



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

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

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## In Search of the Warrior Spirit

John Wayne's True Vietnam War

Don & Dave's (Excellent) Revolution

Burma Update



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**FRONT COVER:** Publicity photo of The Duke as Col Mike Kirby, who was based on the real life persona of SF Capt Larry Thorne (nee Lauri Torni, a Finn who fought both Germany and Russia in WWI, immigrated to the U.S. in the late '40s and joined the U.S. Army). (Warner Brothers)

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## From the Editor



Jim Morris  
Sentinel Editor

### The Special Forces Spirit

When I joined Special Forces in 1962 I was basically a nerd with an ROTC commission of no great distinction, and a brand new pair of novice parachute wings. I was in awe of Special Forces and of the men I was now thrust among and was presumably destined to lead. I was glad to be among them but didn't feel like a leader of such men.

Fortunately, I spent my first months in the 1st Group in the headquarters. Colonel Robert "Woody" Garrett, the Group commander had the false idea that good PR might get him his first star, and the only other guy in Group with a journalism degree was a legendary lieutenant colonel. I could have told him that the best job I could do him would not impress the USARYIS Commander, a rose-growing administrative type, who had never, as Colonel Garrett expressed it, "smelled smoke in combat", but he didn't ask.

I was frustrated. All my SFOC classmates were going to Vietnam and coming home covered in medals, wearing Montagnard bracelets and Rolex dive watches, but I was stuck in the headquarters, learning what I should have already known.

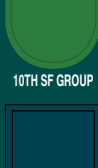
Colonel Garrett never got his much deserved star, but I got to study Special Forces in detail before I had to perform, and I soon realized that there was a vibe, a spirit, an attitude in SF that I had never seen anywhere else. Even the guys coming in from Airborne units had a ramrod up their butts and, well, they were waiting to be told what to do. The old SF guys were casually badass, and their attitude was, tell me what you want done and get the hell out of my way. There was something more than salt in the air of Okinawa. There was also the Special Forces spirit. I got to examine it in detail, going along on great crazy exercises and strange jumps, water jumps, night jumps in Korea, submarine infiltrations.

I saw Gallington, a black rigger and jumpin' fool, make a chopper jump about 0730 one morning, and not finding another parachute, cram his canopy in a shopping bag, go back up, jump again, shake the canopy out of the bag, and come down on it again.

The avatars of the Special Forces spirit were the team sergeants. I had never seen men like that before or since, anywhere but Special Forces. They didn't even walk like other soldiers. They walked like they expected to be opposed, but not stopped. Some names are appropriate here, some you may have heard of, Willie Card, Arif Zaky, John Kessling, who was my team sergeant when I commanded A-322, And this guy, James O. Schmidt: <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2020/06/11/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/E530-5> Check it out. It's a portrait of a modern warrior.

I caught that spirit and I'm still running on it. I believe it's meant more in my life than any other thing. The beret is its symbol, but it's that spirit that makes us who and what we are. ♦

Jim Morris, *Sentinel* Editor





# From the President | November 2020



Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

WOW! What a GREAT turnout for our October meeting. We not only had *thirty* Chapter members in attendance, we had three guests, and three former Chapter members from the Las Vegas Chapter 51. **John Joyce** (one of those former members) provided a PowerPoint presentation on the upcoming SFA 2021 Convention to be held in Las Vegas. John is the Convention Director, which means, 'Chief Cook and Bottle Washer'. GREAT presentation, John. It's going to be one heck of a convention.

Also present for our meeting was **Major Bob Ashley**, the new Commander of A (Alpha) Company, along with several members from one of the ODA's. Major Ashley gave a quick overview of the recent activities of A Company. A Company, and SOD (N) will be conducting a day and night jump during their November drill.

One very exciting note is the re-flagging of A Company. The new designation will be C (Charlie) Company. This is a historical moment. As some of you old timers will remember (me included), C Company of the 3rd Battalion 12th SFG was deactivated in July 1994 at Los Alamitos, and became Delta Company Provisional, until November of the same year, when it became A Company.

The exact date for the ceremony has yet to be announced, but rest assured, I will keep everyone posted for this event. I also plan on making sure SFA Chapter 78 is present for this event along with anyone who served in C Company, 3rd Battalion 12th SFG.

**SGM Hank Eylicio** currently assigned to SOD (N) and former SGM for A Company, and Chapter member will be retiring next month. We all wish him the best. Hank will have served thirty-five years of military service. Hank is still working for the Border Patrol out of the Indio Office.

**Jim Suber** made a donation of \$440 to the Chapter. Jim is a Gold Star family member, who lost his brother Randy on November 10th, 1968 while on a mission for CCN into Laos. Jim is an Honorary member of our Chapter, and regularly attends Chapter meetings. Speaking of donations, the Chapter also received a cash donation of \$200 from **Mike Jameson**.

A tip of the BERET to you guys.

While planning for our upcoming Christmas party with Scott Jones, General Manager for the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club, he mentioned that he was having problems finding ammunition for his Boy Scout Troop. Scott went on to say, that fifteen boys were attempting to earn their merit badges in shooting of various rifle calibers.

However, he was having issues with the overall purchasing of 22 CAL, 223 CAL, 30.06 Cal ammunition due to the overall shortage. I told him that I was sure the Chapter could help him out.

I put an email to the Chapter membership, and lo and behold, what a response! **Jack Eckles**, a long time member of the Chapter who now lives in Texas, was the first to make with a monetary donation directly to Scott Jones.



Scott Jones, troop leader for Boy Scout Troop 90 and General Manager of the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club

At the Chapter meeting we collected 7,780 rounds of ammunition. 7100 Rounds of 22 Cal L/R, 180 Rounds of 30.06 Cal, and 500+ Rounds of 223 Cal. All of this ammunition was given directly to Scott Jones who was in attendance at the Chapter meeting. The Boy Scout shooting event will take place at Lytle Creek's out door shooting range on October 11th. (see photos on page 13)

## WAY TO GO SFA CHAPTER 78!!!

Another matter that's really important is our upcoming Christmas party scheduled on December 6th at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club. Please mail your checks payable to SFA Chapter 78 to:

Santiago Corporation, PO Box 11927 Santa Ana, CA 92711, Attention: Liz Rios.

Our next Chapter meeting will be November 7th, same time, same location.

As always, any questions or concerns feel free to reach out to me. ❖

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

## November Chapter Meeting

Please e-mail RSVP to **VP Don Gonneville** at [don@gonneville.com](mailto:don@gonneville.com), no later than Thursday November 5th, midnight. We need an exact headcount.

**DATE:** November 7, 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)

# JOHN WAYNE'S TRUE VIETNAM WAR



J. David Truby

By J. David Truby

John Wayne's departure for a three week tour in Vietnam in the Spring of 1966 was just what you'd expect from old Duke's modest sense of deprecatory humor, when he told reporters, "I can't sing or dance, but I can sure shake a lot of hands and share a bunch of cold beers with our boys there."

He did just that, then stayed another four weeks on his own dime and time. Therein is the real story of John Wayne in Vietnam.

Hollywood lore is the stuff of legend, especially when it involves iconic actor John Wayne, best known for playing macho soldiers or western characters in more than 250 films before his death in 1979. However, his real-life military involvement is what had people talking in 1966 during the height of the Vietnam War.

Thanks to the USO's tireless efforts, celebrities have visited and cheered American soldiers since 1941. However, Wayne's visit was different. The U.S. Department of Defense contracted Wayne for the three-week tour of Vietnam. According to Wayne, he would be "going around the hinterlands to give the boys some personal support."

John Wayne's Vietnam tour had three missions. One was his good will visit to cheer American combat troops and their wounded, plus some serious fact-finding for a movie he had in mind. Also, he believed in the political necessity of the war.

Wayne said, "It is important that we keep our word on treaties to protect our allies, a universally unpopular view in peace-loving, pink Hollywood."

He felt so strongly about this that he said it was his duty to make a film that showed why the war was needed. He said that his planned film, *The Green Berets*, was "anti-Communist, pro-Saigon and prompted by the American Left's anti-war sentiment."

It was the only major Hollywood film to support the war effort.

Wayne's son, Patrick, told me of his father's Vietnam experiences, "To make a truly realistic, authentic film, My father said he needed to go to Vietnam personally and meet with the real combat soldiers



Wayne signs PFC Fonzell Wofford's helmet during his visit to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, at Chu Lai on 20 June 1966. (National Archives Photo)

who were literally sometimes face to face with the enemy on their turf....and gain their first-hand experiences. He wanted this film to feature the Army's Special Forces guys, the early Marines in Vietnam and their role in the war...and he wanted to get it right."

John Wayne's in-country education began in the spring of 1966, at age 59, with a visit to the 3rd Battalion 7th Marines at Chu Lai, where he shook a lot of hands, passed out a lot of good will, cold beer and also came away with a lot of good Marine field craft. For the rest of his tour, though, Wayne visited the Army's Special Forces (SF) camps, especially the ones out in the boonies, far away from REMF Central.

Former SF SSG John E Padgett recalled, "When an SF camp began construction, the first priority was a strong defensive perimeter. The very next priority was a heavily fortified team house/club from which planning and missions originated, often accompanied by copious supplies of Carlings Black Label and Pabst Blue Ribbon beers. This was also the guest house for our few welcomed visitors."

Retired SFC Ken Richter recalled Wayne's time at the 5th Special Forces Group, Detachment A-219, Mike Force, Pleiku, saying, "I remember him in the C-2 bar one evening saying he hoped he could witness us SF guys kicking Charlie's ass. He got his wish."

After his discharge, SFC Richter worked for Wayne as dive master on his boat, working on a charitable discovery and salvage assignment for Stanford University. He adds, "John Wayne was a true patriot and his boat was full of memorabilia from various military units."

Wayne's boat, a World War II minesweeper he bought and converted into his private yacht, was named *The Wild Goose*. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2011.

Speaking of WWII, there has always been a persistent myth that John Wayne dodged the wartime draft, which he did not do. He was classified as 3A (head of family) in 1942. In 1943, he requested a change to



1A, which was turned down, through back-door politics by Republic Pictures. He persisted and in May of 1944, was re-classified as I-A. Republic Pictures intervened openly against Wayne's wishes and got his classification changed to 2-A (support of national interest) in August of 1944.

Some insiders, including family, said that he always felt guilty about not serving in WWII and that is what drove him to be so personally up front about Vietnam.

Thus, John Wayne made stops at Nui Ba Den to visit the men of A-324 B and Detachment C-3 at Bien Ha. His stated goal to his Saigon minders was to spend time with most of the A and B teams in the III Corps, soaking up SF background and accuracy for his film and hoping to boost the morale of these warriors.

By June 1966, already past his scheduled departure time, Wayne made layovers at Throng Toi and An Lang, where he gathered real and hard experience from the warriors of A-425. Officers, NCOs and EM debriefed him on their mission, operational area and the enemy situation. He was also shown how the new camp was set up, including its defenses.

"This was not an easy visit for us," recalled former SGT John McGovern, who was one of Wayne's guides there. McGovern, a Psy Ops NCO, recalls, "He wanted to go where the action was, far away from the flagpole and the safer sites. Our S-2 knew that the other side knew he was there and we knew what a coup it would be if the Cong could kill the great John Wayne."

One of Wayne's guides was SGT Leroy Scott, who told how Wayne's helicopter was headed into a Special Forces camp near Pleiku in the middle of some heavy incoming action, and were warned to abort landing when two rounds smacked the Huey. SGT Scott adds, "An immediate 180 occurred."

This was a larger problem, too, as there was documented intel that the Republic of North Vietnam's Soviet mentors, the GRU and Spetnetz, had already planted the propaganda benefits of Wayne's chopper being shot down, his jeep blown up or for a sniper to pick him off.

John Wayne spent time under fire at the wire plus in the OPs and LPs. And, of course, he chowed down with the guys. But not every day in Vietnam was a picnic. Stories abound about the "close calls" Wayne had. One report mentioned that a Viet Cong sniper's bullet narrowly missed him, hitting the ground 50 feet behind him. Wayne



Beer in hand and in his rarely seen reading glasses, The Duke visited the fighting men at SF a Team 323 at Camp Trai Bi in June of '66. (Jari Salo)



It was a welcoming Jeep delivery of Wayne from the chopper pad at Plei Djerang, with Capt John Kai, camp CO, at the wheel. Passengers were chopper crew, PIO officer, C-2 officer and The Duke. (Don Briere)

later said to film historian Michael Munn in 1974, "I almost walked into a sniper's bullet that had my name on it. I heard the wind of the bullet whistle past my ear and realized I had had a narrow escape." He added later to family members, "Those tough kids of ours over there have narrow escapes every day, God bless 'em, 'cause sometimes they can't escape getting hit."

Fortunately, wherever John Wayne would go, for the most part, good times rode along. From all reports, he had a true and sincere knack for putting soldiers at ease by signing autographs, taking pictures of them and happily posing for pictures with the guys. Young Marines called him SGT Stryker, his character's name in his classic WWII film, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. Men from out of the way fire-bases threw parties and barbecues in his honor. All agreed that John Wayne knew how to party and how to work.



“When he visited us, he brought in both ice and beer, so we started the day with an ice chest of cold American beer,” recalled Retired MAJ John Hyatt, of Wayne’s visit to A-219. “It was empty when we returned home at the end of the day.”

Then a first lieutenant with the 281st AHC, flying support missions for 5th SF units, John Hyatt recalls John Wayne’s visit to Det C-3, Bien Hoa, in June. “We had just put A-323 on the ground at Trai Bi, Tay Ninh, and were taking sporadic fire on the perimeter, and there goes The Duke out to join some of the team on the line. Helluva man.” Interestingly, two years later, John Hyatt was at Ft. Rucker flying a camera ship to film some of the scenes for *The Green Berets*.

Even though Wayne was offered VIP treatment, he visited very remote Special Forces camps, unlike many celebrities, who stayed comfortable in safer urban zones. The few others who joined the field troops included brave USO visitors, the wonderful Donut Dollies, and the heroic Martha Raye.

One of the more amazing “John Wayne in Vietnam” stories centers around the SF A-251 camp at Plei Djereng. As Wayne made his stop there in June, the camp allegedly came under attack. Supposedly, everyone was returning fire, including Wayne, who was on an M-60, according to the tales, which the Internet grew taller than The Duke himself. Someone was quoted on at least two blogs saying, “I’m telling ya... John Wayne was real fuckin’ John Wayne right with us. He was on top of the TOC choppin’ Charlie with a 60.” Dramatic, exciting and what you’d expect from The Duke. But, it’s fiction, not fact. Special Forces vets who really were there at the time deny the story totally, as did Wayne and his family.

Spec4 Donald Briere, who was the camp radio operator then and who would retire as an SF LTC, said, “There was no raid when Mr Wayne was there. That nasty raid happened a few days prior to his arrival. Obviously, the camp was under enemy observation and tension was high. While there, John Wayne did get familiarization with some of SF’s own special armament.”

As for his dad “chopping Charlie,” son, Patrick, said of the incident, “Never happened. If it had, he would have told us in grand detail. It is also a certainty that the military PIO and the Saigon press corps would have had a field day with it, too.”

For all the stories of fun, heroism and adventure, there are also tales of sentimentality. Two of these center around bracelets that were



Plei Djerang, June 1966, Camp CO Capt John Kai; their guest, John Wayne; SP4 Don Briere; unidentified C-2 officer. (Don Briere)



Camp Plei Djerang was home to SF Team A-251 during John Wayne’s memorable visit there in 1966. It is where the reality of then and the internet rumors of today were separated. (Special Forces Association)

bestowed on Wayne during his time in Vietnam. The first bracelet was a POW/MIA bracelet that represented the life of CPT Stephen P. Hanson, USMC. Hanson had sent his wife and son a picture of himself with the caption “Me as John Wayne.” Sadly, the Marine was shot down over Laos; he never returned home. Wayne wore his bracelet to commemorate Hanson. He kept in touch with Hanson’s wife and son until his own death.

The other memento was a “Yard” bracelet given to him by the Degar or Montagnard People of Vietnam’s Central Highlands, fighters against communism. The brass bracelet was a gift from the II CTZ Mike Force, presented by their Montagnard commander, Ka Doh. The bracelet is a symbol of friendship and respect. *Sentinel* editor

Jim Morris was soldiering with Montagnards, then as a young SF Captain. A strong champion for the Montagnards, Jim has revisited Southeast Asia on their behalf, and that tradition continues to this day. Jim said, "The Montagnard bracelet that Mr Wayne wore to his grave was awarded to him personally by my friend Kpa Doh, in 1966. He was then commander of the II CTZ Mike Force. I met Kpa Doh in 1964, when he was my unit's chief interpreter at Buon Beng. We reconnected when I did my third tour in 1967.

"Much later, I visited Kpa Doh, then a major in the Cambodian Army and scheduled to go to C&GS at Ft. Leavenworth but he could not afford to buy a dress uniform. I mentioned this to John Wayne in a letter I wrote when I returned home. By golly, he sent Kpa Doh money for clothing and travel. Sadly, my friend was killed during the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, and never made it over to the States. But, that's the kind of man John Wayne was...real!"

Wayne's reality lives on, too, according to retired Special Forces SFC John Solberg, who remains an active friend of the Montagnards. His wife's store near the Montagnard settlement outside Ashboro NC donates a major amount from the sale of each of those fabled bracelets like Wayne's back to the Montagnard people to assist in their resettlement to the U.S. It's a generosity that Patrick Wayne considers a major honor for his dad's memory.

But, back in 1966, upon returning to America, Wayne was eager to speak about all the good things that America's military and supporting agencies were doing to save South Vietnam's independence and safety. He strongly voiced his sympathy for our soldiers who put their lives on the line for their countrymen who didn't support them.

Wayne believed that the U.S. was doing what it said it would do for any invaded country. "We've been telling the people of oppressed nations, 'Stand up for your rights, and we'll back you up,'" said Wayne, "We've been saying this for years, we sign treaties that pledge our support, and now, suddenly, it's a terrible scandal that we are keeping our word to the Vietnamese."

In the end, Wayne made his film. *The Green Berets* was shot mainly at Ft. Benning GA and Ft Rucker AL, with a "little unofficial clearance" help from President Lyndon Johnson and the Special Forces Command. The movie was critically panned by the usual cabal of anti-war, anti-Wayne media fops. It is most often criticized for glorifying the war and being unrealistic, which Wayne saw as being politically and socially reproachful of the war, not the film. Regardless of Hollywood's press, the film was a commercial success and is still shown today.

In 1979, the U S Congress awarded John Wayne its Congressional Gold Medal, and the following year he was presented with the Presidential Medal Of Freedom. These are the two highest civilian decorations awarded by the United States government. Sadly, he had passed away from cancer in June of 1979, age 72.

John Wayne faced strong adversity in Vietnam and in America due to his honest patriotic beliefs. Yet, he faced down a very hostile Hollywood power posse and a fairly apathetic American public to personally be with our soldiers and make a movie that supported a cause he deemed important. Being true to himself and his beliefs added strongly to the much deserved honor and legend of John Wayne. ♦



John Wayne signed autographs for everyone and anyone he visited in Vietnam. (Special Forces Association)

## FROM THE AUTHOR

I want to thank the following folks for their kind, unselfish and critical contributions and assistance with this article. Without them this article could never have been written.

Donald Briere	Jimmy Pereira
Robert K. Brown	Kari E. Randall
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Chester Howard	Jari Salo
John Hyatt	Leroy Scott
Patrick Judd	John D. Shank
Paul Longgear	Steve Sherman
John McGovern	Steve Smith
Jim Mertz	John Solberg
Jim Morris	Kevin Stiffler
Robert Noe	Carlos Sucharetza
John E. Padgett	Patrick Wayne

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# Don & Dave's (EXCELLENT) revolution

By Jim Morris

When Jared Chandler and I arrived in Thailand the first thing I did was call Dave Dickinson. Dave's mother is Thai and his father is Canadian. He and his older brother Don are fluent in Thai, and both have served in both the Canadian and Thai armies. Both are airborne, but one with the Thais, one with the Canucks. Dave agreed that he and Don would meet Jared and me in Mae Hong Son on the Thai-Burma — “Myanmar,” if you like — border, in Shan country.

It was 1994. Jared and I had come to Thailand as military technical advisors for the film *Operation Dumbo Drop* (1995), which was based on one of my stories. Jared was an actor and an NCO in a Special Operations reserve unit; he was also technical advisor on the film *Clear and Present Danger* (1994). He has since gone on to be TA on many other films.

Three days after we arrived in Mae Hong Son, Jared and I walked into the spacious, open lobby of the Imperial Tara Hotel to find Don and Dave — long-legged, bespectacled, in cammo pants and sneakers, sharing a scholarly air and a finely honed comic sense — deeply immersed in a story in the Bangkok Post about the Karen tribal rebels in Burma. They were devoted to the Karen cause and had fought in and reported on every major Karen/Burmese campaign for the past six years. (The Karen — accent on the second syllable — are a tribe in Burma, one of a large group of tribes including the Shan, the Wa, the Karenni, and many others.) They looked up and grinned as we entered. We quickly got them drunk on Singha beer and convinced them to command our bad guys, the Asian horde of actors and extras playing the North Vietnamese, who were to set ambushes and conduct night attacks against our American actors in training: Danny Glover, Ray Liotta, Denis Leary, Doug E. Doug, and Corin Nemec.

It was not an easy sell; Don and Dave are not starstruck. What they really wanted was to take Jared and me over the border and see if we could get in some boom-boom.

Dave leaned back in his seat and smiled sardonically as he told us about the State Law and Order Restoration Council, the illegal military government of Burma. I'd seen pictures of them on Thai television. They all look like Oddjob, the James Bond villain, and dress like Nazi bus drivers.

The guiding light of SLORC, General Ne Win, was then about 85. “He had been the dictator, back in the ‘60s,” Dave told us. “His most noteworthy act then was to kick the American ambassador square in the balls when his car stalled and blocked Ne Win's driveway.”

I grinned when Dave told me that. Who has not wanted to kick an American ambassador in the balls?

Dave went on to describe the Burmese custom of burying a slave alive under the cornerstone of a pagoda as it is being built, “So that the spirit of the slave will protect the pagoda.”

“Seems to me the spirit would rather see that sucker torn to the ground with not a stone left standing,” I said, assuming this quaint practice had been discontinued about a thousand years ago. “When was the last time they did it?”

“Nineteen ninety-two,” he replied. “They rebuilt a couple of old pagodas on Sleeping Dog Hill when they recaptured it from the Karen. They buried two Karen girls who had been impressed as porters.” (Porters, in this instance, are usually ethnic civilians coerced into carrying supplies and ammunition for the Burmese army — slave labor.)



Dave, Jim and Don chewing betel on the trail.



Going in with the Karen was something both Jared and I had wanted to do for years. But the reserves would court-martial him for fighting in an unauthorized war, and I had to consider that Myrna Saxe, my lady friend and future wife was coming. She was profoundly allergic to armed ground combat.

When I took up with Myrna, she laid down some conditions. The first was that I put all forms of international intrigue behind me. No soldiers of fortune, no guerrilla movements. No “Dogs of War,” as she called them. To this I readily agreed.

I lied.

When Myrna arrived, almost the first words out of my mouth were, “Wanna go to Burma for Christmas?”

“Yeah!”

I described the trip as a few days at a charming guesthouse in a lovely little community beside the Moei River. I convinced myself that once we got there, she would love it.

Just before we started filming, one of our rented Royal Thai Army helicopters, painted with U.S. Army markings for the film, strayed briefly into the Shan state of Burma, Myanmar...whatever. Thai customs agents subsequently discovered a shipment of Stinger shoulder-fired ground-to-air missiles that Khun Sa, the opium warlord, had ordered to repel the feared American invasion.

He wasn't real thrilled when we began running small patrols of movie stars and maniacs on his infiltration routes either.

### A Town Full of Spies

Nine weeks later, in Mae Sot, Myrna and I checked into spartan rooms at the Porn Thap Hotel. “This town is full of spies,” she said, looking out the window. She was right. The town was just opposite the Karen state and was a center for gem smuggling as well.

“Why do you say that?” I asked, innocently.

“Antennas,” replied former SSG Myrna Saxe, honor graduate of the USAF Electronics School.

I looked out the window. Within the forest of TV aerials on the surrounding roofs were whip and inverted-L antennas, designed to serve powerful two-way radios. They were very obvious, and the Thai aren't stupid about these things. If all the spies working Thailand's borders were jailed, the agents would be quickly replaced by people the Thai didn't know. Better — far better — for all the spies from every side to sit in cafés, sipping tea, and keeping notes on each other.

That evening Don and Dave took us to the Karen safe house, in a residential area of Mae Sot. The Karen have no outside backers, and have to pick up a buck when they can. In their safe house they had a table of hand woven tribal cloth, some paintings

and revolutionary pamphlets. Myrna said, “I never heard of a safe house with a gift shop before.” She's never done intelligence work, but she's read all of Eric Ambler, and the Russians once tried to recruit her when she was doing an engineering gig for the European Space Agency. She turned the guy in and he was expelled from France.

The next morning a pickup carrying supplies to the rebels — 100-kilo bags of rice and chickens in cages — drew up in front of the hotel. We put Myrna in the cab, and Dave and I arranged the rice bags to make a fairly comfortable seat, facing the rear. Except for the occasional temple, white with red trim and a shimmering blue-and-gold Chinese roof, or a pagoda that resembled a 50-foot-tall bishop in a gigantic chess set, the country around us looked like the Ozark Mountains.

That lasted until we turned off the paved road and all but dived toward a creek at the bottom of the hill, a long roostertail of reddish dust rising behind. At intervals there were thatch-roofed hill-tribe villages on stilts and small brown people lining the side of the road, children jumping and shouting.

### Sir Piss-Me-Off and the Longtailed Boats

Forty minutes later we coasted down the last hill, round the last bend, and came to Klecherloo, a cluster of thatch-roofed open-front stores by the riverbank. There were a couple of pickups and a motorbike parked on the open sandy bank. A few smugglers sat at the wooden tables in front of the stores, eating soup or drinking beer.

Don and two of his friends stepped from the shade of a thatch-roofed store. One was a Karen sniper whose name I never got. The other was a young Karen civil official, in shorts and a polo shirt, named Pat Boon. The shooter was a nice enough guy and very quiet. His rifle was a scoped M-16. Not a good sniper weapon, but probably the best available in Karen country.

We grabbed our stuff off the pickup and went for a beer while waiting for the boatman to prepare for departure.



A long tail boat on the Moei River, seen from the Karen Guest House.

The river was wide and beautiful, with jungled mountains rising on either side. A young woman in a sarong stood in water to her hips, a few feet into the river, bending to wash her long hair, glistening black in the sun.

An hour later we boarded. In the past few years the riverboats in Thailand had revolutionized commerce on the waterways. They were the principal reason our journey was half a day, rather than ten full ones. The boats are maybe thirty feet long and five wide at their widest. They are powered by used six-cylinder automobile engines mounted on a long shaft that trails the boat, turning a tiny propeller at a high rate of speed. To steer, the boatman raises, lowers, and turns the long shaft, with the engine, unmuffled and roaring, mounted on it as a counterbalance.

Dave said the long-tailed boat was the invention of Saw Lay Wee, a manic-depressive, half-Chinese Karen known to all, because of his surly disposition, as Sir Piss-Me-Off. Sir Piss-Me-Off had been Minister of Trade of the Karen National Union and invented the powered long-tailed boat as a means to further the Karen rebels' teak smuggling, their most lucrative business until the Burmese took over most of it. Which is why the Karen army is neither as large nor as well supplied as that of Khun Sa, the opium warlord.

Sir Piss-Me-Off came to a bad end. He grew physically abusive during one of his manic periods and was confined to wait for his mood to improve. Unfortunately, the bamboo jail was not secure and the guerrilla guards were not professional. Sir Piss-Me-Off wrested an M-16 from one of his guards, killed them both, and was himself wasted as he exited the building.

The long-tailed boats are a great ride, long and narrow, low in the water, and plenty powerful enough to batter their way upstream against rapids. As waves hit the boat, spray and sometimes bucket-loads of warm water splashed over the side, much of it into our laps.

I'd never been to Burma. All I really knew about the Burmese was that their government had been overthrown by a dictatorship that had brutally repressed its own people, drafted its citizens into slave-labor work gangs, and tried, thus far unsuccessfully, to subdue its ethnic minorities, in violation of the treaty that freed Burma from the British in 1948.

Since then, most of those minorities have maintained a degree of autonomy by force of arms. For years the Burmese mounted an annual dry-season offensive, which would destroy every village it encountered, then bog down as casualties mounted the further they got into the interior.

The Burmese have a conscript army. Soldiers' pay is routinely stolen by their officers; their wounded are routinely executed. Their perks are rape and pillage and to impress porters to do the heavy work. They advance as scavengers.

### Snake of Fire

For the first time the Karen represented a potential threat to the survival of the regime in Rangoon — Yangon, if you prefer. It did not appear that the hated junta (SLORC) could retain power for more than a few more years. Burmese military officers were scrambling to set themselves up in lucrative business ventures. Hence the impressment of slave-labor gangs to build up the infrastructure.

At the highest level the Burmese officers attached themselves to big-business ventures. Unocal, for instance, was cooperating with Total, the French firm, to build a gigantic gas pipeline from Burma to Thailand, across the Karen's northern border. (The Unocal/Total pipeline venture started in 1993, was completed in 1998, and is still in place, pumping natural gas to Thailand.) No sabotage target is so vulnerable as a gas pipeline, especially one running through the jungle. The consortium planned to bury it six feet deep. The junta advised 20. General Bo Mya, the Karen commander, vowed to turn it into a "snake of fire."

Finally we spotted Manerplaw on a high bluff, a ramshackle collection of bamboo, lath, and thatch structures. The boatman cut his engine, and we coasted to the shore. I shouldered my pack and some of Myrna's bags of medicine and field-sanitation equipment. We started up the steep, winding dirt path to the guesthouse at the top of the bluff.

Aside from Myrna, Dave, Don, and me, the guests were three young Caucasian women. Chris, a gorgeous Belgian backpacker, had gotten the fever and apprenticed herself to a Canadian human-rights worker who was trying to help the Karen. She was in that first flush of doing for others, and her eyes burned with it. Carmella Bell, a gamine blonde Aussie in cammie pants and Keith Haring T-shirt, was just in for a couple of days from her usual post with the rebels'



Carmella Bell and Myrna in Manerplaw



Dave and Jim in Manerplaw.



6th Brigade. Her reason for being in this dangerous, uncomfortable place was that she was “thinking about writing a book about it.” Minka, a Dutch journalist, actually was writing a book, but not about Burma or the Karen. She was in Manerplaw “visiting friends.”

The guesthouse dining room was spacious and had a great view — unimpeded by glass, screen, or shutters — of the river, the Thai jungle on the other side, and the long-tail boat traffic. The river and the jungle were peaceful, but the racket from those unmuffled six-cylinder automobile engines made the place sound like Indianapolis on Memorial Day. Lunch consisted of rice and something else. I don't know what it was and don't want to. I do know it was considered a delicacy and was served in our honor. On the other hand, Dave had recently been so honored by monkey brains stewed in monkey shit.

### The Vegetarian Revolt

The fighting units were all out, and the soldiers left in camp were kids, the youngest maybe twelve, none older than sixteen. The soldiers we met wore flip-flops, sarongs, fatigue shirts, an AK-47 slung barrel down on their shoulders, and usually a flower in their hair. They gave us either suspicious glances or big smiles. I think the looks were directed at Myrna, who stood five feet ten inches.

Don and Dave briefed me on the current situation. Having failed in their 1992 offensive, the Burmese had gotten smart. The Karen state holds only about half the Karen in Burma, about two million people. The other two million have become the underclass of the Burmese underclass. Some are in the army.

One of those was a Buddhist monk, Myaing Gyi Ngu Sayadaw, who served as brigade chaplain to one of the Burmese units. The Burmese sent him to exploit divisions within the Karen National Union.

If you want a career in the Karen National Liberation Army the best thing you can be is a Seventh Day Adventist and the next best thing is a Baptist. It's hard for a Buddhist to make it past captain. Bo Mya himself converted from Buddhism to Christianity, probably for career purposes. The monk Myaing Gyi Ngu Sayadaw came into Karen country and organized a following of Karen Buddhists. Then he convinced them to revolt against the revolution. Don and Dave called it the Vegetarian Revolt.

The revolting Buddhist Karen had set up their headquarters in a monastery, Cher Moei Cha, on Sleeping Dog Hill, about ten kilo-

meters north of Manerplaw, at the intersection of the Salween and Moei Rivers. All the movers and shakers of Manerplaw had gone up there for a parlay.

With the Christian and Buddhist Karen forces split, the Karen National Union headquarters — which is where we were — was a sitting duck for the Burmese, and they were just on the other side of Sleeping Dog Hill.

### Camp Hitler and the Frogs of War

As we were coming back to the guesthouse, a Land Rover drove up with two French mercenaries and a couple of Karen henchmen standing upright in the open back, in camouflage jungle kit, weapons ready, faces grim. Don and Dave had told me about these guys, Jean-Luc and Jean-Phillippe. They were former French commandos who believed in some weird Valhalla religion and were said to eschew the company of women. They were on the current merc circuit; Bosnia in the summertime; Burma in winter.

I don't usually see auras, but these guys' auras were black holes. I didn't want to talk to them, and I didn't want to shake their hands. I had met the Frogs of War.

Quite a few volunteers have come to fight with the Karen over the years, and a goodly percentage of them have been killed. One was a French captain, a St. Cyr graduate who had organized the first Karen commando company. Their camp was named for him, Camp Guillaume, although Don and Dave usually called it Camp Hitler, because the Frogs of War gave the camp commander a picture of der Führer, which he displayed on a wall behind his desk.

Another foreign volunteer who got himself killed was Lance Motley, a West Pointer who came as a reporter for *Soldier of Fortune*.

At dinner, all talk, always, was about the Karen/Burmese war. Don told us the ability of the Karen to react swiftly to a breaking situation was hindered by their reverence for age. The old guys ran everything, and they intended to keep it that way, regardless of changes in the situation — tactical, strategic, political, or psychological.

For instance, the central command ran the villages through the village headman, who was of the village but was appointed by the central command — and reported to it — by hiking in for instructions. In some of these villages, nobody from the central government had been out



Dave and Myrna in front of a community meeting house in a Thai village.



A young KNLA trooper takes a break to cool his feet.

to check on the people for a decade. The villages were taxed, their young men were drafted through the headman, and the results in terms of favoritism were what you would expect.

We spent the better part of a week hanging out with journalists and refugee workers. We spent Christmas in the company of Vivien Morgan, a BBC correspondent, and a bottle of Jim Beam I'd brought for the absent high officials.

I wanted to go to Sleeping Dog Hill and see the festivities. Myrna was apprehensive and begged me not to. As I would have no function there but to throw my chest out and posture I assented, but felt bad about it. I wanted to do something.

### Pat Boon

On the evening of the 26th, Don and Dave took me to a meeting with the civil official, Pat Boon. He had asked their opinion about how the Karen could re-establish good relations with their people. Don and Dave had told him about my description of village liaison cadre teams in my book *War Story*. He wanted to know all about them.

We met over a guttering candle in a small general store filled with natural foods and Chinese remedies. We sat at a small table and drank tea. For three hours I laid out every detail of the Vietcong cadre team: selection, training, employment, security, communications, and logistics.

The version I taught had been adapted by my first commanding officer in Vietnam, Captain Crews McCulloch. We had been unable to bring remote tribal villages, controlled by the Vietcong through their cadre teams, into the Strategic Hamlet program. (The program, adopted by the American and South Vietnamese governments in South Vietnam in the early '60s, in imitation of a similar program used successfully by the Brits in Malaya in the late '50s, relocated villages into more defensible positions, with defensive perimeters and local militia guards.)

Crews' idea was that we could counter this with teams of our own. Because we had more stuff and more money, we'd be able to do more for the villagers, especially in the medical area.

The idea was to find bright, dedicated young people, then give them a sense of mission and high morale. The teams were six people: a leader, a medic, an agricultural advisor, an engineering advisor, a security guy, and an intelligence specialist.

The security specialist's main job was to organize a system of trail watchers, groups of three kids with one old weapon and a couple of rounds. The idea was that when the Burmese came along the trail, these kids would zing a couple of rounds at them and then scamper off. When the village heard the shots, they would grab what they could and head for the hills.

The village usually was burned out, but nobody was killed or kidnapped, and you could rebuild a bamboo and rattan village in about six weeks.

When I finished, Pat Boon shook my hand warmly. "Other advisors come to teach us to march and shoot," he said.

"But you teach a way we can win our revolution."

"Yeah," I replied. "If you can get it approved."

"I will try," he said. "Not now, but soon."

When we returned to the film location, the atmosphere had changed. Many of our Vietnamese actors were not professionals, and one of them was a DEA agent in real life. On one of his days off from the movie, he busted five of Khun Sa's top henchmen. Khun Sa was threatening retaliation against all Americans, and it was not lost on our producers that the most prominent Americans in northern Thailand at the time were our movie's stars.

We shot the firebase sequence at Lop Buri, home of the Thai Special Forces, in two weeks and wrapped in Thailand, to shoot the remaining aerial sequence in Florida. Having missed Manerplaw, Jared stuck around for a week to jump with the Royal Thai Army Sport Parachute Team, then the current world champs.

### The Lighter that Burned Manerplaw

A few weeks later, Myrna and I arrived in Bangkok and checked into the Oriental just in time to see, over the BBC World Service, that Manerplaw had fallen. The Karen National Liberation Army had burned it to the ground and abandoned it, just ahead of the advancing Burmese. They burned the city and, of course, their headquarters and evacuated. Refugees were pouring over the river into Thailand; the conventional wisdom was that the Karen were all washed up.

So it was with an anxious heart that I waited for Don and Dave in the lobby of the Oriental Hotel the evening before we left. It is impossible to exaggerate the opulence of that lobby. I sat nursing my discouragement with single-malt scotch, listening to a formally attired string quartet play something classical, wondering if Don and Dave had gotten my message and would show before we left.

Far from looking dejected, Don and Dave entered, still in cammies and sneaks, wearing big grins. Dave fired up a filtertip and said, "This is the lighter that burned Manerplaw. When it runs out of fluid, I'm going to have it bronzed."



Don and three KNLA officers in front of their burning headquarters in Manerplaw



Over dinner that night they confirmed what I had hoped. The fall of Manerplaw had, in fact, solved a lot of problems. The ancient leadership had gone into exile in Thailand, removing one stumbling block. The new young leadership would have to be mobile in the jungle, would have to stay in contact with the people, and would have to promote on merit, rather than religion and family. Losing the capital had cleaned out a lot of deadwood.

In the years since, not a lot has changed. Bo Mya has retired and been replaced by a younger general. The Karen have continued to fight, but if they inaugurated my VC cadre teams, word has not reached my informants. The pipeline is complete, and the Karen have blown a spur line, but not the main one. ❖

## Burma Update

By Edith Mirante

The Burma (Myanmar) military regime kept its absolute grip on power until a 2015 national election was a landslide for the party of longtime opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. But the military still holds 25% of seats in Parliament by constitutional mandate.

A rush of foreign investment followed the changeover, by the West as well as China which installed two south to north petroleum pipelines. Civil society organizations have had more breathing room although there are still crackdowns on the press, artists and activists.

Even in remote areas people have acquired motorbikes and cellphones. But the phones came with Facebook installed and Buddhist extremist social media posts stirred up ethnic hatred. In 2017 Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw) unleashed a genocidal campaign against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic group in the west, driving out an estimated 745,000 as refugees to Bangladesh. Former democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi defended her generals' actions during a genocide trial in the International Court of Justice.

Ethnic conflict continues across Myanmar with the Kachin Independence Army in the north, Arakan Army in the west and other ethnic forces fighting the Tatmadaw, which buys its arms and aircraft from China and Russia.

Having fought an extraordinarily good fight since 1949 the Karen National Liberation Army (armed force of Karen National Union) in 2012 signed a National Ceasefire Agreement offered by the Myanmar (Burma) government.

Continued on page 13



## Humping Ruck

*A poem by former Marine Paul Williams.  
I think we can all relate.-ed.*

We humped our ruck from jungle valleys to mountain spines  
And fought every inch of the way  
With bullets flying and people dying  
And no one knowing what lay beyond

When we got where we were going  
There was nothing there  
Except footprints where the mortars  
And the machine-guns had been

Shell casings littered the ground  
The skipper did not secure the ridge line  
More mortars dropped on us from behind it  
And my radio operator stumbled bleeding down the slope

His nineteen-year old back was riddled with shrapnel  
His face a mask of fear of death  
I put him over my shoulder  
And took him behind a rock

His name is on The Wall in Washington  
He was not then old enough to vote



Reviewed by Jim Morris

My last nine months in the army were spent in a series of hospitals undergoing and recovering from eight operations on my right arm. When I got out I was out of shape and a little nuts.

Reading the first four of Carlos Castaneda's books convinced me that I needed to reclaim my warrior spirit in the civilian world, or I simply would not survive it. My demons were worse enemies than Asian Communists.

From my dad I learned yoga and meditation. He had been a sergeant in the Depression army, but he had been doing yoga since he was a kid plowing behind a mule in the Ozarks.

And I also took up Aikido ("The Way of Harmony"), a martial art exactly opposite of the smash and bash of Karate, emphasizing blending with and taking your opponent's attack down in a circle.

Twelve years later I was a book editor in New York, and thrilled to come across the book I'm reviewing here, realizing that the army, specifically the 10th SFGA, had a program that closely paralleled the path I had followed, with much the same effects.

The Trojan Warrior project emphasized meditation, Aikido, and biofeedback, blended mind, body, and spirit exercises designed to up a Special Forces operator's skill set significantly.

Richard Strozzi-Heckler was the Aikido guy. He is a Navy brat, a former Marine, Sixth degree Aikido black belt with a PhD in Clinical Psychology.

There were problems. SportsMind, the program administering the project, had insisted that all soldiers in the program be volunteers. About a third of them were. The rest were "strongly recommended" to volunteer, and, for the most part were not fully with the program. There was resistance.

They started with a month of Aikido and PT, not their usual army PT, but their own program. That was followed by a month of Aikido and meditation. Gosh, when they opened their minds they found – Surprise! – a lot of rage. A month of meditation mellowed, muted, and neutralized most of it for most of the subjects. Some of them began to see the value of this work.

Then the biofeedback taught them to control their minds and bodies in ways that they had not expected.

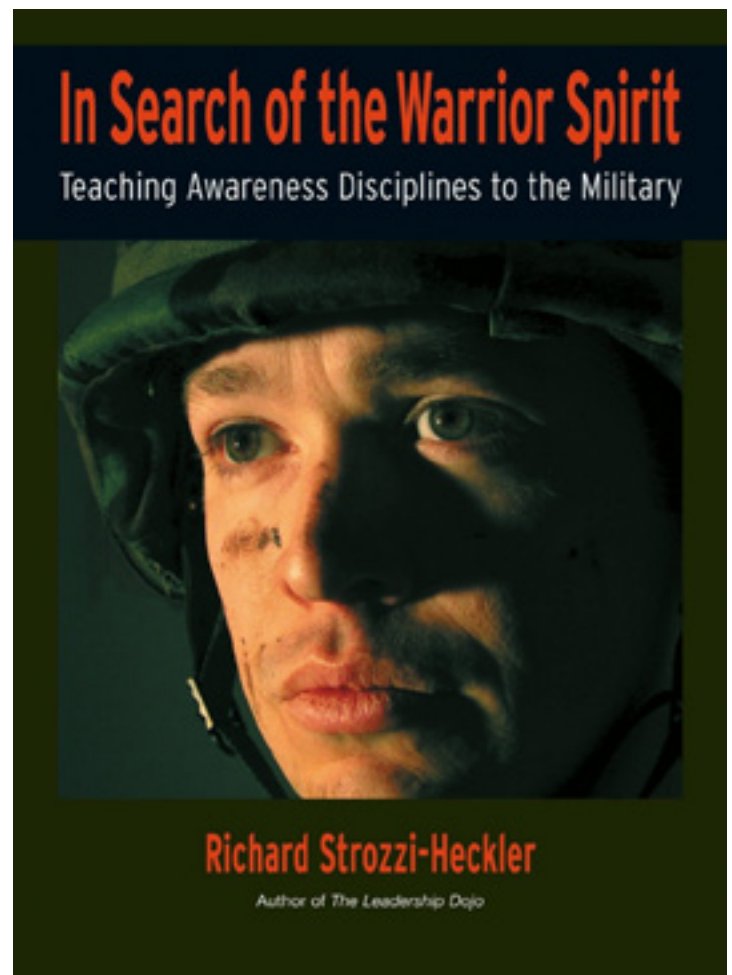
The soldiers also took their trainers on a lot of what they'd have been doing anyway, small boat training, skiing. Two of the trainers were former Marines and adapted quickly and effectively, forming a separate unit withing SF, but not wholly SF, with it's own esprit and camaraderie. In spite of almost drowning a couple of times Heckler ate it up.

Did it work? Like gangbusters! These guys were already at the top of the army's PT scores, but they bested themselves by twenty to thirty percent. And their marriages and family relationships improved, also exponentially.

Remember, this was the army. In spite of the program's success when the Group commanders changed the new guy threw it all out.

When I decided to review this book I looked for my copy and couldn't find it, so I ordered a new one from Kindle. Good thing I did. This is the fourth edition, and it takes the story forward. Since the Trojan Warrior project Heckler had done a smaller such program for the SEALs, and another for the Marines, culminating in the development of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program. He also tried to put one together for the Afghan National Army. In spite of support from both high-ranking Afghans and Americans this program has not gone forward, for budgetary reasons.

He's also kept in touch with the original Trojan Warrior soldiers, some of whom have become lifelong friends. About a third of them don't think it made them better operators, but all agree that it made them happier, more effective human beings.❖



[In Search of the Warrior Spirit, Fourth Edition:  
Teaching Awareness Disciplines to the Green Berets](#)

by Richard Strozzi-Heckler

Blue Snake Books; 4th Revised Edition (November 13, 2007)

448 pages



# Boy Scout Troop 90 Shoot-Out at Lytle Creek



Fifteen members of Boy Scout Troop 90 from Newport Beach worked to earn their Rifle Shooting merit badge at Lytle Creek on October 11, 2020. They are pictured here shooting 22s and M1s (which the boys loved!). They also shot AR15s and 20 gauge shotguns at the event. Chapter 78's combined members were able to supply 7,780 rounds of ammunition to the troop for this event. The boys and parents had a great day!



## Burma Update continued

The KNLA ceasefire did not result in Tatmadaw troop withdrawal so tensions remain along with factionalism among the Karens and encroachments on their land including controversial coal and tin mining plus a Chinese gambling casino development project. Karen refugees have been reluctant to return to Myanmar and the US now has numerous Karen refugee communities.

### Recommended reading:

Zoya Pham's *Undaunted* (2013) and Pascal Kwe Thoo's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (2002.) *All Saints* (2017) is a movie based on a true story about Karen refugees in the US. The Free Burma

Rangers is a humanitarian aid group founded by Dave Eubanks who served in 2nd Ranger Battalion and 1st Special Forces Group. Their website is a great info source on Myanmar and other conflict zones: [www.freeburmarangers.org](http://www.freeburmarangers.org)

### ABOUT EDITH MIRANTE

Edith Mirante is author of two books about Burma, *Burmese Looking Glass* and *Down the Rat Hole* and founded Project Maje [www.project-maje.org](http://www.project-maje.org) which distributes information on Burma (Myanmar) human rights and environmental issues. Global City Review published her recent essay on World War II artists, "[Drawing Soldiers in Burma.](#)"



# SFA Chapter 78 October 2020 Meeting

(Photos by How and Nancy Miller)

- ❶ Major Bob Ashley, the new Commander of A (Alpha) Company and Chapter President Bruce Long
- ❷ SFC Ken Atkinson
- ❸ SFACON 2021 Director John Joyce gave an update the convention plans.
- ❹ Several members of Company A were in attendance
- ❺ SFC Dave Dougherty and Bruce Long
- ❻ Brad Welker, center, with Mr. and Mrs. SFC Kevin Brady.
- ❼ Chapter Secretary Gary Macnamara
- ❽ Enjoying breakfast prior to the meeting.
- ❾ Susan Weeks, Honorary Chapter Vice President
- ❿ Kristapor Boodaghian, Crews Morris, and *Sentinel* Editor Jim Morris
- ⓫ Chapter member Mike Jamison
- ⓬ Chapter member How Miller and Major Bob Ashley
- ⓬ Mark and Kenn Miller
- ⓭ John Creel was in attendance wearing his well worn original beret and Tokyo 2020 Marathon shirt.
- ⓮ Chapter members socialize after the meeting.

