



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 8 • AUGUST 2023

SFA Con 2023 After-Action Report

The John Nesbitt Story
The First Afro-Native American
MAC-V Recondo Advisor
Part II

An Uncle With A Few Dollars
Wounded Heroes of America



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SENTINEL

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 8 • AUGUST 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: A U.S. Army Special Forces Soldier assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) qualifies at a stress shoot range at Ft. Carson, Colorado, Mar. 3, 2016. The stress shoot was designed to test soldiers for actions seen in combat operations. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Connor Mendez)



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How Miller
Sentinel Editor

Colors of War & Peace by Dan Thompson was a series of eight separate tales, including some from SOG. Edgar Tiffany read that book and was so impressed with the richness of Dan's book "Colors" that he wrote a book explaining the not so obvious levels of Dan's writing, called *Hues of Green*. There is a part of these two books that our Gold Star Member, Jim Suber, found especially personal — the mission on which his brother was lost. Jim enthusiastically encourages us to read either, or both, of these books.

Longtime chapter member and recent Vice President, Dennis DeRosia, left our environs for Florida. But he has not abandoned us. He represented Chapter 78 at SFACON 2023. He shares pictures and his personal perspective on the convention and all the fun he had, including at the Indy 500 runup.

Sentinel friend and the driving force behind his nearly daily SOF. NEWS, John Friberg, also went to the convention. He shares with us his quite comprehensive coverage of SFACON 2023. The presentations were also videotaped, and we will make a link to them available on the Chapter 78 website when they become available. A playlist of the videos will also be add to our YouTube channel.

John Nesbitt continues his riveting story in Part 2. This was submitted due to our request from our readers to share their own stories. In his own raw style. He shares what his action-packed experience was like — good and bad. His tale continues past his active-duty experiences to dealing with the aftermath. As with all retellings of experiences more than fifty years ago, what we remember is what we have to rely on.

Mike Talleda, our May Chapter meeting speaker, was interviewed by Ron Sokol for a local publication called "South Bay Cities." We are reprinting it here with permission. It is a short description of some of Mike's many efforts to help others, especially through the 501(c)(3) Wounded Heroes of America, which he co-founded after 9/11/2001. Included is their website address, where you can donate to help this very worthy effort.

As usual, we conclude with photos from our June chapter meeting.

Enjoy! ❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

From the President | August 2023



Gregory Horton
President SFA Ch. 78

Well, we are halfway done with 2023, and it has been an excellent year except for our loss of some wonderful men. These are the unsung heroes who devoted considerable time, energy, and personal wealth to helping those in need. I started thinking about all the people who take active roles in assisting others, and our own Richard Simonian is a prime example. But one does not have to look far to find others who exemplify this type of giving. They are in every community and usually operate below the radar with little fanfare. Mike Talleda, this month's Chapter guest speaker, is no exception.

Mike is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who has assisted Veterans, First Responders, and their families for almost a quarter of a century. After the terrorist attack in September 2001, Mike got some friends together and wanted to do something for the families, and his team decided to put on a golf tournament. The event was a success, and his group donated the money to a needy family. Based on this successful

endeavor, the yearly golf tournament was born, eventually leading to the formation of Wounded Heroes of America (WHOA). Their Charter is to help those who have lost a loved one or suffered a serious injury, be it physical, psychological, or both, while serving the country. Mike's inspirational story of his family coming over as Cuban Immigrants fleeing a savage, repressive government and working hard and becoming leaders in the community is a great snapshot of what can happen here in America. Thanks to Mike for speaking at our meeting.

Another first for the Chapter is the beginning of our trips to shoot trap and skeet at LA Clays in South El Monte. Len Fein, myself, and my daughter got together and shot three rounds of trap and had an excellent time. Len, who has not shot in quite a while, showed why he was a competitive shooter in his younger years. He was smoking the birds. My daughter had an outstanding time too and really enjoyed her first time shooting trap. After we shot, we had lunch at the range café, and I can personally attest to the fact that the Bison Burger was outstanding. We have had a couple of members express interest in the next shoot. We are not going to have any real organized events because everyone's schedules are so busy, so Len and I will pick a date and give you advance notice so you can get ammo, supplies, etc. and come out and shoot. It is a lot of fun, and we look forward to seeing you out there.

And finally, I would like to extend my thanks to Dennis DeRosia for picking up the Chapter mantle and attending the SF Convention in Indianapolis as our representative. I will not write about his adventures and steal his thunder because he is writing an AAR for us. Thanks again, Dennis.

Greg Horton SGM (Ret)
President
SFA Chapter 78



Chapter President Greg Horton presents a chapter coin to the meeting's guest speaker Mike Talleda of Wounded Heroes of America.

Our next Chapter meeting Saturday, August 19, 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:
September 16 • October 21 • November 18 • December 9

Colors of War & Peace by Dan Thompson

Hues of Green: A Critical History of D.M. Thompson's

Colors of War & Peace by Edgar Tiffany



[Colors of WAR & PEACE: A Collection of Short Stories](#)

By D.M. Thompson
Daniel M. Thompson
1st edition (03/23/2018)
190 pages

By Jim Suber

I. The Book

***Colors of War & Peace* was written by Dan Thompson. It was published in 2018 and can be purchased on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Abe Books, among others.**

Thompson served two tours in the Vietnam War as a Green Beret in the highly secretive, unconventional and elite “MACV-SOG” (Military Assistance Command Vietnam-Special Operations Group) from 1968 to 1970. His assignments included Hatchet Force platoon leader, Recon Team Leader (One-Zero), Covey Rider, along with brief stints as asst-S-2 and S-3 and Launch Site Commander. SOG ran missions

behind enemy lines in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam from 1965 to 1972. Adding to their mystique, SOG men were bound by 20-year non-disclosure agreements that prohibited communication with anyone (including themselves) about that group — — with threat of prosecution, and perhaps federal imprisonment for breach or infraction.

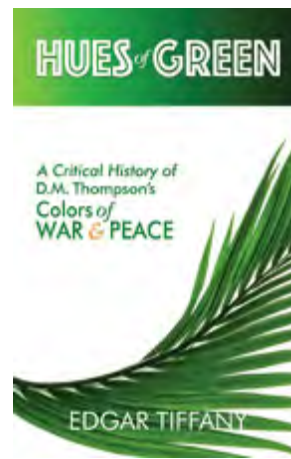
Thompson's book is a collection of eight powerful short stories sharing his experience before, during, and after the war. It includes a brief foray in the business world as a stockbroker, away from the war but not far enough from his recurring addiction to high-risk, high-reward — sadly compounded by inept leadership. The stories are beautifully written — authentic, transparent, intelligent, tragic, ironic, sarcastic, humorous, and, of course, “colorful.” There are numerous magical literary moments — metaphors, imagery, symbolism — inducing the reader to pause, smile, or sigh.

Thompson courageously exposes his own deeply personal “Jacob at Peniel” story; like the Biblical figure Jacob, who wrestled with angels and himself throughout the night, Thompson's stories reveal his determination to find peace for himself and his fallen comrades. Thompson not only describes his poignant emotions, but also skillfully “leads” the reader to join his earnest search for answers.

Those that never served in combat (and most have not) cannot completely understand the depth of his experience and anguish, yet *Colors of War & Peace* artfully magnifies what warriors have said for thousands of years. Dwight D. Eisenhower, for one, said it to the Canadian Club in Ottawa in January 1946 (shortly after World War II):

“I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.”

Most of us cannot imagine the burdens a warrior carries long after the war. Thompson's book often refers to the French and their war, the American precursor in Indochina. Perhaps that is a hint that the answer can be found in the French word for war, *guerre*. That word shares the same root as their word for healing, *guerir* — suggesting that finding peace often, surprisingly, requires combative resolve to obliterate our internal demons, doubts, and fears. Thompson's writing shows that resolve and a healing.



[Hues of Green: A Critical History of D.M. Thompson's Colors of War & Peace](#)

By Edgar Tiffany
Edgar Tiffany (01/31/2023)
223 pages

II. A Book about a Book

***Hues of Green: A Critical History of D.M. Thompson's Colors of War & Peace* by Edgar Tiffany was published in early 2023 on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Mager and Quinn Booksellers, and Alibris.com, among others.**

Edgar Tiffany is a Vietnam Veteran. He served in the First Infantry Division, the 82nd Airborne Division, the 509th Airborne Infantry Regiment (8th Infantry Division's airborne arm in Europe) and U.S. Army Special Forces. He also served in the post-Vietnam Special Forces Reserves which is where he met (then) Captain Thompson.

Tiffany connects to Thompson's “colors” with his interpretive “Hues,” and explains his “book about a book” as,

“This critical history of the writing of *Colors of War & Peace* and ‘a man like any other’ was motivated by the respect I have developed for him, my long history in viewing experiences of this author and a realization, over the four years since its publication, that *Colors of War & Peace* was a far ‘deeper’ read than I allotted it on the first go-around.” (Page 19)

Tiffany goes on to say,

“I have always carried Vietnam around in my head as GREEN. It was (a) place that reverberated with hues of green and I have said as much in my own writing . . . It is safe to say that these same hues of green have drawn me to the deeper intentions and meanings of Thompson's *Colors of War & Peace*, to catch the flickering vision behind his metaphors and lead, as you will see, to answers fascinating, mysterious and challenging.” (Page 20)

“A book about a book,” eh? Could two special operations guys devise a scheme to make us read both books — twice? Yes, they could. Sneaky bastards! If that was their intent, then it certainly worked on me! Without question, their “collaboration” makes both “reads” brilliantly richer.

Like his Special Forces captain, Edgar Tiffany is a fabulous writer and provides extraordinary insight into each of Thompson's eight short stories. As a bonus, Tiffany weaves in observations about an earlier writing from Thompson in 1994 (suspiciously released just after the 20-year non-disclosure moratorium required from all that served in SOG) titled *In Search of My Rune*. Tiffany spotlights Thompson's numerous (albeit sometimes camouflaged) references to Alfred Lloyd Tennyson, Edgar Allan Poe, the chorus in classic Greek tragedy, and a hundredfold others. Tiffany also provides absolutely hilarious and virtuosic illustrations of how Thompson's "real, but ludicrous situations are informed by snatches of Marx Brothers-like dialogue reminiscent of *Duck Soup*, *A Night at the Opera*, *Horse Feathers*, and *Monkey Business*, among others." (Pages 45-48)

Dan Thompson means the world to me — especially his love, respect, and devotion for his fallen comrades in MACV-SOG. He was the Covey Rider that oversaw the last insertion of Recon Team Oregon (two Americans and four indigenous teammates) behind enemy lines in Laos. That team included my oldest brother who was listed as Missing-In-Action (MIA) on November 13, 1969. The two Americans, Ron Ray ("One-Zero") and Randy Suber ("One-One"), remain Missing-In-Action to this day. My wish for Dan Thompson is that he continues wrestling for answers and shares his journey with the rest of us in his magnificent writing.

These two men are talented writers whom, I believe, are finding some solace and peace in their artful writing. The reader is richly rewarded. Both books are mesmerizing reads — especially if you read them twice or more! ❖



RANDOLPH BOTHWELL SUBER
 Rank/Branch: E5/US Army Special Forces
 Unit: CCN – MACV-SOG,
 5th Special Forces Group
 Date of Birth: 22 May 1947
 Home City of Record: Ballwin MO
 Date of Loss: 13 November 1969
 Country of Loss: Laos
 Status (in 1973): Missing In Action



RONALD EARL RAY
 Rank/Branch: E6/US Army Special Forces
 Unit: CCN – MACV-SOG,
 5th Special Forces Group
 Date of Birth: 11 August 1947
 Home City of Record: Port Arthur TX
 Date of Loss: 13 November 1969
 Country of Loss: Laos
 Status (in 1973): Missing In Action

John Stryker Meyer's story "11-13-1969 — SSGT Ron Ray and SFC Randy Suber MIA: Decades Later a Chance Meeting Leads to Answers for Family" provides details about the incident on 11/13/1969. Read it on our website at <https://www.specialforces78.com/11-13-1969-ssgt-ron-ray-and-sfc-randy-suber-mia>

AUGUST 23, 1968 — ATTACK ON FOB 4 MACV-SOG GREEN BERETS KILLED 53 YEARS AGO

SSG Talmadge Horton Alphin, Jr. - PFC William Henry Bric III - SFC Tadeusz Marian Kepczyk - SFC Donald Ray Kerns

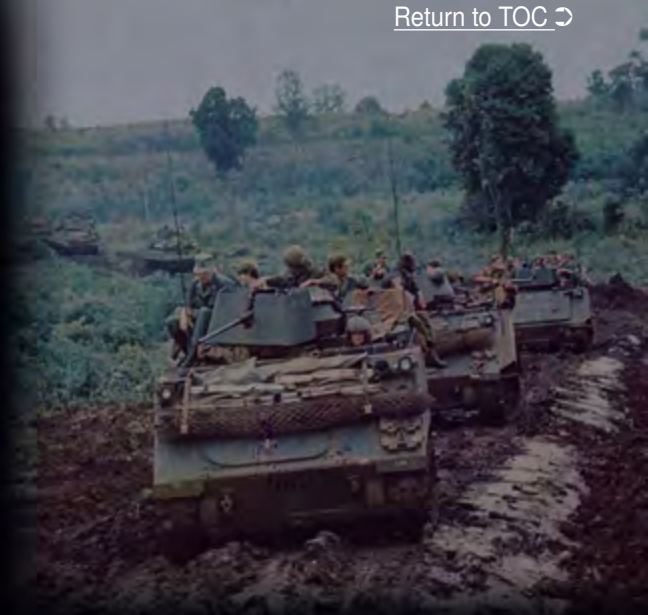
SGT James Thomas Kickliter - MSG Charles Raymond Norris - SGM Richard Epps Pegram, Jr. - 1LT Paul Douglas Potter

MSG Rolf Ernst Rickmers - SP4 Anthony John Santana - MSG Gilbert Arthur Secor - SGT Robert Joseph Uyesaka

SSG Howard Steven Varni - SFC Harold Robert Voorheis - SFC Albert Marion Walter - SFC Donald Walter Welch

WE WILL NEVER FORGET

Read John Stryker Meyer's account of that horrible night in Vietnam with Special Forces suffering its highest single day casualties to this day.
<https://www.specialforces78.com/16-sf-kias-august-23-1968-nva-through-the-wire-fob-4-ccn/>



SFACON 2023:

Indianapolis, Indiana • May 22–26, 2023

After-Action Report



SFACON 2023 – Indy: From My Perspective

By Dennis DeRosia

Photos courtesy Dennis DeRosia

Attendance may have been down, but not the quality! The variety of topics and speakers was outstanding. Unlike previous SFACON meeting formats with multiple, simultaneous sessions, this was a single track of presentations. Thus, having attended each of the sessions, I was blessed to have walked away from each of them with several pearls of knowledge. It is not my intent to summarize all the sessions; I just want to share several that caught my personal attention for one reason or another.

Beginning with BG Lawrence Ferguson, Deputy Commander, 1st SF Command, he reassured us that the Regiment remains strong, focusing on “selection and culture”, in the face of continued recruiting challenges. Currently, a key component to filling the SF ranks is the [18 X-Ray program](#), which I was not familiar with. This is where someone can enlist off the street and declare that they want to enter SF. They must commit to a six-year enlistment, and in turn, the Army enters them into a training program to prepare them for the Q Course. While only 11% will make it all the way through and be assigned to a team, this group now accounts for approximately 50% of the Regiment’s ranks. Interestingly, in service, applications to go the SF route are down.

While there were the usual presentations on past operational missions, a significant portion of the topics were more related to the Warrior Ethos and mindset during both active and post-service years. One such session was Dr. Alice Atalanta who provided numerous examples of the “Warrior/Statesman” throughout history. Throughout history, she

pointed out how the great commanders were well versed in ancient philosophy. One philosopher reminds us that “wisdom and experience peak with age.” I sure hope that’s true because I don’t have many more years left to get there. Her closing was, “care for your bodies, but pay more attention to your mind and spirit.”

On the very serious/emotional side, there were two things that struck me deeply at the conference. First were the photo tribute wall posters of our fallen brethren who had paid the ultimate sacrifice. In the center of these was the following statement: “When you go home, tell them of us and say, for their tomorrow, we gave our today.” Even now, I can barely type this without my eyes welling up.

Wall of Honor

**When you go home, tell them of us and say,
for their tomorrow, we gave our today.**

-De Oppresso Liber



BG Lawrence Ferguson, 1st SF Command, opened the conference with an assessment of the active Regiment today.

Second was the presentation by Bianca Baldwin, the “Silver Star” surviving spouse of Major Darren Baldwin, who suffered traumatic brain injuries from two separate IED incidents and slowly deteriorated over a 15-year period before his death. We are all familiar with “Gold Star” families who have lost loved ones KIA, but what about those who suffer catastrophic injuries and succumb to them at a later date? Mrs. Baldwin was her husband’s constant caregiver for that entire time and now consults with the Green Beret Foundation as an expert on the topic of the emotional and physical needs of long-term caregivers. I would encourage all of you to learn more about “Silver Star” families and look into how you can be of support.

Since my own SF specialty was 91b/18D Medic, there were two medically related topics that I found of particular interest. Dr. Erik Won, MD, Chief Medical Officer at Wave Neuroscience in San Diego, enlightened us on innovative technologies such as Magnetic e-Resonance Therapy (MeRT). This is a form of personalized precision-guided medicine currently in clinical trials with SF Special Operations Command, the VA, and other uniformed services medical facilities to treat brain injuries.

The other medical topic was by MSG Geoffrey Dardia on toxic exposures related to military service in general. As it turns out, Agent Orange was just the tip of the iceberg, and the current list of things to be concerned with is indeed extensive.

Did you know (I didn’t) that the Green Beret Foundation has its own Veteran Service Officers (VSO) network that is dedicated to supporting the potential unique claims of SF community members? If you have ever had issues navigating the VA claim process in the past, I would encourage you to reach out to your local GBF representative.

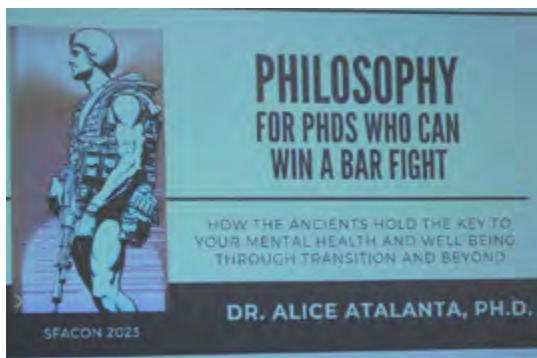
On the west coast, it is Danny Orosoco, 1st SFG(A) VSO at danny@greenberetfoundation.org and 210-383-0269. And I only thought that the Foundation did scholarships; there is so much more that they cover. You owe it to yourself to check out their full list of services.

Chapter Presidents meeting at SFACON:

- Our *Sentinel* was given a shout-out as the “Gold Standard”, as always. Congrats to Deb and How!
- It was proposed and approved that SFACON 2024 would be a 5-day cruise going out of Tampa, Florida, in the 2024 timeframe. Yes, I have already registered!
- There are currently 94 SFA Chapters worldwide and 11,000 members.

Finally, on a personal note, my special fun day at SFACON was at the Sunday pre-conference event arranged by Indy Chapter 500. It was the time trial qualifications for the big race day. We were treated to a private box seating area with food and drink in corner two of the track. In addition, we were provided pit and garage passes so we could get up close to the action. Unlike other sports figures who have large entourages to keep fans at bay, I learned that these Formula One drivers are exceptionally accessible and extremely fan-oriented. Case in point: I briefly met and had a picture taken with Alex Palou, driver of the American Legion sponsored car #10. Twenty minutes after my encounter, Alex was on the track, setting a blistering record of 232+ mph and winning the pole position for the Indy 500. Talk about being cool under pressure — he is definitely SF material.

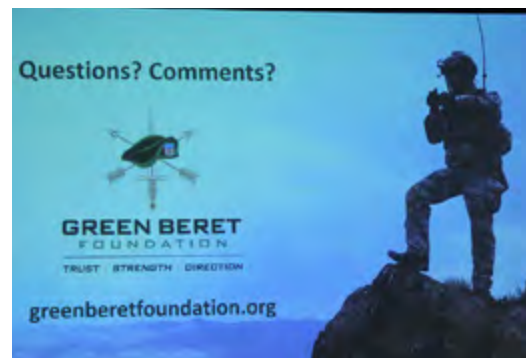
I hope to see you all on the cruise for SFACON 2024. Again, great job Indy Chapter 500! ❖



Dr. Atalanta demonstrated how ancient philosophy is still very applicable today.



Bianca Baldwin the “Silver Star” surviving spouse of Major Darren Baldwin.



The Green Beret Foundation does far more than you know.



LTC Scott Mann encourages our members to tell their stories. His play “Last Out, Elegy of a Green Beret” is touring the country and available on Amazon Prime.



LTC Jeff Tiegs challenges the audience about purpose & passion.



Alex Quade gave a Memorial Day salute to ODA's 725 and 726.



Dennis DeRosia, met with Alex Palou at the track in Indy just before Alex won the pole position for the big race.



Hotel Tango Distillery provided some tasty Bourbon samples.



Relaxation and conversation in the exhibitors hall.



Attendees show their appreciation for the excellent speakers and work done by host Chapter 500.



Special Forces Association Convention — SFACON 2023

By John Friberg

Originally published in SOF.News on June 7, 2023

<https://sof.news/special-forces/sfacon2023/>

[SFACON 2023](#) was held during May 22-26, 2023 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The [Special Forces Association](#) members, past and current, gathered together to renew old friendships and make new friends, listen to an interesting and variety of speakers, and enjoy a number of enjoyable activities. And, of course, thousands of 'war stories' were exchanged during the course of the five days.

The [speakers at the SFA Symposium](#) (scroll down page for biographies of speakers) provided a mix of information and entertainment. Some were funny, some updated the assembly on the latest news about special operations, some provided an in-depth analysis of current events or historical aspects of Special Forces, while others provided insight into the complex problems confronting Green Berets and their families during and after their service.

The convention took place at the Wyndham Indianapolis West hotel. The hospitality suite, open all week, featured a cash bar, plenty of seating, and the Green Beret Marketplace where vendors displayed coins, books, t-shirts, and other types of GB swag. Indianapolis offers a variety of attractions to include the Indy Monuments & Memorials Tour, Indy 500 Museum, Museum of Art, Dallara IndyCar Factory Tour, and Conner Prairie. The registration desk at the conference was open all day, every day to assist with visits to city attractions and tours.

Monday, May 22nd

This was arrival day for most of the Green Berets. Registration began in the afternoon, followed by a social gathering. Welcoming speeches provided information about the coming week. The cash bar had a brisk business as everyone settled down in the hospitality suite. Old friends met once again and broke into their familiar groups to catch up with each other. A number of vendors were open for business in the Green Beret Marketplace set up in the hospitality suite.

Tuesday, May 23rd



SFA President's Meeting. Special Forces Association President Kevin Harry provided an update on the current status of the SF association. The membership of the SFA remains strong at over 11,000 current members. There are 94 SFA chapters across the United States and around the world. A chapter will soon be formed in Key West. The quarterly print magazine, [The Drop](#), is seeing some changes.

Members will have the option to select a print copy or to view the periodical in digital form; the default will be digital. The association is exploring more ways to leverage technology to manage day-to-day operations. There were also updates by other SFA officers to include the treasurer, secretary, and special projects officer Chris Bell. Jeremy Miller of Chapter 500 welcomed the attendees to SFACON 2023. Pete Tingstrom provided a brief on the October 2024 SFA Caribbean Cruise.



BG Lawrence Ferguson, Deputy Commander of the 1st Special Forces Command, provided an update on the SF command and what is coming in the future. The command has been busy; over 3,000 of its 23,000 members are currently deployed to over 70 countries. He commented on the success of the 18X program, citing its importance to the personnel strength of the SFODAs. He presented two short videos about Special Forces entitled "[The Why](#)" and "[The How](#)" (YouTube). **Colonel Matt Valas**, commander of the 20th Special Forces Group, gave the audience a brief on the two National Guard Special Forces groups to include training, deployments, state mission, federal mission, [Rep 63 recruitment](#), and more. **Jeff Man**, a former employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) and information security expert gave a brief on his career with the NSA and the infamous [Special Forces 'whiz wheel'](#) used in the past by 18E's.



Alex Quade, a war reporter with ties to SF units that deployed overseas, presented screenings of her [documentaries on SF teams deployed](#) in Afghanistan and Iraq. **MSG (R) John Armezzani**, Veterans Services Director of the [Green Beret Foundation](#), spoke to the audience about services available to veterans after separation from the military. **SFC (R) Greg Stube**, a retired 18D and [book author](#), recounted his struggle to recover from serious wounds suffered in Afghanistan and provided his input on how to overcome adversity in life. **Gayle Becwar**, a comedian and magician, performed in the evening with some very good magical feats. On Tuesday afternoon a Green Beret motorcycle ride took place around the Indianapolis area.

Wednesday, May 25th



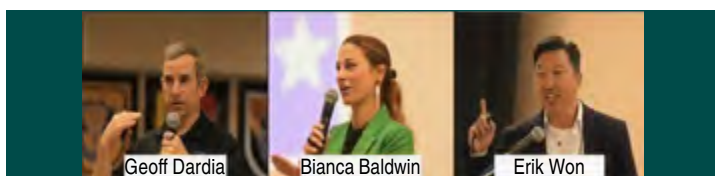
LTG (R) David Fridovich provided a detailed brief on the beginning years of [CJSOTF-P](#); the establishment of the special operations task force in the Philippines that had its origin in the fall of 2001. While

servicing as the 1st SFG(A) commander, Fridovich conducted an initial site survey of the Philippines with the task of identifying future SOF assistance to that nation in 2001 and for many years after. **COL (R) Ken Hurst** gave a presentation of the logistical challenges of supporting the 10th Special Forces Group's entry into Northern Iraq during the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in early 2003. At the time, Hurst was the 10th SFG(A) Support Battalion commander. **COL (R) Dave Maxwell** delivered a presentation entitled "An Unconventional Warfare Mindset: The Philosophy of Special Forces Must be Sustained"; later [published](#) by *Small Wars Journal*. He traces the Unconventional Warfare mindset back to the days of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II. He made mention of how SOCEUR assisted Ukraine over the past several years with the implementation of the [Resistance Operating Concept](#) and how the U.S. should be helping Taiwan with adopting a ['porcupine defense.'](#)



Dr. Alice Atalanta gave a presentation where, how, and why Green Berets can study philosophy; citing the works of philosophers like Seneca, Cicero, and Dante. She is an [author and an advocate](#) for the special operations community. **LTC (R) Jeff Tiegs**, COO of [All Things Possible Ministries](#), provided a motivational speech for the GBs and their wives in attendance. **Eric Prince**, former Navy SEAL and Blackwater founder, attended the evening VIP Mixer and spoke to the audience. The evening ended with a dinner buffet, an auction, and a live band.

Thursday, May 27th



Thursday kicked off with **Kevin Harry** convening a general membership meeting for all attendees providing additional information on the status of the association; with several of the association officers providing reports on projects, programs, activities, and finances. The morning ended with a presentation by **MSG Geoff Dardia** (3rd SFG) discussing 'operator syndrome' and how current and former GBs can take ownership of their health and well-being. [Geoff](#) provided information about the effects of traumatic brain injury, sleep deprivation, inflammation, chronic pain, toxic exposure, [cancer trends in SOF](#), and the importance of seeking support for [mental and physical health](#). **Bianca Baldwin**, a [Silver Star spouse](#), presented a summary of her time as an advocate and spokesperson of injured Green Berets and their spouses. **Dr. Erik Won** talked about technologies that provide treatment protocols with the aim of restoring optimal neurological function.

RADM (R) Brian Losey spoke about the benefits of psychedelics in treating mental health issues in the special operations community. He serves on the advisory board of [Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions](#)



(VETS). The SFA Banquet was held on Thursday evening. Speakers included **LTC (R) Mitch Utterback** (retired SF officer and author) and **LTC (R) Scott Mann**. A presentation by Scott Mann of [Last Out: Elegy of a Green Beret](#) followed the dinner.

Friday, May 26th

The last day of the conference included a morning session with closing remarks and then attendance at [Carb Day at the Indy 500](#). Following the racetrack visit attendees went to the American Legion 500 Festival Memorial Service and picnic. The conference ended officially on Friday; however, many attendees chose to attend the Festival Day and Parade in downtown Indianapolis on Saturday and the [Indy 500 Race](#) on Sunday (free admission).



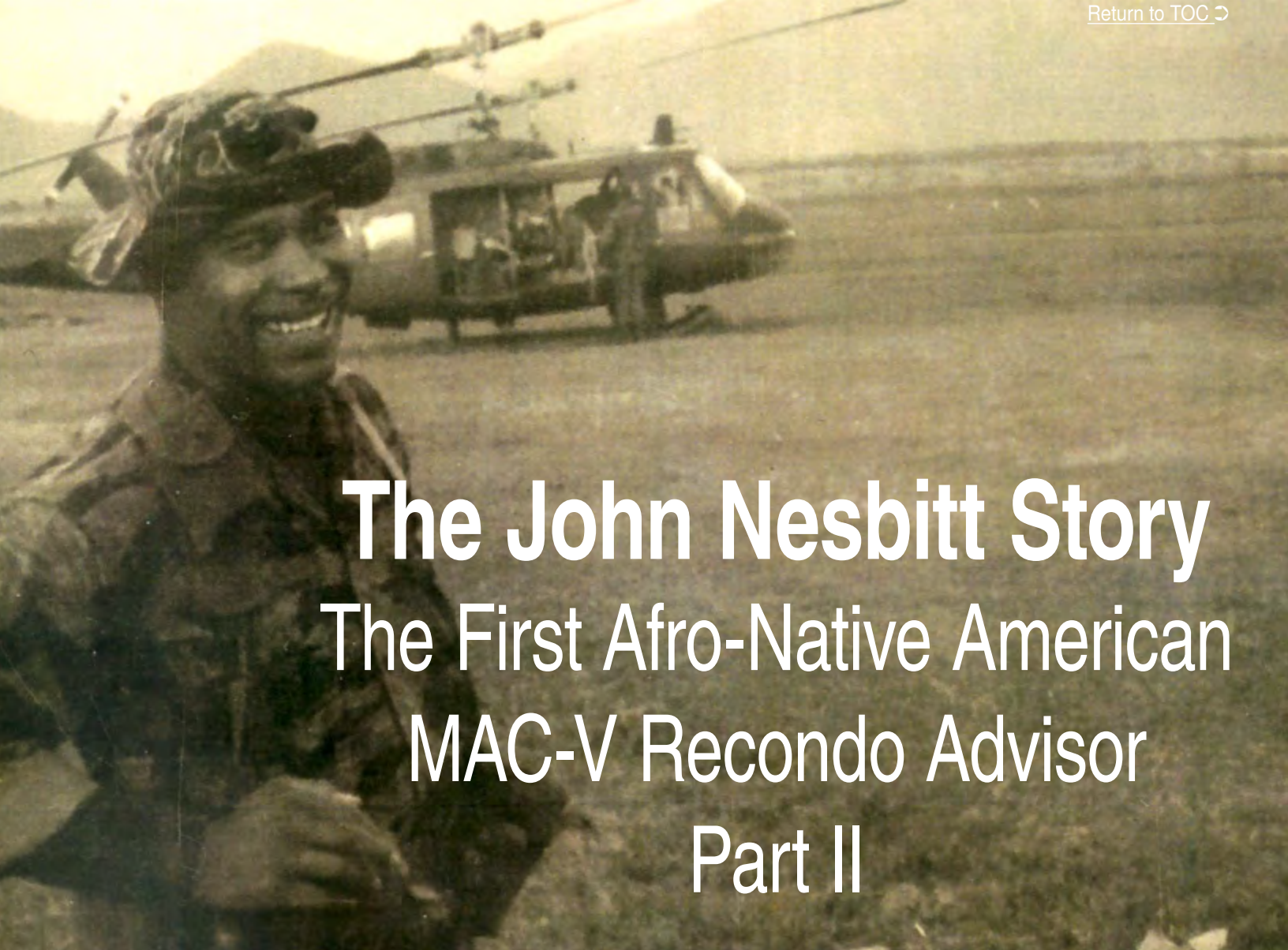
SFACON 2024

Next year's Special Forces Association convention will be held in October 2024. This one will be different than past conventions as it will be held on a cruise ship. It was just recently announced in mid-May 2023 and it already has a couple of hundred registrations. The intent is to fully-book the cruise ship with current and former members of Special Forces. The expected trip will last five days, departing from Tampa, Florida with a couple of stops at Caribbean ports. There will be activities such as a visit to Ybor City, motorcycle ride, and golf tournament held in the Tampa area prior to and after the cruise. Should be an excellent time! Registration — <https://sfali.org/cruise-pre-registration-page/> ❖

Photos: All photos of speakers (except Jeff Man, Mitch Utterback, Scott Mann, and John Amenzani) by Brian Kanof of Chapter 9, Special Forces Association, El Paso.

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The John Nesbitt Story

The First Afro-Native American MAC-V Recondo Advisor

Part II

By John Nesbitt

All photos courtesy of 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

Editors Note: [Part I](#) John Nesbitt's account of his Viet Nam experiences appeared in the July, 2023 *Sentinel*.

The Australians

If I recall correctly, I was introduced to Msg. Cowan of the Australian Special Forces. A very special operation was in store — another water infiltration — in an area north of Hai Phong, at last light. Once in the bush, we wait and listen.

Night began to come, EENT [Ending Evening Nautical Twilight], with a final review of our direction, and we are off to the target area with the CHU HOI, NVA at second man, myself third, and other Aussies behind me. We follow a cow path to the target area; now the asset takes over and leads to a hooch with radio antennas. It is some kind of communications command post. My heart is closing in on my mouth; I can feel the sweat starting to drip; my palms are wet too. Suddenly, the asset stops and signals by hand the actual target location. The Australians move forward to prep the site, meaning to assure entrance and exit from the building.

Now, I'm up and moving with the asset into the building. I am as quiet as a mouse, weapon ready. An officer comes out from nowhere! Maybe a restroom? I only hear the crack of a burst of three rounds as the unfortunate fellow dropped like a stone; even the automatic weapons were silenced. As I enter the room, two individuals in Chinese-looking uniforms began to stand. Automatically, I place two rounds in their heads, backed up by Cowan, the team leader.

Then it's out the door back into the night, and follow the asset to a stream, follow the stream to a small bridge which we must traverse, and continue to the shoreline. There is a farmer(?) or some late travelers;



Aussie team preparation (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

they are as astounded as we are. I looked away for a split second, and the Aussie's dropped them immediately. We wait in hiding till first light; having sent a SITREP, the choppers will be here soon.

No incidents getting out, I took a picture of the team while waiting. I think a picture of me was taken. Yes, I sneak a camera everywhere.

On the chopper two miles out to sea, I have time to reflect on the two men sitting at the table. In my mind's eye, I can see them clearly, like the one who stumbled onto my foot last month. They were Chinese, not NVA. The morning began warm and cool, and the ride back was long. I had not shot people like this before. Fuck it, better them than me. We were debriefed by joint army, CIVILIAN personnel, turned in our hand weapons, and ate a big meal. We landed back in Nha Trang that night on a Chinook chopper. At the team house, BEN was sitting around telling nigger jokes. I drew my 357 and raised it to the ceiling, released a round and screamed, "As you were."

Eye contact became very scarce with the other occupants, and a senior NCO MSG Smith started to act his rank. As I left the team house bar, I screamed to him, "NOT NOW." He got the message and left me alone. I smoked a joint and began to cry.

Note: Because of the incident with Lt. Nuk at the debauched Reaction Force near Phu Bai, I heard I might get court-martialed if the Vietnamese command felt it was 2nd degree murder. It was a good thing my A.I.T. friend Roland Dosier at SF headquarters told me about ROTC as a safety net. I applied, and if accepted, I would be out of the country in 45 days; a court marshal would take 60 in this case. Well, I got orders to go to ARTILLERY OCS, that means I'm out of this country before Christmas, 1966.

I had been set back in OCS for the third time because of my inability to grasp logarithms, and I was waiting to be dropped out of my class. The day I was to go resign I saw a black CID car pull up. CANDIDATE Nesbitt! The first Sgt. Called, "Report to the Commander's Office!" I fantasized about an escape to the Wichita Mountains; I was going to get court marshaled anyway! Too late; they got me for murder in a war! I entered the room, and there were two plain-clothed gentlemen, one uniformed provost officer, and the commander of the Artillery OCS. "Sit down, candidate, relax." "I think you know what this is



Team mission review: Australian team, air infiltration (Courtesy John Nesbitt)

about," stated the older CID agent. The Army has dismissed the initial inquiry as to the possible charges that were alleged against you for the death of Lt. Nuk. It seems his family was of Chinese extraction, and it is known that the family was active and sympathetic to the Viet Minh. We also suspect that the ambush you were in was perpetrated by the family since Lt. Nuk was an LLDB [Luc Long Duc Biet, the Vietnamese Special Forces]. You don't have to worry any longer. I was out of there like the sonic boom of a sound barrier wave. I went to see Lore in Indiana in my '55 Chevy.

My return to Vietnam was perpetuated by a phone call to Mrs. Alexander at the Pentagon. She assured me of my orders over the phone in November 1967. I'd graduated Operations and Intelligence training while in the 3rd SFG, at the J.F.K. Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, N.C., with a new Military Occupational Specialty [MOS], 11F4S, later translated as 96B10, intelligence analyst. My best friend Michael Joseph and I completed intelligence school, ranked 1 and 2. Mike Jo and Johnny Anderson were weightlifters. Little did I know then that I would serve in the Mekong Delta with Johnny a year later. Because the 3rd SF group had no real slot for me, I wasted my time a lot, and almost got two article 15s in the meantime. I racked up 18 parachute jumps, so back to the "jolly green training aide" Vietnam. Mike Jo and I were to travel to Vietnam on the same orders. He got into a fight at Fort Lewis the day before we were to meet up and ship out, and while challenging some legs, he ripped his thumb nearly off. He would have surgery and heal for two months before arriving in country.

RS5 — December 23, 1967

I began Recondo School mission 5 for me, Team Leader SSG. Mrsich, Asst. Team Leader Sgt. Nesbitt: Air infiltration, beyond Khe San near the Laotian border, the Americal Division LRP team, our mission, seek information on the Ho Chi Minh Trail activity.

Once again, at first light, we are in the brush and listening. SSG Mrsich is acting crazy! He stood and walked through trails and brush, inviting shooting from the VC. He even stood up to pee one morning, which would give us away without knowing. At night, he acted as if he were hallucinating; he was standing and readying his weapon at one point until I pulled him down.

MOS Training, Ft, Bragg, NC, March 1967– December 1967: Jump Day at 3rd SFG

(photos courtesy John Nesbitt)



Pre-jump briefing



Travel in the “cattle car” to the deployment site.



At Pope AFB, stick deployment C-130 Hercules



Inside the C-130, en route to the drop zone.

Day four, we see a few cache suppliers, females; we made no contact but wonder why everything is so quiet, with minimal movement along the trail. An increase of medical supplies seemed to be trickling in. On New Year's Eve, we get a message to return to Nha Trang. “Wow, a day early,” I thought. Upon arriving back at Nha Trang Air Base, we found ourselves in a firefight. The TET Offensive had begun. The asshole Mrsich jumped out of the chopper, firing his weapon like a madman. We are on a helipad (!) with other Americans and friendlies around us; he is like John Wayne until a mortar lands next to him and sends him flying. The idiot lived and went home. I make my way to the Recondo compound and set up at our perimeter.

The turkey shoot began at 11:30 AM that morning, and we were being re-supplied with ammo at five o'clock that evening. Reports of action in town and all around us made me feel safer in the bush. 81 mortars, automatic fire, and probing fire continued throughout the night. We could risk an hour or two of sleep in the bunkers, but once in a while we could hear the screams and charges of the VC /NVA or whomever they had recruited to fight.

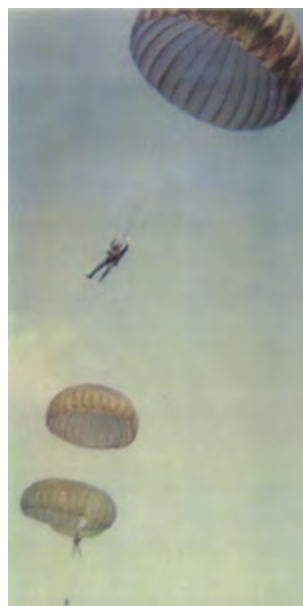
Air strikes were the morning show for us, “spooky the magic dragon” was our show at night. We could see body removal going on in some areas, so we called in chopper gunships on them. I drink water like it's going out of style while in combat. The next two days were like being a grunt; it was all about perimeter security to prevent saper breach.

As the local fighting carried on, another mission order was issued. I was to go into the Nha Trang Valley with SSG Gudgell and a team to call forward fire missions against the VC coming in through the valley. Team Leader SSG Gudgell, Asst. Team Leader Sgt. Nesbitt, two other new SF instructors, Kelly Hughs and Kim Fletcher, and three members of the 24th Infantry Division, infiltrated by air. I carried a serious bad feeling.

Once on the ground, we saw them first! After our 30-second wait and listen, we followed to see where they stopped, logged the location of a cache spot, and called in artillery. There is enough to supply a battalion, and as the rounds fired for effect, we moved quickly through the jungle looking for other spots to pick, except in our haste we were detected and were now being tracked. Gudgell was the team leader and had more experience than I, so he called the shots. RULE one! Never split your team. Gudgell directed me to take the three 24th Infantry people and move to the bottom of a hill while he called the new Cobra gunships in. Well, the asshole threw a color grenade that rolled down the hill 25 feet from our position. For ten minutes, Cobra helicopters strafed the hill where I was with the three others. I tried to get as small as possible as the tops of the trees rained pulp down on us. The crack of 3,000 rounds per minute from the Cobras' machine guns within inches of me now made me want to scream, but with tight eyes and body position, I could only remain frozen while the shooting



Nijmegen Drop Zone



Approaching tree-top level.



On the ground.

lasted. When the choppers left, I called out to the 24th Division guys. One was crying, the other lay peppered and shredded with holes. Pieces of rock, tree bark, and dirt stuck to my skin. I tried my radio but it was damaged. Now I'm stuck with a body, no communication, and nightfall approaching.

The VC returned after the choppers to check the area. It was a Swedish airlines that picked up my UHF distress call and passed my code Diamond from "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" to MACV then to the SFOB. Soon the choppers came in. Someone had to crawl out onto the LZ on his back and open a FLORESCENT panel to identify the spot for the choppers to pick us up. So, there I go again. As rounds popped around me, everything turned slow motion, and I could hear my breath inside me.

I lay on my back with the panel over my chest. The 24th Infantry guys carried their buddy to the chopper while I now provided cover fire. My aim was true; the few figures fell like carnival Ducks. On the ride back, I realized I fired from the hip without taking aim, a distance of 35–40 yards. My eye is now synchronized with the muzzle of my rifle — it means my eye knows the trajectory of the bullet's flight.

When I returned to the Recondo compound, I was questioned about splitting the team. The white boys want to blame the split on me because they thought Gudgell wouldn't have BECOME SEPARATED. Once again, I had to tell them to "fuck off, and Gudgell, like them, ain't shit." If anyone had a problem with that, let's settle here and now with my rifle, and if I hear another nigger word again, I will begin shooting. When Gudgell got back, he gave a "theory" he had for his actions and half-assed apologized for the near disaster. I told him to fuck off too. My attitude became worse.

March 1968, SGT Michael Joseph showed up early from the States. We spent a night in a bunker smoking weed and talking about where to be assigned. I begged him to stay in Nha Trang! Be my assistant team leader, get Recondo qualified, he would get his own team, it was better than the mobile guerrilla force being formed from the MIKE force. As morning came, we agreed to let the soul take to the wind; that's the cleanest fate you can have. He was assigned to the mailroom at C. Co. Da Nang.

RS 7&8 — March 1968

RS 7 and 8 went off without casualties and without incident. I remember training Marines and Koreans; time by now is layered together. One day or night is the same as a week; nothing special sticks out in my mind during that time.

It was March 15th when I really began to enjoy Rum and Coke. As I sat at the bar in the SFOB, a guy came up to me and said, "Hey NEZ didn't your friend Mike go to Dan Nang?"

"Yeah, what do you hear?" I said.

"The teletype has the name of a Michael Joseph, KIA today."

We walked to the S2 office, drinking and talking about the day. "Here man, look!" There it was: Joseph Michael A. KIA, 2:34 p.m. I sat there and cried, drank more, and cursed the fact he was so hardheaded. I wrote a letter to his family; it got there before the Army sent the announcement. I felt my luck running out, and I didn't even care anymore; I had nothing to begin with. So, when will I die?



John Nesbitt, with eyes closed, performs day/night equipment check.

RS 9

At Qui Nhon below Da Nang, we lost three choppers, and four of seven team members, we were extracted by rope ladder. I was given a wrong fix for my location by SSG Petz, one of the flunkies of the crew of Recondo Instructors. I had to take him "behind the barn." As a result, my name came up on the rotation list more often. I resisted depression and cloaked my anger.

April Fools Day! RS 10

At the Cambodian Border, Team Leader Sgt. Nesbitt, Asst. Team Leader Sgt. Shamblen, and Kim Fletcher from California, they were medics and 'new school' intellectually above the traditional SF Sergeant with years of experience; they were my age, 21 and 23. The Ho Chi Minh Trail now was critical to the NVA because TET had kicked their asses so bad. Women were now the main force behind supplies being stashed, while VC and NVA men and boys coordinated attacks.

While eating our MREs' on day four, a patrol walked upon us. I heard them and hoped they would pass, but they saw us and responded immediately. In an instant, two of my team were down, and we were running like hell to separate distance. Down a 65-degree gulch, we fell, laid there for twenty seconds, and emptied our weapons into the trailing VC. I radioed for extraction; two choppers were ready; three were already in the air: one command ship and two gunners. The extraction choppers were first to arrive, but they waited for the cover choppers while we cat and mouse played sniper between the LZ and the E&E route. I lost one other team member somehow. At the LZ, there were only me and two others. As we headed for the chopper to get on, I backed up to be the last one on, providing cover fire...

Fletcher and Shamblin made it on, but the chopper was hit, and I didn't get on because of the weight. I ran to the tree line, thinking the other choppers would come.

There were no other choppers; I threw a couple of grenades with a smoke and hauled ass out of the area. The false smoke made them think I had marked the LZ, so they stayed and waited for choppers that were not coming. All night, I could hear voices. I thought at one point they had dogs! I headed south by southeast towards the central mountains. I ate a Bennie (speed) from my medical pack. Man, I was keen and could hear everything within a mile — birds, ants, crickets, and my own heartbeat. My fear was overpowering because American Special Forces are automatically killed by the VC or taken to North Vietnam by the NVA. At sunlight, I tried my UHF radio and picked up an Air Force fuel tanker near Thailand.

I gave my fix to the pilot, who alerted MACV, who relayed the message to II Corps command, who dispersed a chopper to get me. I heard squelch signals from the Air Force jet in the area. I got ready to meet my pickup at an LZ. I wanted a death challenge, my body resisted acting appropriately. I was going through the motions, but I was numb about my life or safety. Nothing connected anymore; the colored smoke, the extraction, and the debriefing was a blur. I slept for two days. My luck is gone, I told myself, now I'm waiting to be killed.

As I sat in a bunker the next night, waiting for Charlie to probe the perimeter, Ben came in. Ben was a Master Sergeant and a bigot; his first words were, "It's so dark in here, you should feel at home," and "Where are you? That's you, Nesbitt?" Before I could think, my Kbar knife was at his throat. I don't know what I said, but I wanted to kill this American. The sound of others coming into the bunker made me retreat from his body. We never spoke about the incident — another thing I swallowed — without being able to talk to someone. Things got worse. I had written my dad and briefly mentioned the prejudice I was experiencing. He in turn wrote New York Senator Robert Kennedy and my commander, Major Lundy. After a short lecture, MAJ Lundy asked me where in the country I wanted to go, OUT of Recondo. I hadn't heard of any action in the Mekong Delta, I chose D company.

Mekong Delta, June 1968

I was assigned to Detachment A-401 at Don Phuc, 300 yards from Cambodia. As a recon person, I acted as an infantry cadre for the indigenous MIKE Force, 44, 45, and 46 company of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Montagnard, Hmong, and Chu Hoi reassigned. At this time, the psychological stress from Recondo affected my sleep and relationships.

I was not satisfied unless there was a problem to be solved or anticipating shooting, I kept my .357 close at all times. I had 5 months to go — still too long to relax — so I got into the idea of body count and search and destroy. It was simpler than Recon and less technical in the mission objectives. BODY COUNT!! As Don Blue recalls, I showed up at a time when ammunition was almost gone. I arrived with the ammo resupply.

My memory is now a blur, other than day-to-day survival and night stealth by the Viet Cong. Patrols into Cambodia were the norm as the final miles of the Ho Chi Minh Trail splintered into the Delta in all directions and waterways. Isolation became my solitude. Little did



At left, John Nesbitt, center front Johnny Anderson, and Cowboy (Body Guard), June-October 1968 Mekong Delta.

I know I had got myself deeper into trouble by coming here. In '66 we shot six of seven days per week at someone, or someone shot at me. I was going to go to Nui Coto Mountain soon.

July 12, 1968

The first assault on Nui Coto Mountain, the largest of the Seven Sisters mountain range in IV Corps. After three days of expecting snipers but getting nothing, it was quiet. The booby traps were our enemy. As everywhere we expected, a booby trap off-trail movement became the norm. Our accountability was for 300 men, 275 Mike Force, four A detachment companies, and 15 Americans. At 2:00 PM, a rainstorm began. A stream was now a small gorge, and the shooting began just like the rain. I squeezed my eyes shut as B-40 Rockets made a circle around our position by the creek. I slithered down, trying to understand our situation: this is not Recondo; you stay and shoot! Automatic fire was like the sound of the rain.

Screaming, crying, yelling started, and I realized I must face this or be dead. I moved and fired until the M16 jammed. As I grabbed for a B.A.R. from my radio man, two rounds smashed the rock between us, cutting both our faces. We looked at each other with emptiness and wide eyed.

For three hours, the V.C. and NVA showered our position. Donald Blue, a medic, was to my left when Lt. Thurston got hit; a round severed his femoral artery. He yelled for Blue, but I was closer. I didn't move. Blue slid across the ground to Thurston's side; the artery was cut, and a tourniquet was needed.



Don Blue, at left, with John Nesbitt prior to the assault on Nui Coto Mountain. Don Blue, now a retired Command Sergeant Major, saved Lt. Thurston when he was shot through the left femoral artery during an ambush initiated by the Viet Kong.

We had to wait for the other company to descend from the mountain before we could retreat out of the dead zone. We were experiencing plunging fire and direct fire; the pace was frantic, as I thought I saw a brown uniform run past me. I went to assist Blue. We carried Lt. Thurston in a fireman's carry for a third of a mile through the wooded area, which led to the rice paddies. My pack was still on the ground back at the water hole; all I had was my rifle and later an AK which had fallen from the hand of an NVA. I ran with Blue about a quarter mile out into the paddies!

As we reached the staging area, carnage was the scene; about twenty-five men were lined along the rice paddy wall, wounded or dead and dying. My stomach flipped, and I went into a daze. Don Blue let Lt. Thurston off to be medivaced and waited for the surviving remains of the companies. Our interpreter,

Cowboy, shot and killed a prisoner. We drank the blood from the liver and heart — now I'm really crazy. That evening I went to pee, and my penis had a leech on it; the foreskin was scarred when I pulled the leech off.

The next morning, I went to pee, my penis was the size of my fist. I almost fainted. I had left the leech head in the foreskin, and now I was infected. We got the rest of the 125 remaining MIKE Force back to Don Phuc. We assisted as many MIKE Force as possible; 23 were killed that afternoon, July 15th, my birthday. Blue went home soon after, only to return within a year.

I was medivaced to Can Tho, where I was circumcised at the age of 22, a wounded dick and twelve weeks to go home. I was also wounded in the right knee, but the bullet went around and under my skin. I cut the round out myself near the location where we left Lt. Thurston.

My ETS (Ended Time in Service) 17 October 1968, 4:00 a.m., Ft. Lewis, Seattle, WA.

SYMPTOMS after military retirement:

- Interrupted sleep,
- Delayed sexual response when nervous
- Self guilt for being alive,
- Agent Orange blisters on feet when temperature is over 90°.
- Self destructive behavior or attitude when approaching occupational success
- Drug and alcohol usage, abuse relapse and recovery, presently stabilized
- A need for a higher spiritual experience than this dogma society
- Willingness to kill another person, extreme impatience at times.
- A need to be isolated
- A need to cry when good news happens and no response for bad news.
- A feeling of extreme compassion inside when reflecting specific death events.

That's it in a nutshell. ❖



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.

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 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>

An Uncle With A Few Dollars

By Ron Sokol

Originally published in South Bay Cities, featuring the weekly newspapers of Hawthorne, Inglewood and Lawndale (Herald Publications) on February 16, 2023, reprinted with permission

(<http://www.heraldpublications.com/herald/publications/south-bay-0cities-february-16-2023>)

Mike Talleda was nine years young. He, his mother (who was then 8-1/2 months pregnant), his father, and his siblings boarded a plane and flew out of Cuba. They came to Southern California, specifically Alhambra, California. “We were, and we remain, anti-Castro. We have a deep pride in being Americans. This country is the last best hope. So much good can be done here for so many.”

I am sitting with Mike at his real estate office in Hawthorne.

The family eventually moved to the South Bay. By age 23, Mike had a real estate license and came to work in the Hawthorne-Lawndale area. By 25, he was the manager of a real estate office, and at 27 obtained his real estate broker’s license. He was then the youngest broker here. There were good, good times, and Mike’s business grew, including quite a few agents. However, the economy took its toll, and by the early 1990s, Mike tells me, with a wry smile, “All the help left. Many went back from where they had been, such as Northrop Grumman.”

Undaunted, Mike continued in the real estate field until so much changed on that fateful, infamous day: September 11, 2001. At that historical moment, he wondered how he could help a family who had lost a loved one. “If by some miracle we could pull it off, maybe we could show others – with real resources – what was possible, and maybe we could motivate them to help as well.”

Mike was introduced to a family: Cheryl McDonnell, the widow of [Michael McDonnell](#), who perished in one of the towers. “We explained what we planned to do, and she was on board. I think she understood that we needed to do this for our own mental state too.”

A golf tournament was held on November 29, 2001, and \$10,000 was raised.

“We gave \$7,500 to Cheryl, and \$2,500 to [Windows of Hope](#), a fund created to help the families of the culinary and maintenance workers who died that terrible day.

A few days later, we received a beautiful letter from Cheryl. Let me show you; I have it here, framed on the wall. We thought if we can have this impact on a person whose world has been shattered, what else is possible?” It is now been going on for 22 years. Walking around Mike’s office, I realize it is not a real estate office at all. It is the home of Wounded Heroes of America (abbreviated WHOA), and he is the ship’s captain.



Mike Talleda, founder of Wounded Heroes of America, was the guest speaker at SFA Chapter 78’s June meeting

Mike puts in, on average, 50 to 60 hours a week. The walls are filled with photos, accolades, certificates of appreciation, and paddles (from Navy Seals, no less), among other items, to commemorate this man’s and WHOA’s devotion to helping those who have lost a loved one, or suffered a serious injury, be it physical, psychological or both, while serving the country.

(Note to the readers: If I step out briefly from the role of communicating a story. I want to share with you that Mike Talleda has been on a mission since the Fall of 2001.

He is not slowing down. I have to focus on what he tells me and take down what I am hearing and learning, but I am getting lost in my admiration and emotion about what he is sharing. Ok, back to the column.)

The work Mike and his helpers have done evolved. It began with assisting those adversely impacted by 911. Soon the group raised funds for those who lost loved ones serving in special forces and those who lost limbs or suffered trauma, illness, or serious injury. Since 2004, Mike’s group has officially held non-profit 501 status. The focus has become assistance to conventional service members. One of the programs provides a monthly stipend, for example, to a young widow whose husband was killed in Afghanistan.

“Since we were helping surviving spouses, we wondered who was going to send these women flowers on Mother’s Day. We did that as well, and then we thought about the kids. We began sending money and gifts to them on Christmas and for their birthdays.” There is indeed a Christmas program. Through the efforts of Mike, the volunteers, and the staff, Santa delivers toys to homes in many Southern California cities and ships toys to quite a few states (including Puerto Rico and the Navajo Reservation).

WOUNDED HEROES Of AMERICA



Coming up this summer!



Join Wounded Heroes of America to celebrate

“ALIVE DAY” at the coast!

AUGUST 19th

Dockweiler State Beach
12000 Vista del Mar
Playa Del Rey, CA 90293

In collaboration with Dive N' Surf

Dive N' Surf and their professional staff will supply their knowledge, expertise, and safety for some great family fun! Food, Music, and Comradery under the sun, with activities for all young and older..... boogie boards, surfing, body surfing, dancing... Great family experience!

Save the Date! September 16
Our 5th Annual Softball game
WHOA vs. SGVM (San Gabriel Valley Marines)
Loma Park - Monterey Park

Learn more about Wounded Warriors of America's services and events at
woundedwarriorsofamerica.org

Please HELP us continue our efforts!!!
Donate now at woundedheroesofamerica.org.
A very small \$10 monthly donation goes a long way....
Thank you for your consideration ~ WHOA

For a little perspective: When this all began, Mike was doing quite a bit of the funding himself. You can learn more about WHOA online at woundedheroesofamerica.org. There is a Facebook page: [Facebook.com/WoundedHeroesOfAmerica](https://www.facebook.com/WoundedHeroesOfAmerica). The phone number is (310) 355 -0266. The Annual WHOA Golf Tournament is set for May 8, 2023, at Rio Hondo Golf Club in Downey. Every other Friday, there is a lunch with about 15 veterans at the Fantastic Café in Long Beach. The number of people and families who have been helped, for whom support is being provided, and to whom toys and other items have been provided is truly outstanding.

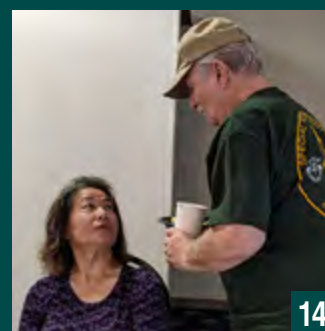
Bottom line: If you go by what looks like a Hawthorne real estate office (address 14147 Hawthorne Boulevard) and then walk to the back there, you will probably see a gentleman wearing a beret, talking on the phone, checking emails, correspondence, accounting records, with a bunch of files on his desk. That would be Mike Talleda. He might take a break to talk with you, but he has a lot on his plate. After all, he wants to help these folks.

That's his gig, his purpose, and perhaps that is one of the key reasons his family left their home in Cuba over sixty years ago. It all seems like destiny. Come to America, the country you love, and reach out to others who have sacrificed so much.

Not bad for a gentleman who tells me, "Ron, I'm just an uncle with a few dollars...." And then takes a call and returns to the effort he fiercely embraces. ❖

SFA Chapter 78 June 2023 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Debra Holm



- 1** Chapter President Greg Horton presented guest speaker Mike Talleda of Wounded Heroes of America with a chapter coin.
- 2** Chapter President Greg Horton and Chapter Secretary Gary Macnamara
- 3** Chapter Treasurer Richard Simonian and Ramon Rodriguez.
- 4** Mike Jameson and Jack Blau
- 5** Sal Sanders
- 6** Jim Light
- 7** Erik Berg
- 8** Ham Salley
- 9** Kenn Miller and Mark Miller
- 10** Richard Simonian and Chapter Vice President James McLanahan
- 11** Don Deatherage and Steve Bric
- 12** Jim Morris
- 13** Left to right, James McLanahan, Len Fein, and Jim Light
- 14** Art Dolick and his wife Lani.
- 15** Don Gonneville



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