SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78
The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter
VOLUME 16, ISSUE 10 • OCTOBER 2025

From the Archive

Special Edition

ARMY SPECIAL FORCES LEGEND MG John K. Singlaub

SENTINEL

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 10 • OCTOBER 2025

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

FRONT COVER: Maj. Gen John Singlaub, seen here in full Jedburgh gear during WWII, passed away at the age of 100 on January 29, 2022. Read the stories in this issue to learn more about this SF legend. (USASOC)

CHAPTER OFFICERS:

President
Aaron Brandenburg

Vice President
James McLanahan

Secretary
Gary Macnamara

Treasurer
Richard Simonian

Sergeant At Arms/ Quartermaster
Mark Miller

Coordinator of ROTC Program
Gary Macnamara (Temporary)

Chaplain
Doreen Matsumoto

Corporate Ambassadors At Large
Jim Cragg
Len Fein

Sentinel Editor
How Miller

Immediate Past President
Greg Horton

Project Officer
Don Gonneville

Please visit specialforces78.com

Follow us:

@SFA_ch78

@sfa_ch78

@sfachapter78

@sfachapter78

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.

From the Editor | October 2025

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

This issue of the Sentinel revolves around the late and legendary MG (ret.) John K. "Jack" Singlaub, a young version of whom is on our cover.

We start with the barbecue, co-sponsored by SFA Chapter 1-18 and SFA Chapter 78, for the most recent graduates of the "Q" course. It is a chance for these outstanding men to mingle with their fellow classmates before they graduate and get shipped out to various SF units around the world. SOG Veteran John "Tilt" Stryker Meyer represented Chapter 78 at the event.

Then an urgent plea from SFA Chapter 88 to support an SF monument at the Jacksonville National Cemetery. They need to make up a funding shortfall in time to have an April 2026 unveiling.

Jack Singlaub is famous for many of his life experiences. He was in the OSS during WWII, from a Jedburgh team helping the Maquis fight the Nazis in Europe to a role in China, directly confronting the Japanese. In Korea he got fired by President Carter, who followed the advice Jack too publicly gave. He was "SOG Boss," heading MACV SOG in Vietnam. He personally tested the Skyhook/STAR prisoner extraction system. He was a true and beloved leader.

The first of several articles that were all previously published in the Sentinel is actually a two-part story by then Sentinel editor, author, and Project Delta veteran Jim Morris about Jack's standout career in the OSS. He covers Jack's ROTC days and how he became airborne and succeeded at the OSS. He continues through his assignment to take over a large number of Japanese soldiers at the close of WWII in China.

Then, a "Last Call" for SFACON 2025 and a short piece about a tribute to MG John Singlaub and COL William Weber at the DMZ in South Korea for selfless service to the ROK-US alliance.

We include three stories about the Skyhook program for rescuing agents, pilots, and others from deep in enemy territory, as shown in the movie *The Green Beret*.

John Stryker Meyer, a one-time Chapter 78 president, wrote about the program, centered around Jack Singlaub's role in getting Skyhook implemented in the Vietnam theatre of operations, including an interesting confrontation with a recalcitrant USAF colonel.

John Gargus wrote about the overall STARS program, mentioning "Jack's" participation.

Lonnie Holmes, past long-time *Sentinel* editor and a past Chapter 78 president, wrote "Skyhook Recovery: A Brief History," detailing the extent of the Skyhook program, some examples, and a tally of 166 recoveries.

John Stryker Meyer also writes about a visit by him and fellow SOG veteran Doug L. "The Frenchman" LeTourneau to Jack Singlaub. During the visit he asked them to represent him at the memorial for Mel Swanson, a Air Force A-1 Skyraider pilot and squadron commander who flew hundreds of sorties in the single-engine SPAD in support of SOG and SAR (Search and Rescue) missions in Laos, N. Vietnam and Cambodia.

Last month we reported on the presentation of a proposal to create a Veterans Memorial Park to honor Owens Valley natives MG John K. Singlaub and Captain James Birchim, both born in Independence, California. Debra Holm has written about James Bircham and his outstanding career. The present proposal is for it to be located in Independence, CA, near the Inyo County Courthouse.

Please feel free to check out coverage of our August chapter meeting, which was once again held at our previous long-time meeting location, the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos.

And of course, please keep sending us your stories about your SF service. ❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

October's meeting has been canceled due to SFACon.

Next scheduled chapter meeting November 15

Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos
The Pub at Fiddlers Green

4745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19, Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176

2025 Meeting Schedule

December (to be announced)

SFQC GRADUATION

CLASS 340

August 28, 2025

Command Sgt. Major Matthew O. Williams, Medal of Honor recipient, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, presents a green beret to a student during the graduation ceremony and Regimental First Formation. (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens)

Congratulations to the 168 SFQC graduates of Class 340, who donned their new Green Berets for the first time on August 28 during the graduation ceremony and Regimental First Formation held at the Crown Coliseum in Fayetteville, NC.

CSM Matthew O. Williams, Medal of Honor recipient and previous command sergeant major for 4th Battalion, was the ceremony's keynote speaker. He emphasized that earning the Green Beret is an honor and responsibility rooted in sacrifice and professionalism, preparing graduates to face evolving challenges with the support of their families and to wear it with humility and pride.

In the days prior to the ceremony, the graduates were invited to attend the SFQC Graduation BBQ, jointly sponsored by SFA Chapters 78 and 1-18, on Chapter 1-18's teamhouse/compound in Fayetteville, North Carolina. At the event, Chapter 78 member John Stryker Meyer (pictured below) welcomed 11 graduates as new life members of our chapter. DOL! ❖

Soon-to-be graduates at the pre-graduation BBQ. (Photo courtesy Jeff Rinaldi)

Left to right, SFA President Chris Wilkerson, Chapter 1-18 member Eli Olivas, and Chapter 78 member John Stryker Meyer . (Photo courtesy Jeff Rinaldi)

Help Honor Our Heroes

Support the Special Forces Monument

Be a part of placing a permanent tribute to the Army veterans interred at the Jacksonville National Cemetery, honoring their service and providing a place of remembrance for families, comrades, and visitors.

SFA Chapter 88 (Northeast Florida) is raising **$18,000** to place a Special Forces monument at the Jacksonville National Cemetery. As of September 17, we've reached 28% of our goal—but we still need your support.

We have received 22 donations from 4 organizations ($980) and 18 individuals ($4165). Of the 18 individual donors, 6 were on GoFundMe ($1100) and 12 were check and cash donations ($3065) to the Chapter. The largest donation is $1000, along with three $500, two $250, two $200, and five $100 donations. We are also thankful for the five $50 and under donations. *Every donation helps!* Thank you to all of our donors!

We are very grateful for all of these generous donations, but we're still a long way from our goal. We must raise the remaining funds by **December 31, 2025**. This deadline allows time to finalize contracts, pay for construction, and ensure the monument is delivered and installed in time for the ceremony. **Corporate sponsors are welcome**.

Your support is so important to reach our goal on time and finish this important and lasting monument. Thank you for your consideration and donation.

Save Saturday, April 11, 2026 on your calendars and plan to join us for the dedication ceremony.

How to Donate

GoFundMe

We've partnered with GoFundMe to make donating quick and easy. GoFundMe accepts most credit and debit cards.

Note: GoFundMe automatically adds a "tip" for their platform (usually 16–19.5%). ***Tipping is optional—you can set the tip to any amount you choose, including $0, by clicking "Enter Custom Tip" before completing your donation.***

Scan to Donate

By Check

You may also send your donation in a check made payable to "SFA *Chapter 88," write "SF Monument" on the memo line. Mail checks to: SFA 88 Monument, 10539 Inverness Dr., Jacksonville, FL 32257.*

We are a 501 (c)(19) charity, Fed Tax EIN: 56- 6148492, and donations are tax-deductible.

For more information, contact

Padraic Mulvihill, Monument Committee Chairman at (904) 534-0035 or email: pem@axisp.com

Above, Lt. Singlaub hooked to the static line during Ft. Benning's jump training. (Singlaub Collection).

SINGLAUB:

The Jedburgh Mission

By Jim Morris
Originally published in the August 2020 *Sentinel*

Editors Note: *Major General John K. Singlaub had his 99th birthday on July 10 of this year. He is without doubt the most highly respected man in the Special Operations community. What most people in the community know about him is that he commanded the MACV Studies and Observations Group during the Vietnam War. But that is only an episode in his storied life, and not the most significant episode at that.*

Outside Spec Ops he is best known for having publicly stated that President Carter's plan to pull American troops out of Korea would lead to a second Korean War. Carter fired him, but did not pull the troops out, and we can speculate that thousands of American and Korean lives were saved by that.

What he should be famous for, in the Spec Ops community, is that after the debacle at Desert One, when Delta failed to extract our Iran hostages, he seized the opportunity to sell the Reagan administration on a plan he had nurtured and shaped for years. Today that plan has been realized and is known as the United States Special Operations Command.

This story originally appeared in Soldier of Fortune in 1981. It is the story of his first mission as a first lieutenant and captain in the OSS. Anybody who has run a mission like this will know it is a mission to die for. And he didn't. Lucky him. Lucky us.

John K. Singlaub wanted to go to West Point real bad. He probably would have, he was told, except that his father was a Democrat. So he ended up as an ROTC cadet at UCLA. He was commissioned and started jump school at Fort Benning, GA, a week after his graduation in 1942. Gung ho to go to war in Europe or the Pacific, his first duty assignment was another frustration to test his resolve to be a career soldier. Second Lieutenant Singlaub was ordered to report all the way to the other end of Ft. Benning, clear over in Alabama. He served as a regimental demolitions officer and platoon leader in a parachute training regiment.

Making the most of his situation, Singlaub quickly demonstrated superior leadership skills under extreme difficulty by organizing successful small commando-type units to act as aggressors on FTXs. This, combined with good marks at UCLA in French and Japanese language studies, soon led to an invitation for Singlaub to volunteer for an unspecified "hazardous mission behind enemy lines." Anxious that he not spend the duration stateside teaching others to go to war, he immediately accepted.

In October 1943, Singlaub received orders to report to Washington. After checking in, he was sent to Building Q in the Foggy Bottom complex where the Office of Strategic Services was headquartered. He underwent initial screening and was dispatched later that afternoon to the Congressional Country Club in suburban Maryland, where a rather bizarre battery of psychological testing began. This included close live-fire tests and having explosive charges set off unexpectedly nearby.

Passing those tests, Singlaub recalls, "is a matter of being able to concentrate your mind on the physical things you have to do rather than worrying about whether you were going to get killed."

Taking a sip of coffee as I interviewed Singlaub in his mountaintop home overlooking the small town of Tabernash, Colorado, I agreed wholeheartedly with that assessment. I once defined soldiering as being able to perform simple mechanical tasks while scared shitless.

OSS control officer (left) briefs Singlaub and two other Jedburgh Team members prior to the three being dropped behind Nazi lines in occupied France. (Singlaub Collection)

Singlaub (left) and other OSS team members question a captured German, with folded arms. (Singlaub Collection)

Singlaub and others were selected for continued training. Many were sent back to regular military assignments or civilian jobs. The selectees were trucked to a nearby secret compound designated as "B-1," now the location of the presidential retreat known as Camp David. The OSS training increased in difficulty and intensity, focusing very much on each individual.

Trainees like Singlaub who survived B-1 would be sent to Scotland for even more rigorous instruction before being assigned to what was known as a Jedburgh Team, a code name assigned by British Intelligence, taken from the name of a town in Scotland. Jedburgh Teams of three men each — two Allied officers and an enlisted radio operator were inserted behind German lines in Europe to help organize anti-Nazi resistance and carry out sabotage and intelligence-gathering operations. They were one of the forerunners of Special Forces A Teams.

A month after the Normandy invasion, Singlaub's Jedburgh Team parachuted deep into German-occupied France to prepare partisan support for a southern invasion.

"The invasion of the north had already started, and my first mission was to train the maquisards, and prevent movement of German troops from the southern part of France up toward the invasion beachheads. So, I just cut all the railroads."

"Blow the bridges?" I asked Singlaub.

He smiled and shook his head. "No, I blew about a foot off of every curved rail in the whole province. Every place there was a curve in the province, or where they had stacks of curved rails, I just chopped a foot off."

"Took it out of the middle?"

"No, just took it off the end. They just didn't move. There was no way that they could..."

"Did you interdict truck transport as well?"

"We did, with ambushes on selected roads. We had several Routes Nationale that went through our province. The Das Reich Panzer Division had tried to move through our area, and they were attacked by some of the maquisards before I got there. In retaliation — the Das Reich was an SS division —they moved into the town of Tulle in Correze and lined up all the young men. They numbered 'em off, made 'em count off one-two-three and so on. 'Okay, all number ones are going to be released, number twos are going to labor camps, and number threes are going to be hung, right there.' And so they started hanging these guys by putting a noose around their necks and pulling them up on balconies.

"Well, there were about a hundred-and-some in each of the three categories, so there were about a 110 who were going to be hung. But I guess the priest who was administering the last rites had some sympathy. So when they had hung 98 or something like that, he said, 'Well, that's all.' "

The Germans apparently had lost count, Singlaub said. "Part way through this they switched. The ones who were to go free were rejoicing, and the Germans said, 'Okay, take the number ones and start hanging ones instead of threes.' The whole thing was a terrible atrocity." Singlaub said the German brutality continued. "They moved into the province to the north and decided they were going to wipe out a town called Oridor-sur-Glen. They went into the town, rounded up all the women and children and put them in the church, and put all the men in a garage. They stopped a streetcar coming out of Limoges, and everybody that had tickets for that town, they took off the streetcar and put in with the others, machine gunned the men in the garage, set the church on fire, and leveled the town.

"Someone from the garage managed to get out. He was left for dead and then came up from underneath this pile of dead and got out, and gave us these details.

"But despite these atrocities, we had more French maquisards wanting to join our unit than we could handle. They were not deterred. They were just fantastically brave, even though they lacked a lot of the skills that we would have liked them to have. And that was the job."

I nodded. "Let me ask you, sir, what was your life like on that mission? Where did you live; how did you move around?"

"Well, we parachuted in to a British agent living as a Frenchman. He was a captain in the British Intelligence forces, but was living undercover. He had indicated to London that there was a good potential for resistance in this area, and that he would run the reception committee. He gathered us up and took us to a little farmhouse and introduced us to leaders of this resistance movement.

"Two distinct groups had been brought together. One was a group headed by a regular army captain, in what was called the Armee Secrete (AS). The other leader had been a corporal in the French army, and he was a communist. This was the FTP, the Franc Tireur de Partisan.

"In my province I had a little better cooperation, although it was not complete. The communists would constantly try to steal any equipment drop that was coming into an area. If they found out that I was running an equipment drop for the AS battalion, they would go out and set up a reception committee, lay out the lights, and send signals, in hope that the airplanes would drop, and on at least one occasion they did.

"I complained that the aircraft didn't come as I'd been told, and London came back with, 'You must be out of your mind. The pilot claims he dropped the supplies.' I found out later they had stolen the supplies. The communists were more interested in arming for the war after the war than they were in fighting the Germans in that area.

"With this group of the AS we were not only able to train them, we actually got permission to take the whole battalion on operations with trucks we had captured from the Germans, and trucks that had been made available for farm usage. These were civilians led by a few regular army people, and they had some NCOs who had seen military service.

"They were not just limited to my province. Because that was a rugged area, underpopulated by French standards, many people who had gotten into trouble elsewhere, moved into that area to live with the maquisards.

"We lived in a farmhouse, a very rugged old thing, with no indoor plumbing, of course. We didn't live with the farmer. They gave us what was, in essence, a barn. That's where we stayed a majority of the time, when we weren't out doing the training and the initial reconnaissance."

"You were a captain by this time?"

"No, I was a first lieutenant, and my Frenchman was a first lieutenant."

"So that was kind of a lucky break for you in terms of career development, to be essentially a battalion commander when you were a first lieutenant."

"Yeah, that's right. Although I was really the adviser."

I nodded. "I can't imagine the Germans were not looking for you. Did you have any close calls while you were there?"

"Not during that time. Later on we did.

"Later we got permission to attack four German garrisons that were in our area. And we eventually captured two of them. One was liberated (by the Germans), and one we had under siege, in the town of Egleton. These were garrisons of several hundred troops, a couple of companies."

"And you would attack with an entire battalion?" I asked.

"Right. We put the town under seige. In two of them the Germans surrendered. We said, 'you know, this is how many we have around and you're completely cut off.' We cut their telephones — they didn't have radios — and cut their water. They surrendered. It was a great problem what to do with them. Some of the French, who had lost family to the SS battalion, wanted to just execute them. But I insisted, and we moved them out away from the main route, into the country, and kept them until after the war.

"But in the case of this town of Egleton, they had a radio, and I think they had some SS with them in there. I couldn't crack it. When we moved against them they were holed up in a reinforced concrete school. We used mortars and British anti-tank rockets

"I called for an air attack on this school, after we'd shot out the top, using mortars, and these projectiles, which were anti-tank things. But they were still in there, defying us, so I radioed London and said that we wanted an air strike. One of the reasons I wanted an air strike was that the garrison we had under attack had called for air support, and they came in and strafed us, and dropped butterfly anti-personnel bombs.

"Well, this was pretty terrifying to these untrained maquisards. It was a real problem, and I was afraid that if they kept this up I wasn't going to be able to keep control.

"So I told London we'd had many attacks. One of them was from a Heinkel He-111, twin-engine plane that came in very low. We could see the rivets on the thing. My Frenchman and I each organized two Bren guns and opened up when it came over us. We sensed that we could either see or hear the rounds hitting it. We knew that we had hit it. But it went off and disappeared.

"We found out later that we had actually hit it, and killed some of the crew, and the thing had crashed before it got back to its base.

"That made them mad, and we had a hell of a lot of air strikes against us. When I reported this to London, and requested that they hit that school, they said, 'Well, according to you, you're getting more air strikes from the Germans than the entire Third Army.'

"That was because all the aircraft were moving back from the beaches, and were in fact moving back toward Germany.

"One day we heard, but did not see, an aircraft fly very high over the area. Later I learned that it was an Allied reconnaissance flight for this special (British) Mosquito squadron they had, that did precision bombing.

"That night the anti-maquisard German force was coming up from Clermont-Ferrond, and they broke through, liberated a group in Ussel, and were on their way to this town of Egleton. So, well after dark, I gave the word to break contact and head for the hills. We had a prearranged rendezvous."

That's when the French presented him with a bill for all that food and wine.

"We'd been up for three days straight, so we were really bushed. My Frenchman, radio operator and I headed up, and I think that I must have been sleeping while walking, because I just didn't remember it.

"I do remember getting to a farmhouse. We didn't go into the farmhouse, we went into the barn, and just burrowed into the hay and went to sleep.

"Well, my radio operator had slept, and he woke up when a German troop came up and banged on the farmhouse and went in and searched the place, looking for maquisards.

"Of course, he couldn't sleep. He was terrified, but my Frenchman and I were out cold. The next morning we got up and started toward the rendezvous. Up on some high ground we could see back toward the town of Egleton. We went to an open area, and saw four Mosquitos coming right on the deck. They flew directly to the town, went up into the air, came down, and four of them put their bombs exactly into that school. Absolutely leveled it.

"The trouble is the Germans had already gotten there, and moved on to find out what had happened to the garrisons in these other towns. The only people left at that time were some wounded Germans, and some people taking care of them. Probably less than a platoon had been left behind.

"By this time, after we had gotten permission to attack, and after Paris had fallen to the Allies, the Germans were interested in heading back to Germany. Our orders were to prevent them from getting from the Atlantic coast ports back to Germany by moving through our province. Our province was rugged enough so that we could pretty well stop them. Their main route was to the north, just south of the Loire River. We got permission to move the battalion up and attack Germans moving through that area.

"By this time we were able to move into towns. Generally speaking, when we'd go into a town, I'd take over the Gestapo headquarters, because I'd found that they were usually pretty well stocked, and in pretty good buildings. So they jokingly referred to me as the 'American Gestapo.'

"We were royally treated compared to the austere eating conditions that we had in England. In England you could only get one egg a week. Well, we were out in farm country, so we could have eggs every day if we wanted. We could have meat. If there was any food available, we were given highest priority in the whole province.

"Later, when we moved into towns, or when we moved into better accommodations, our hosts would crack open a wall that they had sealed up to hide their best wines or their best cognac from the Germans. And they would produce the most incredible wine, just to celebrate the occasion — the arrival of the Allies.

"Eventually we were given instructions to exfiltrate the area. We crossed the Loire River in the vicinity of Orleans. We eventually made contact with some patrols that were on the south side of the Loire River. We crossed on a ferry that had been put into operation — the bridges had all been taken out — and went on into Paris. This was in October of '44, something like that."

Singlaub then began looking for another good mission. "My intelligence officer in the maquisard was an Austrian by birth. He'd spent most of his life in France, but he was fluent in German. He had contacts in Austria. And there were a lot of French that had escaped from the labor camps in Austria, and had gone to the mountains. It was his suggestion that we take our team up there and help set up a resistance in the Austrian Alps, among the French who had escaped. So, I put the proposal to London."

Singlaub even presented the proposal in person, returning to Paris two days later to await formal approval.

"When we came back to Paris I thought they were going to approve this thing, but apparently the status of Austria was under debate, because of the three-power thing: British-Russian-U.S. interests in that area. So that mission never took place."

Singlaub returned to England for further training while awaiting reassignment. In December 1944, he volunteered to go to the Far East. Many of the Jeds had already left to go there. First, though, he had some homefront duty to complete. He received 30 days of leave in the States on his way to the China-Burma-India theatre. He and his fiancee, Mary Osborne, were married 6 January 1945, just prior to his new assignment in eastern Asia. He met her before joining OSS and they announced their engagement just prior to his deployment to Europe.

Now World War II was quickly nearing its end. But plenty of adventure lay in store for Jack Singlaub. Among other things, he would be dropping supplies to U.S. operatives assisting a guerrilla movement in French Indochina headed by a man named Ho Chi Minh. He would parachute into what later became North Vietnam. And he would lead a small commando team which made a daring daylight drop onto Hainan Island to free Allied POWs being held by 10,000 of Japan's Hokkaido Marines.

Once on the ground, with his radio destroyed in the jump, he had the unpleasant task of being the bearer of bad news for the Japanese CO. The United States had dropped the atom bomb, and surrender by Japan was imminent. After refusing to talk with the Japanese lieutenant sent out to take him and his men captive, Singlaub brazenly informed the stunned commander that the tiny commando unit was taking charge of all Allied prisoners and military installations on the island

But that's another tale. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Morris, a former 1st SFGA and 5th SFG(A) officer seriously wounded with Project Delta in Vietnam, later became a war correspondent and author. A past editor of the *Sentinel*, his works include *The Guerrilla Trilogy,* which includes his acclaimed book *War Story*, and *The Dreaming Circus*.

SINGLAUB—
PARACHUTING INTO PRISON:
Special Ops in China

By Jim Morris
Originally published in the September 2020 *Sentinel*

Editor's Note: *World War II had jolted America into a frenzied mobilization by the time ROTC Cadet Jack Singlaub graduated from UCLA in 1942. Just over a year later, having displayed exceptional leadership skills with small teams in Commando ROTC exercises at Fort Benning, Georgia, he was offered the chance to volunteer for unspecified "hazardous duty behind enemy lines." Singlaub accepted and found himself joining the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He was assigned to a Jedburgh team, a three-man commando unit that heavily influenced evolution of the present-day Special Forces A-Team concept.*

Singlaub's Jedburgh team ultimately parachuted well behind German lines into southern France, to help the local resistance prepare for the soon-to-come D-Day invasion of Normandy. The adventures of young 1st Lieutenant Singlaub and his battalion-sized force of maquis *irregulars were chronicled by Jim Morris in the August 2020 issue of the* Sentinel. (see "SINGLAUB: The Jedburgh Mission" page 2.)

Following the successful completion of his mission in France, he volunteered in December 1944 for reassignment in Asia. He departed soon thereafter for training on Catalina Island, and from there deployed to the China-Burma-India Theatre.

The little town of Bhamo sits astride the headwaters of the Irawaddy River, which runs southward out of the mountains along Burma's Chinese border to parallel the famed Burma Road through Mandalay and on to the jungled delta around Rangoon.

United States Army Captain Jack Singlaub got there the hard way, arriving with his OSS company in Calcutta after transiting the Pacific from southern California by ship. From the Indian port they moved onto the upper Assam Valley, in what is now Bangladesh. After being assigned to OSS Detachment 101, a command and control unit commanded by Colonel Ray Peers, they moved on to Bhamo.

Colonel Peers, later to become commanding general of the 4th Division in Vietnam and chairman of the Peers Commission to investigate the My Lai massacre, told Singlaub that he would have to hold for a few weeks on his permanent orders to join another OSS detachment over the mountains in Kunming, China. Not one to sit on his hands until his mission priority allowed him and his assortment of commando troops to fly over the hump into China, Singlaub heard that his CO, Col. Peers, planned to move some of his assets from a place called Dinjan, in the upper Assam Valley, to Bhamo in Burma.

"I volunteered to run a series of convoys up the Burma Road with this equipment, to occupy my guys while we were waiting to get over the hump." Singlaub recalled. "So we took that on, and drove the Ledo Road up to Bhamo in Burma."

Singlaub, center, and his jedburgh team prior to secretly parachuting into occupied France to organize resistance against the Germans.

But typically, just when Singlaub thought his unit would have to hang around and wait, they were told to get up and go.

"Then, strangely enough, we flew back from Bhamo to Chabua and then flew on over the hump to Kunming," Singlaub said. "I had been put in charge of a combined company in California... It was made up of a lot of OSS types. So I had Army, Navy and Air Corps officers. And I had Army, Navy and Marine Corps enlisted. And I had male and female civilians. Processing these people was really something, because each service had its own peculiarities.

"When we got to Kunming, I did some Chinese language training, and then went down to Poseh and trained some Chinese guerrillas for operations against the Japanese," he said.

Chinese guerrillas weren't the only troops being trained by the OSS in Indochina. This brought Singlaub into contact with Viet Minh forces under the command of an insurgent leader named Ho Chi Minh.

"By this time I had my team, and we had a weapons man, a medic and my radio operator, and an executive officer. We had about five, all Americans. We were to take a team into what later became North Vietnam. My mission," Singlaub recalled, "was to blow the railroad and a road between Hanoi and the town of Langson.

"The road and the railroad were on opposite sides of this gorge. It was a very deep gorge and the railroad was an easy one to cut because it had a lot of curved rails and a limited number of culverts.

"The road was more difficult," Singlaub said, "but again it was very steep in several places and it had culverts. I was able to spot the culverts and compute my charges. And I found out where my drop zone was going to be. We were to take in some Vietnamese with us when we went.

"When I went on flights in a C-47 to make a reconnaissance of my targets, as well as my drop zone and so on, I carried along supplies to drop to the [OSS] team that was advising Ho Chi Minh. So I would fly over Ho Chi Minh's headquarters at a place called Tuyen Guang. Mike Holland was one of the guys who was in with Ho Chi Minh, and a Major Thomas. I didn't know the others."

Twenty years later Ho's troops would be fighting and killing U.S. servicemen, but he was more of an unknown quantity at the time, and certainly still conducive to providing at least limited support to

Above, Singlaub in the OSS compound in Kunming, China

In the photo at left, Major Singlaub (right) turning his back on a Japanese lieutenant with whom he refused to negotiate, demanding to see the colonel in charge of 10,000 Japanese marines holding Hainan Island.

U.S. and European interests. Singlaub remembers the Ho Chi Minh of Japanese occupation days as a man who "had a lot of ability to get people to work with him. He continued to promise that they were going to attack the Japanese. They didn't do as much attacking of the Japanese as we would have liked. But at that time the Vietnamese that I worked with — and they had run intelligence nets — said that they recognized the need for continuing help from the West, and they expected the French to return.

"They wanted to be able to teach Vietnamese in their schools," Singlaub said, "and they wanted some concessions from their colonial rulers. But they did not want to give up contact with the West. They said they would prefer that the Americans would come in and take over that role, but recognized that that was not likely.

"But they did not have that absolute hatred and intransigent position that they later took. That's a long story, and a very complicated and involved story: how that developed."

As it turned out, though, Singlaub's mission to blow the road and the rail line was never carried out. There was a temporary postponement in July because of conflicting mission priorities, and then it was permanently scrubbed by an event that surprised everyone.

"We were in this little jungle town and some people came in and said that a big bomb had been dropped on Japan, and the war was going to be over." recalled Singlaub, who at the time expressed disbelief. "We didn't know what they were talking about. Then eventually we were told that our mission was canceled and they were sending a plane to pick me up. A day or so later a plane came in and flew us hack to Kunming. And then they said that the States had dropped an atom bomb on Japan."

Everyone figured a Japanese surrender was at hand. But many problems remained, chief among them the thousands of U.S. prisoners in Japanese camps and the fear that they might not live long enough to see repatriation, especially if the Japanese decided to take out their frustrations of defeat on the POWs. And if the Japanese already had mistreated the prisoners, it would be to the advantage of the vanquished to simply execute the POWs and hide the bodies. It was decided that the OSS should undertake operations aimed at freeing the POWs as soon as possible.

"They asked if I would lead a team to go into Hainan Island, where they thought they had some prisoners," Singlaub said. "There were other teams being brought back from other parts of China, where they had been fighting against the Japanese. Teams were to be sent to Hainan Island, Taiwan, Mukden, Peking, Shantung, Shanghai and Korea.

"I elected to jump my force because we didn't have an airfield. Besides, with the team that went to Taiwan, the Japanese just put a pistol to their faces and said to get back on the airplane," he said.

"I recruited my team— took some of my same team members and added to them. We parachuted into this area where we assumed the camp was. In the two days I was given to get ready for this, that was an important part of it — to analyze photos and try to see where the camp was. I finally was convinced of the exact buildings, from the air photos, and I selected a drop zone. We flew from Kunming one night, over the Gulf of Tonkin, right on the deck, just 50 feet off the ocean, made landfall — I recognized it from the studies — turned right, flew along the coast until I could see the camp and my selected drop zone.

"So we went in and I picked out my heading and told the pilot to let us out at 600 feet.

"We parachuted into this area, which was within sight of the buildings we thought were where the POWs were. The aircraft was supposed to make another pass and drop our equipment but ... I don't know if he was trying to get lower and look and see if we were all right, but he dropped the supplies at an altitude that was too low for the parachutes to open.

"So my radio was about two meters wide by 50 meters long. The bundle just exploded and ruined a lot of the other supplies we were taking in there as well. So we were without a radio."

That wasn't the worst of it. By early August 1945, many of the Japanese had seen the writing on the wall and were talking of surrender. But unfortunately for Singlaub, the 10,000 Japanese on Hainan Island — big, strapping Hokkaido Marines who had been winning all their battles down in the Pacific — had not heard that the war was about to end.

"They weren't very kind to us for the first 36 hours," Singlaub said "They policed us up and put us in a guardhouse. But I wouldn't talk to the captain that was commanding the camp. I said I wanted to talk to his colonel.

"We heard him on this telephone because he had to yell loud. I had a Nisei and a Chinese with me as interpreters, as part of the nine-man force. The Japanese captain said, 'But Colonel, he won't talk to me. He insists on talking to you. The major insists on talking to you.' I was actually a captain, but for that jump the intelligence people convinced my team and me that I should wear major's leaves. So I was a brevet major.

"And it was a good thing, because there is such a big distinction between company and field grade officers in the Japanese Army. As a major I wouldn't deign to speak to this captain.

" 'But Colonel, he insists that Japan is going to surrender!' 'But Colonel, they jumped in broad daylight!' We could only hear one end of the conversation, but we could tell roughly what it was.

"So I had a very, very nervous night, without any communications; in fact, locked up in the guardhouse. I had insisted that I wanted to see the commander of the Allied prisoners, and that I wanted to see the colonel who was commanding this area.

"The next day they finally took us over where I met with the Japanese commander. I told him that I absolutely insisted on seeing the Allied officers in the camp. He apparently had gotten the word by this time that the Japanese were about to surrender. So I told him that I was commandeering all the food on the island, and that, after Allied needs were met, he would have the next priority. All the transportation I was commandeering, all the communications. And I wanted a liaison officer assigned to me immediately, but that the first order of business was to talk to the prisoners

"So they were brought to an Australian colonel, the senior officer, and a Dutch lieutenant commander." Singlaub recalled. "It was quite a reunion. Very emotional, as you can imagine.

"I moved the Japanese to the side, set these guys down, after shaking their hands, and found out what their real problems were. They went back to their quarters. So then I issued some ultimatums to the Japanese, as to what was going to be done specifically.

Brevet Major John Singlaub, fourth from left, tours Japanese prison compound with OSS rescue team on their second day on Hainan Island, just east of the Gulf of Tonkin.

A group of Australian officers poses after their release from a Japanese POW camp on Hainan Island. They were rescued by an OSS team headed by John Singlaub.

"That operation, I suppose, was one of the most satisfying that you could have. Not only providing freedom to almost 400 prisoners of war, but we had the job of bringing them up-to-date on what had happened since they had been captured. They were captured by the Japanese very early in the Pacific war — in February of 1942 —on a small island in what is now Indonesia, which at that time was the Netherlands East Indies. They had been very badly treated by the Japanese. They had been physically abused. They had been put on this island of Hainan in the most inhospitable part of the island, and when the monsoons hit, the water would not only come through the roof, but through the walls.

"Several were dying each day by the time I got there. So we were able to give them not only freedom, but by feeding them about six meals a day, six small meals a day, we stopped the deaths by starvation, And we gave them vitamin B-1 injections and provided them with some essential medical care; although some still died after we got there.

"But then I had the problem of moving them from that location on the west side of the island down to the southern tip, where there was an adequate harbor and an airfield.

"I commandeered a train and was moving them down there when our train was ambushed and the engine was derailed. The rail was blown, but we were flying a home-made American flag on the train. The blue field was denim and the stripes were sheets with the wrong number of stars and the wrong number of stripes.

Capt. Singlaub is decorated at the OSS compound in Kunming for the success of his commando missions in France.

"But that train was never assaulted. That's a good thing, because I only had four armed Americans on it. The rest were unarmed prisoners. We never did find out whether that ambush was the work of bandits or guerrillas.

"So we had to go through all of that to get 'em down there. But eventually we moved them, either by rail or by boat. Some of them weren't up to rail travel, so we had to move them by boat down to the other end of the island, where I proceeded to set up better hospital facilities.

"It was a better part of the island. There was fresh fruit available for them there. We took over some barracks that had belonged to the Japanese Air Force and made it into a hospital and barracks for the troops, until I could eventually bring in some Australian ships to evacuate the Australians and the Dutch up to Hong Kong.

"I found that there were some prisoners who had escaped and were presumed to be with the guerrillas in the interior of the island. Intelligence nets that I set up initially indicated that there had been some Americans who had been captured and killed by the Japanese.

"We produced evidence of this. One of the things that was given to me on my first entry into the camp was a packet of documentation of the atrocities committed against these people, and that evidence, which I personally held on to until I got out and personally turned it over to the British authorities in Hong Kong. It was used as the basic documentation to try some of the Japanese for war crimes after the war.

"I had the problem of locating where these escapees and evaders were … Well, first of all I had the problem of not having any radio. It wasn't until I got down to the southern end of the island and took over a big Japanese transmitter and sent back a message to Kunming, telling what had happened and where I was, that we made contact.

"Although we had had some signals that we were able to display on the drop zone, it was agreed that 24 hours after our drop, they would send a reconnaissance flight over the drop zone and photograph it. I had a series of signals to display by spreading out the reserve parachutes, which were white, in different patterns.

"Fortunately I was able to get my people — two guys — out of that guardhouse where we were and out to the drop zone to display that signal on the second day. On the first day the recce flight went over and there was nothing. They were quite worried in Kunming.

"Second day I was able to indicate that we were out of communication, but we were okay. We had a way of mutilating the panels slightly, if needed, to indicate we were under duress. The parachutes were displayed correctly, so they knew we were okay.

"When we boomed in with that big signal from the Japanese transmitter, they wouldn't believe it was us, so we had to go through a lot of challenges to prove that we were, in fact, who we said we were.

"But I was able then to bring in a doctor on a plane, and I was able to then use that plane to fly over the island. I was able to throw in small bottles of Atabrine (anti-malarial) tablets. I was able to use small parachutes from our jump, the pilot chutes, to float these things down. I would throw them into large villages, with a note that said. 'Take this to your leader. The Allies have landed a small force on the southern part of the island. The Japanese are in the process of surrendering. The war is over. We want to make contact with any Allied former prisoners or evaders. Any Allied personnel, send a message to the southern part of the island, town of Sanya.'

Two days later we got a message that came in answer to that, signed by an Australian major, indicating that he had a certain number of Australian and Dutch troops with him, plus a large number of Indians who had escaped also. These were members of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery. They were Sikhs.

"The Japanese had tried to use them as troops; the Japanese had tried to form a Free India movement. But these people, when given an opportunity to serve, had headed for the hills. There were also some Americans.

"Several messages came in. One of them was signed by the Australian major, and another was from an American who was an evader and who was in the interior of the island with some friendly guerrillas.

"So I had the problem of getting in there as part of my problem of getting all Allied personnel out. I also had the problem of recontacting my exec. The only way I could get to my rear detachment was to parachute in.

"That's when I made my first free fall. I used one of the emergency parachutes off one of the airplanes that flew in supplies. And I took

the reserve that was still intact and cut the old harness that I had jumped in with, tied knots in the risers above the connectors, so that I had a harness for my reserve, and then did a free fall out of a C-47.

"I had no idea how much altitude I should allow, but decided I would need five seconds to clear the airplane and pull the thing, so..."

"Add about 500 feet."

"Yeah, I computed this on the basis of the velocity of a free, falling body, and jumped from less than a thousand feet. When I got into free falling later on, I realized how silly that was. But anyway it was successful, and I got back in.

"Eventually we had to go back into the interior. That was an exciting thing because the Japanese controlled the perimeter of the island, in most cases. But in the interior there were three separate groups; you had pro-communist guerrillas and pro-nationalist guerrillas, and then you had just plain bandits. I still don't know who it was that ambushed our train. It may have been just bandits, but in any case we had to go through several territories.

"The Japanese would only take us so far, and then they said, 'Well, down that road there' — they called them all bandits — 'there are some bandits,' and we'd go down and cautiously display an American flag. They then would take us to the end of the area they controlled, and eventually we got in. We made arrangements to come out a few days later.

"So we brought out several truckloads of escapers and evaders.

"I must say, the Chinese Nationalist commander on the island gave us one of the finest Chinese meals I've ever had, in celebration of this great occasion. It was a 26-course dinner, as I recall.

"We evacuated the majority of the prisoners via destroyers. Later, when I reached Hong Kong, I was able to arrange for a hospital ship to come in and pick up the ones who were really in bad shape.

"I had great pressure from the Japanese. They wanted to surrender to me. They did not want to wait and surrender to the Chinese. But it was very clear in my instructions that I would not accept their surrender, and the Japanese just could not understand.

"They wanted to come and present their swords to me, rather than face surrender to the Chinese, whom they had not treated particularly well.

"By that time a group of logisticians from the China headquarters came in and relieved me. They were from the Services of Supply. They had the responsibility of staying there until the Chinese Army came.

"I then embarked the team on an Australian destroyer and sailed to Hong Kong. We happened to be there the night of the official surrender signing. By this time the majority of the ships of the British Navy has assembled in Hong Kong and they put on quite a fireworks display that night.

"That was about the second of September, I think, in '45.

"A few days later we flew back to Kunming and I released the team." ❖

Maj. Gen. John Singlaub and Col. William Weber Memorialized in Korea at DMZ Peace Park

A memorial dedicated to Col. William Weber was unveiled in October 2023 at Imjingak Pyeonghwa Nuri Park in Paju, South Korea, near the Demilitarized Zone. Weber was instrumental in creating the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. (Courtesy photo; Department of Defense, https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8333792/honoring-korean-war-veteran-and-rok-us-alliance-advocate-col-william-weber)

A memorial dedicated to Major General John K. Singlaub and Colonel William E. Weber was dedicated on October 12, 2024 by Eighth Army Korea, along with Korea-US Alliance Foundation, KDVA and United Nations Peace Memorial Hall, for their selfless service and contributions to the ROK-US Alliance. SK Group Chairman Chey Tae-won lauded the veterans who fought in the 1950-53 Korean War, stating that they "gave us the seed of liberal democracy." The event was held in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the South Korea-US alliance.

Read Yonhap News Agency's reporting of the unveiling event and the memorials honoring the sacrifices of late U.S. MG John Singlaub and late U.S. Army COL William Weber.

John O. Singlaub, MG John K. Singlaub's son, along with his wife prepare to unveil MG John K. Singlaub's memorial at Imjingak Pyeonghwa Nuri Park. (Photo by Carrie Castillo, U.S. Forces Korea)

Dayne Weber, granddaughter of COL William Weber, speaks with LTG Willard M. Burleson III, commanding general, Eighth U.S. Army, before the unveiling ceremony. (Photo by Carrie Castillo, U.S. Forces Korea)

Return to TOC

February 1967:
Skyhook and MG Singlaub

Photos courtesy of Stray Goose International (SGI)

John Stryker Meyer

By John Stryker Meyer
Originally published in the April 2019 *Sentinel*

One of the amazing scenes in John Wayne's movie The Green Berets was an agent being whisked away to safety by a specially equipped C-130 fitted with the Fulton Recovery System, or simply Skyhook. The agent was fitted into a jump suit, with a thick nylon cord attached to it and tethered to a miniature blimp that rose to 500 hundred feet into the air. That C-130 flew under the blimp, the nylon cord suddenly lifted that agent off the ground and a specially trained Air Force crew inside the aircraft gradually winched that person inside the airplane.

By 1967, the earlier Skyhook program had been refined and replaced by the more sophisticated Fulton Recovery System. The Air Force had four C-130's equipped with complex V-jaw snares mounted on the planes nose and winches on the aircrafts' tailgates that would grip the line and pull the dangling person into the waiting arms of Air Force crew members inside the aircraft.

In early 1967, SFA Chapter 78 member MG (R) John K. Singlaub was the officer in charge of the highly classified, secret war run under the aegis of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group or simply SOG, and he had a problem with the Air Force implementing the Fulton Recovery System in a fully operational program. "The Air Force squadron commander in charge seemed to me to be dragging his feet," Singlaub told The Sentinel, during a March 1 interview at his home in Tennessee. "You know how too many career officers are, even back then, were reluctant because they appeared to me to be afraid someone might be hurt or they might lose one of their valuable aircraft."

Singlaub, then a colonel, said he had a "little chat" with that colonel because "we were running more missions, there were downed pilots and this gave us an option to extract key agents, downed pilots and, perhaps small recon teams. We had to explore its capabilities in actual missions. I reminded that colonel that we were fighting a war against a tenacious enemy and we had to explore any possible way to recover key agents or SOG members from behind enemy lines, pure and simple."

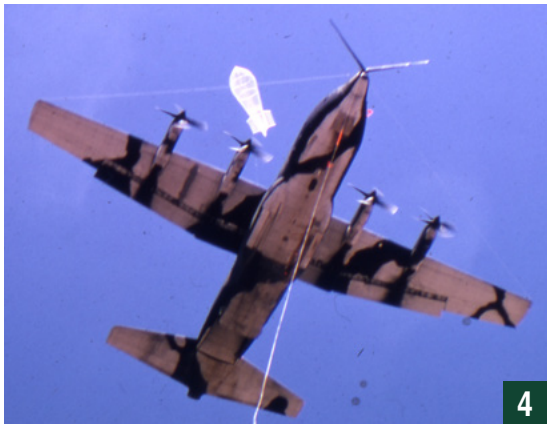
Then he told the Air Force colonel to be ready to check out the Fulton Recovery System with a live pick up. Singlaub asked the Air Force colonel if he'd like to be the first to be picked up. The colonel said no thanks. "Then I told him, that's ok, because I'll be the first person to be picked up live. I wouldn't ask any men under my command to do something dangerous that I myself wasn't willing to do first…needless to say, on that day at the end of February (1967) there were many nervous Air Force officers and NCOs on the runway at Bear Cat."

First, the Air Force dropped the Fulton rig kit, including his insulated coveralls, two tanks of helium to inflate the miniature white blimp and the thick, 500-foot nylon cord that was attached to Singlaub on one end and the blimp on the other. As the blimp rose into the air, Singlaub set on the ground, waiting for the C-130 to arrive. "The C-130 approached low and down wind. Its engines were cut back and I could hear a simple whistling sound as it slammed into the line….much to my surprise the lift off was much gentler than I had imagined, due to the stretching of the nylon cord, it had some give way to it. In a matter of seconds, or less, I was flying backwards. It was hot and then I realized I had another problem. The pilot was flying over the combat zone instead of turning and flying out over the South China Sea. I said to myself, 'Where is this guy going? He's flying over enemy territory!"

The pilot flew northeast toward the Iron Triangle and War Zone D. Adding to Singlaub's frustration and anger was the fact that the C-130 appeared not climb above 1000 feet, meaning he was a flying target for NVA/VC troops. A few days earlier, Singlaub had flown over the war zone with Maj. Gen. Bill Depuy, "and I vividly remembered seeing those green tracers from enemy weapons reaching up and hitting our chopper that day, and, as I was on my back, hanging behind the C-130, unable to turn over due to the wind, I imagined enemy soldiers firing at me! Of course, had the enemy known it was a colonel hanging behind the aircraft, I'm sure there would have been more gunfire."

Singlaub said it felt as though he hung outside behind the aircraft "for what seemed like a long time," before he felt the wind change and he finally observed the aircraft's tail section. Shortly, he was pulled inside the reliable workhorse airplane. "I was real happy to be inside that airplane. Real happy….the important point here was, we proved it could work. I was real pleased it worked. Later, I went up there (over North Vietnam) and supervised one of the missions that picked up a pilot, or an agent. To be honest, I forget whom we picked up, but we did. I believe we successfully used this procedure to pick up a few pilots in North Vietnam. It gave us one more tool to use."

In 1967, Singlaub was 54 years old. His official title in MACV-SOG was "Chief SOG", the officer in charge of all SOG operations. He served on a Jedbergh Team in Europe and Asia during WWII, in spec ops during the Korean War and served two plus years as "Chief SOG"



1 MG Singlaub inflating the balloon
2 The balloon with aircraft guide flag markers
3 MG Singlaub ready for pickup
4 Balloon engaged by C-130
5 MG Singlaub at lift off
6 In the air!
7 MG Singlaub being winched into the aircraft.
8 MG Singlaub recovered in aircraft.

during the Vietnam War. Many years after the war during dinner with Gen. William Westmoreland, "Westy" reminisced about several missions and daring deeds that Singlaub ran during his military career, which began before WWII.

Under urging from his wife Joan, Singlaub admitted that Westmoreland called Singlaub his "young whipper-snapper." Singlaub added, "Westy told me, 'I'd think of the hardest mission I had and I'd give it to him and some way, one way or the other, he'd get it done.' "

Just like Singlaub did in late February 1967, hanging from the back of a C-130 over enemy territory. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

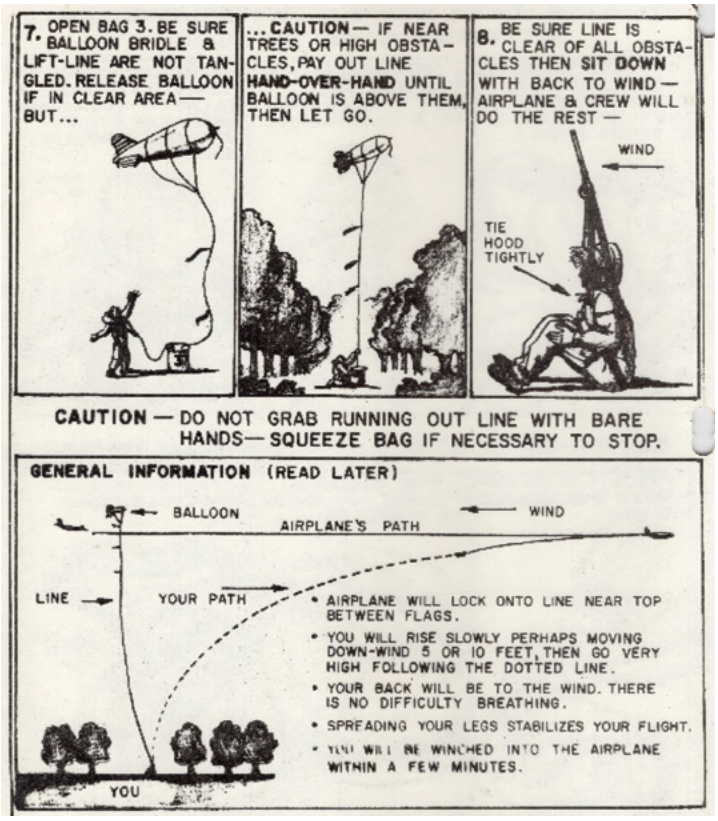
John Stryker Meyer, a Special Forces veteran of two tours with MACV-SOG's Spike Team Idaho, has written extensively about the secret war in Vietnam. He is the author of several books, hosts the SOGCast podcast, and shares more at sogchronicles.com.

STARS Surface to Air Recovery System

John Gargus

By Colonel John Gargus (USAF, Retired)
Originally published in the April 2019 *Sentinel*

Surface to air recovery system (STARS) was the most exciting operational capability of the early C-130 Combat Talon aircraft. Each one of the eleven crew members had a role in this unusual event. Regretfully, it was never employed during the Vietnam War for its designed purpose to recover stranded personnel from otherwise inaccessible hostile environment. Live personnel recoveries were staged only for the VIPs and air crews that were most likely to end up stranded deep inside of enemy territory.



A page from the Skyhook kit instructions on how to assemble the Skyhook for recovery. The diagram at the bottom of the page illustrates the aircraft snagging the line and taking the man in tow. Photo courtesy of Stray Goose International (SGI)

Ideally, a Combat Talon would air drop a one or a two man Fulton recovery kit to a survivor and then 20 minutes later return to intercept a 500 foot long lift-line for a ground to air extraction. This time was believed to be sufficient for an able bodied survivor to unpack the kit and follow enclosed instructions to don the special harnessed suit connected to an inflatable balloon by a 500 foot long nylon braided lift-line. Kit's helium containing canister was included for that purpose. Fully inflated balloon would hoist the lift-line to the level of the rescuing aircraft and the survivor was instructed to sit down facing into the wind and wait for an exhilarating lift off.

Meanwhile, the Combat Talon's crewmembers would make their own preparations. Two loadmasters would secure themselves with restraining harnesses on the lowered ramp ready to secure the lift-line to the equipment that will bring the survivor inside of their aircraft. The second flight engineer would become the winch operator who will control the reel in of the lift-line with the trailing survivor suspended at its end. Behind the flight engineer is the third pilot who will serve as the safety officer. He will monitor the movements of the ramp crew, interpret their hand signal communications and relay the recovery progress to the cockpit crew through the intercom. Loadmasters do not wear headsets because the intercom cables could restrict their movements on the ramp. During demonstration pick-ups the electronic warfare officer and radio operator observe the operation from their crew positions at the bulkhead of the cabin because they have no assigned duties. However, on pick-ups inside of hostile air space they would play key roles in keeping the aircraft out of harm's way. Then the electronic warfare officer would monitor transmissions from enemy radars and provide warnings of impending attacks and the radio operator would assist him and maintain contact with a controlling ground based or airborne command post.

Up in the cockpit, the map reading navigator would don a restraining harness and open the overhead escape hatch through which he will have to retrieve the trailing upper portion of the lift-line. The radar navigator would determine the wind direction and velocity and guide the aircraft for a head wind approach to the survivor and his already lift-line tethered balloon. The two pilots with the flight engineer between them would begin to strain their eyes, trying to locate the deployed balloon and the three red flags on the lift-line just below it. For nighttime pick-ups there would be three pulsating strobe lights spaced in the same lift-line location. Once spotted, the flags, or the

strobe lights, must be perpendicular to the horizon to ensure that the aircraft is headed upwind. Consequently, if the flag alignment stretches at an angle from one o'clock to seven o'clock position, the aircraft must make a track correction to the right until the flags are aligned from twelve to six o' clock position. Once that is done, the intercept flying pilot aims for the middle flag and ensures that the lift-line gets engaged between the 24 foot span of extended "V" shaped yokes for a safe slide into the nose mounted locking mechanism. In case of a miss, the lift line gets cut by sharp blades imbedded in the cables that are stretched between the aircraft's nose and its wing tips. This prevents the lift-line getting wound up around the spinning propellers.

The first sensation the survivor experiences is a gentle lift one feels on an upward curve of a playground swing. This wink of an eye moment is followed by a rapid vertical acceleration that measures less in "G" forces than the opening shock of a parachute. This vertical ascent can clear a 30 foot tree 5-10 feet behind the sitting survivor. Then the vertical lift transits in to a rapid upward curved path that propels the survivor well above the aircraft's flight level. It is then followed by a downward fall along a diminishing sine wave curve until the survivor's path gets stabilized behind the aircraft at its flight level. The first downward path along this sine wave curve frightens the survivor because its descending movement increases his body's velocity and diminishes the forward pull on the line, giving him a sensation that he is freefalling and is no longer connected to the lift-line.

The sudden jerk on the lift-line ruptures the balloon and the loose end of the line slaps down on top of the aircraft's fuselage. The map reading navigator has to retrieve it into the aircraft by sticking out the upper part of his body through the escape hatch into the 135 mile slips stream. He has a tied down pole with a hook to help him to pull the line that ends up draped on either side of the fuselage into the cockpit for clean-up. He has to remove the remnants of any flags or glass strobe lights from the line and cut off the hardened pig tail of the line to prevent them from jamming in the nose locking device. This allows the loadmasters an easy pull through of the lift-line to the rear ramp of the aircraft.

Meanwhile, the loadmasters either kneel, or lie down, on the floor of the ramp and try to snatch the lift-line trailing behind the aircraft with a special bomb shaped fish hook. They pull the line inside and secure it in two places on the ramp. Then they wait for a signal from the safety officer that they can pull the top of the lift-line out of the cockpit through the released nose locking device. Once this is done, they lock the tail of the line to the winch and raise an "A" frame support for a pulley that elevates the lift line from the floor to a shoulder height level. This allows the pulled in survivor to arrive at the ramp in a stand up position. The flight engineer then operates the winch that winds up the lift-line and reels in the survivor for a joyous welcome on board event. ❖

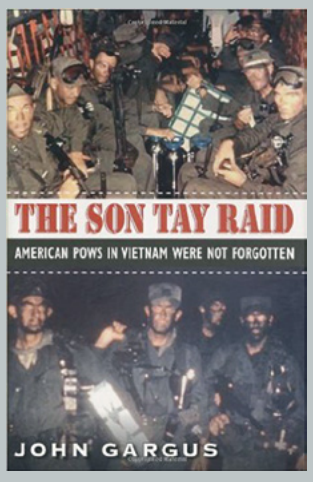
About the Author

John Gargus was born in Czechoslovakia from where he escaped at the age of fifteen when the Communists pulled the country behind the Iron Curtain. He was commissioned through AFROTC in 1956 and made the USAF his career. He served in the Military Airlift Command as a navigator, then as an instructor in AFROTC.

He went to Vietnam as a member of Special Operations and served in that field of operations for seven years in various units at home and in Europe. He participated in the air operations planning for the Son Tay POW rescue and then flew as the lead navigator of one of the MC-130s that led the raiders to Son Tay, for which he was awarded the Silver Star.

His non-flying assignments included Deputy Base Command at Zaragoza Air Base in Spain and at Hurlburt Field in Florida and a tour as Assistant Commandant of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

He retired in 1983 after serving as the Chief of USAF's Mission to Colombia, having accrued more than 6,100 flight hours, including 381 combat hours in Southeast Asia. In 2003 he was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. He has authored two books, *The Son Tay Raid: American POWs in Vietnam Were Not Forgotten*, published in 2007, and *Combat Talons in Vietnam: Recovering a Covert Special Ops Crew*, published in 2017. He has been married to Anita since 1958. The Garguses have one son and three daughters.



Skyhook Recovery: A Brief History

Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor
(2012-2019)

By Lonny Holmes
Originally published in the April 2019 *Sentinel*

The recovery of personnel from the ground by a flying aircraft became practical in the early 1960s and continued until early 1982 using the Fulton Skyhook procedure or as the Air Force named it, Surface to Air Recovery System (STARS). The STARS system was developed by inventor Robert Edison Fulton Jr. during a long career and the first human pick-up was on August 12, 1958.

During World War II recovery systems were studied and prototypes produced to recover shot down pilots but due to technical difficulties were never perfected. Following the Korean War the CIA furthered the development of the All American System which became a forerunner of the STARS and on November 29, 1952 attempted the recovery of two American CIA Agents from the Kirin Province of Manchuria. A double agent had alerted the Chinese and the C-47 was shot down and the pilots killed. Agents Richard G. Feateau and John T. Downey spent twenty plus years as POW's and were released on December 1971 and March 1973 respectively.

The first live pick-up using STARS occurred on August 12, 1958 at Quantico Marine Base, recovering Marine SSG Levi Wesley Woods of the 2nd Recon Force.

The first operational recovery using STARS occurred on Operation Coldfeet in the Arctic on a Soviet Union research ice station that they had developed then abandoned. Two American agents were parachuted in to gather information and equipment then extracted under difficult weather conditions on May 31, 1962.

The first Green Beret recovered was Captain Farrington on February 24, 1964, at Fort Bragg by a CV-2 Caribou. On March 18, 3rd Special Forces Group Commander EB Smith was picked up, again at Fort Bragg. Continuing the saga of famous Green Beret Officers picked up by the STARS are: Major General William P. Yarborough on May 21, 1964 at Camp Mackall and Brigadier General Joseph Stillwell on August 13, 1964 at Fort Bragg.

On May 3, 1966 the first dual (side by side) recovery was performed at Edwards Air Force Base, CA, when Air Force Colonel Allison C. Brooks and A3C Ronald L. Doll were picked up.

A number of STARS recoveries were performed in Viet Nam, Thailand and the Philippines. Major General, then MACV-SOG Commander Colonel Jack Singlaub was extracted from Long Thanh, Viet Nam on February 24, 1967 by a C-130E aircraft which was by then the designated primary recovery vehicle. Colonel Singlaub's story written by Chapter 78 President John S. Meyer is featured in this issue of the *Sentinel*.

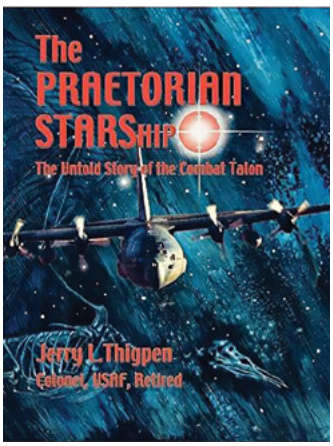
Following my return from Viet Nam to Thailand and working at the SFOB dispensary waiting for my team assignment I was involved in the STARS recovery of Green Beret Major Douglas Horne at Lopburi, Thailand on May 23, 1969. Yes, it was exciting and was over in seconds for those of us on the ground.

Major General William P. Yarborough, father of the modern Green Berets, was picked up the STARS on May 21, 1964 at Camp Mackall.

Of the 166 STARS pickups recorded by Richard Green, USSOCOM Historian, there was one death — SFC Clifford W. Strickland, B-32, 10th SFGA on April 26, 1982 in Germany. This was the last STARS. The STARS historical collection effort is a work in progress by the SOCOM Historian

*(**Editor's note:** Richard Greene has reported that the document is the final stages as of now, September, 2025, and being prepared for review and approval for publication. We hope to be able to post it on our website sometime in the near future.)*

For detailed information on STARS I refer you to the story by Colonel John Gargus in this issue of the Sentinel who has participated in a number of live pickups. The single most compete source of STARS information is Colonel Jerry L. Thigpen's book, *The PRAETORIAN STARship: The Untold Story of the Combat Talon*. ❖



The Praetorian STARShip: The Untold Story of the Combat Talon by Jerry L. Thigpen

SOG Boss Jack Singlaub Gives Chapter 78 Members a Mission

Editor's note: This account of a meeting at the home of the late MG John Singlaub carried a significance not mentioned in story that follows.

Upon MG Singlaub's passing, he was memorialized on *Sandboxx.us* by Stavros Atlamazoglou in "John Singlaub, American Commando and Leader, Dies at 100." In it, Stavros quotes John Stryker Meyer:

"He always cared deeply about the men who served under him. For example, Doug 'the Frenchman' LeTourneau and I had lunch with Jack, his wife Joan and Debra, Joan's daughter. Joan told Jack that Doug was battling Stage 4 bone marrow cancer and was having some issues with the VA at the time. Jack pulled out his cell phone, dialed a rare-cancer doctor in Houston who specialized in that cancer. The doctor took Jack's call and following Jack's request, he examined Doug four times and monitored his condition until he died from heat exposure-related causes July 26, 2019," Meyer told Sandboxx News.

The visit described in the previous story was the same occasion Meyer recalled here—just one of many times Singlaub's actions revealed his deep concern for his men.

As Stavros noted: *"There are many traits that make a good leader: Vision and moral courage are some. But a good leader isn't necessarily beloved by his or her men. Those leaders that earn both the love and respect of their men are a rare breed indeed. One trait that they possess is empathy and sympathy for their men. They truly care about them and their well-being. They understand that a true leader is there to serve his men and not the other way around. Singlaub was such a leader."*

SFA Chap 78 members Doug "The Frenchman" LeTourneau, left, and John S. Meyer, right, visit with Spec Ops legend (retired) Maj. Gen. Jack Singlaub in Franklin, TN on April 21, 2017.

By John Stryker Meyer

Originally published in the May 2017 *Sentinel*

Two SFA Chapter 78 members recently visited spec ops living legend Jack Singlaub in his new Tennessee home.

The newest Chapter 78 member, SOG recon man Doug L. "The Frenchman" LeTourneau and fellow SOG recon dog and chapter member John Stryker "Tilt" Meyer visited (retired) Major General Jack Singlaub, his wife Joan and daughter Debra in Franklin, TN, on April 21.

Before brunch, Singlaub talked about previous missions as an agent for the OSS during WWII, spec ops in Korea and of course, a few stories about his two-year tenure as Chief SOG. He was one of colonels who commanded the secret war in Southeast Asia conducted under the aegis of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group. And, he was kind enough to autograph his book *"Hazardous Duty"* for The Frenchman, who served one year in SOG running recon with RT Virginia and RT Idaho.

Before they left, Singlaub asked them to carry his message of gratitude to the Mel Swanson Day Celebration of Life to be held the following day at the Tennessee Museum of Aviation in Sevierville, TN. Singlaub, who turns 96 in July, explained that he couldn't attend it but asked the SOG recon men to do so on his behalf. We saluted and provided him details about the venerable Air Force A-1 Skyraider pilot and squadron commander who flew hundreds of sorties in the single-engine SPAD in support of SOG and SAR (Search and Rescue) missions in Laos, N. Vietnam and Cambodia.

Reviewing Hardy's MACV-SOG Vol 10, showing the General Doug's photograph in the book when he was on recon team Virginia

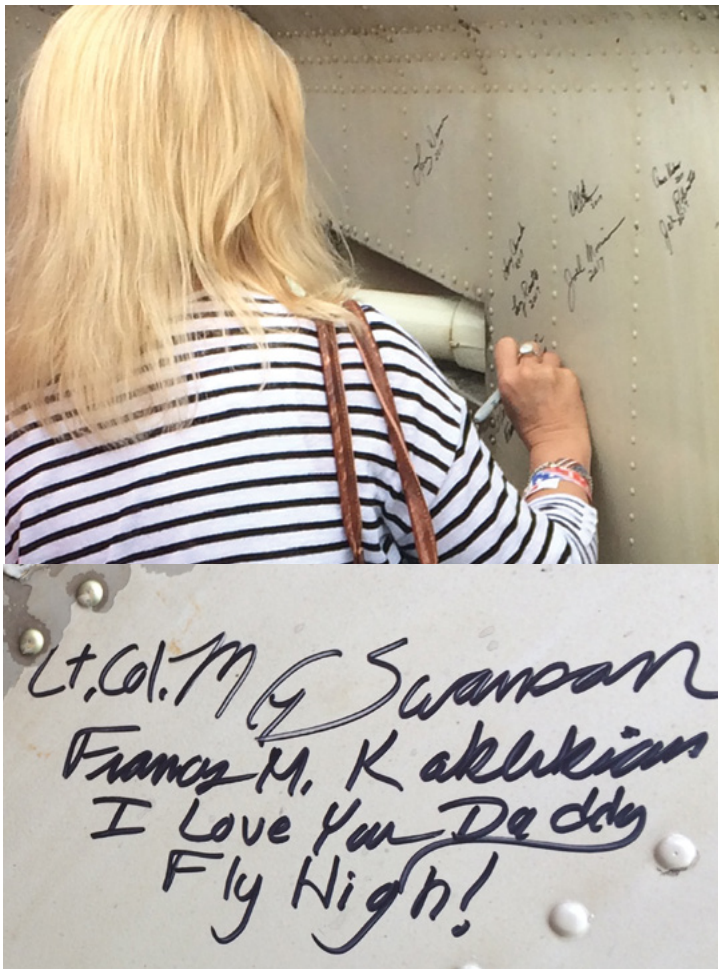
The Frenchman and Tilt sit in the door of a Sikorsky H-34 helicopter.

After returning from flying the missing-man formation, piloted by Neal Melton.

In early 1970, Lt. Col. Melvin G. "Mel" Swanson was assigned to command the 56th SOW Operating Location Alpha Alpha (OLAA) at Da Nang, where he led the small unit in support of SOG recon and Hatchet Force missions across the fence, along with pulling SAR missions. In September 1970, a Green Beret Hatchet Force out of Kontum ran one of the most successful missions against communist forces in Laos in Operation Tailwind. With close air support from SPADs led by Swanson, Marine Corps Cobra gunships from Scarface, and fast mover jets during the day and Spectre C-130s at night, the 16 Green Berets and 120 indigenous forces successfully destroyed enemy weapons and food caches, collected hundreds of enemy intelligence reports and documents while successfully taking pressure off of a CIA operation deep in Laos, thus enabling then to crush enemy resistance at that time.

When Swanson died March 12, fellow OLAA pilots and Museum staff planned the celebration of his life that included SOG recon men George Hunt, George Steinberg, John Hutchens, LeTourneau and Meyer who told stories about how fearless SPAD pilots like Swanson had saved their teams on numerous occasions during the eight-year secret war.

Swanson's daughter Frances and her granddaughter were told that Gen. Singlaub wanted them to know that there were times when the Air Force brass attempted to replace A1 Skyraiders with other assets, but he and other commanders insisted on keeping SPADs assigned to support SOG missions because they provided the most ordnance in close support of SOG teams and could stay on station longer than any other aircraft. Singlaub said he saluted Mel Swanson, his courage and all of the SPAD pilots who served in Vietnam. ❖



Mel Swanson's daughter signed the A1-H Skyraider that spread Mel's ashes.

Independence-Born, Owens Valley Raised: Remembering Captain James Birchim

By Debra Holm

The story of Captain James Birchim began on July 16, 1946, in Independence, California, a small town in the Owens Valley's southern stretch, framed by the Sierra Nevada to the west and the Inyo Mountains to the east. His family had lived in the Owens Valley since the mid-to-late 1800s. James grew up there, attending Owens Valley elementary and high schools.

Taking a break from studying entomology in college in 1966, Birchim joined the Army, determined to open doors for his future. He excelled in training, completing Officer Candidate School along with specialized courses in both Chemical and Special Forces schools. After a short assignment at the Presidio in San Francisco, he received orders to report to Travis Air Force Base in July, 1968, with Vietnam as his destination.

By November 1968, then-First Lieutenant Birchim commanded an eight-man Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) under the 5th Special Forces Group, Command & Control North (FOB 2). On November 15, his team set out to locate a missing patrol but walked into an ambush. During the firefight, Birchim suffered a broken ankle and fragmentation wounds, yet he managed to call for extraction that evening.

When rescue helicopters arrived, the terrain prevented them from landing. The crews lowered McGuire rigs—ropes with harnesses—to lift the men out. Four soldiers went up in the first helicopter. The second aircraft carried only three rigs for the four remaining men. Captain Birchim secured his soldiers first, then, despite his injuries, clung to the back of another man's rig in a desperate attempt to escape.

As the helicopter ascended, the rig tore through the trees, but Birchim held on. Thirty to forty-five minutes into the flight, a storm struck. Exhausted and wounded, he lost his grip and fell from roughly 2,500 feet.

Searchers scoured the area but never found his body. The Army declared him Missing in Action (MIA), and promoted him to Captain. Later this status was updated to Missing in Action and Presumed Dead. In 1972, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Captain Birchim's name is etched on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Panel 39W, Line 69). He left behind his wife, Barbara, whom he had married just two years earlier, their infant daughter, Kim, and their unborn son, David. Only 21 when she lost him, Barbara devoted her life to uncovering the truth of his fate. In 1988, she traveled to Vietnam in search of answers. Her journey led her to co-author *Is Anybody Listening? A True Story About the POW/MIAs in the Vietnam War,* giving voice to families of the missing.

James Douglas Birchim's life embodies extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty. Though his remains were never found, his legacy endures in the Owens Valley where he was born, and in the hearts of those who continue to honor his service. ❖

SFA Chapter 78 August 2025 Chapter Meeting

Photos by How Miller and Debra Holm

Guest Speaker, Jerry A. Guzzetta Author of *I Walked With Heroes*

1 **2** Guest speaker Jerry Guzzetta, who we first met at the July Chapter meeting at Iron Mike's, spoke about his highly rated book *I Walked With Heroes*. Jerry's book is the true account of his experiences as a Green Beret in MACV-SOG, the top-secret U.S. special operations unit in the Vietnam War. As the first chapter of his book focused on his personal story, he began by sharing some of those details with the group. The remainder of the book, as he put it, "is about the people I served with and the stuff that they did— people who did unbelievable things." He spoke about some of those men, many are considered SF legends. If you missed this presentation, definitely read his book. It is available for purchase on his website iwalkedwithheros.com and also on Amazon.

3 Christine, Jerry Guzzetta's daughter, and Lynn, his wife.

4 Wives of soldiers meet—at right, Geri Long, widow of past chapter president Bruce Long, meets Lynn Guzzetta, at left.

5 Chapter 78 Treasurer, Richard Simonian

6 Left to right, Mark Miller, Robert Casillas, and Ham Salley

7 Jim Duffy

8 Chapter President, Aaron Brandenburg

9 Left to right, Tom Turney, Chapter VP James, McLanahan, Mike Jameson, and James Carter.

10 Nimo brought the group up to date on matters regarding the Afghan refugee community, now also located in Needles as well as Mojave, California. On behalf of the community, chapter members were invited out for a future meeting at the Mojave community.

11 Travis Mayfield, Vietnam War Army veteran and member of the American Veterans Assistance Group.

12 Ernie Alonso, Army veteran and a member of the American Legion Newport Beach Post 291.


1

2


3


4


5


6


7


8


9


10


11


12