



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2025

An Excerpt from  
John Stryker Meyer's  
**ACROSS THE FENCE**

## Four Bullets in His Boots

A BOOK REVIEW:  
**BOBBIE THE  
WEATHERGIRL**

A FILM REVIEW:  
*On Healing Land,  
Birds Perch/  
Đất Lành,  
Chim Đậu*





## IN THIS ISSUE:

From the Editor.....	1
SFA Chapter 78 May 2025 Meeting.....	2
Letter to the Editor: Remembering MAJ Clyde Sincere .....	3
Book Review: <i>Bobbie the Weather Girl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letters from Vietnam</i> by Pia Bows .....	4
Book Review: <i>Across The Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam</i> by John Stryker Meyer .....	5
An Excerpt from <i>Across the Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam: "Four Bullets In His Boots"</i> .....	6
A Film Review: <i>On Healing Land, Birds Perch/Đất Lành, Chim Đậu</i> .....	13
SFA Chapter 78 Out and About.....	18



**FRONT COVER:** After the August 23, 1968 attack on FOB 4/CCN, Chapter 78 member Doug LeTourneau stands under CCN's new entrance sign, which he built and put up to replace the sign lost in the attack. Read John Stryker Meyers' story about the attack at <https://www.specialforces78.com/16-sf-kias-august-23-1968-nva-through-the-wire-fob-4-ccn/>. This issue includes an excerpt from John's *Across the Fence*, which tells a story of Doug's journey from newcomer to combat veteran under intense circumstances. (Photo courtesy of John Stryker Meyer)

## CHAPTER OFFICERS:

<b>President</b> Aaron Brandenburg	<b>Chaplain</b> Si Rangel
<b>Vice President</b> James McLanahan	<b>Corporate Ambassadors At Large</b> Jim Cragg Len Fein
<b>Secretary</b> Gary Macnamara	<b>Sentinel Editor</b> How Miller
<b>Treasurer</b> Richard Simonian	<b>Immediate Past President</b> Greg Horton
<b>Sergeant At Arms/Quartermaster</b> Mark Miller	<b>Project Officer</b> Don Gonneville
<b>Coordinator of ROTC Program</b> Gary Macnamara (Temporary)	



Please visit [specialforces78.com](https://specialforces78.com)

Follow us:



@SFA\_ch78



@sfa\_ch78



@sfachapter78



@sfachapter78



Funding for the SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel is provided by

**VETERANS AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM**

A program of American Veterans Assistance Group

888-923-VETS (8387)

[VeteransAffordableHousing.org](https://VeteransAffordableHousing.org)

The *Sentinel* is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California — **art direction and design by Debra Holm, Dinwiddie Holm Graphics**. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command, the Special Forces Association, or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor at [sfachapter78@gmail.com](mailto:sfachapter78@gmail.com).

# From the Editor | July 2025



How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

Our editor, How Miller, is away this month but will return next issue. But before leaving, he gathered the stories you'll read in this edition of the *Sentinel*, which hold special meaning for many of our contributors.

We begin with a letter from COL (Ret.) Vahan Sipantzi, reflecting on his longtime friend Clyde Sincere, who passed in [March](#). Vahan and Clyde met in 1952 when they were among the first accepted into what would become the Army Special Forces. He shares memories of Clyde's service and their enduring friendship.

Next, Marc Yablonka reviews *Bobbie the Weather Girl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letters from Vietnam* by Pia Bows. Marc and co-author Rick also wrote about Bobbie Keith in their book *Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network*.

Next is How Miller's review of *Across The Fence* by Chapter 78's John Stryker Meyer, along with an excerpt in which John recounts a

story about his friend Douglas "The Frenchman" LeTourneau. Doug passed away suddenly in July 2019, and his loss continues to be deeply felt by those who knew and loved him.

Marc Yablonka also reviews the documentary *On Healing Land, Birds Perch*, which tells the story behind one of the Vietnam War's most iconic photos. Visit [onhealingland.com](https://onhealingland.com) for screening info—I've already signed up for updates.

Lastly, you'll find photos of Chapter 78 Vice President James McLanahan presenting a \$9,225 donation to Sunburst Youth Academy—proceeds from April's Valor Luncheon. Also on the back cover is Chapter member Kris Boodaghian, who spoke at Azusa's Memorial Day event. **Note to our chapter members:** If you participate in similar events, please share them with us—photos are welcomed!

We hope you enjoy this issue. Keep the stories coming so we can continue sharing them with your fellow Green Berets and supporters. ♦

Debra Holm  
Sentinel Editorial Designer/Webmaster  
Honorary Member SFA Chapter 78



## SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

**July 19, 2025**

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

**Courtyard by Marriott**

5865 Katella Ave, Room A, Cypress, CA 90630

## Next scheduled chapter meeting August 16

### 2025 Meeting Schedule

September 20 • October 18 • November 15  
December (to be announced)



## MG BARGEWELL WEEKEND

Celebrating the legacy of service by  
Hoquiam native Eldon Bargewell.

**JULY 11-12, 2025**

**HOQUIAM, WASHINGTON**

The Delta Park Committee invites all  
past and future donors, military veterans,  
and the community to visit Hoquaim  
and to enjoy the events of the weekend.

**Friday, July 11, 6:00 PM:** an informal no-host social at the Hoquiam Brew Pub. . Open mic.

**Saturday July 12, 7:30 AM:** Free breakfast at Jitter House Cafe.

**11:00 AM:** Ceremony at Delta Park.

**1:00 PM:** Free luncheon at Hoquiam Elks with speakers Ken Bowra, Dick Thompson, and Fred Kliebacker.

**Keynote Speaker COL Scott White, ACOS USASOC**— following his speech he will administer the Oath of Enlistment to a group of future soldiers from around the Pacific Northwest.

**The 2025 Challenge Coin is available to donors.** Proceeds will go to park maintenance, improvements to parking and 10% of proceeds will fund a trip to Ft Bragg hosted by MG (ret) Ken Bowra.

**There will be an exciting drawing for MG Eldon A Bargewell Foundation members** for an all-expenses-paid 5-day trip for two to Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. Air fare, ocean front room, car rental included.

### How can you become a member of the foundation?

Donate \$50 or more within the last 12 months (July 2024-July 2025). If you aren't a lucky winner, you're welcome to tag along at your own expense. Dates to be determined.

**Write to Jay Fry for details:** [jayf@eldonbargewell.org](mailto:jayf@eldonbargewell.org)

**RSVP** at [info@eldonbargewell.org](mailto:info@eldonbargewell.org)

**More details as they develop** at [eldonbargewell.org](https://eldonbargewell.org)



## SFA Chapter 78 May 17, 2025 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Debra Holm and How Miller



**1** Richard Simonian, chapter treasurer, pictured with VP James McLanahan, discussed the final results of the Chapter's Valor Luncheon fundraiser.



**2** Gary Macnamara and How Miller



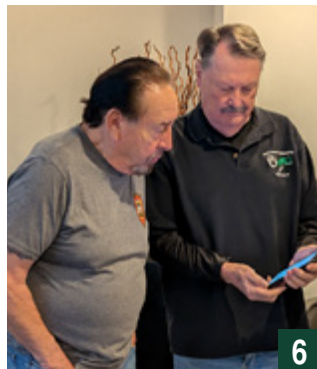
**3** Mark Miller



**4** James Carter



**5** Jim Lockhart



**6** At left, Ramon Rodriguez and Thad Gembazc, at right.



**7** Mark Griffin and Gus Populus



**8** Left to right, Art Dolick, Doreen Matsumoto, and Lani Dolick.



**9** Micheal Healy of Iron Mike's in Yorba Linda (<https://iron-mikes.com>).



**10** Taylor Walker

## Blast from the Past

Chapter member Art Dolick often brings intriguing relics from our SF past to meetings, and at this one, he brought a real standout—a “Beer Can Bazooka.” In the late '70s, while assigned to the 12th Special Forces Group and stationed in isolation in Arkansas, one inventive team member with a weapons MOS built the bazooka from empty beer—and likely soda—cans. It launched tennis balls using three squirts of lighter fluid sprayed into the tube, plus a bit extra sprayed into a small ignition port near the handle (faintly visible in the photo). A lighter did the rest. According to Art, it packed enough punch to knock someone out if they were unlucky enough to be in the line of fire. When the team was done with it, Art claimed it as a souvenir.

Many thanks to Art for continuing to share pieces from his remarkable collection—always a highlight of our meetings.



# Letter to the Editor

**From Vahan Sipantzi**  
**Chaplain (COC) USA SF (ret.)**

**Subject: Remembering Maj. Clyde Sincere**

Clyde J. Sincere began his military career with the 508th Airborne Regimental Combat Team at Sand Hill, Fort Benning. The 508th was one of the two Quick Reaction Forces during the Korean War (Police Action). The other unit was the 198th RCT at Camp Drum.

Sometime in early (I believe January) 1952 a request came down from the Pentagon for volunteers for a unit that required “frequent parachute jumps” (T-7 parachutes) and glider flights (C-122—engineless, which became the C-123. Someone figured, “Why not just put engines on it?”).

We were interviewed by our C.O. and Battalion Commanders even though none of them really knew what Special Forces was except that it might involve guerrilla warfare. There were four of us that volunteered and were accepted: Clyde Sincere, Don Traynor, Dave Clark, and myself, Vahan Sipantzi. I drove up to Fort Bragg with Don Traynor, who was one of the rare (in those days) enlisted troops who owned a car. We arrived on 7 June 1952, when there were only 7 others already there. Clyde arrived a day or two later. We were amazed that we were part of the 10th Special Forces Group (ABN), but there was no 1-9th SFG’s, and we were assigned to the 16th Detachment (which was a Company), but there were no 1-15th Detachments.

We were both promoted to Staff Sgt., but because we lacked PFCs or Corporals, we pulled KP as Staff Sgts, and Private of the Guard as Staff Sgts.

We were part of the PsyOps Group, so we pulled all the dirty jobs with them, although they were mostly PVTs, PFCs, and Corporals.

Clyde and I were part of the Weapons Committee as we prepared to train the first class, which began once we reached 120 personnel: 65 officers and 55 NCOs. That was the initial cadre and included former OSS types like CPT Jack Hemingway (Ernest Hemingway’s

son) and MSGT Checko Bassalian, who rode an Aerial 4-Square motorcycle to work each morning, could shoot with either hand, and was a skilled knife fighter.

The first class graduated around Christmas, if I remember it right. We were actually firing more ammunition than the 82nd Abn. Div. as we put our training to use and “relocated Government Property that was not being utilized in the Ammo Dump into areas of greater utilization.” We finished the “demo phase” by setting off 500 pounds of explosives (the post limit was 5 pounds) at once, which created a little excitement on post, but not unexpected from a bunch of “undisciplined snake-eaters.”

Clyde liked to gamble but did not do well. He also was an avid stamp collector. I sold him my stamp collection (quite good) for 50 bucks. When the 10th got ready to deploy to Bad Tölz in November 1953, Clyde “took a burst of six” (re-enlisted for 6 years) and received a \$600 signing bonus. He used \$300 to pay off some of his debts (he paid me \$25 for half of the \$50 he owed me for my stamp collection. I got the other \$25, without interest, in early 1968 when I found out he was commanding FOB 1 at Phu Bai. By then, he was a Major and his gambling skills had improved, as he said he was making about \$1000 a month) and the rest he lost gambling, but was now committed to the Army.

Clyde, as a really young soldier, enjoyed the off-post party scene in the Fayetteville area but always arrived back in the Detachment area for the 0530 PT formation on time—or close to it.

In 1962, while training the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis in guerrilla warfare, I learned that Clyde had been commissioned and was now a 2nd Lieutenant, and I was also a 2nd Lieutenant (Staff Specialist Seminarian) XO on a 17th Special Forces Group A-Team. While in Vietnam with the 101st Abn. DIVARTY, I learned from the DIVARTY XO (also former SF) that Clyde, now a Major, was just down the road in Phu Bai commanding CCN. We finally got together again after so many years. He paid me the \$25 he still owed me. I was so delighted I forgot to ask for interest on 16 years of debt. That renewed our friendship, which lasted until his final PCS in the presence of Jesus Christ, who was on the advance party to prepare a place for him.

I’ll miss him, but I’ll see him later. ❖



Vahan Sipantzi and Clyde Sincere participating in “The Originals” Panel at the Special Forces Association 2022 Convention in Colorado Springs.

This is a shot captured from the video shot that day of the discussion. In addition to Vahan and Clyde the panel included two other Original members of Special Forces who joined in 1952-53: SFC (Ret) Henry Bertrand, and former SSG Richard Simonian, They recount how they were recruited, how they trained, and how they formed our very first SF elements that eventually became Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alphas (ODAs).

[Click here to watch the video](#) or visit our YouTube channel [@specialforces78](#), where you will find the video listed as #8 in the SFACon 2022 De Oppresso Liber playlist.



# Book Review

## *Bobbie the Weather Girl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letters from Vietnam* by Pia Bows

By Marc Yablonka

"The newsroom was down the hall from the weather set, and when the whispers reached us [that Bobbie the Weathergirl was there] we'd find an excuse to breeze through the TV studio 'on business.' I don't think I ever talked to Bobbie. I was still too shy and she was way too beautiful. At the end of her routine, she'd dance to a pop song and wrap it up with her signature close, 'Have a good evening weather-wise, and, of course, otherwise,'" American Forces Vietnam Network War News Editor Rick Fredericksen wrote in his book *Broadcasters: Untold Chaos*.

By the time Rick and I devoted a chapter to her in our book *Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network*, I thought I knew everything there was to know about Bobbie Keith. I was wrong! Author Pia Bows' new book *Bobbie the Weathergirl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letter from Vietnam* (R & P Bows Publishing. New Smyrna Beach, FL, 203pp. \$22.99, paperback) offers a fascinating look into the life of one of the radio-TV network's most storied personalities. Not only does Bows' biography of Bobbie (née Barbara) provide vivid detail of the "unintended" broadcaster's life, it is laced with page after page of fascinating photos throughout detailing Bobbie's time in Vietnam. Bows also delves deeply into Bobbie's life before and after one of America's most tragic wars.

Early in the book, Bows reveals how, because her father was stationed in Japan as an Army Intel officer in the early 60s, Bobbie spent four years there, studying at Sophia University. At the same time, her parents enrolled her in charm school, whereupon she would take on modeling assignments and photo shoots for Japanese ads.

"I enjoyed my time in Japan, and I made some wonderful friends there. My experience at charm school was a hoot. They actually told me the ladylike way to hold a cigarette," she told Bows.

Back in the States in 1966, one of Bobbie's friends convinced her to apply for a clerical position with the United States Agency for International Development in Vietnam (USAID). "To her, it was another adventure," her mother told a local newspaper in Virginia.

She underwent rigorous training required by the agency for the job, the author tells us. Including the politics of the region. "Of course, we were thoroughly indoctrinated in the Domino Theory, and we all believed in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. I think everyone believed that what we were doing was right," Bows tells us Bobbie said.

In *Bobbie the Weathergirl*, the author relates how a daily occurrence for Bobbie and her USAID co-workers was being driven to and from work by a bus with bars on the windows to guard against attacks by local Viet Cong.

"Armed guards would ride with us at times," Bobbie recalled.

In June 1968, a strange occurrence would come Bobbie's way. While in the dining hall of the International House with friends, US Army Lt. Col. Ray Nash, commander of the American Forces Vietnam Network, approached her and said, "You look like the next weathergirl."

While Bobbie had done TV commercials in Japan, she had no training in broadcast news whatsoever and, at first, thought Col. Nash was hitting on her. She realized that he was serious when he invited her to audition, along with 20 other females, for the position.

"There was no script," Bobbie told Bows. "Just a big map of the United States on set. I had to adlib. I just focused on looking into the camera and adlibbed a weather report."

She got the (volunteer) position.

"The whole concept fascinated me," Bobbie said. "It felt right. When you're young and something feels right, you go along with it."

Soon Bobbie Keith was leading a parallel existence to that of her fellow AFVN broadcaster, Hollywood actress Chris Noel, being choppered into and out of firebases, receiving fan mail at AFVN from GIs in-country, asking her to mention their name, say hello to their girlfriends back home, shout out to their units, etc.

But by Tet 1969, "she began to question everything. Especially those who had placed the troops in such a predicament. She had become skeptical," Bows wrote.

By May of that year, she was no longer permitted to say good night with her sign off or do her little dance because the format had changed. The implication was that both were too suggestive.

At the close of her final AFVN broadcast on May 24th, 1969, Bobbie signed off with, "I won't say good-bye because it's a small world, and I expect to see you in the real world. I'll be praying you have a pleasant tour weather-wise, and throughout your lives, otherwise."

Pia Bows' *Bobbie the Weather Girl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letters from Vietnam*, is a must read for anyone interested in the history of broadcasting, military or otherwise, anyone who served in Vietnam, professors who teach the war, and students who study it. ♦

[Bobbie the Weathergirl: AFVN Saigon's Weathergirl Shares Letters from Vietnam](#)  
By Pia Bows  
R & P Bows Publishing  
203 pages  
Available in softbound



# Book Review

## Across The Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam by John Stryker Meyer

By How Miller

John "Tilt" Stryker Meyer is a battle-hardened SOG veteran.

His book *Across the Fence* is about his experience from 1968 to 1969 in the super-secret and super-dangerous MACV-SOG. Based in South Vietnam, the men of the unit would secretly travel by helicopter to Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam to stem the flow of men and material from the communist north to the anti-communist south.

John (code name Tilt) became the 1-Zero of Spike Team Idaho and led a small group of about 6 skilled and intrepid warriors, American and indigenous, whose ideal mission was to sneak in, accomplish a recon, sabotage, or prisoner-capture mission, and sneak back out, undetected. Of course, the enemy devoted a large number of forces and effort to make sure that did not happen.

During his one-year tour at SOG, the enemy (particularly the NVA) had become so skilled and focused that it became extremely dangerous and difficult for our teams to succeed. In fact, when Tilt first landed at FOB 1 at Phu Bai, he watched current ST Idaho personnel climb right into that same helicopter, fly to a mission, and were never heard from again.

Tilt tells it all, from his own thoughts and feelings to the nitty-gritty of the intense actions that occurred. He only wrote the book, after the twenty years that he was required to not talk about it with virtually anyone, at the urging of his fellow SOG veterans to tell his and their stories. They recognized what a polished writer he was, and of course they respected him and trusted him with their stories.

He also tells how all the pieces worked together, including the difficulties surmounted by all those who supported the teams; from the unflappable Vietnamese CH-34 "Kingbee" pilots to the Covey pilots, the "Spad" drivers, Cobra pilots, and others. He even includes political squabbles and deadly blunders.

These stories include those of his peers. For example, Lynne Black, when his team leader was killed, took over and led the team against a division of NVA troops and survived, being outnumbered by about

10,000 to 6. Thanks to skill, luck, and the magnificent support from Air Force, Marine, and Army pilots helping suppress the enemy, most of the team got shot up but survived.

Tilt also encourages others to tell their own stories, from having them as guests on his podcast—SOGCAST—to encouraging some to become authors and even podcasters themselves, supporting them with sage advice, contacts, etc.

And this is one of several books that Tilt has written about SOG. All are typically widely available for excellent reading and learning adventures. All celebrate the daring accomplishments while solemnly tipping the beret to those many that made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom.

Join us now in reading, on page 6, an exciting selection from *Across the Fence*, about ST Virginia and "The Frenchman" LeTourneau's brush with death. ❖

*Across The Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam (Expanded Edition)*

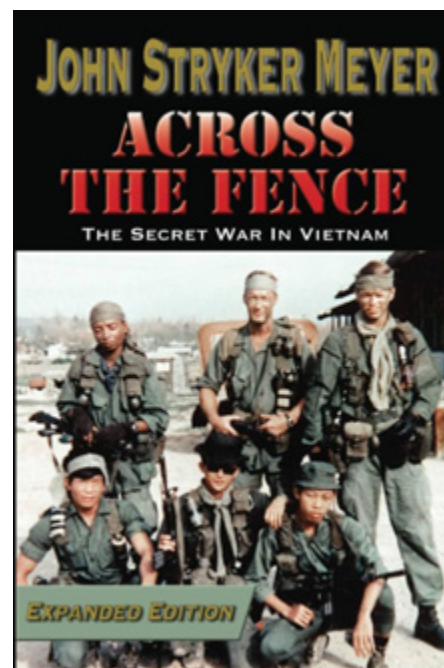
By John Stryker Meyer

SOG Publishing

April 21, 2011

370 pages

Available in Kindle,  
Audiobook, Hardcover,  
Paperback



**Attention  
SFA  
Members!**



**SFACON 2025**

**14-17 OCT 2025  
LAS VEGAS, NV**

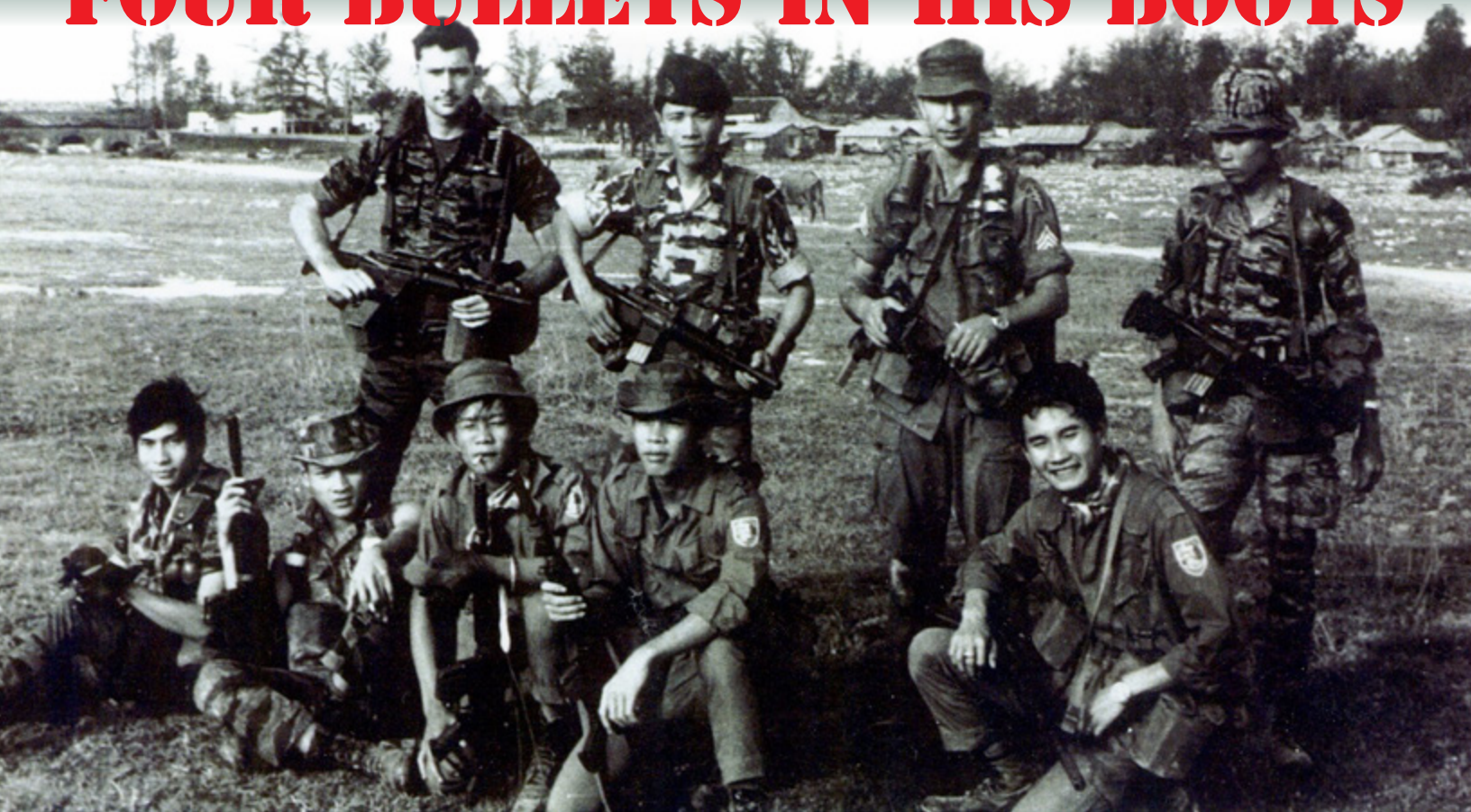
Register now to attend the 2025 SFA Con! This year's event is being held concurrently with SOAR. Visit <https://www.specialforcesassociation.org/sfacon-2025/> for details and for registration.



An Excerpt from

**ACROSS THE FENCE: The Secret War In Vietnam**

# FOUR BULLETS IN HIS BOOTS



Members of ST Virginia taking a photo break during training in Phu Long, outside FOB 1 in January 1969. Standing in back from left, Doug “The Frenchman” LeTourneau, an indig team member and newly appointed One-Zero, Gunther Wald, who served in the Marine Corps before joining Special Forces and an unidentified team member. Kneeling are several indig team members, including Hoahn, interpreter, last on right. (Photo courtesy of Doug LeTourneau)

By John Stryker Meyer

From *Across the Fence: The Secret War In Vietnam, Expanded Edition*; SOG Publishing, April 21, 2011; Chapter Eight, pages 155-175; used with permission.

A few days after returning from the Echo 4 target, I talked to Spider Parks and Pat Watkins about the many changes that were swirling around the American component of ST Idaho and whether or not I was ready to be a One-Zero. Spider provided brotherly advice and reminded me that I had been on the team more than four months and that he and Wolken had trained ST Idaho hard after the old ST Idaho team disappeared in May. “Talk to Sau and Hiep. See what they say,” he advised.

I walked over to the indig team room and talked with Sau and Hiep. After a few more jokes from Hiep about my feet being too big and me being too tall a target, he said that he and Sau thought I would be okay as a One-Zero. Besides, he added, he and Sau didn’t want any strangers taking over our team, like what had happened to ST Alabama. Hiep ended the brief chat by telling me that I might not be the brightest American in camp but I did okay calling in air strikes.

I went back to Spider, and he had that “I-know-what-happened” grin on his face. We went to the S-3 shop and made it official: I would be the ST Idaho One-Zero. I was pleased that Spider, Sau and Hiep had faith in me. But, at the same time, the invisible weight of being a One-Zero landed on me mentally—their safety now rested squarely on my shoulders. There was no celebration. We simply went about our business. I asked S-3 about replacements. The sergeant said there were a few new SF troops slated to arrive at FOB 1 any day. With that, I packed up the team and headed to the range for live-fire drills.

While we trained in Phu Bai, the replacements arrived in Da Nang. Among the newly-minted Special Forces soldiers were Douglas L. LeTourneau, a skinny, 135-pound California cowboy, John Shore, a blond-haired, slightly overweight, baby-faced kid from Georgia, and Frank McCloskey, a tough, combat-hardened veteran of the 101st Airborne Division. McCloskey arrived sporting seepage from a wound in the back of his head.

This trio of Green Berets had completed their Special Forces in-country training program in Nha Trang, the 5th Special Forces Group Headquarters. When a sergeant in Nha Trang asked for Special



Forces soldiers to volunteer for a “secret project” they raised their hands. In short order they were flown to FOB 4, in the northern sector of South Vietnam—I Corps. Upon reporting in, they were told camp commander Col. Jack Warren would brief them in the morning on the C&C mission in Southeast Asia.

Finally, after more than a year of training for LeTourneau, the game was on. How much better could this get? It seems all his life he'd been preparing for this moment, from riding rodeo broncs and breaking nearly every bone in his body to wrangling animals for television shows like *Daktari* and *Cowboy in Africa*, starring Chuck Connors. LeTourneau knew a little bit about taking a calculated risk. And after he had gotten his hands on Robin Moore's book *The Green Berets* he knew this was for him. Guerilla warfare? Check. Counterinsurgency training? Check. Unconventional warfare? Check. LeTourneau couldn't wait to write his own story that he could someday share with his dad, a WWII B-17 pilot and former POW.

Nothing, however, could have prepared him for the sight that greeted him as he entered the transient barracks. There, etched into the concrete floor, and forever in his memory, was the charred outline of a man's body, a grisly reminder of the 23 August 1968 attack on FOB 4. That fateful evening, North Vietnamese sappers and Viet Cong operatives killed 18 Green Berets in a carefully executed sneak attack.

The deadly side of guerrilla warfare was brought home to him right there. He was in a war zone. The enemy didn't play by any set rules. It was an unsettling evening.

The next morning after breakfast, the trio walked over to S-3 and chose their codenames. LeTourneau, McCloskey, and Shore now became “The Frenchman,” “Nam,” and “Bubba”—names that would stick with them far beyond their tours of duty in Vietnam.

Because S-3 was temporarily located in the headquarters section of FOB 4 since the attack it was a quick shuffle into the briefing room with everyone else. An intense, short, black-haired man wearing pajamas, slippers and a bathrobe walked in smoking a cigarette. Before a word was spoken, Col. Warren abruptly pulled a white sheet off a large map with a flourish, tossed it aside, and announced, “Welcome to C&C, men.”

Turning to the large map that had black-tape, boxed target designators on it in Laos, the DMZ and North Vietnam, he continued. “This is what you volunteered for. This is why this is a top-secret project. If anybody asks, the president can say we have no men stationed in the AO. That's why you'll wear sterile fatigues and carry no form of identification of any kind on your missions. That's why you agreed not to talk to anyone about this operation for at least 20 years. Our intel reports land in the White House. Any questions?”

Not waiting for a response, Warren continued to explain the difference between spike teams and hatchet force elements, where the different FOBs were located, how FOB 3 at Khe Sanh was closed after the siege earlier in the year, and how Major Clyde Sincere, Jr. had opened a site at Mai Loc now designated FOB 3.

Following an update on intelligence reports in the respective Areas of Operations, Col. Warren asked if anyone had any questions. LeTourneau raised his hand. “Where do you need help, sir?”

“We need men at FOB 1. We lost a One-Zero on October fifth and some of the First Special Forces TDY (temporary duty teams) troops from Okinawa are returning back to the island.”

LeTourneau turned to Shore and McCloskey and asked, “How about it? FOB 1?” Shore nodded in the affirmative.

McCloskey said, “No. I think I'll stay here.”

LeTourneau turned back to Warren and said, “We'll go,” nodding toward Shore, surprised at McCloskey's response.

Without missing a beat, Warren told the remainder of the SF troops in the room that he'd be right back. He turned to LeTourneau and Shore and said, “Follow me,” as he headed out of the briefing room and into the S-3 Operations Center. He told the Center staff to get a Kingbee to FOB 4 in an hour to transport LeTourneau and Shore to FOB 1 ASAP. Next he headed to S-1 and told the clerk that the newbies were to be processed and cleared to go to Phu Bai.

An hour later, PFC LeTourneau and Spec. 4 Shore were in a Kingbee heading north over the Hai Van Pass that crossed the rugged Truong Son Mountain. As they flew parallel to Highway 1, the door gunner nodded to LeTourneau and Shore, indicating they should sit in the doorway that was on the right side of the chopper, thus setting them up for the typical newbie welcome to FOB 1. Unaware, they sat on the floor and enjoyed the ride, dangling their feet outside as the Kingbee pilot did some nap-of-the-earth flying.

After they passed the Hue/Phu Bai Airport on the eastern side of Highway 1 in Phu Bai, the Kingbee pilot abruptly rolled the chopper on its right side, providing LeTourneau and Shore with a heart-stopping look at the ground. Both leaped to grab something that was attached to the aircraft, anything that didn't move as the crew quietly laughed at their expense.

When they landed, the rookies quickly jumped off the chopper, grabbed their gear made their way across Highway 1 to the long road that led to the command center. A truck carrying a recon team drove past the jittery pair, heading to the landing zone.

When they finally reached the S-3 shop, it was a beehive of activity. They were told to step outside and that someone would take them to their billets once things calmed down. The departing recon team had a Brightlight mission. That meant a team on the ground was in trouble. LeTourneau and Shore were not a priority.

As they stood outside, Pat Watkins walked up and introduced himself. He then promptly asked LeTourneau if he had been demoted to PFC before shipping out for South Vietnam. Watkins had done his homework. Before LeTourneau and Shore landed at FOB 1, Watkins had gone into S-1 to learn about the new men being sent to Phu Bai. The Frenchman was listed as a PFC and his MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was listed as weapons. At that time, in Special Forces, no one below the rank of E-5 received that SF MOS when going through Special Forces Training Group. When he saw LeTourneau's MOS and rank, he thought either LeTourneau was a badass who'd been demoted or he was lying.

LeTourneau explained that when he went through Training Group, he had requested the weapons MOS, pointing out that he had joined SF to go to 'Nam and that he wanted to go as a weapons man. Somehow he convinced the review board to allow a private E-2 to go through that

training, thus setting a new precedent. He was one of, if not the first, E-2s to get that training. On that day, every E-2 that came after LeTourneau alphabetically had the option to elect for SF weapons training.

SFC John McGovern walked by and Watkins introduced LeTourneau to the veteran SF trooper. McGovern had run several missions with the Hatchet Force before being transferred to Recon Company, where he eventually became the One-Zero of ST Virginia. By October, McGovern was one of the senior enlisted men in camp. All of the recon men respected him due to his experience running missions and his ability to work with indig troops. In short, McGovern epitomized the quiet professional, the experienced combat-veteran Green Beret who quietly performed his missions without pomp and circumstance.

Watkins told McGovern about LeTourneau's MOS and that he wanted to run recon. McGovern said ST Virginia could use a weapons trained troop. He said he was getting short in country and that he was going to be transferred to the S-2 shed for his remaining time during this tour of duty in South Vietnam.

"Let me introduce you to the new One-Zero of ST Virginia Spec 5 Childress," McGovern said. Childress had run several missions and McGovern described him as a good man. McGovern explained that the recon teams needed SF-qualified men to replenish the recon team ranks. Back in May, there were 30 recon teams in camp. By mid-October, only a few teams were fully operational. "We've lost some good men in recent months."

Meanwhile, Watkins told Shore ST Idaho had an opening because the One-Zero had transferred to flying Covey.

Within 24 hours, LeTourneau and Shore were on recon teams at FOB 1 and they immediately began training: immediate reaction drills, weapons and explosives training, reviewing team SOPs, practicing helicopter extractions on strings, and practicing wire taps.

As October yielded to November, many of the members of the two recon teams began to build a rapport because they were doing so much training together on the Phu Bai range. In addition, LeTourneau and Shore also quickly learned that the veteran indigenous personnel on their teams were highly skilled and fearless warriors.

One night, while LeTourneau was recording a verbal message for his parents on his portable cassette player, Lap—the young point man on ST Virginia—came into his room and spoke into the recorder: "I want to tell you, parents of Private LeTourneau, not to worry about him. We respect him and I'll keep an eye out for him. And, don't worry; if an enemy shoots at him, I'll catch the bullets with my body. I'll protect your son. Thank you for sending him to Vietnam. He's a good soldier."

A few days before Thanksgiving, ST Virginia's One-Zero Childress announced that an operation order had come down from S-3. The team had a mission in the western section of the DMZ. Childress told them that he was going to fly a VR of the target area before the team launched for the mission. He also introduced a young lieutenant who would be assigned to ST Virginia for the mission. "We need bodies and we're glad the lieutenant volunteered to join us," he told the team.

After the team meeting, Childress told LeTourneau to help the officer obtain any gear and equipment needed for the mission. When Childress left to fly the visual reconnaissance, LeTourneau and the lieutenant walked over to the supply building, gathered all of the appropriate gear and assembled it so the officer would be comfortable under the weight of his web gear and rucksack.

Afterward, LeTourneau ran into McGovern and mentioned that ST Virginia finally had a mission, but he didn't have a CAR-15—the preferred weapon among most recon men at FOB 1—even though the lieutenant had somehow obtained one. Since he was only a PFC, LeTourneau didn't want to ruffle any feathers.

The quiet-spoken McGovern gave him a wry, half smile and said, "We can't have that. You need to have a CAR-15 for your first mission. Follow me."

The duo walked over to McGovern's room. He opened his locker and pulled out a clean CAR-15 and handed it to LeTourneau. "This is a special CAR-15," he said. "According to official Army records, this CAR-15 was written off as a combat loss at FOB 3 Khe Sanh, meaning as far as the Army's concerned this weapon doesn't exist. Some day, after a successful tour of duty in Vietnam, if you're so inclined, you can take this baby home with you because it doesn't exist. But, as you can see it does and it's a sweet weapon. It never failed me. And I know that since you're a weapons man, you'll take good care of it."

Up to this point, LeTourneau had used an M-16 for all of his training. Now, with his CAR-15 he was ready to take on the world.



From left, Don Wolken and John McGovern take off in a Kingbee heading to Quang Tri. Although they are smiling here, both had volunteer for a special mission. (Photo courtesy of Stephen Bayliss)





Doug LeTourneau, left, and John Meyer, at right, at SFA Chapter 78's July 2019 Chapter meeting. (Photo courtesy of John Stryker Meyer)

That opportunity arrived on Thanksgiving Day 1968. After the weather cleared at the Quang Tri Launch Site, ST Virginia boarded the Kingbees and headed west to the target area, with three American and four South Vietnamese team members: Lap, the 17-year-old hard-core point man who had run many missions; Hoanh, the interpreter; Cho, the M-79 operator; and Khanh "Cowboy" Doan, who had fought valiantly beside Lynne M. Black, Jr. with ST Alabama.

As the second Sikorsky churned westward, the 135-pound LeTourneau went through a mental checklist of everything that he was carrying: McGovern's CAR-15, the PRC-25 FM radio, an extra battery for it, a sawed-off M-79 grenade launcher, a .22 caliber High Standard Pistol with a silencer, ammunition for all weapons, hand grenades, a gas mask, smoke grenades, a camera and five special bags of dehydrated rice. He quickly realized that he was carrying more than 100 pounds of gear.

His inner thoughts were jarred when the door gunner test fired his 30-caliber machine gun without announcing his intention to anyone. Within a matter of seconds, the Kingbee cut power and began a tight, downward spiral into the LZ, where Childress, the lieutenant, Hoahn and Lap were already waiting. The dizzying downward spiral ended as the pilot revved the engine and landed on the LZ. Cho exited the H-34, with LeTourneau and Cowboy following him into the wood line, connecting with the remaining members of the team. The Kingbee lifted off the LZ and quickly cleared the target area.

And then there was absolute silence.

The audio contrast was startling. As LeTourneau's senses adjusted to the quiet, he scoped out the LZ, which was in a deep valley between three jungle-covered mountains. Gradually, sounds of the jungle resurfaced, birds chirping, bugs humming. After 10 minutes, Childress signaled LeTourneau to radio Covey with a "Team OK." The insertion was successful, no enemy activity evident.

Childress moved the team toward the first mountain. Movement was slowed by tall elephant grass and the only communication between team members was hand signals. The team moved in 10-minute intervals, stopping every 10 minutes to listen to what was going on around it. After more than an hour, the team finally emerged from the elephant grass as it continued to climb the first mountain.

LeTourneau was on hyper-alert, his heart pounding hard whether sitting in a long rest period or moving up the mountain. Near the top of the mountain, Lap pointed out an observation platform that had been cut into the jungle high off the ground. From that platform, anyone could observe the LZ and the valley where the team was inserted as well as other open areas that could be used for landing helicopters. Had a trail watcher been sitting on the platform when ST Virginia flew into the LZ? If so, where was he and when would the NVA hit the team?

Late in the day, the team finally reached the top of the mountain and found a wide, well-used trail. LeTourneau's first thought was, "How could any trail be out here in the middle of nowhere in this thick jungle?"

Regardless, the team set up its night perimeter, far above the trail where it could see anyone moving while remaining camouflaged and out of sight. At last light, Childress made the final commo check with Covey as the team settled in for its first night in the jungle.

It was an uneventful night. Childress did a midnight commo check with Hillsborough, the night command aircraft that flew high above the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the DMZ, and he checked in with Covey in the early morning.

After the team ate breakfast in shifts, Childress directed Lap to move parallel to the trail with Cowboy as the tail gunner in the line of march and LeTourneau walking in front of Cowboy. The team moved slowly in less than 10-minute intervals before taking breaks to listen to the surrounding sounds. They did this because moving next to a trail was fraught with inherent risks.

As ST Virginia moved up the second mountain, Cowboy and LeTourneau began to hear women's voices off of the trail. Cowboy urged LeTourneau to go explore the sounds. LeTourneau shook his head no, indicating they had to stay with the team. Cowboy, who spoke broken English, repeated the suggestion adding: "It could be a small NVA village. We could kill everyone and make the NVA beaucoup angry. We want to let them know we can hurt them the same way they attack our camps and villages."

LeTourneau again declined and gave him the hand signal to plant some M-14 Anti-Personnel Mines on the trail behind them, in case NVA soldiers were trailing them. As the team moved on, LeTourneau planted a few more toe poppers and marked their locations on his map after covering them expertly. He laid down some powdered mustard gas on the ground for any tracker dogs that might follow their trail. The mustard gas powder was left over from WWI—how it landed at Phu Bai remained a mystery to LeTourneau. The good news was that it still worked. That fact was confirmed during the next break when the team heard a dog howl in anguish after snorting some of the old mustard gas.

Maybe it didn't work that well, because a few minutes later, the dog was back on the team's trail. Cowboy told LeTourneau to use his pistol to kill the dog. LeTourneau's mind flashed back to Special Forces Training Group where instructors had said the same thing.

LeTourneau pulled out the .22, quietly moved back down the trail, took off his rucksack and moved a few more feet before lying down on the ground, facing the trail. The dog never realized LeTourneau was there. When the dog was about 10 feet away, LeTourneau fired one shot. It struck the dog between the eyes, killing him instantly. The canine dropped in his tracks, out of LeTourneau's view.

Unaware of what had happened, the dog's handler moved up the trail. When he got near the dead dog, he stepped on a toe popper. LeTourneau and Cowboy heard the NVA screaming in pain and anguish. They left him behind, figuring he would die shortly.

The team moved further up the mountain, with LeTourneau and Cowboy providing rear security. Again LeTourneau and Cowboy heard women's voices below them. Again, Cowboy urged LeTourneau to go downhill and attack the encampment. And again, LeTourneau declined.

By the time LeTourneau completed his last radio call to Covey, the team was enveloped in darkness and team members began to set up a perimeter for the night.

Dawn broke without any enemy activity. When Covey flew over the team in the morning, he warned Childress that a team was being extracted under enemy fire and another was being inserted into a top priority target. "Sit tight," was the last instruction from Covey. ST Virginia didn't move from its quiet spot alongside the mountain. During lunch hour, each member ate in shifts and LeTourneau went out to inspect the claymore mines the team had deployed to ensure that the NVA hadn't turned the deadly explosive devices around to face toward the team. When he completed his inspection, LeTourneau found a log to sit behind.

Later in the afternoon, Childress signaled the team to pull in their claymore mines and prepare to move out. Due to the combined weight of his rucksack and web gear, LeTourneau moved to his knees and slung his rucksack on his back.

Just as it landed on his back, AK-47s opened fire. LeTourneau was slammed to the ground face first. The impact so severe he thought he had broken his nose.

Startled, LeTourneau jumped up with his CAR-15 pointing toward the AK-47 gunfire that was near the front of the team. Surprised that there were no NVA near him, LeTourneau removed the rucksack to discover that four AK-47 rounds had ripped through the 23-pound PRC-25.

He reached into an especially tailored pocket on his fatigue shirt, which was sewn with vertical zippers—one on the left side of the shirt and one on the right side, between the top and bottom pockets on the shirt—pulled out his URC-10 emergency radio and broadcast a general alert for any aircraft in the area. ST Virginia was declaring a Prairie Fire Emergency.

Then, there was sudden, complete silence. Eerily silent.

Amazed at the quietude, LeTourneau walked to Childress, who asked him what he had done with the PRC-25. LeTourneau explained that four rounds had ripped through the radio and that it was probably useless.

"Get the fucking radio," Childress yelled. "What if it's working and we leave it behind for those assholes to use?"

Stunned, LeTourneau went back, picked up the ruck sack and walked back to Childress, who grabbed the handset as NVA troops began firing at ST Virginia, and yelled into the radio, "We have a fucking Prairie Fire Emergency. Get us the fuck outta here or I promise you I'll kick your ass all the way back to Saigon."

As the firefight raged on, the remainder of the team was lying down on the ground, firing at the NVA, while Childress and LeTourneau

continued to argue while standing up, oblivious to the AK-47 rounds cracking over their heads.

LeTourneau yelled back at Childress, "It don't work!" while pointing at the PRC-25 radio where the antenna had been shot off. No antenna, no commo.

LeTourneau grabbed a spare whip antenna and handed it to Childress, who screwed it into the PRC-25.

This time, Childress screamed into the radio, "We need an exfil, now! I'm declaring a Prairie Fire Emergency. Is anyone out there?"

Within a second or two there was a response: "Calm down, Childress. I realize you're under fire," said a Covey rider. Just at that moment several AK-47s opened fire from the wood line near the log where LeTourneau had been unceremoniously slammed onto his face. Lap and Cowboy returned fire.

Covey rider continued: "We heard your team declare a Prairie Fire Emergency on the Guard frequency and I've rallied the cavalry. What's your mark? Do you have an LZ in sight?"

Before Childress said a word into the radio, he turned to LeTourneau and said, "See. It works. Suppose we had left it for the NVA. Never. I say again, never, ever leave behind a radio."

As if to emphasize that point, the NVA opened fire again as Lap began looking for an LZ while he moving the team down the hill, away from the most concentrated NVA gunfire.

Cutting LeTourneau no slack, Childress roared, "Tell Covey we'll give him a fix in five minutes. We'll probably need strings to get out of here. I doubt we can make it down to the valley where a Kingbee can pick us up."

Without missing a beat, LeTourneau—who for the first time felt four burning stings in his back—repeated those words to Covey while he and Cowboy began providing covering fire as the tail element of the team. Then LeTourneau nodded to Cowboy, who ignited several claymore mines that the team had set out on its perimeter. Those mines only slowed the NVA for a few seconds.

Before the dust and debris from the blasts had settled, NVA soldiers were moving through it toward Cowboy and LeTourneau.

Without saying a word, the two men took turns firing at the enemy while moving down hill. Rotating around each other. Cowboy would fire several bursts from his CAR-15, and then reload. As he reloaded, LeTourneau would open fire, providing covering fire for the team.

During one short lull, Cowboy again planted a claymore mine in the direction of the advancing NVA and LeTourneau dug out another claymore from his ruck sack and placed a 10-second delayed fuse in it. When the NVA again advanced, Cowboy ignited his claymore mine. When the NVA moved toward the team again, LeTourneau ignited his fuse and ran down the hill with Cowboy to catch up to their team.

Before they reached the team, two B-40 anti-personnel rockets slammed into the trees above them, showering them with shrapnel. A few more exploded as LeTourneau and Cowboy moved down the hill. Then the 10-second fuse ignited another claymore. It bought precious time for the gun-and-run team of LeTourneau and Cowboy to cover ground and catch up to the remainder of ST Virginia.



As Childress called in air strikes, LeTourneau reflected on how surreal this firefight had been. It wasn't anything like he had witnessed on television or in any movie. Instead of men charging each other and killing each other in plain sight, here in triple-canopy jungle, he observed green tracers from AK-47s first, or at the most an enemy hand or foot. And, somehow the NVA found firing lanes where they could launch shoulder-held B-40 anti-personnel rockets that slammed above and around them as they raced down the hill for their lives. Again, the voices of his Special Forces instructors echoed in his mind: they had told the young aspiring Green Berets at Ft. Bragg that the NVA was a tough, resilient opponent. Many had fought against the Japanese during WWII and against the French, driving them from Vietnam in 1954 after the battle of Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam.

The sounds of Kingbees in the distance and the crashing thunder of B-40 rockets slamming into the trees above his head shook LeTourneau out of his moment of introspection and turned his undivided attention to a crescendo of AK-47 fire from the enemy. ST Virginia responded with volley after volley of full and semi-automatic gunfire while LeTourneau and Cho fired several M-79 rounds toward the densest section of jungle where the AK-47 gunfire was emanating.

Through the gunfire, someone popped a smoke grenade, which brought the Kingbees closer to the RT Virginia's location in the jungle. Over the din of gunfire, Childress and Cowboy told everyone to put on their Swiss seats and to prepare for a string extraction.

In short order, a Kingbee was hovering over ST Virginia, more than 125 feet above the jungle floor. LeTourneau, Cowboy, Cho and Hoanh hooked their D rings into the old McGuire rig that hung from the end of the ropes and shortly were being lifted out of the jungle.

As the quartet of recon men was being lifted into the air, the NVA unleashed another salvo of AK-47 gunfire and several B-40 rockets. Shrapnel from the rockets hit them with varying degrees of size and velocity. All of them were wounded.

It was during those explosions that LeTourneau realized his CAR-15 had somehow become caught in the rope above him, just far enough away that he couldn't reach it. He pulled out his M-79 and launched a 40 mm grenade toward the NVA positions: now, all he could see of the enemy were hundreds of muzzle blasts from AK-47s and green tracers rounds eerily climbing upward toward the quartet of ST Virginia men.

Before he could reload his M-79, the Kingbee began to move away from the target area, surprising him because the men had not cleared the jungle yet. Instead of continuing to climb out of the target, moving straight up until the men cleared the jungle's triple canopy of trees and vegetation, the Kingbee was moving away from the target area due to the heavy enemy ground fire. In recent months

at least two Kingbees were shot down during string extractions from hot targets, but these facts were unknown to LeTourneau at that time.

Shrapnel from the B-40 rockets exploded around the ST Virginia men stinging them with pieces of hot metal, further spooking the Kingbee crew. LeTourneau began to violently collide with the tall jungle trees. Feeling like a metal ball in a pinball machine, LeTourneau caromed off several more trees as at least one more B-40 exploded in the treetops, again showering him with shrapnel.

A tree branch hit LeTourneau from the side and turned him upside down in his rope Swiss seat. As the rope seat began to slip down from his hips, LeTourneau remembered Spider telling how a One-Zero from another team had been recently shot out of his Swiss seat during a rope extraction.

Another tree struck LeTourneau before he was able to muster a surge of strength and momentum to reach up and grab the rope above him as his body finally cleared the treetops.

The only thing between him and certain death below on the jungle floor 200 feet below was the single piece of rope tied into the Kingbee.

With one final urgent pull, LeTourneau was able to move himself upright in the Swiss seat as the Kingbee continued to climb higher into the sky, distancing itself from the fury of the exploding B-40s and AK-47 gunfire while gaining air speed.

As the Kingbee ascended, the heavily sweating LeTourneau clung to the rope as another sensation overwhelmed his body: chattering teeth. Within a matter of minutes, the Kingbee had climbed to an altitude of more than 5000 feet, where the air is thinner and much, much



Doug and Joan Singlaub, wife of Major General John K. "Jack" Singlaub, at her home in Franklin TN, in April 2017.

Joan Singlaub passed away recently, on April 27, 2025. A proud American, Joan deeply loved her country and was devoted to honoring those who served. Read more about her at <https://www.oakesandnichols.com/obituaries/joan-singlaub>. (Photo courtesy of John Stryker Meyer)



John Meyer, left, and Doug LeTourneau, at right, on 11/11/11, the day he received the Purple Heart for wounds he received in November 1968 on his first SOG reconnaissance mission across the fence in Laos with Spike Team Virginia out of FOB 1, Phu Bai. (Photo courtesy John Stryker Meyer)

colder than on the jungle floor—so much colder that LeTourneau's body began shaking violently from the dipping temperatures as the Kingbee continued to climb into the safety of higher altitude.

LeTourneau would never forget that extraction. Rockets were exploding around him while he was dripping with sweat, hanging upside down, and in the next moment, he felt as though his sweat was freezing to his body.

Few people realize just how cold and terrifying it is to be hanging from a rope, freezing to death while going more than 100 miles per hour dangling under a chopper.

In ordinary circumstances, few people would ever think about freezing to death over Southeast Asia, but for the men in C&C, it was just another hurdle they had to clear.

As the Kingbee headed east, LeTourneau looked down on spots in the jungle that appeared to be good LZs, thinking “Why don't you land there?”

But, ST Virginia's collective agony continued until the Kingbees finally landed in South Vietnam. By that time, every member of ST Virginia had their circulation cut off to their legs. They couldn't stand or walk. All they could do was unhook from their Swiss seat, grab their stuff and try to get the circulation going again in their legs while the door gunner helped them get back to the Kingbee.

When the team returned to the Quang Tri launch site before heading south to Phu Bai, Childress pulled LeTourneau aside and told him, “Take good care of that radio. You're going to take it on the next mission whether you like it or not.” Childress and the lieutenant returned to the S-3 tent, while LeTourneau went into the old WWII tent where the Vietnamese members sat on old stiff cots, searching each other for shrapnel wounds while bandaging the more serious wounds.

As darkness fell, the Kingbees lifted off from Quang Tri for Phu Bai. When the old war birds landed on the FOB 1 landing zone, ST Virginia was greeted by one man: Former ST Virginia One-Zero John McGovern. He greeted each of the team members as they exited the Kingbees, asking each one, “Are you okay?”

After the Kingbees departed, bathing them in the sand, dust and LZ debris kicked up by the prop wash, McGovern asked Childress, “Did you hear about Bader, et al?”

Childress shook his head. “No, what happened?”

“November thirtieth, we lost a Kingbee with seven SF troops on it and we lost the entire Kingbee crew. They were a bunch of straphangers who volunteered to pull an Elder Son mission on the trail. But, an anti-aircraft round hit the Kingbee en route to the target. It exploded in mid-air. They never had a chance.”

In silence, McGovern drove the tired, dirty and hungry team back to the team room. As the Vietnamese team members climbed off the truck, McGovern turned to LeTourneau and said, “You know what was really scary about that mission? The day before they got shot down, me, Lynne Black, Rick Howard, John Peters, Tim Schaff and a few others had volunteered and were actually on the Kingbee suited up ready to go, only to be canceled the last minute due to bad Whiskey X-Ray (weather) in the A.O. That was too close for comfort.”

After a long pause he asked LeTourneau, “How did it go out there? I heard you were good on the radio. You didn't get rattled. You ain't a cherry no more. You've joined a small, unique club of SF men, C&C recon men who went across the fence.”

“It was nothing like I could have ever imagined,” LeTourneau responded. Looking toward the Vietnamese team members, he added, “Let me get some chow for the indig. You were right about them. They have ice in their veins. I'm beat. I'll see you in the morning.”

LeTourneau walked through the white sand to the mess hall, picked up some fresh sandwiches and cold sodas for the team. After lingering with the Vietnamese team members LeTourneau returned to his room, finally taking off his rucksack and web gear.

As he started to undress, LeTourneau became aware of pain in his back, from where the four AK-47 rounds had slammed him face-first into the ground. First he peeled off his jungle fatigue shirt and was amazed to find four bullet holes in it. Then, he took off his undershirt. Ditto! Four bullet holes were in it. LeTourneau picked up the rucksack: four bullet holes were in it—both in the front and the back—something he hadn't realized during the firefight.

Then, he looked in the mirror and saw the four large welts and broken skin up his spine where the AK-47 rounds had hit his body after punching through his rucksack and PRC-25.

Only then did LeTourneau begin to comprehend just how lucky he had been hours earlier in the day when the NVA shot him in the back four times.

LeTourneau began to cut away the black electrical tape around his socks, which he pulled up and over his pant legs to keep out leeches and bugs. Then he made a startling discovery:

When he pulled his pant leg from the sock and pulled off his right boot, four AK-47 bullets fell on the ground. In the heat of battle, the Frenchman didn't realize that after he was shot in the back, the four 7.62 mm NVA rounds had fallen down through his pants and socks into his right boot.

Continued on page 17



## A FILM REVIEW:

# On Healing Land, Birds Perch/ Đất Lành, Chim Đậu



By Marc Yablonka

When the late Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams shot the horrifically iconic, [Pulitzer Prize-winning image](#) of ARVN Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting Viet Cong Capt. Nguyen Van Lem at point blank range in the head with a Smith & Wesson .38 on the streets of Saigon during the Tet Offensive in 1968, Adams was known to feel that not just one, but two lives were ruined on that day thanks to his photo.

He would never know that 50-years after the fall of Saigon on April 30th, 1975, a documentary film would be made, not only to revisit the indelible moment the picture was taken and its aftermath, but to seek out those most immediately affected by that moment: the daughter of Gen. Loan, June Nguyen; the children of VC Captain Lem, Loan and Thong Nguyen; and the lone survivor of the equally horrific assassination of the family of Lt. Col. Tuan Nguyen, Rear Admiral Huan Nguyen, USN.

The film's title, *On Healing Land, Birds Perch/Đất Lành, Chim Đậu*, from a proverb attributed to Emperor Le Loi during the Le Dynasty (1428-1527), is an appropriate title for a 30-minute documentary that explores the possibility that members of the three families whose lives were affected by the shooting of Capt. Lem might one day find a sense of healing from what their parents experienced that fateful day. Stirring, tearful, soul-searching, and gut-wrenching are adjectives that come to mind.

The film's co-producers, Naja Pham Lockwood and Julian Cautherley, in Pham Lockwood's directorial debut, reveal, "For the first time on camera the intense emotions this photo elicits even today and the impact it has had on their lives. While these individuals hold widely differing views on this photo, the film poignantly portrays that all have something in common: the lasting trauma from the War."

"We worked very hard not to promote violence in the film, but we had to show the photo," Pham Lockwood said.

Pham Lockwood traces her transition from Investment Banking (she majored in the field at Harvard University), to documentary filmmaking, to being named Arts Commissioner in San Francisco by former Mayor Willie Brown and Governor Gavin Newsom, during which she

secured funding for the Asian Art Museum in the city. When her family moved to Park City, Utah, she was asked to be on the local board of the Sundance Film Festival.

"That was where I saw the power of storytelling. I started off as an executive producer, finding money and investors for films. *On Healing Land, Bird Perch* is my vision. For the 50th Anniversary [of the end of the Vietnam War] I really wanted to tell a story from the perspective from both sides of the Vietnamese," she told the *Sentinel*.

As a youth, Pham Lockwood was repeatedly haunted by the horror of Adams' photo—War's anniversary after War's anniversary after War's anniversary.

"Every year, starting in '75 when I came here, I would always see that photo during the anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. I was traumatized. My whole room was lit up so that I could sleep," she said.

Pham Lockwood's father, who had worked in Intelligence for USAID during the war, did his best to assuage Naja by telling her that Gen. Loan was not the terrible man the media had made him out to be, which resulted in a deportation hearing.

Regarding that hearing, no doubt influenced by the media and public opinion, in 1978, "the Immigration and Naturalization Service contended that the summary execution of Nguyen Van Lem had been illegal by Vietnamese law. In an attempt to revoke his [Nguyen Ngoc Loan's] permanent resident status to ensure that he could not become a United States citizen, they approached Adams to testify against Loan, but Adams instead testified in his favor and Loan was allowed to stay. The deportation was halted by the intervention of United States President Jimmy Carter, who stated that "such historical revisionism was folly," according to [www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com).

Meanwhile, to further put her at ease about the photo of Loan and Lem, Pham Lockwood's father would add, "There's this boy whose family was assassinated. He's alive and he's living somewhere in the US." in reference to Nguyen Huan, the sole survivor of the family that the VC allegedly assassinated. That of Lt. Col. Nguyen Tuan, an officer of the armored forces of the ARVN.

In his wisdom, her father also counseled her not to pass judgement on someone who takes the life of another during war time.

Pham Lockwood was asked why Eddie Adams photo haunted her more than two other iconic photos snapped during the war, also taken by AP photographers. One being Nick Ut's photo of nine-year old Phan Thi Kim Phuc running naked from her Cao Dai village of Trang Bang during a napalm attack. The other being Malcolm Browne's photo of the Venerable monk Thich Quang Duc immolating himself outside a Buddhist temple in Cho Lon, the Chinese quarter in Saigon. While admitting the other photos were horrific, Pham Lockwood emphasized, "Eddie's photo was so grizzly!"

It was also the fact that it was one Vietnamese killing another Vietnamese, according to Pham Lockwood. "It's brothers killing brothers for me. To see Vietnamese in such a brutal way was shocking."

"People have asked me, 'Does that mean you think the Vietnamese story is more important than the Vietnam veterans' story? Absolutely not! I think it adds to their story. It's only when we see perspectives of all sides, and understand each other beyond borders, and understand each other, that we actually move beyond the war, our trauma, and our tragedy," she said.

In the film, June Nguyen, Gen. Loan's daughter, reveals that when, as a young girl, she first saw the photo of her father shooting the VC, she was horrified. In school, when the photo was brought up, she was chastised by her classmates. But as the years went on, she knew her father to be the loving, caring father that, to her, he always was.



June Nguyen, daughter of Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, preparing a meal at home with her daughters (Photo courtesy Naja Pham Lockwood)



June Nguyen, daughter of Brig. Gen. Nguenyn Ngoc Loan viewing exhibits at the Museum of the Republic of Vietnam, Little Saigon, California (Photo courtesy Naja Pham Lockwood)





Loan and Thong Nguyen, children of the VC Capt. Nguyen Van Lem, looking at their father's tombstone, Saigon (today Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam (Photo courtesy Naja Pham Lockwood).

Meanwhile the daughter and son of Nguyen Van Lem, Nguyen Loan and Nguyen Thong, swore through tears, not only was their father not the assassin of Lt. Col. Tuan, but that the Viet Cong were not involved in the murder at all.

For his part, US Navy Rear Admiral Nguyen Huan, who harbors guilt to this day since he went outside and came back in [a bad omen during Tet] because superstition holds that the first person to enter a house during the New Years holiday should be wealthy and healthy. For that reason, Huan's father slapped him, and he feels he brought bad luck upon his family. Through the bitterest of tears, he recalls the moment of his family's assassination, and the fact that he is alive today because he hid behind sandbags while the siblings whom death forbade from growing old like him are not.

Pham Lockwood is the first Vietnamese-born American to tell the story of Adams' photo from both sides. Compelled to include her own family's story as it relates to how she came to be the director of *On Healing Land, Birds Perch*, she describes herself and her family thusly:

"I am the daughter of South Vietnamese, the last generation [to have been born in Vietnam by the end of the war]. At least for them, and for my parents, I think it's very similar to the Jewish Holocaust, where they came to America. They didn't have time to grieve. They didn't have time to deal with their trauma. Now, as an adult, I realize that. They were just so busy trying to survive in a new country. It's the children of that generation that are telling the stories," she said.

She echoes the oft-told generational occurrence in most cultures of children growing up not knowing what their parents had suffered before immigrating to the US.

"We never talked in my family about the war. My family was so focused on making sure their kids were Americans and that we had the best opportunities. They were very focused on moving forward, making sure their kids spoke fluent English and were able to fend for themselves in a new country. We grew up knowing that we would never go back to Vietnam, and that we are Americans," she added.

From their first Thanksgiving in Boston, where Pham Lockwood and her siblings grew up, they were completely taken aback by how inclusive the community was.

"I give back and my family gives back because we were given. America really opened its arms. We were so grateful those first few years," Pham Lockwood recalled.

To Pham Lockwood, Admiral Nguyen Huan shares the same fate. Thanks to America, she feels, "He is that bird [in *On Healing Land, Birds Perch*]. He is able to rest a long time and find home in a place that is a good land, a fertile land of peace. That's his journey. He hopes for peace everywhere in the world," she said.

Gen. Loan's family has found their sense of peace over Adams' photo. Growing up, his children harbored anger towards Adams, according to Pham Lockwood. But since they've grown up, they have come to appreciate the late photographer and the deep friendship he had with their father, solidified by the fact that Adams was present at the general's funeral.

Once, when Adams expressed regret, the general told him, "If it wasn't you, it would have been someone else who would have taken the photo," Pham Lockwood revealed. "Eddie won the Pulitzer for that photo, but he never meant for it to destroy anyone's life."



US Navy Rear Admiral Nguyen Huan looking out to sea at Big Sur, California during the filming of *On Healing Lands, Birds Perch* (Photo Courtesy Naja Pham Lockwood)

Nguyen Van Lem's children had an equally difficult time growing up, in their case, without a father.

"It was really hard for Loan and Thong to grow up without a father. Only ten years ago did the Vietnamese government present them with a picture of their father in uniform. Prior to them growing up, Eddie Adams' photo was the only photo they had of their father!" Pham Lockwood stressed.

But Lem's children don't blame Eddie Adams.

"That was his job," they told Pham Lockwood. "They never had any bitterness toward him," she said.

Even with the absence of bitterness toward Adams from all of the principals, it was not an easy task for the project to get under way.

"These were traumatic experiences for these individuals. For Gen. Loan's family, they have never [been interviewed]. They mistrust the media, as they should, because of how their father was portrayed. They'd never granted an interview since they came to America in 1975. That took a lot of trust that needed to be built," Pham Lockwood said.

Admiral Huan had been interviewed previously. However, he was not immediately amenable to being in the film.

"He didn't want to talk about the story. He had been asked [about it] and would comment. But he had never gone in this great depth. It is so painful, as you can see from the film."

In order to convince Huan to participate in the filming, Pham Lockwood and her production team brought in one of the nation's top psychologists on childhood trauma.

"Every step of the way, even deciding where we decided to film to help each with their own trauma. That was the reason why Huan was in Big Sur in the Redwoods and peace of nature. We were advised by our psychologist, and it helped a lot. If we had put him in a CNN studio with lights on top of him, I don't think he could have told that story," she said.

For the children of the Viet Cong, Pham Lockwood and her team had to go to Vietnam, ask permission, send questions in advance, and be approved.

"We didn't want to hide anything. We wanted to be as clear and direct as possible," she said. "They were very courageous and honest about their story. We worked really hard to cut through the politics."

They did, however, have to mention the Tet Offensive.

"The story is really about how the children dealt with the decisions of the previous generation," Pham Lockwood believes. "And how they move beyond the war. None of them are there yet, as we see. They are still dealing with their trauma. They are moving towards healing every day," she says.

"None of these people have the money to go through therapy. This is their live therapy in their interview," she adds. "I think you should think of this film as a journey towards healing. Maybe it will take their children's generation to have complete reconciliation. I don't see them coming together to have a kumbaya moment at this time because they're still dealing with their own trauma. The journey is getting better, but it's still horrifically painful for them after 50 years."

At the same time, Pham Lockwood views the participants in the film as very brave.



“Only when we see the other side and their own journey of pain and suffering do we fully comprehend what it means for the Vietnam War,” Pham Lockwood adds.

In the end, Naja Pham Lockwood wants how she feels about photojournalism to be clear.

“I believe in the power of photojournalism. It was so during the War, and even more so now,” she says. “In our film, we wanted to bring forth [that] it’s really the civilians that are hurt the most by war.”

*On Healing Land, Birds Perch* succeeds brilliantly in that mission. ❖

**Writer’s note:** Thus far, *On Healing Land, Birds Perch* has been featured at the following film festivals: San Francisco International Film Festival, Cleveland International Film Festival, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, Newport Beach (CA) Film Festival, Martha’s Vineyard Film Festival.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Yablonka is a military journalist and author. His work has appeared in the U.S. Military’s *Stars and Stripes*, *Army Times*, *Air Force Times*, *American Veteran*, *Vietnam* magazine, *Airways*, *Military Heritage*, *Soldier of Fortune* and many other publications. He is the author of *Distant War: Recollections of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia*, *Tears Across the Mekong*, *Vietnam Bao Chi: Warriors of Word and Film*, and *Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network*.

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

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

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

# Four Bullets In His Boots Continued

He stood in utter amazement, staring at the four rounds on the floor, before picking them up and throwing them in the sand outside his room.

Exhausted, LeTourneau walked over to the shower room. The water stung the wounds in his back. Amazingly, the four bullets had enough energy to penetrate his skin wounding him, but not enough to get under his skin.

Too tired to treat the four bullet wounds in his back and the shrapnel wounds in his arms, LeTourneau finished his shower and went to bed.

The PRC-25 wasn’t called a “Prick-25” for nothing. In addition to weighing a ton, they were famous for their inconsistency in the field. The Frenchman would use this same radio on Christmas Day to help ST Idaho avoid an NVA ambush. ❖



**Editor’s note:** Doug “The Frenchman” Le Tourneau, 72, passed away unexpectedly on 26 July 2019. Just weeks before, on July 9, LeTourneau was featured in a two-hour Jocko Podcast, which was posted by Jocko Willink, on July 17. This is the link to that memorable podcast: <https://jockopodcast.com/2019/07/17/186-taking-a-secret-war-to-the-enemy-in-vietnam-w-the-frenchman-doug-letourneau/>.

At left, a final salute to Doug LeTourneau at his funeral on August 7, 2019, at Valley Oaks Cemetery, in Westlake Village, CA.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — John Stryker Meyer entered the Army Dec. 1, 1966. He completed basic training at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, advanced infantry training at Ft. Gordon, Georgia, jump school at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course in Dec. 1967.

He arrived at FOB 1 Phu Bai in May 1968, where he joined Spike Team Idaho, which transferred to Command & Control North, CCN in Da Nang, January 1969. He remained on ST Idaho to the end of his tour of duty in late April. Returning to the U.S., he was assigned to E Company in the 10th Special Forces Group at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, until October 1969, when he rejoined RT Idaho at CCN. That tour of duty ended suddenly in April 1970.

He returned to the states, completing his college education at Trenton State College, where he was editor of *The Signal* school newspaper for two years. In 2021 Meyer and his wife of 26 years, Anna, moved to Tennessee, where he is working on his fourth book on the secret war, continuing to do SOG podcasts working with battle-hardened combat veteran Navy SEAL and master podcaster Jocko Willink.

Visit John’s excellent website [sogchronicles.com](https://sogchronicles.com), which includes information about all of his books. You can also find all of his SOGCast podcasts and other podcast interviews. In addition, the website includes in stories of MACV-SOG Medal of Honor recipients, MIAs and a collection of videos.

## SFA Chapter 78 Out and About



## SFA Chapter 78 Presents Donation to Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy

On Monday, June 9, 2025, Chapter Vice President James McLanahan, along with his wife Melanie and Johann Hindert, presented the Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy with a check for \$9,225, proceeds from the "Raise Your Paddles" auction at the Chapter's Valor Luncheon held in April.

At left, the group gathered for a photo after the presentation. James presented Chapter 78 Challenge coins to Sunburst Chief Medina (top left), Director Sarah Rambo (top right), and Justine Makoff (bottom left), a Sunburst Youth Academy Foundation Board Member. Johann Hindert (bottom right) presented each cadet with American Flag pins to thank them all for their assistance at the Valor Luncheon.



## City of Azusa Memorial Day Event

SFA Chapter 78 member SGM (Ret.) Kristapor Boodaghian was the keynote speaker for the city of Azusa's Memorial Day event, held on May 26, 2025 at the Azusa City Hall Courtyard.

**Connect**  
with SFA Chapter 78!

**Scan the QR code** or visit [specialforces78.com/links/](https://specialforces78.com/links/)

