



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1 • JANUARY 2023

**SFQC Graduation
Congratulations
to Class 331**

**The Slaver's Wheel
Sully in the Congo**

**Across The Fence:
HAPPY NEW YEAR**

**James O. Schmidt
1927 – 2022**



SENTINEL

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1 • JANUARY 2023

From the Editor



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: Soldiers assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School don their green berets for the first time during a Regimental First Formation at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, May 12, 2022. The ceremony marked the completion of the Special Forces Qualification Course where Soldiers earned the honor of wearing the green beret, the official headgear of Special Forces. How Miller, Chapter 78 member and Sentinel Editor, attended the November 17, 2022 SFQC graduation. Story on page 2.(U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens)



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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 sfachapter78@gmail.com.



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

I left 3SFG at Fort Bragg more than 50 years ago for a “paid vacation in the sunny tropics” with the 5th Group, as the junior medic at an A camp on the Cambodian border — A325 Duc Hue.

I got the opportunity to represent Chapter 78 at events for the Q-Course Class 331 graduation, at Fort Bragg in November and packed in as much activity as time allowed, along with Duc Hue team mate Lew Chapman, commo man.

Our first story covers the barbecue co-sponsored by Chapter 78 (SoCal) and Chapter 1-18 (Fayetteville) as an introduction to SFA and what it has to offer the graduates in the future. That was followed by our attendance and support for the new Green Berets at the graduation.

The JFK Special Warfare Museum was a treat to visit, and that was topped by meeting Director Roxanne Merritt, who has been working there for forty years. She and her staff are part of the SF Family. The displays that they have put together and maintained, are informative, interesting, and leave you both appreciative of the accomplishments of SF and wanting more.

The fascinating story of Sully deFontaine in the rapidly deteriorating, newly-independent Republic of the Congo, came to us in a Letter to the Editor. Jack Lawson was able to extract the story from the soft-spoken Sully, and they collaborated to bring out an SF success story that virtually nobody knew about. Jack sent me the book “*The Slaver’s Wheel*” to review and I insisted he let us publish a couple of riveting chapters.

John Stryker Meyer was another Green Beret whose story, along with those of his intrepid peers in SOG, was not allowed to be told until many years afterward. John has written several books about SOG, including his *Across the Fence* series, about the super secret war behind enemy lines in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. He shares with us one of those stories centered around New Years, the enemy never letting up, and loyalty.

SGM James O. Schmidt has left us. Remarkable doesn’t begin to describe his life. He made a combat jump into Sicily at 15 and continued to have an amazing career. He earned a very rare 3 CIBs and fought in Korea at Chosin Reservoir, and was CSM of 5th group in Vietnam. Add in a stint with Air America and a long civilian career. This tribute was written by his fellow SF Jack Williams.

We end with our chapter meeting pictures.

Enjoy. ❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

From the President | January 2023



Gregory Horton
President SFA Ch. 78

Well, at the invitation of Chapter Member Thomas Kasza, I attended the screening of the National Geographic movie “Retrograde.” This was hosted by The Occidental College Department of Critical Theory and Social Justice and the NMRG Rescue Project. Never has my soul been rocked like it was at the screening of this movie. This was in spite of the fact that I knew what had happened in Afghanistan when the United States so abruptly departed.

The Director, Matthew Heineman, of this sure to be award-winning documentary did a masterful job in the making of this film. The documentary tells the story of the last months of the 20-year war in Afghanistan through the intimate relationship between American Green Berets and the Afghan officers they trained. Ho hum, another dry, history documentary. But then the Executive Producer, Baktash Ahadi, piqued the audience’s interest by describing a unique method of filming called Cinéma Vérité. In this method, the cameramen have no verbal interaction with the subjects, they just film non-stop. In fact, for this project, none of the camera crew spoke the native languages Pashto or Dari. They just followed them and filmed. Even when they were working around the Americans, they had no verbal interaction. What you see is what you get.

Early on, General Sami Sadat is introduced and developed as the main character of the film. As I followed the movie, it was so interesting watching the change in him as the story progressed. General Sadat is a well-respected officer and as he took over command of the Armed Forces of Afghanistan, you could see the commanding presence and confidence in the man. But as events unfold and the military suffers body blow after body blow, you can sense the impending doom and watch the marked change in the General. The final part where the United States pulls out and the country descends into the hell of a Taliban takeover is gut wrenching.

When I went to the premier, I was in the process of reading “Operation Pineapple Express” by Scott Mann. I was reading the portion where Nezam is trying to make it to the airport to get rescued by a team and put on a flight and has reached the outskirts of the rendezvous spot. The author describes perfectly the chaos of the thousands of Afghans trying to escape the impending Taliban takeover. But nothing written prepares you for the actual video clips of the horrific panic

and desperate acts of a frightened population. Nothing. Frightened parents clinging to their children with a look of total desperation and their cries for help, only to be pushed back and in some cases beaten. The videos were heartbreaking and gut wrenching.

And while this was going on, they would flash back to scenes of the General and his troops as they are preparing for, and fighting. The sense of desperation and fear was palpable, and I began to empathize with them and imagine me and my family in that situation. I cannot help but remember the words of Henry Kissinger:

“To be an enemy of the US is dangerous, but to be a friend is fatal!”

I was glad to see that General Sadat was able to flee with some of his troops and his family to the UK, but I think that this documentary is an indictment on the way the withdrawal was handled. I am sure the series of decisions and actions taken will be debated about for years by pundits and politicians alike. Could of, would of, should of. But the bottom line nothing was done.

I personally would like to thank all the people involved in making this documentary and would encourage everyone to watch it. If you are interested in the trailer, the link to the YouTube production is <https://youtu.be/gaabPkONJ4Q> In my opinion, I repeat, this is a must see film when it is released.

On a much lighter note, at the time of writing, the Chapter is preparing for our annual Christmas party at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club. This will be a lot of fun again, and the Club is an awesome place to relax and mingle with each other. The party will take place after this issue goes to print, so there will be more about it in the February issue.

Our next Chapter meeting Saturday, January 21st, 2023

LOCATION: The Pub at Fiddlers Green
TIME: Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830
LOCATION: The Pub at Fiddlers Green
ADDRESS: 4745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176
(Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos)

Greg Horton SGM (Ret)
President
SFA Chapter 78

SFA Chapter Meeting Schedule

SFA Chapter 78 meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of the month at the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos, California.

Mark your calendar for the following scheduled dates for 2023:

Jan 21 • Feb 18 • Mar 18 • Apr 15

SFQC GRADUATION



CLASS 331

November 17, 2022

U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY

SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL

— The Special Operations Center of Excellence —



By How Miller

Former teammates of A325 Duc Hue, Lew Chapman 05b/18E and I, a 91B/18D, attended events for the graduating Q-Course Class 331. After an appearance at a meeting to showcase what would become available to them, from the Green Beret Foundation and the Special Forces Charitable Trust, to the SF4Life concept provided by the Special Forces Association, we met them again later the same day.

SFA Chapters 78 (SoCal) and 1-18 (Fayetteville) cosponsored a barbecue at 1-18's spacious chapter compound for the graduating class. The fact that it was raining did not dampen enthusiasm at all.

Chapter 78 contributed to growing the SFA membership rolls by granting Lifetime SFA memberships to the thirteen California graduates. So during the activity I handed out Gold membership cards along with copies of the *Sentinel*, Chapter 78 Challenge Coins, and welcomes and congratulations. It was well appreciated by them, and for the second straight class, included one who was an honor

graduate. It was a great opportunity to hopefully build relationships and even impart some old-timer wisdom. They used the time to be with their classmates once more, before they were to be dispersed to their various, far-flung groups and duty stations.

Chapter 1-18 President, Chris Wilkerson was called away to attend some other business, so Vice President TC Rupert took the reins. He and SFA President Kevin Harry and others talked about things that awaited them from the SFA, now that they were joining the ranks of the SF Regiment — such as mentoring, connectivity, and opportunities to expose their potential businesses, etc. The delicious food served by Mission BBQ Catering, the beers served by 1-18 members, and the camaraderie worked to make it a fun event. Those feelings made themselves known after the graduation when they seemed quite appreciative of the enthusiastic congratulations Lew and I gave them.

Pictures of the new class were not taken, due to op-sec. However, Lew took pictures of items on the wall of the teamhouse. Likewise, pictures were not allowed during the graduation ceremony two days later at Pope Field. However, the official photographer, Kenneth Kassens, caught Lew and myself standing, just prior to the "Toast to the Regiment," which we enthusiastically joined.

That was an impressive event. There were the requisite speeches, disbursing of awards earned, and most importantly the handing out of the virgin-wool, rifle-green berets, replete with the flashes of the groups they are being assigned to, and the crests proclaiming "De Opresso Liber." The highlights for me were the simultaneous Donning of the Berets, and the intensity of the graduates reciting the Special Forces Pledge. It left me with a feeling that the Regiment will be in good hands. ❖



Lew Chapman, center, and How Miller, left, await joining the Distinguished Members of the Regiment for the Toast to the Regiment. (Photo by official photographer Kenneth Kassens.)



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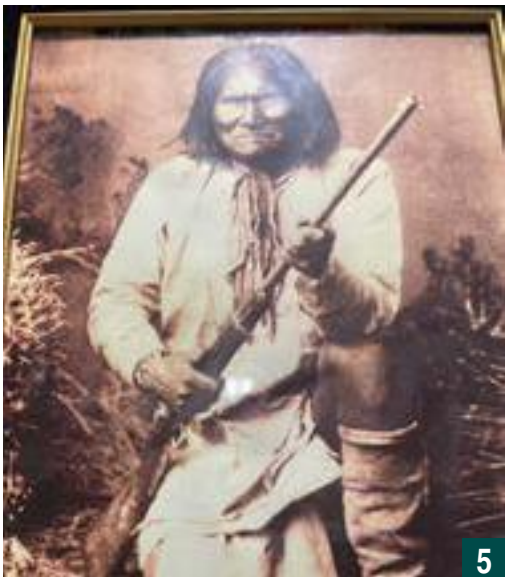


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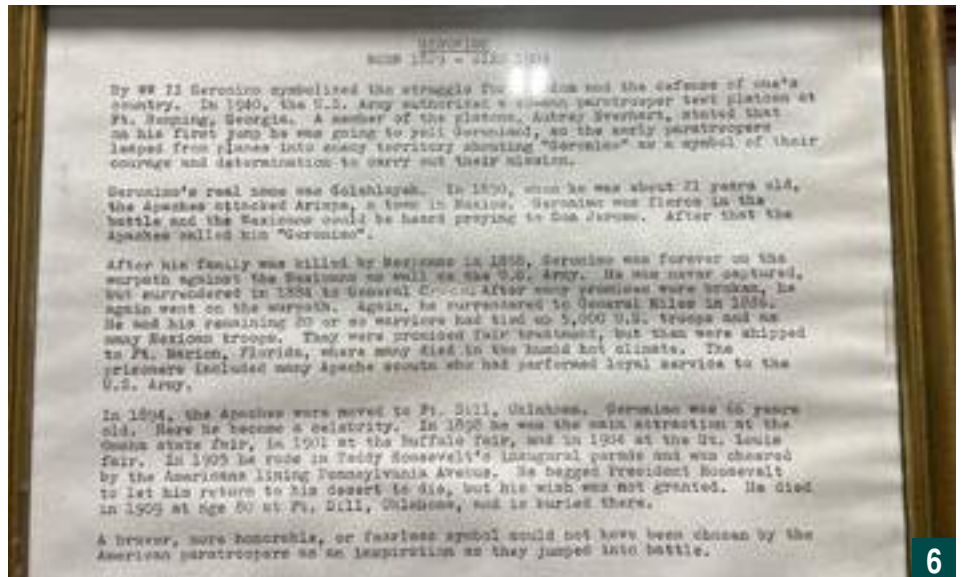
The SFA Chapter 1-18 Teamhouse

Photos courtesy How Miller

1. Chapter 1-18 teamhouse walls are covered with SF memorabilia.
2. A poster commemorating the 1st Special Service Force aka "The Black Devils" or "The Devil's Brigade."
3. An early rebreather rig circa 1943.
4. John F. Kennedy, the only U.S. President to earn a Purple Heart, with BG Yarborough. Kennedy later makes Green Beret official.
5. Geronimo, the man.
6. Geronimo, the inspiration.



5



6

JFK SPECIAL WARFARE MUSEUM FT, BRAGG, NC



By How Miller

All photos courtesy How Miller and Lew Chapman

As part of a very busy visit to Fort Bragg, scheduled to be re-named Fort Liberty, A325 Duc Hue teammates, Lew Chapman and I, had the distinct pleasure of perusing the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare (JFKSW) Museum.

After a closure, it was reborn in April of 2021 in a newly revamped building, about a block from the old location. It is open to the public, and it is not very difficult to get on base to see it. Chapter 78 member Jim Duffy visited in May, 2022 and took a lot of pictures, many of which we showed in [Sentinel June 2022 issue](#).

After we saw most of the exhibits, it was time for our scheduled meeting with the Museum Director, Roxanne Merritt. She has been caring for the museum, and the Green Berets whom it so eloquently honors, for forty years. Not only is she a fount of knowledge, she is clearly the glue that binds this treasure together along with her three employees.

She has personally interacted with a great many of the SF and Special Ops legends, as well as one-tour Green Berets such as Lew and I, SF families, and the general public. She has many tales she can share, and many I'm sure she can't. When I mentioned to her how valuable she is to the Regiment, she deferred, saying that it was you who talked to your congressmen and others who saved the museum. After the closure was announced she began to be very busy interfacing with many of them. Eventually SF and others came to the rescue.

The glass-cased displays run the gamut from the SF precursors — Devil's Brigade, OSS, and Philippine Scouts in WWII, through the founding days of SF and PSYOPS in 1952 as a permanent part of the army, Laos and Vietnam, Central and South America, and Africa, to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Each display tells a story, replete with actual artifacts from the events, from Sten Guns used extensively by the OSS, to anti-tank Javelins used from Iraq to Ukraine, and even some spears. There are some gold plated weapons "donated" by Sadaam Hussein's son Uday, along with a toppled statue of Sadaam. One of my favorites is a mockup of Nick Rowe's V.C. captivity, before he escaped and eventually founded the SERE school. Its realism includes a life size "Nick Rowe" shackled in a bamboo cage in the jungle, and a sound track with jungle sounds and distant gunfire. It is extremely easy for a Vietnam Vet to become immersed.

The displays are as far ranging as is the SF experience. There is working with the indigenous personnel around the world, such as the Montagnards and Afghans, and surprises like the OSS working with Ho Chi Minh. You'll find "Barbara," the actual model used to plan the Son Tay Raid, and even a revealing display about the Q-course's culminating event: Gobbler Woods, later revamped and renamed Robin Sage.



How Miller with Director Roxanne Merritt

Roxanne gave us a personal behind-the-scenes tour. She showed us the poster printer they have and other tools of the trade, along with progress in a new 1500 square foot section they are expanding into. The attendance for the museum is recovering nicely, already higher by far than last year.

Besides giving us details that were not obvious about several of the displays, such as the mascot Malayan sun bear, Barnie, another orphan covertly adopted by SF, and ultimately the museum. She took us into the Martha [Colonel Maggie] Raye conference room. All four walls are filled with Martha Raye memorabilia, much from her estate. Col Maggie has the unique honor of being buried at Ft. Bragg, partly from her diligence in



Nick Rowe exhibit



Roxanne with Barney the Malayan sun bear, mascot of Company Alpha, 5th Special Forces Group, Airborne, Ben Hoi, South Vietnam.



1960's Gobbler woods, reborn as Robin Sage is the final stage of Q-course training, involving many local citizens in the scenarios.



An early version of a rebreather which allowed for stealthy underwater access to the enemy.

visiting every A-site in Vietnam and taking Polaroid shots with each member of the team. The Polaroids were given to the team member along with a St. Christopher medal. I still have those that she gave me. I don't know any Green Beret whose eyes don't light up when they talk about a visit by Col Maggie to their camp. She loved the Green Berets and we loved her. One of the several books about her was written by Noonie Fortin, *Memories of Maggie: Martha Raye — A Legend Spanning Three Wars.*

As for the future, they will continue to create meaningful and informative displays and interact with the public and the Regiment. There are many ways for you follow them from afar, as well as their proximity to Interstate 295, making a drop-by visit while travelling is a treat to look forward to. (Continued Page 6)



Lew Chapman in the "Col Maggie" conference room.



The OSS example was directly used to formulate Special Forces, working hand in hand with PSYOPS.



BG Yarborough and Kennedy exhibit.



First Special Service Force, the combined Canadian/American "Devil's Brigade."

How do you find out more about the JFKSW Museum?

Roxanne says the best way is to visit one of the following:

- Facebook page [@JFKSWM](#).
- JFKSW museum website specialwarfaremuseum.org/
- Special Warfare Museum Foundation swmfoundation.org
The Special Warfare Museum Foundation supports the JFKSW Museum in its mission to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret significant historical property

She says that since they are one of the few private museums, they are dependent upon donations. You can find ways on the museum's website (specialwarfaremuseum.org) to donate artifacts and keep the museum alive for future generations. Monetary donations are accepted at the [Special Warfare Museum Foundation](https://swmfoundation.org) website (see above).

Would you like a printed copy of the *Sentinel*? Visit the museum, because they are now available there. If you don't see one, ask. The *Sentinel*, *Veritas*, and other items are displayed on the wall racks between the Vietnam and WWII displays near the rest rooms. The plan is that they will be available in the gift shop, when it reopens.

Lew and I also visited the Army Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville. It is impressive in its own way, and duplicates some of the topics covered in the JFKSW Museum. It is a big, fancy museum that caters to the public as well as veterans' families, and covers the Airborne experience more broadly with interesting and well-crafted displays. If you have the time, you should visit both. But if you don't, chose the JFKSW Museum. If you want to recall, or learn more about your roots and others who share the Brotherhood in a more intimate setting, chose the "Special Forces" museum at 3004 Ardennes Street, Fort Bragg, NC. ❖

Chapter 78 Member and Past President Jim Duffy Honored by Artemis Defense Institute



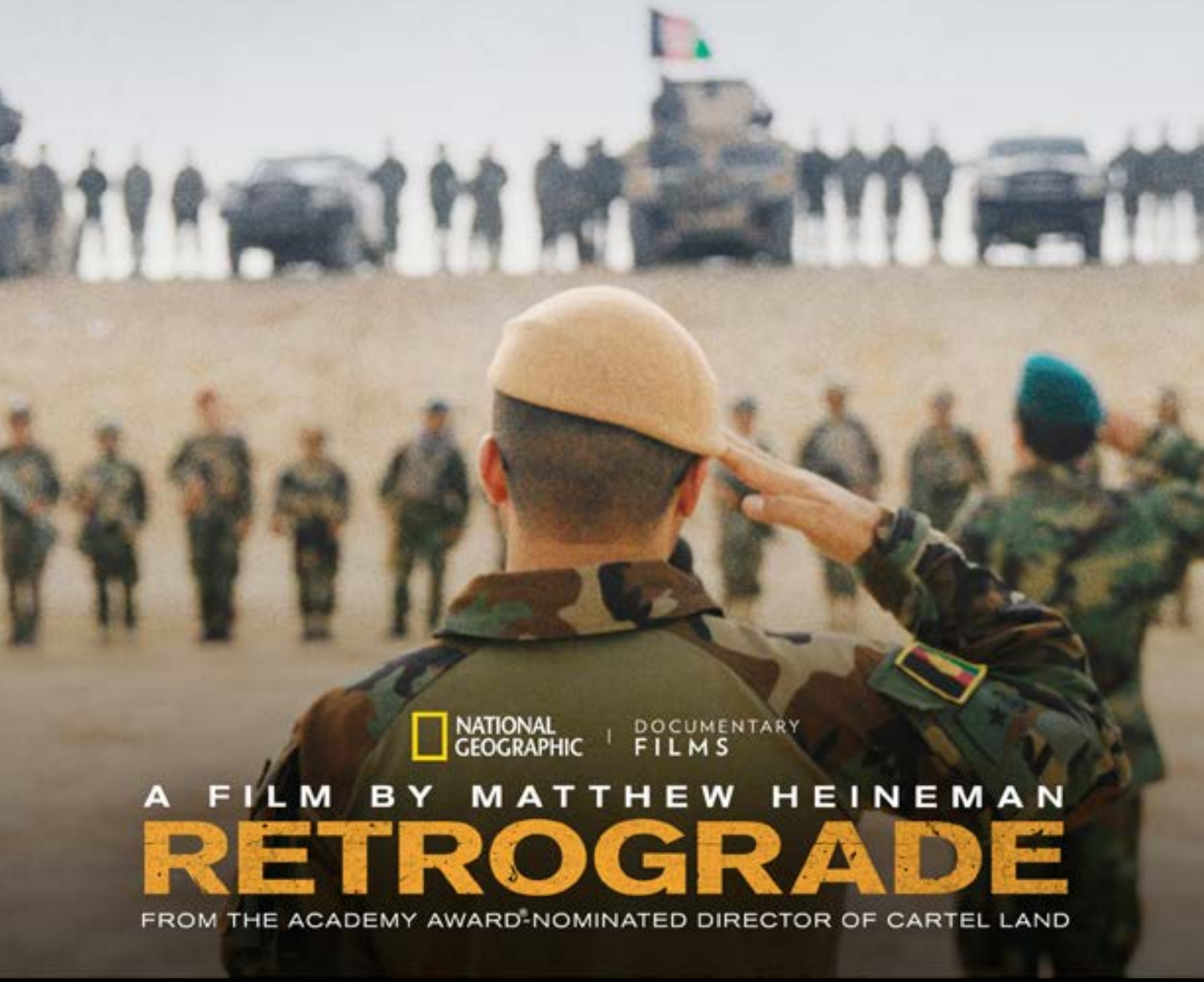
Jim Duffy, center, with Sandy and Steven Lieberman, co-founders of Artemis Defense Institute


LTC (ret) Jim Duffy, a Chapter 78 member, was recognized by Artemis Defense Institute on Veterans Day 2021, by having his name added to their "Wall of Honor." The Colonel is a long-time and much-loved member at Artemis.

Jim facilitates their seniors self-defense class, "Self Defense With The Colonel," where he teaches students where to target an attacker and what to use as a weapon. There are no throws or contact sparring involved in the classes. To enroll visit <https://www.artemishq.com/product/self-defense-with-the-colonel/>.



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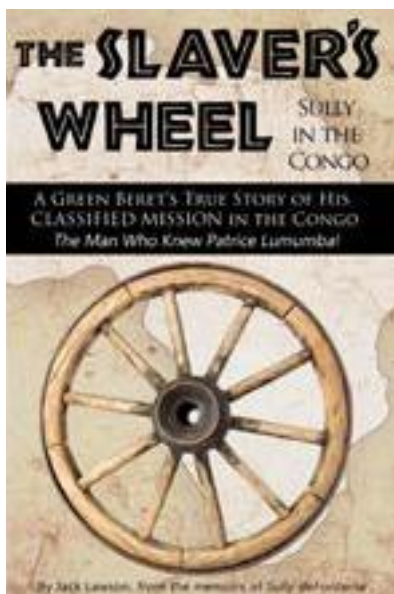


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RETROGRADE

FROM THE ACADEMY AWARD-NOMINATED DIRECTOR OF CARTEL LAND



THE SLAVER'S WHEEL: Sully in the Congo

By Jack Lawson with Sully deFontaine
Excerpted from [Slaver's Wheel: A Green Beret's True Story of His CLASSIFIED MISSION in the Congo](#), JNM Media (March 22, 2018), Chapters 20-21, with permission from Jack Lawson

Editor's Note: In 1960, Belgium granted the Congo its independence under pressure from the United Nations, knowing that the country was woefully unprepared and would likely devolve into multi-tribal conflict. Green Beret Sully deFontaine with his small team was sent on a secret mission to rescue missionaries and others from the ensuing ethnic cleansing to rid the country of the hated white colonists. All manner of horrors awaited those that were to fall victim.

The "Slaver's Wheel" lays out the situation and the effectiveness of the mission. These two chapters suspensefully tell of just one incident from the mission. The whole book is well worth the read.

Standoff

Robert One, this is Robert Four, come in!" Frenchy's voice crackled over the radio from the small airport at Coquilhatville to where Sully had moved the team. The call awakened Sully, Clement and Mazak. Sully looked at his watch; it was 4:45 in the early morning hours of July 19, 1960. He shook his head in disbelief.

Sully leaped off his cot and grabbed the radio handset. "This is Robert One, go ahead Robert Four," he answered.

"Robert One, I just had a call from a group of people in Gwante calling for help. It sounds like they're in real trouble. I've confirmed twelve people including nuns, a priest and some missionaries. The message was weak, but he made it clear that his missionary outpost is under attack by a large group of rebels. The rebels are threatening to kill them."

"Robert Four, did you tell them to mark their location with a white cross or flag?" "Affirmative, Robert One."

"Okay Robert Four, we're on our way!" Sully relayed. "How the heck did Frenchy pick that call up at this time in the morning?" Sully wondered aloud, shaking his head in disbelief.

"He's sleeping with his headset on!" Clement said chuckling.

As only one aircraft was available in Coquilhatville, Sully and Mazak took off in it, heading toward Gwante.

Sully left instructions with Captain Clement that as soon as another aircraft arrived at Coquilhatville from Brazzaville, it was to be immediately refueled and he was to fly out to assist them.

Despite seeing no flag or marker in the area of Gwante or any building resembling a church or mission, the pilot set the aircraft down on a dirt road bordering the village to conduct a search. Sully got out of the plane with two hand grenades concealed in his pockets while Mazak covered him with a submachine gun. Sully briefly searched the village and found no one. Still concerned that the people may be in hiding, Sully told Mazak to search the village further while he proceeded to search from the air.

When Sully left him at Gwante, Mazak was carrying a medical backpack, a radio, grenades, a submachine gun and more ammunition than most Special Forces soldiers would take with them. It was like Mazak had once confided to Sully: "I always carry one more knife, one more grenade and twice as many magazines as the guy next to me. That's how I've stayed alive this long."

Mazak was to radio him if he found the evacuees at Gwante. After flying ten miles east of Gwante, Sully caught a glimpse of a white flag fluttering from a church steeple in the neighboring village of Mombaka.

The pilot landed on a narrow road leading into the village, the tree branches on the sides of the road scraping the wings. Coming to a stop in a clearing about a hundred yards from the church, Sully got out, and the pilot turned the aircraft and readied for takeoff.

Outfitted in his British safari suit and armed only with the two concealed grenades and the pistol in his medical bag, Sully approached the church. A middle-aged priest with snow-white hair ran toward him. His smock was drenched in blood, his face was bruised and cut, and one eye was swollen shut.

"Are you who I radioed for help?" he asked Sully. "Yes, I'm Robert. Where is everyone, Father?"

"In the church. Come this way," the priest said. He beckoned as he turned and both men hurried to the church door. The priest took Sully aside and described their ordeal.

"When the rebels came into the village we barricaded ourselves inside the church, but they broke in and beat us for it. Six of the women are sisters of this church. All of them and others have been abused by the rebel soldiers. I am afraid that some will not live very long. They're all badly in need of medical treatment. We have bandaged them, but I think two of the elderly sisters have internal hemorrhaging."

Sully handed the priest his medical backpack, telling him to do the best he could with what was in it and that he would try to radio for more help from Coquilhatville.

The priest told Sully that he believed there were about a hundred rebels terrorizing the village. He also reported that the commander of the rebel forces had said he would return to kill the priest and the

others. They had tried several times to get out of the village and escape into the jungle, but were chased back each time.

Sully heard the sound of rifle and machine gun fire close by and, realizing that he had little time to spare, called the pilot on his radio handset.

“Jake Nine, this is Robert One, come in.” Sully received no answer and called again, “Jake Nine, this is Robert One, come in please!” There was silence. He called again, “Jake Nine, do you read me?”

This time the message from Jake Nine was garbled. Sully called for Mazak.

“Robert Three, this is Robert One. Come in.” Sully called Mazak and waited, but received no answer. “Robert Three, this is Robert One. Come in, over,” Sully repeated.

“Robert One, this is Robert Three, I read you but your signal is two by four,” meaning Mazak’s reception was poor. Sully suspected there was something wrong with his radio.

“Robert Three. I’ve found the evacuees. I’m at Mombaka, ten kilometers due east of Gwante. Have the Belgians send a platoon of Para Commandos immediately, and I need another plane here as soon as possible. My radio is on the blink. Have Jake Nine land the plane now. The situation here is not going well. Do you copy?”

“Roger, Robert One. I read you. I’ll radio Jake Nine and the Belgians in Coquilhatville immediately!”

“Are they sending help?” the priest asked.

“Yes,” replied Sully. He turned to the priest and told him the plane would have room for only six passengers. “Get the sisters ready to move. We’re going down by the road to load those injured the worst on the plane. But the rest of us will have to go into the jungle and hide until more help can get here.”

Sully organized the small group of refugees, moved them out of the building and down the road to where the aircraft would land.

A cloud of dust stirred and the engine loudly droned as Jake Nine landed his plane and turned it for takeoff. Sully sprinted to the plane and, over the engine noise, yelled instructions to the pilot.

“Jake, my radio is not working. I’m going to put some of these people on your plane. Get them to the hospital in...” “Robert, behind you!” Jake Nine yelled to Sully, pointing.

Sully turned to see a horde of rebels charging toward them from about a hundred yards away. They began firing their weapons in the air as they ran toward the evacuees.

“Get airborne now, Jake!” Sully yelled, quickly closing the airplane door. The pilot gave the aircraft full power and was airborne in a matter of seconds.

Sully raced back to the priest and nuns as the rebels came closer.

“Kill the whites! Kill the whites!” he heard them chanting. The words would be etched indelibly in his mind.

A surge of adrenaline hit Sully. He placed himself between his evacuees and the heavily armed approaching rebels. In addition to rifles, pistols and machine guns, each one of the rebels carried a machete. The rebels continued toward them, firing recklessly at the plane and into the jungle. Sully quickly turned his medical bag displaying the Red Cross toward them. The group’s charge slowed when they saw the Red Cross, and they came to a stop in front of the refugees. The petrified refugees crowded behind Sully in search of some mental comfort for protection.

Sully singled out a tall Congolese who appeared to be the leader of the group. Sully approached him speaking in French and Lingala. “I’m Robert. Are you the commandant?”



American Congo Missionaries, who had been hiding from rebel soldiers for days, drive madly for the U.S. Air Force rescue helicopter after finally contacting authorities by two-way radio, desperate for evacuation.



U.S. Air Force Pilot George Meyers runs back to his helicopter with the people of Vanga, Congo in pursuit. The other pilot and captain Albert Clement, U.S. Army Special Forces, are running alongside him to the left out of camera view.



Evacuees scream from the aircraft door at other refugees to hurry to the aircraft. Not shown in this picture are the rebel soldiers and villagers racing towards the rescue helicopter to attack them.

“I am Major Kimba,” he said to Sully in Lingala.

“Could we talk over here?” Sully said, gesturing to a place away from his rebels, not wanting them to hear the conversation. “You will address me as Major Kimba!” the major barked, glaring at Sully. The major appeared intoxicated and reeked of alcohol. “Of course, Major Kimba,” Sully replied.

“That is better,” the major said with a smirk. “Could we talk alone Major Kimba?”

The major began laughing loudly. “Yes,” he said, “but it will make no difference.”

“Major Kimba, I’m a French-Canadian and here to help these people with their medical needs. These people desperately need medical attention. They need to be taken to a hospital. Then they will be no problem to you,” Sully said, as the two began slowly walking away from the rebels.

“They will not need medical attention in a short time. They will not be a problem much longer. We are going to kill them,” the major said, laughing loudly.

Sully, in his bush hat, safari shorts and shirt, looked every bit the neutral French-Canadian medical officer, but it had little impression on the rebels. As they strolled away from the rebels, Sully quickly surmised that any further pleading would get him nowhere, as he suspected the rest of them were also intoxicated. Worse, Sully suspected his request for mercy would get him killed along with the people he was there to rescue.

As they came to a stop, Sully calmly removed a grenade from his vest, straightened the ends of the pin and pulled it from the grenade in front of the major’s eyes. Holding the fly-off lever down to prevent the grenade from exploding, he grabbed the major’s hand, put the pin in it and closed the major’s fingers over it. All Sully had to do was release the grenade from his hand, the lever would pop off and the grenade would explode in seconds. Sully figured he could create a standoff and buy them enough time for help to arrive.

“You know what this is, don’t you Major Kimba? If you do anything more to those people or if you kill them, you will die with them,” Sully calmly told the major.

The major, a former corporal or sergeant in the Belgian Congo Army, was well acquainted with the powerful explosive device Sully held up to his face. The major opened his hand and stared in horror at the grenade pin he held, and then looked at the grenade Sully was holding. The rebels behind him saw the grenade and began to panic, moving away.

“Don’t move!” the major yelled to his men.

The major started to move away in an attempt to run, but Sully grabbed him by the front of his shirt, thrusting the grenade right by his nose and slowly starting to release his grip on it.

“If you try to get away get away from me Major Kimba, I will shove this grenade down your pants!”

The petrified major’s eyes bulged as he wet his pants. He yelled again to his troops, “Shut up and don’t move a muscle!”

A tense, two-hour standoff followed, marked by silence and the periodic punctuation of rebel troops yelling and firing their weapons into the air. Each time the rebels became unruly, the major begged them to stop.

The American MK II AI “Pineapple” fragmentation grenade Sully was holding weighs only twenty ounces. But after holding the grenade for two hours in the midday sun and drenching humidity of Central Africa, it began to feel as if it weighed a hundred pounds.

Sully changed the grenade from one hand to another, but each minute passed like an hour. Pushed to his limits, Sully was wondering how much longer he could continue to hold the grenade. Major Kimba was starting to lose control of his troops.

As adrenaline coursed through Sully’s veins, his head began to ache. He was beginning to feel that his threat was going to fail. He could hear the rebels talking among themselves about shooting Sully, Major Kimba and the refugees. Over and over, he thought, “Where are the Belgian troops?”

Just after Mazak talked to Sully, he told Frenchy to contact the Belgians at Coquilhatville to send help. Mazak’s and Sully’s handset radios were not powerful enough to allow them to talk directly to anyone but Jake Nine or Frenchy, and Sully’s radio was no longer working.

“Robert Three, they’re going to airdrop a platoon of Para Commandos into the Mombaka,” Frenchy said, relaying the Belgian captain’s message to Mazak.

“Tell him to forget the air drop, Robert Four. His men will be too vulnerable to ground fire from the rebels. Just tell him to send them in one of the Otters. Have them stop in Gwante to pick me up on their way.”

“Roger that Robert Three!” Frenchy signed off. A few minutes later, Frenchy radioed Mazak again.

“Robert Three, this is Robert Four. The Belgians can’t pick you up, and they can’t get to Sully for an hour. Do you copy?”

“Roger, I copy. Tell the Belgians to forget it. Send an Otter directly to Robert One’s position! I’m heading to Robert One on foot,” Mazak said.

Jungle Monster

Sully’s safari jacket was drenched with sweat. It had been more than an hour since he’d pulled the pin on the grenade and started the standoff. Most of the women were in urgent need of medical attention. He was now worried that they would die if they stayed out in the baking sun much longer without water. Sully did not dare take the chance to move anyone; the standoff was on a razor’s edge.

The major was as scared as if the devil himself were standing in Sully’s boots. His troops were growing agitated as the situation moved into the second hour.

“Major Kimba, if you order your troops away from here and come with us, I will release you as soon as we’re far enough away,” Sully said in a low voice.

“I don’t know how much longer my troops will take orders from me. You heard them talking,” he whispered to Sully. “They are discussing killing everyone, including me!”

Mazak knew from the radio transmission that Sully was in dire straits. The life of his commanding officer was in peril, along with the evacuees.

“Robert Three, this is Robert Four,” Frenchy’s voice crackled over Mazak’s radio.

“Go ahead, Robert Four.”

“The Otter just got to Coquilhatville. They’re refueling now, but it will be about another hour before they get to Robert One.”

There was silence as Mazak pondered what to do. He could wait an hour for the Otter to pick him up and fly to help Sully or he could run there. The jungle was thick and virtually impenetrable, but Mazak remembered seeing a machete in one of the villager’s huts.

“Robert Three, do you copy?” Frenchy asked after no reply.

Mazak replied, “Robert Four. Send the Otter directly to Mombaka. I’m moving there on foot.”

At that, Mazak ran to the villager’s hut, grabbed the machete and then ran east on the road for about two kilometers until it turned sharply north. He tightened his webbing straps and set off into the jungle.

A few kilometers into the jungle, Mazak began to wonder if he’d made a mistake. He was chopping, hacking, tripping and falling but moving slowly through the thick jungle bush toward Mombaka. He drove himself mercilessly, fearing he would not get to his commander in time. He was soaked with sweat and covered with vines and green slime from the jungle foliage. The worst of it was the “wag a rukkie” bush, so named by South African Afrikaners as it literally means “wait a moment.” Its hook-like, needle-sharp thorny seeds tear clothing, lacerate the skin and then break off under the skin’s surface. After a few days each seed begins to ferment, creating an infection until the seed pops out simply from touching the skin. It leaves a horrendous hole. This is Mother Nature’s African way of propagating itself.

Just as bad was the buffalo bean. The brown, bean-like seeds hang from trees and have prickly hairs that shoot into the skin causing days of relentless itching. Amazingly, water buffalo virtually subsist on this bean in parts of Africa.

Mazak saw the tails of a dozen venomous snakes slithering away from him as he fought his way through the dense vegetation. The odd thought of how many snakes had struck at him but missed flashed through his mind.

Finally, Mazak saw the signs of village life come to view in the form of jungle paths and trees that had been chopped down for firewood. He picked up the pace and soon was on the outskirts of Mombaka. As he approached the village he looked up and saw two aircraft circling. He bent down and cautiously observed the area. There was no one in sight, but he knew something had gone wrong.

Exhausted, but moving in a crouched position, he made his way to the edge of the jungle and peered through the thick foliage. He spotted the group of rebels and the tiny band of refugees facing each other on the road with Sully and a big Congolese man standing between them. Mazak crept around the rebels alongside the road until he was in a position behind Sully.

He quietly maneuvered himself even closer to Sully’s position. He peered through the thick vegetation to see Sully threatening the largest of the Congolese with a grenade. Mazak’s clothes were ripped, he was drenched with sweat, out of breath and his mind raced, contemplating his next move. Just then the rebels pulled out their machetes and began advancing toward Sully.

“Stand still!” Mazak heard the officer yell at his troops.



A photo of a U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft. This was the type of plane used to transport the Special Forces Rescue team and their equipment to the Congo from Germany in early July 1960.

This time they did not obey their commander’s orders but continued moving toward Sully and the refugees.

As one hour grew closer to two, Sully knew his repeated threats were losing effect on the rebels. The other plane had arrived about five minutes earlier and was circling overhead alongside Jake Nine’s aircraft. The rebels became increasingly agitated on sight of the second aircraft and intensified their threats and shouting. Sully’s hands were aching from holding the live grenade. It felt as though an eternity had passed since this started.

Each time the major had tried to move away from Sully, Sully pulled him back between the evacuees and his troops, again threatening to detonate the grenade. The hot sun had taken a toll on everyone. Sully silently cursed. Where the heck were the Belgian troops? He changed the grenade from his left hand to his right hand one more time and began to recite a prayer in his mind.

“Stand still!” the major shouted in a last feeble attempt to control his troops. Sully watched as the rebels drew their machetes and slowly moved forward. He knew that they were seconds away from the rebels killing the major, himself and the refugees in the most gruesome way. As they drew upon them, the priest began to pray out loud. Everyone knew the final moment was near.

Just when Sully thought all was lost, he heard a rustle in the undergrowth next to the road. The clamor turned into a tremendous thrashing sound as a filthy Sergeant Stefan Mazak sprang from the undergrowth to Sully’s side and fired a burst from his submachine gun in the air. He was spewing foul language that Sully knew could only come from former French Foreign Legionnaire Stefan Mazak.

Sully released his grip on the major who ran screaming toward his men. As physically drained as he was after the standoff, Sully threw the grenade he’d been holding into the middle of the rebels. The explosion was deafening. Taking the cue from Sully’s action, Mazak leveled his weapon and fired directly into the rebels. The rebels who weren’t killed or wounded ran for their lives into the jungle, more frightened from their superstition of this “thing” than the gunfire.

Mazak was a fearsome sight and almost unrecognizable to Sully. His clothing was torn, his face and arms were bathed in sweat mixed with dirt and blood, and he was draped with vines as if they were growing from him. He looked like a jungle demon out for vengeance, as he cursed and fired his submachine gun in every direction.

As Mazak changed magazines and fired into the retreating rebels, Sully pulled the second grenade from his pocket and threw that too, then grabbed his pistol from his backpack. The rebels were tripping over their dead and wounded trying to get away.

Shrapnel from one of the grenades hit Sully in his thigh and hit Mazak in the midsection of his back. Fortunately, they were only flesh wounds. Mazak, still screaming torrents of abuse, chased off the rebel soldiers. He returned to Sully's side where they both faced the retreating rebels, shooting at any who paused to fire.

Sully turned to Mazak and told him in French, "Good God, Stef, you were the last person I thought I'd see!" Sully grinned at Mazak's appearance.

"You look like you've been to hell and back. You got here just in the nick of time, Stef. I thought we were finished."

"Sorry I took so long to get here. The plane and the Belgians were going to take so long. I finally decided to come here on foot."

"Stef, my radio isn't working. Give me yours. I've got to call the planes in before these guys regroup and come back."

Mazak pulled off his backpack and handed his radio to Sully.

"Jake Nine, this is Robert One, land immediately. Who's the other Jake up there?"

"This is Jake Three, Robert One. I'm flying the Otter."

"Well it's sure good to hear from you again, Jake Three. I want you to land after the Beaver takes off. Do you copy?"

"Roger that Robert One. Quite a show you guys put on down there. Best fight I've seen in a long time. I would have paid big money to see that, but I had free ring side seats up here!" Jake Three laughingly said.

The pilot of the Beaver landed, and Sully put the worst injured of the evacuees on board his plane. After they took off, Jake Three landed the bigger Otter.

Sully smiled and chuckled at Mazak's ragged appearance. Mazak started laughing too as he peered down at his clothes. He noticed the blood running down Sully's leg.

"You've been hit, Sully!" Mazak exclaimed.

"I think it's just a flesh wound Stef, probably from one of my grenades."

"Think I caught some of it in my back too, Sully." Sully looked under Mazak's backpack.

"I can't tell Stef, you're covered with so much dirt and sweat. I'll look at you on the plane. Let's get out of here."

With their guns trained on the jungle, they retreated toward the last plane. Miraculously, none of the hostages had been hit by the rebel's gunfire. Just before he got on the plane, Sergeant Mazak fired one long burst from his submachine gun to keep the rebels' heads down and give the plane time to take off.

Mazak had been hit in the back by shrapnel. Sully bandaged Mazak's wound and his own as they flew to Coquilhatville.

I saw you holding the grenade up to that guy's face, that's pretty crazy, Sully!" Mazak said.

Sully laughed.

"I got the idea from Jack Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway's son. When we were in France in World War II, he told me he got into a dispute with the Communist leader of the French resistance movement. This guy refused to have his men surrender their weapons like the anticommunist French Partisans had done after the war was over in France.

"The Allied High Command had ordered Jack to meet with the Communist leaders to demand the surrender of their weapons also. They met in a small house and the meeting turned into an argument where the Communists pointed their weapons at Jack. Jack pulled the pin on a grenade, threw the pin on the table in front of the Communists and said, 'If I'm going to die, everyone will die!' Jack held the grenade out in front of the Communists threatening to drop it on the table if they shot him. They agreed on the spot to turn in their weapons. They thought he was crazy!"

Mazak laughed. "I'll have to remember that one the next time I'm outnumbered!"

On the flight to Coquilhatville, one of the elderly sisters incoherently repeated her ordeal of being assaulted by one of her fourteen-year-old choirboys. She told Sully that the boy had taken part in mass for years but had joined Lumumba's rebels in "ridding the Congo of the foreign devils."

Upon their arrival at Coquilhatville, Belgian Army medics were swarming around the Nuns and Priest attending to their many cuts, a few fractured bones and abrasions.

Despite their hasty first aid bandages, both Sully and Mazak were still bleeding from their wounds. There was so much blood on the plane and on everyone's clothes, the medics just assumed Sully and Mazak picked it up from their passengers. Both their clothes were soaked with sweat and Mazak was covered in slime and dirt from his run through the jungle.

Seeing Mazak crouched down and in obvious pain, but redressing Sully's wounded leg, two Belgian medics scurried over to attend to them. Sully had been struck in the lower leg by grenade shrapnel or a bullet. Whatever it was, it had gone straight through his leg without hitting a bone, the medics told him, as they bandaged his wound.

Mazak was extremely lucky. A piece of shrapnel had struck him in the back, just to the left side of his spinal column, hit one of his ribs and glanced off after ripping holes in his safari jacket and tearing a horrendous looking chunk of his skin off.



Patrice Lumumba at the 1959 Round Table Conference in Brussels.



Sully's Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU or United Nations) armband which he took with him when he left the Congo. These identified UN members in the Congo.

On July 20, 1960, Sully was informed that Belgian troops were to depart the Congo in three days. The United Nations peacekeeping troops had arrived, but they were ineffective against the rebels. Tensions mounted between the Congo rebel army and the UN troops, and the situation was deteriorating rapidly. Even the UN troops fortified their positions and isolated themselves in their compounds whenever possible.

The day after the standoff with Lumumba's rebel soldiers at Mombaka, Sully encountered Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba for the first time at Coquilhatville. Lumumba looked far from being the man responsible for so much bloodshed and for fueling the fire of anti-foreign sentiment among the Congolese. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sully deFontaine

Born in Belgium to French parents and trained in 1943 by the British Special Operations Executive and Special Air Service (British SAS), Sully has been awarded over 20 U.S. and International decorations and has recently been inducted into the Special Forces Hall of Fame. Sully is a retired U.S. Army colonel and lives with his wife in the southwest United States.

In March of 2018, Sully deFontaine was presented the United States Congressional Gold Medal in front of the leaders of the United States Congress. Sully earned this out of respect for his achievements and service as a 17-year-old Frenchman in service to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency.

In February of 2018 the Las Vegas Nevada Special Forces Association Chapter 51 was named the Las Vegas Nevada Sully H. deFontaine Special Forces Association Chapter 51.

Jack Lawson

Jack Lawson served in the United States Air Force as a missile electronics and nuclear weapons arming technician. He was later a member of a Foreign Legion counter insurgency unit during an anti-communist guerrilla war in Africa. Jack has authored two other books. He and his wife live in the southwest United States.



Sully deFontaine, pictured in the photo at right, receiving the Legion of Merit from Colonel 'Iron Mike' Paulick, Commander of the 10th Special Forces (at left), in a secret ceremony at Bad Tölz, Germany. At the time of this action, the political situation in the world was such that regardless of their use of force in defense of themselves and their evacuees, the sensitivity

of Special Forces personnel engaged in combat operating in the newly independent former Belgian Congo would have had severe political repercussions and caused great embarrassment to the United States.

Because of the classified nature of this operation, only a small secret ceremony was permitted. The citations awarded gave the appearance that this operation was part of a peaceful United Nations mission, which it was not. The United Nations came in after this mission's conclusion.

At Mombaka, Sergeant Mazak received shrapnel wounds to his spinal column from a grenade explosion which he recovered from after receiving treatment from Belgian Army Medics at the Belgian held airstrip at Coquilhatville, Congo. Sully deFontaine was wounded either by a bullet or grenade shrapnel passing through the calf of his leg during their furious fire fight and was also treated by Belgian Army Medics.

Sergeant First Class Stefan Mazak, below left, and **Captain Albert Clement**, below right, the two other Special Forces members of Sully's rescue team.

As part of Special Forces procedure, Sully was put in command even though he was of junior rank to Clement because of his previous time spent in the Congo. In some cases, enlisted men have become the unit commander over high ranking officers if they are more familiar with and have more knowledge of the particular Special Forces mission. All were fluent in French, the predominant language spoken in the Congo. Sully also spoke native Swahili and Lingala.

These men accomplished a mission that no one else in the world, including the United Nations, was able to do. By the time the United Nations brought troops in to restore order, Sully and his team had completed their rescue of 239 people from certain death.



Across The Fence: HAPPY NEW YEAR

By John Stryker Meyer

[Across The Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam](#), SOG Publishing;
Second edition (July 11, 2018), Chapter 14, Reprinted with permission
by John Stryker Meyer

Because it was New Year's Eve, FOB 1 Camp Commander Major William Shelton had ordered extra base security, including having all reconnaissance teams and Hatchet Force personnel on alert in case the local VC or NVA had attack plans up their communist sleeves. Months earlier, a VC had placed a marker on the roof of the lounge, which VC or NVA mortarmen could use as target guide-on. It was also revealed that in the last day or two, one of the Hatchet Force NCOs had found a camp worker carefully counting his steps as he walked away from the clubhouse. That was a common practice for mortarmen or artillerymen to improve their accuracy against a proposed target. As we prepared to ring in the New Year, the jukebox blared, the drinks flowed, the men played the slot machines, and the poker stakes were high. But there was an edge to the evening's festivities. Shelton ordered it closed early, in case of enemy activity.

Before the club closed, the conversation around our poker table turned to the FOB 4 team that was on the ground in the MA target. Headman told us how happy he was to have been extracted in time to spend New Year's Eve at FOB 1, instead of across the fence. A few comments were made about how the team in the target area planned to celebrate New Year's Eve. Someone mentioned that the Americans had taken a bottle of Jim Beam to the field for the occasion. Headman and I gave each other a skeptical look. Personally, I wondered how they could carry a glass bottle and not break it. Another recon man said the two SF troops were unhappy about having to run a target on New Year's Eve. However, the S 3 brass cut them no slack and sent them out anyway. I knew one of the troops from Training Group and considered him a good recon man. The other I knew only slightly, but there was no reason to believe that either man would be so foolish on the ground.

Around 2200, Spider told us that he and the Covey pilot were going to fly into the team's AO at midnight to wish the men a "Happy New Year." While Spider's O 2 was over the target area, the mortarmen at FOB 1 lit up the sky with flares of various colors and other rudimentary explosive devices, welcoming in the New Year. When he returned to base, Spider told me it sounded as though the Americans had had too much Jim Beam. He gave the team holiday greetings and a reminder that they were in Laos. The only activity we had at FOB 1 was from a poorly trained VC mortar crew who lobbed some mortar rounds at us, but they landed in the ARVN compound to the south instead.

On 1 January 1969, Spider left FOB 1 early for a commo check with RT Diamondback. He talked to the team's radio operator and returned to Phu Bai. Later in the morning, however, the One-Two requested a



This is one of the few photographs of four ST Idaho One-Zeroes together with some of their South Vietnamese team members. From left, kneeling, Nguyen Van Sau — the Vietnamese team leader and counterpart to the One-Zero, Tuan — the M-79 grenadier, Cau and Nguyen Cong Hiep — interpreter. And yes, Hiep always wore those sunglasses, even in the jungle in the dark of night. Standing from left, Lynne M. "Blackjack" Black Jr., Don Wolken, Phouc — fearless point man for ST Idaho for many months, John S. "Tilt" Meyer and Robert J. "Spider" Parks. (Photo courtesy of Doug LeTourneau)

tactical extraction from the AO because there had been a lot of enemy activity around them. While Spider was talking to the SF troop, he heard a burst of AK-47 fire and screams. Then silence. For a long time he was unable to raise anyone on the radio. He knew something was terribly wrong. He finally got an indigenous team member on the radio who said that the Americans were dead, but the indig had survived the attack.

Back at FOB 1, around 1200 hours, someone from the commo shack came into the club and said a Vietnamese team member from RT Diamondback was on the radio, talking to Spider. That was very bad news. Several of the recon team members in FOB 1 headed toward the commo shack. Before we got there, Tony Herrell, a veteran recon man, came around the corner with more bad news.

"They were hit by sappers. It doesn't look good," he said. As we tried to walk through S 3 to the commo shack, the S 3 major told the team members to stay outside so the SF commo troops could do their job. The major was universally despised by every recon team member in camp because he showed no sympathy toward any team member and acted as though he didn't care whether a team lived or died in a target area. The fact that he still had a thick German accent didn't help matters either. It never occurred to me that perhaps his gruffness was a buffer between having to send teams into targets where the probability of casualties was extremely high and keeping his own sanity.

As always, when a team was in trouble, several team members pulled out their PRC 25s, attached a long antennae, and monitored any radio traffic they could pick up. From FOB 1, SF troops usually would be able to hear the Covey rider talking to the team on the ground. The transmissions from the team on the ground, however, were too far away to be picked up in Phu Bai. The only news this first day of the New Year was bad. We could hear the Covey rider patiently talking to the Vietnamese team members on the ground.



Standing in front of ST Idaho's Team Room at FOB 1, Phu Bai, S. Vietnam, after returning from a recent mission in Laos, from left, Nguyen Van Sau — Vietnamese Team Leader, John Meyer, Nguyen Cong Hiep — ST Idaho Interpreter, and Lynne M. Black Jr., team leader (Photo courtesy John Stryker Meyer)



Lynne M. Black Jr. and John Meyer out on the range. (Photo courtesy John Stryker Meyer)

They were obviously shaken. At first, we assumed the Vietnamese team members were wounded. But as time passed, it was apparent that the three Vietnamese were alive and had suffered no combat wounds. In addition, there were no NVA casualties.

It appeared the Americans had been slow to react. In a matter of seconds, the sappers killed the three SF troops and chose to leave the South Vietnamese team members alive. The news about the sappers was a triple dose of bad news: First, we had three dead Green Berets. Second, reports One-Zeros had received for months about NVA sappers being a lethal force were now confirmed. Third, by killing only the Americans, the NVA pulled off a major psychological coup. By leaving the Vietnamese team members alive, their survival would plant seeds of doubt and dissension between SF troops and our little people.

That tactic worked momentarily at Phu Bai. Some of the U.S. personnel in camp who didn't work daily with the little people were openly questioning the loyalty of the Vietnamese team members. I went over to the ST Idaho hootch and told Hiep and Sau to have the team be



During early 1969 FOB 1 was closed. ST Idaho was transferred to CCN at Da Nang, where on occasions the team pulled guard duty atop Marble Mountain. As the team hunkers down for another cold night on the mountain team members enjoy a light moment. From left: Hung, Douglas L. LeTourneau, Cau, Son, Chau, Lynne Maurice Black Jr. and John S. Meyer. (Photo courtesy of Rick Howard)

alert for any untoward comments from U.S. personnel in camp. I also asked them to learn as much as they could about the Vietnamese team members on RT Diamondback as quickly as possible.

I headed back to the comm center. This time, the major was gone and no one stopped me. The radio room usually took on an eerie silence after a team had been pulled out of a target. That afternoon was no different. The only sounds in the comm center were radio tones, hums and static while the men waited for the helicopters to return to base. And whenever a team was hit as badly as RT Diamondback had been, the comm center took on an additional somberness. On the first day of 1969, it was tomb-like. Three Americans dead, no apparent intelligence other than the fact that all of C&C now knew that the NVA sappers were as good as they had been touted in earlier briefings. For Herrell and me, it was hard to swallow because we had lost a friend. Forever. For several minutes we just sat there, deep in our own thoughts. It had been about 10 minutes since the pilots had called in to report that all of the RT Diamondback team members had been recovered and were returning to Quang Tri.

Oddly, none of the aircraft extracting RT Diamondback received any significant ground fire from the NVA. To me, that was a definite indicator that the NVA wanted to send a psychological message along with the carnage the sappers had wrought on RT Diamondback. On 30 November, we lost seven SF troops and an entire Kingbee crew. Thirty-two days later, we lost three Americans. And since this was a secret war, Walter Cronkite could tell viewers that he no longer believed in the war, but he couldn't tell the American public about another day in SOG. I stood up and started to walk out of the comm center. A war-weary voice broke the long silence in the comm center with a short, clear transmission: "Happy New Year."

His words caught me off guard. I thought of those three words in the context of the many close calls ST Idaho had survived since the day I joined it, the same day Sergeant First Class Glen Oliver Lane and an entire ST Idaho team had disappeared in the Prairie Fire AO. I thought of how every member of ST Idaho would probably have been killed in action had it not been for the heroics of Kingbee pilots, Marine and Army helicopter gunship crews and Uncle Sam's Air Force. On 1 January 1969, the NVA

had upped the ante and the thought of going across the fence sent a sobering chill down my spine. I walked over to the club and had my first drink since August. Within days, ST Idaho boarded Kingbees to launch into an MA target in another attempt to find the NVA gasoline pipeline.

And while we headed north to Quang Tri, the 101st Airborne Division choppers carried the six men south. When the choppers landed on the helicopter pad, Colonel Jack Warren had ordered every man in FOB 4 out to the site. He was held in high regard by SF troops because he genuinely cared about his men. It had been said that because of his dedication to the SF mission and the men of SF, that he would never advance beyond the rank of colonel. He had remained in SF too long, a career decision the traditional Army hierarchy despised and punished. Diamondback was from FOB 4, which Warren commanded. At the time, FOB 4 was transitioning into becoming Command and Control North (CCN) as part of a major consolidation of resources within SOG. FOB 1 would join FOB 4 in Da Nang. Where once there had been six FOBs, there would now be three bases, CCN in Da Nang, Command and Control Central (CCC) in Kontum, and Command and Control South (CCS) at Ban Me Thuot.

After the three corpses were unloaded from the helicopter, Warren gave a terse, teary-eyed speech to his captive audience. Warren warned everyone that if they were careless in the field, death was the result of that carelessness. Then he bent down, opened a body bag and picked up a portion of a body of one of the dead Americans. Now he was crying and screaming at his men to never be careless in the field. Warren was never the same after that. Neither was C&C.

During January, ST Idaho was moved to CCN at Da Nang and ST Idaho became RT Idaho. Da Nang was two or three times the size of FOB 1. Gone forever was the camaraderie of FOB 1. Additionally, team member Bubba Shore requested to be transferred to headquarters. Bubba and I had run many targets together during his brief tenure on the team. It was a request I respected and granted instantly. Now it was simply Black and myself. Black recruited Do Ti Quang from ST Alabama, a man born in North Vietnam, who moved south with his family to escape communism. We didn't bring any additional Americans on the team because our Vietnamese team members were so strong and we felt they were better in the jungle than most Americans in camp.

The daily grind of running missions across the fence was wearing on me physically and mentally. As '69 dawned, I began a mental examination of life in SOG. Being in an elite unit within America's finest special operations was where I wanted to be. The adrenaline-enhanced high of deadly firefights against a relentless enemy under extremely lopsided odds was intoxicating. I had never experienced such exhilaration or sheer terror. Yet there was a little voice in the back of my head which spoke of survival, surviving not only a vigorous enemy campaign directed against SOG teams, but merely surviving the odds of going home in one piece.

My mind also began the mental debate between rising to the new challenges inherent in a secret war and returning to a safer assignment. My one-year tour of duty was scheduled to end at the end of April. Under the general rules of SOG, after running targets across the fence for six months, I could request a cushy assignment. I had already spent seven months with the team. I was alive, however, thanks to Hiep, Sau, Phuoc, Tuan, and the other men of ST Idaho. I couldn't just walk away. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Stryker Meyer entered the Army Dec. 1, 1966. He completed basic training at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, advanced infantry training at Ft. Gordon, Georgia, jump school at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course in Dec. 1967. He arrived at FOB 1 Phu Bai in May 1968, where he joined Spike Team Idaho,

which transferred to Command & Control North, CCN in Da Nang, January 1969. He remained on ST Idaho to the end of his tour of duty in late April, returned to the U.S. and was assigned to E Company in the 10th Special Forces Group at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, until October 1969, when he rejoined RT Idaho at CCN. That tour of duty ended suddenly in April 1970. He returned to the states, completed his college education at Trenton State College, where he was editor of *The Signal* school newspaper for two years. In 2021 Meyer and his wife of 26 years, Anna, moved to Tennessee, where he is working on his fourth book on the secret war, continuing to do SOG podcasts working with battle-hardened combat veteran Navy SEAL and master podcaster Jocko Willink.

Visit John's excellent website sogchronicles.com. His website contains information about all of his books. You can also find all of his SOGCast podcasts and other podcast interviews. In addition, the website includes in stories of MACV-SOG Medal of Honor recipients, MIAs and a collection of videos,

James O. Schmidt

October 1, 1927 – November 6, 2022



By Jack Williams

Former Sergeant Major of the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam, SGM James O. Schmidt, has made his last jump, joining his comrades-in-arms from three wars in the hereafter. He was 95 and living with his daughter in Alaska when he passed on November 6, 2022. He will be interred in Arlington National Cemetery in 2023, where he will rest in peace for eternity.

Born on October 1, 1927, when WWII broke out, he fibbed about his age (14) in order to enlist and join the paratroopers. In 1943, as a 15-year-old, then PFC Schmidt combat-jumped into Sicily (Operation Husky) with the 3/504th PIR, 82nd Airborne. Wounded in action, he was hospitalized and then sent home for being underage. This occurred after his mother found out about his WIA status and wrote directly to President Roosevelt questioning his combat eligibility. Not to be deterred, he immediately joined the Navy and was aboard a destroyer on combat patrol when he was again found to be underage. He was sent ashore and again discharged. He spent the rest of WWII in the merchant marine, crewing an ammunition ship plying the U-boat infested North Atlantic.

Upon turning 18, Schmidt re-joined the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 508th PIR in occupied Germany with the rank of SGT, already sporting jump wings, a CIB, and a Purple Heart. Progressing through the ranks, SFC Schmidt was stationed in Japan when the Koren War exploded. He was assigned to the 7th ID, 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT, the "Polar Bears") and was a part of the 10th Corp advance to the Chosin Reservoir in November, 1950.

The 31st RCT was virtually destroyed, 90 percent casualties, east of the Chosin Reservoir in late November, when the Chi-coms intervened and overran Task Force Faith. SFC Schmidt survived the onslaught and, with the remnants of the regiment, joined the retreat of the 1st Marine Division et al., from Chosin down to Hungnam, the famous "attacking in another direction" retrograde. He was awarded a Silver Star and another Purple Heart for his actions during that retreat, along with his second Combat Infantry Badge.

In 1961, now MSG Schmidt joined Special Forces and was deployed to Laos in 1962. In 1963, while leading native Laotian Hmong troops in combat, he was awarded a second silver star for action against the Viet Minh communist forces. He also earned his third CIB, becoming one of only 326 men ever to be decorated with that medal. When the 5th SFG deployed to Vietnam in 1964, Schmidt became the Group CSM and served with the 5th SFG until returning to the US and retiring from the Army in 1965. He then worked with Air America in S.E. Asia for two years, supporting the US Intel flight operations in Laos and Vietnam.

At left, SGM James O. Schmidt receiving a medal in Viet Nam in December 1964. At right, SGM Schmidt in a 2022 photo.

Returning as a civilian to the US in 1967, Mr. Schmidt accepted a position heading water districts in the far west US, a job he accomplished for 20 years with true SF and SGM style. Between fighting three different wars for his country, Mr. Schmidt found time to marry his best "B-Team Leader" in 1958. He is survived by his understanding and supportive wife of 64 years, Peggy Ford Schmidt. He is also survived by his three daughters, nine grandchildren, and four great grandchildren, all of whom were taught the highest lessons of honor and duty by their family patriarch.

The numbers of living veterans that connect us to the great airborne events of WWII, the snowy, desperate struggles in Korea, and the jungles and mountains of S.E. Asia are shrinking rapidly. When the few remaining heroic troopers from those eras make their last jump, America will be a sadder place. SGM James O. Schmidt fought in three wars in defense of his country. He lived a lifetime of duty, honor, and responsibility, in and out of uniform. And he lived his private life as a role model of familial responsibility, parental guidance, and love for his family and country.

SGM Schmidt's passing is a loss to all of us. RIP SGM James O. Schmidt.... and, "airborne all the way!" to your memory. ♦

Editor's note: Jack and Gene Williams wrote about SGM Schmidt in the [December 2015 Sentinel](#), "Tracking Down a Hero; The Story of SGM James O. Schmidt."

After opening up about his military service to Williams, SGM Schmidt began to talk more often about his history to family members and others. This inspired his nearly 14-year-old grandson to launch a Facebook letter-writing campaign as a birthday surprise for his Grandfather in 2018, which included a link to the *Sentinel* story. *It went viral*, leading to a 2020 documentary film about Schmidt's military career. The documentary can be viewed at <https://wwiifoundation.org/lesson/grandpas-war-story-goes-viral/>.

On June 11, 2020, Alaska Congressman Don Young recognized [SGM Schmidt in the Congressional Record](#), so that future generations can learn of his service for years to come.

SFA Chapter 78 November 2022 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Rick Carter and Dennis DeRosia



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- 1 Chapter President Greg Horton presents new member Thomas Golden, friend of Bruce Long, with a Chapter coin
- 2 New member Eric Berg, who served in 12th SFG with Art Dolick, is presented with a Chapter coin by President Greg Horton
- 3 *Sentinel* Editor How Miller, gives the group a recap of his trip to Ft. Bragg, where he attended the recent SFQC graduation, which he writes about in this issue ([see page 2](#)).
- 4 Chapter member Thomas Kasza brings the group up to date on the work of his group the NMRG Rescue Project (nmrg-rescue.org).
- 5 Chapter member Art Dolick presents a slide show of historic photos and a video of the 82nd Airborne in San Diego.

- 6 Chapter member Jim Cragg
- 7 Chapter secretary Gary Macnamara
- 8 Chapter members James Carter and Mike Jameson
- 9 Chapter members at the meeting watch Art Dolick's video presentation.
- 10 Chapter member Steve Bric
- 11 Chapter member Nimo
- 12 Chapter members Sal Sanders, Thomas Golden, and How Miller look over the latest issue of the *Sentinel*.
- 13 Chapter member Jim Lockhart
- 14 Chapter members Jim Duffy and Don Gonneville