted by the Forward Air Controller on November 2, 1969. (Courtesy Nick Di Benedetto)



When Donald Shue's remains were recovered from the hilltop area near the Huong Lap Village his Zippo lighter was also found. Note that along with his name, the engraving, "CCN, RECON, WE KILL FOR PEACE." (DOD Photo)



Nick Di Benedetto left, stands with 21 SOG recon men, federal officials from DoD Department of POW/MIA Accounting Agency and family members. In the center row at far right, Eldon Bargewell is wearing the blue shirt, with Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau standing on his left. Both passed away in 2019. (Courtesy John S. Meyer)

LeTourneau also had a burning interest on any details about RT Maryland's fate because its One-Zero (Team Leader) Gunther Wald had served with him as the One-Zero on RT Virginia for a handful of missions into Laos and the DMZ in late 1968 and early 1969, before LeTourneau transferred to RT Idaho. LeTourneau also knew Brown from their days at FOB 1 and at CCN. He met Shue in early October 1969. After he ran his last mission with One-Zero Lynne M. Black Jr., on RT Idaho, he turned over all of his equipment to Shue, "because he was a new guy in camp," said LeTourneau. "I showed him the ropes at CCN because I remembered how kind (SFC) John McGovern was to me when I first landed at FOB 1. That's what SF does, we take care of our own....I liked Shue. He was a sharp, young soldier."

I told LeTourneau how Di Benedetto had landed close by in a village of ten or so huts, Ban Chakeuy Tai, at the side of a river where he was greeted by about 40 screaming kids. I told LeTourneau, "Nick had brought a backpack full of colored pencils, pens, exercise books, T shirts and 2 cartons of cigarettes for the adults. The pilot told Nick that it was a good thing he was an Italian because if he were an American the authorities would not have allowed him to give even those innocent gifts to the locals!"

I read to LeTourneau Di Benedetto's e-mail to me: "So this has been the 14th December 2009 of Nick Di Benedetto and I'm grateful for this accomplishment." He added: "Next time you talk to your people please tell them that a friend of yours (no need to mention my name), after 40 years left the photos of three of you (one is your picture John) and the (Shue) POW-MIA bracelet in a corner of that jungle, as a sign of your never ending presence."

"Wow, our secret agent man did good. I can't believe he tricked those commie bastards so he could get to the RON in an effort to help



Nick Di Benedetto holds an RT Idaho shirt presented to him earlier in the day by members of RT Idaho and Bargewell. (Courtesy John S. Meyer)

locate the men of RT Maryland. He managed to do something that none of us have been able to do. That's amazing," LeTourneau added.

Three days later Di Benedetto wrote saying the pilot who flew him to the RT Maryland RON told him that Americans working on locat-



From left: SOG Recon veterans Ron Owens, Larry Kimmel, Lou DeSeta, Bill Barclay, John Meyer, George Sternberg, Terry Lanegan, John Owens, Nick Di Benedetto and Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau, after breakfast in Kannapolis, N.C., on April 30, 2011. (Courtesy John S. Meyer)

ing POW/MIA's remains were optimistic about locating U.S. airmen's remains. There was no mention about any Army remains.

Thus, LeTourneau and I felt Di Benedetto had earned the nickname of SOG's Secret Agent. Di Benedetto was too modest, telling me that he simply wanted to try and honor someone who had been kind to him.

Flash ahead to March 2011, Di Benedetto's driving — probably at a fast rate of speed — on a road in Rome when he received a text message from me explaining that authorities had recovered Shue's remains. Stunned, the speeding Di Benedetto had to pull over and stop. For one of the rare moments in his life, he was speechless. He later wrote to Shue's sister Betty S. Jones, ... "I was shaken and wordless."

By that time, he had purchased a new POW/MIA bracelet with Shue's name on it and wore it daily. As soon as he heard the good news about Shue's recovery, he booked a flight to Charlotte, N.C., and quietly met with the SOG recon men who attended that historic weekend event in Kannapolis and Concord, including Bargewell, LeTourneau, Lou DeSeta, John Owens, Ron Owens, George "The Troll" Sternberg, Terry "Destiny" Lanegan, Robert Noe, Larry Kimmel and SF soldiers Jack Tobin and John Randolph.

At the funeral home in Kannapolis, we observed Di Benedetto explaining his story quickly to Shue's sisters Betty S. Jones and Peggy S. Hinson, and presented them with the Shue MIA/POW bracelet he had worn since returning from Laos 16 months earlier and a book he compiled on his story relating to Shue. Lastly, he presented Betty with a stone he picked up from RT Maryland's RON site, which he had a jeweler turn into a necklace.

Throughout the entire proceeding, Di Benedetto quietly blended in, paid his final respects and reluctantly spoke to a local reporter about his trip to Kannapolis that day, then returned to Rome, Italy, a humble

man who earned the respect of every SF man in attendance at Shue's service.

Shue's nephew Micky B. Jones told the *Sentinel* that he'll never forget Di Benedetto and the Green Berets who traveled from near and far away to attend Shue's service in Kannapolis on May 1, 2011. Jones added, "The Shue family would like to thank everyone involved for their participation helping bring Donnie home. That event was beyond anything anyone could hope or even imagine coming true to pay respect to Uncle Donnie for his sacrifice for his love of family and country. Absolutely incredible!"

"Thank you all, God bless."

SOG recon man John Owens, who attended Special Forces Training Group classes with Shue and spent time with him at CCN before the fateful mission, said this about Di Benedetto: "It's a great honor to know Nick Di Benedetto and to know about all that he has done for our mutual friend Don Shue.

What started as a chance meeting with Don in a coffee shop, to renting a helicopter forty years later in Laos to look for Don's MIA site is unimaginable. God bless you, Nick." ♦



During the funeral service there was a short break, and the aide checked his phone for messages, then leaned over to Mulholland and whispered in his ear.

Doug LeTourneau was standing next to the aide: "I heard that major tell General Mulholland, 'They got him.' "

LeTourneau didn't say anything until we returned to our hotel and on the TV was the good news that Osama bin Laden was killed by Special Operations Forces.

"I heard him say it but didn't realize how significant those words were," LeTourneau said that night. "It also gives you special insight into the character of Lt. Gen. Mulholland, here on a day so significant in the war on terror, he took time to pay homage to our Donnie Shue."



THE SORROW OF WAR: A Novel of North Vietnam by Bao Ninh, translated by Pham Thanh Hao

THEY WERE SOLDIERS: The Sacrifices and Contributions of Our Vietnam Veterans by Joseph L. Galloway and Marvin J. Wolf



Kenn Miller

The Sorrow of War

Reviewed by Kenn Miller

"It is a great error to hold a soldier responsible for the merits of a cause in which he happens to fight: the side he takes is controlled by a power he cannot resist. The individual is no more at such a time than a straw in a cyclone."

John Singleton Mosby

Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* has been proclaimed by critics all over the world as perhaps the greatest novel of the Vietnam War, and if American novelists, who served in that war, wrote about it and have read it, were polled, I bet my computer that the majority of us would also proclaim it the best of the lot.

There is a wise old saying that the people with whom a combat soldier has the most in common is his (or, these days, her) military enemy. Bao Ninh fought in what his side called, "The American War" as a soldier in the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade from 1969 to the end in 1975. Of the 500 soldiers who went to war in that brigade, Bao Ninh was one of only ten who survived. Half a century or so ago, had any of us had the chance, we'd have killed him. And if he'd had the chance, he'd have killed any one of us. That's war, and that war is over.

The Sorrow Of War begins shortly after the end of the war, as a small detachment of cynical, weary North Vietnamese soldiers with an unreliable Russian truck are stuck with Missing in Action Remains-Gathering duty in a damp and dreary jungle. "All day and all night the water streams a sea of greenish vapor over the jungles carpet of rotting leaves." Sound familiar? Sure, but few American units have ever been so completely defeated as these People's Army of Vietnam units had been. Their side may have won the war, but for these soldiers the victory is long away. Their unit has been destroyed, and here they are, a few survivors in a dank hell they call the "Jungle of Screaming Souls." They suffer from failed health, unhealing wounds, ghastly memories, haunting apparitions, fevers, delirium, grief, and along with the horrors of combat they have seen madness.

The central character of the novel, a soldier named Kien (the author's alter ego), remembers a battalion commander shouting "Better to die than surrender, my brothers! Better to die!" as American soldiers and helicopters wipe out most of his command, leaving the few survivors and the bloated bodies of the dead, and then the commander blows his brains out with his pistol. Sound familiar? Probably not if you

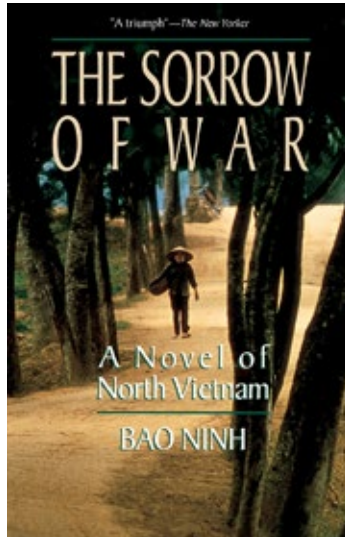
served in an American battalion. We had the helicopters and well trained and equipped artillery and infantry, and brave as they were, these North Vietnamese soldier got maimed and killed under our fire power. Resilience was their strongest weapon. But while there is much in this novel — very much — that American Vietnam veterans can easily relate to, and there is much to make American veterans proud of their own power and respect our enemy's resilience, and while this part of the novel is beautifully written and says a lot about the real sorrows of war and its aftermath, the part most of us might most look forward is yet to come. That begins when a train full of combat veterans — all of them suffering from wounds of one sort or another, or a medley of wounds — are shipped north on the newly repaired railroad, the train stopping at every station. This part of the

novel, more than any other, is what brought the curtain of censorship falling heavily down on Bao Ninh. In my edition of the novel, this begins on page 79:

"There had been no trumpets for the victorious soldiers, no drums, no music. That might have been tolerated, but not the disrespect shown them. The general population didn't care about them. Nor did their own authorities. The railroad scenes were just like afternoon markets, chaotic and noisy. The authorities checked the soldiers time after time, searching for loot. Every pocket of their knapsacks had been searched as though the mountain of property that had been looted and hidden after the takeover of the South had been taken only by soldiers. At every station the loudspeakers blared, blasting the ears of the wounded, the sick, the blind, the mutilated, the white-eyed, grey-lipped malarial troops. Into their ears poured an endless stream of the most ironic of teachings, urging them to ignore the spirit of reconciliation, to beware of the 'bullets coated with sugar,' to ignore the warmth and passions among the remnants of this fallen, luxurious society of the South. And especially to guard against the idea of the south having fought valiantly or been meritorious in any way. But we 'meritorious' and victorious solders knew how to defend

ourselves against this barrage of nonsense. We made fun of the loudspeakers' admonishments, turning their speeches into jokes, ridiculing them. By the time we reached the northern Red River Delta areas, where the roads were running alongside us showing the way home to Hanoi, we were all deliriously happy. All the dreams and wishes that had so long been pent up inside us suddenly burst from us. Even the most conservative among us expressed wildly passionate ideas of how they would launch into their new, civilian, peacetime lives."

But, of course. those wildly passionate hopes were to be shattered. There was no glorious welcome home waiting for the soldiers when their train arrives at Hanoi Station. This strange and moving novel



The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam

by Bao Ninh (Author),

Pham Thanh Hao (Translator)

Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

Reprint 08/14/2018

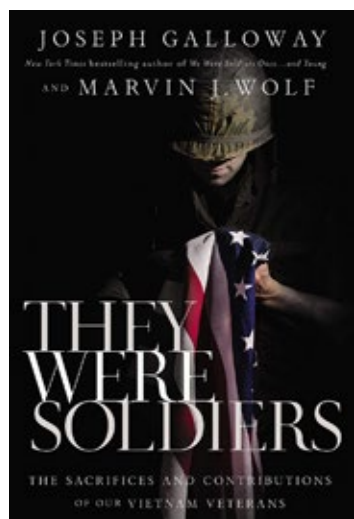
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continues, not so much merely a war novel as a novel of war's continuing sorrow. Kien and his fellow veterans struggle to overcome the North Vietnamese version of PTSD, find a place in the civilian world, and make sense of what they had gone through. Many North Vietnamese towns and villages had sent all their young men south, only to have none return, and for those who did make it home, it was often to encounter not hospitality but the bitter hostility of neighbors whose sons — and daughters — were never to make it home.

I first read *The Sorrow of War* in a slightly rougher samizdat edition smuggled in from Thailand before the novel was legally published, and the bitter comments of the wounded soldiers on the train were somewhat more colorful (“If the Americans are such lousy soldiers where’s my fucking leg?” – Ed.). When *The Sorrow of War* was legally published (outside Vietnam) and appeared in English and Vietnamese in the public library system I borrowed a copy of each and took it to the father of my son’s elementary school best friend to read. Mr. Nguyen had taught English and French comparative literature at Vanderbilt University for a time in the 1960s, during which

time he got to know many returned American Vietnam veterans. He and his wife and two older children returned to Vietnam in 1969, when they believed the RVN was about to win the war. After the summer of 1975 he and his family were arrested and sent to a re-education camp where their oldest son died and their two younger children — my son and daughter’s friends — were born. While a prisoner he was eventually pressed into duty as a teacher to NVA veterans hoping to resume or start their educations. I remember a long conversation with him after his family came to America in which I asked him what it was like to have taught both American and North Vietnamese veterans — how did they differ. His first response was one word, “language”. And then he went on that other than that they were just about exactly the same — and how interested and fascinated his NVA students were about American veterans. When I asked him about ARVN veterans he gave one of those Gallic shoulder shrugs the Vietnamese had learned so well, and said, “That may take time, but Vietnamese people have a lot of experience getting over their civil wars just in time to start another one. ❖



They Were Soldiers: The Sacrifices and Contributions of Our Vietnam Veterans

by Joseph L. Galloway
and Marvin J. Wolf
Nelson Books
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416 pages

***They Were Soldiers:
The Sacrifices and
Contributions of Our
Vietnam Veterans***

Reviewed by
Marc Phillip Yablonka
Author of *Vietnam Bao Chi:
Warriors of Word and Film*
(Casemate Publishers)
<https://warstoriespress.com>

Joseph L. Galloway and Marvin J. Wolf, two renowned writers of the Vietnam experience, have combined forces to write a book with an untraveled approach to the Vietnam War. *They Were Soldiers Once: The Sacrifices and Contributions of Our Vietnam Veterans*, (Nelson Books/Harper Collins) is quite refreshing in that, while it includes the in-country experiences of 49 people who fought in the war, it is a first of its kind to delve into what these

men and women have done with their lives since Vietnam, in and for their communities. That is the most captivating factor of this book.

They Were Soldiers has its obligatory A-list of Vietnam veterans who fill its pages. Among them Army nurse Diane Carlson Evans, whose idea it was to fight for the recognition of women who wore the uniform in Vietnam. That effort ultimately led to the Women’s Memorial across from the existing Wall honoring the more than 58,000 who died in Vietnam; film director Oliver Stone, whose film *Platoon* has been largely touted as the first realistic film about the

war; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State Colin Powell; Sen. Max Cleland, who left three limbs on the battle field in Vietnam, all come to mind. These are people who are the stuff of legend whose service to our country is well documented, as it should be in this book.

What makes this book unique and even more worth the read though are the lesser-known Vietnam veterans who also grace the book’s pages. People like Paul Longgrear, a Baptist pastor from the South, who said of his service in Vietnam, “...I really didn’t mind going. I wanted to see the world. I was pretty wild at that time. *Really* wild, to be honest.”

He didn’t get to Vietnam right away, however. At Ft. Benning GA, Lt. Longgrear served as a tactical officer, all the while desperately wanting to serve in Vietnam. “He called a Pentagon personnel officer five weeks in a row,” Galloway and Wolf wrote, “until that officer suggested he volunteer for parachute training and then apply to become a Green Beret.”

Become a Green Beret he did, and, once in Vietnam, he commanded loyal Montagnard hill tribesmen in the Central Highlands. After the war, his religious calling became his highest priority. He spent several years living in Israel (he calls himself a Christian Zionist), and traveling to Russia and the Ukraine to teach the impoverished, homeless, and the incarcerated. Of God, Longgrear told Galloway and Wolf, “He doesn’t speak audibly, but He has nevertheless made it clear to me what He wanted me to do.”

Burbank, California resident, Don Ray, quite the permanent fixture at veterans’ events in the city, is another fascinating addition to the book. Ray was a dog handler stationed near the Cambodian border. He was attached to the Soc Trang Civil Action Group. “When the Sergeant in charge of the unit and the veterinarian were both arrested for black marketeering, he suddenly found himself in the role of the detachment’s acting veterinarian technician,” wrote Galloway and Wolf.

Continued on page 17

Beat the Reaper



Tai Chi Chuan: Does It Have A Military Application?



Kenn Miller

By Kenn Miller

A couple decades ago *Sentinel* editor Jim Morris and I got into a debate about martial arts. Jim was into Aikido, and I was working out with Chinese and Korean martial arts that I was never very good at. Still I thought I was getting a lot from Tai Chi Chuan — both the Yang style, wimpified at the time for old folk in Aleve commercials on television, and the much more kinetic and practical Chen style which was also more fun.

But I wasn't very good at either style. I was clumsy, impatient, and hampered by arthritis in all my lower joints but the middle one. But I did feel I was getting physical improvement from it. I was sure my side of the debate was better than Jim's, and I was arrogant about it. Now, years later Jim has commissioned me to write a piece for the *Sentinel* about the martial and military uses of Tai Chi Chuan.

But first let me explain the distinction between Tai Chi (太極) which, alludes to all sorts of Chinese daoist philosophical things, many of which actually make sense, and Tai Chi Chuan. When the word Chuan (拳) which means "fist" is added to the other characters you're referring to the martial art. Even the Chen style wouldn't be much good in an MMA bout, though if you're cool, calm, well trained and lucky, it can be of use in a self defense street fight.

Even people who have never been in a fight, not even on an elementary school playground, and can't imagine ever getting in a fight, can get physical and health benefits from the practice. I first encountered Tai Chi Chuan in the spring of 1968, a few months after the Tet Offensive and the Battle of Hue when without any of us expecting it, a company — or rather the remnants of a company — of the 1st ARVN Division's Hac Bao (Black Leopard) elite Special Operations unit came to stay with us at F/58 LRP Camp Eagle, to train and patrol with us for a while.

None of us, except the CO, 1st Shirt, and one of our platoon sergeants knew that these dudes were famous to the edge of legendary. The whole 1st ARVN Division was excellent, but the Hac Bao was something beyond that. During the fighting at the Tay Loc Airfield about 50 Hac Bao soldiers (and later an ad hoc reinforcement of ordnance and division headquarter personnel) held off two NVA battalions for almost two days and a night. And when the Hac Bao survivors of that battle were recalled to join the rest of the unit, they continued to fight until the NVA was finally driven out of Hue.

But we didn't know that, and the first morning they were with us a few of us went down to the chopper pad to see what the hell those ARVNs were doing. It looked like some sort of effete dance, But then the 1st Shirt came down, chewed us out and told us who those guys were. One of the Hac Bao officers came over and in perfect English explained that his troops were doing a martial art. It didn't look all that mar-

tial to us, but the Hac Bao officer said that this martial art taught people how to breathe slowly and deeply and with control so that they can calm down, slow the heartbeat, and perform better and with less fear in combat. And it trained them how to move slowly and carefully to stay still when hiding. We were skeptical, but a few of us admitted that some of that made sense. That was the first time I ever saw Tai Chi Chuan.

Some years later, I think it was 1993, I went to a Ranger Rendezvous at Fort Benning, and early one morning I was outside the hotel doing a little bit of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan when I noticed a man in a uniform I couldn't immediately recognize. When I took a break he came over and introduced himself. He was an Australian infantry officer and we talked for a while. He said that he was new to Tai Chi Chuan, but he was beginning to take it up seriously, because it was becoming very popular among Australia's Special Air Service, Commando and Airborne battalions, and beach clearance units — the last of which I took to be the Aussie version of our Navy SEALs.

I don't know if those units are still doing Tai Chi Chuan, but if the 1st ARVN Division's Hac Baos, and the elites of the Australian military considered it worthwhile, I'd say that, "Yes, it is a real martial art, and one with practical military benefits."

Tai Chi Chuan won't win you any belts in the UFC. It won't increase your lifespan an extra fifty years, cure your maladies, or give you esoteric super powers like some old white eyebrowed Gungfu master out of a Shaolin Temple movie, but you might come to really enjoy it. ❖



The Tai Chi Chuan master Yang Chengfu (c. 1931) in Single Whip posture of Yang-style t'ai chi ch'uan solo form. (U.S. work public domain in the U.S. because it was published in the U.S. before 1925.)

More controversial opinions
by the shy and retiring Mark Smith, DSC

ONE HUNDRED and ONE SOLDIERLY THOUGHTS

U.S. Army photo by
Staff Sgt. Chad Menegay

Editor's Note: Mark Smith is a retired Special Forces Major. He was captured in the battle of Loc Ninh in Vietnam. He had 38 holes in his body when captured, back broken, lung messed up, bowel penetrated, and other wounds. He was held in a camp in Cambodia until released. He was an officer, but he was a sergeant first as he was field commissioned. Having been an infantryman and a sergeant in Vietnam ex-POW, Mark is a recipient of the DSC.

By Mark Smith
May 5, 1997

Author's Note: *Some decades ago, a friend in the Pentagon asked me to jot down a few soldierly thoughts. Down through the years I added a couple, but deleted none of the originals. They may not be modern or politically correct, but they did make the rounds. I stand by them today. Mark*

1. Never accept an officer as competent based on his source of commission.
2. Your right to influence the battlefield is diminished in ratio to the distance you are from the actual arena of action.
3. The battlefield selects its own Generals. No school or board can replace it.
4. Never call fire on your own troops, unless you stand among them.
5. Leaders are indeed born and no military school can provide what God did not.
6. Equipment procurement will always be compromised by not only being made by the lowest bidder, but by attempting to make it multi-functional.
7. Attempting to lighten the soldiers load by diminishing the weight of any given weapon, will always result in shorter range and less firepower.
8. Excellent staff officers rarely make good battlefield commanders.
9. Outstanding commanders will surround themselves with excellent staff officers.
10. Never make command a reward for good staff work.
11. Discipline began its decline with the demise of the swagger stick and centralized promotion boards.
12. Outstanding NCOs may make good officers. But, rarely will a riffed officer make a good NCO.
13. Atheists will never be trusted by their troops on the battlefield.
14. Women can do many things men do, except for a few days every month.
15. "Going through the change" has nothing to do with the female senior officers uniform.
16. Sexual harassment is a two-lane road.
17. Soldiers tell the truth about good and bad commanders. Their opinion is the ultimate evaluation of an officer.
18. No commander was ever hated for being too hard. But, many are detested for trying to cultivate that image, without substance.
19. The maximum effective range of any weapon is that range at which the individual soldier can hit his target and not an inch further.
20. Pretty females rarely feel harassed by male counterparts.
21. Plain-looking female soldiers are usually the best performers and fit in.
22. Endurance should be judged on the bayonet assault course and not on a marathon run.
23. How far soldiers can run in shorts is unimportant, compared to how far they can speed march with full equipment.
24. Pregnant females are overweight soldiers. Thus, the US Army Weight Control program is not based on equal enforcement of the rules.
25. Tears on the cheeks of any soldier, regardless of gender, are only acceptable on the death of a relative or comrade and when Old Glory passes by.
26. Pregnancy is self-inflicted, thus abortions should be paid for by the soldier, as a non line of duty procedure.
27. Soldiers are not sent into combat, they are led.
28. Your worth as an officer should never be judged on how well you ran with a football in college.
29. West Point is a place of learning, as is any college. Both produce two types of officer; Good and Bad.
30. The computer will never be able to judge the content of a soldiers spirit, as his Sergeant can.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Steven Lewis

31. Esprit De Corps cannot be attained at the Battalion picnic or Sports Day. It must be instilled by good leadership and belief in ones fellow soldiers.
32. No new weapon or tactic will ever instill the same fear in the enemy that one Infantryman with a bayonet can.
33. He who drinks at lunch is a drunken soldier in the afternoon.
34. No soldier is so smart that his physical deficiencies can be overlooked in the Infantry.
35. Painting rocks and serving drinks to officers have never been soldierly functions. And golf is not a required skill for officers.
36. Consolidation of all administrative personnel at battalion level has eroded accountability and proper reporting.
37. Anyone who thinks that future battlefields will not contain Infantrymen knows nothing about war.
38. Indecision kills more soldiers than any wrong decision. One can command his way out of a wrong decision.
39. The only mission of the Infantry Soldier is to kill the enemy. "Humanitarian Missions" are someone else's job.
40. Only the Infantry and Armor can gain ground. Only the Infantry can hold it alone.
41. Special Forces are not Rangers or Light Infantry and should never be employed as such.
42. Rangers are light infantry and are not Special Forces.
43. Victory is not a limited objective. There is no other reason to engage an enemy, except victory.
44. Never shower or apply after-shave and cologne forty-eight hours prior to a night attack.
45. Sweat is the true lubricant of the Infantry fighting machine.
46. No American Soldier can be managed to victory. He must be led.
47. The only color in the U.S. Army is green.
48. Use of chemical weapons and biological weapons are a crime against humanity.
49. Not training your soldiers to protect themselves from them is a crime against your own troops.
50. Any tactic written in a book is known to your enemies.
51. If short hair is truly a matter of hygiene and discipline, then all soldiers must have it.
52. No member of a soldier's family is more important than the mission.
53. No soldier can accomplish his mission if the Army neglects his family.
54. Any soldier who sleeps with another soldier's wife or lover cannot be trusted on the battlefield and should be shunned.
55. Officers are more likely to wear unauthorized awards than any NCO or Private.
56. Any officer who claims he is accepting an individual award for the entire unit should allow his soldiers to wear it.
57. There can be no quota for awards.
58. Any award for Valor is of more value to the Army than any school diploma or certification.
59. Heroism cannot be taught. But, cowardice is a communicable disease.
60. The machine gun is too important a weapon to be used as a tool for punishing poor soldiers.
61. Precision weapons will jam if the Commander demands communal cleaning.
62. No officer should be given a command because he needs one for his career.
63. No officer should be denied a command because he already had one.
64. The state of the Army can be evaluated by how its soldiers look in uniform at any airport in the world.
65. No reporter can be trusted with operational plans. A reporter who reveals operational plans is a traitor to his country.
66. A combat veteran of any war should be respected by soldiers.
67. American soldiers do not lose wars. Leaders lose wars.
68. What a soldier saw with his own eyes, cannot be ignored or changed by higher headquarters.
69. If Special Forces are not assigned strategic missions, they are being misused.

70. The Hummer is a vehicle and is the only thing of that name allowed in the Infantry.
71. If you wish to learn about guerrilla warfare, study Francis Marion and not Westmoreland or Giap.
72. The one night you don't dig in will bring mortars on your position.
73. Taking the easy way will always get you killed.
74. Blank ammunition has no place in Infantry training.
75. The more you restrict Infantrymen possessing live ammunition, the more accidents you will have.
76. The Air Force and Navy are supporting arms.
77. Intelligence Officer is usually a contradiction in terms.
78. Inclement weather is the true Infantryman's ally.
79. There is no special duty so important, that it takes the Infantry Soldier away from his squad.
80. Commanders who use the Off Limits authority to deny sex to combat soldiers will have a high V.D. rate.
81. A commander's morals are his own and cannot be imposed on his soldiers.
82. Chaplains must present themselves when the soldier has time, not because they have a schedule.
83. An officer must be judged on his ability and not on how many coffees his wife has attended.
84. Senior officers who allow discussions about a brother officer, not present, are not honorable men.
85. A Commander who bad-mouths his predecessor will never be truly respected.
86. Equal opportunity is guaranteed by the law and does not require a separate staff.
87. If a Sergeant Major suggests a unit watch, he is the supplier.
88. The quality of food went down with the initiation of the consolidated mess.
89. No NCO or Warrant Officer outranks a Second Lieutenant.
90. Any officer who does not listen to NCOs and Warrant Officers is a fool.
91. If you wish your subordinates to call you by your first name, go sell shoes. There is no place for you in the Army.
92. Any Army man who sneers at a Marine for being sharp and well turned out is no soldier.
93. Any Infantryman who must call higher headquarters before engaging the enemy has a fool for a commander.
94. Soldiers respect leaders worth emulating. They cannot be ordered to respect anyone.
95. No man who refused to serve his country in war should be elected or appointed over men and women being sent to fight.
96. The soldier must obey the orders of all those elected or appointed over him.
97. The leadership genes in famous American military families usually become weaker as the generations roll by.
98. A soldier should not be denied the right to wear his uniform anywhere in America, including the White House.
99. The only truly unique headgear is the one the Army was forced to authorize. All others are cheap copies.
100. There is only one reason to join the Army and that is to serve the Country.
101. If a soldier says he hates combat, he is in the wrong profession.

ABOVE ALL, IF YOU ARE NOT INFANTRY, YOU ARE SUPPORT! ❖

Book Review — *They Were Soldiers: The Sacrifices and Contributions of Our Vietnam Veterans* Reviewed by Marc Phillip Yablonka Continued

To say that Ray's tour was eventful would be a gross understatement. During his time in-country, a mysterious canine "nosebleed disease" took the lives of hundreds of Army dogs. Through research, consultation with veterinary staff at Tan Son Nhut Airbase and other locations, Ray was able to save the lives of many other canines.

After Vietnam, his passion for research led him to a career in broadcast journalism at KNBC-TV, Channel 4 in Burbank. Ray was part of a team of investigative reporters who discovered that cult leader Jim Jones, responsible for the deaths of over 900 followers in 1978, had previously been arrested but never tried for lewd conduct. In *They Were Soldiers*, Galloway and Wolf speculate that, had that fact been known, perhaps those who followed Jones to his death might never have perished.

Ever the researcher, today, Don Ray heads up the Endangered History Project, which he founded to preserve documents of his-

torical value, from old films and music to World War II letters and photos. Contributing to his community is never far from his mind.

Even years before the fall of Saigon, Vietnam veterans have suffered the indignities of being labeled the first GIs to ever lose an American war, drug dealers, baby killers, etc. Many a Hollywood film unquestionably added to that erroneous persona. The truth is that an overwhelming majority of Vietnam veterans, much like their World War II veteran parents, came home from their tours, fit right back into their communities, went to college or right back to work, married, had children and continue to make this country the great country it is today. Joseph L. Galloway's and Marvin J. Wolf's *They Were Soldiers: The Sacrifices and Contributions of Our Vietnam Veterans* goes a long way to illustrate that. It will greatly enhance the libraries of Vietnam veterans themselves, students of the war, journalists who reported on it, as well as the J school students of today. ❖

SFA Chapter 78 June 2020 Meeting (Photos by How Miller)



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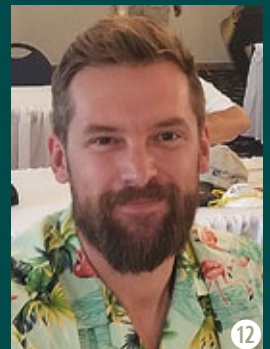
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- 1 Chapter President Bruce Long presenting a chapter coin to LT Reza Muhammad with Ken Atkinson OPNS SGT A Co. 19th SFG(A).
- 2 Chapter member Patrick Kinsey addresses the group.
- 3 The Chapter meeting in its new meeting room was well attended.
- 4 The Chapter meeting for July was held in its new location, Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base, in the Pub at Fiddler's Green.
- 5 The picnic area adjacent to the Fiddlers Green Billiting.
- 6 Mike Keele checking in Jim Duffy.

- 7 John Creele, Susan Weeks and Gary Macnamara
- 8 Bob Crebbs and his ride — his 1940 restored Packard "General Officers" car.
- 9 Jim Suber and Don Gonneville
- 10 Hamm Salley, Mark Miller and Rick Carter
- 11 Tom Turney
- 12 James McLanahan.