



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

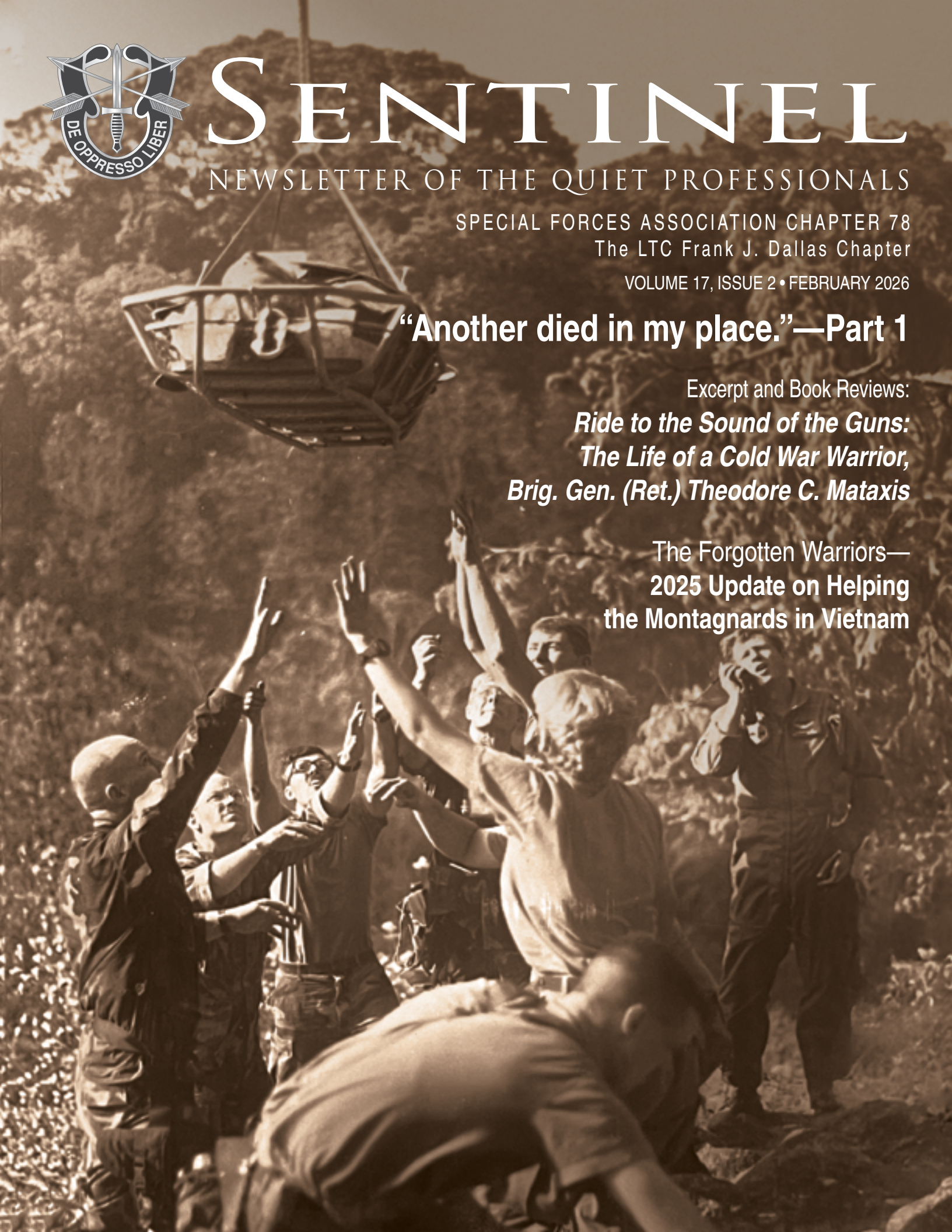
VOLUME 17, ISSUE 2 • FEBRUARY 2026

“Another died in my place.”—Part 1

Excerpt and Book Reviews:

***Ride to the Sound of the Guns:
The Life of a Cold War Warrior,
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Theodore C. Mataxis***

**The Forgotten Warriors—
2025 Update on Helping
the Montagnards in Vietnam**





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FRONT COVER: After stabilizing crew chief Spec. William "Buddy" Jarrell, the sole survivor of the May 13, 1991 MEDEVAC crash in Honduras, members of the search team release his Stokes litter as he is transported from the crash scene. Greg Walker's "Another died in my place—Part 1" tells the full story beginning on page 5 of this issue. (Photo by Spec. Jeff Troth, image courtesy Ken Kik)

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From the President | February 2026



James McLanahan
President SFA Ch. 78

Momentum Is a Choice

Momentum is one of those things everyone recognizes when it's present and feels when it's gone. What's less often discussed is this: momentum doesn't happen by accident. It is not a function of luck, nostalgia, or even history. Momentum is a choice, made repeatedly, often in small and unglamorous ways.

Across the country, our organizations are fading, not because their missions stop mattering, but because participation becomes

optional, leadership becomes reactive, and "next time" quietly replaces "this time." That's the fork in the road where good organizations stall. *Not this chapter.*

Look, and you will see it in the details: our speakers, our venues that encourage engagement rather than isolation, and events designed to include spouses and families, not as an afterthought, but as part of the team. These are not cosmetic decisions. They are deliberate investments in relevance and longevity.

February is a telling month. There's no holiday glow, no year-end urgency, no easy excuses to show up. And yet, that's precisely why it matters. Our upcoming gathering at Iron Mike's isn't just about marksmanship or social time. It's about reinforcing the habit of participation. In Special Forces, we understood that readiness was built long before deployment. The same principle applies here. Plus, it's good fun.

Momentum compounds when members choose to engage even when it's inconvenient. When leadership plans ahead instead of scrambling to recover lost ground. None of that happens overnight; it happens if we decide to do it. And it helps that you have all done this before, so you can help me along the way. Tom Turney has taken to planning our trip to Normandy, something he has wanted to do for a long time. Now we all benefit from his leadership, energy, and expertise. Thank you, Tom.

The reality is this: organizations that endure don't chase energy—they create it. They don't rely on past benchmarks or achievements; they honor them by staying active, disciplined, and forward-looking. My first Team Sergeant told me, "You make your own Kool-Aid." He was right. At Chapter 78, we make our own momentum.

My ask is simple: keep choosing momentum. Show up. Bring your spouse. Bring a fellow member who's been quiet for a while. Tell your friends who didn't come what they missed. And for heaven's sake, please reply to our VP Don Deatherage to help get an accurate headcount. Those small decisions, made consistently, are what ensure that Chapter 78 remains strong, not just this year, but for the next generation who will inherit what we build today. It is going to be a great year. ♦

De Oppresso Liber,
James McLanahan
President, SFA Chapter 78



SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

February 21, 2026

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

Iron Mike's

23253 La Palma Ave
Yorba Linda, CA 92887

Shoot Back at Cupid

*Bring your spouse for
late-Valentines Day fun!*



Next month

March 21, 2026

Back at JFTB—

The Pub at Fiddler's Green

2026 Meeting Schedule

March 21 • April 19 (Valor Luncheon)

May 16 • June 20 • July 18 • August 15

September 19 • October 17 • November 21

December (to be announced)

From the Editor | February 2026



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

Chapter 78 member Tom Turney and well-known Doc Padgett update us with ongoing efforts to help the Montagnards whose families were left behind after the Vietnam War and continue to be zealously marginalized by the Vietnamese people and government.

“Another Died in My Place,” Part 1, by chapter member, retired Green Beret, author, and investigative reporter, Greg Walker. From the not well-known efforts by SF in El Salvador in the 80s, Greg brings to light the truthful

account of a rescue mission gone bad and covered up. He tells of mistakes made, procedures not followed, and the bravery of three pilots who died trying to complete the ill-advised nighttime mission.

Greg has spent years trying to find out what actually happened and see that the medals that were deserved were finally awarded, while bringing closure to the families. His attention to detail is remarkable.

Ride to the Sound of the Guns, by retired Special Forces officer Ted Mataxis Jr., tells about the remarkable career of his father, Ted Mataxis Sr. Much of the material was gathered and written already by his father, and Ted Jr. added to that and wrote an interesting book about a heralded career Army officer and his family.

From the buildup and deployment to WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and against the Russians in Afghanistan and beyond, Ted Jr. tells us about his Dad's career—often in the elder Mataxis' own words. Included is a section exploring the period when they were both serving in Vietnam at the same time. Notable figures have brought up the fact that Ted Sr. led from the front and rode to the sound of the guns, which contributed greatly to mission success.

Ted Jr. went on to serve with SF in Granada and El Salvador. His son, Ted III, fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is truly a story about Family and their love for our country.

Textbook Special Ops: The Son Tay Raid was written by John Gargus and Cliff Westbrook. John was one of the major planners and a participant in the famous raid. With the benefit of years of interviews, Gargus has added much detail and additional depth to make this what will be the definitive book about the Son Tay Raid. High praise from Gen. McChrystal and a collection of high points herald this [newly published] book. Hopefully, we will have an excerpt from the book in next month's *Sentinel*.

The Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club in Newport Beach provided a beautiful backdrop for Chapter 78's annual Christmas party. With incoming president James McLanahan at the helm as emcee, guests enjoyed Sinatra classics and holiday favorites performed by local celebrity Frank DiSalvo. The program featured a colors presentation by Sunburst Youth Academy cadets, and our guest speaker was Norma Shinno Irving Donlon, author of *Soldiers Widow... Soldiers Wife... Soldiers Mother...* We were also honored to welcome distinguished visitors, including SFA President Chris Wilkerson and SFA Chapter 75 President Lee Jacobs.

As part of the chapter's long-time outreach to future SF candidates, Chapter Secretary Gary Macnamara presented the ROTC Award of Excellence to 2LT Kyle Debisaran at the Cal State University Fullerton ceremony commissioning ceremony.

We are delighted to keep receiving excellent stories from our readers. Let's keep that momentum going, and send us your stories that you think Green Berets, young and old, would like to hear. ❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

SAVE THE DATE

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2026

3RD ANNUAL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION VALOR LUNCHEON

FEATURING GUEST SPEAKER

U.S. ARMY LTC (RET.)

HENRY “DICK” THOMPSON, PH.D.

Legendary MACV-SOG Veteran, Codename “Dynamite”

Internationally recognized consultant, educator, speaker and author

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THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS



2025 Update on Helping the Montagnards in Vietnam



Tom Turney

By Thomas W. Turney
SFA Life Member (M-14394)
Edited by Len Fein

Many US Army Special Forces (“SF”) veterans who served in Vietnam worked with the local indigenous peoples, largely Montagnards, to create an effective fighting force to counter Viet Cong and NVA forces operating in South Vietnam. Whether deployed at an A Camp

where an SF team would recruit, train and operate with their indigenous troops; to Mobile Strike Force (Mike Force) units that acted as a quick reaction force (QRF); to MACV SOG or Special Forces Greek alphabet named units, the importance of working with these indigenous soldiers cannot be understated.

Close bonds between these troops and their SF counterparts were formed because of working together. When the US withdrew from Vietnam, many of these “Forgotten Warriors” were captured and put into re-education camps or killed. Their families were uprooted, and their ancestral lands were confiscated. All who had worked with these soldiers felt we had abandoned them, and many of us worked tirelessly to try to help them emigrate to the US. The small Montagnard community near Ft. Bragg, NC is one example of success. While a small contingent of them were able to successfully relocate to the US, most were left behind.

Many Special Forces veterans and others who worked with the Montagnards during the Vietnam era have worked tirelessly over the years to help them. Organizations such as Save The Montagnard People (<https://montagnards.org/>) have helped those who were able to escape to the US, and various other organizations have been working to help those who remain in Vietnam.

I have been working to support groups working to help the indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands in Vietnam since I returned there in 2016 having last been in the area in 1969. I was appalled to learn what had happened to the Yards and have been trying to help them since

then. One way I do that is financial support; but also, I am hopeful that the work I do and the endorsements I make, will motivate others to donate to help them as well.

In the past, I have financially supported non-profit organizations where I believe in their mission. One of those is Refugee Relief International Inc. (<https://refugeerelief.org>) that has worked in many conflict areas around the world. It has as volunteers John Padgett, a well-known former SF medic and retired PA who worked with SOG, and his wife Vicki Padgett, PA-C, MAJ USAF (Ret). When I learned about Viet-Dreams in 2022, I reached out to John to see if he would be interested in working in the Central Highlands. Since then, John and Vicki have made two trips there. The first was primarily a scouting mission and the second was devoted to teaching health education and basic first aid. There was an article published in the March 2024 issue of the Sentinel outlining their initial trip.

I plan to support VietDreams and the work they are doing in the Central Highlands and urge you to join me. Donation information can be found here: <https://vietdreams.org/donate>. ❖

By John “Doc” Padgett, PA-C Emeritus, MAJ (Ret), USSF
SFA # D/L 3551
SOA # 404 G/L

Refugee Relief International, Inc (RRII) sent Team Padgett (John and Vicki) on a recon to the Kontum area to assess the needs and what could be done, followed by a teaching mission. Humanitarian missions in Vietnam, especially to assist the Montagnard, or “Dega”, population are more difficult than it would seem. Our initial assessment trip was almost canceled because prior to our visit a Montagnard resistance movement attacked a Vietnamese police and Communist Party post, killing several. The Vietnamese are not inclined to let foreigners into the highlands at any time, let alone following an attack on their infrastructure. But Viet Dreams, an NGO that puts in wells and water purification into rural area villages, schools, and public places, is welcomed by the Vietnamese government. Our Refugee Relief team managed to be added to the permission document as part of the Viet Dreams team. We followed as the Viet Dreams CEO Mr. Quan examined and adjusted water projects in schools and orphanages.

As part of our initial assessment, we visited rural schools with Montagnard students, and a group of orphanages caring for Montagnard children, run by Catholic nuns. The situation among Montagnard families is critical, and poverty is the norm. Often impoverished parents, knowing that they cannot feed another child, will drop off a newborn at one of the orphanages. Other children, from newborn to teenagers, are from broken homes, have been forced out of their homes, or are true orphans with no surviving parents.

The orphanages are striving to be self-sufficient, as they receive no support from an antagonistic and distrustful Communist government. The orphanages have seven campuses, and a few grow their own vegetables and rice, and raise animals. One bakes bread to sell, and another does handicrafts for the local market. All send the children to



John and Vicki Padgett with Sedang schoolchildren. Note gift bags.

local schools and have computers to help with learning. The computers were very old and difficult to use due to viruses, so RRII donated 12 new laptops. With anti-virus software, of course.

RRII determined that a way to help the Yards in Kontum was to teach basic pediatric skills to the nuns who care for the children, and the teachers and staff at the rural schools in the rural Kontum area. Small problems like colds, minor injuries, and stomach trouble could be evaluated and treated before they became big problems. The number of visits to the inadequate local clinics could be reduced. For the second mission John and Vicki developed and taught a course in basic pediatric primary care to the nuns. The Yard school teachers were held back by the government for political reasons. Supplies were distributed, and simple diagnostic tests such as strep throat screen, urine dipsticks and pregnancy tests were donated and taught.

The single course in basic childhood illnesses and injuries is far from what is needed to support Montagnard orphanages and schools. But it's a start. In partnership with Viet Dreams, RRII is dedicated to continuing its support of the orphanages and will continue to try to reach the schoolchildren in rural Kontum province. Go to www.refugeerelief.org to help. ❖



Vicki instructing basic pediatric care at an orphanage

“Another died in my place.”

Part 1

By Greg Walker (U.S. Army Special Forces, Ret.)

“I will add this about Medevac crews past and present, when we receive a request for help, we will respond to the best of our capability, we will find a way to help if at all possible. Our mission requires risk-taking beyond most other aviation units. The 5 years I spent flying Dustoff was the most rewarding of my military career.” — Ken Kik, Flight Medic, 571st Medical Company (Air Ambulance)

.....

“When in command—Command. Do not ever give in to the wrong course of action, despite pressure and opinions of others. Command is not a popularity contest. It is a responsibility. First, the mission was not a life-threatening mission and should not have been approved.

“Once the XO decided to launch a second attempt, although the wrong decision due to weather conditions, he now went down the slippery slope of high risk by pushing the pilot to fly the mission. Pressuring the pilot in command was yet again unprofessional and poor leadership. Once he was aware the co-pilot was not NVG qualified, another qualified crew should have been used if he persisted to order the mission.

“Again, it still would have been wrong to launch. By approving a non-qualified crew, the XO made a fatal decision which was also a violation of regulations. Never let enthusiasm overcome capabilities. Never.

“The XO’s actions resulted in the death of those brave Americans who never, ever, should have launched. He should have been severely punished and not only relieved.” — Major General (Ret.) Kenneth R. Bowra, <https://gssof.org/kenneth-bowra-bio/>

Prologue

On May 13, 1991, a California National Guard MEDEVAC crew was tasked to provide then nighttime air evacuation of a non-emergency Army soldier from a mountain top radar site in Honduras. Aborting the first attempt due to poor weather, the crew was released for the night, and a ground evacuation was arranged. Against Army aviation regulations and the MEDEVAC SOP for the 4/228th Aviation Battalion to which the CAL Guard crews were attached the executive officer for the 4/228th pushed for a second attempt. It resulted in the deaths of the three female crew members and the severe injury to the crew chief, the only survivor of the accident. This is their story.

As Operation Desert Shield began (August 2, 1990–January 17, 1991), both Army Reserve and National Guard MEDEVAC units began being called up for duty with both CONUS and OCONUS taskings. On November 21, 1990, the 126th Air Ambulance Company, California National Guard, was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas. Its mission was to assume the duties of the 507th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) as the 507th (AA) was being deployed for Operation Desert Shield and what became Operation Desert Storm.

“The first MEDEVAC unit to deploy to the Persian Gulf region was Delta Company, 326th Medical Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Maj. Scott Heintz, who had taken over just one month prior, was the commander. He and the first three aircraft and crews arrived on 20 August and immediately assumed MEDEVAC alert.

“When the 326th received its deployment orders, it had one Forward Surgical MEDEVAC Team (FSMT) of three aircraft on temporary duty with the Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras. Heintz received permission to recall those aircraft. With operations still ongoing in Central America, the 571st Med Det (RA) at Fort Carson, Colorado, was directed to self-deploy three UH-1Vs to Honduras.



Located atop Cerro de Mole in Honduras, TACAN was a highly classified U.S. radar and communications intercept site. A single dirt road led from the town of La Paz up to the site whose elevation is 6,631 feet. (Credit: Google Earth)

“As active-duty units deployed into the theater, both USAR and ARNG units were rapidly activated to fill in at Army garrisons in the United States and Europe. The 126th Med Co (AA), California ARNG, was activated and sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, and Fort Sam Houston, Texas, assuming the home missions of the 507th. It also deployed three aircraft to Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras. On that deployment, a 126th crew was lost while flying a night rescue mission on 13 May 1991, and Capt. Sashai Dawn, 1st Lt. Vicki Boyd, and S.Sgt. Linda Simonds were killed. The crew chief survived and was recovered by rescue forces the next morning.

“When the 326th received its deployment orders, it had one Forward Surgical MEDEVAC Team (FSMT) of three aircraft on temporary duty with the Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras. Heintz received permission to recall those aircraft. With operations still ongoing in Central America, the 571st Med Det (RA) at Fort Carson, Colorado, was directed to self-deploy three UH-1Vs to Honduras. 1st Lt. The 571st deployment took five days, with stops in San Antonio and Brownsville, Texas; Vera Cruz, Mexico; Belize City, Belize; and then into Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras. The crews flew at 90 knots and logged twenty-six flight hours in route. At Soto Cano, they assumed MEDEVAC duties for the next three months until replaced by another group of 571st pilots and then eventually crews from the 54th Med Det (RA) from Fort Lewis, Washington, and the 126th Med Co (AA) from the California ARNG.” — *Call Sign “DUSTOFF”: A History of U.S. Army Aeromedical Evacuation from Conception to Hurricane Katrina*, by Darrel D. Whitcomb, <https://medcoe.army.mil/borden-tb-dustoff>

However, the MEDEVAC crews coming from the Reserves and National Guard to support missions in Southwest Asia and Honduras faced significant obstacles. One active-duty aviation officer assigned as an advisor to the 347th Med Det (RA), USAR, from Miami, Florida, deployed then to Saudi Arabia in December.

“Capt. Randy Schwallie, an active-duty officer previously assigned to the Flatiron Detachment at Fort Rucker, Alabama. As DESERT SHIELD began, he saw a message stating that the 347th needed an active-duty advisor for their upcoming deployment, and he volunteered. He reported ASAP to Fort Stewart to ship out with the “Dolphin Dustoff,” as they were known. Upon the unit’s arrival in Saudi Arabia Schwallie began encountering and resolving as best he could the challenges Reserve and National Guard MEDEVAC units were facing—these were similar in nature to what the 126th crews at Soto Cano encountered upon their arrival.

“I am becoming increasingly aware of the lack of aviation support that we are receiving through our chain of command,” he wrote in his personal log. “We have not been able to get good weather reports, tactical locations of the refueling points, or information about the aviation intermediate maintenance unit

that supports us. I am starting to understand the saying that “medical aviation is a stepchild that no one wants to own...We serve two masters; the medical and aviation communities, but we don’t seem to serve either one very well.” Using personal connections within the aviation community, Schwallie was able to get his troops some briefings on aviation operations, airspace control, and the enemy forces arrayed to the north of them. He was not getting any of that data through the medical chain.” — *Call Sign “DUSTOFF”*

MEDEVAC support for the U.S. clandestine war in Honduras

At Soto Cano, CPT Sashai Dawn was experiencing the same shortcomings. Upon the crews’ arrival Dawn, per the crash report, met with the 4/228th’s battalion commander. He stated in his interview, conducted on May 17th and while he was on mid-tour leave, he was “pleased with the experience level of the incoming unit”. Further, he noted the pilots averaged 1500 hours of flight time and were on average 35 years of age. It was noted in his interview the last rotational MEDEVAC unit’s “high time” aviator possessed only seven hundred hours in the air. The battalion commander himself possessed 18 years of military service with 3400 hours of flight time.



CPT (P) Sashai Dawn had over 1500 hours of flight time as a MEDEVAC pilot and was being considered to take command of her CAL NG unit upon coming off Active Duty. (Credit: Family Archives)

He instructed CPT Dawn to “ensure her crews received an adequate local area orientation... and that all her crews flew from Soto Cano to Macora, both day and with night vision goggles “because he expected the majority of MEDEVAC missions to be flown from Macora since that was the location of the heavy engineer equipment and road-building project.”

How to kill an aircrew and then cover it up

When informed during his interview that 1LT Boyd's NVG credential had run out of currency (shortly after her arrival in Honduras), the battalion commander said “he felt, however, this was probably due to weather (April/May) as the end of April and the first week of May had very poor flying weather, and “very little could be accomplished.”

The commander of the 126th Medical Company, the parent unit for the detachment serving in Honduras, told accident investigators that all those deployed had accomplished check rides and other pre-deployment preparations so these “wouldn't arise while they were in-country.” Still, the commander informed investigators CPT Dawn had verbally reported to him that the three crews' orientation upon their arrival was limited. Dawn elaborated saying the orientation was not as extensive as she believed it should have been to include orientation flights where the crews were simply passengers in a Blackhawk and the promised Instructor Pilot, a pilot (IP) who is a highly experienced aviator and is responsible for training and evaluating other pilots, and an IFE, or In-flight examiner. An “Instrument Flight Examiner” is a pilot who is qualified to evaluate the instrument flight proficiency of other pilots.

This was a major issue for CPT Dawn as, per the accident report, “The unit had scheduled an IP to go with the detachment to Honduras, but a week prior, a decision was made not to send an IP because they [the 126th Medical Company at Fort Bliss] understood that an IP and IFE was available in-country.”

The 126th unit commander stated he had flown with both crew members [CPT Dawn and 1LT Boyd] as an evaluator and did not detect any real problems. The crash report summary of this conversation



UH-1H/#640 impacted a massive mountainside boulder at over 100 knots. One investigator told survivor SPC Buddy Jarrell, the crew chief that night, it was the worst aircraft crash he'd seen in 30 years on the job. (Credit: Buddy Jarrell)

offers he (the unit commander) was not uncomfortable with the crews deployed to Honduras “however, he probably would not have attempted the mission with the crew that suffered the accident.” It is noteworthy that the summary does not present any narrative as to why the unit commander felt this way given his laudatory observations made earlier. For example, was he referring to the pilot/co-pilot? Or was he referring to a nighttime MEDEVAC attempt which the pilot/co-pilot had not been properly orientated for by the 4/228 due to poor weather in April and early May and the fact 1LT Boyd was not re-certified NVG wise by the 4/228th despite this capability crucial to MEDEVAC operations? And why did the XO recall Dawn's crew rather than alerting the 2nd Up crew? And why provide them with a conventional UH-1H which unlike MEDEVAC UH-1Vs did not have radar altimeter capability? The context of the 126th unit commander's remarks was clearly missing in the summary of his interview.



1LT Vicki Boyd, copilot, was a well educated and capable flight scheduler and aviator. (Credit: Family Archives)



SSGT Linda Simonds was an extraordinary flight medic and well liked by her peers. (Credit: Family Archives)

The unit commander stated he was unaware of which Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) the detachment was to use “but thought it was the 507th’s, integrated with the 4/228th’s.” In short, he had no idea as to which MEDEVAC SOP the three deployed air crews fell under command and control wise. He did say CPT Dawn had called him about crew selection two weeks earlier and he had told her what to take into consideration. He was under the impression “that the Medical Detachment belonged to, and was to take its guidance, from the 4/228th Aviation Regiment.”

The 126th unit commander had 5,500 total flight hours and departed CONUS on May 14th to meet with the unit at Soto Cano Air Base.

Nowhere in the accident report is found any documentation or interview summary detailing 4/228 sponsored orientation flights other than a “ride-along” by any of the three crews to include either daylight or nighttime NVG assisted flights to the TACAN site on Cerro la Mole, just 9.2 miles from Soto Cano.

Host unit negligence and a weak executive officer

The NVG issue is a significant factor in what occurred on May 13th, the night of the accident. The 4/228 did not do much flying in April/early May, and because an in-country IP was unavailable to the crews, 1LT Boyd’s NVG currency lapsed once in-country. Per Army Aviation regulations night vision goggles (NVGs) are not allowed on an aircraft if even one crew member is not NVG current, as night vision operations require all crew members to be trained and qualified to ensure crew coordination and safety. The non-current crew member cannot safely operate or assist in an NVG-assisted mission, as they lack the necessary training for the modified environment and the use of the equipment.”

On the first MEDEVAC attempt to TACAN the effort was made during the early hours of evening and was flown under Visual Flight Rules, or VFR. Meaning—the pilot is flying by visual reference to the ground and sky without relying on instruments. It requires pilots to maintain a certain distance from clouds and have adequate visibility, with specific weather minimums that vary depending on the airspace class.

At approximately 2130H the medical officer on duty for the Soto Cano Hospital received had received a call from the TACAN radar site. The caller offered a 28-year-old black male was complaining of back pain and a swollen abdominal area and a MEDEVAC flight was requested as a favor rather than arranging ground transportation. Although the soldier’s reported illness was not life, limb, or vision threatening the first MEDEVAC attempt launched but returned to base due to poor weather. Upon discussion with the chain of command ground evacuation was authorized. Thirty minutes later the physician on duty was notified a second air evacuation was being attempted per the authorization of the 4/228th XO. At 2300H, the doctor re-contacted TACAN and asked if the MEDEVAC had been completed? When told no, he called Warrior Operations and it was only then, an hour and a half after the second launch, the doctor was told all contact had been lost with the aircraft shortly after take-off.



4/228 UH-1H #640 at Soto Cano just days before its fatal crash on May 13, 1991 at Cerro la Mole. #640 was a conventional aircraft with no MEDEVAC specialty configuration nor the crucial radar altimeter capability necessary for MEDEVAC missions. (Credit: Ken Kik)

CPT Dawn had aborted the first launch and returned to Soto Cano roughly twenty minutes after take-off. This due to heavy cloud cover at 3500 feet in and around Cerro la Mole. The TACAN site elevation was 6,447 feet. Per the accident report her decision was accepted by the unit’s executive officer who was the OIC that night given the 4/228 commander was on mid-tour leave/absent from Soto Cano.

Note: During research for this story the identify of the executive officer (XO) that night was established. As the Army crash report redacted the majority of names of those interviewed, per policy, the author has chosen not to identify the XO although the families of those lost have been duly informed of his identity.

When the XO initiated and authorized the second and fatal attempt just hours later that night, CPT Dawn informed him of 1LT Boyd’s NVG currency being out of date. This meant no one on CPT Dawn’s aircraft could have onboard or use night vision assistance for a



Impact site (white) of Dustoff 01 as taken by flight medic Ken Kik in a later deployment. (Credit: Ken Kik)

second attempt. According to the air traffic controller (ATC) at Soto Cano that night, and contrary to the urging of the 4/228 XO that the weather had cleared to the degree a second attempt could be made, “the weather was bad and the TACAN site was fogged in until 0100–0200 the next morning [May 14th].” The ATC went on to describe the weather station, the tower, and the GCA facility at Soto Cano Air Base was calling the TACAN site “every 10–20 minutes questioning them about the weather at the site.” Although ground evacuation had been authorized and was being arranged and the medical officer on duty at the hospital clearly did not consider the reported illness/injury to be life-threatening given his communication with TACAN ninety minutes after the second launch had occurred, it becomes evident a great deal of command pressure was being channeled through the 4228th’s leadership to make the MEDEVAC happen.

After the fog cleared TACAN’s lookout in its tower reported seeing a fire to the south of his position. No one at TACAN had been made aware all contact with the aircraft had been lost at 2255H. TACAN’s ability to accurately describe the weather conditions from its location was minimal. They could see only what the weather conditions were at the site and above it. They could not see what conditions (cloud cover, for example) existed below their line of sight.

Pushing the limits and pressuring the pilot for no good reason

Per the 4/228th’s MEDEVAC SOP “The approval to launch MEDEVAC rests with the 4/288th chain of command...the OIC, Communications Center and JTF-BRAVO will ensure that MEDEVAC request procedures are followed and that missions are transmitted per this SOP... [and finally] **The 4/228th Commander will ensure compliance with this SOP and resolve problems between the MEDEVAC section and other JTF-BRAVO elements.**”

In the summary interview with a 4/228th officer and pilot (1000 flight hours) he told investigators the MEDEVAC crew, S-3 Operations Officer, and other personnel discussed and concurred with CPT

Dawn’s decision to abort the first attempt as clouds were encountered at 5,500 feet. CPT Dawn determined she was not going to climb any higher since the elevation/landing pad at TACAN was 1200 feet higher with no visibility noted at the decision point to abort.

At 2115H, according to the CQ log, the Emergency Operations Center with the 4228th acting commander (XO) in concert contacted Warrior Operations stating a directive from the 4/228th chain of command to monitor the weather as a second attempt would be authorized if it cleared. At 2125H, Warrior Operations called TACAN and was told they had three miles visibility and a 1500-foot ceiling. However, in the ATC’s statement he confirmed TACAN was socked in below the TACAN site with harsh weather and was not predicted to see any change until 0100–0200 in the morning.

The accident report itself states in its Role of Weather section (DA Form 2397-11-R) “The accident occurred at night. The moon had not risen and with a 500-foot overcast condition with haze and smoke, most likely the horizon was not visible to the crew.”

Specific online aviation weather data (such as a METAR report) for Soto Cano Air Base on May 13, 1991, is described as:

General Climate and Aviation

Context

- **Wetter Season Start:** May 13th is the beginning of the wetter season at Soto Cano Air Base, which typically lasts until late October. The chance of a “wet day” (at least 0.04 inches of precipitation) is 27% or greater during this period.
- **Typical May Weather:** May in Honduras is generally warm to hot, with an average daily high of around 89.4°F and a low of 71.1°F. The climate often involves a mix of partly cloudy to mostly cloudy skies with a chance of showers.
- **Night Flying Conditions:** One search result mentions that a helicopter crash on this date was attributed to “nighttime flying conditions in difficult terrain.” This suggests that visibility or terrain challenges may have been a factor in some operations around that time, possibly due to darkness or cloud cover.

• On May 13, 1991, the moon was in a **Waning Crescent** phase with an illumination of approximately 1%. The new moon occurred on the following day, May 14, 1991.

Further –

• **Location and Mission:** In 1991, the 4-228th Aviation Battalion was headquartered at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, with a mission to support U.S. military groups in Central America through air assault, air movement, MEDEVAC, and contingency operations. The environment was considered a “low intensity conflict” zone.

• **Operational Context:** The unit faced challenging conditions, including adverse weather, jungle, and mountainous terrain, and possible insurgent/bandit activity.

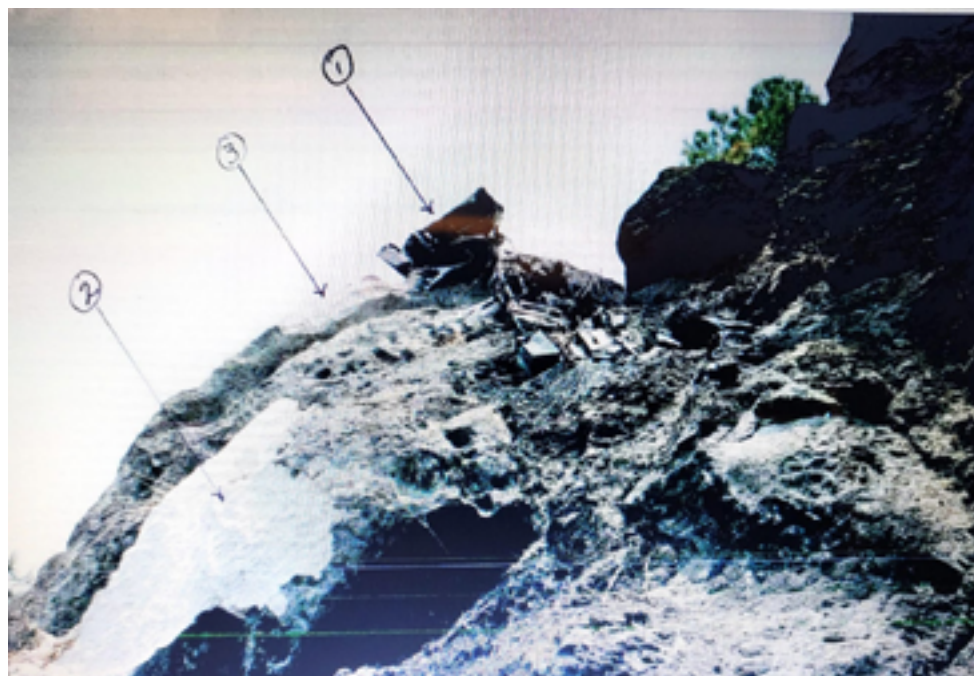


Crash site located in the early morning hours on May 14th by a four-man QRF from JSOC/the 2nd Bn, 7th Special Forces Group and SPC/flight medic Ken Kik. (Credit: Ken Kik)

- **Night Vision Goggle (NVG) Use:** Operation Just Cause in Panama (Dec 1989), which involved elements of U.S. Army aviation and occurred shortly before 1991, is noted as the first time night vision goggles were used in actual combat operations. This indicates that NVG operations were a relatively new and evolving aspect of general Army aviation practice around that time, and specific SOPs would have been critical for their safe and effective implementation.
- **Training Concerns:** An Army report from around that time, specifically concerning crashes in Panama in February 1990, cited concerns about corner-cutting on pilot training and an “erosion of skills and confidence,” leading to potential pilot error. This suggests that unit-specific SOPs would have been essential for maintaining safety standards, a 4/228th SOP included in the accident report which the unit did not follow leading up to and including the night of May 13, 1991.

An unnamed 4/228th officer/pilot told investigators that two (names redacted) unit officers “talked with the PIC [CPT Dawn] about aided versus unaided flight and the PIC indicated she felt comfortable going unaided.” Upon learning from Dawn her copilot’s NVG currency was out of date the XO offered another pilot who was current. It was then that CPT Dawn offered she wanted to keep her crew together but required a replacement aircraft as hers had a malfunction light come on during the return flight to Soto Cano earlier. A UH-1H from the 4/228th was made available (#640) and reconfigured for MEDEVAC equipment.

The second attempt was launched with the XO’s authorization. It should not have been. Whether a fire team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, or platoon leader/company commander your job is to prevent your troops from doing something contrary to regulations, policy, procedure, and SOP. This did not occur between the XO and CPT Dawn—in fact, just the opposite took place per the accident report.



#640 impacted head on with this massive boulder while attempting to evade crashing into Cerro la Mole to the north. Bits of wreckage are indicated and the resulting fire was so intense heat-wise that metals melted/fused together. (Credit: Ft. Rucker Accident Report)

At 2250H, an interviewed officer stated he monitored two transmissions by 1LT Boyd which were made in a strained voice. She is reported as saying “Left bank,” and within seconds, “There are 26 pounds of torque.” At this point, according to crew chief and survivor Buddy Jarrell, UH-1H 640 impacted a massive boulder at over 100 knots and with over one hundred Gs of force. The accident report reflects the internal communication traffic as listened to by the tower personnel.

What happens to the human body

- **For brief moments:** A brief pulse of one hundred Gs, lasting only milliseconds, can be survivable, though still potentially causing severe injuries.
- **For longer durations:** Sustained 100 Gs of force would be fatal, crushing the body’s internal organs and overwhelming the circulatory system.

The impact force was so immediate and high that all three females’ pelvises were crushed. These types of forces are encountered in high-energy, blunt-force traumas such as motor vehicle accidents, falls from significant heights, or crushing injuries.

The 4/228th officer concluded his statement saying “*the decision to launch the second attempt at the MEDEVAC mission was really more the PIC’s than any other individual. Command pressure to complete the mission did not exist [Italics mine].*”

Those familiar with writing and reading official reports might recognize the word-play in this statement, particularly the emphasis regarding Command pressure not being a factor whatsoever.

The accident board concluded that the crash was human error—individual failure. Specifically, “The pilot’s actions were the result of her overconfidence in her own ability to fly the aircraft and assist the copilot with navigation. The copilot appeared to be disorientated as to their location and the location of the road they wanted to follow.”

However, the findings also pointed out a fraction of the 4/228th command failures to have followed its own MEDEVAC SOP. In its second Finding the board stated **Present but not Contributing** to the accident was this. “The local area orientation provided the 126th Medical Detachment on arrival in-country was inadequate and not in accordance with the 4/228th Aviation Regiment Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Some unit members received no orientation or a partial orientation while others received theirs as a passenger in a UH-60 aircraft where they were unable to see and navigate. Also, they had not conducted the night vision flight to and from Macora as directed by the battalion commander.”

The board made it clear “The Findings listed below did not contribute directly to this accident; however, if left uncorrected, they could have an adverse effect on the safety of

aviation operations.” The accident report included a statement that no other or further investigations were necessary despite the investigators knowing a collateral board was required due to the loss of life directly connected to the crash.

In short, the board’s conclusions and placement of blame on the pilot/copilot was an unmitigated lie meant to protect the truly responsible parties involved. The report omits eye-witness accounts to conversations at Soto Cano regarding command pressure; offers subjective private opinions of CPT Dawn in specific; presents critical factors as fact that are refuted by the survivor and flight medic Ken Kik; and is a report slanted in bias. Meaning it is an official account that selectively chooses information or data to support one side and that side was the 4/228th Aviation Battalion at that point in time.

The most glaring as well as unpalatable example of in-house bias and inaccuracy at the 4/228th comes from a former company commander at the unit who had interacted with CPT Dawn at briefings. The officer, in a 2025 email, stated “The 126th Med. Co. only arrived in Honduras on April 17, 1991. They were NOT serving in a conflict or with an active hostile force...Even the Official US Army Accident Report (910513-2312-6815640 (Copy-C) dated 23 Dec 1991) confirms there was no hostile threats to the mission and the crew did not fly with weapons or was the crew armed.”

Factually the U.S. clandestine/covert war in Honduras had been going on for over ten years. The Contra War was just winding down in 1990. Soto Cano SOPs in May 1991 made it clear no U.S. personnel could travel outside the gates unless they had a fully armed MP escort and a very good reason to do so. Finally, Buddy Jarrell, the sole survivor, affirmed with the author that he’d drawn his M16 for the mission and the pilot, copilot, and flight medic were likewise armed, per MEDEVAC policy, with their sidearms. And the report itself states the Threat level was “Low—None”.

Note: *What it signifies:*

- **High Security/Stability:** The region is considered stable, possibly friendly territory, or an area with overwhelming air superiority.
- **Reduced Risk:** Enemy air defense systems (SAMs, AAA) are likely absent or ineffective, and enemy aircraft aren’t expected to contest the airspace.
- **Mission Focus:** The mission can focus purely on its objective (delivery, reconnaissance, VIP transport) without extensive counter-threat measures.

What it doesn’t mean:

- **No Hazards:** It doesn’t eliminate all dangers, such as weather, birds (BASH), or accidental encounters, but it removes the man-made threat of attack.
- **Total Complacency:** Crews still maintain situational awareness (SA) and follow procedures; “low” still means some potential exists, even if extremely remote.

In simple terms: “Go fly; we don’t expect anyone to shoot at you, but keep your eyes open anyway.”



The Army MP platoon at TACAN was fully armed as a perimeter security force. (Credit: AFEM for Honduras FB page)

Throughout the 1980s the U.S. conducted a counter-insurgency operation in Honduras against both internal and external (Sandinista Nicaragua) threats. By 1990, the Contra War was ending and along with it U.S. military support to include a history of cross-border operations from southern Honduras across the border into Nicaragua. These were most often conducted by 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces, then stationed at Soto Cano and JSOC Special Mission Units (DELTA/SEAL Team SIX). It was not uncommon for MEDEVAC crews to mask their aircraft ID markings and fly, fully armed per MEDEVAC SOP, into Nicaragua to evacuate wounded SF combat advisors or CIA officers.

U.S. Army MEDEVAC aircraft, during the ten-year insurgency and Contra war mounted from southern Honduras, would often strap M-60 light machine guns to the deck when entering Nicaraguan air space to rescue/recover U.S. personnel advising the Contras. They were not mounted but rather “carried” and could be used if necessary by the crew chief in hand-held mode.

Per the survivor, CPT Dawn and her crew were armed per SOP and in fact then SP4 Jarrell’s M-16 was recovered, bent into the shape of a “U”, at the crash site.

The report’s mission briefing statement clearly states the Threat level on May 13th was “Low – None”. And the JTF-BRAVO SOP during this same time period restricted any U.S. travel outside Soto Cano, especially at night, without a fully armed MP escort. Further, the TACAN site featured a platoon of MPs, again fully armed, to ensure the safety of the site and its personnel from insurgent attacks. As for accident report stating the crew was unarmed as claimed, a response to my query to the Fort Rucker FOIA team affirmed accident investigators/reports do not mention or account for weapons or munitions. And MEDEVAC regulations/policy states crews can fly armed with personal weapons which CPT Dawn and her crew did. This given the still uncertain nature of the environment bandit/insurgent wise.

But it is this retired officer’s comment regarding CPT Dawn, sent in an email thirty-four years after the crash, which illuminates the dark side of the unit culture at the senior leadership level in the battalion regarding not only the 126th Medical Detachment but female aviators such as CPT Dawn and 1LT Boyd.

“As a Captain, I attended the staff meetings with CPT Dawn periodically after her arrival and before the accident. From my encounters with her she was definitely headstrong, a bit cocky and didn’t like to be crossed or questioned. She was what I would call “Hot-Crazy” Definitely a hot 10, but also a bit crazy-scary!”

D. Joyner, who served at Soto Cano and knew the aircrew, posted this good-hearted and complementary observation on the AFEM for Service in Honduras FB page:

“I was there as well, CPT Dawn and crew was way too nice to a bunch of Freight-Train PFC’s always trying to pick em up at the Blackjack club. Very classy with her rejections, lol.”

Several now retired Army aviation pilots the author spoke with offered this keen insight. Female aviators have always had to work twice as hard as their male counterparts to earn respect. Mr. Joyner’s recollection illustrates the other obstacle they faced and addressed professionally.

Note: CPT Dawn was not located by the JSOC team and flight medic Ken Kik at the crash site. It was felt she had either been thrown further away from the point of impact or, according to the accident report, captured. The report notes the capture of a Honduran national by the MP element on the road below the crash site in the early morning hours. The Honduran was turned over to the host country police authorities. It is unknown why he was inside the perimeter and attempting to avoid detection. A former MP who was stationed at Soto Cano at this time described to this author that Honduran nationals were a concern and frequent encounters with them by the MPs took place. “We never knew if they were looters, or bandits, or insurgents, or just showing up because they were curious,” he said.

Dawn’s remains would not be discovered until the tail boom of the aircraft was x-rayed at Soto Cano by the Fort Rucker investigation team. She had been dismembered upon impact and her torso, burnt beyond recognition, had been forced from the cockpit back through the passenger compartment and into the tail boom itself.

1LT Boyd’s body was discovered by the JSOC team and flight medic Ken Kik. According to Kik it was clear she had survived the crash although thrown 225 feet, still in her seat, downhill. Kik described it was evident Boyd had gotten herself out of the seat, removed her helmet, and then crawled/fell twenty-five feet further downhill. Because the 4/228th XO refused multiple times to launch a MEDEVAC immediately upon the discovery of two possible survivors on the mountain, Kik believes 1LT Boyd died of her injuries during the hours after the crash and the JSOC team getting onsite. According to Kik, had he been hoisted into the crash site much earlier Boyd may have had a fighting chance to survive her injuries. It was 1LT Boyd survivor Buddy Jarrell heard calling for help as he lay three hundred yards downhill, gravely injured and surrounded by the torrent of flames the aircraft’s punctured fuel cell was feeding.

SSGT Simonds was killed upon impact. SPC Kik located her body on the mountainside.



The hand-drawn illustration from Buddy Jarrell of the crash. The “000” is #640 as it banked hard left to avoid impacting Cerro la Mole. The helo swiftly lost altitude while gaining speed and barely avoided crashing into a cliff face on the western side of the valley. CPT Dawn regained control and began to climb but by then it was too late. #640 impacted the eastern cliff face at over 100 knots (the report offers 90 knots but Jarrell was told by an investigator their air speed was higher). (Credit: Buddy Jarrell)

SPC Buddy Jarrell was thrown over 300 yards down the mountainside. That he survived his injuries, recovered from them, and remained on Active Duty until his retirement (E7) is a miracle in and of itself.

The officer's subjective comment as quoted is indicative even years later the culture at the 4/228th was biased as well as unacceptable as held by certain members at the command level.

Due to name redactions, it is possible but unknown if this individual was interviewed for the accident report, or in some other manner contributed his disparaging thoughts regarding CPT Dawn and/or 1LT Boyd. Regardless, they demonstrate serious unit cultural problems at that time and the practice of laying blame on the doorstep of the dead.

A public relations nightmare

The fatal crash of a MEDEVAC aircraft in Honduras was front page news. In addition, that three female aviation personnel were killed drew even greater attention. The personnel files of all three women were requested by both media and congressional members. The accident report's conclusion, that CPT Dawn became distracted while attempting to assist her copilot with navigation duties and by doing so flew into the side of a mountain made it a cut and dried event. Pilot error. No more, no less.

In 2025, SFC (ret) Buddy Jarrell recalled what truly occurred adding much of his official statement to investigators was heavily edited.

Jarrell offered CPT Dawn flew to La Paz as they could see the town's lights. She was hoping to find the road that led up to the TACAN site and simply follow it. They did find the road per both Jarrell, who was lying on his belly looking down and using the aircraft's landing light for illumination, and the internal communications traffic between Dawn and Boyd as presented in the report.

They had made several attempts to fly up the valley but the terrain and tree cover made it impossible to keep the road in sight. Jarrell recommended to CPT Dawn that they abort the mission as it was becoming too dangerous. Dawn's response was curt, adding they would try one more time. Jarrell recalls seeing Cerro la Mole appearing right in front of the aircraft. Dawn made a sharp adjustment to the left, placing the aircraft at an estimated 30-degree angle. The MEDEVAC helo began losing altitude while also picking up speed. They missed impacting into a cliff on the west side of the valley, but as Dawn regained control of their decent and began to climb they crashed into the cliff side on the east side of the valley.

Note: The report states CPT Dawn never located the road. But elsewhere in the report the internal communications traffic between pilot and copilot states clearly they had. And Buddy Jarrell's recollections decades later confirms the road was indeed, for a very short period of time, located and attempted to be followed.

Jarrell remembers trying to push SSGT Simonds into the crash position but she kept sitting straight up. "There was a lot of screaming over the headset and then the next thing I knew I was lying on my back, in the dark, watching a river of fire coming downhill toward me from the punctured fuel cell. I heard someone, I thought it was Linda, calling for help. There was nothing I could do but yell back that help was coming." ❖

Part II — Crash survivor William "Buddy" Jarrell and flight medic Ken Kik tell their stories for the first time in 34 years.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Walker is an honorably retired "Green Beret". He served in El Salvador in the 1980s and during Operation Iraqi Freedom. His awards and decorations include the Combat Infantryman Badge (X2), the Special Forces Tab, and the Legion of Merit. Upon retirement Greg returned to college and in 2009 began working as a case manager and patient advocate for the SOCOM Care Coalition. Today, fully retired, Mr. Walker lives and writes from his home in Sisters, Oregon, along with his service pup, Jasper.



Greg Walker- Interview with SF historian and 7th Special Forces Group Vet

Bud Gibson's YouTube channel "The Reconnaissance Cast" is a fantastic resource for those interested in firsthand accounts from MACVSOG/FORCE RECON and Aviation Veterans!

Listen to the interview at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-0HXK0Eeiw>



MG (Ret.) Kenneth Bowra and Greg Walker at SOAR 2024. (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)



RIDE TO THE SOUND OF THE GUNS

The Life of a Cold War Warrior,
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Theodore C. Mataxis

By H. R. McMaster Lt. Gen., US Army (Ret.)

Forward from *Ride to the Sound of the Guns: The Life of a Cold War Warrior, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Theodore C. Mataxis* by LTC (Ret.) Theodore Mataxis Jr., published by Casemate, August 15, 2025, pages ix-xi, used with permission.

In *Ride to the Sound of the Guns*, Brigadier General Theodore Mataxis's son, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Theodore Mataxis Jr., has written a memoir of his father that not only illuminates an extraordinary career, but also reveals the character of a man who exhibited tremendous courage, intellect, and compassion.

Brigadier General Mataxis was a prepossessing figure. He seemed intimidating through the eyes of a 14-year-old boy as I arrived at Valley Forge Military Academy and College as a high school freshman in August 1976. When I first saw him, he was in his dress greens army uniform with the stars on his shoulder boards gleaming in the hot summer sun. I thought that this barrel-chested, fit man with a shaved head was a dead ringer for the actor and World War II veteran and son of Greek immigrants, Telly Savalis. I was an avid consumer of military history and movies and was a fan of many of the World War II movies in which Savalis often played the role of a tough, irascible sergeant, like Sergeant Guffy in the 1965 film *The Battle of the Bulge*. I would soon learn that Mataxis's true exploits across three wars far exceeded any Hollywood heroics.

Mataxis's record surpasses fictional stories in literature as well as film. His career and character resonate with Anton Myrer's portrayal of Sam Damon, the strong, principled, and dedicated soldier in the novel *Once an Eagle*. Mataxis commanded a battalion in combat in World War II at the age of 26 and a regiment in the Korean War at the age of 36. He served for four years in Vietnam and Cambodia.

I had the privilege of getting to know General Mataxis well during my high school years at Valley Forge and we stayed in contact after I departed for the United States Military Academy at West Point. We corresponded across most of my subsequent career in our army. His intimidating countenance belied a deep concern for the young cadets of Valley Forge, and I remember fondly our many conversations over those years, even those which followed adolescent indiscretions on my part. Mataxis emphasized the tenets of leadership in our army. He told us that army leaders must always put mission accomplishment and the survival and well-being of those they lead before their own well-being. He described how he fostered trust, confidence, and cohesion among soldiers as the key ingredients for courage in battle. Trust, confidence, and cohesion, he told us, form psychological and emotional bulwarks against fear and inspire soldiers to act in ways contrary to the natural preoccupation with self-preservation. I remember him saying that good army teams take on the quality of a family in which the teammates' sense of honor make them more afraid of letting one another down than they are of the enemy's bullets. All of this rang true to me as I prepared soldiers for and led them in battle years later.

Mataxis had witnessed many changes in the army across three wars, but he was a source of one of the greatest continuities in the profession of arms: the priority of developing the next generations of leaders. I grew to admire greatly that tough, empathetic general. He showed me that the United States Army is a living historical community in which younger generations look to earlier generations for inspiration and to understand better their calling as soldiers.

Mataxis had a profound influence on me and other future leaders through his example and his mentorship. I soon realized that behind our commandant's rugged countenance was a person who always treated everyone with respect. I later understood that Mataxis was also an intellectual, an author, an avid reader, and collector of books.

Across my career he sent me the books from his library that he thought were most relevant to my new responsibilities. When I decided to write a doctoral dissertation on how and why Vietnam became an American war, I asked to see General Mataxis for advice. In a letter to him in February 1997, just prior to the publication of that work as a book, I wrote to him: “I often think of you as the book nears publication. It all really began for me with an interview I did with you in the Carolina Inn.”

I was fortunate to be with him and his wife, Helma, in the last years of his life when he attended the ceremony in which I assumed command as 71st colonel of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. He whispered words of encouragement and expressed confidence in me as our regiment was preparing for a second combat mission in Iraq. I told him that I would do my best to live up to his example.



Theodore and Helma Mataxis, 1941



Major Theodore C. Mataxis, Germany, 1945

I hope that many young people read this memoir of a great soldier, father, and citizen so that General Mataxis can continue to inspire future generations through his example. Readers will, no doubt, note the contrast between Mataxis's embrace of danger—he received a Silver Star, three Bronze stars with “V” devices for valor, and two Purple Hearts—with the “safetyism” that pervades much of American society. On battlefields there are no safe spaces to which one can retreat and the riskiest course of action is the one that, in seeking the safest course, cedes initiative to the enemy. Young Americans may also draw inspiration from the patriotism of a man whose father arrived, penniless, at Ellis Island from Greece in 1907. The Mataxis family story might help young people challenge the orthodoxy of self-loathing to which so many Americans are subjected in universities and secondary schools. All who read these pages will understand better the rewards of service across lives well-lived. Even after his retirement, when the Soviets occupied Afghanistan in the 1980s, Mataxis went to his fourth war as the field director for the Committee for a Free Afghanistan in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Readers will also gain an understanding of the rewards of service across multiple generations. The author served with great distinction in US Army Special Forces and the Rangers. Brig. Gen. Theodore Mataxis pinned captain's bars on his newly promoted son's uniform when they were both serving in Vietnam in 1971. Theodore Mataxis Jr. went on to serve in two more wars: Grenada in 1983 and in El Salvador from 1988 to 1989. His son, Ted III, carried on the family tradition of service, deploying to combat in Afghanistan and Iraq. All three who wore “Mataxis” nametags on their combat uniforms began service as enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers in the reserves before their commission as officers. The author, his father, and his son served their nation in eight wars across their three generations. All three men understood that it is a privilege to serve their nation and their fellow



Lt. Col. Theodore C. Mataxis, Major Acupe, and Capt. Hal Moore at Kojado POW Camp, Korea, 1952

citizens in uniform. And General Mataxis's wife, Helma, exhibited other forms of courage and an equal commitment to service. Married to the general for 65 years at the time of his death, she had lived in bombed-out Berlin in 1946 with two small children, lived in India with no running water and dirt floors with three small children for over a year, was the only parent for three small children for two years while the general was in Kashmir and then in the Korean War, and endured having both her husband and son in combat together in Vietnam for 14 months.

All bore trials and tribulations, but they persevered and experienced the joy of being part of teams committed to missions more important than any individual in which the man or woman next to you is willing to sacrifice everything for the soldier next to them. *Ride to the Sound of the Guns* is a compelling story that should be shared and discussed with others. And it is my hope that it will inspire many more to emulate General Mataxis and his family in service of our nation. ♦

Words of Praise for *Ride to the Sound of the Guns*

Within the pages of this book is a description of the extraordinary odyssey of a man and his quest to master the Spartan mother's ancient command to "return with your shield... or on it"; his family's commitment and sacrifice during the course of that journey, and the extraordinary multi-generational legacy of service to nation by his family that he fostered through examples of word and deed.

Personally, this story resonated with me due to the extraordinary ways in which it paralleled, intersected with, and reflected my own family's experiences with a father who was a professional Soldier for 32 years, spanning WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War. Two of his sons, a grandson, a granddaughter, and a son-in-law have served, or still serve, covering every conflict since.

Professionally, BG (R) Ted Mataxis, Sr., epitomized the U.S. Army Warrior Ethos: Always Place the Mission First; Never Accept Defeat; Never Quit; and Never Leave a Fallen Comrade. As a leader he lived the Army Values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage to their fullest.

In a free society where less than 1% of our citizens serve in the armed forces, this story needs to be known more broadly. While we all hear the mantra that "Freedom is not Free," too few really understand the fully burdened cost borne by so few. — **Peter J. Schoomaker**, General, U.S. Army (Ret.), Former CinC, U.S. Special Operations Command & Former Army Chief of Staff

Ride to the Sounds of the Guns is so much more than another war story. It chronicles the life of a Soldier, of an Army family, and the history of this Nation through wars and peace from WWII to the Global War on Terror, and BG Ted Mataxis Sr. was involved in every event. Personally, I have never seen or heard of an officer, from any service, who was on the ground in more places in war and peace and involved in more important actions than BG Mataxis. The prominent military and civilian leaders with whom he had interactions with, reads like a list of great leaders of America; many served under his command and were mentored by BG Mataxis.

This meticulously researched book details the life experiences of a dedicated, talented, and professional Soldier, BG Theodore Mataxis Sr., as witnessed and recorded by his equally talented and dedicated son, COL (ret.) Theodore "Ted" Mataxis Jr.

I had the opportunity to be assigned with COL Mataxis and was impressed by his work ethic and expertise, and now I know it was clearly inherited from his Army officer father, who had incredible experiences around the world in peace, in war, in peacekeeping, and in peacemaking and the highest levels of diplomacy.

I took an affection to this book as many of the experiences are my own as an Army brat raised in France and Eritrea, and watching my WWII veteran father deploy time and time again to war zones and embassy assignments around the world.

From humble but sturdy beginnings and experiencing hardship and hard work, BG Mataxis was raised around veterans to include an instructor commander at ROTC, who had a lifelong impact. This experience shaped him as a leader and mentor. Of all his incredible contributions, his position at Valley Forge Military School, where he developed future leaders like Gen H.R. McMaster, must be included as one of his greatest legacies.

This is the story of a Warrior. This is the story of an Army family that was dedicated, resilient, innovative, and fought through the hardships of constant separation and often assignments into less-than-desirable conditions. This is the story of a Nation that was forced to grapple with challenges from the world at war to insurgencies and counter-insurgencies and foreign affairs issues at the PhD level. Mataxis was integral to all the solutions.

I read lots of leadership books, but this one now goes to the top of the list for the Army officers who want to aspire to doing leadership and mentorship correctly. They will also see what sacrifice and service to Nation really looks like. As I meet with those about to take command of Army units, my #1 recommendation will be to read, study, and understand *Ride to the Sound of the Guns*. — **Bryan "Doug" Brown**, General, 7th Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

Ride to the Sound of the Guns, by Theodore Mataxis Jr., is the story of a great soldier who epitomized selfless service, duty, and service to our great Army and nation.

General Mataxis was a mentor and special friend throughout my service, from when I first met him while serving with his son, Ted, in the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) following our service



Lt. Col. Theodore C. Mataxis, Vietnam, 1965

in Vietnam, and later when we again crossed paths in the final days of the Khmer Republic in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 1975 when the city was under intense rocket and artillery fire, and later in the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan where, as a battalion commander and later Group Commander of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), our soldiers provided support and training to the Mujahideen. Never “stacking arms” after retiring from the Army, he continued to march to the sound of the guns, serving our great nation and allies.

General Mataxis was a true combat leader who was truly an unsung hero of our victory in the Cold War. Future generations of soldiers will find this book a must-read to enhance their professional development, and all will find it a special story of a great soldier and his family. —**Kenneth R. Bowra**, Major General (Ret.), U.S. Army, Smithfield, Virginia

In today's increasingly divided country, it's truly time for a book on a humble American warrior, Ted Mataxis Sr., who served with valor during WW II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War from its' start in Berlin in 1946 to its conclusion after Russia's failure in Afghanistan. How better to have his story written with exquisite detail than by his son, Ted Mataxis, Jr., who had his newly minted captain bars pinned on his uniform by his father while serving our country in Vietnam in 1971. The author of *Ride to the Sound of the Guns* tells how Ted's grandfather arrived from Greece penniless in 1907 at Ellis Island. His grandfather was able to realize the American dream through hard work and dedication. Ted became so enamored with the land of the brave and the home of the free that he set out on a life course of service to the United States.

Over the years, there have been thousands of American veterans who returned from war in foreign lands after serving our country and took their stories of service to the grave with them. Thankfully, Ted Mataxis, Jr., who served in three wars, stepped up to the plate to document his father's unique story for all of us to read, while humbly noting that his son Ted Mataxis III is proudly serving our country. Those three generations of soldiers saw combat in eight different wars following in the footsteps of Ted Mataxis, Sr., whose story and family history of personal sacrifices are captured in *Ride to the Sounds of the Guns*. —Green Beret SOG Veteran **John Stryker Meyer**, author of *Across the Fence*, *On the Ground*, and *SOG Chronicles Volume One*.



President Ronald Wilson Reagan and
Brig. Gen. Theodore C. Mataxis, Valley Forge, 1981



Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Mataxis with the Mujahideen, Afghanistan, 1987



Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Mataxis, Lubbock, Texas, 1989

Visit www.legacyofduty.com to purchase a signed/ personalized copy of *Ride to the Sound of the Guns*!

Watch the short video “Ride to the Sound of the Guns: The Life of a Cold War Warrior” (which may also be viewed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qhGHwJKwFE), and learn about the Mataxis family, additional book information, and helpful links for those interested in military history.



Brig. Gen. Theodore C. Mataxis, Sr., promotes Capt. Theodore C. Mataxis, Jr., Vietnam, 1971

ABOUT LTC (Ret) Theodore Mataxis Jr

I realize everyone here knows a part of the history that took place in World War II. Keeping that in mind, I would like to review the background and causes in retrospect. The greatest war of world history began on 1 September 1939, with the invasion of Poland by Germany. It ended six years later with the Surrender of the Japanese to the United States in a ceremony aboard the battleship "Missouri" in Tokyo Bay. All the major powers of the world had joined the war, and all the lesser states had enlisted on one side or the other or declared themselves as neutrals. All countries felt the impact of the war. The main issue was putting down the aggression by the axis powers. Before the end of the hostilities, nearly 73,000,000 men had been called into the military service, of whom nearly 17,000,000 were dead or missing, and 27,000,000 were wounded. The principal theaters of the war included: Europe, East and Southeast Asia, Indonesia, coastal areas of North Africa, islands of Japan, the North Atlantic, island areas of Central and the Southwest Pacific, and brief encounters in Hawaii and Alaska. Upon the conclusion of World War II, the Soviet Union had taken over by force, subversion, and pressure more than 95 million non-Russian citizens in 400,000 square miles of Eastern Europe.

It did not take long for the Cold War to begin in Berlin's early occupation. Our family was reunited after 21 months of separation while dad was off fighting in WWII. Dad came home to take us to bombed-out Berlin in November of 1946. My dad, in his late 60s and early 80s, when many people are drawing Social Security and sitting at home, was working with the Afghans in an effort to get the Soviets out of their country. He did this through the Committee for a Free Afghanistan as their field director. There, he assisted in improving tactics and techniques as well as logistical support, calculating the number of mules required to move in ammunition and weapons and move out their seriously wounded. He supported the introduction of the shoulder fired Stinger missiles to combat the heavily armored Soviet Heinz helicopters and jet aircraft participating in bombing

runs. Until that time, the Soviets had dominated the air space and were defeating the Muj. After receiving the Stingers, more than 200 Soviet aircraft were shot down, significantly contributing to the withdrawal of the Russians from Afghanistan.

I arrived in Vietnam in November of 1969, and in June of 1970, my dad arrived for his second tour. We both had extensions in Vietnam. I came back in January of 1972, and my dad retired out of Cambodia in February of 1972. While dad and I were in Vietnam, my mother built their retirement home here in southern Pines in the original Sandhurst development. This home incorporated an apartment on the lower level that had a fireplace, library, bathroom, and kitchen, that was to be my apartment.

Mom and dad lived here for over 20 years.

I basically lived in Southern Pines off and

on from 1969 until today. Kirby and I raised our family here, and our children all grew up attending Moore County schools. Ironically, they all live here in Moore County. My oldest daughter, Stacey, lives in Whispering Pines; my oldest son, Ted, just built a home at CCNC, Carson, our youngest son just purchased a farm next to our farm here in Southern Pines Horse Country. Ted and Beth's children are the 4th generation of Mataxis's here in Moore County..

When I retired, I worked for Moore County schools for 22 years as my second career after serving 31 years in the military. When I got bored again, I went back to work at Ft Bragg at USASOC's History Office in the "Sensitive Activities Historical Collection." And then at JSOC, where I was a Plank-holder, working in the J-7 lessons learned section. Finally, I retired at age 77 to write my dad's book. ♦



Just Making It Through: An Army Officer's Multiple Tours in Vietnam, 1969-1972

LTC (ret.) Ted Mataxis was recently interviewed as part of the War & Life Project. You can view the episode on the *Stuff of Life—War & Life Project* YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi_QaVfBVvU.

Special Forces Association Chapter 78

Christmas Party

December 13, 2025

Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club, Newport Beach, CA

GUEST SPEAKER

Norma Shinno Irving Donlon

COLOR GUARD

Sunburst Youth Academy

Photos by How Miller, Mary Cruz, Doreen Matsumoto, and Debra Holm



Guest Speaker,
Norma Shinno Irving Donlon



The Sunburst Youth Academy Class 36 Color Guard, shown above with SFA 78 Treasurer, Richard Simonian, third from left, and their advisor SFC Timothy Kim, served our group despite having officially graduated on the previous day.



James McLanahan, Chapter VP



Jim Duffy, Richard Simonian, Lee Jacobs (*President of SFA 75*), Chris Wilkerson (*SFA National President*), Ramon Rodriguez, How Miller, and James McLanahan



Erik Berg, Bob Crebbs, and Darek Wawryk



Linda & Ham Salley



Don Deatherage



Gary Macnamara



Geri Long, Suzanne & Jim Lockhart, and Nicole Ronald



Art & Lani Dolick and Doreen Matsumoto



Mike & Chris Jameson



Patty & Gus Populus



Mark & Amie Griffen



Bob & Arlene Crebbs



Mary Cruz and Mark Miller



Paul Buron, Wayne & Marla Ogelvie



Robert & Jacki Casillas



Martha & Bill Reed



Oscar Gallardo, Lauretta Rustad, Jim Duffy, James McLanahan, Lee Jacobs, Regina Romiti, Jerry Romiti, Chris Wilkerson, Lisa Jacobs, and How Miller



Norma Donlon and her family



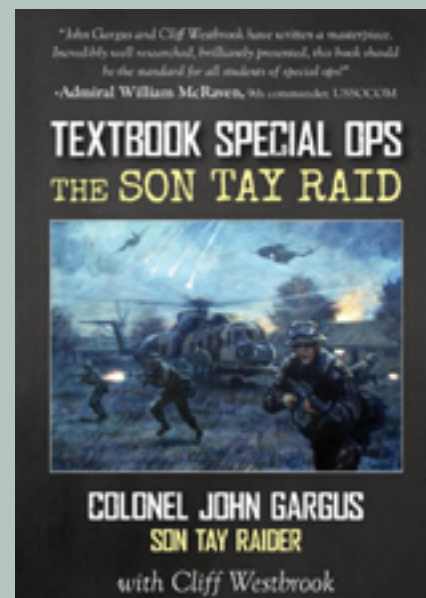
LTC David Babcock, CSUF's
Professor of Military Science



Debra Holm and Gary Clark, a
member of SFA Chapter 75



Mike Jameson displays the POW MIA flag, which
he collected with his winning raffle ticket.



Former USSOCOM Commander Admiral William McRaven said this about our book: *"John Gargus and Cliff Westbrook have written a masterpiece. Incredibly well researched, brilliantly presented, this book should be the standard for all students of special ops!"* After such a glowing endorsement, the best response is to offer a glimpse of what readers will find inside.

Gargus is the only author to fully document the largely media-ignored Naval support for the Son Tay raid, including what he calls "the greatest deception of the Vietnam War," which enabled joint Army and Air Force Special Forces to reach the POW camp unchallenged. He is also the only author to successfully present North Vietnamese accounts of the attempted rescue, explaining why the POWs were moved and who occupied the nearby facility known to the raiders as "the secondary school."

The book introduces additional new material, taking readers aboard three aircraft carriers and support ships, into the RC-135 airborne command post that intercepted NVA and SAM operator communications, and into the cockpits of high-flying jets evading SA-2 missiles. Readers will also see examples of clandestine intelligence passed out by POWs, learn about Col. "Bull" Simons' concerns regarding the secondary school, and uncover the deceptive narratives that followed the initial denial of a helicopter landing there.

The authors assess the current body of knowledge on the Son Tay raid, debunking misconceptions, conspiracy theories, rumors, and fabrications that have accumulated over time. They caution against repeating unverified sources and emphasize that serious students of this operation deserve accurate, verifiable facts. This book helps clarify and improve understanding of a mission that remains a model for professional special operations planning.

The book, not available in bookstores, can be ordered online under the title ***Textbook Special Ops: The Son Tay Raid*** from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Walmart, ThriftBooks, and Better World Books. Copies may also be ordered directly from John Gargus at Gartalon70@gmail.com or by phone at 702-787-5513.



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2



3

SFA Chapter 78 Awards ROTC Award of Excellence at CSUF ROTC Commissioning Ceremony

SFA Chapter 78 congratulates two newly-minted officers to the ranks of the United States Army—2nd Lieutenants Kyle Debisaran and Leo V. Libao III. Both took the oath of office in a ceremony held Friday morning, December 19 at California State University, Fullerton. Both were members of the Titan Battalion, CSUF's Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps unit.

Gary Macnamara represented Chapter 78 to present the ROTC Award of Excellence to Debisaran, who earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice, will serve on active duty as a Field Artillery Officer.

The commissioning ceremony was officiated by LT COL David Babcock, CSUF's Professor of Military Science, who assumed this new post earlier this year.

1 2nd Lieutenants Leo V. Libao III and Kyle Debisaran raised their right hand and took the oath of office in the ceremony held on December 19 at California State University, Fullerton.

2 LT COL David Babcock, CSUF's Professor of Military Science

3 Gary Macnamara, acting as Chapter 78's ROTC Program Coordinator, presented 2LT Debisaran with the Special Forces Award of Outstanding Achievement during the ceremony. 2LT Debisaran received a check for \$500.00 from our Chapter and a copy of the US Constitution.

Connect
with SFA Chapter 78!

Scan the QR code
or visit specialforces78.com/links/

