



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

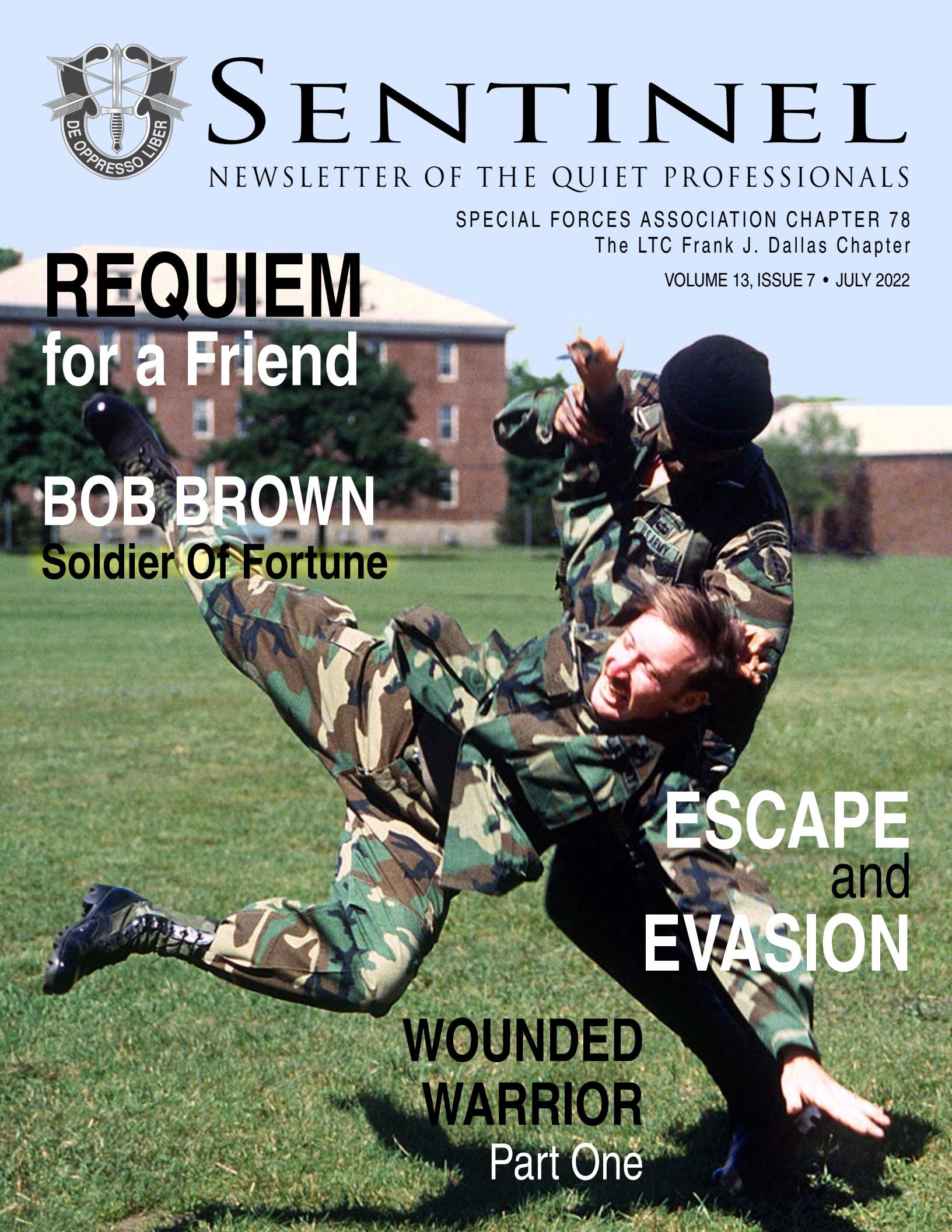
VOLUME 13, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2022

REQUIEM for a Friend

BOB BROWN
Soldier Of Fortune

ESCAPE
and
EVASION

**WOUNDED
WARRIOR**
Part One





SENTINEL

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2022



US ARMY SPECIAL
OPS COMMAND



US ARMY
JFK SWCS



1ST SF COMMAND



1ST SF GROUP



3RD SF GROUP



5TH SF GROUP



7TH SF GROUP



10TH SF GROUP



19TH SF GROUP



20TH SF GROUP



8TH SF GROUP



11TH SF GROUP



12TH SF GROUP

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FRONT COVER: Members of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) practice hand-to-hand combat (DoD photo from the National Archives Catalog by Dean Johnson)



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Funding for the SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel is provided by

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The *Sentinel* is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California — *art direction and design by Debra Holm, Dinwiddie Holm Graphics*. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command, the Special Forces Association, or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor at sfchapter78@gmail.com.

From the Editor



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

Our cover photo shows that Mike Echanis' teachings don't get old.

We'd already accepted Part 1 of Greg Walker's article about Echanis, "Wounded Warrior" (on page 12), when his dear friend John McMullen passed away. Besides John's many accomplishments in the field, from El Salvador to Iraq, he drove the successful effort to gain official recognition (including heroism awards and an Expeditionary Medal) for the Green Berets and others that served in El Salvador's civil war in the 1980s.

Hardly anyone in SF hasn't heard of Bob Brown or his publication *Soldier of Fortune*. Our Jim Morris worked for and with Bob for years. In honor of Bob's "retirement", Jim enthusiastically describes his relationship with Bob.

John Friberg of *SOF.NEWS* brings us another timely book review of Paul D. LeFavor's *The Wild Fields*. Published a few days before the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Paul describes a family's struggles in Zolote, in the Donbas Region, which (at *Sentinel* publication) has possibly fallen to the Russians within the last few days.

John Gargus brings us another gem in "Escape and Evasion", describing several individuals, including his father, who helped people to escape and evade from behind enemy lines. The story begins in World War II and runs through the beginning of SF and through the Vietnam War years.

As referred to earlier, Greg Walker's "Wounded Warrior," tells about an exceptionally talented and motivated individual, Mike Echanis. From Mike's determination to get into the field and fight in Vietnam, through his overcoming his wounds from his brave actions in combat, to his leading a reformation of how we teach hand-to-hand combat, he was truly an outstanding individual. Part 2 of Greg's article will appear in next month's *Sentinel*, and congratulations to Greg for being approved for his Military Veterans in Journalism Press Pass.

Now is the time to get on board to SFACON 2022 in Colorado Springs. Besides the bounteous camaraderie, the stellar line up of activities, speakers and SF topics, there will be visitation with the current 10th SF Group. Details and contact info are on Page 17. And while you are there you will undoubtedly get a first-hand look at the current state of the National Special Forces Green Beret Museum while attending the SFACON 2022. Or check it out on their website.

I would also like to point out that Debra Holm, our graphic designer and Chapter 78 webmaster has provided you two ways to view the *Sentinel* online. You can download (or simply view) the PDF of the entire magazine, or you can read the articles separately in what she calls "Blog Format" at <https://www.specialforces78.com>.

Enjoy. ♦

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

From the President | July 2022



Gregory Horton
President SFA Ch. 78

Greetings! Another month flying by! Our meeting on 18 June had a good turnout with 26 members present. After the usual opening, we had our first Invocation with our new **Chaplain CSM Si Rangel**. Upon conclusion, Chaplain Rangel talked with the members and let them know that he is not just a once-a-month fixture. He made sure that everyone knew that he is there for the members anytime that they need spiritual help or guidance. He is available for individual counseling for the members, their family, or significant others. If you have a crisis, please contact

me immediately and I will have the Chaplain respond to you.

We discussed the National SFA elections and our Chapter wishes to extend our congratulations to the new Board. We look forward to working with them.

Our *Sentinel* Editor **How Miller** and *Sentinel* designer, and Chapter webmaster, **Debra Holm**, really outdid themselves on this month's edition of our stellar magazine. The cover was outstanding and the content very professional as usual. Debra discussed how we have had several of our members get onto the Teamhouse site, put their information in and set their visibility at the level they wanted. We have better participation by our members and this is outstanding for our Chapter.

Our Associate member **Nimo**, gave us an update on our Afghan community as they integrate into life in the local area. As they get settled in, they are finding jobs and doing well. But the best news is that nine babies are due in the next few months. We have a total of 40 families currently in the Mojave and Ridgecrest communities, with 12 more in the vetting process and on the way. We have many of our community in the application process for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) and we are providing assistance where we can. Our thanks go out to all the people helping out behind the scenes in this labor-intensive process.

Member **Len Fein** has been working with the staff at the USS Iowa for our Chapter to take a tour of the Battleship on August 20th. The tour is about 2 hours long and the ship opens at 1000 hours. He will be finalizing the costs and other details in the next week so we will put out all the information as we get it. This will be an excellent trip for the Chapter and I hope everyone can make it. Complete details to follow.

We have a new member named **Thomas Kasza**, who is a 1st SFGA troop and is the co-founder of a very interesting organization. While deployed to Afghanistan in 2019-20, Tom managed a detachment of the National Mine Reduction Group (NMRG). The NMRG were Afghanistan's premier force for route clearance and mine removal and they worked exclusively with SF, NSW, and MARSOC and were highly competent and trusted. But when the US left Afghanistan, the majority of the NMRG were left behind to face the wrath of the Taliban. Tom felt this was a grave injustice, and so he co-founded the 501(c)(3) organization named "Team 11", along with Mahdi, an interpreter for his old ODA who escaped Afghanistan during last year's evacuations.



NMRG technicians undergoing their constant training to keep an edge in this dangerous business. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew B. Fredericks)



To learn about Save Team 11 visit:

[www.SaveTeam11.org](https://www.saveteam11.org)

[change.org](https://www.change.org/p/us-state-department-save-team-11)

<https://www.change.org/p/us-state-department-save-team-11>

 [saveteam11](https://www.instagram.com/saveteam11)

 [@saveteam11](https://www.facebook.com/saveteam11)

Team 11 on NPR

Save Team 11 is dedicated to ensuring the safety, well-being of former NMRG members, along with providing SIV (Special Immigrant Visa) assistance to National Mine Reduction Group Team 11 members and their families within Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Over the coming year, his intent is to expand his organization to encompass all former NMRG members still in Afghanistan. You can go to the website www.saveteam11.org to read up on the organization and donate if you want to help out these men who assisted our troops.

Jim Duffy gave an update on his Artemis training program of self-defense. It is held on Fridays, 1100-1300 at the Artemis training site.

Don't forget that the 2022 SFA Convention in Colorado Springs will be held September 20-24. Hope to see you there.

Our Next Chapter Meeting 16 July 2022

TIME: Breakfast 0800 — Meeting 0830

LOCATION: The Pub at Fiddler's Green

ADDRESS: 4745 Yorktown Ave., Bldg. 19
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176
(Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos)

Greg Horton SGM (Ret)
President
SFA Chapter 78

Requiem for a Friend

By Greg Walker (ret)
USA Special Forces

John McMullen (pictured at right) and I were close friends and SF Brothers for well over 40 years. On May 27, 2022, John passed away at home in his sleep. John was a mentor, a catalyst for doing the hard right over the easy wrong, and co-founder of our grassroots political organization the Veterans of Special Operations – El Salvador. In 1996, John and I celebrated ten years of tireless effort to see our war in El Salvador declared an official military campaign by the U.S. Congress. John was adamant — “We will never, ever quit!”

He wrote or rewrote all the original combat awards and decorations recommendations after that victory — and all of them were approved. The evening after we learned the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal had been authorized for those who served and fought in El Salvador — I was visiting with John at his home in Virginia — we raised a cold beer, clinked our bottles together, and toasted our fallen comrades from that war.

After West Point, Col. McMullen's Army career spanned over 25 years and included multiple commands, honors, and overseas deployments. He was a member of the 7th Special Forces Group and his duties spanned Army and Joint field, staff, combat, and intelligence assignments, primarily focused on the Latin America region. He held various senior positions and commands throughout his career, including as Battalion Commander of Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras, Deputy Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, and Chief of the Counterproliferation and Counterterrorism Division, Operations Directorate of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His fellow soldiers described him as a “soldier's soldier.”

Through all of these achievements, Col. McMullen was most proud of his service in El Salvador in 1987-1988. During that time, he served as Senior U.S. Advisor to the 4th Military Zone and 4th Infantry Brigade of the Army of El Salvador. In this role, he advised, trained, and fought alongside the Salvadoran Army to conduct successful counterinsurgency against guerilla forces during the civil war there. He participated in four separate offensive campaigns there, earning him his Combat Infantry Badge and Army Commendation Award for Valor.

John invited me to join him in Baghdad, Iraq, in late 2003. He was the 2IC to Ambassador Trent Lott at the Coalition Provisional Authority, Ministry of Transportation and Communications, at that time. There were too many adventures to recount here about those months in Iraq — other than to say we got the job done and to Colonel McMullen's usual high standards, uncompromising work ethic, and doing it all with a smile, a laugh, and a penchant for making the impossible possible by putting “boots on the ground.”

As Director of Security McMullen was swift to address the plethora of challenges facing the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). One of these was stemming the waste of U.S. dollars to purchase AK-47s for the emerging Iraqi security forces. Why, he asked, are we paying the Jordanians \$400 per weapon when we have literally



U.S. Army Special Forces Colonel John P. McMullen, Jr. (ret.)
(Photo courtesy McMullen Family)

Learn about the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzehIBl10No>.

thousands upon thousands of brand new and used AK-47s right here in Baghdad? John was furious when he learned the U.S. Army was happily blowing up these stockpiles even as the Jordanians were making money hand of fist from the deal makers at the CPA.

When he learned a well-intentioned but clueless Army officer at the CPA had ordered the sole cell phone tower/transmitter to be blown up (according to the officer it was an “illegal” tower as the Kuwaiti firm that had set it up hadn’t “gotten permission” from the CPA to do so), it was John who, behind the scenes, got cell comms up and running again to include a new transmitter tower.

On one occasion John wanted to travel up to Kurdistan, so we jumped in an SUV along with some Kurd bodyguards/guides and went to Irbil. Upon our arrival McMullen made some calls and soon



Author (left) and Colonel (ret.) John McMullen at Baghdad International Airport in late 2003. (Photo courtesy the Greg Walker Collection)

we were meeting with a variety of truly interesting folks so McMullen could gather some “ground truth” about what was happening — or not happening — in northern Iraq to include Mosul.

I grew to appreciate John's keen sense of off-beat humor, too. He delighted in driving his own Toyota truck wherever we went and when he had someone traveling with us, whether in downtown Baghdad or elsewhere, he would always ask me to shoulder my PKM light machine gun and “ride in the back”. Meaning, in the bed of the pick-up truck! “You'll be fine, he joked once. “You're armed!”

As the insurgency was already in its early stages John developed his own intelligence gathering network in Baghdad. Together we quietly met with and vetted our sources, focusing on potential threats to the CPA itself, as well as those civilian contractors working on various CPA projects to include the financial reconstruction team brought in from Washington, DC. When a credible lead came in we'd address it, bringing in the experts John trusted to make recommendations and provide guidance and direction. Former Iraqi security officers were a rich target given many of these had committed truly heinous crimes against the Iraqi People in their heyday, and were now providing a wide variety of services, personnel, arms, and intelligence to the insurgency leaders in and around Baghdad.

One evening, quite late, and working in conjunction with an American army unit stationed in the Green Zone, we mounted a raid during which an Iraqi officer was captured along with a significant cache of light weapons, ammunition, and documents. At the time such detainees were only held for a maximum of 72-hours and the insurgent officer was being released upon offering only protests of his innocence and fealty to the new Iraqi government. With John's blessing I drafted a memorandum asking the man to be held and

further questioned. It was a timely memorandum and bore positive results. McMullen's earlier and extensive work in El Salvador and Honduras had honed his intuition to a fine edge.

And he didn't like to lose “just because”

On September 24, 2021, John sent me an email note. It was the last written communication between us prior to his passing.

“Once again, many thanks to you Greg for ALL your hard work, and for the generous call out for me! It's hard to believe so much was accomplished, but it truly has been extraordinary. Clearly God's hand was guiding all these efforts and they came due according to His Plan. You have MUCH to be proud of, and especially for telling our story so often and so well-in spite of all the obstacles. They would have stopped most men cold, but you persevered and succeeded! Your diligence and perseverance and vow to never quit! is why the Army can celebrate our story and point our next generation of SF to its eternal lessons. Well done to you for all your exceptional efforts! Your friend and compa, John DOL”

As always, John assigned success and merit to his soldiers, and I am proud to have been one of them. That being said, had it not been for Colonel John McMullen, none of all he was referring to would ever have happened.


Arlington National Cemetery Memorial —

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3uy8Ey23ls>

Rest in peace, Brother, rest in peace. ♦

“The A-Team”, SSG Barry Sadler —

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgCS_8O_u0M



COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY
BAGHDAD, IRAQ

INFO MEMO

October 7, 2003

FOR: Captain Bryan Logan

FROM: John McMullen, Director for Security, Ministries of Transportation and Communications

SUBJECT: Detention / Interview Status – Person of Interest

The arrest / detention of the General Manager of the al-Hyatt Hotel is of interest to this office.


It is my understanding this individual is alleged to be a long time Ba'ath Party member as well as a mid to senior level intelligence officer for the former regime.

Due to recent CPA and military efforts to harden the al-Hyatt and search it for evidence of possible planned attacks on American and Coalition partners staying there - attacks possibly orchestrated by the Person of Interest detained during the recent military operation conducted by your unit - it is encouraged the full range of interview possibilities be exploited regarding this individual. This to include Task Force assistance should the individual possess the training and background necessary to successfully avoid full and honest disclosure as to alleged ties to the former Iraqi intelligence network and perhaps current FRL / counter-Coalition activities he may be involved in.

Please keep my office informed as to progress made in this manner.

John P. McMullen, SES
Director for Security
Ministries of Transport and Communications
Coalition Provisional Authority
Baghdad, Iraq
USA 1-914-360-4101
DSN: 318-239-6322

THE JOINT STAFF



J-33, SPECIAL OPERATIONS DIVISION

20 Feb 98

TO: CG, US Army Special Operations Command
ATTN: DCSPER (COL Cummins/LTC Lang)
Fort Bragg, NC 28307-5000


SUBJ: Combat Infantryman Badge/Combat Medic Badge (CIB/CMB) -- El Salvador

Sir, enclosed under is the list of Army personnel eligible to receive the CIB/CMB for service in El Salvador. Personnel listed were advisors to Salvadoran infantry or special operations units at Brigade level or below, and served in direct ground combat with those units. All personnel meet the requirements for award of the CIB/CMB as stated in paras 8-6, 8-7 of AR 600-8-22, dated February 1995.

The enclosed list was boarded and vetted by a Council of Colonels from 14 January to 20 February 1998. Taken together, the Council Members' service in El Salvador covers the entire period of the war from 1981 to 1992. Members of the Council were:

COL Roy Trumble	Cmdt, USASOA
COL John McMullen	J-3, SOD, Joint Staff
COL Hy Rothstein	J-5, JSOC
COL Chris St. John	OASD(SO/LIC)
LTC(P) Frank Pedrosa	MOSO-SOD, Army Staff
LTC Bob Jarrell	USSOCOM WO

Request that USASOC publish orders awarding to individual soldiers the CIB or CMB as appropriate.


JOHN P. McMULLEN
 COL, USA
 J-3, SOD/CP

BOB BROWN SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

By Jim Morris

Sometime in 1975 I read a piece in the local paper that some guy in Boulder CO had started a trade journal for mercenaries. That struck me as one of the nuttier ideas I had ever encountered, but on the other hand they might be interested in Vietnam stuff that I hadn't been able to sell anywhere. Before my last Vietnam tour I had sold a couple of military pieces to *Esquire*, but times had changed and to achieve publication about Vietnam in a mainstream publication in 1975 it had to be subtitled *mea culpa*.

So, I called this guy, whose name, as it turned out, was LTC Bob Brown, and who it also turned out had been a captain in the 5th SFGA in Vietnam. When I told him I had a cardboard box full of stuff I had written about SF in Vietnam, he said he was going to reserve summer camp and he'd swing by and look at it. Why not? It was only 500 miles out of his way.

He stayed for dinner. My lady at the time was nonplussed when he ate his salad with his hands. He took my cardboard box back to Boulder and promptly lost it. I had no carbons.

In the next few years I made four trips to Boulder for other reasons, but every time I tossed the *SOF* offices, and never found my box. Then, more than four years later, in Fayetteville AR, I got a post card from Bob Poos, the new editor, a former Korean War Marine and AP bureau chief, accepting my article. I had no idea which article, but it was *Operation Dumbo Drop*, and *SOF* paid me \$500 for it. Eventually they bought the whole box. The article was adapted from a term paper I had done in grad school on the three best stories I had covered as 5th Group Information Officer. It had taken me about two hours to write, and I thought \$250 an hour was pretty good pay. Eventually it was made into a Disney movie, and I made about a quarter of a million for it. Not bad for two hours work, but then again it's about seventy percent of all the money I've made in a fifty year career as a military journalist.

Brown on camel in Afghanistan. The AK is not a prop. (Photo by Jim Coyne)



Next time I heard from *SOF* they wanted me to go to Beirut. I did, and wrote them a three-part series that was well received. So I moved to Boulder and started working for them full time. That's when I got to know Bob. Every individual is unique, but Bob is more unique than most. I love the guy, but I think of him as the world's oldest seventh grader. He has that boundless enthusiasm, and a knife in the teeth "Charge!" instinct that tends to put him in situations that most people would prefer to avoid, like sitting in an ambush position in the middle of the night in Rhodesia, or hosing down a Soviet camp in Afghanistan with a Dashika.



Brown in Salvador with sniper rifle (Photo courtesy RKB Collection)

During the time I knew him he made three trips to Afghanistan, getting in firefights with the Soviets every time. At one point he mounted his own insurgency in Laos.

In 1982 he and I, Jim Coyne, *SOF* correspondent and doorgunner in Vietnam, and Tom Reisinger, the *SOF* business manager, former SF medic in Vietnam, shared a penthouse apartment in Bangkok with BG Heinie Aderholt, USAF (ret.), and my then wife, Kathy, an ace photographer, administrator, social coordinator and intrepid correspondent. Heinie was there looking for American POWs in Vietnam and Laos, which was the major reason we were there.

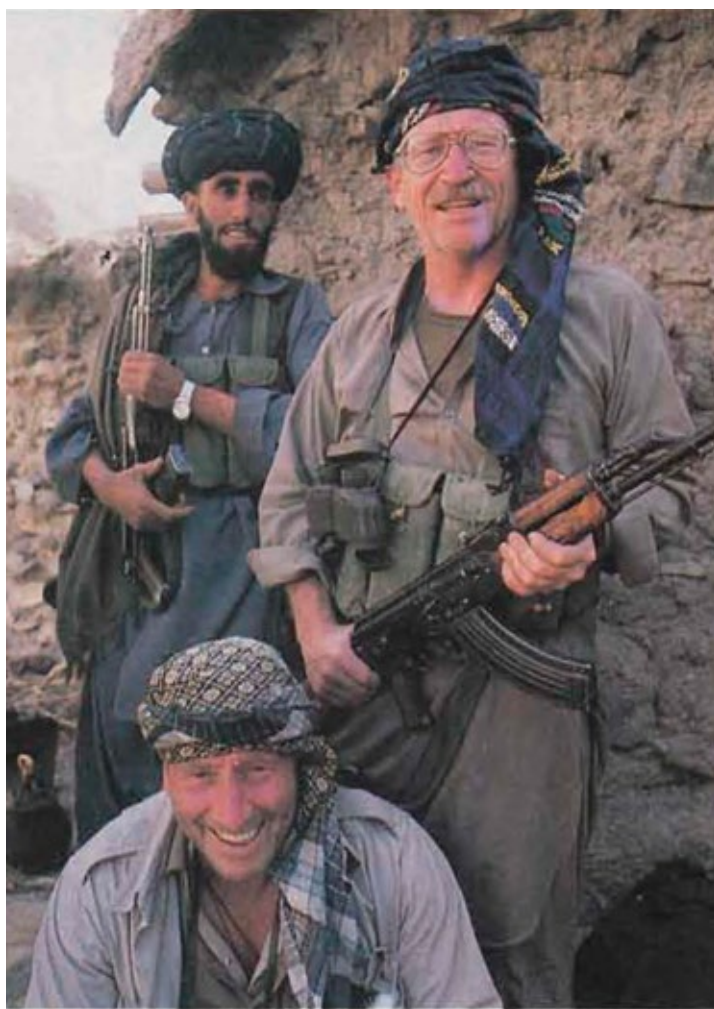
Heinie had been the last US general out of Laos. Once he and I went to his old headquarters to transact some business. On the way back he fell into conversation with our cab driver, who told us it was possible to drink cobra blood early in the morning near Lumpini Park. Pay a vendor a little money, and he'd slash a cobra's throat and you could drink cobra blood directly from the cobra. This was a specific treatment for virility. I wasn't enthusiastic, but Bob was on fire to try it. "C'mon, we'll drink cobra blood and take pictures. You can write it up for the magazine."

He was disappointed when Coyne and I flat refused. I said Coyne would shoot it and I'd write it up if he did, but he didn't want to do it alone, so we dropped that one.

We were in Bangkok for six months. Thailand was in several wars internally and on its borders. In the north it warred with Khun Sa, the Opium Warlord, but also was in contact with the Lao Resistance, the Cambodian resistance, and in conflict with the Communist Party of Thailand and the Communist Party of Malaysia. We had contacts and occasional "contact" with all these people. Brown and I were the two oldest, and we worked out daily to keep up. Coyne and Reisinger did not. We jumped the balloon with Thai Special Forces, and that afternoon jumped a C-130 with the junior class of the Royal Thai Military Academy.



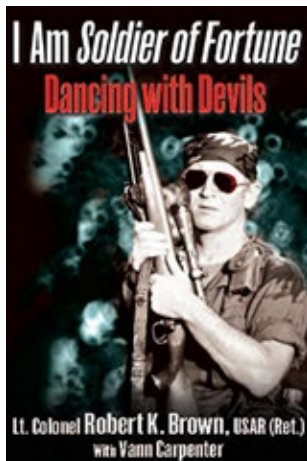
RKB at anticommunist Laotian United Liberation Front base camp inside communist Laos. At one time the camp held 125 armed Hmong who were to assist in search for American POW's. (Photo courtesy SOF – RKB Collection)



LTC Robert K. Brown in Afghanistan with an unidentified Afghan and a smiling MAJ Mike Williams. Mike joined Special Forces when it was formed, fought with UNPIK in Korea, and went on to serve as a major in three armies, U.S., Rhodesia, and Mike Hoare's 5 Commando in the Congo. (Photo courtesy RKB Collection)



RKB, armed with a Russian Draganov sniper rifle poses with rebel Milan missile outside of Jalalabad in 1989. First photo proving the rebels had such sophisticated anti-tank systems to reach the West. (Photo courtesy SOF – RKB Collection)



To obtain a copy of Brown's memoirs, *I Am Soldier of Fortune: Dancing With Devils*, email him at rkb1col@aol.com

As honored guests we were given the only steerable chutes on the aircraft. I was in the upwind stick and before I could get the toggles free the wind turned me and sent me right into the canopy of one of the cadets. I sprinted across that sucker and slid off the other side about fifteen seconds before my PLF. I've often wondered if that kid even knew I was there. If he'd looked up he'd have seen size 12 jungle boots outlined going fast on his canopy. That sucker billowed up around my waist before I got off it.

Our two young studs were injured slightly, but the two old farts who worked out came through it unscathed.

Bob has a lot of favorable characteristics, one of which is generosity. The number of people he has helped is legion, including third-world countries, down on their luck mercenaries, and me. In two years I covered six wars for *SOF*, and at the end of that time I was pretty much burnt. He got me a job as Managing Editor of a copycat of *SOF*, *EAGLE Magazine* in New York. Who does that?

I've sold *SOF* a few pieces since then, and always maintained the connection. You don't let a bunch like that go.

That job was hard, and dangerous as hell, but as much fun as I've ever had. It had wonderful goofy aspects, like the conventions, which were costume parties with one costume allowed, camo. At one convention in Las Vegas a documentarian named Steve Dreher asked my friend Larry Dring, Mike Force company commander in Vietnam, and perhaps the best small unit leader I have ever known, how you could tell the real guys from the phonies at a deal like this. Larry said, "Well, you could ask to look at their passports. Also, the real guys usually walk with a limp."

Bob sent Larry to Lebanon to advise the Lebanese Forces militia on tank-killing techniques, on my recommendation. There was a lot of Soviet ordnance in Lebanon and much of it differed from its description in US manuals. Larry brought back a barracks bag full of it, live ordnance, through customs. Nobody checked it and we took pictures and wrote it up for anybody who needed the information. If you wanted to know why a war was being fought, read the *New York TIMES*. If you wanted to know how it was being fought, read *SOF*.

Brown's branch had been MI, and we sent that barracks bag and a lot of stuff we didn't publish to his DIA contacts. All the stuff we didn't publish because it might get people killed he sent to the DIA to help them kill people we didn't like. I figure *SOF* was worth a free MI detachment to the U.S. government. I thought of it as the Squad Leader's intelligence Agency.

A couple of years later, Fred Reed, former Marine in Vietnam and one of the very best writers ever to grace the pages of our favorite magazine, did a piece about *SOF* for *Playboy*. It was a great piece, told some improbable stories. I responded by writing a letter to the editor, of which they published part. In the part they published I said Brown is so courageous that, "he has to carry his balls around in a wheelbarrow." They headlined the excerpt with the title "Testicular Testimony." In the part they didn't publish I said Brown was the Hugh Hefner of violence, just as Hef was the Colonel Harlan Sanders of sex. The takeaway from that is that Bob is much more accepting of a joke at his expense than, say, Hugh Hefner.

Bob is ninety now and wants to concentrate on writing some books about his adventures. He has sold *SOF* to Susan Katz Keating, who is an intrepid journalist indeed. It won't be the same, but I believe it will continue to be great. ❖



Jim Morris

About the Author

Jim Morris joined 1st SFGA in 1962 for a 30-month tour, which included two TDY trips to Vietnam. After a two year break, he went back on active duty for a PCS tour with 5th SFG (A), six months as the B Co S-5, and then was conscripted to serve as the Group's Public Information Officer (PIO). While with B-52 Project

Delta on an operation in the Ashau Valley, he suffered a serious wound while trying to pull a Delta trooper to safety, which resulted in being medically retired.

As a civilian war correspondent he covered various wars in Latin America, the Mideast, and again in Southeast Asia, eventually settling down to writing and editing, primarily but not exclusively about military affairs.

He is the author of many books, including the classic memoir *War Story*. His new book, *The Dreaming Circus* will be released in July 2022 and is available for pre-order — information available at <https://www.innertraditions.com/books/the-dreaming-circus>.

Book Review

The Wild Fields: A Fight for the Soul of Ukraine by Paul D. LeFavor

By John Friberg

05/24/2022, <https://sof.news/books/the-wild-fields-ukraine/>

A recently published novel, *The Wild Fields: A Fight for the Soul of Ukraine*, provides the story of a man struggling to live a peaceful life and keep his family safe in the battle-weary Donbas region of Ukraine. The story takes place about five years after the Euromaidan Revolution of 2014, the Russian invasion of Crimea, and the establishment of two 'breakaway republics' by Russian-supported separatists in the Donbas region adjacent to Russia's border.

Paval Koval and his family reside in the town of [Zolote](#) (Google maps) in eastern Ukraine. They live in an apartment building within sight of the 'line of conflict'; the series of trenches and strongpoints between the Ukrainian army and the separatists. Paval, in his 50s, is a butcher in the local town. The story is about the struggle he has in making the right decisions for himself and his family. Should he take sides in the conflict? Would his family be safer in Odesa, Dnipro, or a location in Ukraine further west? The villagers of Zolote are fearful of an invasion by Russia to 'come to the aid' of the separatists. Like Paval, they wonder if they should leave their lifelong homes for safer communities further west.

Paval has been successful in avoiding entanglement in the Donbas conflict and believes his family is relatively safe; but he recognizes things could change quickly. Paval has seen war before, having served with the Soviet army in Afghanistan. He knows he does not want to experience combat again but events beyond his control are bringing him closer to the conflict. He finds himself becoming more and more involved in the intrigue and clandestine nature of the fight between the opposing sides.

This book by Paul D. LeFavor provides a historical background to the current conflict and Ukraine's struggle to forge an independent path between the West and Russia. It is informative about the Donbas region and why it is so contested by both sides in the conflict. The nature of long war between the pro-Russian insurgents and the pro-Ukrainian counterinsurgents along the 'line of conflict' is highlighted in this novel.

The Russians suffered a significant defeat with their failure to capture Kyiv and topple the current government of Ukraine in the opening months of the invasion of early 2022. It has withdrawn its military forces around Kyiv and the northern part of Ukraine and re-positioned them in the Donbas region – where this novel's story takes place. *The Wild Fields* is an informative read that sheds light on the years-long conflict in the Donbas region. This timely novel was published on February 15, 2022, just days before the Russians launched their invasion of Ukraine.

The author weaves an interesting account of life in war-torn Zolote. A map of the Donbas region and the town of Zolote is provided in the beginning of the book. This is a good read for those following the Ukraine War and who wish to understand more about the long-running conflict in the Donbas region. ❖

[*The Wild Fields: A Fight for the Soul of Ukraine*](#)

by Paul D. LeFavor

Blacksmith Publishing,

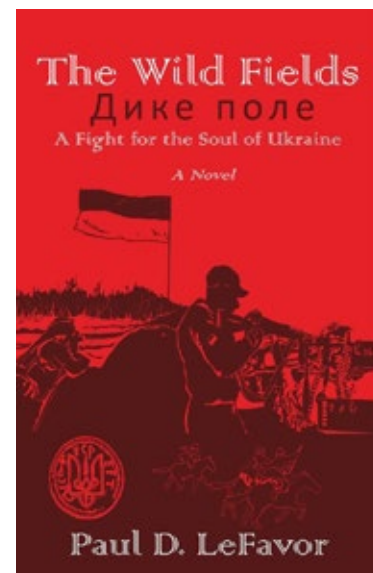
Fayetteville, NC, 2022

274 pages

Available in paperback and

Kindle on Amazon.com.

About the Author: Paul D. LeFavor is a retired Special Forces Master Sergeant who served in several overseas conflicts and continues to provide training to special operations forces as a contractor.



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He is a retired Command Chief Warrant Officer (CW5 180A) with 40 years service in the U.S. Army Special Forces in active duty and reserve components. He has deployed multiple times to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations throughout the world during his military career.

After retirement from the military, he worked as a counterinsurgency advisor in Afghanistan (2012-2014), as a Security Force Assistance SME for NATO in Europe and Afghanistan (2015-2017), and providing support to military exercises as a contractor in the U.S. and overseas. He holds a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree (ALB) from Harvard University, concentrating in International Relations.

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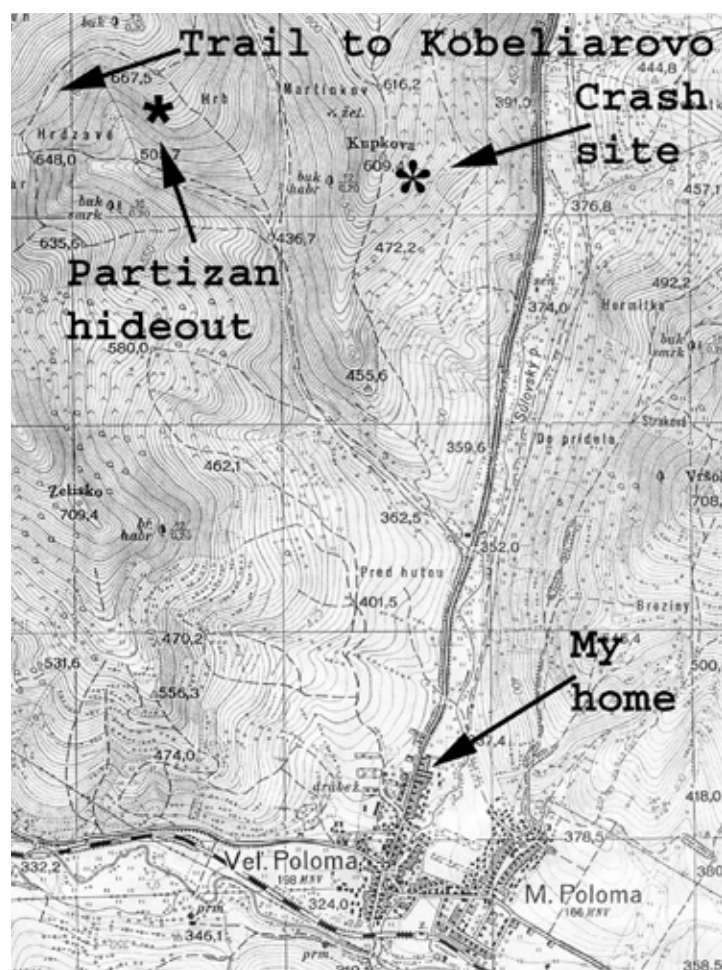
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ESCAPE AND EVASION

By Colonel John Gargus USAF (Ret)

When I was a ten-year-old boy in 1944, I visited the crash site of a Russian Li-2s transport aircraft which impacted into a wooded hill just about one kilometer from my native home in *Vel'ká Poloma*, Slovakia. It was a terrible experience which I have been recalling throughout my lifetime. Aircraft fuselage, which was a copy of an American C-47, was broken up into several pieces that were strewn among crash damaged trees. Eighteen fighters who came to participate in the Slovak National Uprising died there. They were Slovak and Russian volunteer partizans and all the members of the aircraft's crew.



This map shows Vel'ká Poloma with my native home and the location of Russian aircraft's crash. It also shows the location of the partizan hideout and the trail from a safe house in Kobeliarovo. (Courtesy John Gargus)

My second encounter with a crashed aircraft came just four months later on a snowy field south of newly liberated county town Rožňava. This time it was an American B-17 Flying Fortress which made a successful belly landing in deep snow. The bomber sustained extensive battle damage during its mission somewhere over Poland and could not return to its home base in Italy. Its fuselage was intact and, apparently, the crew survived and found refuge in the nearby forest.

I visited this aircraft with two of my classmates from Rožňava's secondary school that had reopened after war's frontal passage in January 1945. We were awed by the size of this huge four engine bomber. It was structurally intact; however, its insides were stripped of all instrumentation and other removable parts. There was plenty of visible battle damage from anti-aircraft artillery and perhaps even from some interceptors that might have attacked it from the air. I sat down in each crewmember's seat and imagined how it must have been to sustain all that crippling damage. Still movable gun turrets fascinated me the most. Even though I had not yet flown in an airplane before I imagined how it must have been to defend this bomber against the swifter enemy interceptors that must have swarmed around such huge and slower moving airplane.

Seventy-six years later, in 2021, my brother forwarded me an article about a lady from Rakovnica, Helena Mišurdová, who was a nurse that helped two of the injured crewmembers of this aircraft. She hid them in the basement of her hospital until the Russians liberated Rožňava. This article was published in the 24 September 2021 issue of *Čítanie na Vikend*. The story had a photograph of two turret gunners and revealed that their bomber was one of 31 that departed from Italian air base at Torretta to bomb targets in Poland. The bomber formation came under enemy attack while flying over Hungary and this Flying Fortress became one of its victims.

Much earlier, in 1953, when I was already a second-year university student in the USA, I visited my godfather Ľudovít Linczenyi in Canada during Christmas holidays. He was the older son of Paloma's Lutheran minister who had been a democratic representative in the Czechoslovak legislature. He had to escape to Germany after the Russian supported Communist Party took over the government in February 1948 and he became a political target as an enemy of the state. Eventually, he immigrated to Canada. He informed me about how he and my father escorted two escaping American airmen of Rožňava's Flying Fortress from Kobeliarovo to a band of partizans in a Súľová forest near my home so that they could lead them across the front line into Russian custody.

This revelation surprised me because our father never shared the event with our family. Godfather asked me to help him to locate the two airmen. Because part of my university education was Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) he thought that I could find out how to find such airmen. I was sure that I could help because I knew that Colonel Luther Bevins, commander of our ROTC department, was a former B-17 pilot. I also knew that he had flown in the B-17 bombers from a base in Italy. He did not recall the loss of this aircraft because there were too many of them.

The Colonel was confident that he could find out about the fate of the airmen. Godfather did not have their names, but he gave me their photograph that was of poor quality because it was taken by the light of a kerosene lantern. Their faces were too white and lacked distinguishing features. He learned after the war that their escape to the Russian occupied territory was not successful. They were captured by the Hungarians at the next safe house and turned over to the Germans. Because the Germans were known for treating American prisoners of war properly, Col. Bevins believed that they probably survived their German imprisonment. He wrote articles for some military publications with details of the crash and their unsuccessful evasion. He received a reply from only one magazine. It was the one that received the only existing photo of the airmen. The reply was that they were not able to publish the photograph because of its poor quality. Other magazines did not respond to the searching stories.

In 1990, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it was safe for me to return to my native village, where I spent much time in the attic of the house in which I was born. There I scanned through family documents and photographs covering my 41 year period of separation from the family. One of the most significant documents I located was a short testimony letter drafted by my godfather in his capacity as a democratic representative of national legislature. It described how he and my father escorted two American airmen from a safe house in Kobeliarovo to custody of partizans on the way to the next safe house in Henclova, a small isolated village that was at that time very close to the Russian front line.

Here is a loose translation of my godfather's document:

I hereby attest that Ján Garguš, born on March 10, 1908, in Veľká Poloma, teacher, currently serving at a middle school in Rožňava, continued in underground service after the cessation of the Slovak National Uprising against the occupying German forces. I joined with him in saving and hiding American airmen who were forced down near Rožňava. Two airmen were successful in evading and hiding in Kobeliarovo. We assisted them by delivering them to a partizan unit that would take them to a safe house in Henclová and then across the front line into Russian custody. Their safe passage did not succeed. They were captured by the Germans in Henclová.

My father's role in this clandestine escort of American airmen was well within his role as a prior soldier in the Slovak National Uprising which ended in October 1944. It was his military duty to facilitate local assistance to allied airmen whose planes were forced down in his rebellious region of the country. As an intelligence officer for his Astra brigade, he probably knew all the safe places and routes



This map shows the location of the B-17 crash landing south of Rožňava. White line shows the escape route for American airmen through Kobeliarovo to Henclová. Black line shows the route traveled by Garguš and Linczényi to the partizan hideout. (Courtesy John Gargus)

within the Slaná valley which they defended from the Germans. Very likely he knew some of the people of the underground railroad that was established for this purpose. Someone knew to come to him with information about the two airmen hiding in Kobeliarovo and he acted on it with his buddy Linczényi.

My own first exposure to escape and evasion occurred during the Vietnam War. There I served as a crew member and mission planner in special operations aircraft known as Combat Talons. We flew clandestine nighttime missions over North Vietnam for a very secret organization known only as Studies and Observation Group (SOG). We infiltrated agents into North Vietnam, resupplied them as needed and dropped propaganda leaflets from high altitudes. These missions were like those flown by the Russian crew which crashed north of my native village. In Vietnam the geography and the closeness of friendly territory was such that there was no need for safe houses to assist downed crews. Also, the helicopter search and rescue had already evolved to such a degree that surviving airmen could be picked up soon after their aircraft were shot down. The most important concern for our Combat Talon crews was to identify suitable crash-landing locations along their mission routes.

Escape and evasion scenario was much different when I came to the 7th Special Operations Squadron in Germany where I once again served as a mission planner. Our wartime missions called for infiltration of special forces teams or agents into Warsaw Pact countries where we would resupply them, as needed. We could even extract some of them and bring them home with our capability with Fulton's surface to air recovery system (STARS). We also had suitable crash-landing areas and a network of supporting safe houses behind the Iron Curtain through which able survivors could be escorted to friendly NATO forces.

We conducted Cold War training exercises called Flintlocks with the Army Special Forces (Green Berets) and with army and navy Special Forces counterparts of allied nations. As we would do after the start of hostilities, we deployed our whole squadron to England for six weeks where we received special operations aircraft reinforcements from U.S. Air National Guard units. From there we planned and flew missions to friendly countries, which at that time

included even distant Iran. We parachuted infiltrators and resupplied them as needed. We could not do high altitude leaflet drops because these would cause undue political and litter problems, and live STARS rescues, which would have required very extensive coordination and approval from countries where they could interfere with their normal air traffic controls. Our Special Forces partners from Bad Tölz, who were responsible for psychological operations, designed sample propaganda leaflets for targeted populations in all East European languages. These could never be dropped or released to anyone. Their fictional anti-communist propaganda content was very sensitive and carried high security classification

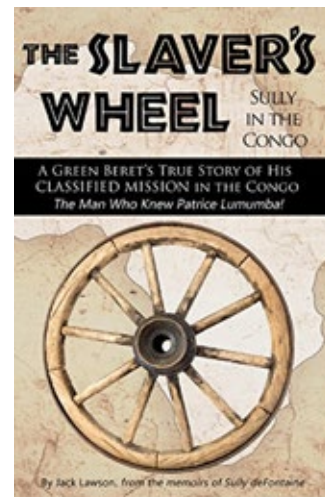
Things we could not exercise during Flintlocks, we accomplished in required annual paper mission planning. My small staff would design a mission scenario with a target area for each combat ready crew, which was then tasked to prepare its low-level terrain following flight plan with all other flight documentation. We used highly classified maps of different scales that depicted various terrain details with man-made facilities. They showed all enemy air bases and lacked only the often-mobile locations of their country's air defense radars and anti-aircraft missile and artillery positions. We simulated these by locating them in the likeliest geographical areas. Included in this mission planning were known secret safe areas where downed crews could find a degree of safety and make contacts with friendly individuals who would assist them in their return to friendly territory.

Should it become necessary to execute an actual wartime mission, each crew member would be issued a silk cloth map of safe areas along the flight route with instructions on how to proceed if forced down behind enemy lines. Hiding and patience was required once stranded in a safe area. One would have to observe and wait for appearance of a woodchopper, beekeeper, or a forest Meister who would attract friendly attention to himself.

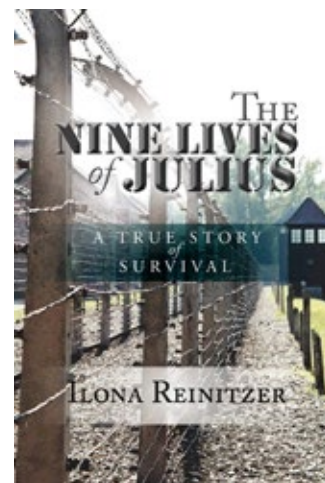
Escape and evasion training was included in all Flintlock exercises. It was conducted by the Green Berets from Bad Tölz, who were very good at it. Participating individuals (evaders) were briefed on their roles as prisoners of war who desperately needed to get to safety. Most of their handlers or facilitators were the same men who planned their scenarios. However, they had to include some native Germans who provided hiding places in their homes and villages. First, during their days as captive prisoners of war (POW), they were subjected to intensive harsh treatment interrogations. A staged POW rescue would free them, after which they were split into singles or pairs and sent out in different directions to reach safety. To convince the evaders about the hazards for being discovered and recognized, their German facilitators would show them photographs of wanted posters with their well-sketched facial images and offers for rewards. Photographs would show these posters in make believe East German public places and police stations. Their often-traumatic experiences with hiding, foraging for food, running, and traveling at night, were credible and would last more than two weeks before they succeeded in being guided or escorted to friendly forces. I had nothing to do with planning of this part of the exercise but met with some of their planners.

Three such planners became my friends when I joined the Special Forces Association as a retiree in Las Vegas. Edward P. Davis and

my native countryman Victor Kreisman, (who served in the armies of 5 nations: first in Czechoslovakia, then Belgium, England, Israel and finally the USA), had planned some of the Flintlock escape and evasion training exercises, and so did the legendary Sully H. DeFontaine, who during the Second World War, as a French resistance fighter, escorted evading American airmen through France to safety in Spain. His clandestine activity in the French underground railroad and rescue of allied airmen are documented in his autobiography titled *The Slaver's Wheels*. This intriguing book focuses on his orchestrated rescue of more than 200 life threatened Christian missionaries from the former Belgian Congo. Sully sponsored me for my associate membership in Las Vegas' SFA Chapter 51. This chapter was eventually named after him just before he died in 2019.



When I relocated to Manchester, NH in 2021, I joined the New Hampshire Trojan Horse SFA Chapter 72. There I met another native of Czechoslovakia, Julius Reinitzer, whose amazing experiences with escaping and evading are documented in *The Nine Lives of Julius – A True Story of Survival*, written by his daughter Ilona. As a senior teenager, Julius was gathered up by the Germans with other Prague students to work in a forced labor camp near Auschwitz in Poland. There the Germans performed maintenance on tanks and other motorized wartime vehicles. He escaped from there, but was captured during an unsuccessful evasion. They returned him to Poland to a forced labor camp that constructed defenses against the advancing Russians. He escaped once more, and this time succeeded in returning to Prague where he participated in the city's uprising against the German occupiers.



His acquired talents in resisting and escaping from German captivity became valuable after 1948 when Czechoslovakia fell behind the Iron Curtain. When his twin brother faced an arrest for his political anticommunist activities, Julius provided him a safe hiding place and then helped him to escape to West Germany. Then, when the authorities learned about his role in his brother's escape to freedom, he also had to disappear and make his own escape to safety in Germany. Once there, he began an aggressive though unsuccessful search for his twin brother, who had by that time emigrated to Australia. This brought him to the attention of American intelligence personnel who had helped him in the search for his brother. They were impressed by his past escapes and recruited him to become an agent whom they parachuted back to Czechoslovakia to escort high valued individ-

uals across the border to Germany. Julius became a fearless agent who risked his life repeatedly by assisting endangered individuals who had to escape from their communist persecutors. He became so successful at it that they expanded his role to establishing new underground safe houses for evading individuals.

However, after many successes his evading luck came to an end. He was apprehended on one of his missions for traveling with forged documents. That was a serious charge to which he had to confess, but his clandestine role as an American agent never came to light despite many long and harsh interrogations. He was sentenced to 14 years of hard labor in the Jáchymov uranium mine. That was more than a death sentence because there was no escape from that well-guarded camp and no one could survive that long with so much hazardous radiation. Julius knew that he had to get out of there. He recruited about ten equally desperate collaborators who managed to dig a tunnel from an abandoned mine shaft to a place outside of the prison's security fence. Unfortunately, someone had betrayed them. They were captured while they were exiting from the painstakingly constructed escape tunnel. After harsh interrogation, all were dispersed to other forced labor camps to await new trials. This dispersal was a good outcome for Julius because it ended his virtual death sentence confinement at Jáchymov. They sent him to a not far away coal mine from which he quickly escaped. This time he evaded his would-be captors and used one of his previously used underground railroad tracks to West Germany.



Julius Reinitzer and John Gargus in Hudson, NH in June 2022. (Courtesy John Gargus)

His American handlers were amazed upon his return. They rewarded him by helping him to join the U.S. Army where he found a good respected and very productive place for himself. When the new Green Berets were established, he eagerly joined the first wave of recruits who qualified for this highly selective special operations forces unit. He became a tremendous asset to his new country's military which profited in many ways from his amazing skills and accomplishments in escaping and evading as well as in establishing safe houses and underground railroad nets. He spent most of his active-duty time at Bad Tölz in Germany with USA assignments at Ft. Bragg, NC and Ft. Devens, MA. He retired as a Sergeant Major in 1982. ♦

About the Author

John Gargus was born in Czechoslovakia from where he escaped at the age of fifteen when the Communists pulled the country behind the Iron Curtain. He was commissioned through AFROTC in 1956 and made the USAF his career. He served in the Military Airlift Command as a navigator, then as an instructor in AFROTC.

He went to Vietnam as a member of Special Operations and served in that field of operations for seven years in various units at home and in Europe. He participated in the air operations planning for the Son Tay POW rescue and then flew as the lead navigator of one of the MC-130s that led the raiders to Son Tay, for which he was awarded the Silver Star.

His non-flying assignments included Deputy Base Command at Zaragoza Air Base in Spain and at Hurlburt Field in Florida and a tour as Assistant Commandant of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

He retired in 1983 after serving as the Chief of USAF's Mission to Colombia, having accrued more than 6,100 flight hours, including 381 combat hours in Southeast Asia. In 2003 he was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. He has authored two books, *The Son Tay Raid: American POWs in Vietnam Were Not Forgotten*, published in 2007, and *Combat Talons in Vietnam: Recovering a Covert Special Ops Crew*, published in 2017. He has been married to Anita since 1958. The Garguses have one son and three daughters.



WOUNDED WARRIOR

Part One

By Greg Walker (ret)
USA Special Forces

Early Days

Michael Dick Echanis was born on November 16, 1950, in Nampa, Idaho. Mike, with two younger brothers and a sister, was the oldest of the four Echanis children. He grew up in eastern Oregon in the small rural town of Ontario where as a young man he became an avid outdoorsman and martial artist. Attending Ontario High School Mike was a solid academic student who participated in track and field as well as basketball, a sport he was particularly fond of and demonstrated exceptional skill as an "Ontario Tiger".

Echanis' first close quarters combat instructor was WW2 paratrooper Charles "Chick" Keim. Keim served with 501st Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, jumping into Normandy at the onset of the Allied invasion of Europe, then again during Operation Market Garden. At the end of the war Chick settled in Ontario, Oregon, where he would soon marry into the Echanis family. "Mike was about 14 when we met," he told me during our first interview together. He wanted to learn all the "dirty tricks" we'd been taught as paratroopers when it came to hand to hand combat. We became fast friends and I later taught him how to SCUBA dive, as well."

Becoming a Soldier

Military service runs strong in the Echanis Family and while Mike was in high school his cousin, Major Joseph Ygnacio Echanis, was shot down over Laos and designated as Missing in Action (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=24338117>).

According to his family young Mike, who early on showed a great interest in serving his country in the military, felt that if he could get to Vietnam under the right circumstances he might be able to learn what had happened to his cousin. Echanis skipped his high school graduation ceremony and joined the Army on May 12, 1969.

Mike attended Basic Training at Fort Ord, California, and then Advance Infantry Training at Fort Gordon, Georgia. While there he volunteered for Special Forces training and was accepted. Upon his successful graduation from AIT he went on to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he attended Airborne training in October 1969 where he was awarded the "Silver Wings" of a paratrooper.

Echanis, arriving at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, began the Special Forces Qualification Course, Class 70-18. Upon completing Phase



Hand to Hand Combat Instructor Michael D. Echanis with 1st Generation DELTA operators (Author Collection)



Charles "Chick" Keim (September 12, 1922 – June 29, 2016) fought with the 501st "Screaming Eagles" during WW2. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star for Valor. "My favorite weapon was the .45 caliber Tommy Gun", he recalled. (Author Collection)

II of the demanding course he and several other candidates were informed they would not be going to Vietnam upon graduation but rather to Okinawa where they'd be assigned to the 1st Special Forces Group (ABN). Mike's response was near immediate. He, along with another candidate, terminated SFQC, requesting to be sent to Vietnam immediately. His request was granted with the caveat given his class standing that he could return and complete the "Q" course at a later date.

Rangers Lead the Way

Arriving in Vietnam on March 23, 1970 and upon being assigned to the 173rd ABN, Specialist 4th Class Michael Echanis volunteered for duty with the 75th Ranger Infantry as a scout-observer. He was accepted and assigned to Charlie Company (Ranger), 75th Infantry. Known as "Charlie Rangers" the company operated under control of I Field Force (Vietnam) and was based at Ahn Khe. The company was moved to Pleiku on March 29, 1970, where it came under operational control of the aerial 7th Squadron of the 7th Cavalry. The Rangers conducted thirty-two patrols in the far western border areas of the Central Highlands in only a few very short weeks.



After terminating from the SFQC, Echanis took 30 days leave at home before leaving for Vietnam where he was accepted and assigned to Charlie Rangers. (Author Collection)

On April 19th the company was attached to the 3rd Battalion, 506th Infantry and relocated to Ahn Khe, where it was targeted against the 95th NVA Regiment in the Mang Yang Pass area of Binh Dinh Province

On May 4, 1970, the company was placed under the operational control of the 4th Infantry Division. On May 5th, Operation BINH TAY I was launched with the invasion of Cambodia's Ratanaktri Province. Ranger combat actions during the operation were fierce and sometimes adverse to include the Rangers themselves being ambushed. Company C concluded Operation Binh Tay I with thirty patrol observations of enemy personnel, five NVA killed, and fifteen weapons captured. On May 24, 1970, Company C was pulled out of Cambodia and released from 4th Infantry Division control.

Echanis completed the "Welcome to Charlie Rangers" course after signing in and prepared to be assigned to a Ranger recon team. He was elated.

Becoming a Wounded Warrior

It was May 6, 1970, and SP4 Echanis had been in Vietnam for a month. Traveling with three other Rangers in a military truck through the Ahn Khe Pass the vehicle was ambushed by an estimated company size element of North Vietnamese regulars. Within minutes both the driver and assistant driver of the truck were badly wounded as well as the rangers themselves.

Echanis, having opened fire on the enemy with his rifle as the vehicle came under attack, jumped from the truck as it left the road and skidded into a ditch turning onto its left side. Struck in his left foot by AK47 fire Mike continued to engage the NVA. Bullet fragmentation then struck him between the eyes after careening off the bridge of his sunglasses. With blood now pouring down into his eyes the young ranger continued to fire on the advancing enemy troops. Another AK round hit him in his right foot, traveling up into and lodging in his calf. Still firing Echanis was struck a fourth time by enemy fire across one forearm. His mother, Pat Echanis, would later recall her son describing the scene as U.S. helicopters arrived to relieve the embattled Rangers. "Mike told me even as the helicopter was arriving the enemy was so close to him he could have reached out and touched them."

In 2017, I interviewed Ed Toliver, who was the company executive officer at the time of the An Khe ambush. "My recollection after 50 years is that the driver was wounded in the hand and drove the truck into the bank on the up-hill side of the curve. He was having trouble controlling the vehicle and didn't want to go over the edge. Echanis took a round in the bottom of the foot as the truck came around the hairpin curve. He then returned fire over the tail gate and was struck a glancing blow in the forehead by spalling when a round hit the tail gate. The blood flowing into his eyes prevented him from seeing clearly. I believe an MP light armored vehicle showed up about that time and relieved the ambush."

"I recall is that he had to go to Charang Valley (173d ABN Rear Echelon) to take care of some admin matter. Whether he was still in school or was sent back from the teams, I don't recall. I was the Company XO. I really knew nothing about him until the ambush in the An Khe Pass when I wrote his BSM citation.

"I next saw him in Jake Jakovenko's team room in '75 but I didn't link him to Charlie Rangers. It wasn't until about '86 when I was killing time in the Pentagon and saw a book about him in the bookstore and started browsing that I realized who he was. I recognized the BSM citation in the book from the one I wrote."



The ambush of the rangers was the highest casualty producing such combat action for Charlie Rangers at that time. Echanis, ultimately the only ranger capable of returning fire, was able to hold the NVA off until a nearby element from the South Korean White Horse Division arrived along with U.S. reinforcements brought in by helo. Battered, bloody, and in a state of adrenaline fueled shock the young ranger was coaxed by another ranger to surrender his now empty rifle. Years later Mike recounted the ambush to a close friend while teaching Hwa Rang Do in Los Angeles. "Mike told me about the ambush," recalls Teresa Carr, who was both a student and an office helper at the HWD dojang Mike was instructing at. "We were sitting outside during a break. He told me when the Americans arrived an officer tried to take his rifle from him. He refused to let it go. He said he had it clutched in his right hand and in his left fist he was clutching the Saint Christopher medal he always wore. Mike said he remembered he was crying and

shaking. He was scared to death. Finally, he released the rifle, but he remembered telling the officer he wouldn't give him his Saint Christopher amulet."

For his heroic actions during the ambush Mike Echanis was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device on July 15, 1970. His citation reads in part "Despite his numerous wounds, Specialist Echanis continued to fight until the beleaguered truck was relieved. Specialist Echanis' aggressive spirit and undaunted courage were decisive in preventing the annihilation of the truck and its personnel."

Recovery and Rehabilitation

Upon aerial medevac Specialist Echanis was sent to the Army 17th Field Hospital and then to the 249th General Hospital in Japan. There his surgeon, reflecting on how young the soldier was, elected not to amputate Mike's seriously injured right lower leg. Years later Pat Echanis recalls the correspondence with the doctor who offered he wanted to give her son a fighting chance so "he patched him up as best he could and sent him to Letterman Army Hospital". At Letterman in San Francisco, California, Specialist Echanis would undergo 7 months of grueling surgeries and a complicated casting process that left him exhausted. He went from 150 to 123 pounds during this period.

The weight loss and being bedridden left him emaciated and depressed. The bullet wound to his head resulted in a diagnosis of cephalalgia, or chronic headaches affecting the frontal and temporal areas of his brain. Although his wound to his left foot healed the right foot and calf were badly and permanently damaged. Echanis suffered foot drop with contracture of the third, fourth and fifth toes due to nerve and artery interruption. In addition, he now had vasomotor instability of his right lower leg. He was medically considered crippled.

His cousin, Michael L. Echanis, remembers “Little Mike” describing to him his lack of overall feeling in his right lower leg after his return from Vietnam. “His nerve endings were badly injured by his wounds,” offers “Big Mike” Echanis. “His entire lower right leg was constantly numb, and he lived in chronic pain.”

On December 18, 1970, Mike Echanis was medically retired from military service. The VA in Boise, Idaho, would rate him as being 100% disabled and provide him with a small pension. He returned home with a soft brace for his crippled right lower leg, an orthopedic insert in his right shoe, a cane and an uncertain future as a wounded warrior in the early 1970s. "Mike was never a quitter," remembers his mother. "He was stubborn even as a little boy. He always told you exactly what he thought. He questioned everything. He was tough."

For two months the young veteran lived in a basement room in the family home which he seldom left. His friends and family would visit him there and his father, Frank, had a pool table put in the room so Mike could entertain himself and his friends. "He was a great pool player," offers Frank. "He learned how to play pool here in Ontario before the Army and he could make all the trick shots." When exactly



Mike decided he would learn to walk again is unclear but when he did he asked his mother to get him a pair of soft desert boots, the only footwear he could wear comfortably, and he began teaching himself, step by step. "He used the pool table in his room to support himself," the family recalls. "He'd brace himself on it and walk around and around it."

The soft brace meant to reduce the ill-effects of his foot drop condition was tossed aside. Echanis strengthened his upper thigh and hip muscles and in doing so developed a technique where he would flex and tighten his upper right leg as he took a step, literally but discreetly throwing his lower leg and foot forward. In his soft shoes and with great will power he not only appeared to be walking normally but in time he was able to run again without support. Randy Wanner, who became Mike's HwaRang Do instructor and a close confidant, described Echanis as having "acquired a bouncing, rolling step" with which he moved swiftly. Even so, without wearing his soft shoes Mike experienced extreme difficulty movement and balance wise to include not being unable to hold himself up when bathing.

Two hometown physicians and friends of the family, Dr. Baker and Dr. Sanders, encouraged Mike to take up weightlifting to increase his potential for recovery. The recommended rehabilitation program included a diet heavy with nutritional supplements and a high intake



Adopted by Frank Echanis, Pat Echanis' second husband, Mike and his mother were exceptionally close. Today mother and son are buried side by side in Ontario, Oregon. (Author Collection)



Medically discharged with a 100% Veteran disability rating Mike Echanis fell into a deep, dark depression. Encouraged by his family and childhood friend, Chuck Sanders, Mike determined he would regain his mobility relying, in part, on his martial arts training (Author Collection)

of protein, most often through homemade milkshakes. Mike enhanced his physical training program by incorporating the anabolic steroid Dianabol, popular in the 1970s among European and American body builders. He went from 123 pounds post hospital care to a healthy two hundred pounds, diligently exercising every day and pushing himself from one physical and mental goal to the next without compromise.

Interested in the martial arts as a young boy he took Judo up again and then Karate in Boise, Idaho. He later trained as a boxer with Al Barras, a Boise based trainer, and would go on to fight as a heavy weight locally. By the time Echanis was awarded his 1st DAN black belt in the Korean martial art HwaRang Do his “high altitude” kicking abilities were extraordinary. “Mike was very proud of his spinning kicks,” remembers retired SEAL Skip Crane, a good friend of the martial artist. “He loved demonstrating how powerful and how high he could effectively kick you.”

In 1975 Mike moved to southern California where he attained his 1st DAN black belt in HwaRang Do. Still, the love of military life and his desire to serve his country in a meaningful manner continued to pull deeply at him. If he could not soldier any longer could he use his remarkable self discoveries about the strength of the human mind and will to overcome fear, pain and physical disability to train soldiers, specifically Special Operations soldiers like the Rangers, Green Berets and Navy SEALs?

In 1976, in a letter to his family from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, after being appointed as the Senior Hand to Hand and Special Weapons Instructor to the United States Army’s John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance, Mike wrote “I am completing a 6-week [military hand to hand training] film and completing an Army Manual [on the same subject]. I am standardizing the Army’s Hand to Hand system. It’s a lot of work, 5:00 in the morning til 2300 every nite...I feel I have found my profession and I know the military is my home.”

The initial results of his work at Fort Bragg would be presented in the January-February 1976 issue of VERITAS, the official publication of the elite Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program in an article simply entitled “HwaRang Do”.

In February 1977, in a formal letter from the 5th Special Forces Group (ABN) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, then Major Juan A. Montez said the following of Echanis’ training programs – “Mr. Echanis’ totally comprehensive approach to the development of soldiers, physically, mentally, and his focus upon the fighting spirit of men, gives us an approach to hand to hand combat well exceeding the usual physical programs developed today.

“His programs dwell on the precise needs of the individual soldier, with his primary focus upon the Physical-Psychological development of the man concerned. Instilling confidence through training, these men acquire the proper state of mind for battle and the physical ability to react decisively to a vast and varied amount of hand-to-hand combat situations. The reaction to these programs of instruction by the individual soldier have been excellent.”

Montez would also point out the U.S. military had not developed a new [hand to hand combatives program] since the O’Neal System was enacted in 1945. “Mr. Echanis’ training programs exceed any close-quarters combatives manuals, books or training programs that I have viewed up to this time,” he wrote. ❖

In the August 2022 Sentinel:

Wounded Warrior Part 2

Following recovery and rehabilitation, Greg Walker discusses Echanis’ phenomenal transition from being a medically retired/crippled Vietnam veteran to becoming the senior hand to hand and special weapons instructor for the Army’s elite Green Berets and Navy SEALs. Following this period is Echanis’ involvement in Nicaragua, leading to the end of his journey.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Walker is an honorably retired “Green Beret” and lifelong martial artist whose close friendship with Ms. Pat Echanis, Michael Echanis’ mother, has resulted in an upcoming book about this Army ranger and Special Forces legend.

Today, Greg lives and writes from his home in Sisters, Oregon.



THE NATIONAL SPECIAL FORCES GREEN BERET MEMORIAL™

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SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION 2022 CONVENTION



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20-24 September 2022

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Join us in colorful Colorado at the Antlers Hotel, Colorado Springs, from 20-24 September 2022. Come celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Regiment with our Colorado Green Berets, who are among the Nation's best.

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 - Task Force VIKING (N. Iraq) – LTC (ret) Mark Grdovic
 - The Battle of Shok Valley – MoH Recipient, MSG Matthew Williams
 - The Attack on FOB Ghazni – MoH Recipient, MSG Earl Plumlee
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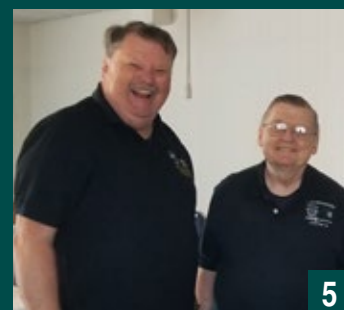
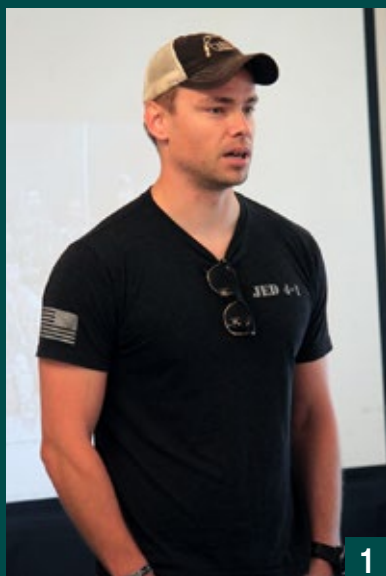
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SFA Chapter 78 June 2022 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Dennis DeRosia and How Miller



1. New Chapter member Tom Kasza made a presentation to the group about [Save Team 11](#), which is dedicated to ensuring the safety, well-being, and SIV (Special Immigrant Visa) assistance to National Mine Reduction Group Team 11 members and their families within Taliban controlled Afghanistan.
2. Tom Kasza's presentation clearly explained the mission of Save Team 11, the history behind its formation, the challenges the group faces, and the progress made since its formation in November 2021.
3. Geri and Bruce Long
4. Left to right, Chapter President Greg Horton, Don Deatherage, Len Fein and Chapter 78's new Chaplain Si Rangel
5. Thad Gembacz and Chapter Secretary Gary Macnamara
6. Tom Turney and Don Gonneville
7. Nimo and Richard Simonian
8. Ham Salley and Mark Miller
9. Members catch up before the meeting. In the foreground, left to right, Thad Gembacz, Richard Simonian, Sal Sanders and Jim Duffy.
10. Debra Holm answering questions for Art Dolick about the SFA Teamhouse and also the Chapter 78 website.
11. Bruce Long and Don Gonneville
12. Chapter 78 members give the speaker their full attention.