



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

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SOME GAVE ALL



5TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

Honoring All Special Forces Soldiers Lost in the Vietnam War



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FRONT COVER: During Legion week, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) gathered on September 24, 2025, to unveil the new Vietnam Memorial Wall on Gabriel Field, located at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The memorial includes 798 names of all Special Forces soldiers lost in Vietnam, including 58 SOG MIAs and 40 in-country SF MIAs. This photo, taken during the playing of the “Ballad of the Green Berets,” includes from left, Mayo Hadden, John S. Meyer, CWO 5 Mitch Taggart, George Sternberg, Marcus Whitt, SOA President Doug Godshall, CWO 5 Carey Hyde, 5th Special Forces Group Commander Col. Kenneth Wainwright Jr. (Photo by Sgt. Cody Williams)

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19TH SF GROUP



20TH SF GROUP



8TH SF GROUP



11TH SF GROUP



12TH SF GROUP

From the Editor | November 2025



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

This issue opens with a cover story by Debra Holm on the new Special Forces Vietnam Monument dedicated at Fort Campbell, Kentucky—home of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)—on Gabriel Field. The monument honors 798 Special Forces soldiers killed or missing in action during the Vietnam War, which spanned South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam.

James Bullinger of Chapter 88 shares the remarkable story of Green Beret medic Jarred

“Jay” Collins, recently appointed Lieutenant Governor of Florida. Decorated for valor and multiple Purple Hearts, Jay became the first Green Beret to return to full deployable status after losing a leg to combat wounds. His dedication to service continues in public life, and we wish him great success in his new role.

Also in this issue: a look ahead to the upcoming Son Tay Raiders Reunion, honoring those who carried out the daring 1970 mission to rescue American POWs near Hanoi. Though no prisoners were found, the operation became a model of precision planning and led to improved treatment of U.S. prisoners of war.

We’re also calling on readers to support the effort to establish a Special Forces Memorial at Jacksonville National Cemetery. The fundraising goal must be met by year’s end to allow for an unveiling in April 2026. Every contribution helps.

Author Jason Collins, known for the *Pucker Factor* series of books and the “MACV-SOG: Interviews with Warriors” *YouTube* channel, joins Jim Burns, Ron Winkles, and Charles Svoboda in profiling the USAF 20th SOS “Green Hornets,” who provided vital transport and fire support for SOG teams. I review their new book and Jason shares excerpts

from once-classified reports documenting the unit’s extraordinary record—including a gripping account of an aircrew forced down in Cambodia alongside Jerry “Mad Dog” Shriver’s recon team.

In “Lehr Regiment—Brandenburg z.b.V. 800,” COL (Ret.) Michael Haas recounts the exploits of Germany’s WWII special operations forces—from Otto Skorzeny’s rescue of Mussolini to Lt. Baron Adrian von Foelkersam’s deception tactics that helped capture the Maykop oilfields. His piece revisits daring missions and legendary ruses, including the infamous road-sign switch that stalled Patton’s advance.

From LTC (Ret.) George Williams, we have a photo of Medal of Honor recipient COL Ola Mize addressing Boy Scouts at a national jambo-ree—another reminder of Special Forces’ long support of Scouting.

Chapter 78’s Art Dolick contributes a page from the 17th Special Forces Group Daily Bulletin, a fascinating piece of SF history.

And finally, be sure to see our coverage of Chapter 78’s September meeting in Mojave, hosted by Afghan refugees supported by ACL and Chapter 78, with guest speaker Jim Shorten.

As always, enjoy—and please keep sending in your stories from life in Special Forces.❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting November 15, 2025

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

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

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

Chapter 78 Christmas Party

Saturday, December 13, 2025

Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club
1601 Bayside Dr, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625

1500 Cocktail Hour • Program Start Time 1600

With guest speaker Norma Donlon
Libations • Raffle • DJ and Dancing

COST

\$40.00 per person, same for guests

Special Note: Members of C/1/19 \$10 per person.

Please mail your check payable to SFA 78 **to arrive no later than 12/6/25** to: Santiago Corp, PO Box 11927, Santa Ana, CA 92711, Attn: Liz Rios

DRESS

Men: SFA Green Blazers, White Shirt with Regimental Tie,
Dark or Gray Slacks, or Sport Coat with Tie

Ladies: Cocktail Attire

If you haven’t sent your check in before December 3rd, please send an email to SFAChapter78@gmail.com with your name and guest name so we can have an accurate head count. Please make sure your check arrives on or before the 6th.

QUESTIONS??? Feel free to call or text Aaron Brandenburg (719) 963-3948 or send an email to abrandenburg443@gmail.com.

Honoring Our Fallen — The Gabriel Field Vietnam Memorial Unveiling



After the ceremony, left to right, Tony Bandiera, Jr., Marcus Whitt, Bill Werther, Ron Owens, George Sternberg, John Stryker Meyer, and Doug Godshall. (Photo by Sgt. Cody Williams)

By Debra Holm

During Legion Week on September 24, 2025, members of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) gathered at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to unveil the new Vietnam Memorial on Gabriel Field.

The monument bears the names of 798 Special Forces soldiers lost during the Vietnam War, including 58 SOG MIAs and 40 in-country Special Forces MIAs. Until now, their sacrifice had been symbolized by a single magnolia tree and plaque; the new monument ensures each soldier is remembered by name.

Gabriel Field, dedicated to Specialist 5 James “Kimo” Gabriel, Jr.—one of the first Green Berets killed in Vietnam—serves as sacred ground for the 5th Group. Since 1988, every member lost in combat or training has been honored there with a red maple tree and stone marker.

The dedication of the monument marks the completion of Phase I of the Gabriel Field Legacy Project. Phase II will add a formal entrance archway on the east side of the field, modeled after the Roman Victory Arches to reflect the unit’s proud nickname—the “Legion.” View illustrations of the plans for the park at www.sfa38.org.

Donations to support this project may be made online at sfa38.org or by check mailed to SFA Chapter 38, P.O. Box 223, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Questions about the project may be directed to Mike Cunningham at sfa38secretary@gmail.com. ♦



Remembering Gary Harned, who died in 1970 while missing in action. His remains were not recovered until 1995 and were officially identified in 2001. (Photo by Sgt. Cody Williams)



Left to right Bill Werther, Marcus Whitt, Ron Owens, John Meyer, John Mulholland and George Sternberg. (Courtesy John Stryker Meyer)



John Stryker Meyer with his grandson, his wife, Anna, and daughter, Alaina. (Courtesy John Stryker Meyer)



John Stryker Meyer points to the names of ST Idaho's MIAs, One-Zero Glen Lane and One-One Robert Owen. On May 20, 1968, Meyer was exiting a chopper for his first SOG assignment at Phu Bai just as Lane, Owen, and four indigenous troops boarded it, flying toward an enemy-held area in Laos' Salavan Province. The team was lost that day, and Lane and Owen remain officially Missing in Action, still unaccounted for. (Courtesy of John Stryker Meyer)

Green Beret Becomes 21st Florida Lt. Governor



By James Bullinger

Retired Army 1st Sgt. Jarrod “Jay” Collins is a highly decorated Special Forces combat-wounded veteran who served his country for over 23 years. Born in 1978 in Scobey, Montana, Collins enlisted in 1995 after high school. He served as an 18D medical specialist during his career, with service in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, the Special Warfare Medical Group (Airborne), and with the 7th and 1st Special Forces Group (Abn). His deployments as a medic include Afghanistan, Iraq, and twice to South America.

During his 2007 Afghanistan deployment, he was shot in the arm and helped perform surgery on himself in the field. A few months later, he sustained additional injuries that would eventually lead to the amputation of his left leg later in 2012. Following his lower leg amputation, Collins re-qualified as a fully deployable special forces operator, going on to serve for five more years on active duty. He retired in 2018 from his final assignment as the First Sergeant of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the Special Warfare Medical Group (Abn) at Fort Bragg, NC.

Collins’s awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Soldier’s Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, and Meritorious Service Medal, along with the Combat Infantryman Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, Military Freefall Parachutist Badge, Special Forces Tab, and numerous other unit and service awards. He is the 2017 recipient of the Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub/Jedburgh Award, presented by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

After retirement, Collins took a position with Operation BBQ Relief, overseeing the distribution of millions of meals to Americans following natural disasters and helping veterans and their families by creating culinary delights together. Through his nonprofit work across the country, Collins heard the concerns of many Americans—people who agree that they want their families to succeed, their children to have better lives than they did, and to improve the quality of life in their communities.



In 2022, Collins decided to enter public service by running for state senator in Florida’s Senate District 14.

During his tenure as a senator, he distinguished himself as the chairman of the Agricultural and Transportation Committees, championing infrastructure initiatives vital to Florida’s economic connections across tourism and agriculture. He also supported the state’s farming industry by banning cultivated meats and protecting farmlands from criminal intent. He authored and passed over 55 pieces of legislation and secured more than \$120 million in funding to uplift the Tampa Bay region, support first responders and veterans, and invest in educational institutions. Collins’s record of results and vision for the state led Governor Ron DeSantis to appoint him in August 2025 as the 21st Lieutenant Governor of the State of Florida. This makes Florida the only state that has two military veterans serving as governor and lieutenant governor.

A committed family man, Collins is married to his wife Layla of more than 25 years, who is also a retired 20-year veteran. They have two sons and reside in the Tampa area. ❖



SAVE THE DATE



THE 55TH & FINAL SON TAY RAIDER REUNION

Hosted in partnership with the National Infantry Association
Presented by the National Ranger Memorial Foundation



A LEGACY REMEMBERED. A BROTHERHOOD CELEBRATED.

Join us for a historic and heartfelt event as we honor the Son Tay Raiders - the brave men behind one of the most daring rescue missions in U.S. military history.

This special reunion will also commemorate and recognize:

- MACV-SOG • MIKE Force • Operation Tailwind
- The Battle of Lang Vei • Vietnam War POWs
- 50th Anniversary of the End of the Vietnam War
- 250th Anniversary of the U.S. Army's Founding

LOCATION: Ft. Benning, GA
DATE: November 19-21, 2025

Join us in paying tribute to these extraordinary warriors and their timeless impact on history.

Rangers Lead the Way!

Help Honor Our Heroes

Donate to the Special Forces Monument for the Jacksonville Nat'l Cemetery

TO REMEMBER AND HONOR
THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS



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 October 6, we've reached 34% of our goal—thank you to everyone who's contributed!

We must raise the remaining funds by December 31, 2025 to finalize contracts and ensure the monument is ready for the dedication ceremony on April 11, 2026.

Corporate sponsors are welcome *Every donation helps us reach our goal!*

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

How to Donate

GoFundMe

Donate easily through our GoFundMe page—most credit and debit cards accepted.

Note: GoFundMe adds an **optional** platform “tip” (typically 16–19.5%). You can adjust or remove it by selecting “Enter Custom Tip” before completing your donation.



Scan to Donate

By Check

Make checks payable to “SFA Chapter 88” with “SF Monument” on the memo line. Mail to:

SFA 88 Monument, 10539 Inverness Dr., Jacksonville, FL 32257

SFA Chapter 88 is a 501(c)(19) veterans charity (Fed Tax EIN: 56- 6148492). Donations are tax-deductible.

For more information, contact

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

Book Review

The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF Vietnam War Volume 1 by Jim Burns, Ron Winkles, Charles Svoboda, Jason B. Collins

By How Miller

Jason Collins has put together several books, including the *Pucker Factor* series, his powerful collection of action stories about MACV SOG, the super-secret group that ran operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. Many of the stories are first-person accounts.

Almost all of MACV SOG's missions included a strong component of air assets. Small, slow propeller-driven FAC planes did pre-mission area reconnaissance, communicated, and organized the other assets, such as Hueys and other unarmed "slicks" for infiltration and exfiltration, and a variety of armed aircraft, from helicopter gunships to propeller-driven "Spads" and jet-powered attack planes. The FACs, called "Covey," each carried a very experienced Green Beret with them to help communicate with the teams on the ground. And there was constant coverage by a high-flying C130 for longer-range communications, Moonbeam by night and Hillsboro by day.

Although an ideal recon mission would involve insertion in the enemy's area of operations, finding actionable intelligence, and getting back out without being detected, it very often did not go that way. When a team was discovered and came into enemy contact, they were often outnumbered by tens or hundreds to one. That's when the whole array of assets got into the action. If a team could not be quickly extracted, then the enemy would need to be held at bay by those gunships. That kept everybody very busy. Once the team was extracted, then the gunships would let loose with everything they had at the enemy.

Needless to say, we could not have done our job without the very brave airmen who had our backs, sometimes at the cost of their own lives.

This book is a history of one of those collections of brave men who were the Air Force's only Huey Helicopter unit whose full-time job was to support SOG, along with some search and rescue-type missions. The 20th SOS Green Hornets flew out of both Vietnam and Thailand. Jason starts with selections from then Top-Secret Project CHECO reports (Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations); one is dated 4 December 1968. They detailed the unit's history, operations, and lessons learned. You can read a section from 1967–1969 in this issue of the *Sentinel*, beginning on the page following this review.

There are details on weapons and tactics used, followed by a couple of pictorial histories of 20th airmen. Jason has also allowed us to share one of the stories about an airman who found himself stuck on the ground with a SOG team led by legendary Jerry "Mad Dog" Shriver, called "Bird Down in Cambodia." You will find it beginning on page 11. It is good to see the tale told from an airman's perspective. Jerry and his dog Klaus show up elsewhere in the book too.

There is an account, typically with news clippings and photos of each man of the 20th SOS that was killed in action.



The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF Vietnam war Volume 1:
20TH SOS GREEN HORNETS in Vietnam

By Jim Burns, Ron Winkles, Charles Svoboda, Jason B. Collins

Published by Barnes & Noble Press, 12/15/2024

228 pages

Available for purchase in hardbound or paperback at

[BarnesandNoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)

The one-time commander of CCS, who passed a year ago, LTC Fred Lindsey, wrote "Secret Green Beret Commandos in Cambodia," detailing much of the action there. Often the only records were the award citations that typically gave the action's location as "deep in enemy-controlled territory," as most of the records were ordered destroyed before SOG shut down in 1972. There is a large section of this book that utilizes Fred's information.

This is a tribute to brave men who are usually only mentioned when a SOG team got in trouble and regularly saved Green Beret asses. Jason does a very good job in honoring them in an entertaining way. ❖

PROJECT CHECO

(Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations)

South East Asia Reports

By Jason Collins

An excerpt from *The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF Vietnam war Volume 1: 20TH SOS GREEN HORNETS in Vietnam* by Jim Burns, Ron Winkles, Charles Svoboda, Jason B. Collins; published by Barnes & Noble Press, 12/15/2024; 228 pages.

By July 1967, the unit had 13 UH-1F helicopter deployed at Nha Trang, Tan Son Nhut, and Kontum. From 1 July to 30 September 1967, supporting cross-border operations out of Kontum, the UH-1Fs transported more than 63 tons of cargo and 5,314 passengers, and expended 389,000 rounds of ammunition.

The squadron's assets were stretched to the limit. Logistics problems, which were due in large part to the conduct of operations remote from the main operating base, compounded the problem of helicopter shortages.

Nevertheless the "Green Hornets" increased the level of operations during the last three months of 1967. The unit performed the following missions in support of MACSOG:

Armed UH-1F:	Infiltration	104
	Exfiltration	127
	Visual Reconnaissance	66
	Army Base Defense	21
	Tactical Movement	257
Unarmed UH-1F:	Infiltration	148

The highlight of the last quarter of 1967 was a change in the location of the Forward Operating Location from Kontum to Ban Me Thuot on 10 December. Ban Me Thuot (BMT), with only a few temporary interruptions, remained the primary FOL of the 20th SOS until its withdrawal from the RVN in early 1972. The probable reason for the move to BMT was to enhance SOG operations into Cambodian territory. The effect of the move on the 20th SOS was alleviation of aircraft shortages and associated logistic problems, since BMT was significantly closer to the main support base at Nha Trang.

"Green Hornet" Operations - 1968 (U)

The "Green Hornets" saw much more direct combat action in early 1968. Reaction to the Communist Tet Offensive accounted for most of the increase by diverting support from the primary mission: SOG



cross-border operations. In the first three months of 1968, equipped with 15 UH-1Fs, the unit more than doubled the sortie level of the previous quarter. Armed helicopters fired some 834,000 rounds of ammunition and launched over 2,000 rockets; the first figure represented nearly a three-fold increase, and the second figure a seven-fold increase, over expenditures during the previous quarter.

Although helicopters continually supported infiltration and exfiltration missions, they frequently supported ground elements in a conventional air assault role. Extracts from the 20th Helicopter Squadron Historical Report describe this type of support:

"The gunships were first scrambled before dawn on 30 January. They fired on suspected mortar concentrations. Later that day two gunships drove VC [Viet Cong] and NVA troops from a stream of refugees and killed six of the enemy as confirmed by FAC's. Before the day was over, the gunships took part in an assault on an estimated two companies of NVA, dropping, 28 more of the enemy according to FAC's...At 0330 hours on 2 February 1968, a gunship element was launched to attack observed enemy mortar positions. An enemy position was observed firing and was immediately attacked and destroyed by the gunships. A few minutes later, the flight was advised that an ARVN compound was under heavy attack 2 miles west of Ban Me Thuot. ...The gunships put their initial fire at 50 meters inside the perimeter and on succeeding passes worked outward to drive the enemy outside the compound..."

During the spring of 1968, the 20th Helicopter Squadron received eight additional UH-1F helicopters, enabling another surge in operations. To accommodate the new aircraft and aircrews, the unit formed another flight, with the helicopters concentrated at Ban Me Thuot. Normally ten aircraft were situated there at any one time: four gunships, four troop carrier helicopters (commonly called "slicks"), and two spare helicopters (one gunship and one slick).

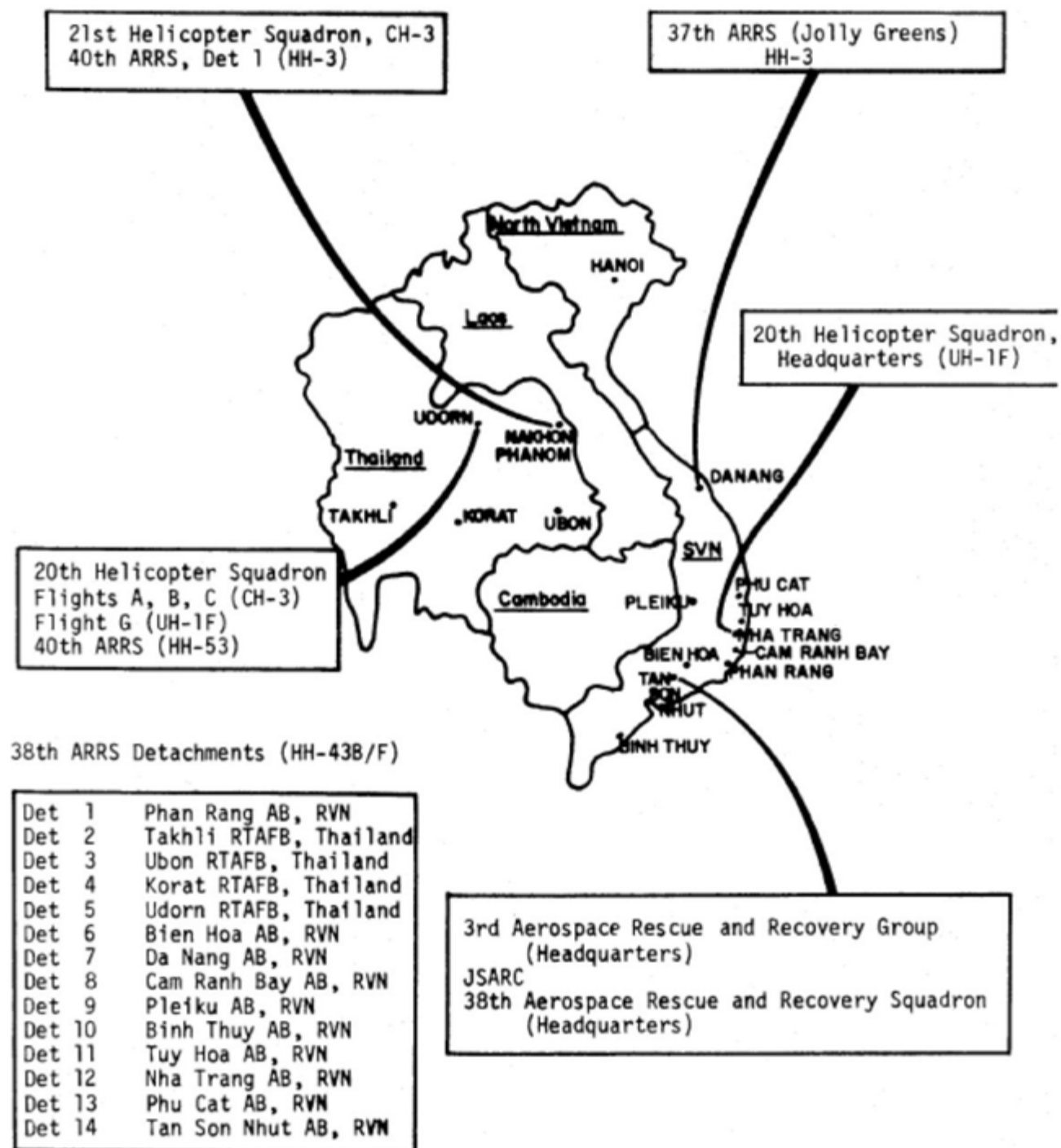
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FIGURE 1

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Support to Daniel Boone operations, compared to other mission, attenuated further during the spring. The 20th Helicopter Squadron rendered support to Daniel Boone operations on only nine days during a three-month period. The unit participated mostly in fire suppression missions, but did perform many insertions and extractions inside the RVN.

From 1 July through 30 September 1968, the newly-designated 20th SOS was able to increase its support to MACSOG so that it represented approximately half of the squadron's total effort. It retained ten aircraft at Ban Me Thuot but transferred four aircraft to the Udorn detachment. Both in-country and out-country infiltration and exfiltration missions encountered greater enemy resistance. The number of emergency extractions jumped notably. Aircraft damages and crewmember injuries rose proportionately: forty hits from enemy groundfire were sustained, and five crewmembers were wounded.

The following account of an emergency extraction alludes to the hazards of such an operation and underscores the requirements for aircrew courage, flight proficiency, and coordination between ground and airborne forces:

"On 2 September, the UH-1F's were launched on an emergency extraction of a Long Range Reconnaissance patrol... When the forward air controller arrived, he located their [ground team's] position and directed them eastward, toward a landing zone. After cresting a hill and starting down slope, the team made contact with hostile forces in a trench and bunker complex.

After exchanging fire with the enemy, the team retreated to the west [UH-1F] crews arrived and protected the team with mini-gun and rocket fire. The FAC directed the team toward a bomb crater approximately 75 yards north; the team met hostile fire after mov-

ing approximately 35 yards and had to retreat to their previous position. The gunships continued to deliver ordnance on known enemy positions and were drawing automatic weapons fire from the north, east, and south of the team. The two gunships were getting low on fuel and, prior to being relieved by guns 3 and 4, they continued to suppress the fire in the bomb crater area. The FAC directed the team into the bomb crater... [A slick] crew made a descent to come in at tree top level, and to a hover above the bomb crater. The crater was too small to permit landing, so a rope ladder pickup was made. As the team climbed the rope ladder, Gunships 3 and 4 made repeated mini-gun passes overhead to suppress the automatic weapons fire... During the last five minutes of the pickup, the FAC received fire from heavy automatic weapons to the south. Immediately after the slick departed the landing zone, several hostile troops were spotted in the bomb crater that was used for extraction of the team."

In the ensuing months of 1968 the "Green Hornets" resumed full-scale support to MACSOG. During this period the unit lost two aircraft. On 26 November, one gunship was downed by enemy groundfire during an emergency extraction operation. The next day, a slick registered the second loss when it crashed during an infiltration mission. These losses portended an attrition problem which emerged in 1969 and severely jeopardized the Air Force SAW helicopter role.

The 20th SOS Crisis in 1969 and 1970 (U)

In early 1969 the 20th SOS began experiencing a series of helicopter losses from hostile causes and maintenance malfunctions. The problem became acute in the summer when a rash of engine failures resulted in numerous losses and caused a low operationally ready rate in the remaining force. ♦

Interviews WITH



WARRIORS



MACV SOG Green Hornets 20th SOS UH-1 Tactical Operations

Visit Jason Collins *YouTube* channel "[MACV-SOG: Interviews with Warriors](#)" for this episode with

USAF film footage explaining about the Twin engine UH-1F.

Purchase *The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF in Vietnam*, available in hard and soft bound, through [Barnes & Noble](#). This is only volume #1, #2 is the process of being created.



By SSgt Jim Burns

Bird Down in
CAMBODIA
29 October 1967

An excerpt from *The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF Vietnam War Volume 1: 20TH SOS GREEN HORNETS in Vietnam* by Jim Burns, Ron Winkles, Charles Svoboda, Jason B. Collins; published by Barnes & Noble Press, 12/15/2024; 228 pages.

Photo on previous page—Jim Burns with Bob Hope (Courtesy Jim Burns, from *The 20th SOS Green Hornets USAF Vietnam War Volume 1: 20TH SOS GREEN HORNETS in Vietnam*)

BY SSGT Jim Burns

U.S.A.F., UH-1F helicopter, tail number 65-7927 as a flight mechanic/gunner with the 20th Helicopter Squadron “Green Hornets”.

We were the only U.S.A.F. UH-1 “Huey” helicopter unit in the Vietnam War.

During my tour from June 1967 to March 1968, we were assigned directly to MACV SOG and operated out of forward operating bases at Kontum and Ban Me Thuot, RVN.

This day began, like many others, at the MACV SOG camp at Kontum(FOB II), RVN, also known as CCC. I had completed my pre-flight on my bird and we received our mission briefing for the day. Our mission was to insert a six-man team (two Americans & four Montagnard ‘mercenaries’) into a landing zone (LZ) along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia, near the triborder area of South Viet Nam, Laos & Cambodia. For this insert my bird was designated as “low bird”, which meant we would be carrying the team and making the insert. Our ‘gaggle’ consisted of three Air Force UH-1F ‘slicks’, four Air Force UH-1F ‘gunships’, two Army UH-1B ‘gunships’, an 01 “Birdog” Forward Air Controller (FAC) and a couple of A-1 fighters (the A-1’s were not allowed to cross into Cambodia so once we crossed the border, they stayed behind in SVN). My pilot was Capt. John Fiser, CoPilot was 1st Lt. Graham, my left door gunner, was Sgt. O’Leary and I was on the right gun.

We loaded up the team and took off, headed for the LZ in Cambodia. Our ‘slicks’ had M-60 machine guns mounted in the cabin door and each crewmember carried a M-16 automatic rifle, a .38 cal. revolver side arm, a survival vest and a set of chest armor plate. Both Sgt. O’Leary and I wore ‘gunner’s belts’, which was a belt, buckled around our waist with a strap that was attached to a tie down ring in the cabin floor by a buckle. None of us wore the armor plate, aka “chicken plate.” The pilots placed theirs in the cockpit chin windows and us guys in back (GIB’s) sat on ours. The UH-1F’s are the smaller cabin versions of the Huey (like the UH-1B models) and we had removed all the seats, both to save weight and make it easier and faster for the teams to get off or on the bird. On my ‘slick’ we had eight of us in the cabin, two pilots in the front. One of the other two ‘slicks’ had just the two pilots and two gunners and the other ‘slick’ had two pilots, two gunners and a Special Forces medic. The gunship’s all carried the basic four-man crew.

Things were going quite smoothly as we crossed the border, and we were cruising along at about 1,000 feet and preparing to begin our descent and dash to the LZ. We were about ten minutes away from

our intended LZ, when suddenly there was a loud “bang” or explosion that came from the engine area, and we lost all engine power to the transmission and rotors.

Capt. Fiser immediately entered an autorotation and called out that we had lost power and we were going down. He called out a “mayday” as we started down. The “Green Hornet” gunships immediately closed in behind us and started following us down. One of the gunship’s called to us that we were on fire with flames and smoke coming from the engine compartment and were trailing a lot of smoke.



Capt. Fiser said the engine was running just fine... but we had no power to the rotor. We found out later that the speed decreaser gearbox (SDG) that connects the engine to the main transmission had blown apart and was on fire. As luck would have it, Capt. Fiser was able to auto rotate to a soft marshy clearing along what looked like a very shallow stream. He did a great job of setting us down safely (one of the softest landings I could remember) and we all began to get our gear and exit the bird, which was still on fire. As soon as we hit the ground the SOG team, Sgt. O’Leary and the copilot exited the left side of the bird. One of them grabbed the fire extinguisher and put out the fire in the left side of the engine compartment. At the same time, I was getting my M-60 machine gun off its mount, grabbing my survival vest, M-16 rifle and as much M-60 ammo as I could wrap around my neck. I jumped out and went about a foot before I was yanked to a sudden stop. When I looked back to see what had grabbed me, I realized I had forgotten to disconnect my gunner’s belt, so I was still attached to the bird. I had to turn around, lay down my rifle and my survival vest, to free up a hand, so I could disconnect my gunner’s belt.

Once this was done, I picked my rifle and survival vest up and started for a large bush a short distance away from the right side of the bird. I glanced back at the bird and saw that Capt. Fiser was still trying to get his cockpit door open. The armor plate on the seat was making it extremely difficult for him to reach around it and get to the door handle. So, I ran back again, laid down my rifle and survival vest and opened his door. He climbed out and I again picked up my rifle and survival vest, then the both of us headed for the large bush for some cover.

We knew we were in a bad area, but we had not drawn any enemy fire or seen any enemy activity so far. Our gunships were orbiting overhead and after a few minutes I turned to look for Capt. Fiser to tell him that I thought we should move to the other side of the bird and join up with the SOG team and the rest of our crew. I went completely around the bush—Capt. Fiser could not be found!! So... here I am, all alone, in an enemy area. Needless to say, it didn't take me long to decide to head to the team and the rest of the crew's location on my own. As I came around the front of the bird, I could not see the team anywhere, but I did see another of our helicopters on the ground, around a little curve in the stream bed, about 30 yards off our nose. So, I took off and headed in its direction. Once I got there and hopped in—there was Capt. Fiser, already sitting on the cabin floor. He had thought I had seen the helicopter landing and had taken off and headed that way as soon as he saw it coming in.

We set there for a short time waiting for the rest of the crew and the team to come, until one of our gunships told us to take off and they would send another slick in to fly right over the team and the rest of the crew, so they would see it land, to pick them up. The second bird went in and successfully picked up the rest of the crew and the team and took off. Then someone who was trying to get a head count to be sure that everyone had got out, called our bird and said for us to go back in because there were two still on the ground. As we were making our approach, someone did another head count and realized that the two they thought were still on the ground were Capt. Fiser and me. So, we broke off the approach, climbed out and headed back to FOB II.

Because of the location where we went down, Saigon would not let our escort fighters come across the border and bomb our bird to destroy it; they did not want any bomb craters in that country. Also, it was about two or three days before Jackie Kennedy was going to be visiting Cambodia and they did not want any political fallout to occur. So, the decision was made that the bird had to be removed from Cambodia before the end of the day.

An Army CH-47 recovery crew, from Pleiku, was tasked to go and sling it out. When they found out where it was located, they initially refused to go get it. My understanding was they received a direct call from Gen. Westmoreland, and he ordered them to get it out of out of its current location. He said he didn't care what they did with it once they were back in South Vietnam, but that they would get it back across the border that day.



By the time all this was going on, we were back at our camp listening to the recovery operation on the radio. The CH-47 crew did finally get it out, in the dark, and brought it back to Camp Holloway, Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam. The next day they brought it back to FOB II, where after several weeks of repairs, we finally got it back into the air.

While we were listening to the recovery, one of our gunship gunners, which had followed us down, was telling me how “neat” it was watching us go down. “Flames and smoke trailing behind, it looked just like you would see in the movies”. I gave him a few choice words and let him know that I didn't think it was so “neat” and not one damn bit funny. He was filming us going down and he gave me a copy of the film. As I look at it now, it does look just like in the movies.

Well, that's my story (as best I can remember it) of a few moments in my life, one day, in Cambodia, while doing my job on one of my tours to sunny Southeast Asia.

**** MORE OF THE STORY ****

In 2007 while I was reading an entry on the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association email traffic I saw an entry from David Wilke about the day, in 1967, he was sent “across the fence” to recover a downed Air Force “Huey.” Knowing that we were the only Air Force unit in the Vietnam War flying the “Huey” and my bird was the only one to go down in Cambodia in 1967, I contacted David to see if it was my bird that he helped recover. It was and David sent me his story of that day which I've added below. (*Note: see following page*)

By: David Wilke, 189th AHC, U.S. Army

This story is for anyone who has been “there”,
done that or, I hope, never has to go there or do that.

29, October 1967

Camp Holloway, Pleiku, Republic of Vietnam

Sunday Morning @11am

I was up, cleaned up and was writing letters when a dispatch runner from HQ came to my “hooch” and I was told to report to HQ ASAP. I immediately grabbed my Browning 9mm, Survival Knife and Helmet and went to HQ.

Since I was a volunteer on the Recovery Team for my unit, I assumed that I was going somewhere to recover one of OUR ships. Shot down, mechanical failure or Pilot Error, whatever. And wherever it happened.

I was told an Air Force UH-1 had crashed in a remote area; nowhere near their home base and they needed volunteers to go get it. “Getting it” means being dropped off nearby, running to it and rigging it with tie down straps so it could be hooked under a bigger helicopter (CH-47 “Chinook”) and carried back to a USbase. The hookup strap was 90 feet long and my final job was to make the connection to the cargo hook under the Chinook, feed the strap out until the UH-1 was going to be lifted off the ground. Under normal circumstances, in a hostile area, other helicopter gunships and even Air Force jet fighters were over the area, and maybe a small contingent of South Vietnamese Infantry were with us. Time from insertion until lift off of UH-1 was usually 30 minutes or less.

Two other Recovery Crews from other units refused to volunteer, but we said we would go, we, meaning three of us. We were flown to Dak To, a notorious Special Forces Camp, which was the launch point for SOG/Omega missions into Cambodia or Laos, since all three countries “touched” around Dak To. Dak To was on the “fence” meaning across borders. Illegal to cross borders.

Dak To gained fame 1 month later as the famous battle for Hill 875 was at the same Dak To. Largest single battle between the US Army and

North Vietnamese Regulars. Place where we lost the most soldiers in one place during the entire 10-year war.

As we waited for the recovery mission to begin, the rest of the facts came out. This Air Force helicopter had crashed across the “fence”, “not too far over”. We were waiting for the OK from Washington DC to come to put “boots on the ground” “over there”!

What was to be quick and easy, took over 4 hours for the “green-light” to happen. We “crossed over” in 2 Huey’s, one with us three and three Special Forces Soldiers and the other Huey carried 10 Mercenaries that worked for the Special Forces.

Turned out, “just over the fence” wasn’t exactly accurate, how about 23 miles into “somewhere” we weren’t supposed to be. The Air Force Huey wasn’t normal either, it was carrying radios that had special capabilities and the code books on board were invaluable. So much, that the normal answer is to destroy everything on the ground by air ordinance. But the secrecy of the radios and materials required removal from site, to ensure nobody got anything. So we went into this scenario, ready to complete the mission.

The downed helicopter was on the side of a cereal bowl-shaped marshy area. Wet in the bottom, dry on the sides.

With jets and gunships flying everywhere to cover us, we were inserted, and everybody took positions as to what we were going to do. It took only a few minutes for our “bodyguards” to position themselves around our perimeter to cover our recovery activities. These activities usually took about 5 to 8 minutes to rig it for lift, but due to the extenuating circumstances, I think we were done in 3 to 5!! We called for the Chinook to come and get it so to speak. It was not authorized to come over until we were done rigging.

Took about 15 to 20 minutes to arrive and damn’ there was a big tree in the center of the swamp that blocked its descent. Had to get a chainsaw ASAP!! 30 to 45 minutes later 1 chain saw was lowered to us. Since there was only the “hookup” left for the recovery team and

Interviews WITH



WARRIORS



SSGT Jim Burns

MACV SOG 20th SOS Green Hornet Crew Chief and Gunner Jim Burns

Visit Jason Collins *YouTube* channel “MACV-SOG: Interviews with Warriors” to view his episode with Jim Burns.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ghzrlzf4Tk

In this interview, you will hear Jim tell some of the stories about his adventures while with the Green Hornets, with some very hairy moments, and some interesting interactions with Jerry Shriver and his motley crew of animals.

I was the “Hooker”, my two mates left to go home, back to Vietnam!! Started thinking that I might not see them again. While a Green Beret Captain was cutting down the tree, he had an accident and nearly cut a leg off. He had to be taken out immediately as he was hurt badly.

This delayed everything and what started at 11 am was now at 7 pm! All of the aircraft involved by now had fuel problems and they all started to leave for refueling. Great! More time to think!!

After everybody left, I was laying down next to the new leader, a Green Beret Sergeant on the side of the swamp. It was pitch dark, whispering only. I had my Pistol in my right hand, my survival knife stuck in the ground in front of me and just waited to die. Had many thoughts and to this day some are still here. We got a message that we were probably going to have to stay overnight. The Sergeant, bless his heart, whispered, “negative on that” idea. “We will never survive the night if we are left here”, he whispered into the radio. Boy, I felt really good now! This was another great idea of mine, I thought.

They reconsidered, agreed and said they were coming back in the darkness to get the Huey and us. Don't know if it was us or the Air Force Huey they really came back for.

We were lying in the dark, staring up at a pitch-black sky, looking for a light.

There!! We told them quietly where the flash was in relationship to us and waited. Again!! Closer this time. Gave new location and the third time was the charm. Lit us up like a spotlight!!

I ran, crept over to the Huey, climbed on top and waited for the Chinook to come down to me. He couldn't leave his light on so as not to “paint” me standing on top. He finally got close enough for me to hookup, feed out the line and jump off just before it was in the air. As it swung away, it hit a tree and broke off the entire tail boom, but the radios were all inside and in the radio compartment in the nose.

Two Hueys (ours) came down to a hover and we all jumped in and went back over the fence. What a RUSH on the way home!!

On landing back at Holloway at 1 a.m., my Commanding Officer was there waiting for me, since I was the last one home that night. Since I hadn't eaten in it 13 hours and was mildly stressed and hyped up, he opened up the Mess Hall and had the cooks make dinner for me. Nice Gesture it was too!!

Went to bed at 2:30 but couldn't get down!! Too excited. Finally got up at 9 am and went back up to the Maintenance area. My buds thought I was gone. I at times, thought so too.

Three weeks later I volunteered to fly the “over the fence” missions inserting and extracting Special Forces for 60 days. Needed the “high” I guess. And I was no good at it. No fear so to speak.

39 years later and I can still go through the day & night with unbelievable accuracy.

Maybe jerked my psyche a little, as I needed more time than I thought to “erase the demons” when I got back into the “world”. Cost me plenty.

Note: Contrary to David's memory, the USAF “Huey” was recovered fully intact, including complete with its tail boom. ❖

From the National Museum of the United States Air Force, “Secret War: Green Hornets, Dust Devils and Blackbirds”



Pony Express missions carried just about anything to support the secret missions and radar sites in Laos. This Green Hornet UH-1 at the forward operation location at Duc Lap, South Vietnam, is hauling lumber and plywood sheets. (U.S. Air Force photo)



A UH-1 gunner manning a GAU-2 minigun that fired 7.62mm ammunition. (U.S. Air Force photo)



A UH-1 crew armed and ready for a covert mission. Notice the flexible ladder that could be extended to pick up personnel when the helicopter could not land. (U.S. Air Force photo)

Lehr-Regiment Brandenburg z.b.V. 800

By Colonel Michael Haas, USAF, Ret.

This history of the Lehr-Regiment Brandenburg z.b.V. 800 by Col. Haas was published by SOF News on August 22, 2025.
<https://sof.news/history/lehr-regiment-brandenburg>.



He was the nightmare come true to the notoriously paranoid and vicious *Narodny Kommissaria Vnutrenny Diel* (NKVD), the Soviet security service dreaded no less by Soviet citizens than by its German foe. Speaking fluent Russian and often dressed in NKVD uniforms, his special forces teams repeatedly stung the Red Army with daring “disguise” (*tarneinsatz*) operations. The name for this particular NKVD nightmare was **Leutnant Baron Adrian von Foelkersam**, an extraordinary officer serving in one of the most amazing special force units of World War II, the so-called “Brandenburgers.” Though little known in the west, the *tarneinsatz* executed on the Eastern Front by Foelkersam and the Brandenburgers demonstrate a level of courage and sophistication seldom surpassed in the annals of unconventional warfare. As always, the key to such success is found in the nature of the few men willing to take the most frightening risks. He would be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, Iron Cross First and Second Class.

“The impersonation of enemy soldiers represents the highest level of penetration technique in special operations. This mindset requires the self-confidence of the “con artist” and the nerves of a safecracker...”
Dr. Edward N. Luttwak, Professor, International Relations.

Foelkersam was born in 1914 in St. Petersburg, Russia, the son of a Baltic German and former admiral in the Tsarist's ill-fated navy during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Learning to speak colloquial Russian with native fluency would later prove invaluable to Foelkersam, as would his deep affinity for the Russian culture and the subservient

mentality of the Soviet soldier. His exceptional flair for languages and intelligence would manifest itself repeatedly during his youth as he learned English and studied at universities in Vienna and Berlin. Tall, slim, and with piercing gray eyes, his presence conveyed that hallmark of the 1930s-era German family with a proud heritage and a deeply ingrained sense of duty to family and country. This sense of duty certainly accompanied Foelkersam in 1939, following his transfer from the army's elite honor guard unit, *Wachtruppe Grossdeutschland*, to the ranks of an organization as ideally suited for his talents as he was for its covert mission.

Foelkersam and other carefully selected *Volksdeutsche*—German ex-patriates returning home to rally in support of Germany's National Socialism—reported for duty to a discrete, private estate near Brandenburg-on-the-Havel, a small town some thirty miles west of Berlin. As with the other candidates, Foelkersam's loyalty and personal talents had been rigorously screened before his recruitment to the Abwehr, Germany's foremost military intelligence service. Despite his obvious suitability for intelligence work in Abwehr Departments I (espionage) or III (counter-intelligence), however, it was not to these departments that this Baltic German had been recruited.

Foelkersam had in fact been selected to conduct Abwehr Department II's special mission: high-risk sabotage and subversion missions in times of peace and war, both abroad and even within Germany itself. Though the unit he would help form later that year would grow from company to division size throughout World War II, it was first activated as the 800th Special Purpose (z.b.V.) Construction Training Company. An intentionally bland title meant to obscure the real nature of its secret mission, this formal designation was seldom used by unit members who universally referred to themselves simply—but with considerable pride—as “Brandenburgers.”

So effective would Brandenburg *tarneinsatz* prove throughout World War II that even in the waning months of combat, even the rumor of “Brandenburgers” on the battlefield still spread consternation amongst Soviet and Allied armies. The devastating psychological effect of this fear was fully evident in December 1944, for example, when a handful of English-speaking German soldiers penetrated U.S. Army lines in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

Employing the *tarneinsatz* tactics that were the hallmark of the Brandenburgers, this ad hoc Waffen SS unit spread chaos within the American ranks out of all proportion to the actual threat. General Eisenhower would later complain that the security measures taken to protect him from the assassination attempt rumored to be the goal of this special group, so smothered his ability to command that he became largely irrelevant to the outcome of this critical battle. It was no doubt a bitter pill to swallow for the proud general, but perhaps one made easier to take had the equally proud Red Army generals been available to share with him their bitter experiences with Brandenburgers on the Eastern Front.

Title images above, at right: Adrian von Foelkersam receives the Knight's Cross for the spectacular success of his “disguise” operation at Maykop, deep behind Russian lines on the Eastern Front. (Photo Source: Bundesarchiv); at left is the patch/insignia of the Brandenburg Division. (Public Domain)

Such a general-to-general conversation would have taken some time, as Brandenburg deep penetration missions had successfully attacked Soviet installations from the Arctic Circle to Persia. Had British generals joined this imaginary conversation, they could have told Eisenhower of their own bitter encounters with the Brandenburgers in France, the Mediterranean, North Africa, Iraq, and even along the Afghan-Indian border. Frequently operating closely with disaffected nationals in these far-off lands, the Brandenburgers were more often hampered by their distance from Germany than by skillful counter-measures from their opponents.

More common for the Brandenburgers were the short-range penetration efforts; missions that were defined in an agreement between the *Abwehr* and the military services as operations to a maximum depth of fifteen kilometers behind enemy lines. For such missions Brandenburg companies were subordinated to the operational control of the respective Army Group in a given theater. Thus, from the very beginning of Germany's June 1941 invasion of Russia, Operation Barbarossa, Russian/Ukrainian-speaking Brandenburg teams were found throughout the foremost vanguards of the army's fast moving Panzer spearheads.

The Brandenburgers quickly proved invaluable to Germany's *Blitzkrieg* form of warfare, disrupting enemy communications and seizing intact the bridges needed to assure the continued momentum of the army's attacking panzer formations. One particularly effective *tarneinsatz* took place on the Dvina River in the Baltic Republic of Latvia, when Brandenburgers uniformed and armed as Red Army soldiers seized and held against determined enemy counter attacks a key bridge in the path of the advancing panzers.

By 1941 the basic combat unit for the now-regimental size Brandenburgers was the 300-hundred strong company; itself divided into one heavy platoon and two half-companies capable of independent action. The volunteers to the elite unit were—like Foelkersam—carefully screened for their political reliability and the psychological stability needed for operations behind enemy lines. Physical fitness and military proficiency in tactics and weapons were also stressed. Like the shock troops of the Waffen-SS the Brandenburgers trained extensively with live ammunition.

Furthermore, the men found in each company were usually assigned to that unit on the basis of their foreign language skills and ex-patriate experience in a particular region, e.g., Ukrainian-speaking Germans in the company targeted for operations in the Ukrainian sector. Transfers from company to company were thus rare, and the resulting cohesion among the men proved to be a key factor in the astonishing success they often achieved of their extremely high-risk missions. This was certainly true, for example, of Foelkersam's success as commander of the *Baltenkompanie*, a unit formed in 1941 largely of Germans born and raised in the pre-war Baltic republics.

The formation in Germany of Foelkersam's *Baltenkompanie* was soon followed by the return of the men to their familial homeland, as the German invasion of the Baltics earlier that year had quickly provoked a Soviet response. Moving just as quickly the *Abwehr* units in the Baltics began infiltrating a number of Red Army deserters back into their former units, generating in response valuable field intelligence that the *Baltenkompanie* would use to devastating effect.

During the ensuing months Foelkersam initiated and led a number of sabotage and disruption operations in the dark Baltic forests behind Soviet lines, capping these off with a daring raid against the headquarters of a Soviet Rifle Division. After reviewing the wealth of intelligence information brought back from this particular raid, an astonished and grateful *Abwehr* subsequently awarded Foelkersam a well-deserved Iron Cross.

The grim reality for most soldiers committed to years of exposure to front-line combat is that their ultimate release from this lethal environment will come only as a result of their suffering either a disabling injury, capture, or death. There are, however, a minuscule few that will escape these mortal statistics, not only surviving but in the process becoming even more dangerous as they master the art of killing. So, it was for Foelkersam in the winter of 1941/42, as nearly two years of Brandenburg combat in Poland, Belgium, and the Baltics had transformed the talented young officer into one of the most dangerous commando leaders of the war.

He would need all of his mastery the following August while leading a Brandenburg team to a stunning *tarneinsatz* success in the Caucasus region, some 1,500 hard-fought miles southeast from Germany. The target to be seized was oil; the natural resource needed above all others in 1942 by a severely extended German war machine. Thus, the capturing, intact, of the huge Soviet oil fields and refining center at Maykop, was of overwhelming strategic importance to Hitler's ambitions in the East.

German Army Group South dubbed it Operation Maykop, and by late July no less than three divisions from the III Panzer Korps were moving relentlessly southward from the Russian city of Rostov. Advancing through the mid-summer heat and choking dust of the Kuban steppe the panzers crushed all Soviet resistance as they closed in on the Maykop complex that would soon fuel their thirsty vehicles. For Foelkersam, however, Operation Maykop had already started weeks earlier in East Prussia where he selected sixty-two Baltic and Sudeten Brandenburgers for the special-purpose Kommando that he would take to into the targeted oilfields.

The *Kommando's* complex three-stage mission called for it first to infiltrate the Russian defenses days in advance of the arrival of the main German forces—with a *tarneinsatz* obviously. Once inside the men were to find some means to reduce the Maykop defenses that lay in the path of the advancing panzers, then prevent the retreating Red Army from destroying the vital oil refinery and pumping facilities. Immediately after the selection of the required men, *Abwehr* Departments I and III placed Foelkersam and his Russian-speaking soldiers into an intense training program that rehearsed every facet of the daily life of a NKVD front-line unit.

Department I provided NKVD uniforms, weapons, training, discipline, and forged documents. Department III used information and documents from captured NKVD officers to thoroughly familiarize Foelkersam's men with both security service procedures and mannerisms that would be expected of real NKVD personnel. Russian was the only language permitted during this period. This indoctrination extended even to drilling the men after they had consumed quantities of vodka—the Russian's alcohol of choice—as even the most trivial German remark or curse would spell certain death for Foelkersam's entire force.

During their planned week behind enemy lines the fate of the entire Kommando would rest on each Brandenburger's ability to deceive the most security conscious and brutal security service in the world. This would be no quick bridge seizure, some wild but short-lived burst of excitement under enemy fire. Once inside the NKVD encampment, sixty-three Brandenburgers would work, sleep, eat, and drink with their unforgiving foes day after day, at every instant dreading that one mistake that would spell detection and death for every Brandenburger.

Following their training in East Prussia, the men joined the III Panzer Korps, then fifty miles northeast of Maykop, for a final pre-mission coordination and intelligence briefing. On the night of 1-2 August, the NKVD-uniformed Brandenburgers, carrying authentic identification papers, equipment, and weapons, were motored to within 15 miles of the oil fields to begin their footmarch through the Soviet lines.

Hours later the Brandenburgers came upon a Kuban village filled with disaffected soldiers from various retreating Soviet units. Fortune followed by quick thinking soon provided the Brandenburgers with another boost, as they discovered that in addition to a number of Russians the scene included many Cossack and Ukrainian nationals. Seizing the moment the fake NKVD detachment moved in at dawn, Foelkersam's men firing their weapons into the air for effect as they took control of nearly eight hundred apathetic soldiers.

As "Major Truchin" (Foelkersam) tongue-lashed them for their lack of patriotic spirit and courage, his men used standard NKVD procedure to separate the two major groups according to their nationality. Amidst the confusion of these first minutes the presence of numerous vehicles suddenly caught Foelkersam's eye. To the quick-thinking Leutnant, the trucks answered several questions as to his next step, and he moved quickly to exploit the momentum.

Leaving half of the detachment behind to guard the Russians, he mounted the remaining half of his force on two trucks, then force-marched the Cossacks down a road to a ravine a mile from the village. Three-quarters of an hour later the already-frightened soldiers in the village were startled by long bursts of gunfire coming from the direction in which the disloyal Cossacks had been herded.

Given every reason to believe that a typical NKVD execution had just taken place, those in the village never suspected that Foelkersam had in fact persuaded the thoroughly confused Cossacks in the ravine to desert en masse toward the advancing Germans to the north. No doubt grateful that it was the Cossacks, not themselves, that had gotten the knock, few in the village were inclined to ask questions as Foelkersam's group returned to the village, ordered them aboard their own vehicles and escorted them at gunpoint toward nearby Maykop.

Reporting to NKVD headquarters in Maykop brought more good news for Foelkersam, this time in the form of an unusually effusive greeting from the NKVD general responsible for the South Caucasus Front. News of his "liquidation" of the Cossacks had already reached the general's ears, so pleasing him that he scarcely looked at the NKVD orders Foelkersam offered for his inspection. His relationship with the general steadily improved during the following nights, fueled by the many glasses of vodka they shared. The days were even more productive as Foelkersam accompanied the general in his daily inspections of Maykop's disorganized defenses. His men

were doing likewise with their NKVD counterparts, until by 7 August the Brandenburgers had developed the three-point plan they would implement with the arrival of the first panzers now only forty-eight hours from Maykop.

Foelkersam made his move in the early morning darkness of 9 August, dividing his men into three groups. Knocking out the army communications center was an obvious priority, and one of Foelkersam's team accomplished this task by surreptitiously planting timed-explosive charges amongst the busy radio operators working inside. Even as the building went up with a roar minutes later, Foelkersam was already informing the senior artillery commander at Maykop that orders had been received directing their overall retreat from the oilfields.

Initially reluctant to believe the news, the lieutenant colonel promptly accepted Foelkersam's suggestion that he call the communications center to confirm the orders. And as Foelkersam expected, the artillery commander's reluctance evaporated even more promptly after discovering that his calls to the communications center failed to generate a response. From there Foelkersam immediately moved to the headquarters of the front-line infantry commander, repeating the orders that they too were to retreat. In the face of this commander's reluctance, Foelkersam invited the officer to look at the retreating artillery forces to his rear! These initial retreats caused in turn a domino effect all along the northern front-lines facing the oncoming panzers, now only some twenty kilometers away.

As Foelkersam's team generated chaos along the front lines a second Brandenburger-NKVD team successfully bluffed the staff of the North Caucasus Communications Center to abandon their building to join the growing retreat. Having done so, the men promptly began answering the frantic incoming calls pouring in from isolated units unable to reach the army communication center. All frantic callers were, of course, urged to join the overall retreat immediately.

Speed was obviously essential if the men were to prevent the Soviets from setting off the demolitions that would destroy the invaluable refineries, pumping stations, and oil storage tanks. Thus, the third Brandenburger team fanned out to their pre-designated targets in the oil fields, bluffing, when possible, the technicians and guards to abandon their posts; killing those who could not be bluffed. While a few panicked guards succeeded in blowing some of the facilities, the overwhelming majority of Maykop was ultimately seized intact.

The first panzers rolled into Maykop at mid-day on 9 August, having easily overcome the weak resistance offered by the few Red Army units who had waited too long join the Brandenburger-induced retreat to the south. Fittingly their speedy arrival was further enhanced by a second group of Brandenburgers who, while posing as Soviet soldiers, had earlier seized a critical bridge on the outskirts of Maykop. For his remarkable nerve, courage, and leadership, during his seven harrowing days at Maykop, Foelkersam was subsequently awarded the coveted Knights Cross of the Iron Cross on 14 September 1942.

Maykop proved the high-water mark for German special operations on the Eastern Front, as a resurgent Soviet Army slowly but irreversibly began forcing the Germans onto the defensive later that year. Desperate for manpower to stem the advancing Soviets, army commanders soon began employing the *Abwehr's* highly trained and offensively

oriented Brandenburgers for conventional infantry and anti-partisan duties. These new missions made little use of Foelkersam's talents, and appealed to a man of his temperament even less.

Thus in the fall of 1943 Foelkersam left his beloved Brandenburgers for assignment to Friedenthal, an ancient castle located deep in the Brandenburg forests ten miles northwest of Berlin. There, at the Waffen-SS headquarters of *Jagdverband Mitte* (Commando Unit Central), he would serve for the duration of the war in what was, for all intents and purposes, the Third Reich's special operations "clearing house." There he met his future commander and Germany's most flamboyant commando, the ubiquitous *SS-Oberststurmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny.

Active in special operations from the outset of war, Skorzeny had just trumped all of his previous achievements with his daring mountaintop rescue in Italy of the Italian Duce, Benito Mussolini. Still flush with his success and evidently a keen judge of talent, Skorzeny quickly made Foelkersam his chief of staff and trusted confidante for the burgeoning *Jagdverband*.

Staying close to Skorzeny meant staying close to the action, given the special trust Skorzeny enjoyed from Hitler. This trust was further solidified in July 1944, when, after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler at his headquarters in East Prussia, Skorzeny and Foelkersam played key roles in establishing order and safety from the confusion that reigned at the scene. Later apprised of their actions, an obviously shaken Hitler made clear the special favor in which he held Skorzeny and his men. Hitler's faith was shown again in October of that year, when Skorzeny and Foelkersam were sent to Budapest, Hungary, to execute one of the most politically sensitive missions of the war.

Operation *Panzerfaust* was of supreme importance to Germany. Its goal was nothing less than ensuring—immediately and by whatever means necessary—the continued loyalty of Hitler's wavering ally, Hungarian Regent Admiral Miklos Horthy. Should the regent succeed in his furtive efforts to make a separate peace with the Soviets, the advancing Red Army would trap nearly 400,000 German soldiers on the Eastern Front. The whole matter took on even greater urgency when, on 15 October, the regent went public for the first time with his hidden agenda, broadcasting on Hungarian radio his request to the Soviets for a cease-fire.

Working quickly and efficiently together, the Skorzeny-Foelkersam team ended the Regent's plan less than forty-eight hours after their arrival in Budapest. This they accomplished by first arresting the Regent's son—the Admiral's sole surviving heir—and placing him on a flight to Germany, then seizing the Burgberg Palace, Hungary's seat of government. Using speed, surprise, and bluff to minimize the bloodshed, the special operation had effectively spared nearly thirty German divisions from imminent entrapment. The cost to the German team: four dead and twelve wounded.

Operation *Panzerfaust* was another classic demonstration of that special élan that had become Foelkersam's trademark during years of high-risk missions. Nevertheless, time was rapidly running out for the former Brandenburg as 1944 grew to a close. Skill and daring were rarely in need at this late stage of the war, as the massive Allied tank armies from both East and West smashed into the reeling

German army like steel fists into an opponent's rib cage. Barely two months after the successful conclusion of *Panzerfaust*, Foelkersam would push his luck in the Ardennes Forest of northeastern Belgium.

It was code-named Operation *Greif*, after the mythical animal that was half-eagle, half-lion. Moreover, it was to be Hitler's last great gamble of the war, a massive, stunning armored attack intended to split the American and British armies and seize the port of Antwerp. If it failed, all failed for the Germans. If it were to succeed, the onrushing panzers would once again have to rely on two Brandenburg specialties: bridge seizures and *tarneinsatz* aimed at causing the maximum possible confusion within the enemy's ranks. This time the uniform worn by over one hundred of Skorzeny's English-speaking soldiers would be that of the U.S. Army.

Skorzeny formed an ad hoc Waffen SS group under the cover name "Panzer Brigade 150" for Operation *Greif*. In addition to the English-speaking *tarneinsatz*, element, the brigade would include Battle Groups X, Y, and Z, each dedicated to the seizure of a key bridge in the path of the planned attack. But after scoring initial successes, *Greif* went awry, both in the larger picture and for Skorzeny. Though only thirty-two of his English-speaking men made it through the American lines, they caused chaos and confusion far beyond their small numbers. Only twenty-four of these *tarneinsatz* soldiers later found their way back to German lines.

But the Battle Group X commander was killed almost immediately, forcing an already wounded Foelkersam to take command of the group. Less than two weeks Foelkersam and the exhausted survivors of Panzer Brigade 150 returned to Germany to rest and wait for the final act in the black drama which had become Germany in the final months of the war.

Recovering from his wound the following month, Foelkersam immediately pressed Skorzeny for command of *Jagdverband Ost* (Commando Unit East). Foelkersam could have few illusions about his prospects on the Eastern Front, which had now been driven back to a generally north-south line through the center of Poland. But perhaps personal factors beyond his sense of duty and patriotism were also involved. Like those of many other German officers, Foelkersam's wife and newborn daughter lived in the region of western Poland long-since "Germanized" from the period when Prussia ruled the region in the late eighteenth century. Foelkersam's family in fact lived in the major city of Posen, one hundred miles east of the German-Polish border.

In mid-January an extremely reluctant Skorzeny finally capitulated to Foelkersam's repeated requests. Immediately, now *SS-Sturmbannführer* Foelkersam rushed to assume command of the 800-strong battalion then located in the Hohensalsa forests just west of Warsaw. There he rejoined many of his old comrades, former Brandenburgers who had transferred from the division after its reformation to a panzer-grenadier unit in late-1944. As Skorzeny feared, it was the last time he would see his loyal subordinate alive.

"Foelkersam was my best comrade and my most loyal friend. For all those who knew Adrian von Foelkersam, he is not dead. He scorned death too much, ever to die and be forgotten."
SS-Oberststurmbannführer Otto Skorzeny, Jagdverband Mitte

Several weeks later, two officers and thirteen soldiers—all that remained of *Jagdverband Ost*—straggled back to German lines. Foelkersam was not among them. As the survivors recalled, a badly wounded and unconscious Foelkersam had been placed aboard an artillery tractor as the battalion split into smaller groups for an attempted breakout from entrapment during the night of 21-22 January. During the breakout the groups lost contact with each other, and the fate of Foelkersam's party was never determined.

Today Foelkersam's remains lie—most likely with his Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross—somewhere in the dark Hohensalsa forests, covered every winter by the same white mantle of snow that hides the graveyard of *Jagdverband Ost*. With these remains also lies something else: a standard of courage and conduct that well befits the Profession of Arms from all countries, for all times. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Col. Michael Haas, USAF, ret., began his first eight years of active service in the U.S. Army, serving in airborne, Ranger, and Special Forces assignments. As a flight platoon commander in an assault helicopter company, he completed 962 combat flight hours in Vietnam. Subsequently transferring to the Air Force, his tours included special operations aircrew, the Defense Intelligence Agency, command of the Pararescue Squadron, and service in the Special Tactics Group. He is the author of *Apollo's Warriors*, *U.S. Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War*, *In the Devil's Shadow*, *UN Special Operations during the Korean War*, and numerous magazine articles on special operations topics.

From the Editor

We received this short note from LTC (ret.) George Williams. Ever since the American Boy Scouts were organized, the U.S. Army has been one of its best friends and chief boosters. Special Forces in particular has long supported Scouting.



Thought you might like to see this photo that I found it on my computer. Think it was about 1980.

Colonel John H. Brookshire Ret. 20th SF, 5th SF VN (now passed) knew Colonel Ola Mize, who was then at Fort Bragg, NC. I (George Williams), a former 20th SF SSG, went to Fort Bragg with Colonel Brookshire, where he at some point asked Colonel Mize to speak at a Boy Scout Camporee near Washington, NC. Colonel Mize came with MSG or SMJ Adams (can't see) and made an excellent presentation for the young Scouts. One of the young Scouts is beside Colonel Mize. I (George) was an assistant Scoutmaster. I eventually went back in the Army IRR and retired as an LTC. I served in the Persian Gulf War. Col Brookshire and Col Mize were both from Alabama.

Left to right: Colonel John H. Brookshire Ret., George Williams RET LTC, Sergeant Adams (name tag), [Colonel Ola Mize MOH](#), and unknown Scout

17TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE) DB.

DAILY BULLETIN
NUMBER 4

9 August 1964
Julian Date: 4222

OFFICIAL

1. By order of the Executive Officer of 17th Special Forces Group (Abn), personnel on pass will wear proper civilian attire. AG44 Green uniform will not be worn off post.

UNOFFICIAL

2. THE SPECIAL FORCES PATCH: The Special Forces patch is identical in all Special Forces units, to include Army Reserve and State National Guard. Each part of the patch has a meaning which should be of general interest to all who wear it. The arrowhead represents the basic skills of the American Indian; the sword stands for the unconventional skills utilized by Special Forces; the three lightning bolts are the ability to strike by land, air and sea; the colors teal blue and gold are the colors of US Army unassigned personnel.

3. SAFETY: A class conducted for Officers and EM by Capt. Barnett on rigger checking was very helpful in illustrating the safety measures which must be taken prior to jumping. Six demonstrators were purposely rigged with errors and the airborne qualified members were to conduct a regular rigger check. A total of 66 errors were overlooked (20 of these considered fatal) and 64 were detected. A .500 batting average in this case is very poor. Let's be glad it was only a training exercise.

4. National Geographic Magazine is presently in the process of filming pictures of the 17th Special Forces Group. The original intent of National Geographic was to film a picture sequence of the Air Force at Elmendorf, but upon seeing the 17th SF Gp they decided to go where the action was. On 6 Aug 64 the clamshell on a C-119 was removed to facilitate filming a jump. On 7 Aug 64 a camera was mounted directly outside the jump door to film the exit. If all goes as presently planned, this story will appear in the June 65 issue of National Geographic.

From the Collection of Art Dolick — 17th Special Forces Group, Daily Bulletin, 9 August 1964

From Chapter 78 member Art Dolick's personal collection, this page from the 17th Special Forces Group "Daily Bulletin" offers a snapshot of unit life in 1964 — from uniform rules and safety lessons to mention of a planned National Geographic feature.

The 17th Special Forces Group, a U.S. Army Reserve unit based in Seattle, was activated in Boise, Idaho, in 1961 and later absorbed by the 12th Group in 1966.

While the article mentioned in the bulletin wasn't located, National Geographic did publish "American Special Forces in Action in Vietnam" in its January 1965 issue. You can read it here: <https://archive.org/details/jan-1965-vol-127-no-01/page/n41/mode/2up>

SFA Chapter 78 September 2025 Chapter Meeting

Photos by How Miller and Debra Holm

**Guest Speaker,
James “Jim” Shorten
AKA Wild Carrot
Veteran—Navy, Army Special
Forces (13 months in MACV-SOG),
Air Force/CA National Guard,
Pararescue (PJ)**

1 Jim Shorten being presented a Chapter 78 Challenge coin by VP James McLanahan. As the guest speaker, Jim Shorten shared the amazing story of his life’s journey—a true adventure.

As a boy, he dreamed of living a life of adventure, and he certainly has. He served 20 years in the U.S. military, first volunteering for Vietnam while in the Navy. Inspired by “The Ballad of the Green Beret,” he shifted his goal from becoming a SEAL to joining the Army Special Forces, later volunteering for MACV-SOG.

After leaving active duty, Jim joined the 12th SFG (Reserves), worked in law enforcement, then trained as an Air Force Pararescue Jumper. He served as a paramedic for the first three Space Shuttle launches and during the Mt. St. Helens eruption.

Even after an injury ended his military career, Jim kept moving—earning a doctorate in radiology and practicing for 20 years. He’s also a dedicated meteorite hunter and has twice returned to Cambodia searching for the Phantom crew his team sought during a 1970 Bright Light mission.

Jim’s boyhood dream of a life filled with adventure? Mission accomplished. But, Jim shows no sign of slowing down—and we look forward to hearing more as his story continues to unfold.

2 The meeting was hosted by the ACL Afghan Community in Mojave, CA. A group of the Afghan veterans was introduced.

3 A group of youngsters from the community were on hand to help.

4 The women of the community prepared a delicious lunch of traditional Afghan dishes.

5 Amy Griffen, wife of chapter member Mark, made the trip out to Mojave for the meeting.



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