



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter


VOLUME 14, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2023

Burying the Dead with Dishonor

The John Nesbitt Story:

The First Afro-Native
American MAC-V
Recondo Advisor

Veteran Brothers Take Fellow Vets Beyond Selfies



LTC JOSEPH L. LUJAN
U. S. ARMY
MARCH 19, 1946
JULY 15, 1987



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SENTINEL

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 6 • JULY 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: The Green Beret, which had once belonged to LTC Joseph L. Lujan — the story of LTC Lujan's death is told by author Greg Walker in this month's "Burying the Dead with Dishonor." (Photo courtesy of Ms. Judy Lujan)

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How Miller
Sentinel Editor

10th Special Forces Group (ABN) held a Sergeant Majors Symposium in May. Recent MOH recipient Paris Davis spoke at his old stomping grounds (17th commander of 10th GRP), along with our Richard Simonian. War reporter Alex Quade shared a snippet of information for the event, replete with photos.

I was inspired to read *The Jedburghs* by Bill Irwin, about Special Forces' direct predecessors in WWII's OSS who, with the British SOE, jumped into Nazi-controlled territories to train and equip the resistance. It was to fill in gaps in my knowledge, but I soon found myself absorbed, and wrote an appropriately glowing review.

Gold Star Chapter Member Steve Bric attended a Memorial Day event with his brother, former Burbank Mayor Gary Bric. A poignant moment was when Steve read out loud the name of their brother William, who was one of 17 Green Berets KIA at FOB 4 on August 23, 1968.

"In Burying the Dead With Dishonor, Part 1," Chapter member and author Greg Walker writes about the circumstances leading to SF's involvement in El Salvador and how the required secrecy led to some things being covered over or misrepresented. LTC Luhan, of our cover photo, and Sp4 Dawson are two of the several Green Berets and others killed in El Salvador whose families suffered due to misinformation. In his longtime effort to have those who served in El Salvador receive normal wartime honors and uncover the deceptions of that time, Greg continues to pursue the truth.

We have been encouraging all of you to submit your experiences. This issue's story by John Nesbitt is a bit raw and emotional. Having become SF qualified in an unorthodox manner in Vietnam due to exigencies of war, he was assigned to B52 Project Delta, apparently as its first black member. His reception was mixed, but he persevered to have a high number of recon missions and become a Recondo School Advisor, as well as a long and interesting civilian career after his second Vietnam tour. This is part 1 of 2.

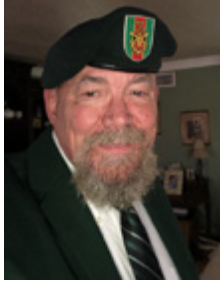
"In Beyond Selfies," since the Canon Representative who sponsors our photography class is looking to expand to new groups around the country of vets, first responders, and spouses, I wrote about our class run by two brothers, Bill Espinosa of the Army and Steve Espinosa of the Navy's Sea Wolves. Their class has a lot of good energy, lessons, and camaraderie, and my wife and I have learned a lot.

You will also find an early announcement of next year's SFACON/World Gathering and a heads-up that Dennis DeRosia, who attended this year's SFACON in Indianapolis, will be presenting an article about his experiences there.

Lastly, you will find pictures of our May chapter meeting. And maybe you too will be inspired to send us tales of your SF service.

Enjoy! ❖
How Miller
Sentinel Editor

From the President | July 2023



Gregory Horton
President SFA Ch. 78

Well, May was a busy month. First off, there was the prep and gathering things up for the Paul Ehline Memorial Ride and Shoot that was held on May 13th. Got my RV prepped and set up at the range for us to have a CP to operate out of. Saturday, bright and early, the Marine Motorcycle Club rolled in and the festivities began. The Marine Corps Piper opened the day with a rousing pipe melody and Mike Ehline introduced me and our Chapter. We donated \$250 to the cause of Veteran's service-related cancers. I want to thank Jim McLanahan and

Jim Cragg for coming out and supporting the Chapter on this event.

From a good weekend at Lytle Creek, to another fantastic meeting on May 20th. We changed the venue to The Villa due to an active-duty requirement at the Los Alamitos location (*Thank You Very Much Richard*). It was a very nice meeting location and the food was great. But the real reason it was so special was our World Class Speaker, Annie Jacobsen. Annie is a Pulitzer Prize finalist and the New York Times bestselling author of *AREA 51*, *OPERATION PAPERCLIP*, *THE PENTAGON'S BRAIN*, *PHENOMENA*, *SURPRISE*, *KILL VANISH*, and *FIRST PLATOON*. She discussed several current and historical issues and it was an excellent "give and take" session, but the best part was her personal reflections of her relationship with Billy Waugh. It was a great interchange and I want to thank her profusely!

And finally, I wish to thank our member-at-large, Dennis DeRosia, for taking up the mantle for us at SFACON 2023. We will be including a review Dennis is crafting for us in our August issue of the *Sentinel*. During his attendance at the President's gathering, they put out the information that next year's SFACON is being set up as a cruise out of Florida. This sounds like a great adventure and there will be more information to come!

Our next meeting will be at our original venue.

Greg Horton SGM (Ret)
President
SFA Chapter 78

Our next Chapter meeting Saturday, July 15, 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)

Mark your calendar for the following scheduled dates for 2023:
August 19 • September 16 • October 21 • November 18 • December TBA

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Richard Simonian and Col. (ret.) Paris Davis Speak at the 10th SFG SGM Symposium



SF Original, Richard Simonian speaks at the 10SFG SGM Symposium on May 18, 2023. (Photo courtesy Alex Quade)

On May 18, 2023, Richard Simonian, SF Original, St. Philip Neri Award recipient, and Chapter 78's Treasurer, had the privilege of speaking at the 10th SFG SGM Symposium on May 18, 2023, alongside Col. (ret.) Paris Davis, a recent Medal of Honor recipient. Each of the men shared lessons learned as well as advice for the SGMs present.

Richard spoke about his journey to becoming a Green Beret, the impact the lessons he learned in training had on his life view, how those lessons were applied to his life after leaving the military, contributing to his success in business, and how that success has made it possible to provide aid to fellow veterans in need.



At left, retired Col Paris Davis, MOH recipient, spoke about his military experience and on the topic of leadership. Appearing at Col. Davis' left are Chapter 78's Richard Simonian and Ramon Rodriguez (Photo courtesy Alex Quade)

Col. Davis, who was the 17th Commander of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) before retiring in 1985, spoke about leadership and his experience in the military.

Copies of the *Sentinel* featuring Richard and Col. Davis on the cover were on hand at the meeting, thanks to Alex Quade (who also supplied Sharpies for autographing!). ❖



SFACON 2023 — Indianapolis

Stay tuned — Dennis DeRosia's recap of the convention will appear in next month's Sentinel



Book Review

The Jedburghs: France, 1944, and the Secret Untold History of the First Special Forces by Will Irwin

By How Miller

“The Jedburghs” by Bill Irwin is an illuminating portrayal of the direct predecessors of the U.S. Army Special Forces. Each of us can picture ourselves in the roles depicted, and hope that we would have been as resourceful and lucky to have overcome the obstacles before us.

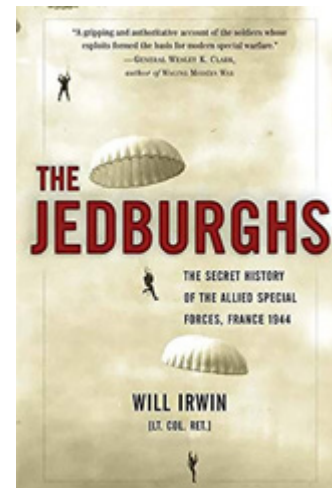
The Jedburghs were the core of what an A-Team is today. After rigorous recruitment, selection, and training, a select few were chosen to be parachuted in as part of a Jedburgh team, sometimes referred to as a “Jed.” Typically a Jed would be a three man team including a radio operator and two officers. At least one of the team was to be indigenous to the area of operation, and a minimum of one had to be either a Brit from SOE or an American from OSS. Most were also multi-lingual.

The book, both extensively researched over twenty years, and told from multiple perspectives, shows the process of assisting and guiding the many active and potential resisters of Nazi occupation in France and beyond. The uncountable number of acts of bravery by those Maquis were made more effective by the equally brave, tenacious, and wise British SOE and the American OSS working side by side with them, providing arms, training, and coordination with the Allied Armed Forces. All the high-ranking generals expressed their deep appreciation of how much the resistance accomplished, both in direct actions and in intelligence provided. For example, it is quite possible the Normandy invasion may have failed without their help.

The breadth of the story gives the reader both an overall understanding of the process and the importance to the Allied Victory, as well as a very relatable recounting of the ground actions of several Jedburgh teams. Some very familiar names are shown in their earlier days, such as “Wild” Bill Donovan, Aaron Bank, and William Colby, along with the first official naming of Special Force HQ.

I was struck by the many parallels described by COL(Ret) Mark Rosengard at SFACON 2022 with [Task Force DAGGER](#) and beyond, including gaining trust and coalition building to achieve the prime objective. “By, with and through” is alive and well within the regiment.

The book, first released in 2005, is available on Kindle, audiobook, hardcover, paperback, and audio CD. It contains charts of participants and much more. ❖



[The Jedburghs: France, 1944, and the Secret Untold History of the First Special Forces](#)

By Will Irwin

PublicAffairs

1st edition (October 10, 2005)

352 pages



The City of Burbank Honors Its Fallen and Lost Heroes on Memorial Day

Burbank’s annual Memorial Day ceremony at the McCambridge Park War Memorial was held on May 29, 2023. The ceremony included music played by the Burbank Community Band as people gathered in the park. The Condor Squadron, aviation enthusiasts dedicated to flying at events such as these, flew overhead in restored WWII North American Aviation AT-6/SNJ trainers.

The most important part of the event is the Ceremony of the Rose. The names of Burbank citizens who have died in service to our country are read aloud, and a rose is placed for each person on the memorial stones at McCambridge Park.

Former Mayor and City Councilman Gary Bric read a portion of the names of the fallen from the Vietnam War. In the photo at left, he had handed the list to his brother, Steve, a member of Chapter 78, when the moment came to read aloud the name of their brother, PFC William H. Bric III, a 1965 Burbank High graduate. Steve read the name, identified his brother as an Army Special Forces Green Beret, and added the date of Bill Bric’s death, which was August 23, 1968. Bill Bric was killed in action along with 16 other Green Berets during the attack on FOB4, also known as the Battle of Marble Mountain. ❖

Burying the Dead with Dishonor

By Greg Walker (ret)
USA Special Forces

Forward

In late February 1981, then Executive Secretary to Mr. Richard V. Allen at the Reagan White House, L. Paul Bremmer III, submitted a working paper commissioned by the National Security Council regarding "The Way Ahead" regarding what would become the 10-year proxy war in El Salvador.

The meeting, held on February 18th, was chaired by the Deputy Secretary designate and attended by, among others, Dr. Ikle from the DoD, General Pustay (JCS), General Schweitzer (NSC), and Mr. Jackson (CIA). Its content would be declassified on June 6, 2006 (FOO-002-#2430).

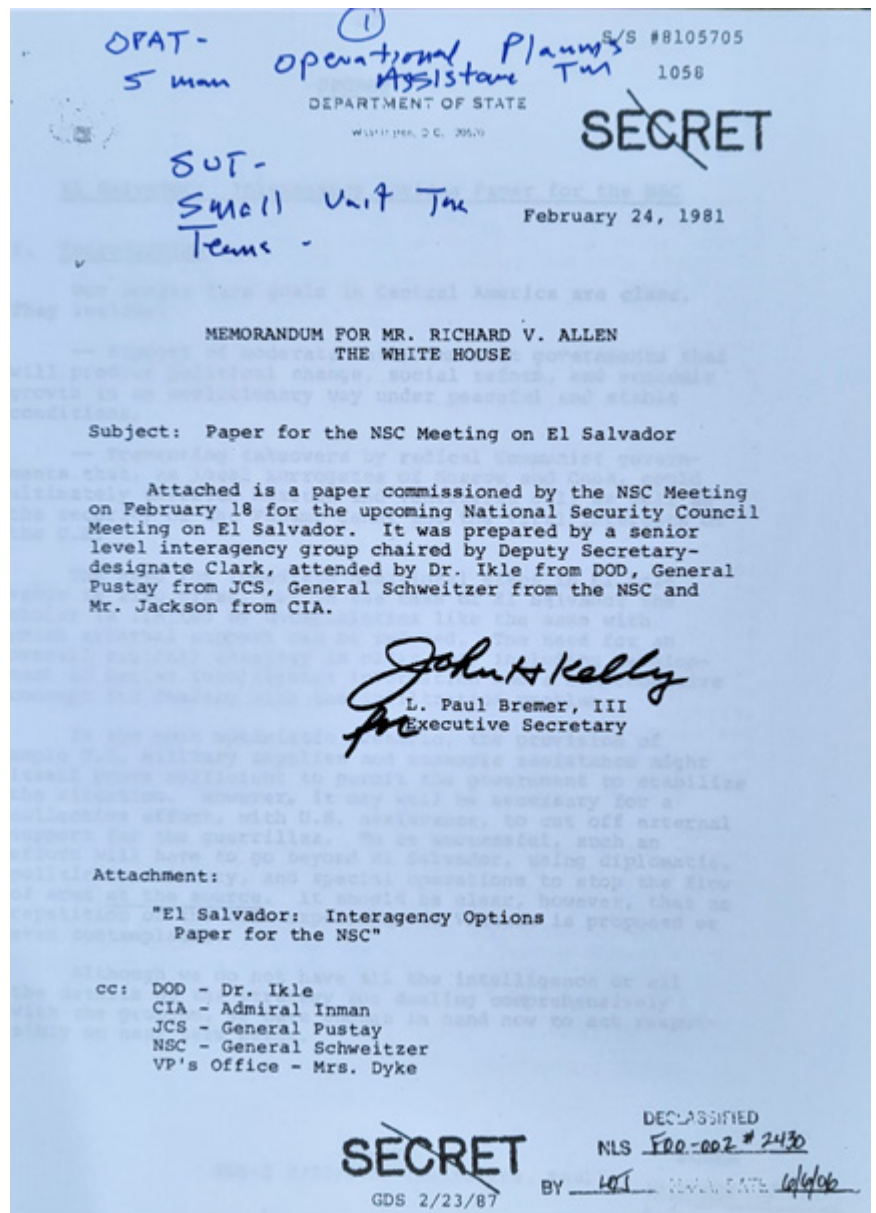
This working paper would become the foundational document for the U.S. involvement in El Salvador. Its goal was to successfully circumvent the coming campaign from having to comply with the 1973 War Powers Resolution (P.L. 93-148). The WPR required that Congress be notified before U.S. Armed Forces could be introduced into hostilities or situations where imminent involvement in hostilities was clearly indicated by the circumstances, and that the President submit to Congress a report of such an introduction within 48-hours after such introduction of Forces had occurred.

"Firm rules of engagement would be required to prevent any blurring of the distinction between 'trainer' and 'advisor.' Nevertheless, inadvertent involvement would certainly still be a possibility...If U.S. [military] personnel to get caught up in direct hostilities, we might have to withdraw them or alternatively address the terms of the War Powers Resolution," wrote Bremmer.

The interdepartmental group offered another distinct observation. "...the fall of the government of El Salvador would represent a major reversal for the United States. *"We might have been able to maintain a posture of indifference toward the fate of that government had it not been for the large scale and blatant external support for the insurgents...particularly not in our own hemisphere, of permitting a government to fall because we have denied it legitimate means of self-help while the insurgents have received unlimited assistance from communist countries [Italics mine]."*

The 1981 working paper specifically implied although it does not state that any and all combat engagements involving U.S. military personnel, particularly the Army's Special Forces and their supporting elements, would be deliberately denied, covered up, and if needed the circumstances of both the wounding or killing of such personnel by either accident or enemy fire would have to be hidden from the Congress and American public.

This included "body washing" or creating a cover story as to how an American "trainer" may have died and where, and what he was doing at the time of his death. The 1981 working paper concludes with this statement. "In the present circumstances, the proposed deployment of MTTs (Mobile Training Teams) to regional commands in El Salvador does not appear to involve imminent risk of hostilities. However, such a deployment would increase the exposure of U.S. personnel to such a risk. In this regard, the U.S. personnel would be in close physical proximity to potential hostilities, and the company of Salvadoran personnel who might become engaged in hostilities. The War Powers



The 1981 working paper that defined the U.S. war in El Salvador (Courtesy Greg Walker)

Resolution defines an ‘introduction’ of U.S. Armed Forces as including the coordination or accompanying of foreign forces in hostile situations.”

In 1996, after a ten-year grassroots political campaign organized and executed by both active duty and retired Special Forces personnel who had served and fought in El Salvador, the Congress authorized the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and appropriate combat awards and decorations for all those U.S. personnel, all Services, who participated in the war.

“Requiem for a Friend” — <https://www.specialforces78.com/requiem-for-a-friend/>

Shot down, captured, and executed

A tragic and violent incident on 2 January 1991 received increasing media attention as the facts surrounding the capture and execution of two U.S. Army aviators became known. Marxist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) brought down a U.S. Huey assault helicopter with small-arms fire. The gunship carried two crewmen and Lieutenant Colonel David H. Pickett, commander of the 4th Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, based in Honduras. According to U.S. Army aviation crews who served in El Salvador at the time, FMLN guerrillas executed Pickett and his crew chief, PFC Ernest G. Dawson Jr., minutes after their helicopter auto-rotated down outside the little village of La Estancia.

While the UH-1H was airborne, ground fire wounded the senior pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Daniel S. Scott; he died of these wounds sometime during or after the crash. The ensuing killings occurred about 20km northeast of San Miguel, only several clicks from the Honduran border. Pickett and his crew were returning to Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras from a staff visit to American flight and ground crews stationed in El Salvador. Pursuing a shortcut route, the Huey had flown from San Miguel toward San Francisco Gotera, then moved north-east toward the town of Corinto. By this approach they could reduce flight time and slip inside the established “Green Three” route into Honduras, leading directly to Soto Cano.

“The doctor who performed the autopsies had access to the debriefing. He told us it appeared the crew chief was shot first,” recalled a CWO 2 “Bob Bailey.” “Pickett apparently made the decision to run for it and was peppered with AK-47 fire at close range.” (*Author’s Note:* Some U.S. Salvador veteran aviation crewmen providing information on this and related incidents requested anonymity for security reasons; where noted, such sources are identified here by noms de guerre).

An aviation accident investigation team from Fort Rucker, Alabama, flew to El Salvador to evaluate the incident, per Army regulations. According to “Bailey,” this team’s report “was never released to the aircrews in El Salvador. This was fairly unusual, as all crash reports are circulated among the pilots so we can learn why a crash took place.”

Pickett’s helicopter had been armed with two M60 machine guns, but these were strapped to its floor rather than mounted. At the time, policy for airframes flying in Honduras called for positioning the guns in this manner.

It was after this incident that authorities determined a need for an ongoing airborne support unit in El Salvador, and it fell to B Company of the 4th Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, to provide such an asset even as the war was beginning to be brought to a diplomatic conclusion.



The charred remains of U.S. Huey helicopter shot down by Marxist FMLN rebels over El Salvador in January 1991. Two of the three crew members survived the crash but were brutally executed on the ground after their capture. (Photo: El Diario de Hoy — San Salvador)



Aircrew from B Company, 4/228th, relaxing between missions. Calling themselves “Danger Pigs, ...these crews flew countless taskings in support of the Salvadoran war effort. UH-1H choppers were known by their crews as “pigs” (a loving term). Here door gunner Cory Brua holds AN/PVS-6 night-vision goggles mounted on his flight helmet. Such gear permitted U.S. night operations whereas, at the time, Salvadoran air crews did not have such equipment. (Courtesy Greg Walker)

“They wanted to cover it up,” confirmed one flyer, known here as CWO 1 “Jim Miller,” “But it was definitely shot down.” It was commonly known among those serving in-country that Pickett’s aircraft had taken ground fire from a confirmed concentration of FMLN forces and indeed had crashed almost on top of the guerrillas after being hit. After the tragedy, Army aviation crews began flying in tandem to cover and, if necessary, recover one another if forced or shot down during flight. All American helos flying in El Salvador were ordered to fly with mounted guns carrying live rounds in the chambers; B Company, 4/228th, was selected to provide air and ground crews in support of the U.S. MilGroup operations in El Salvador.

Door gunners from the 193rd Infantry Brigade in Panama were assigned to B Company in force after the executions. Air crews from B Company flew the body-recovery mission to Pickett’s crash site, where they came under intense ground fire from FMLN guerrillas; the U.S. gunners returned fire and completed their mission. It was found that Pfc. Dawson, promoted to SP4 after his death, was killed with a single bullet to the back of his head. Pickett had witnessed this murder and attempted to escape. The autopsy report states the colonel was hit with some 15 to 20 rounds, including at least one which passed through his hand and then struck his face.

According to “Bailey,” who spoke with the doctor conducting Pickett’s autopsy, the conclusion was that the colonel tried to cover his face with his hand even as guerrillas fired point-blank at him. After the deaths of Pickett, Dawson and Scott, the 4/228th renamed several facilities at Soto Cano for the dead aviators. For example, the former Camp Blackjack (home to the 228th) is now known as Camp Pickett.

Today, Colonel Pickett’s grave at Arlington National Cemetery overlooks the El Salvador memorial in Section 12. His father, after a hard-fought battle with the Army, was successful in seeing a posthumous POW medal awarded in his son’s memory. Recent developments in May 2023 between the Secretary of Defense’s Office and the Human Resources Command at Fort Knox see renewed effort being made, at Secretary Lloyd Austin’s express direction, to review and facilitate the same award for Earnest Dawson.



SP4 Dawson’s surviving family members were quietly pleased to learn of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s direct involvement to see their loved one’s sacrifice finally acknowledged with a posthumous Prisoner of War medal. (Courtesy Greg Walker)

July 15, 1987 — More lies as families grieve

On 15 July 1987, a UH-1H helicopter under the operational control of the U.S. MilGRP, crashed while attempting to return to Illopongo after aborting a MEDEVAC mission. According to the crash report filed at Fort Rucker, Alabama, pilot errors and poor weather during its attempted landing were at fault.

At 80-plus knots the UH-1H crashed into the hillside above Lake Illopongo and some fifty meters below the ridgeline. Onboard were two Special Forces medics enroute to the National Training Center (CEMFA) in La Union. Gunfire there had severely wounded SSG Tim Hodge, an SF adviser in the neck; and he required immediate evacuation.

The aircraft and its crew were assigned to Joint Task Force Bravo, stationed at the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras. However, the air crew was assigned to support operations in El Salvador and was based at Illopongo Air Base. Task Force Bravo predated the 228th Aviation Regiment’s service in El Salvador. Originally many in El Salvador believed the aircraft had been struck by an FMLN shoulder-fired, Soviet-made SA-7 or SA-14 antiaircraft missile. However, pilot error was stated as the cause of the crash by the investigative team from Fort Rucker. Today, that conclusion rings hollow based on newly discovered information.

Six Americans were reported killed in the crash: Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Lujan, a decorated Special Forces officer and the OPAT for CEMFA in La Union; Lt. Col. James Basile, deputy commander of U.S. MilGrp El Salvador; First Lieutenant Gregory Paredes, the co-pilot; Chief Warrant Officer John Raybon, a pilot whose resume included flying for the DELTA counter terrorism unit as an aviator with the “Night Stalkers”; the crew chief, PFC Douglas Adams; and SF medic, Sergeant First Class Lynn Keen. SFC Tom Grace, also a medic, was the sole survivor.

Circumstances of the crash were immediately hushed up

The only survivor, severely injured, was SFC Thomas Grace. Both Keen and Grace worked at the National Military Hospital in San Salvador where they assisted in treating wounded Salvadoran soldiers. Keen was posthumously awarded a Meritorious Service Medal (MSM), the peacetime equivalent of the Bronze Star. Keen’s award was a continuation of the flawed awards policy dictated by the USGOV after Sgt. 1st Class Greg Fronius was killed in action in March 1987. Fronius died rallying Salvadoran troops under attack at the 4th Brigade’s headquarters at El Paraiso. The “Green Beret” sergeant was confronted by three FMLN sappers who shot him, and then murdered him by placing an explosive charge under his body and then detonating it.

Sixty-four ESAF troops were killed during this attack, with another seventy-nine wounded; only seven guerrillas were reported killed. Fronius is credited with stalling the enemy assault, as guerrillas overran the compound after ESAF officers abandoned their troops. His team leader, now retired Gus Taylor, recommended Fronius for a posthumous Silver Star; the proposal was bitterly fought over in Panama and at the Pentagon. In the end, Fronius was awarded a posthumous MSM and a Purple Heart with 3 U.S. general officers signing off that “no mention is to be made of combat” regarding Fronius’ death.

LTC Joseph L. Lujan, upon hearing of one of his men being wounded at the National Training Center in La Union, rushed to join the MEDEVAC from San Salvador. Arriving even as the helo was preparing to lift off, Lujan replaced the senior U.S. Army Medical MTT officer. In a personal letter to Mrs. Judy Lujan wrote, “I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to understand why the events of the 15th developed the way they did, trying to find a reason why Joe took my place... I still find no explanation as to why we changed places. He felt he was doing his job, I felt I was doing mine... I miss him.”



(Photo courtesy Ms. Judy Lujan)

SSG Timothy Hodge graduated from the SFQC in May 1978. Hodge, a communications expert, went to El Salvador just weeks after an MTT to Bolivia, where he provided technical assistance to CIA and NSA personnel in La Paz. He had only been at the National Training Center in La Union for two weeks when he was seriously wounded, his injuries leaving him paralyzed. “We had 3500 Salvadoran soldiers and recruits on CEMFA at that time,” he told this author. “And we knew 10 percent of them were infiltrators. After I was MEDEVAC’d, they swept me and what happened under the rug.”



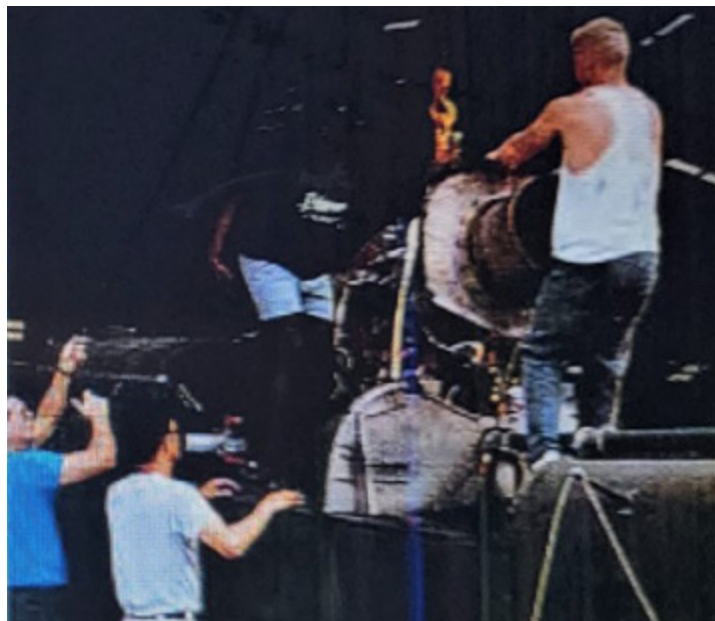
(Photo courtesy SSG Tim Hodge)

This represented the awards policy hinted at in 1981 in Bremmer’s classified working paper. It was a policy that became the norm and applied to U.S. military personnel fighting and dying in El Salvador, a policy shrouded in shame, deceit, and dishonor.

What truly happened at CEMFA / La Union and at Lake Ilopango

In March of 2023, this author began revisiting the circumstances of the shooting of Special Forces adviser, SSG Timothy Hodge, in La Union that prompted the U.S. helicopter piloted by Chief Raybon and Parades to be launched from San Salvador, and the subsequent abortion of that mission and deadly crash.

That investigation continues. However, the Fort Rucker accident investigation FOIA has already been fulfilled and a growing number of the family members of those lost as well as others who until now have remained silent, are for the first time being shared in this initial story for the *Sentinel*.



Army aviation-support personnel at Ilopango Air Base change the engine after a precautionary landing near Limpa River by a U.S. helo. These personnel kept U.S. assault helicopters flying, despite hits from enemy small arms and everyday mechanical problems. (Courtesy Greg Walker)



Salvadoran “Llama” prepares to lift fully armed SF advisers into Chalatenango area, long considered a guerrilla stronghold. This photo was taken in 1980. (Courtesy Greg Walker)

And the information received to date is disturbing when compared to the official reports and media releases at the time. Examples of this include:

- LTC Joseph Lujan had accepted an offer made in Washington, DC, to serve a one-year tour of duty in El Salvador as the OPAT for the National Training Center in La Union. In a phone call to his wife shortly after that meeting, and perhaps with a premonition, he told her “I’ve just made the worst decision of my life.”
- In the official accident report issued by Fort Rucker it is states the U.S. helo aborted its medevac mission 12 minutes after departing the LZ at 1st Brigade in San Salvador. This due to extremely bad weather. The report offers this did not affect the MEDEVAC of Tim Hodge as a Salvadoran helo had launched from San Miguel, just a 20-minute flight away from La Union / CEMFA and was already transporting the wounded soldier to the military hospital in San Miguel. However, it has now been learned the initial request for a Salvadoran MEDEVAC was rejected in

San Miguel with the comment “We don’t fly at night.” According to retired Special Forces medic Morgan Gandy, who provided combat life-saving care to Hodge at CEMFA, the UH-1H that came from San Miguel was clearly a CIA aircraft with U.S. crew onboard.

- Ms. Judy Lujan, LTC Lujan’s widow, filed a complaint with CID at Fort Bliss, Texas, as she was not convinced her husband’s remains had indeed been recovered as reported to her. A CID agent there called her back and offered LTC Lujan’s remains had been properly identified at Gorgas Army Hospital in Panama. When she asked how they were identified she was told “by his medical and dental records.” Ms. Lujan informed the agent that was impossible. When asked why, she replied “I have his medical and dental records here!” The next day CID was at her door demanding the records from her. They had been sent to her by a point of contact in El Salvador her husband had left for her to call in case he was killed or disappeared. Along with the records she received his green beret, and a pair of his dog tags with blood stains on them.

LTC Lujan’s family was told his remains could not be viewed as they were burned beyond recognition. However, the Fort Rucker report and several pictures purported to be of the helo’s wreckage, said to have been located on the hillside into which it crashed, clearly show the fuselage did not burn. The trees and ground are not burned. And the diagram purported to show where each body was found is likewise not described as having been burned. The aircraft flew directly into the hillside at such speed that, per the Rucker report, ALL those onboard but one were thrown from the aircraft, their safety harnesses and belts tore away due to the force of the Huey’s impact.

A close friend of Chief Raybon and former crew chief likewise shared that Raybon’s remains were likewise labeled as non-viewable.

Even more puzzling is an Aviation Safety report identifying another UH-1H, the wreckage of its tail boom and rotor along with the aircraft’s ID number clearly visible, having crashed on the same date and year as the helo LTC Lujan was on...its wreckage in water at Lake Illopango. As of late May 2023, the Command at Fort Rucker offers it has and knows nothing about this second helicopter.

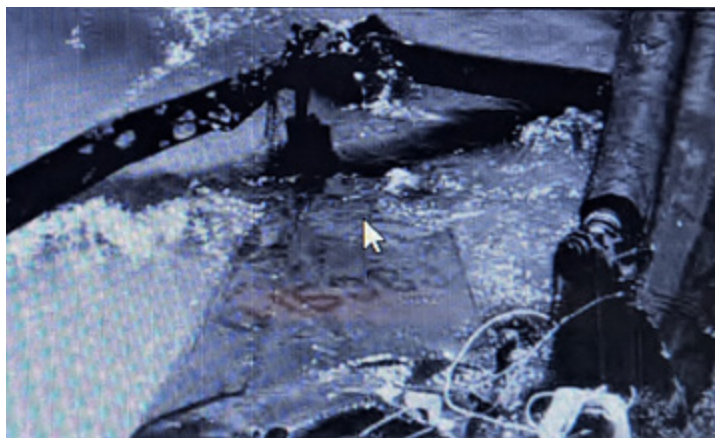
Another highly credible source, an American who served in El Salvador and as an Agency employee, former Marine Force Recon (Vietnam) veteran, Mr. Harry Clafin, shared with this author that as of 1992, when he finally left El Salvador, the fuselage and those onboard who were killed had not been recovered from Lake Illopango. Is Clafin referring to the mystery helicopter Fort Rucker knows nothing about? Clafin, who trained and led the highly effective GOE, or Special Operations Group, as well as the Salvadoran Airborne Battalion, is quite familiar with the National Training Center in La Union.

“I was at CEMFA after the attack there. I was on the immediate reaction team. It was always on alert. It can be launched in less than 20 minutes. I was in the battalion commander’s chopper. We went after the G’s that were running up the railroad track. They were headed for the hills.

“In the late 80’s there were so many things going on at Illopango it was not possible to know everything and I had my plate full with the GOE training at the different Brigades. Some of what was going on



From the Fort Rucker accident report — the main fuselage of Chief Raybon’s MEDEVAC helo where it came to rest 33 feet below the ridgeline on approach to Illopango Air Base, El Salvador. The investigation showed the Huey’s engine was operating at maximum power when the crash occurred. This indicates a possible evasive effort to avoid a now known second UH-1H, possibly being flown by CIA contractors, departing the air base under extreme weather conditions. (Courtesy Greg Walker)



Provided to this author in 1993, the tail boom and rear rotor of the UH-1H that crashed on July 15, 1987, is clearly visible in water (Lake Illopango). The airframe’s ID number is likewise visible. This single picture and the date it became available is believed to be a CIA operated UH-1H that may have collided with the original MEDEVAC Huey piloted by WO2 Raybon that night. (Courtesy Greg Walker)



At left, Fort Rucker accident report photo of alleged tail boom of the crashed UH-1H. Note the wreckage is purported to be on land, and the tail boom is positioned so its ID number, unlike the 1993 picture of the same wreckage, is not visible. (Courtesy Greg Walker)

was best not to know anything about. I tried to stay away from Hangar Five and what the ES Airforce S-2 was up to. Sometimes you can know too much and wind up dead. After spending ten years being on the inside I found it was not healthy to get involved with some things. I was at the DAO's house one evening to celebrate a new class of cadets that had just graduated and General Bustillo [the Salvadoran Air Force commander] saw me there. The next day he called me into his office and told me to remember where I worked and lived and not get too close to the Americans.”

Clafin, the only American to have been commissioned as an officer in the Salvadoran military (as a captain), was busy in 1987.

“During that time frame the only person I worked with was Mark Gardwell who was my direct contact with the Agency. 87 was a busy year for me with a lot of catch-up work from being in Nicaragua for 8 months, 4 in the North training CONTRA and 4 months in the South training the FDN. My world was very compact and I did not pay a lot of attention as to what other units did or did not do. I went to the monthly meeting that MilGrp held at the embassy in San Salvador...to stay in the loop... As you know the Agency had a base of operations on an island off the coast of El Salvador [Tiger Island]. If the Agency was involved you will never find out what happened for sure.”

Setting the record straight – No fallen comrade left behind

In 1998, SFC Greg Fronius' family received their loved one's posthumous Silver Star at the largest awards and decorations ceremony held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for the 7th Special Forces Group, since the Vietnam war. Additional long-overdue combat awards were made to include fifty Combat Infantry and Combat Medical badges. This the result of the 10-year grassroots political campaign to see the U.S. Congress reverse historical course on the subject and authorize our war in El Salvador as an official U.S. military campaign.

Using the information gathered by those of us involved in that campaign, LTC David Pickett's father, himself a retired Army colonel, was later able to force the Army to recognize and then authorize his son's posthumous POW medal. A similar effort by SP4 Dawson's family, which did not have the kind of horsepower and knowledge of the

system as Pickett's father did, has to date not seen the same just due awarded their son. In early April of this year a concise documentation packet petitioning Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III was sent to the SECDEF – asking he and his staff to review this case and to step in and correct this grotesque manipulation of this 20-year-old black service member's ultimate sacrifice.

In 1996, Ms. Judy Lujan, escorted by the sole survivor of the crash that killed her husband and 6 others, attended the dedication of a memorial to those Americans and Salvadorans killed during the war in El Salvador at Arlington National Cemetery. When interviewed by the Washington Post she said this. “Judy Lujan, wife of Army Lt. Col. Joseph H. Lujan, was told her husband died in 1987 when the helicopter carrying him crashed into a hillside during stormy weather. But the Army never produced her husband's personal effects or photographs of his corpse, despite her repeated requests, she said yesterday. “I can't get on with my life, I can't do anything, until I know for sure he's dead,” she stated.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/05/06/public-honors-for-secret-combat/f764f45e-1b75-4e8c-8c32-94844434d5e0/>

Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Ceremony —
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3uy8Ey23Is&t=5s>

When I asked Ms. Lujan if she has ever received her husband's personal effects...his watch, his wedding ring...she replied she has not. “I was told, when I asked for these, that they had been ‘washed down the drain’ during her husband's alleged autopsy in Panama.

Judy Lujan has never remarried. ❖

A warning from our past

“The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten.”
Calvin Coolidge, 1920.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE –

The never before released details of the wounding of SSG Timothy Hodge, A Company, 3/7th Special Forces Group (ABN), in his own words — and the true account of how 6 Americans lost their lives in their attempt to save him.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Walker is an honorably retired “Green Beret.” Along with Colonel John McMullen he founded the Veterans of Special Operations — El Salvador in 1989. — <https://www.specialforces78.com/requiem-for-a-friend/>

A veteran of the war in El Salvador and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Greg's awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, 2 awards of the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Special Forces Tab, 2 awards of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and most recently the National Infantry Association's Order of Saint Maurice.

Mr. Walker is a Life member of the SFA and SOA.

Today Greg lives and writes from his home in Sisters, Oregon, along with his service pup, Tommy.

At left, the author in La Union, El Salvador, 1984. (Courtesy Greg Walker)

HEADQUARTERS

SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (A&B)

The John Nesbitt Story

The First Afro-Native American MAC-V Recondo Advisor

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

ST JOHN E. NESBITT 16 844 2



John Nesbitt, Jump School Graduation portrait, June 1966, Ft. Benning, Georgia. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

By John Nesbitt

Viet Nam: An account of the experiences of Sgt. John E. Nesbitt, 16-844-233, Detachment B-52 Delta Project From From September 18 through December 1966 and from December 1967 through May 1968 at the MAC-V RECONDO School, RECONDO STUDENT # 114 RECONDO ADVISOR #135 From June through October 1968 at Detachment A-401 DON PHUC, Mekong Delta, CIDG Company 43, 44 and 46 MIKE FORCE

I did not go home in June of 1966. I was a platoon guide all the way through training, and now I would go to Leadership Training School at Fort Gordon, Georgia, for two weeks instead of going back to New York City. Within the next ten days would be jump school at Fort Benning, GA. My number as a jump student, the infamous #711, and then to Vietnam.

AUGUST 18, 1966, IN COUNTRY, my brother David's birthday¹: heat, dust, and humidity; an acute sense of my flesh surface awakening over the next three days. I was recruited out of Ben Hua, Repo Depo and sent to the 5th Special Forces Forward Operations Base [SFOB] in Nha Trang for examina-

1. Birthday of my brother David, 1966 Peace Corps assignment, Caracas, Venezuela

tions for two weeks. I was tested each day; one day equaled a month block of instruction; no test failures allowed, or you were shipped out! Theater-to-battalion-level operations orders and Secret Operation orders comprised the curriculum, along with night duty and security assignments on the perimeter, where we received probing fire and periodic Sapers, began my September of 1966. My green beret was awarded, and I was assigned to Detachment B-52, Delta Project, along with Robert Crenshaw, of Yuba City, California.

Within hours after graduation, I was reluctantly signed in by my 1st Sergeant at Delta Project; the ole-timers resentment was immediate:

1. A college boy
2. A Nigger and,
3. Not from training group stateside.

“What the fuck we comin’ to?” voices rattled through the office as I left to my hooch.

1st Action

After returning from my first seven-day mission, in which I was almost kicked out of SF for firing my weapon accidentally, I was called to the Opns room, “Bring your weapon!! You’re going on a break through at Phu Bai, A-102 South of the DMZ, in I Corps.”

The Viet Cong is preparing to overrun the camp. We ride a chopper to Da Nang refuel and pick up two assets one ARVN and one LLDB Lieutenant. Things felt bad from the beginning. I was new, and still taken with the country side, the colors, as an artist I was caught by the lush beauty. Our briefing plan was to spear a path into the A-camp and open an E&E route out of the camp at 180 degrees. We were prepared for sixty people to exit by our penetration. There were two LZs to use in tandem: (A) LZ was primary at 180 degrees from the camp, and (B) LZ was at a 90-degree angle from the penetration point.

The LLDB lieutenant took charge immediately on the ground; we had 34 total reaction forces, including five Americans. 1st Lt. Nuk led the column and gave the ARVN the azimuth to follow; he then began dropping back. The terrain was moderate to thick, so we had to stick close. Speed to the penetration point was the focus, and swiftly and as quietly as possible, we moved. I could feel everyone at once—not any one specifically, but all of us at the same time. In the distance, I could now hear the small arms rattle and the deep grunts of heavy mortars. I no longer felt anything except my breath and movement itself. The closer, the louder the sounds, the more off the azimuth we went. We dropped down into a gulch—not good, I thought. I slowed to check the azimuth on my compass. We’re off!!! And why is Lt. Nuk next to me? And moving away? I’m about 16th or 17th in line. I heard a B40 rocket go off, along with screams and some words in Vietnamese and American voices, and like raindrops, the sounds of AK47 pops flooded the gulch. A crescendo of small arm fire lasted about five seconds, and the voices were Vietnamese, all yelling at this time. I was in a complete, flat-out run back to the rally point.

Within seconds, one other American arrived, a Spec 4 Miller from supply, two other Americans arrived, and around eight ARVN troops. That’s ALL? Of 34, we now have twelve people! The call went out to the choppers to return immediately; they couldn’t be far, we were on the ground for maybe ten minutes.



John Nesbitt, 1966, B55, CIDG/MIKE Force, Nha Trang Valley, Ban Me Thuot. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)



Team infiltration, by rappel, ropes out. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

I assessed the situation for myself, although Lt. Nuk suddenly again took charge. The Primary LZ is 180 straight back; Lt. Nuk says to go for the alternate at 90 degrees; this will create a parallel foot race to the alternate LZ. We will all get shot, or we could go back to the original LZ and set up quick ambushes on the way, but only if they are chasing us from behind! We should control the move to the LZ, but Lt. Nuk says “go to the alternate” ... I say “NO WE GO BACK THE WAY WE CAME!!” Calls go to the choppers to return to the primary LZ. Angrily, Lt. Nuk started to say something, and without thinking I gave him a fistful right cross knockout punch to the chin and led the return to the original LZ.

The other Spec 4 now took the lead, and I returned to the rear to set an impromptu ambush. It took four to five seconds. I could hear the brush beating behind us. An ARVN was next to me; I didn't even realize he was there, my asshole was so tight. Before the images became faces, we emptied our weapons on the forms... got up and ran. At the edge of the LZ, we stopped, dropped, and fired our weapons again at the area we thought the VC should be. It suddenly became quiet. As we got to the choppers, small arms began to pour in on us again. I was the last to get on... I saw Lt. Nuk hanging off the back of his radio man. As he began entering the chopper, his back exploded, a B-40 rocket, two of them, one hit Lt. Nuk, and the other went through the opening of the chopper and out the other side.

So, along with me, one other American and six Vietnamese arrived in Da Nang out of a 34-man reaction team. A successful ambush against a reaction team, very suspicious. After a short debriefing, I thought I could relax. I might be court marshaled now that the after-action report was filed that I punched Lt. Nuk, and in turn he was killed as a result of being incapacitated by me at the rally point; he was 'punched out,' that's why he was being carried, and was subsequently killed being assisted onto the chopper.

They would plant the blame on me was the 'in camp' speculation.

This is the beginning of extreme anxiety for me.²

October 1966, Delta Project Recondo School

The first Delta Project Recondo Advisor/team leaders graduated at the new MACV Recondo School.

2. The accidental firing of my weapon caused me to fail the first Recondo Instructor course; I lost thirty points for the three rounds that went off. In retribution, Msg. Smith assigned me to return to pick up the bodies of KIA belonging to the families of B-52 CIDG. I now carried my own combination of racial resentment, with fear and disgust for the war itself.

Mission: to instruct allied and friendly forces in the technique of **seven-man team, intelligence reconnaissance patrolling, and information gathering techniques.**

The rotation was as follows: teach and physically train five days, enter isolation two days, final operations order on the fifth or sixth day, and infiltrate day six at EMNT, i.e., Early Morning Nautical Twilight, or BENT, Beginning Evening Nautical Twilight. Carry out missions for six point five days, exfiltrate the seventh day, debrief day seven and eight, if necessary, clean weapons and equipment, and you are off for two days if lucky.

Sgt. John Nesbitt completed 14 Recondo missions from October 1966 through June 1968. The life expectancy for a LRP team member is **8**.

From October 1 to December 17, 1966: **4** missions

From December 17, 1967, to May 28, 1968: **10** missions

July 1968, at Detachment A-401 Mekong Delta, Sgt. Nesbitt was awarded the Air Medal for 4,000 hours of air combat assault time logged.

RS 1 — October 1966

Team Leader, Asst. Team Leader Spec 4 Nesbitt: land infiltration, U.S. Marine Corps LRP team, seven days, just south of Da Nang near Quy Nhon, two evasion incidents from Viet Cong, no casualties.

November 1966, I experienced my first "can't sleep, stay awake at night."

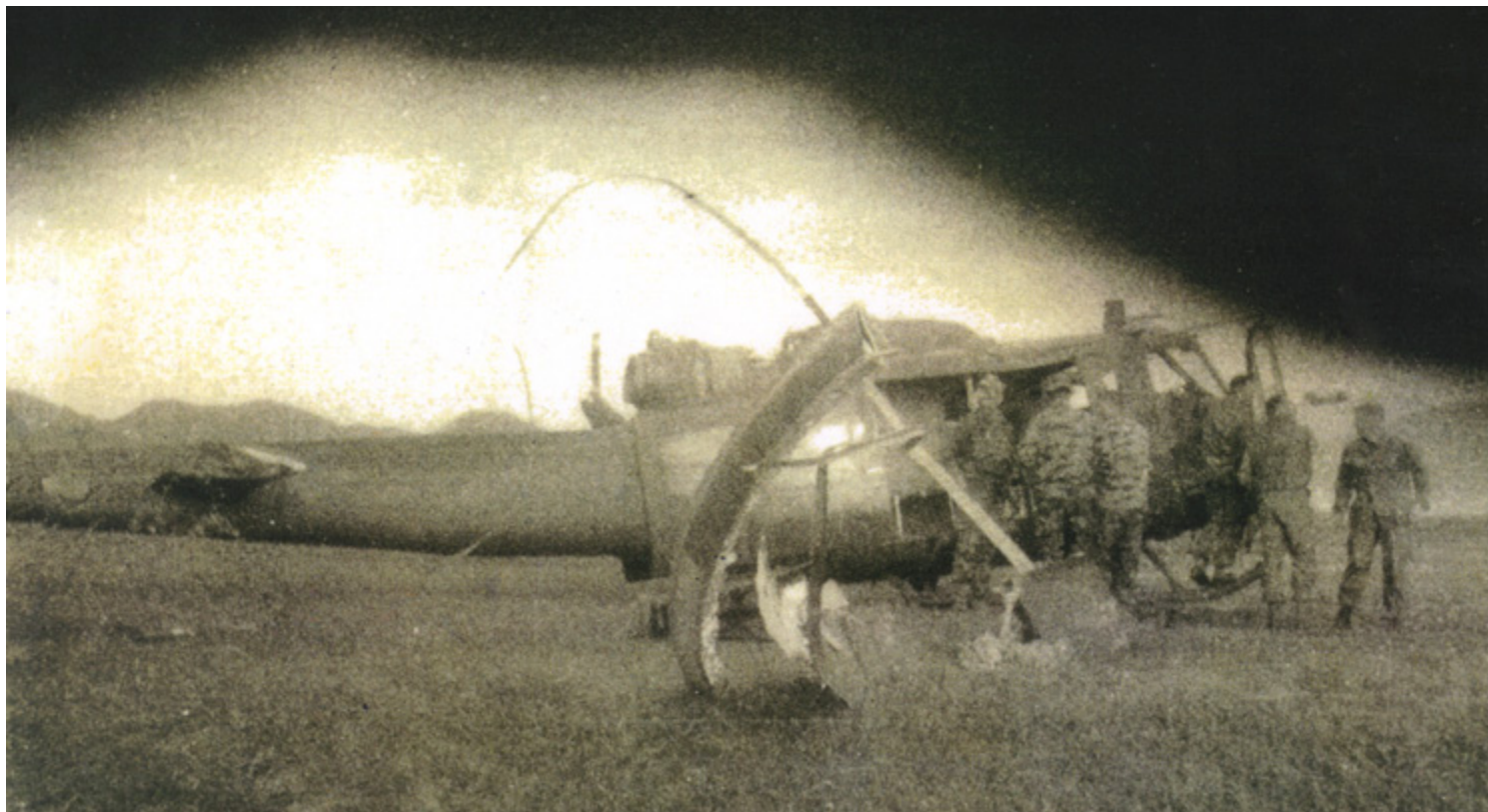
RS 2 — November 1966

Team Leader, SSG Mrsitch, Asst. Team Leader Spec 4 Nesbitt: walk in infiltration, 4th Infantry Div. LRP team, seven days into operation area west of Quy Nhon.

Day four, as I rested during 'Poc time,' a Viet Cong wandering back to his camp walked up on me. I heard his approach and raised my 357... For an instant, we looked at each other. As he stumbled over my foot, I fired a single round. I saw myself falling as he fell to the



Project Delta, MAC-V Recondo Cadre, October 1966, John Nesbitt is the second from right, third row. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)



Chopper down— 1 VC KIA; 2 US WIA. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

ground, and immediately we were up and running. Our E&E route now in effect; choppers were called, and we were extracted within four hours, with no loss of American lives. At this point, I have given myself up to being dead.

RS 3 — November 1966

Team Leader, Spec 4 Nesbitt, Asst. Team Leader, Spec. 4 Robert Crenshaw: Nha Trang valley west of Ban Me Thuot, 24th Infantry LRP, air infiltration, mission: to identify Ho Chi Minh Trail outlet and cache points.

Day five, first morning movement, walked head-on into an NVA scout team. Our immediate reaction drill killed the first two of about nine. We ran and set an immediate impromptu ambush while distress calls were made ground to air. No sound; within ten seconds they are moving to our flank, but which one? I follow the procedure requiring a right turn after 30 seconds of running and wait. We eased our way to an alternate LZ for pick-up while reporting information SITREP data. The LZ began to echo with voices; another patrol had been summoned, it seemed, because both sides of the LZ were giving probing fire. A fix as to the NVA location was given, and gun ships engaged the ground while I scurried my team from the point to go for the choppers. It took too long; the NVA were on us with AK fire, two of my team dropped; while helping the two wounded to the chopper, one chopper was downed with three of my team on board. Now we are out in the middle of the LZ, shooting at the first group that spotted us. This was not a stand-up-and fire situation, but with three of us left, I gave cover fire with the other two heading for the chopper.



Last day of mission, rifle shot identifies our position to the NVA. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

Once we were all in, I looked at the ground. The chopper was burning, and figures were approaching with weapons blazing. Now self-regret and questioning begins, an attempt to sum up what happened. The ride back was beautiful. I could lose myself in the cool air above the jungle and avoid the temptation to throw up and cry.

I realize the decisions I made were okay; the LZ had to be cleared or at least engaged before we could approach the choppers. I didn't talk to anyone; the SF people didn't talk to me about my missions; they talked only to themselves. I was the first black Recondo instructor team leader.

I let go of past disgust and renewed it with a determination to go this alone.

The Death of SSG SMITH

One hour after I began to unwind, my name was called to report to the operations room. A B-55 MIKE force was being readied to go after the patrols we roused up in RS 3. In two hours, I was back at the LZ I had left that morning. We were in a circle with perimeters covered, and assignments for night watch were being given, when probing fire came from the southeast of our location — shit, I was going to make me an MRE, Chile Con Carne.

Because it started out as a probe, I rolled over on the ground, thinking this would be a short one.

I heard a RFPF guy run by yelling for BOXY (doctor). "All right, get into action," I thought, so up and running I go. I stop short when I see SSG Bott leaning over an American on the ground. I lean over him. His breathing is short and his body is clammy and cool, so shock is setting in fast. We search for holes. There is an entry to the right chest and shoulder and exit wounds behind the chest, so I turn him onto the side of the wound and treat for a sucking chest wound. SSG Bott is by my side; we worked together when a Viet Cong ran past us. Now SSG Smith is turning purple, blue, and gray. I laid down in front of him and yelled at him to hang on at the top of my voice. I could see the energy drain from him and the transition from life into the other side. I was very drained and sick to my stomach the rest of the day. Even while firing my weapon, I felt the pointlessness of the war and separated from my body.



The team performing mission preparation on a RB15.. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)



Infiltration team, Sgt. R. Crenshaw, Sgt. Wade, Spc. John Nesbitt, November 1966 (Courtesy John Nesbitt)



Project Delta team leader SFC Charlie Telfare at Nha Trang Harbor — sunrise preparation. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)



Navy "swift boat" RB-15 Commander, coffee cup in hand, overseeing mission preparation. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

That night we experienced several short rounds, and I now understand the misery of the machinery of war.

I returned to Nha Trang on a chopper the next evening. The Viet Cong were eventually kicked out of the area, it made Nha Trang Valley safer. SFC Paul Tracy questioned me about SSG Smith's death; they were close friends.

RS 4 — December 1966

Team Leader, SFC Charlie Telfare, Asst. Team Leader, Spec 4 Nesbitt: Water infiltration, what seemed to be just below Nha Trang Harbor, and the mission was to gather information on sea infiltration points by the Viet Cong. A unique situation here — we were to infiltrate by RB 15, with the help of the Navy swift boat along with a U.S. Marine Corp LRP team.

Preparation from Nha Trang Harbor started at 0800, December 1966. At last light, the Navy swift boat took to the sea three miles out. We acquire our infiltration location, and at the Beginning Evening Nautical Twilight, we strap our gear to a single line running the length of the RB 15 (Rubber Boat 15 persons). Two SEALs swim in about a mile to shore and set a boundary for us to row to. The waves flip us over and thrash us into the rocks and beach, causing confusion for about ten seconds. The SEALs show up, we cut the gear line, release air,

and begin pulling the RB 15 back to sea. We move into the brush and stop, listen for three minutes, and then, wet and chilled and eyes wide open, we set up for the night. At first light, we start a cautious listening period; our direction is strictly by compass. Now light is upon us, the day is starting, robot slow we move till midday and stop. Our objective here is mainly the perfection of patrolling and information gathering.

By the last day, we could hear periodic small arms fire; we were being tracked! If I recall correctly, the team spent the night next to a beach, under some bushes, alert for our trackers. We were picked up by chopper from an out-of-the way beach site and returned to Nha Trang. I still felt like a rookie. It was Charlie Telfare that I watched closely the whole mission; he had been with the Delta Project teams, and they truly were the experts in the bush. It would be thirty years later that I would talk to Charlie again, and how we got reintroduced is a unique story in itself. ❖

IN THE AUGUST SENTINEL —

John Nesbitt's story continues beginning with an account of a special operation with the members of the Australian Special Forces, and continues with his accounts of Recondo School missions and his assignment to Det A-401 in the Mekong Delta, 300 yards from Cambodia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Nesbitt enlisted in the U.S. Army in January of 1966 and was deployed to Vietnam on August 18, 1966. He was recruited by the Special Forces, Project Delta, and completed two assignments with the unit: September 1966–December 1966 and December 1967–May 1968. He became the first African-American advisor for the MAC-V Recondo School, where John completed 14 missions. Subsequently serving with Detachment A-401 in the Mekong Delta with the “Don Phuc Mike Force,” he went home in October 1968.

Upon discharge, John continued his education, earning a BS in Secondary Art Education and a Master in Fine Arts (MFA). He taught at several schools, including Grant Union High School and Hampton Institute, College of Arts and Letters, in Hampton, Virginia. As a Case Manager for the Mather Community Campus in Sacramento, John initiated a Resident Council and Community Garden.

John's commitment to community service work has been demonstrated by his full involvement with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Neighborhood Emergency Training (NET), and the Veterans History Project (VHP). His contributions to these groups led to his selection by the Bank of America as one of five “Local Heroes” in his community. He also received Congressional recognition as a Sacramento Regional Community Trainer.

John is also a fine artist whose oil paintings have been displayed at various galleries throughout the US. He is also a Tae Kwon Do master with 7th Dan certification and has operated a training school that offered special youth programs.



John Nesbitt with representatives of the US Soldiers Association — to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive, John Nesbitt received both a bronze star for valor and the air medal. (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

John Nesbitt has raised two children and is currently living in the Sacramento area.

John Nesbitt's VHP interview about his military service can be viewed at https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.38179/#item-service_history

To learn more about John Nesbitt visit his website at <https://www.jnesbittandassociates.com/index.html>

Veteran Brothers Take Fellow Vets Beyond Selfies



Left to right, Steve Espinosa, Mike Eliason, Art Van Dover, Bill Espinosa, How Miller. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)

By How Miller

Once upon a time there were two brothers. One joined the Army and the other joined the Navy.

Bill Espinosa, the elder brother got into some classified work that kept him away from combat, but was critical work, and eventually became a college professor. Steve had a far different experience, serving with the Sea Wolves in the Mekong Delta providing helicopter transport mainly for Special Ops missions, such as inserting and extracting SEALs and others into enemy held territory. He did both mechanical work and crew work. He eventually retired from the Santa Barbara Fire Dept.

Many years later they were invited to participate in a photography class for veterans at a Santa Barbara City College extended learning center. They found the experience so worthwhile that, when the instructor was unable to continue, they offered to take over the class, working totally for free. What was somewhat unique about the class is that it was sponsored by Canon USA. Their representative Art Van Dolan provided the class with two high class printers, ink, photo paper, loaner cameras, and advice. All Canon asked in return was a report at the end of each class showing the participants, short bios, and some of their photos.

Bill and Steve jumped right into upping their game. Building on the prior class, they came up with presentation materials for each subject to be covered, and learned a lot more as they studied the material themselves. They titled the class “Beyond Selfies”, as the objective was to teach each student (veteran or spouse) how to use the equipment they already had, taking it off “Automatic”, while learning the basics of photography. Included was how to use Adobe Bridge and Photoshop to bring out details that seemed lost in many pictures, resulting in top quality photographs. SBCC provided the computers and the software.

Areas covered ranged from a thorough understanding of the exposure triangle to High Dynamic Range techniques, including merging multiple shots of the same subject. Assignments were given, with the results being displayed for the class along with discussions of techniques used, obstacles overcome, and student critiques. A favorite of mine was the concentration on how to deal with backlit subjects. We had in-class practice sessions for each technique. Bill and Steve made sure each of us was comfortable succeeding with our own wide-ranging brands and types of cameras.



The class plus Art and Mike. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)



Army Combat Engineer, Henry and Heidi Wynn with their two granddaughters preparing small pics for longer display in library display cases. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)

Next, we had to learn how to make those photos work with the high-class printers we had. One was a Canon desktop 1000 model that used 10 or so ink cartridges. The other was a floor model, Canon 2100, for making poster sized prints. Naturally many of those went up on our classroom walls. A lot of pride was evident when those went up, seeing how much better photos we were now producing. At the end of the semester, we had an exhibition near our classroom. Many people from SBCC showed up and were very impressed. We even got new students from the attendees.

The next semester had many repeat students, and new students as well, in part due to the class now being open to first responders and spouses. At the same time, word was spreading at the City College, and this last class was invited to exhibit at the library on the main campus. That turned out to be a great success. Many notables attended from the college, the president of the Santa Barbara Foundation who had decided to pitch in some help, and a few community photography people, including Mike Eliason, famous news photographer and instructor. Mike also did a very helpful presentation at one of our



Air Force, Phillip Bennie discussing with Jeannette Chian, Dean of Continuing Education. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)



Marine, Rudy Gomez discusses his photos and the class with former owner of photo developing business and another guest. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)

classes, and ran into some of his old students there. And a current UCSB student, Jimmy Zahn, came and took pictures of the event.

Art Van Dover, our Canon sponsor, was also able to show up. He was quite happy with the accomplishments of Bill and Steve, the students, and the exhibition. He was quite pleased with how well City College has warmed to the class.

In talking with Art, I asked him if he had other classes that he was sponsoring. He said “just a few”, but he was hoping to expand to different parts of the country. So, if you are interested in exploring the possibility of setting up a class for veterans and/or first responders, please contact us at the *Sentinel* at sfachapter78@gmail.com.

That is the reason for the article. ❖



Bill Espinosa addresses class at Wake Center SBCC. (Courtesy How Miller)



Overview of the exhibit area. (Courtesy Jimmy Zhan)

SFA Chapter 78 May 2023 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Rick Carter



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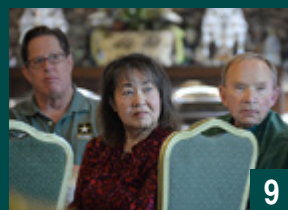
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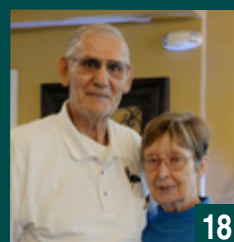
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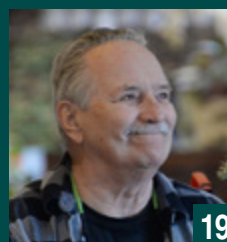
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1 Author Annie Jacobsen was the guest speaker at May's meeting.

2 Annie Jacobsen with her father. Annie is holding a flag that was given to her by Billy Waugh after an unsuccessful pilgrimage.

3 Chapter President Greg Horton presents Annie with a Chapter coin.

4 Richard Simonian introduces Scott McReynolds of the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG).

5 Ramon Rodriguez reports on the SGM Symposium at Fort Carson, which he had attended with Richard Simonian just a few days previously.

6 The audience listens with rapt attention to Annie Jacobsen's story.

7 Mark Miller, James Suber, and Jim Suber

8 Tom Turney

9 Mike Lanterman, Lani Dolick, and Len Fein

10 Gary Macnamara faithfully attends to his Chapter Secretary duties.

11 Robert Casillas, Don Gonneville, and Jack Blau

12 Don Deatherage

13 Left to right, Nimo, Annie Jacobsen, Richard Simonian, Ramon Rodriguez, Thad Gembacz, Gary Macnamara

14 At left, at the front of the table, Jim Duffy, to his right, Michael Wayne

15 Nimo and friends from the ACL Afghan community.

16 Art Brown, Jim Suber, and James Suber

17 David Yegenian, Richard Simonian, and Alex Gavidia

18 Erik Berg with his wife Gloria Jean

19 Art Dolick

20 Annie Jacobsen's story about Billy Waugh sparked discussion after the meeting.



20

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