



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 3 • MARCH 2023

**A Journalist's
First Trip to a
Communist
Country**

**Saigon
Memories
– 1990**

**Value Added:
A/1/19th SFG in Iraq**

**The Bolivian Rangers and the
Capture of Che Guevara**

From the Editor



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

I'm excited about a recently added capability on our SFA Chapter 78 website. People can now subscribe to the electronic version of the *Sentinel* thanks to Debra's addition of this feature, and they will then receive the monthly email from the SFA Teamhouse announcing the release of the most recent issue.

It's also time to start making plans for this year's SFA national convention, SFACON 2023. It is being held early in the year this time. Since Indianapolis is the host, it makes sense that it is being held around the Indy 500 schedule. You can read about how welcom-

ing the venue is trying to make our Green Berets and about speakers and events. Believe it or not, there is not much time left to act.

Nick Hun spent some "interesting" time with SF as a part of his distinguished career. In *Budapest to Vietnam*, he gives the reader a feeling of what it was like to use lessons he learned in SF to make it to Full Bird Colonel and much more.

Included is a mention of Blue Ridge Safehouse (BRS), founded by SFA member Greg Peterman in order to help active duty Green Berets and their families reconnect post deployment. Located in NC fairly near FT Bragg, NC, BRS facilitates the process of reintegration to the family by providing an amazing weekend of fun filled family adventures.

Our long-time Sergeant-at-Arms, Mark Miller, was surprised to receive a very special gift from an interpreter he worked with in Vietnam. Even fine photography does not do this lustrous painting justice. So many of the elements are quite shiny and give it a feeling of elegance, much like the colorful Ao Dai worn by Vietnamese women.

My first connection with Marc Yablonka was a [June 2019 Sentinel](#) review of his wonderful coverage of military reporters in Vietnam in his book *Vietnam Bao Chi*. "Bao Chi" means reporter in Vietnamese. Marc treats us to a rendition of his uneasy visits to a couple of locations in Communist countries, Laos and Vietnam, 15 years after the fall of Saigon.

Our chapter meetings are held in Los Alamitos at the Joint Forces Training Base, also the location of SF National Guard Company C/1/19. Many of the members of C/1/19 are members of our Chapter. It is incredible how much time these National Guard Green Berets spend on active duty across the world, often deployed in very small numbers, from the Sandbox to Africa to Ukraine. Two of our articles give a detailed account of some of their early exploits, which helped them gain the respect they have both inside and outside the regiment today. The first was published by Robert W. Jones, Jr. for ARSOF's *Veritas* magazine in 2005, while the second was written by Greg Walker for the *Sentinel* with an extra 17 years of hindsight, adding some rich details. Perhaps this will give some insight into why we are so proud of them.

We end with another *Veritas* article written by Kenneth Finlayson giving the inside account of the Bolivian Rangers' successful mission in 1967 to end Che Guevera's reign of Communist terror. Che simply couldn't outlast Bolivia's best unit, trained by our 8th SFG.

Enjoy. ♦

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

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FRONT COVER: Green Berets with 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), conduct room clearing drills on February 28, 2018. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Iman Broady-Chin)



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From the President | March 2023



Gregory Horton
President SFA Ch. 78

It has been an extraordinary month with some highs and lows. One of the highs is that pressure was brought to bear on the United States government by outraged politicians and citizens to release Abdul Wasi Safi from Border Patrol custody. In case you missed the story, Safi served as a soldier with the Afghan Army in their elite Special Forces. Safi trained with and worked alongside the US Special Forces until Afghanistan fell in 2021. Even after the fall, Safi continued to fight the Taliban with the Northern Alliance resistance. Eventually he was forced

to flee for his life and for months, managed to evade authorities until he was able to get to the Texas border. There, Safi told interviewers that he expected to be met by authorities and welcomed with open arms as a loyal US ally who risked it all for our country. Imagine his shock when he was arrested and advised that he would be deported back to Afghanistan, where he faced certain torture and execution. But numerous politicians, citizens, and veteran's groups expressed outrage, and finally Immigration released him to his family.

Chapter Member Thomas Kasza is still the Executive Director and is active with the 1028 Foundation <https://www.1208foundation.org/>. The Foundation is putting on another screening of the fantastic National Geographic documentary *Retrograde* at the SOF and Airborne Museum in Fayetteville on February 1st. The screening is primarily for USASOC, and the Green Beret Foundation is hosting the event. I sent out an email to the Chapter and SFA President to get the word out because I was fortunate to see the original screening here in California. It was a fantastic documentary and if you get a chance, do not miss it. One of the excellent things that the 1028 Foundation is trying to do is to get others to emulate what Chapter 78 has done with Nimo's folks, even if it is at a much smaller scale.

We had an excellent meeting at Fiddler's Green and it was very well attended. We discussed the past month's activities and interesting member tidbits. Our speaker this month was Dr. Bob Reed and he gave us a brief of some of his interesting jobs while assigned to 46th SF Company in Thailand. He was working as a dentist and his presentation was on a Dental Civil Action Program (DENTCAP) in an isolated village and had a 20-minute film that was taken during the operation.

It was an interesting snapshot into the interaction between the SF Team, Indigenous military, and civilian medical personal with the villagers. This was a ground breaking project, the first of its kind, and was very sensitive because of the missions of the 46th Co. Unbeknownst to the Doctor or me, 25 years later that program was still in operation. I was on a similar mission to a remote village in Thailand to provide dental assistance to the villagers. Just like they did in the original mission, in addition to the dental work, I was responsible for the instruction on how the children should brush their teeth. I had packets with a toothbrush, toothpaste, instructions for every child. There was a major difference for my team. After my block of instruction, we had to sing Karaoke with the kids. With my voice I am thankful there was not an international incident!



Photo of Abdul Wasi Safi, a US-trained special forces operative who escaped from Taliban control, fled to Texas, and was arrested for crossing the border seeking asylum. (Sami-ullah Safi)

Our next Chapter meeting Saturday, March 18, 2023

Please RSVP to VP James McLanahan at james@primalrisk.com.

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:

**Mar 18 • Apr 15 • May 20 • June 17 • July 15 • August 19
September 16 • October 21 • November 18 • December TBA**



SFACON 2023:

HIGH SPEED – LOW DRAG

Indianapolis, Indiana

May 22–26, 2023



SFACON2023 promises to be fast-paced and jam-packed full of fun, learning, and excitement. While honoring our brothers killed in action over the decades.

The Special Forces Association National Convention 2023 will be an exciting and unique opportunity for former members of the United States Army Special Forces community and their families to come together in Indianapolis, Indiana, and celebrate another year of the Regiment. The convention we have planned for 2023 will be one to remember, as the city of Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway are both so excited to be the site of this convention that they've opened their doors to our Regiment to participate in the festivities in a number of ways.

Who is telling our stories right now?

Who will be telling our stories a year from now?

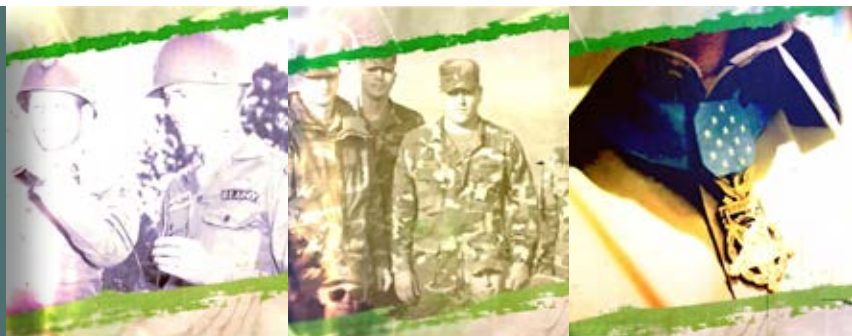
Are our stories even being told?

This year's convention will focus on the stories of our history, present, and future, with a priority on our Regiment and their families expressing their stories in their own words to inspire a future generation and ensure the stories are not lost forever. The emphasis of the convention will be on hearing some of the diverse stories of Special Forces in the past, what is going on in the regiment now, and thoughts about what the future may bring.

Participants will have the opportunity to attend panels and meet Special Forces veterans who will talk about their experiences in the Regiment and how it shaped them. While we are still confirming some names to take part and speak in the nearly week-long convention, two key guests, Scott Mann and Jeff Tiegs, have confirmed and we will be excited to welcome them to Indianapolis.

During the conference, we will be running 8-10 interview capture stations for 20-30 minutes to collect everyone's tales. We will request that *everyone* who comes participate to the fullest extent possible.

This isn't all, though. In addition to the numerous speaking engagements scheduled, guests will also gain exclusive access to the events surrounding one of the biggest races in the world: the Indianapolis 500. Attendees of the convention will get to enjoy a weekend of activities and events through local educational tours and entertainment.



Scott Mann is a retired Green Beret who continues his work for the Regiment as a motivational speaker and an advocate for veteran's rights and causes through some of his internationally recognized work in Afghanistan rescuing our allies from the chaos that unfolded during the withdrawal in 2021, to his play [Last Out: An Elegy of A Green Beret](#).



Scott Mann, right, with Afghan Special Forces Sergeant Nezam. (Courtesy Scott Mann)

Jeff Tiegs is a Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency Expert with over 25 years of service in the U.S. Army Special Operations. He has commanded units during combat operations around the globe, including Panama, Iraq and Afghanistan. Jeff has a Master's Degree from the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and has earned numerous military decorations and awards, including five bronze stars for distinguished service during combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and a silver star award for valor during combat in Iraq. In addition to his combat experience, his non-traditional assignments were influential at the policy and strategy levels of the U.S. government.



For more information and to register to attend, visit the SFACON23 page at <https://www.specialforcesassociation.org/sfacon-2023/>

Book Review

Budapest to Vietnam by Nick Hun and Michael L Jewell

By How Miller

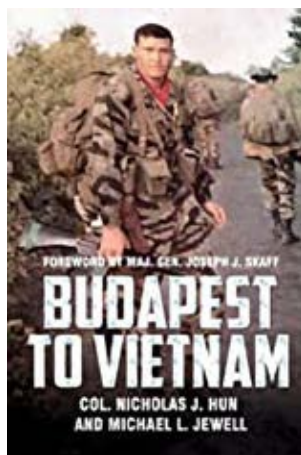
From *Budapest to Vietnam*:

"The chatter of the enemy was getting much too close., and we were receiving some "incoming" from the tree line about 75 yards out. It was time to break contact with them, but first to 'get some' before departing.

"I took the M79 from the striker next to me and zeroed in on the tree line where the bushes showed some movement. I was experienced firing the old M20 (3.5 inch) Bazooka in training with the 1st Airborne Battle Group of the 187th Infantry at Fort Bragg, making the conversion to the M79 quite easy.

"Having a relatively free line of fire, I shot the M79 toward the enemy three times. The first one impacted long and the second one short. This established a bracket around the target, allowing me to place the final round with deadly accuracy. As I fired one more time, the HE (high explosive) round landed just as four or five NVA soldiers, with AK and SKS rifles at the ready, stepped proudly out of the jungle into the tall grass.

"We heard them scream and watched them fall, helmets flying like Frisbees, as they were instantly blown up in a haze of gray smoke. Departing, I turned one last time to witness their throes of death in the smoking elephant grass."



[Budapest to Vietnam](#)
By Nick Hun and Michael L. Jewell
Njh Consulting Services (June 4, 2021)
318 pages

Nick Hun has written a book about a well-lived life. It is his story — a man who emigrated with his family from Budapest, Hungary, at the age of seven and thrived in the United States. His career has included service as an MP, a Green Beret, and many other roles.

His SF career ran from Chi Linh and Dong Xoai A camps to directing the establishment and building of Bunard in hostile VC-controlled territory.

He then volunteered to help out the hard-hit 173rd Airborne Brigade for a tour as a ground-pounding airborne officer and went on to be a helicopter pilot, returning to Vietnam for many "interesting" missions in Cobras and other craft.

Afterwards, he returned to the MPs and continued up the ranks, reaching full bird colonel with realistic designs on his first star. Nick served at West Point, Fort Riley, and Panama, commanded a recruiting battalion, and served as an active-duty advisor to the WV National Guard. After military retirement, he worked with his state government as the WV Commissioner of Corrections.

Then he served many years as a VA team leader and counselor, and upon retiring from that, he became a private investigator and author.

He obviously was following the track of the regular army career officer with a notable, but "respectably" short duration, stint with SF, and never stopped. It is quite a story.



Our purpose is to help active-duty Green Berets reconnect with their families post deployment.

Blue Ridge Safehouse (BRS) helps the best of the best in the Army — the Green Berets. We do this by facilitating a series of counseling sessions as well as guided activities to help the soldier and family connect in a stress-free environment at our location in West Jefferson, NC less than 4 hours from FT Bragg, NC.

Please consider donating to Blue Ridge Safehouse, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. 100% of all donations go back to Green Beret families.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visit www.blueridgesafehouse.com

or contact Greg Peterman at 931-221-9250



Members of Chapter 78 Mark Miller, on the left, and Len Fein present the painting to the audience at a chapter meeting.

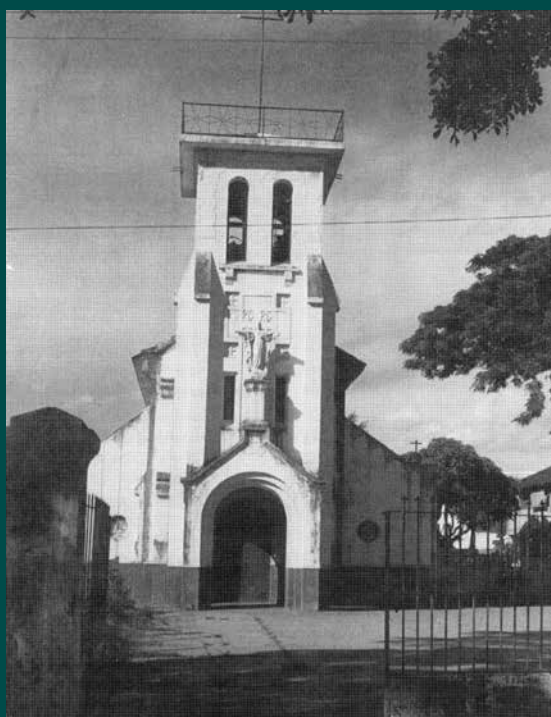
An Expression of Gratitude

Chapter member Mark Miller brought a painting to a recent meeting to share with the group. Unrolling the canvas secured with a piece of tape, he revealed the depiction of a peaceful street scene in Vietnam. The painting had been presented to him by at a Ranger Reunion in 2009 at Fort Benning by Trinh, a former Vietnamese interpreter for their LRRP Ranger company. Trinh and his wife had been trapped in Vietnam after the war. The company banded together to raise funds and sponsored them, which enabled the couple to leave the country. It was years later that Trinh presented the painting to Mark, who had been Team Leader.

A JOURNALIST'S FIRST TRIP TO A COMMUNIST COUNTRY



Laos — My cyclo driver outside the Lane Xang Hotel, Vientiane (Photo courtesy Marc Yablonka)



Church Of The Sacred Heart, Vientiane (Photo courtesy Marc Yablonka)

By Marc Yablonka

This article first appeared in the [Hmong Daily News](#) on December 26, 2022.

The night before I flew out of Bangkok for Vientiane, Laos in 1990, I confessed to the director of the UNHCR office at the Hmong section of the Panat Nikhom refugee camp that I was nervous because it would be the first time I'd ever been in a communist country. I had certainly interviewed enough Lao and Hmong refugees, and recorded their horrific stories for my master's thesis at USC on their plight, to "earn" that nervousness. She just laughed.

And the next morning when I deplaned at Wattay International Airport, spied the big blue-painted barn that then passed for an airport terminal, and spotted several uniformed Communist Pathet Lao soldiers with their typical wide brimmed, red banded, Soviet style dress hats, I didn't feel any less apprehensive.

I deplaned with a young French-Cambodian woman, Phaly Pao, from Lyon, France. Phaly and her family had escaped Cambodia by boat in the late 1970s during the reign of the despot Pol Pot and his murderous Khmer Rouge. This was to be her first trip home to Phnom Penh. A trip she was going to have to make from Vientiane in a rickety old Russian helicopter since airplane flights between the two Indochinese capitals had yet to be established in 1990.

Phaly and I had befriended one another at the gate of our Thai Air flight at Don Muang International Airport during a delay. Between her very broken English and my high school French, I was able to understand that she was not sure where she would stay in Vientiane.

"Je loge à l'hôtel Lane Xang," I told her in French. "Why don't you try there?"

At Wattay, as we walked through the plane's open door together, we viewed those Pathet Lao soldiers. Phaly appeared a frightened child. She looked up at me and said, "I think I stay at Lane Xang Hotel...with you!"

Thirty-two years is a long time, and all I remember is breakfasting with my new friend, touring the Buddhist temples of Vientiane with her, and the desk clerk at the hotel handing me a farewell note from Phaly, whose helicopter I could not see off because I'd arranged to interview the Bishop of Vientiane, Apostolic Vicar Jean Khamse Vithavong, for the National Catholic Register newspaper.

As my cyclo driver pedaled me through the city enroute to its main Catholic church, as I wrote in my book about my time in Laos, *Tears Across the Mekong*, in 2015, "Throughout the city, loud speakers mounted strategically on decrepit telephone poles, looking like they'd emerged from the French era (which, like the telephones they connected, they indeed had) blared the latest edition of Marxism/Leninism Lao style while thousands of electrical wires meshed overhead in total chaos."

When my cyclo driver deposited me at the Church of the Sacred Heart, I was confronted by a structure badly in need of a new coat of paint. Its leaning steeple reminded me of Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Inside, however, a warm Bishop Vithavong, clad in a blue jumpsuit, greeted me and welcomed my questions about the state of the Catholic Church in Laos. He confessed to me that since 1975, when Laos, like neighboring Vietnam, fell to communism, there had been a "brain drain" in the Church because so many priests and nuns had fled the country in fear for their lives.

I was to meet one of those priests, Father Lucien Bouchard, whom I interviewed for *Tears Across the Mekong*, 25 years later. But for the most part, the bishop told me, everything was “Bo Pinh Yan.” A typical Lao expression meaning “Everything is okay.” He did, however, admit that the government placed certain restrictions on worship.

Later, while at the Souriya restaurant across the dusty road from the Lane Xang, I spotted Anne Mills Griffith, director of the National League of POW/MIA Families, strategizing with US Embassy types over her search for prisoners of war and our missing in action. I thought of how many broken hearts she must have encountered Stateside and silently wished her well.

One afternoon, I strode into the bar of the Lane Xang, where a group of people were intently listening to the news on CNN, which the Lao government then allowed for two hours a day. I heard the unmistakable sound of cannon fire. My eyes settled on the sole Caucasian gentleman in the bar. Mistaking him for French, I asked, “Qu'est qui se passe?” (“What's happening?”). In a thick Russian accent, he replied in English, “America attack Iraq.”

Just then, another unmistakable sound occurred. That of a Russian MiG jet soaring loudly overhead. That was not the only time I was to hear a MiG take off from Wattay.

The next day as I again walked into the bar, decked out in the typical journalist attire: shirt with epaulets, cargo pants about an inch too short, and chukka boots, vowing not to blunder in French anymore, I heard a voice from across the room shout at me, “You waiting for a flood?”

That was my introduction to Don Scott, a man so dedicated to the resettlement of Indochinese refugees that it eventually took his life at the young age of 62. Don rattled a lot of cages in Washington, D.C. because he strongly felt that we owed the American brand of freedom and peace to the people from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that we had left behind. That we promised to help and then broke that promise in 1975 when we departed Indochina.

But Laos in the 90s was not Don's first taste of Southeast Asia. He and his wife Marilyn, both UCLA graduates and pacifists, had headed up the San Diego-based Christian group Project Concern's hospital in Lien Hiep in Vietnam's Central Highlands during the war. A hospital that often had a Viet Cong cadre in a bed right next to an American soldier's bed.

At one point, the hospital was overrun by Viet Cong. When that happened, Don rushed out in the middle of the melee, grabbed the AK-47 off one of the VC and tossed it into the jungle. The VC was so frightened that he ran away. The same year I befriended Don, his time in Vietnam was chronicled in a *CBS Sunday Night Movie of the Week*, “Vestige of Honor: The Don Scott Story.”

Just before I left Vientiane, I had gotten permission through my government minder to visit the wondrous old royal capital of Laos, Luang Prabang. Sadly, it was also the site where most of the Royal Lao family had been systematically murdered by the Pathet Lao.

The night before my flight though, over a dinner of larb, the national dish of Laos, my minder took me aside and whispered, “Mr. Marc, Lao aviation sometime crash.” Mr. Marc quickly changed his mind, flew Thai Air back to Bangkok, where he made plans to report from the second communist city he would soon touch down in: Saigon.❖



Buddhist monks in Vientiane. (Photo courtesy Marc Yablonka)



The Patuxet Monument, Vientiane. (Photo courtesy Marc Yablonka)

SAIGON MEMORIES — 1990



Saigon's Chinese quarter, Cho Lon 1990. (Photo by Marc Yablonka)

By Marc Yablonka

Beatle John Lennon once declared New York City the "Center of the Universe." But as I swung open the doors to the lobby of the Continental Hotel in downtown Saigon in 1990 and walked out onto Lam Son Square, I formed a very different opinion.

All at once, Bui Doi, "The Dust of Life," mixed children of American GIs who had been forced to desert Vietnam, accosted me with shouts of, "Ba! Ba! Ba! Ba! (Father! Father! Father! Father!), give me `monay! Give me `monay!" I was barraged both aurally and physically.

Along came Mr. Manh, a local "xich lo" driver, who saved me from the onslaught of teens. Some fair-skinned, some dark-skinned who possessed the typical features of their Black fathers. Manh and I adopted one another that rainy morning, and he was to fend for me and cart me around the entire time I was in Saigon. Once even chasing away a would-be thief who was eyeing my camera as he rode by.

Yet, Manh would constantly refuse my attempts at remunerating him for the destinations he would take me to throughout the city, waiting diligently for my return. It was as if he knew, and rightfully so, that there would be an American pot of gold awaiting him the night before I would depart Saigon. I handed him that pot of gold on my last night. The sum of US \$20. At that time enough to feed his family rice for a month, so I was later told.

As my Thai Air flight made its final approach into the former Tan Son Nhut Airbase that had been so crucial to the American war effort, including the American departure from Vietnam in April 1975, through the fog I could make out the revetments that had sheltered American bombers from attack by the Viet Cong. They were still there in 1990. Yet empty of war planes.

Instead, Russian and East German made Tupolev 134s and smaller Ilyushin short haul jets lined the runway. All bearing the livery of Vietnam Airlines. All purportedly in various stages of airworthiness and disrepair because of a shortage of replacement parts, said some, because of the American embargo still then in place on Vietnam. Others opined it was because of unscrupulous Russian parts dealers.

Whatever one believed, the planes, manufactured by Russian carrier Aeroflot and East German manufacturer Aeroflug, were crashing in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia all too frequently in the 1980s and 90s.

Before wheels down, a Band of returning Australian Brothers had jumped up to peer out of windows at the airport they had most likely left 25 years earlier.

Once off my Thai Air flight and in the customs line, I made conversation with a San Diego-based attorney who'd come with his adopted Vietnamese daughter because, then a high school senior, she wanted to see where she had originally come from. As it turned out, we were all staying at the fabled Continental Hotel. And, as it also turned out, I was able to be of some assistance to him and his daughter in determining the orphanage which cared for her until she was adopted.

Soon, I was safely ensconced in my room at the Continental, where so many news bureaus had offices during the Vietnam War, and which Graham Greene had featured in perhaps his most famous novel, anti-America slanted *The Quiet American*. For many years,



An abandoned Huey by the side of the road (Photo by Marc Yablonka)



Notre Dame Cathedral (Nha Tho Duc Ba), District 1, Saigon
(Photo by Marc Yablonka)

anyone declaring himself or herself a journalist upon checking in at the Continental received a 40% reduction in charges. Suddenly, I was jarred out of a reverie by the ringing phone by my side.

“Hey Marc,” my new attorney friend said. “They’ve got a massage parlor on the second floor!” My response as a happily married man at the time, was tepid at best. I was later to learn that massage parlor was legit. Not at all like the massage parlors out behind joints frequented by American GIs like the “Hollywood Bar” or the “New York Bar” during the war. And I admit it. I imbibed...once. Even got my back walked on by a tiny Vietnamese girl who told me, “I only 19!” My reply: “I only 40, and I married!”

A couple of months prior to touching down in Saigon, I had occasion to be watching Larry King on CNN. He was interviewing Cherie Clark, one of the founders of Friends of Children of Vietnam, a group dedicated to placing Vietnamese orphans in American homes. But Cherie was not new to that line of work. She’d done the same thing as Saigon was falling to Communist forces in April 1975, lending a hand to “Operation Baby Lift.” And, after a stint assisting Mother Theresa at her dispensary in India, Cherie was back in Vietnam.

I’d been able to contact Cherie through her organization’s Bangkok office prior to my arrival in Saigon and arranged to tag along on one of her missions to secure adoptions. As we drove from orphanage to orphanage, I was completely taken in by these children and nonplussed as to how and why anyone in their right mind would give them up. Apparently,



Orphanage #1 (Photo by Marc Yablonka)



Continental Hotel, Saigon (Photo by Marc Yablonka)

Woody Allen and Mia Farrow, then happily married, felt the same as I did because they accepted one of “Cherie’s kids” into their home. Once I was home, I profiled Cherie for the *Jakarta Post* newspaper.

There were several other indelible experiences from my time in Saigon. Among them the night my attorney friend and I dined at an outdoor restaurant whose name escapes me so many years later. As we ate, our waiter bent down close to us and whispered, “Please help me. My ODP (Orderly Departure Program) case very slow. This my number.” He handed a slip of paper to the attorney, who promised to look into his case once home. Moments later, we spied the waiter’s boss looking evilly suspicious at him. Obviously, a loyal party member. I pray the man is safe and fulfilled somewhere in these United States.

Another night, in Cho Lon, the Chinese quarter in Saigon, in the home of Mr. La, the uncle of a colleague back home, over a dinner of delicious “Chao Tom” (Shredded shrimp baked on sugar cane), the power in the district suddenly went dead. We were forced to eat Mrs. La’s delicacy, still a favorite, by the purplish light of a mosquito lamp.

Perhaps the most memorable of my experiences of that journey took place outside of Saigon at the infamous Cu Chi Tunnels, about 50 kms. outside of the city. As is well-known today, the tunnels housed Viet Cong cadres who often lived submerged during entire days, only to come out at night to fight the American “imperialists.” The tunnels purportedly reach all the way from Saigon to the Cambodian border.



Second level of the Cu Chi tunnels with former VC guide.
(Photo by Marc Yablonka)

In 1990, the Cu Chi Tunnels weren't even a blip on tourism's radar. Today tourists come off the cruise ships from Singapore and are bused to what has become a nauseating attempt at drudging up war propaganda for the almighty US dollar. Why...tourists even get to shoot AK-47s for one of those USD! The tunnels have purportedly even been bored out to accommodate western torsos.

When I arrived there, the Cu Chi Tunnels amounted to a hooch in the middle of nowhere with a handful of former Viet Cong, one minus an arm he claimed had been shot off by an American GI for whom he no longer bore malice. One of the VC offered to take me down into the tunnels. I obliged him with trepidation. We went down two levels, which afforded me the chance to see a kitchen, a schoolroom, and a makeshift hospital. He offered to take me down another level, but an odd-looking insect made up my mind for me. I elected to return to the surface. Before departing, I noticed a beat-up old armoire in the hooch upon which some visiting US Marines who had preceded me had stuck one of those iridescent USMC automobile stickers. I thought to myself, "How ironic is that?"

I left Vietnam on its notorious national carrier, Vietnam Airlines. An airline I would have no trouble boarding today. But at the time, survivors of its flights had taken to twisting its Vietnamese name "Hang Khong Vietnam" to "Hang On Vietnam" or "Air Nuoc Mam," a reference to the pungent fish sauce that Vietnamese are known to use in many of their dishes.



At left in the above photo, Marc Yablonka's article about the Continental Hotel for the Pacific Stars and Stripes framed and displayed in its lobby (Photo courtesy James Caccavo)

Thank God, my flight made it to Bangkok without incident. But as I looked around prior to take off and saw that the seat in front of mine was not properly bolted to the fuselage floor, the seatbelt in the seat next to mine wasn't working properly for its passenger, and the flight crew could do nothing about it, I wondered if we would make it. I would return to Saigon five years later. To my old haunt, the Continental Hotel, which I wrote about for the *Stars and Stripes*. And to a much more prosperous "Pearl of the Orient." ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — Marc Yablonka is a military journalist whose reportage has appeared in the U.S. Military's *Stars and Stripes*, *Army Times*, *Air Force Times*, *American Veteran*, *Vietnam* magazine, *Airways*, *Military Heritage*, *Soldier of Fortune* and many other publications.

Between 2001 and 2008, Marc served as a Public Affairs Officer, CWO-2, with the 40th Infantry Division Support Brigade and Installation Support Group, California State Military Reserve, Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, California. During that time, he wrote articles and took photographs in support of Soldiers who were mobilizing for and demobilizing from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

His work was published in *Soldiers*, official magazine of the United States Army, *Grizzly*, magazine of the California National Guard, the *Blade*, magazine of the 63rd Regional Readiness Command-U.S. Army Reserves, *Hawaii Army Weekly*, and *Army Magazine*, magazine of the Association of the U.S. Army.

Marc's decorations include the California National Guard Medal of Merit, California National Guard Service Ribbon, and California National Guard Commendation Medal w/Oak Leaf. He also served two tours of duty with the Sar El Unit of the Israeli Defense Forces and holds the Master's of Professional Writing degree earned from the University of Southern California.

Value Added

A/1/19th SFG in Iraq

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in a 2005 edition of *Veritas* and appears here unedited, with the exception of endnotes with source references available at the address noted below. Be sure to read page 14 by Greg Walker, which contains updated information that relates to Alpha Company, 1/19th Special Forces Group (ABN).

BY ROBERT W. JONES, JR.

From *Veritas*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2005

https://arsof-history.org/articles/v1n1_value_added_page_1.html

One of the hallmarks of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) is the integration of Reserve component units into the overall operation. During their participation in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group (A/1/19th) demonstrated the ability of National Guard Special Forces (SF) teams not only to integrate with the Active force, but also to exemplify the Special Forces core values—especially versatility. In the words of one veteran sergeant, “19th Group broke the mold of old fat guys; the Guard [could] do the mission.”

During initial call-up of National Guard Special Forces units after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, A/1/19th SFG provided individual replacement personnel for other units being deployed while the remainder of the company concentrated on previously scheduled peacetime training exercises. Eventually, twelve A/1/19th soldiers deployed to Afghanistan in support of 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG).

In July 2002, the company was selected to conduct a joint combined exchange training (JCET) exercise in Malaysia. Training was centered around counterterrorism and emphasized close quarters combat and sniper skills.

While the company was still in Malaysia, it was notified that upon its return, the unit would mobilize and deploy to the Middle East. Contrary to expectations that A/1/19th would be sent to Afghanistan, the company command soon learned that the unit was being sent to Kuwait in support of Operation DESERT SPRING.

Operation DESERT SPRING (ODS) was the United Nations-approved ongoing contingency deployment developed after Operation DESERT STORM as support for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH—the enforcement of the No-Fly Zones in southern Iraq.

The Special Forces commitment for ODS was a reinforced company of between five and nine SF teams, operating as coalition support teams (CSTs) training and working with the Kuwaiti army. In the event of aggression by Iraqi forces, the Special Forces CSTs would provide support to the Kuwaitis, deconflicting any problems between coalition units and providing terminal guidance with close air support in order to defend the Kuwait-Iraq border. In order to meet the requirements of ODS, A/1/19th SFG was reinforced with a support slice from the group headquarters and a military intelligence Special Operations Team-Alpha (SOT-A), bringing the total force deploying to approximately 110 soldiers.

Between 26 and 28 September 2002, A/1/19th SFG arrived in Kuwait and immediately set to work. Its primary mission was training and conducting liaison duties with elements of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces. Some of the A/1/19th Operational Detachments-Alpha (ODAs) trained with the Kuwaiti 35th Mechanized Brigade and other conventional units, while others trained with the Kuwaiti Naval Commandos. One of the most important tasks accomplished was extensive close air support (CAS) training, including an urban CAS scenario on the Faylakah Island range complex. The company also conducted extensive demolitions and live fire training with Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs), the High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV, “humvee”) modified for desert operations.

In addition to the CST mission, by November 2002 the staff of A/1/19th began planning and training to support 5th SFG in the event of combat operations against Iraq under Operations Plan (OPLAN) 1003V. According to the OPLAN, two SF forward operating bases (FOBs 52 and 53) would operate in southern Iraq supporting the conventional force (the Coalition Forces Land Component Command or CFLCC) as it moved north to Baghdad.

Under Major Greg Allen, A/1/19th began training for an SF liaison element (SFLE) mission with coalition forces. The SF planners' major concern was avoiding fratricide of ODAs conducting strategic reconnaissance (SR) and unconventional warfare missions beyond the forward edge of the battle area. Even as planning progressed, ODA 912 was given a special mission tasking to Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC) headquarters.

With ODA 912 at CFSOCC and a number of men still with 3rd SFG in Afghanistan, the rest of A/1/19th was assigned as SFLEs to both U.S. and coalition conventional ground forces.

As war neared, the remaining five ODAs of A/1/19th began their SFLE missions. ODAs 911 and 913 were assigned to 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1st MEF), primarily supporting the 1st Marine Division. ODA 915 became the SFLE for the 101st Airborne Division. To support both the British 1st Armored Division and the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division (3rd ID), ODA 914 operated as a “split team.” The ODA commander and the team sergeant led the “A” split and supported the British. The “B” split of ODA 914 joined ODA 916 in support of 3rd ID, whose mission comprised the main effort of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: the assault on Baghdad.

With only one and a half ODAs to cover the entire 3rd ID, ODA 916 split into three teams, giving the SFLE four functioning splits. Each of the three ODA 916 splits consisted of four men and a single GMV, with one split each assigned to 3/7th Cavalry, the division cavalry squadron, and the lead brigades. ODA 914B also distributed its efforts among the 3rd ID units. While in their tactical assembly areas, the SF teams began coordinating with their assigned units. Much of the coordination was designed to prevent fratricide of forward-deployed SF teams operating in nonstandard vehicles.

As President Bush’s deadline for action neared, ODA 916 conducted a detailed analysis of the 3rd ID plan, cross-referenced it with the 5th SFG (acting as Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF)-West) plan, and made face-to-face coordination with the individual ODAs and 3rd ID units. During the coordination with the 3rd ID staff, battalion commanders identified the companies and platoons likely to be tasked with the on-order mission to conduct a relief and passage of lines. ODA 916 developed a training plan and practiced the drill with all of the designated platoons. The effort expended during the training proved worthwhile once hostilities commenced and the 5th SFG ODAs successfully infiltrated into southern Iraq.

On the morning of 20 March 2003, coalition forces began the ground assault on Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq. One of the first deconfliction missions conducted by ODA 914B with the 3rd ID concerned the linkup with ODA 555 in As Samawah. After conducting SR on the Qadasiyah Canal Bridges, ODA 555 was concerned that with 3rd ID units fighting throughout the city, they might be fired upon. ODA 555 maintained security and stayed in its hide site until ODA 914B could escort the team safely back to the 3rd ID’s tactical command post.

As OPLAN 1003V was refined and supporting plans were developed at all levels, 1st MEF added to its combat power by creating Task Force (TF) Tarawa. Centered on the headquarters of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and consisting of three infantry battalions and



As Special Forces Liaison Elements, the ODAs of A/1/19th were tasked with the difficult job of ensuring that 3rd Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division did not mistake 5th Group’s forward-deployed ODAs for enemy forces. In exchange for such deconfliction, the conventional forces provided ODA 915 with support, such as fuel for their GMVs. (US Army)

attached logistics, artillery, engineer, tank, reconnaissance, and light armored vehicle companies, TF Tarawa was of considerable size. Since all of A/1/19th’s ODAs were tasked out, the company headquarters—Operational Detachment-Bravo (ODB) 910—task organized to become a sixth SFLE. The twelve soldiers quickly adapted and soon the mechanic manned the M2 .50 caliber machine gun and a rigger manned the MK19 40mm grenade launcher, allowing ODB 910 to ride into action with the Marines. As TF Tarawa moved through Iraq, ODB 910 coordinated fire support with the various ODAs infiltrated into the area of operations, which numbered between five and ten teams at any given time.

ODA 915 began its SFLE mission to the 101st Airborne Division by linking up with the division at Camp New Jersey in Kuwait. The team worked in shifts in the division’s main tactical operations center (D-main) to coordinate space, to track the 5th SFG units with Blue Force Trackers, and to provide updates to the command. Once the 101st left Kuwait, ODA 915 conducted split team operations; ODA 915A accompanied Major General (MG) David Petraeus and the division tactical center, while ODA 915B followed about a day later with D-main.

Serving with the 101st occasionally provided an opportunity to do more than liaison work. Staff Sergeant (SSG) Ethan Hansen (pseudonym) represented the special operations forces (SOF) element in a war gaming session conducted by MG Petraeus. After the field-grade officers reviewed several scenarios for operations in An Najaf, MG Petraeus turned to SSG Hansen and asked, “SOF, what do you think?” Hansen replied, “Sir, this is what I would do,” and explained

a course of action. The assembled officers criticized Hansen's plan extensively, until they were cut off by the general: "Okay, this is what we are going to do—exactly what [Hansen] said."

After the division had moved north for approximately two weeks, ODA 915 was reassigned to CJSOTF-West, and subsequently attached to advanced operating base (AOB) 570 and two ODAs from 3rd Battalion, 5th SFG, in the vicinity of An Najaf. This spelled the end of ODA 915's SFLE mission and a chance to prove its versatility by taking on new missions. ODA 915's responsibilities in An Najaf included gathering intelligence and conducting raids on high value targets (important enemy personnel). On 10 April 2003, ODA 915 became the quick reaction force for an incident sparked by rival Muslim cleric Imam Abdul Majid al-Khoei, who attempted to enter the Imam Ali Mosque. Although the team arrived within minutes of the attempt, it was too late: al-Khoei had been stabbed to death by a mob. A warrant was later issued for the arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr for his role in the murder. ODA 915 also found itself locating and cleaning out weapons caches from local schools. The weapons, mines, mortars, and ammunition were consolidated, and some of the items were used to rearm the Iraqi police and the Civil Defense Corps.

While the other five ODAs assumed SFLE duties, ODA 912 was selected for a special mission. In early December 2002, ODA 912 was assigned to CFSOCC with duty as a personal security team (PST) for Brigadier General Gary Harrell. The team immediately started training for this unusual mission, using the Diplomatic Security Service manual as a resource. The team flew to Qatar, where CFSOCC headquarters was located, and continued training. In anticipation of a move forward to Iraq, ODA 912 planned for various contingencies. The team also spent time in Qatar training a small detail of military police as a security force for the tactical operations center.

Although "stuck" in Qatar for three weeks while the rest of A/1/19th waged war, members of ODA 912 did finally make it to Iraq. On 10 April 2003, four team members and SOCCENT Command Sergeant

Major (CSM) Jay F. Lovelace loaded one GMV on an MC-130 from the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and flew to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) in blackout conditions. The flight began uneventfully, but once it hit the Karbala Gap, the plane received heavy antiaircraft and ground fire, including rockets. The soldiers later learned that their plane was only the second one to land at BIAP since the war began.

A firefight between 3rd ID soldiers and Iraqi defenders blocked the SF soldiers and the sergeant major from moving directly from their plane to their final destination in the airport complex. While the 3rd ID continued its fighting in and around the airport, the newly arrived group found and secured a maintenance building on the west side of the airfield. The men joined several 3rd ID soldiers watching the red and green tracers flashing against the night sky, and soon saw their first "Baghdad sunrise"—a red sun rising through the dust and smoke of combat, outlined in the landscape of the city.

Once the rest of ODA 912 rejoined the advance party, the team secured one of Saddam's small palaces (a "ballroom palace") about one kilometer south of BIAP. The palace, which became CFSOCC forward headquarters, was three stories tall with thirty rooms, including several large ballrooms (perfect for the operations center), and a large pool within the compound. Once settled into its new team house (the pool cabana), ODA 912 added local patrols to its mission profile.

After the initial thirty days as SFLEs, A/1/19th began additional missions with FOBs 52 and 53. For the most part, these consisted of a 19th SFG team colocating with a 5th SFG team for increased capability. Combined, the two ODAs could then provide additional security and conduct missions. As major Iraqi resistance evaporated, the ODAs completed the transition from the SFLE mission and prepared to go home.

After ten months in the Middle East, the soldiers of A/1/19th began to redeploy home in June 2003. The ODAs first traveled by ground with their vehicles to Kuwait. Once vehicles and weapons were maintained and cleaned, they packed their equipment and began perhaps the most tedious part of any operation — waiting for a ride home. After spending three weeks at Camp Arifjan, A/1/19th finally returned home to Buckley, Washington.

In the course of a single deployment, A Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group tested and proved its own versatility. From peacetime training exercises to personal security details, locally patrolling on foot to planning a 101st Airborne Division's operation, and palace renovation to Special Forces liaison element, A/1/19th successfully completed every mission it was handed. ♦



In mid-April, ODA 912 joined the 3rd Infantry Division at Baghdad International Airport (formerly Saddam International Airport). The airport complex was not only strategically vital, but also gave coalition forces temporary shelter preceding the liberation of Baghdad. (US Army)



Alpha Company, 1/19th SFG(A), Kuwait (December 2002). A-Co is the only National Guard combat unit to have deployed in-full at the onset of the ground war in Iraq. “Reports started coming in that they were seeing Blue Force trackers with our identifiers coming up on the screens — ‘Do we have National Guard units this far deployed in Iraq?’ was the question asked. ‘Yes, they’re my guys,” answered Major Greg Allen. “And yes, that’s where they are.” (Courtesy Greg Walker)

Alpha Company, 1/19th SFG(A) at War

By Greg Walker (ret)

Alpha Company, 1/19th Special Forces Group (ABN) had just completed its recertification requirement at JRTC, Fort Polk, Louisiana, when the Twin Towers came down in New York City. At the time the largest company in 19th Group, with most of its fully qualified members coming from the 1st Special Forces Group, 2/75th Ranger Battalion, and long-time members representing 7th Group as well as 5th Group, A-Co was uniquely positioned to participate in what would become known as Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Commanding the unit was then major, Greg Allen. Allen, a West Point graduate, had served in the 2nd Ranger Battalion and at 1st Group. He had strong ties with CAG, as well. “I knew what a good company looked like,” Allen told me. “And A-Co was a good company.”

At Group Headquarters in Utah, Allen approached the Group Commander and requested to take his company to Kuwait. Operation Desert Spring, an ongoing post Operation Desert Storm mission, required a 6-month commitment even as U.S. and Coalition forces were ramping up and deploying to Kuwait. Major Allen figured if he could get his unit in-country he could then begin working on seeing them participate in what most knew was the coming ground war with Iraq.

Allen’s greatest challenge was convincing “Big Army” as well as the active-duty SOF unit commanders in Kuwait and elsewhere that his National Guard unit was every bit as capable as companies from the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups, already positioning themselves in Jordan, Kuwait, and Turkey for the push into Iraq.

As their commander was making his case, his teams were hard at work training, making their vehicles ready, and capitalizing on their accumulated years of Special Forces service to include calling on their Vietnam veterans’ experience and “lessons learned”. Many of them had served in the 12th Special Forces Group, transitioning over to the 19th Group post Desert Storm when the 11th and 12th Groups were deactivated. If there was ever a Band of Brothers it was A-Co, 1/19th.

On the morning the ground war began A-Co was in position.

ODA 911 was the liaison team for the 3/5th Special Forces Group and was one of the first A-Co teams to airland at the newly captured Baghdad International Airport; ODA 912, after a fierce competition with several 5th Group teams, was selected to act as the SOCCENT commander (General Gary Harrell) PSD once in Iraq; ODA 913 provided passage of lines escort for U.S. / Coalition forces leaving Kuwait and entering Iraq; ODA 914 was the SF liaison supporting the 3rd Infantry Division with ODA 915 accompanied the British Forces; and ODA 916 was attached to the 101st Airborne Division.

Five A-Co operators were assigned to the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC Main) and its Special Operations Forces Integration Detachment (SOFID). Ultimately a 15-man detachment, the SOFID oversaw all U.S. and Coalition SOF operations pre-invasion and war and during the ground war, to include real-time deconfliction of friendly fires into areas where SOF units were conducting their missions unknown to U.S. and Coalition ground force commanders. Two SOFID members deployed with LTG Frank McKiernan, CFLCC CDR, to Baghdad with the Early Entry Command Post (EECP).

One officer was sent to Saudi Arabia to assist in coordination of air assets for the SOF war in Afghanistan.

AOB 910, commanded by Greg Allen, deployed all units forward and then went forward itself. It would provide intelligence assistance in al Nasseryia during the work-up for the rescue of PFC Jessica Lynch, and then participate in the liberation of Al Kut, Iraq. In support of Task Force Tarawa, Allen and his team acted as the SOF link with AC-130 gunships in support of Marine combat missions. “The AC-130s were SOF assets,” recalls Allen today. “We called them in when the Marines needed their support.”

Upon the unit’s return stateside the Group commander and a member from A-Co traveled to Fort Bragg to brief the USASFC Commander, now retired Major General Geoffrey Lambert. At the conclusion of the private meeting at USASFC, General Lambert exclaimed “I had no idea your company was doing all of this. We really need to learn more about our National Guard units’ capabilities and skills!”. ♦

The Bolivian Rangers and the Capture of Che Guevara

By Kenneth Finlayson

From Veritas, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2008

https://arsof-history.org/articles/v4n4_capture_of_che_page_1.html:
source article contains endnotes with source references

On 26 September 1967, the ragged band of 22 insurgents led by Ernesto “Che” Guevara, entered the small hilltop town of La Higuera above the Rio Grande in Bolivia’s Cochabamba Province. Finding the town deserted except for a handful of old women, Che discovered that the Bolivian authorities knew his presence in the area when he found a telegram to the village mayor warning of his approach. When the sick, dispirited guerrillas left the village, the Bolivian Army ambushed them, killing three men. The guerrillas fled two kilometers to the west, into the rugged, broken canyons leading down to the river. (Two Bolivian guerrillas deserted during the move into the canyons). This article will look at the final episode in Che’s Bolivian adventure when he is captured on 8 October by the 2nd Rangers.

Following the graduation ceremony on 19 September 1967, the Bolivian Army’s 2nd Ranger Battalion departed the 8th Infantry Division headquarters at Santa Cruz. The troops were loaded to capacity on stake bed sugar cane trucks. The battalion was headed for the Zona Rosa, the “Red Zone” along the Rio Grande near the town of Vallegrande. This was the reported area of operation of the band of guerrillas led by Che Guevara. The battalion’s mission was to destroy the insurgents.

The 650-man 2nd Ranger Battalion was Bolivian President René Barrientos Ortuño’s response to the guerrilla attacks in March 1967. Barrientos directed the creation of the unit and asked the United States for assistance in training. A 16-man Mobile Training Team (MTT) from the 8th Special Forces Group in the Canal Zone, Panama, under the command of Major (MAJ) Ralph W. Shelton arrived in April. Over the course of nineteen weeks, the team turned the untrained conscripts into “the best-trained unit in the Bolivian Army.” Within two weeks of their graduation, the Rangers lived up to that assessment.

Since late June, Che and his now seventeen-man force were under constant pressure from the Bolivian Army. His original force had been divided and decimated in contacts with the Bolivian Army. Forced into constant movement, shortages of food, medicine and equipment had worn the guerrillas down and caused several desertions. Units from the Bolivian Army’s 4th and 8th Divisions cordoned off the area north and south of the Rio Grande and gradually surrounded the guerrillas. The terrain had rolling hills with deep, densely wooded, thorn infested ravines that generally ran north to south. Narrow riverbanks sporadically disappeared into the canyon walls. The canyon sides were covered with dense thickets of reeds, trees, vines, and cacti. Hilltops were largely barren except for small trees and scrub vegetation. In the rough, broken terrain of deep ravines and thick vegetation, the Army could not find the guerrillas. Che and his men continued to move, seeking a way to break out of the encirclement.

After the 2nd Ranger Battalion was trucked to Vallegrande on 26 September, Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya, the 8th Division commander, sent Company B (Captain Gary Prado Salmón) in pursuit of the guerrillas that fled La Higuera. Prado’s men rode to the village of Pucará and marched through the night to take up positions at the southern entrance of San Antonio Canyon. By 30 September the insurgents were bottled up. Che and his forces were given a brief respite as Army troops conducted thorough sweeps along the Rio Grande, but did not venture into the narrow canyons.



MAJ Ralph W. Shelton and MTT-BL 404-67X trained using an arduous 19-week program to turn the new recruits into an effective combat unit. (US Army)



The ravines running into the Rio Grande provided the cover for Che's guerrilla band when it was ambushed leaving La Higuera. The steep ravines and thick vegetation made movement extremely difficult. (US Army)

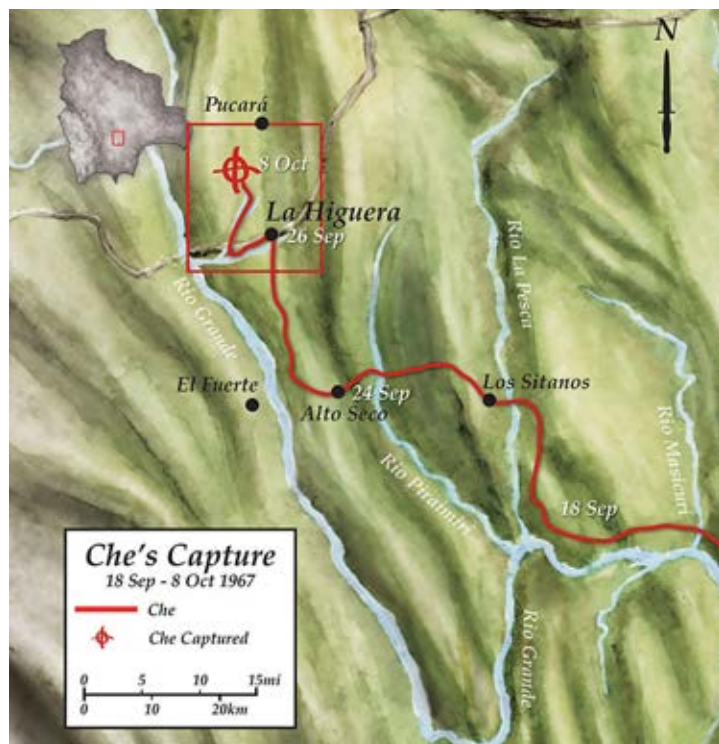
Company B searched along the north and south banks of the Rio Grande until October 4th when they set up a patrol base near Abra del Pichaco at the mouth of San Antonio Canyon. Two sections (platoons) from A Company (Captain Celso Torrelio) were attached to Prado's company and positioned near La Higuera. Prado now had 200 Rangers under his command. The remainder of Torrelio's company was given the mission of combing the ravines to the east of San Antonio Canyon. The Ranger companies continued searching the area without success until 8 October. Then, a crucial piece of intelligence was received.

That morning (8 October) at 6:30 am, Second Lieutenant Carlos Perez, the First Section (Platoon) Leader in Company A (attached to B Company), reported that Pedro Peña, a local campesino, watched seventeen men skirt his potato field to enter El Churo Canyon the evening before. Perez contacted Prado on his AN/PRC-6 radio and was directed to move the two A Company sections to the north end of El Churo Canyon while Prado positioned himself with one rifle section, two 60 mm mortars and one Browning M1919A6 .30 cal machine gun on the high ground overlooking the south end of the small ravine. The Ranger company immediately began to close off the ends of the canyon. The net around Che's posse was closing.

El Churo Canyon, about 300 meters long, ran downhill northeast to southwest. At the southern end, it merged with La Tusca Canyon and fed into San Antonio Canyon. The steep ravine, as much as 200



The Bolivian Rangers, equipped with M1919A6 machineguns and 3.5 inch rocket launchers, routed Che's forces in El Churo Canyon. (US Army)



Che and his men fled from La Higuera into the San Antonio Canyon complex between the village and the Rio Grande. (US Army, map by D. Telles)

meters deep, was thickly vegetated, particularly along the canyon floor, becoming sparser near the top. In addition to the two sections from A Company at the top of El Churo Canyon, Captain Prado sent his Third Section (Sergeant Huanca) up to the north end of La Tusca. He set up his command post and established a blocking position with his two mortars and single machine gun at the southern confluence of the two canyons. By 12:30 pm, Prado's elements were in position and the search of the canyons began.

Che had split his force into three groups, sending four men (Pombo, Inti, Darío, and Ñato) forward into the upper part of El Churo Canyon and four others to the southerly confluence of the two canyons. The rear guard (Chapaco, Moro, Pablo, and Eustaquio) slipped out before the Rangers got into position. Che stayed hidden in the center of El Churo with the remaining guerrillas. His intent was to block the troops from entering the canyon and escape with his main body by climbing to the high ground. The Ranger forces began searching the canyons, closing in on Che. Immediately there was contact at the north end of El Churo.

Second Lieutenant Perez' men were taken under fire when they began to cautiously enter the north end of El Churo. Two Rangers were killed in the initial exchange. The movement halted as the Rangers tried to maneuver to take the insurgents under fire. They had cut off movement to the high ground from the north end of El Churo, but could not penetrate down the narrow ravine. Prado called Sergeant Huanca on the radio and told him to rapidly clear La Tusca and get to the canyon confluence. Before the Rangers arrived, Che made his first attempt to break out.

Captain Prado had positioned his crew-served weapons to overwatch the area where El Churo and La Tusca canyons converged. When the guerrillas emerged to begin their breakout, he engaged them with mortar and machine gun fire. The guerrillas retreated back into El Churo with casualties. Che was wounded in the right calf, and his M-1 carbine was destroyed. A second breakout attempt resulted in another wounded guerrilla. The tide of battle began to run against the guerrillas.

Prado used his AN/PRC-10 radio to call in his appraisal of the encounter to 8th Division Command Post (CP) at Vallegrande. Two North American AT-6 Texan airplanes carrying napalm bombs and armed with machine guns were launched from Santa Cruz to assist. The narrow, near vertical canyon walls and the close proximity of friendlies precluded using the close air support. An OH-23 helicopter also arrived at Prado's CP to help with the evacuation of dead and wounded Rangers. The restricted maneuver room meant that it would be an infantry slugfest at point blank range.

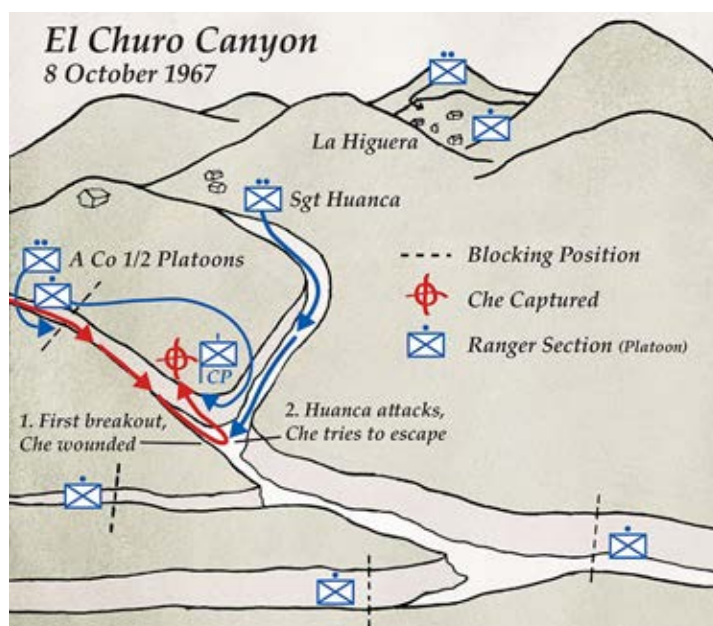
Sergeant Huanca and his section, having completed their sweep of La Tusca Canyon, were directed into El Churo to drive the guerrillas against the two sections of A Company atop the ravine in a "hammer and anvil" maneuver. Huanca courageously attacked Che's main body with hand grenades, killing two guerrillas. This forced the insurgents to fall back and enabled the Rangers to get into the canyon. Now Che had no choice but to try to escape, and the only way out was up.

Separated from the rest of his men the wounded Che with "Willy" helping him began climbing out of the canyon. Two Rangers manning an observation post near Prado's CP caught sight of the two fleeing guerrillas. They held their fire and stayed hidden, allowing the insurgents to climb up the ravine. When they were ten feet away, the two Rangers stood up and took them prisoner. Che had been caught within 15 meters of the command post. When asked by Captain Prado to identify himself, he replied, "I am Che Guevara." Prado radioed to the 8th Division CP the news of Che's capture, then turned his attention back to the battle.

The fighting lasted the rest of the afternoon as the Rangers continued to sweep the canyons for insurgents. Che was detained at Prado's CP until dusk, and then he and Willy were marched by their captors the two kilometers to the village school at La Higuera. There they were kept along with the bodies of two other dead guerrillas.

Che and Willy were held through the night of 8 October in the schoolhouse at La Higuera. The next morning, on orders from the Bolivian President, they were executed by Bolivian troops. In the fighting that lasted until 14 October, the Rangers had nine men killed in action and four wounded. Of Che's force, eleven were killed, one captured, and five (three Cubans and two Bolivians) escaped into Chile.

Of Che's guerrilla band that once numbered more than fifty, only five survived. Che's dream of starting "one, two, many Vietnams" in the jungles of Bolivia died in El Churo Canyon under the guns of the Rangers. Major Ralph Shelton, commander of the MTT who trained them, summed up Che's end "Che was trapped by and tried to break through the best platoon in the best company in the Ranger Battalion, Gary Prado's B Company and the 3rd Platoon commanded by Sergeant Huanca." ❖



Captain Gary Prado's positioning of his platoons. SGT Huanca's section advanced into El Churo canyon. While attempting to escape, Che is captured near Prado's command post. (US Army)



The training of the 2nd Ranger Battalion was hard and realistic. When the battalion finished training, they were immediately committed to seek out and destroy Che's guerrilla band. (US Army)

SFA Chapter 78 January 2023 Chapter Meeting

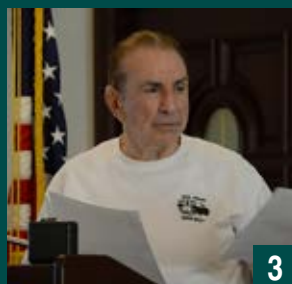
Photos by Rick Carter



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1 Chapter President Greg Horton presented a Chapter coin to Kevin Turvey. Kevin, a guest of Mark Miller, spoke to the group about his experience receiving treatment at the Brain Treatment Center in Newport Beach through the Wounded Warrior Treatment Program. More information regarding this program will be featured in a future Sentinel.

2 Chapter President Greg Horton and Vice President James McLanahan

3 Chapter Treasurer Richard Simonian presents the monthly report.

4 Chapter Secretary Gary Macnamara presents the previous months meeting minutes to the group.

5 New Chapter member Erik Berg

6 Dr. Bob Reed made a presentation about the DENTCAP program he developed while assigned to 46th SF Company in Thailand.

7 Dr. Reed spoke briefly before presenting a video about the program which was made at the time he was serving in Thailand.

8 Left to right, Mike Jameson, James Carter, Ham Salley, and Robert Casillas

9 Art Dolick and Debra Holm reviewing a document.

10 Ham Salley and his guest, Robert Cassias. Robert reported that his veteran's group at Casta Del Sol located in Mission Viejo was in need of veteran speakers.

11 Tom Turney, Gary Macnamara, and Len Fein enjoy a discussion after the meeting.

12 James Carter and Mark Miller catch up.

13 Richard Simonian checks out the January issue of the Sentinel.

14 Left to right, Al Roth, Kevin Turney, Kenn Miller, Mark Miller, and Si Rangel.

15 Lani Dolick, Sal Sanders and Art Dolick look over the massive notebook Art had brought to the meeting. It was packed with photos, news clippings, and other artifacts.

16 Tom Turney

17 Jim Lockhart

18 Richard Simonian and Ramon Rodriguez

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