



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 8 • AUGUST 2021

## REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN

**16 SF KIA**  
**FOB 4/CCN, August 23, 1968**

### **A Letter From A Friend**

A Soldier's Tribute to a Friend Lost at FOB4

Afghanistan to Arlington —

### **We Are Sentinels**

Assault Into the Sangin Valley —

**"That's What Heroes Do"**







# SENTINEL

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 8 • AUGUST 2021

## From the Editor



How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

This issue has many aspects: action, respect, introspection, great writing, and good news, from CHIEFSOG Jack Singlaub's 100th birthday, to long overdue recognition with legendary Ranger Ralph Puckett's Medal of Honor, described by John Friberg, editor of SOF. NEWS, and a USASOC announcement of 60 Silver Stars and more for Mogadishu actions.

John "Tilt" Meyer recalls how formidable the NVA were, the arch enemies of MACV-SOG. Through planning, intelligence, sympathizers and reckless self-regard, the NVA managed to attack the super-secret CCN where they lived, with devastating results. John gives a blunt account of how many things went wrong at FOB4, and what it took to overcome them.

Chapter 78 Gold Star member Steve Bric, lost his brother Bill at FOB4, and shares a letter from a friend of Bill's he received years later. It is a poignant and well written story in its own right. Steve is forever grateful for that letter.

Alex Quade who has long covered SF, frequently embedded downrange, pens two pieces. First she tells of her visit, with other of our comrades in arms, to Arlington National Cemetery, and many of her memories of some who are buried there. Then she expands on the loss of Flipper 75 that she had been scheduled to be on during its final mission, sharing ODA 726's Joff Celleri's letter of his first hand experience.

Then that operation is described from a different perspective, highlighting how a small SF detachment, "without orders from higher", took it upon themselves to come to the aid of their fellow soldiers and airmen, "because that's what heroes do" in Alex's words. She also shared a letter of appreciation from the aviation commander to the team, along with exclusive downrange photos from that Sanjin Valley operation. Our three August guest speakers were on that op. Check out Alex's video! ([see the link on page 15](#))

Steve Sherman is a former Green Beret who has helped uncountable numbers of us with information on how to find old teammates, and a cataloging that has helped us place ourselves in the big picture. In his lifelong endeavor he has written a series of books, one for each year of the Vietnam War. He has finally completed the series, and it is described by Mike Bengé, who is one of the many contributors to the collection. There's even a special deal for us on the set. ([see page 16](#))

Medics, from all of our readership, please send pics and stories to Dennis DeRosia for the SFACON medic event.

Another SF Medic, MOH recipient, Gary Beikirck, appears on Army Times with an inspiring video in the series "Dear Young American": <https://www.militarytimes.com/video/2021/07/27/you-have-to-decide-what-is-the-right-thing-to-do-dear-young-american-gary-beikirck/> ♦

How Miller, Sentinel Editor

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**FRONT COVER:** SOTF-71 CMDR COL Pat Mahaney pays final respects onboard C-130 to 1-of-3 of his 7SFG Green Berets KIA, KAF, Afghanistan, 2007. (Courtesy SOTF-71)



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[specialforces78.com](http://specialforces78.com)  
and [sfa78cup.com](http://sfa78cup.com)



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# From the President | August 2021



Bruce Long, President SFA Chap. 78

Our meeting at the Eagle's Nest, in the city of Cypress, got off to a late start due to staff issues. But as most of you know, as SF we are flexible and when we can't be flexible we become fluid. I had a COL tell me that once and it has stuck with me during frustrating times.

The big event of the Chapter meeting was the celebration of **Richard Simonian's** eighty-ninth Birthday. We sang him two rounds of "HIM" even in mixed company. A delicious sheet cake was provided by my wife Geri. Our Chapter meeting

was well attended with thirty members in attendance. One of our "Old Time" members **Sal Sanders** was present, along with his wife. Other guests included **Jim Suber's** wife and son, and our guest speaker Frank Snepp III and his daughter Paige.

Our guest speaker Frank Snepp III, a former Chief analyst for the CIA, was in Saigon right up to the bitter end. For those of us who served in 'Nam it was quite informative. A real eye opener was hearing how a double NVA agent, Vo Van Ba, the Ambassador Graham Martin, CIA Station Chief Polgar, and Henry Kissinger all played major roles in the withdrawal of military forces and the South Vietnamese agents and families that were loyal to the U.S. For those of you who were not in attendance, you really missed out on one of the best speakers of the year.

We gained seven new LIFE members to our Chapter — **John Gietzen, Nicholas Murray, Gianni Pacheco, Steven Sechier, Rostislav Tokman, Andrew Vargas,** and **Broneil Baytkarimmoshahad** (that's one long name tag). These individuals just completed the Q-course. Since we instituted LIFE memberships for individuals who have a HOR in CA, we now have fifteen new members — thanks to Richard Simonian's generosity.

As most of you know, the Chapter made a \$10,000 donation to National for an upgrade to their software. Club Express is the name of the new software, and will be going into effect as I write this column. This will allow a wider distribution of not only our *Sentinel* Newsletter, and will allow easier access to National and the forwarding of new chapter applications, to just name a few improvements. This will bring National into the 21st Century. John Joyce, a former member of our Chapter, and who is now a member of SFA Chapter 51 (Las Vegas), is part of the driving force behind this project. John is also the Director of the upcoming October 2021 SFA Convention in Las Vegas.

Get ready for our August 21 special guest speaker, Pat Mahaney COL, SF (ret). For more details on our upcoming speaker, please read the back page of the July *Sentinel* — **very impressive.**

The next Chapter meeting is scheduled Saturday, August 21 at the Joint Forces Training Base (JFTB) in the city of Las Alamos. Same time, same room. Please remember to email Don Gonnevill at [don@gonneville.com](mailto:don@gonneville.com).

As usual, if you have questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to me. ❖

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

## COMPLIMENTS TO THE SENTINEL

We received this note and update from former SF COL Alan Shumate, Ch.1-18's Treasurer:

"Thank you, Alex Quade, you made me smile, I mean really smile with that article ("Brotherhood Builds Over BBQ & Beer," *Sentinel* July 2021 issue, the photo at right, upper left appeared along with the story). The photo attached (see far right) is from the 28 June 2021 SGM(R) Walter Shumate bridge dedication in Pocahontas, VA, my Dad's hometown. SF for life — and beyond! Thank you for supporting SF and telling our stories. DOL — Alan Shumate"

FYI: CSM Walter L. Shumate, Distinguished Member of SF Regiment, served seven tours in Vietnam, among other accomplishments. Pictured at right, bottom left, he was well known for his large handle-bar mustache. ([https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/RegimentalHonors/pdf/sf\\_shumate.pdf](https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/RegimentalHonors/pdf/sf_shumate.pdf))





# Happy Birthday MG Singlaub!

John Singlaub was born in Southern California, a graduate of Van Nuys High School and UCLA, he had an illustrious career in the US Army and beyond. He very early began fighting behind enemy lines in a Jedberg unit in France. He worked with the CIA in Manchuria during the communist revolution. He commanded troops in Korea and was CHIEFSOG for two years in Vietnam, running the super secret MACVSOG in enemy territory, and remained active for decades more.

The Special Operators Association created an award in his name, which is “presented annually to a deserving recipient who [like Jack] exemplifies the Special Operations Forces Next traits, the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) promise, and demonstrates an unwavering commitment to bettering ARSOF.”

He just celebrated his 100th birthday on July 10th. John “Tilt” Meyer, our Chapter 78 ambassador and past President, went to visit Jack a few days earlier. Tilt said, “When we visited Jack he has his new copies of the Sentinel on the table and said he was going to read them. He also sent us a thank you note for the flowers that we sent him and for remembering him as a member of Chapter 78.” ♦

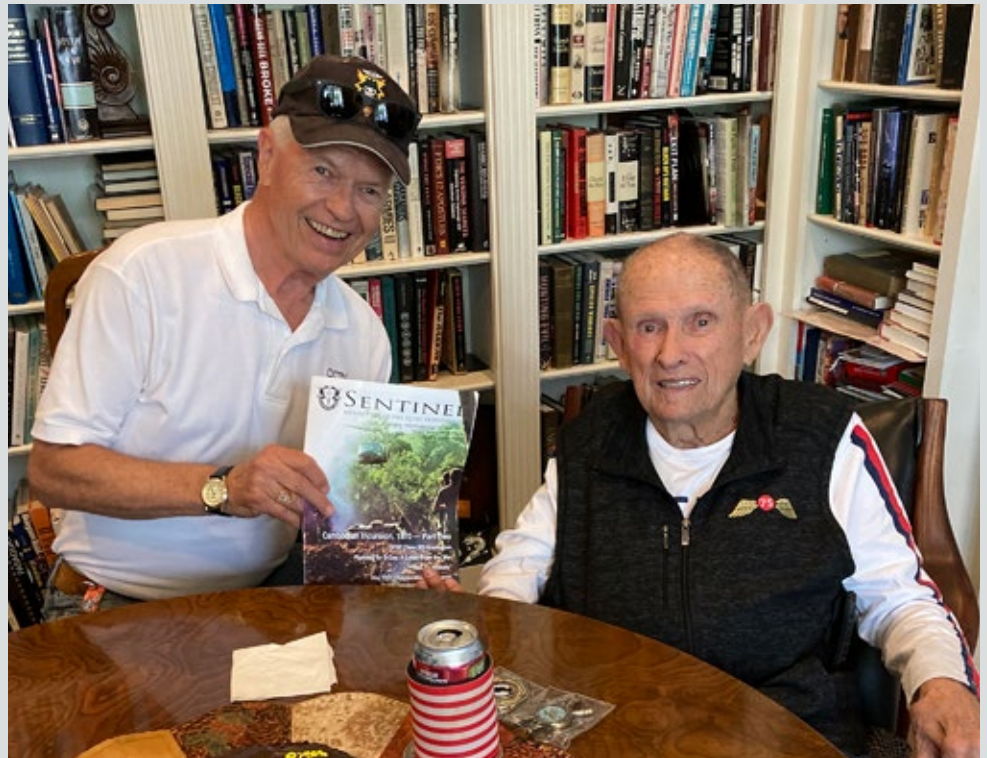
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Read the issues of the Sentinel listed below at [specialforces78.com](http://specialforces78.com) to learn more about Jacks exploits:

[April 2019](#), February 1967: Skyhook and MG Singlaub

[August 2020](#), SINGLAUB: The Jedburgh Mission

[September 2020](#), SINGLAUB—Parachuting Into Prison: Special Ops In China



John Stryker Meyer, left, and John “Jack” Singlaub at his home



John K. Singlaub on a 1941 Matchless G3 motorcycle used in Operation Jedburgh during WWII in Belgium, France and Holland.

# 60 Army Special Operators Awards Upgraded for Operation Gothic Serpent



By USASOC Public Affairs,  
July 1, 2021  
News Release #21-07-001

FORT BRAGG, N. C. – The U.S. Army approved the upgrade of sixty Army special operators' awards for their heroic actions during Operation Gothic Serpent — more commonly known as the Battle of Mogadishu or “Black Hawk Down.” Fifty-eight awards were upgraded to Silver Stars and two were upgraded to Distinguished Flying Crosses.



The upgrades are a result of the October 2020 directive from former Secretary of the Army, Ryan McCarthy, who directed the Senior Army Decorations Board to re-evaluate

previously approved awards for valor.

The Silver Star Medal is the third-highest military combat award and is awarded in recognition of a valorous act performed during combat operations while under fire from enemy forces.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is awarded in recognition of heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.

The upgraded awards will be presented later this year in separate commemoration ceremonies hosted by the units in which the Soldier served at the time of the mission.

Operation Gothic Serpent, led by U. S. Special Operations Forces during the Somali Civil War, took place in Mogadishu, Somalia, from August to October 1993. On the afternoon of October 3, armed militants shot down two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, after which U.S. ground forces converged on the two downed aircraft to recover the personnel. The ensuing intense firefight resulted in the loss of 18 American Soldiers and remains an especially significant point in the history of the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Special Operations Command specifically.

2021 marks the 28th anniversary of Operation Gothic Serpent. ❖

## **-SINE PARI-**

## Col (Ret.) Ralph Puckett Medal of Honor



President Joseph Biden presents the Medal of Honor to retired Col. Ralph Puckett Jr., on May 21, 2021. (Spc. XaViera Masline)

By John Friberg  
(2021, February 24, [sof.news](https://sof.news/history/col-ret-ralph-puckett-medal-of-honor/), <https://sof.news/history/col-ret-ralph-puckett-medal-of-honor/>)

Colonel (Ret.) Ralph Puckett Jr. was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions while serving as the commander of the 8th Ranger Company during the Korean War. Puckett was a career Army soldier who served in both the Korean and Vietnam wars. After his service in Korea, he attended Special Forces training and commanded Special Forces B and C teams in the 10th Special Forces Group in Bad Tolz, Germany. He was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Biden in a ceremony on May 21, 2021 at the White House.

In November 1950, Puckett and his Rangers attacked and secured Hill 205 in the vicinity of Unsan, Korea. His company held off five Chinese counterattacks after taking the hill — even though they were outnumbered ten to one. On the sixth counterattack, they were overrun in hand-to-hand combat. Puckett was wounded multiple times and unable to move, but his men managed to evacuate him to safety.

Puckett continued to serve on active duty after the Korean War. His subsequent assignments include the U.S. Army Ranger School, West Point, and other postings. While serving as a Ranger advisor to the Colombian Army, he helped establish the Escuela de Lanceros program. His other awards include a Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Legions of Merit, two Bronze Stars with V device, five Purple Hearts, and others.

In 1971, he retired from the Army and became involved in a number of activities and organizations. He was the national programs coordinator of Outward Bound, Inc. and established Discovery, Inc. He would receive several other prestigious honors after his military retirement, including induction into the U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame and as honorary colonel of the 75th Ranger Regiment. ❖

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**About the Author:** John Friberg is the editor and publisher of [SOF News](https://sof.news). He is a retired Command Chief Warrant Officer (CW5 180A) with 40 years service in the U.S. Army Special Forces with active duty and reserve components.



# 16 SF KIAs — August 23, 1968: NVA THROUGH THE WIRE... FOB 4/CCN



John S. Meyer

By John “Tilt” Stryker Meyer,  
One Zero of Spike Team Idaho  
(2021, April 27, [sofmag.com](https://www.sofmag.com/17-sf-kias-august-23-1968-nva-through-the-wirefob-4-ccn/), <https://www.sofmag.com/17-sf-kias-august-23-1968-nva-through-the-wirefob-4-ccn/>)

As the first flare ignited over the camp, Sergeant Patrick N “Pat” Watkins, Jr., made out an NVA soldier standing in the door of the BOQ. “He was wearing a breech-cloth

and bandana,” recalls Watkins, and was holding an AK-47. The NVA didn’t see Watkins, who crawled backwards down the hall.

Passing one room, Watkins saw a young officer dead in his bed, impaled by a jagged piece of two-by-four that a satchel charge blew through his chest, literally nailing him to the bed.

Crawling outside, Watkins saw NVA at the TOC (Tactical Operations Center) pouring heavy gunfire into the Special Forces troops trying to awake and counterattack. As he headed toward another BOA, an NVA sapper spotted him and “for some reason...he threw a satchel charge at me instead of shooting me with his AK.”

Watkins rolled out of harm’s way as the sand absorbed much of the blast. When the NVA saw Watkins still alive, “he threw a grenade at me; again, I was amazed that he simply didn’t shoot me. He must have been high on drugs or something, that’s the only thing which explains it.”

Several survivors of the attack felt many of the NVA soldiers were drugged to enhanced their fearlessness.

## OJT Pistol Practice

After the grenade exploded, Watkins pulled his .45. “Hell, I had never hit anything with a pistol before. I remember the instructors telling us to shoot low, so I aimed, fired several rounds and finally lucked out and hit him. Talk about miracle hits!”

Still another NVA threw a grenade at Watkins. This time, Watkins was so close to the sapper that he rushed the NVA, knocking him down and taking his AK-47 before sending him to the big rice paddy in the sky.

“After awhile, it all started to run together in my mind. I remember a radio operator named Hoffman, who stood up to go to help one of our guys who was crying for help. He only made a few steps before he was hit. At one point, we had a guy hit real bad who was screaming for help. But, the NVA were using him for bait. Anyone who went to help him was shot or shot at pronto.”

SF medic Sergeant First Class Robert L. “Bob” Scully, “was hit real bad, there was gray matter lying around...we had to get him to the dispensary ASAP.” But the dispensary was on the south side of camp, and the NVA controlled the TOC which lay in between. A medic named Henderson gave Scully an I.V. “I had to put my hand over his mouth to keep him quite, because there were so many NVA,” he recalls. Later, Henderson carried Scully to the dispensary.

“I’ll tell you one thing, the SF medics were their usual outstanding selves. One medic got a DSC for driving around camp, picking up the wounded and getting them back to the dispensary under heavy constant fire,” Watkins said.

This tragic story of the most Green Berets killed on a single day during the Vietnam War had remained shrouded in secrecy for 25 years until this exclusive SOF report.

Sixteen U.S. Special Forces Soldiers were killed 23 August 1968 in the top secret Command and Control North (CCN) outpost in Da Nang when three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) sapper companies executed a well-planned night attack, featuring a daring infiltration into the camp.

## Top Secret CCN

The veil of secrecy had remained over this strike for two reasons: It occurred inside the top secret CCN compound, and there were

embarrassing breaches in security, without which the attack would not have been so deadly. During a lengthy guerrilla war, even the best of troops and their commanders can become lax, an error the NVA dramatically exploited at CCN.

Only the outstanding heroics of individual Green Berets and some of the indigenous troops assigned to the Recon Company prevented the casualties from exceeding 16.

CCN was under the auspices of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam — Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), which oversaw classified missions run by multiple-service, unconventional warfare troops throughout Southwest Asia, including Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam.

In *Green Berets at War*, former Special Forces Captain Shelby L. Stanton notes those special operations also extended into Burma and “Yunan, Kwangsi, Kwangtung and Hainan Dao Island in China.” The majority of the personnel running the missions were Green Berets who were funneled through the 5th Special Forces Group in Nha Trang—the command headquarters for all conventional Green Beret assignments such as A comps along the border, to the top-secret Phoenix project. As men arrived at CCN, they signed formal agreements not to write or speak of these top secret operations for 20 years.

By August 1968, there were six Forward Operating Bases (FOBs): FOB 1 in Phu Bai, between Hue and Da Nang; FOB 2 in Kontum; FOB 4 in Da Nang; FOB 5 in Ban Me Thuot; and FOB 6 in Ho Ngoc Tao, north of Saigon. FOB 3 was in Khe Sanh, which was shut down in June. FOB 3 became Mai Loc.

In 1968, six-man or eight-man Spike Teams and Hatchet Force (company-sized elements of Green Berets and indigenous mercenaries) were launching from the FOBs or their respective launch sites on classified missions, missions that varied from area and point reconnaissance to POW snatches, wiretapping, installation of trail sensors, destruction of NVA fuel lines and attempts to locate American POW camps.

### Arch Enemies

By that year, the NVA knew well of MACV-SOG troops. In Laos alone, intelligence estimates were of 40,000 NVA and Pathet Lao soldiers and attached personnel who worked the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex. Part of their job was to attack the MACV-SOG teams.

As far back as 1966 — when mass media in the United States were still reporting it as a civil war — the NVA amassed a battalion attack against the final Special Forces A camp in the A Shau Valley, thus clearing the most significant supply and troop infiltration route into I Corp in the northern sector of South Vietnam. Without that route, the NVA could not have launched the massive Tet Offensive in 1968.

Because of the strategic importance of the A Shau Valley, MACV-SOG placed a premium on targets run in that AO. For Spike Teams



Larry Trimble's MACV-SOG Recon Team (Photo courtesy Larry Trimble)

assigned to those missions out of FOB 1, they were the most difficult and risky of targets: The NVA controlled the area, there was no friendly artillery support, and the triple-canopy jungle covered steep, mountainous terrain that soared above 5,000 feet in rain forests often cloaked with clouds, thus curtailing or precluding the use of air power.

The menace of the A shau Valley targets was dramatized in May 1968, when an entire Spike Team disappeared and another team was devastated by heavy NVA firepower while searching for the first team.

Whenever the NVA tangled with a MACV-SOG team, they suffered heavy casualties. Thus, the NVA knew the MACV-SOG teams and



Chapter 78 member Doug LeTourneau standing under CCN's new entrance sign which he built and put up to replace the sign lost in the attack. (Photo courtesy John Stryker Meyer)





Damage at FOB 4 after the attack (Photo courtesy Larry Trimble)

C&C teams knew and respected the abilities of the NVA. Clearly, the NVA wanted to hurt these elite teams — and hitting them at home would be hitting them where it hurt.

Unbeknownst to SF personnel at FOB 4, shortly after Tet in 1968, the NVA built a sand table of FOB 4 in the Marble Mountain caves to organize the 23 August attack. Marble Mountain was on the south side of FOB 4. Highway 1 bordered the western perimeter; an NVA POW camp was situated to the north of FOB 4/CCN, while the China Sea lapped lazily onto the white sandy beaches of the compound's eastern front.

### The Enemy Next Door

Marble Mountain was honeycombed with caves and trails. South along the China Sea, the beaches were flat. Abruptly, the two rugged peaks of Marble Mountain jutted up, and cradled between them was a pagoda, complete with monks who protested whenever U.S. troops got too close to their holy temple — but apparently didn't seem to mind having NVA or Viet Cong cadre around.

In support of the conclusion that the NVA had infiltrated agents inside the camp is the fact that the NVA launched this attack when the number of soldiers within FOB 4 had swelled well beyond normal: There was an enlisted promotion board held the previous day; all of the FOB commanders, executive officers and their respective S-3 and S-2 officers held their monthly meetings earlier in the day; that, in addition to the fact the population had grown when the CCN headquarters was recently moved from downtown Da Nang to FOB 4, thus making it FOB 4/CCN.

"By the time the NVA sappers hit the camp, there had to be at least twice, maybe three times as many Special Forces troops in the camp as were normally assigned there," recalls Watkins, who was in his second tour with MACV-SOG, at that time out of FOB 1, and had appeared before the promotion board earlier in the day.

The spirit earlier that fateful day was "typical of any promotion board gathering," Watkins said. "There was a lot of drinking, a lot of partying,

and general hell-raising" by Special Forces troops. With any promotion board, the drinking was usually heavy because many soldiers hadn't seen each other for extended periods of time, and at these gatherings, they tended to make up for the months apart during one day's heavy drinking.

### Inside Without A Shot

As America's elite partied into the night, NVA sappers quietly prepared for their attack. One company dressed in white loin-cloths, with white headbands and a piece of white material attached to their AKs. The last company wore red.

The NVA troops began infiltrating through the thin wire in the southeast corner of the camp. For months, locals who worked at FOB 4 returned home through the wire. On

that night, the NVA marched right into camp, heavily armed and carrying satchel charges.

Sometime after 0100 "all hell broke loose," said former Green Beret Sergeant Ronald D. "Red" Podlaski. "At first, I thought we were taking incoming." What many thought were incoming rounds were satchel charges exploding throughout the compound.

One company attacked the American recon huts, which sat in three north-south rows on the eastern side of the camp. Another company of NVA hit the TOC, destroying it and damaging the commo center. Other sappers hit the officers' quarters and transient barracks at the northwestern quadrant.

Podlaski was a team leader in recon company at FOB 4/CCN. The NVA sappers with satchel charges went up to the front door and threw charges into each plywood hut, which housed two to six GIs.

A medic who was staying with Podlaski that night later recounted: "We were lucky. The front door on our hootch had an extra-strong spring on it, so that the door was hard to open... When the sappers came to our hootch, they pulled open the door and threw the satchel charge. But the spring was so strong, the door closed so quickly that the charges bounced off the door and blew up the front steps."

There was so much confusion and pandemonium that the medic and Podlaski didn't realize what had happened outside. "Hell, when we ran outside we didn't realize the steps had been blown away, so we fell ass over head," Podlaski recalls.

As Podlaski and the medic fell, an NVA sapper opened fire on full automatic, shooting high: "He fired where he thought we were going to be running. If we hadn't fallen, he probably would have gotten us... Running recon in CCN, we had plenty of close calls in the field," said Podlaski, who ran more than a dozen targets in Laos and Cambodia during his tour with MACV-SOG, "but I remember hitting the sand and disbelieving that the closest call of all of em was right there in camp, in CCN, when that sapper opened up on us. Unbelievable!"



A South Vietnamese CCN recon team member killed the sapper, as the indigenous troops rallied from their quarters.

Watkins was asleep in the BOQ along the northern quadrant of the camp because the transient billets were packed with people who had gone before the promotion board earlier in the day.

Like Podlaski, Watkins and several of the officers “were awakened by the explosions,” Watkins said. “thought we were taking incoming at first. Then, I realized we weren’t taking incoming and simultaneously, I regretted having given my Swedish K [to a friend] that night.

“All I had was my old Colt .45, which was in my flight survival vest... the NVA had knocked the air conditioners out of the wall and pushed several satchel charges into the building through the holes...”

As Watkins crawled down the hallway, several explosions ripped through the building. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief as he saw two officers looking out a nearby window. “I told the officers to get down on the floor or they weren’t long for this world.”

By then men in the camp began to put up flares, lighting the camp-turned-battlefield.

At some point, an AC-130 Spectre gunship with fore miniguns and two 20mm cannons arrived over CCN.

“Specter did a hell of a job,” Watkins said. “They dropped flares and caught some NVA, in the wire, plus they were able to hit a couple of pockets of NVA in the camp.”

### Good Morning, Vietnam

At first light, Lieutenant Colonel Roy Bahr led a relief force from FOB 1 down the coast of the China Sea into FOB 4, clearing all NVA sappers who had escaped along the beach from the camp after Spectre arrived.

Also at first light, SF troops tracked two NVA soldiers to an outside latrine at the northeast corner of the compound. Accounts of this are mixed: One officer said the NVA killed themselves with a frag grenade; a second account said the SF troops opened fire on the latrine, venting pent-up anger over the carnage wrought by the daring NVA night attack.

Staff Sergeant Robert J. “Spider” Parks returned to FOB 4/CCN shortly after first light. “It was a sight I’ll never forget,” Parks reminisced recently. The road into camp ran from the highway along the northern edge of the perimeter, with turn-offs for the helicopter pad, headquarters, and at the eastern end of the road, for the NCO club, mess hall and Recon Company.

As Parks walked down that road “it looked like a hazy movie scene. There was a haze hanging over the camp—you could still smell the cordite from all the weapons fire. People were running around, some of them still dazed by the night’s tragic events...

“There were still some sappers around in the camp and snipers firing down from Marble Mountain. The NVA fired on the ambulances leaving camp as well as the one pulling in. People in the camp got organized and linked up with the relief force Colonel Bahr brought in from Phu Bai.”

Parks pulled out his camera and took pictures of the dead enemy, including the NVA soldier Watkins killed with his .45. Some are included here.

Later that day, Watkins and several SF and indigenous recon troops went to Marble Mountain and found the sand table the NVA had used to rehearse their attack on FOB 4/CCN.

### The Enemy Within

There were several facts about the attack which were confirmed by Watkins and numerous survivors interviewed shortly after the FOB 4/CCN massacre:

- “It was obvious they had worked months on the attack...the NVA had good intelligence from inside the camp which helped them pick that night for the attack,” Watkins said.
- Prior to the attack, warning about security problems along the south-east perimeter, where locals walked through the barbed wire, were ignored. Additionally, the local security force appeared to cooperate with the NVA instead of defending the camp. NVA weapons and satchel charges had been cached inside FOB 4/CCN.
- The attack could have been worse: Some NVA troops carried maps which the local Viet Cong had drawn upside down. Thus, they ignored the indigenous recon billets at the southeastern corner of the compound, instead hitting the BOQ at the northern side of the compound. “That was a major mistake, because the recon indig reacted quickly and severely hurt the NVA that night. In ‘68, the indig at FOB 4 were outstanding and they stood tall that night,” Watkins said.
- “We were very fortunate in another aspect,” said Bahr, “because after our commanders meeting, many of us flew back to our FOBs. Thus, when we heard about the attack, I was able to put together the reaction force. We flew down in Kingbees (Vietnamese-piloted H-34s) before first light...otherwise the losses could have been much more crippling.”
- Many SF troops reacted slowly because there was too much boozing the previous night.
- The total of 16 SF troops killed at FOB 4/CCN “was the heaviest USASF loss in a single incident in SF history,” according to *Green Beret* magazine. Plus, “In the subsequent three days, eight more USASF were killed, six at Duc Lap”—Special Forces A Camp (A-239).”

According to *Green Beret*, those killed at FOB 4/CCN were;

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Ssgt. Talmadge H. Alphin, Jr.     | • Master Sgt Rolf E. Rickmers       |
| • Pfc. William H. Bric III          | • Spec. 4 Anthony J. Santana        |
| • Sgt. 1st Class Tadeusz M. Kepczyk | • Master Sgt. Gilbert A. Secor      |
| • Sgt. 1st Class Donald R. Kerns    | • Sgt. Robert J. Uyesaka            |
| • Sgt James T. Kickliter            | • Ssgt. Howard S. Varni             |
| • Master Sgt. Charles R. Norris     | • Sgt. 1st Class Harold R. Voorheis |
| • Sgt Maj. Richard E. Pegram, Jr.   | • Sgt. 1st Class Albert M. Walter   |
| • 1st Lt. Paul D. Potter            | • Sgt. 1st Class Donald W. Welch    |

# A Letter From a Friend

The letter that follows was presented to the *Sentinel* staff by Steve Bric, Chapter member and Gold Star Family member, along with this message:

"Attached is the letter that I received out of nowhere some 21 years after the tragic loss of 16 SF warriors from the attack on FOB 4 – CCN. My brother Bill Bric (William) was one of those who was KIA during that attack.

The letter is built around Don's relationship with my brother, but it really is about those who survived their tour but came home never to be the same person who shipped out to Vietnam.

I ask those with whom I share this to please print the letter and do not read it on the screen — read it slowing as Don's incredible writing skills really shine when you take your time. Somehow holding the paper, you will feel the emotions that Don describes and the hurt that all who go in Harm's Way carry for their entire lives — some nice '60s song in the background helps as well. I still cannot read this letter without tears.

Perhaps this is something that could prove helpful in your efforts to support Special Forces and help those who return home to somehow find peace — Chapter 78 goes a long way towards that goal when we meet."

(for music try Steve's favorite "Have You Ever Seen the Rain" by Creedence Clearwater Revival (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu2pVPWGYMQ>) or "We've Gotta Get Out Of This Place" by The Animals (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUpBSvN1a50>).

September 16, 1989

Dear Steve:

I'm writing to you because you're the most senior member of the Bric family that I could locate without actually talking to anyone directly.

This is the letter I've been meaning to write to you and your parents for 21 years — but couldn't. Many times I hesitated for fear of the pain it might trigger in your parents. But it was just as much for fear of my own pain that I held back.

I'm sure you've never met me. You probably knew my sister, Nancy, from school. I went by the name of Don Ripley then, but that still shouldn't ring a bell. Suffice it to say I knew of you at John Muir Junior High as Bill Bric's older brother. That made you special in my eyes.

*It's a long walk from Capitol Hill to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial — but there was no other way for me to get there. It was February of 1988. I was in Washington D.C. to cover a congressional hearing that involved a Los Angeles news story. I stayed an extra day with a fellow journalist who lives a block away from the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court and the U.S. Capitol. I was glad he had a prior engagement the next morning. That meant I could go off on my own without having to explain. I knew I had to go to the Memorial — but also I knew I couldn't say the words aloud. It wasn't on the Capitol Mall maps posted here and there. It*

*was obviously too new. I knew I couldn't ask for directions or even tell a cab driver where I had to go — I knew there was too much of something in me that was pounding to get out.*

*So I wrapped my wool scarf tightly around my ears, jammed my hands in my overcoat pockets and I walked. The only person I was going there to see was Bill.*

As I walked through the snow in the direction of the Washington Monument, I tried to remember as much as I could about Bill. I remembered a rainy morning, also in February, but in 1966. A girl I had been seeing called to tell me her brother Steve had died. Steve was about 13 at the time and had been confined to a wheelchair his whole life. Steve had enjoyed chasing his sister and me up and down the sidewalk in his wheelchair. He could maneuver himself so quickly. I remember feeling how he had been cheated in life. His sister said Steve didn't have a lot of friends — not even enough for a full complement of pall bearers. She was three short and asked if I'd help out.

My mother heard my half of the conversation and waited for me to hang up before she asked me. "Why did you turn her down?" It was one of those questions that didn't require an answer. I thought about it for less than a moment and called my friend back.

"That's nice of you," she said, "but we're still two short. Do you know anyone else who will help?" The funeral was the next day. I called every close friend and then started calling kids I knew from school. Of course, Bill Bric didn't hesitate for an instant. He had never met Steve. In fact, he wasn't sure who Steve's sister was. "Sure, I'll be there," he said. "But I don't have a suit. I'll see what I can do."

The next morning Bill was there, as promised, in an oversized Navy pea coat I believe he borrowed from your father. I learned altruism from him that rainy morning.

Bill was a quiet and gentle person. That made it all that much more surprising the following year when word buzzed around Burbank High School that someone had taken on the heretofore meanest guy at school and won — and it was Bill Bric that did it. The guy I'd never seen angry apparently stepped forward when the self-proclaimed bad guy picked a fight with someone Bill thought was much too small. Bill wasn't a whole lot bigger, but he stepped in anyway. He taught me about sticking to one's beliefs — even when the odds were drastically skewed in the other guy's favor.

One day Bill told me about his involvement with the Burbank Police Explorers. By now I really looked up to Bill. It didn't take any coaxing to get me to join up. We had a lot of fun directing traffic during events at the Starlight Bowl. Bill had me convinced I should be a policeman.

When we had outgrown the Explorers program and graduated from high school, I didn't see Bill for a few months. Then he resurfaced as an Army trainee. I told him I had taken the test for the Air Force and was hoping that when I enlisted I'd get a good assignment. Bill spent a good three



hours explaining why I was a fool to join the Air Force — a four-year commitment, no job guarantee. He was in for only three years and there was no question that he'd wear a green beret one day. He asked if I'd go with him to his recruiter and listen to what the man had to say.

*As I neared the long reflective pond that stretches its way like a blue carpet up to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, I realized that back then I was able to actually do something for Bill — he got a three-day pass for signing me up in the Army. I remembered how he coached me in how to prepare for basic training. He said that if I took control of things during the reception period — showed some leadership and all — that I'd surely be appointed as a squad leader. He was right about that.*

Even though Bill enlisted months before me, we were both still in training in the spring of 1968. I was at Military Police School at Fort Gordon, Georgia. Bill was in a nearby training unit — getting closer every day to wearing that green beret.

With both of us being in training, it was difficult for us to get together. But on April 4th, the eve of my graduation from M.P. school, Bill got word to me to come and visit him at his unit. He showed me around his company area in the darkness of the evening and then we went to a movie together at one of the theaters on the base. I don't remember the movie, but I'll never forget the images that followed. Word was spreading throughout the area that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had just been killed.

I remember that a lot of guys were happy about it — practically cheering. I also remember not knowing who Martin Luther King really was. It was just a name in the news — a lot like Vietnam.

That was the last time I saw or spoke to Bill. The assassination of Dr. King would result in nearly everyone in my unit having their orders changed. Everyone would be shipped immediately to Ft. Dix, New Jersey for riot control training. Only a handful of us who had been arbitrarily designated as sentry dog handlers would be shipped overseas.

We were given a few weeks of leave before we were shipped to Okinawa to be assigned dogs to train. My mother tried to convince herself that we'd train in Okinawa and then be assigned somewhere safe. It did no good to spell it out for her. Mother refused to drive to the airport with us. She walked as far as the car and then turned and ran back inside, holding her hand over her mouth as if it would somehow keep her from crying.

*I walked up the steps that led up to the giant, seated statue of Abraham Lincoln. I still hadn't found the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. The Gettysburg Address is etched on one of the inside walls of the Lincoln Memorial. I had memorized it in the third grade, but it didn't mean anything to me until that cold morning. I held my hand over my mouth — as if it would somehow keep me from crying.*

We landed at Kadena Air Force Base. While we were waiting for someone to pick us up, a couple hundred tired young soldiers landed for refueling on their way home from Vietnam. It was an ominous message they had — more images that would be forever etched in the human mind.

"Good luck, guys," one of them said. "They're really taking names down there."

While we were training in Okinawa we heard about the assassination of Robert Kennedy. What was going on back home?

On July 1st, my group landed, dogs and all, in Cam Ranh Bay. On the 4th of July, we were flown to Saigon and eventually driven to Long Binh. Within a month, the demeanor I'd learned from Bill helped get me shipped out earlier than normal to Soc Trang, a detachment in the southern part of the Mekong Delta. By August I'd settled in and become familiar with the sounds of incoming mortars and snipers' bullets.

*When I turned to walk down the steps, I was amazed at how far away the Washington Monument seemed — and how much farther still the Capitol was. I'd walked a long distance. Then I noticed the people walking off to the left, toward statues of three soldiers in jungle fatigues. I had — maybe instinctively — found the Memorial. As I walked to it, I did everything in my power to not look anyone in the eye.*

If you took all of the discomfort, danger and fear I experienced during my year in Vietnam, and combined it into one horrible moment, it wouldn't come close to the devastation I felt when I read the words my mother wrote me. She didn't send the clipping from the *Burbank Daily Review*. That would have been too easy. She mustered up 19 years of accumulated motherhood to try to soften the words she knew would hurt me so much. My friend was dead.

*When I finally located panel #47 west, line #38, I was surprisingly composed. Maybe it was because I was among others who had somehow come to terms with their losses — losses of actual family members.*

I was able to take a taxi back to my friend's place, but I was never able to tell him, or anyone, about that morning. But I vowed I'd track down Bill's family by his birthday. I couldn't do it. I decided to make contact on August 23rd of last year. I guess I still wasn't ready. Then I froze up again the following March.

This June my girlfriend and I went to Washington, D.C. on a business/vacation. We visited the Memorial. It was Cindi's first time. She never asked about the name I again looked up. She stood silently as I stared at the wall. Then she quietly handed me her camera so I could take a picture of Bill's name. When she had the film developed, she gave me the print — again, without asking or saying anything.

Last night I was sorting through some boxes and found an old record album. I cranked up the stereo and listened. Now it was time.

This letter is an awfully long way to say a few simple things to you and your family...

I'm terribly sorry about your loss and mine.

I am a better person because of what Bill gave me.

I sincerely hope my contact is not intrusive or overly painful for you.

I'm sure my letter can't do much to help any of you - but I truly believe it is somehow good for me.

Sometimes it takes a long, long time to work through things. It makes a person tired.

Fondly,  
Don Ray

Don Ray is at [donray@donray.com](mailto:donray@donray.com) and encourages anyone to share this letter, as long as they don't make changes, and they also include this sentence.

# Afghanistan to Arlington — We Are Sentinels of History & Our Fallen

By Alex Quade, War Reporter,  
Honorary SFA National Lifetime Member  
Photos courtesy Alex Quade (unless otherwise noted)

## Sentinel – [ˈsent(ə)nəl]

(noun) – **Protector, defender, guardian.** A person or thing watching or standing as if watching.

(roots) – Sentina, meaning “**vigilance**,” and sentire, “**to hear or perceive**.”

At Arlington National Cemetery, battle buddies from “that Chinook shootdown op in Afghanistan” — Special Forces ODA-726 teammates, an Apache Longbow helicopter pilot, and a blonde pony-tailed war reporter gal in a baseball cap — honored those taken too soon.

“A nation can be judged in part by how well it honors its heroes,” President George H.W. Bush — who I interned for — once said. And *that’s* what our motley crew was there to do.

We thanked *them* for their service and sacrifice. We shared memories and stories. We left SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel magazines, notes, photos, flowers, and flags.

But for the 400,000-plus heroes resting around us, we were virtually alone in the sporadically pissing rain.

We paid tribute to...

OGA friends who’d worked alongside our SF brothers... such as Johnny Micheal “Mike” Spann, the first American KIA in Afghanistan after 9/11. The CIA Special Activities Division paramilitary ops officer was with 5SFG “Horse Soldiers” at the fortress of Qala-i-Jangi. Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters assassinated Spann during a prisoner uprising.

We paid tribute to...

SF Medal of Honor recipient friends no longer with us... such as SGM Jon Cavaiani, who I last saw at SOAR (Special Operations Assoc. Reunion) wearing a Harley Davidson t-shirt, drink in hand. He always gave me a huge smile and hug. And, my mentor COL Robert L. Howard — who I called “Ranger Bob.” He emailed me advice at 0430 almost daily. He taught me everything that mattered.

The last time I was with those two SF MOH recipients at Arlington — while they were still alive — was National Medal of Honor Day, March 2009. They’d invited me to pay tribute to our nation’s Fallen, along with thirty other living MOH recipients. President Barack Obama unexpectedly joined us at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There,



At top and center left, Alex Quade and 7SFG ODA team members pay tribute at the grave of the Flipper-75 crew lost in Afghanistan. Center right, the grave of Johnny Michael Spann. At bottom left, a signed note from MOH recipient SGM Jon Cavaiani to Alex, and bottom right, his grave with tributes.

he and Bob (who was the MOH Society’s President), and three other recipients laid a wreath.

President Obama called the recipients “the bravest of the brave,” who “embody the best of American values and ideals.”

“Their *bravery and humble strength* continues to reassure our nation of the strength of its character and ideals even in these difficult times. We owe these heroes a debt of gratitude that our nation





At left, President Obama and MOH Society President Robert L. Howard, Arlington Cemetery, National MOH Day, March 2009. (Courtesy CMOH Foundation). Center, MOH group photo at Arlington Cemetery shot by Alex Quade, 2009. At right, from left to right, COL Howard, Alex Quade, MAJ Drew Dix and COL Roger Donlon.

can never fully repay,” President Obama stated. Adding, “We must never forget their sacrifice and will always keep the Fallen and their families in our thoughts and prayers.”

*Humble strength...* described my mentor.

“It’s not about uttering words, but living by them,” Bob, ever the teacher, told me later after I snapped an MOH group photo. He shared more “Quiet Professional” lessons with me that night at the USO Gala, as fellow SF MOH recipients COL Roger Donlon, and MAJ Drew Dix nodded in agreement.

Ranger Bob was in hospital a few short months later.

*“You need to Continue the Mission of telling the stories of our Special Operators — for their families that resent their continued deployments and absence — and so America doesn’t forget,”* he tasked me, at his bedside.

*“This is no bullshit!”* He was serious. *“I challenge you to stay alert, stay safe, watch your back, and return home to share your stories and experiences with the public that need to be reminded,”* he pointed his finger at me.

The last thing SF MOH recipient “Ranger Bob” Howard said to me was, I “can kiss him in his coffin.”

I kiss his headstone every time I visit him now, in Section 7A, by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. And, I take his deathbed tasker “to Charlie Mike,” seriously — which my battle buddies know well.

Which is why we paid tribute to...

Fallen brothers-in-arms from various Global War on Terror operations downrange... especially from “that Chinook shootdown op” we were on in Afghanistan — which happened on a Memorial Day weekend, past.

We read letters to the air crew buried together. Those Heroes resting peacefully before us, due to the Green Berets and Apache pilot around me, who fought valorously to carve order out of chaos, secure the crash site and recover their remains.

7SFG Battalion CSM Joff Celleri — who’d given me his ODA-726 baseball cap from downrange with names of fallen SF brothers he’d Sharpie-penned inside — asked me to read his letter out loud for him. In it, he publicly shared for the first time, something personal he’d already shared with me. Something his family, his Command,



Left, Alex Quade and Bob Howard, December 2009, Texas. Right, Alex pays tribute at his grave, 2021.



At left, 7SFG Battalion CSM Joff Celleri

Above, the ODA 726 logo stitched on Joff’s baseball cap from downrange, which he’d given to Alex. He’d written the names of fallen SF brothers on the inside of the cap.

and even his ODA-726 teammates didn’t know about. Shortened version of Joff’s letter below:

*“Today I want to ensure we remember the legacy of the Flipper-75 crew. From the moment the round impacted the CH-47, until the last trigger squeezed from my M-4 to ensure we recovered all the HEROES that were part of the crew — **this event impacted my life.***

*On Memorial Day Weekend, 2007 – an American CH-47 helicopter, Flipper-75, was shot down in the vicinity of Kajaki Sofia in Helmand Province, southern Afghanistan. The crash killed seven soldiers: five Americans, a Briton and a Canadian.*





Left, Flipper-75 crash site which claimed the lives of seven soldiers: five Americans, a Briton and a Canadian (who were mistaken for reporters). Right, ODA-726 team brothers Cecil and Joff, Helmand, Afghanistan, May 2007. Below right, Apache pilot Stew Pitou, Alex Quade and Joff, Ft. Bragg, NC, April 2021.



*Securing the crash site became the priority. We did not know the number of enemy we would be facing. Enemy continued to move towards the site. It became a race between the enemy and us to the crash site. The firefight became more intense. Some of the vehicles were disabled due to enemy fire. We continued to move. We entered the site.*

*We secured the site and the enemy intensified their engagement with us. As the CH-47 rounds were cooking off, as the fire of the crash was intensifying, as the enemy rounds were impacting all over us, and the smell of the fumes and bodies burning was assaulting our senses — our JTAC called Danger Close air to ground engagements to stop the enemy from overrunning our position. Thanks to one of the Apache helicopters providing support, we were able to gain control of the situation.*

*Stu, the pilot, is a HERO. His story of valor would never have been told to Senior Official military or to America, if not for a reporter named Alex. She tracked Stu down and gained his trust, and got him to talk about it for the first time. Alex was supposed to be on that CH-47.*

*Stu's valor and skills saved the lives of my ODA and other soldiers. Stu maneuvered his Apache low to the ground in order to draw fire from the enemy, not once or twice, but numerous times. Additionally, Stu completely disregarded his own safety. After running low on fuel, he decided to continue providing air support until additional air support came on station.*

*As I come to the end of this short writing, **I would like to share something. Last year on the anniversary, my family almost lost me.** But, the angels who protect our country, who give us this most precious thing called life, protected me that day. They allowed me to continue to live, and continue to serve with the best of the best, the Green Berets.*

*I can never un-see what I have seen. I can never undo what I have done. As veterans, we will always carry war blood on our hands. We will always have scars from twenty years of war. But, **I ask all veterans to get help** and use the resources available for you.*

*Remember, our flag does not fly because the wind moves it. It flies with the last breath and ultimate sacrifice of each soldier who died protecting it. God bless America. God bless all the families of the Flipper-75 Crew. DOL."*

Later, Joff shared his letter on social media.

*"This is a story I did not know, CSM. It is an incredible story of immense courage, sacrifice and dedication to duty," retired LTG John F. Mulholland commented. (Mulholland is the former Assoc. Dir. Military Affairs at the CIA, Dep. CMDR SOCOM, CMDR USASOC, JSOC, 5SFG, etc.)*

*"It certainly brought together elements of some of our country's most famous units and capabilities... the 82nd Abn DIV, US Army Special Forces, and our great aviators flying both lift and attack in the face of the enemy. May God rest those who fell that day, and may He bless all the great warriors of land and air who won the race... and the day on behalf of Fallen comrades. Lest we forget — Strength and Honor," Mulholland added.*







Above left, ODA-726, Helmand, Afghanistan, May 2007 (Courtesy SOTF-71). Teammates reunite with Alex Quade with their ODA-726 VALOR shirts, April 2021, near Ft. Bragg, NC

*"Thanks for writing this, Joff. That was an exceptionally tough fight during an intense campaign, and it is time the full story came out,"* former Special Operations Task Force-71 (SOTF-71) CMDR COL Pat Mahaney commented.

"America has a lot to be proud of about what happened that day and throughout that campaign—it was 'One Team, One Fight', and we all knew it. Am very glad to see the Quiet Professionals are letting more people know what happened, and what we were (and are) capable of. DE OPPRESSO LIBER," Mahaney added.

Getting that full story out is a responsibility I take very seriously.

ODA-726's trust in me to share their part of that mission that we were all on, is humbling. These Green Berets fought valorously to ensure our fallen heroes came home to their families. They continue to honor them, their Gold Star families — and everyone on that mission — by taking the brave leap to come out of the shadows to share their story.

*"You are the right person to tell this story, Alex. You were there. I pray it gives some closure to the families,"* Joff told me.

Closure...

That mission impacted the lives of everyone involved. "Quiet Professionals" like CSM Joff Celleri are leading from the front by encouraging others to seek help (I wish my former cameraman would have, after that op — *but that's another story*).

*We... are the Sentinels* — "the protectors, defenders, guardians" — of history, and of our Fallen. By sharing our stories — we ensure that their service, actions, and legacy live on. ♦

▶▶▶ FYI — SOTF-71 CMDR COL Pat Mahaney is SFA Chapter 78's August Special Guest Speaker. 7SFG BATT CSM Joff Celleri and another ODA-726 teammate will also join us. Be sure to RSVP early!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Quade is an award-winning war reporter and documentary filmmaker who prefers flying under the radar downrange and letting her life's work speak for itself. Former Commanding General of USASFC, and SOCEUR, MG (ret.) Michael Repass describes Alex's work this way: *"War correspondent Alex Quade is this generation's Joe Galloway, who tells intensely personal stories. Alex nails the essence of sacrifice found in America's Special Forces operators and their families. Alex Quade is the real deal. She's spent more time with Special Forces operators in combat zones and back home after deployments than any other reporter. Alex knows them and their families, and is uniquely qualified to tell their intensely-lived, extraordinary stories."* Hachette is publishing Alex Quade's book on this operation. For more info: [alexquade.com](http://alexquade.com)



Alex and Maggie



Alex and Joe Galloway

# ASSAULT INTO THE SANGIN VALLEY — “THAT’S WHAT HEROES DO”

By Alex Quade

On May 30, 2007, the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade (Task Force PEGASUS) led by Task Force CORSAIR with elements of Task Force DESERT HAWK and Task Force TALON, air assaulted the 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment 4th Brigade Combat Team (Task Force ONE FURY – The Theater Tactical Force) of the 82nd Airborne Division into Kajaki, a known Taliban stronghold



“Assault into the Sangin Valley – ‘That’s What Heroes Do’” by Fred Rothenbush — a print given to Alex Quade, signed by some of the men on the op. (Courtesy Alex Quade)



At left, LTC Brian McFadden and, right, SOTF-71 CMDR Pat Mahaney, “Flipper” CH-47 unit behind them, KAF 2007. (Courtesy Pat Mahaney)

within the Upper Sangin Valley in the northern Helmand Province of Afghanistan. OPERATION KULANG HELLION was **the largest air assault since the onset of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM and became a defining moment against a determined enemy force.** This coalition assault force composed of American, Canadian, British and Dutch forces demonstrated valorous combat action by seizing key objectives, destroying insurgent forces and restoring security while aiding the terrorized Afghan people within the Upper Sangin Valley.

The feats and heroism by the air assault force throughout the battle were not without loss. One CH-47 Chinook helicopter (call sign Flipper 75) was shot down while exiting the objective area after its troop insertion was complete. With the battle raging on for several hours, an anti-tank platoon and scout platoon from Task Force ONE FURY... **and a small Special Forces Detachment (7th Special Forces Group/Task Force-71), without orders from higher, took the initiative and moved to and secured the crash site despite intense enemy resistance.** The Green Berets, ONE FURY Troopers and Task Force PEGASUS AH-64 Longbow crews fearlessly fought through ambushes and hundreds of determined enemy, securing the downed aircraft and crew... BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT HEROES DO.

While the ground combat raged on, Task Force PEGASUS flight crews continued their mission by inserting the remainder of Task Force ONE FURY by CH-47 Chinook and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, landing in the face of enemy forces, while AH-64 Longbow helicopters engaged enemy positions and provided supporting fire to Task Force ONE FURY. Despite the loss of an aircraft and intense enemy fire,

## COL Pat Mahaney received this note from Aviation Command:

“On behalf of all Task Force Corsair I want to express my gratitude for the extraordinary effort by your soldiers in response to the loss of Flipper-75. From the instant the event occurred it was readily apparent that nothing would come between your troopers and their desire to secure, safeguard and recover our fallen comrades.

In the face of heavy and organized resistance (your SFODA troopers) conducted themselves with bravery and gallantry in the highest traditions of special forces. The debt we owe them is one we can never hope to repay. It is truly an honor to serve beside your outstanding unit.”

Brian McFadden, Lieutenant Colonel Aviation Command





Task Force PEGASUS aircrews continued the mission without hesitation, inserting the remaining forces on time and on target, because the lives of the Troopers on the ground and the success of the operation depended on it... BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HEROES DO.

After the mission, the Task Force ONE FURY Commander conveyed his reassuring words of condolence and gratitude by stating, "As parachute infantrymen, we have not lost sight of the fact that the crews continued to deliver their chawks to the objective area and allowed our Paratroopers to get their feet on the ground, despite their loss. We hope you and your team can take comfort in the fact that on this crew's last flight, they accomplished their mission." As you visualize the assault into the Sangin Valley, imagine the feats of heroism of all involved and never forget the devotion of the air and ground forces as they were aviators, crewmembers and Paratroopers, giving selflessly for each other and a grateful nation. They accomplished their mission... BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HEROES DO." ❖



**Editor's note:** Check out Alex Quade's truly riveting 10-minute video *Chinook Down*, which was made as a tribute to the soldiers she was embedded with and nearly died with at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=O86cWWNcDAQ&pp=sAQA>.



- ❶ Ramp Ceremony honors Flipper-75 aircrew KIA. KAF, Afghanistan, June 2007. (Courtesy 82nd CAB)
- ❷ SOTF-71 Green Berets and UAE SF partner stack on house, Helmand, Afghanistan, May 2007. (Courtesy SOTF -71)
- ❸ ODA-726 fights through Helmand poppy fields, May 2007. (Courtesy SOTF -71)
- ❹ CH-47 (from Flipper unit at KAF) delivers usable vehicle to ODA-725 and ODA-726 at FOB Rob, Sangin, after one of their vehicles "shot to shit" in ambush during Chinook shootdown op. (Courtesy SOTF -71)

## Book Review

### Indochina in the Year of ... Series

by Vietnam Veterans for Factual History (VVFH.org)



Michael D. Bengé

By Mike Bengé  
Former POW, VN 1963-74

It's nearly impossible to write a review of a series of 14 books regarding the American involvement in Vietnam with chapters written by a plethora of real people — American, Vietnamese, allies and historians, who had been there and done that, and know what they are talking about. The series of books

range from Indochina in the Year of the Dragon (1964), to Indochina in the Year of the Cat (1972), with a wrap up Indochina in the Years 1963–1976. In these books, there are true stories of Vietnam and the Vietnam War that you'll find nowhere else.

Steve Sherman, a Special Forces historian, through Vietnam Veterans for Factual History and RADIX Press, has done an excellent job of recruiting authors and putting together this collection of genuine history of what really went on in Vietnam.

The complete set (14 volumes), plus a thumb drive with a complete set of searchable pdf files is available for \$250.00 (see ad at right for a limited time special offer). The tables of contents for the books can be found at <https://www.specialforces78.com/indochina-vvfh-toc/>. ♦

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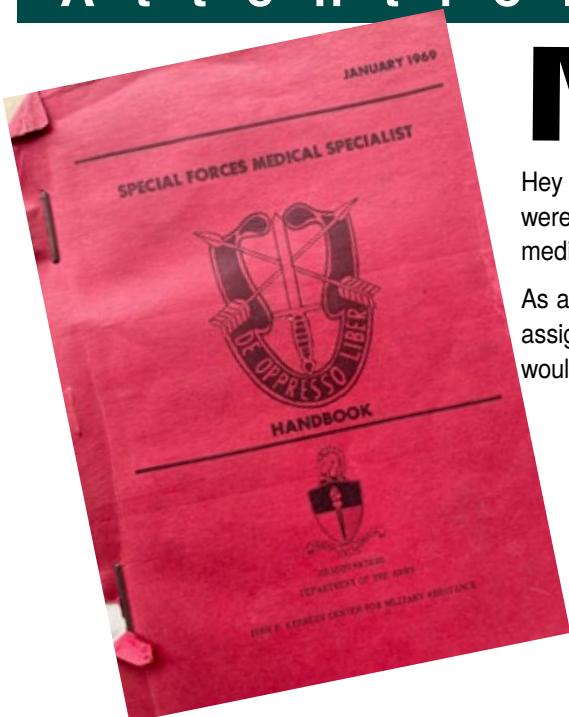
## A t t e n t i o n S F A M e m b e r s !

# M E D I C !

Hey Doc, a bunch of us are getting together during the SFACON in Las Vegas this fall. If you were a 91B/18D, we would love to see you there. In preparation, we are gathering photos from medical training, field dispensaries, etc.

As a 91B myself (70-79), I often felt I had a somewhat privileged position on the teams I was assigned to, and know that many other Medics felt the same way. Our goal with this gathering would be as follows:

- ▶ Promote comradery within the group
- ▶ Share stories of the impact being a medic had on our lives, both in and out of service
- ▶ Find out which of us used our SF medical training to transition into civilian medical positions
- ▶ Explore how we may be able to assist currently active duty 18D's transition into civilian medical fields
- ▶ Demonstrate the evolution of the SF Medical Aidman training program from the 60's to current practices



Please send your photo's, and any stories that you wish to share, to Dennis DeRosia at [dderosia@cox.net](mailto:dderosia@cox.net), so that we can compile them into a little presentation. More information on where and when we will be meeting at SFACON to come.





## **SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION 2021 CONVENTION**

The 2021 Special Forces Convention "SFACON" promises to be one of the biggest, SFA Conventions of all time. Las Vegas is the entertainment capital of the world and we promise to throw a lot at you over the course of 4+ days. Our host hotel, The Orleans, has a huge hospitality room which will feature an "open" bar for the entire convention. Don't miss this one!



**October 22-25th  
Immediately following  
SOAR**

# **SFACON**

**[www.sfacon.com](http://www.sfacon.com)**

**Starts with free welcome breakfast  
10am - 10/22/2021**

### **FEATURING**

- Open Bar All Days
- SF Speaker Symposium
- Butler Purple Heart Run
- M Hotel Day Club After Race Party
- Death Valley Motorcycle Ride
- Golf Tournament
- Valley of Fire Tour
- Mob Museum Tour
- Shopping Outlet Tour
- AND MORE  
visit [sfacon.com](http://sfacon.com) for updates



**Mark Your Calendar!**

**21 AUGUST 2021**  
**SFA CH. 78 MEETING**

**SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER**  
**COL PAT MAHANEY**

Joined by 7SFG Batt CSM Joff Celleri  
& another ODA-726 teammate

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

LOCATION: The Pub at Fiddlers Green  
Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos  
745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19  
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176



(Photos courtesy Alex Quade)

**RSVP early!**

Send your RSVP to **Chapter VP Don Gonneville** at [don@gonneville.com](mailto:don@gonneville.com)

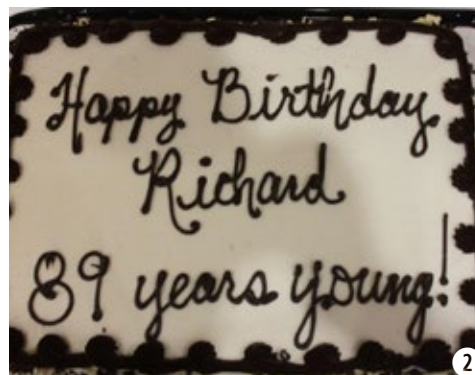
## SFA Chapter 78 July 2021 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Dennis DeRosia

- ❶ Chapter 78 Vice President Don Gonneville and President Bruce Long addressing Chapter business.
- ❷ Happy birthday Richard! Chapter Treasurer Richard Simonian's 89th birthday was celebrated with a delicious cake.
- ❸ Richard Simonian reacting to a rousing chorus of "Him."
- ❹ Guest speaker Frank Snapp speaking to the group.
- ❺ The Sentinel crew, left to right, How Miller, editor, Debra Holm, designer, and Dennis DeRosia, photographer.
- ❻ SFA member Alex Quade updating the group on matters regarding SFA national.



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