



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

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**The Chapter 78 Delegation
Visit to Normandy, France for the
82nd Anniversary of D-Day: Part 2**

AFN: The Voice of Home





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FRONT COVER: The French Resistance Memorial in Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, erected in 2021, honors the French Resistance's crucial role in the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944, and its support for the elite Jedburgh teams during World War II.

The monument depicts three symbolic figures: a civilian armed with a Sten submachine gun, a woman operating a radio transmitter (representing clandestine communications), and a child with a bicycle (representing young liaison couriers). Surrounding them are 93 parachute canopies, symbolizing the 93 Jedburgh teams—mixed French, British, and American units who parachuted into France before D-Day to support the Resistance.

Read Part 2 of the account of the Chapter 78 delegation's visit to this site and others beginning on page 3 of this issue. Part one can be read in our August issue at <https://www.specialforces78.com/summary-of-the-chapter-78-delegation-visit-to-normandy-france-for-the-82nd-anniversary-of-d-day-part-1/>. (Photo courtesy of Robert Casillas)

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From the President | September 2026



James McLanahan
President SFA Ch. 78

Converging Jet Streams

Sometimes it's just good to be lucky. I have heard that luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity, and I believe it.

By the time you read this, I will have handed out a bunch of Chick-fil-A gift cards to our Chapter members (a fun bonus) for showing up at the August meeting, spending time with us, and hearing from our guest speaker, Ben

Ruzicka, who was at the Battle of FOB Ghazni.

I had the good fortune to fly home seated near a gentleman named Gib Bosworth. As a sales guy, I don't always have the energy to talk to people about mortgages. Sometimes I am just too tired and simply run out of words. In fact, my available word count was probably something like negative 150. But as I got up from my chair to deplane, I noticed a guy wearing a Gary Sinise Foundation shirt.

I feel like people thank us for our service a lot. It's nice, and it never gets old. But the people who do charitable work on our behalf can never be thanked enough. So, I felt that if I was going to set a good example for our organization, I should thank this man and give him a coin.

We are trying to get things done. We need to grow. We need to meet new people, ask them what they do, and tell them about us. If our values, goals, or paths align in any way, we will be stronger together. If they do not, we can still meet someone new and practice good manners.

Did I mention I was tired? I was grumpy, had too much on my plate, and did not have enough time to get it all done. But it wasn't like anyone was shooting at us.

So, I said hello and asked whether he was affiliated with the foundation. He said yes. I told him, "You guys do some great work, and we are proud of you." He lit up and introduced himself. I let him know who I was and shamelessly bragged about Chapter 78 for a moment.

He asked whether I had a business card, to which I replied, "Kind of." I shook Gib's hand and gave him my Chapter coin. We walked and talked as we deplaned, and he handed me his card and a stack of Chick-fil-A gift cards. He said, "Please give these to the guys at your next meeting on behalf of a grateful nation."

It was a simple exchange, but I cannot tell you how much it pumped me up to have such a pleasant conversation with a guy who flies around the country helping veterans when they need help most. ♦

De Oppresso Liber,

James McLanahan

President, SFA Chapter 78



SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

September 19, 2026

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

Please send RSVP by Monday, September 14 to
VP Don Deatherage @ drdeathca@gmail.com

Next month—October 17, 2026

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

2026 Meeting Schedule

October 17 • November 21
December (to be announced)

From the Editor | September 2026



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

This September marks 25 years since the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York. Special Forces led the response to that attack.

We are bringing you the second part of our summary of the Chapter 78 trip to Normandy, where 82 years ago, the U.S. and its allies elevated their response to Hitler's devastation of Europe. While we were already advancing on Japan, which had perpetrated its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, we began our on-the-ground response to the Nazis in North Africa and on to Italy.

Part 2 picks up on 5 June and continues the already acclaimed After Action Report with highly personal and moving descriptions by Aaron and different members of the tour.

The Normandy D-Day invasion was to strike straight at the German homeland and crush the Nazis. This largest invasion ever from the sea did indeed herald the end of the Nazi madness. The cost in lives to the allies was enormous, and this trip by six Chapter 78 members and some of their wives was to honor both the fallen and the survivors.

Aaron Brandenburg, our most recent past president, is an eloquent and compelling writer. If you have not yet read part one in the

August *Sentinel*, I encourage you to do so now, visit <https://www.specialforces78.com/summary-of-the-chapter-78-delegation-visit-to-normandy-france-for-the-82nd-anniversary-of-d-day-part-1/>.

Our regular *Sentinel* contributor, Marc Yablonka, tells us about the beginnings of the AFN. From an experimental high-wattage San Francisco radio station, broadcasting to South America and the Far East, to the current Armed Forces Network, Marc shows us how the station developed and served the troops in WWII, Korea, and what most of us remember in Vietnam. This is a revealing tribute to those who helped brighten many millions of military days. Hopefully it will bring back some happy memories.

Among the many celebrities mentioned is Chris Noel, who is still serving veterans in West Palm Beach, FL.

We pay tribute to Salvador "Sal" Sanders, one of our chapter's original members, who passed away on July 19. He was laid to rest with full military honors at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Cypress, California. He will be remembered and greatly missed.

We appreciate your continued support, and please keep sending your stories to us to share with the Regiment. ❖

How Miller, *Sentinel* Editor

Salvador E. Sanders

Aug 25, 1934 — Jul 19, 2026

Salvador "Sal" Sanders, one of the few remaining original members of SFA Chapter 78, passed away on July 19, 2026.

Sal was born in Canon City, Colorado. Although he lived in Southern California for many years, his heart remained in the Colorado Rockies, as well as the Catalina Mountains and Sonoran Desert of Arizona, where he attended the University of Arizona.

He enlisted in the Army in 1951 and completed Special Forces training. After leaving active duty in 1961, he continued his military service as a Special Forces reservist before joining the Arizona National Guard's 158th Infantry Regiment (Bushmasters).

While working full time, Sal earned a BA from California State University, Long Beach, in 1970 and a JD from Pepperdine University School of Law in 1973. He passed the California Bar in 1974 and began a legal career specializing in mediation.

Sal was an active Chapter 78 member for many years, volunteering at the Green Beret Shooters Cup and other chapter events. His presence at our meetings was always appreciated, and he will be greatly missed.

He is survived by his wife, Joan Skogsberg Sanders; daughters Linda Marie Armstrong, Theresa Ann Alvarar-Eulberg, and Cynthia Marie Beltz; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.





Summary of the Chapter 78 Delegation Visit to Normandy, France for the 82nd Anniversary of D-Day Part 2

Previously in Part 1: The Chapter 78 Delegation crossed the Atlantic to walk the beaches and bluffs of Normandy alongside two WWII veterans, the “Pair of Jacks”—tracing footsteps from Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc to the graves of Colleville-sur-Mer and the church tower of Sainte-Mère-Église. What began as a trip became a pilgrimage. ([Click to read Part 1](#) in the August 2026 issue of the *Sentinel*)

5 June 2026 – Aaron Brandenburg

As a Special Forces soldier, particularly a 10th Special Forces Green Beret, I've heard the stories about our heritage. While I embraced them and swelled with pride as I learned about our history, I never truly understood or connected with the heroism and courage displayed by the men, women, and children who paved the way for today's special operations forces.

About six months ago, we had the opportunity to have Joey Ivanov as a guest speaker at one of our SFA meetings. Joey, a former SF soldier, owns a house in Sainte-Marie-du-Mont. During the meeting, he invited members of our chapter to attend a ceremony there on 5 June honoring the French Resistance.

When we arrived, the first thing I noticed was a church with a pronounced steeple reaching high above the surrounding buildings. On the church grounds were several authentic military Willys Jeeps left behind by American forces, along with 30 to 40 reenactors. They are passionate European citizens who dedicate their time and resources to preserving history and paying their respects to the American soldiers who never made it home. It is a humbling experience.

Dressed in our SFA uniforms, we walked down the road to the ceremony site. At the gated entrance, hundreds of soldiers and civilians were waiting to get in. I wasn't prepared for that kind of turnout.

As we got closer, a platoon of Rangers marched past us. Boy, did they look sharp in their tan berets and immaculate uniforms. I took one look at the line and decided on the spot that I wasn't waiting in it. As the last few Rangers passed by, I moved the railing and bypassed security. As it turned out, we had been invited to an exclusive event. I watched in dismay as high-ranking officials were turned away because they weren't on “the list.” The officials were visibly frustrated while the French security personnel remained calm and collected. They would not waiver and would not deviate from “the list.”



French Resistance Memorial in Sainte-Marie-du-Mont.

The monument itself depicts three figures of the Resistance. There is a civilian armed with a Sten submachine gun. A woman operates a radio transmitter, reminding us of the crucial role clandestine communications played and the immense contributions women made to the effort. There is also a child holding a bicycle, representing the youth involved, their freedom of movement in a non-permissive environment, and the liaison missions they carried out.

Around these figures stand ninety-three parachute canopies, each thirty centimeters high. They symbolize the ninety-three Jedburgh teams, mixed groups of French, British, and American operators who parachuted into France before D-Day to support and coordinate Resistance actions. It is largely agreed that the intelligence provided by the Resistance greatly contributed to the success of D-Day.



Delegation members Connor Wynn (a pseudonym used to protect active operational security) and Bob Crebbs laying a wreath at the French Resistance Memorial.



Chapter 78 Delegation at French Resistance Memorial

The speakers delivered several moving addresses, including those from leaders of the Resistance Foundation, the town mayor, Joey Ivanov, and SOCOM Europe Commander Admiral Bradley.

Putting bias aside and remaining objective, Admiral Bradley absolutely knocked it out of the park. His message had four key takeaways.

- The French Resistance was essential to D-Day's success. The Resistance sabotaged German communications, disrupted troop movements, gathered intelligence, and created the conditions that allowed the Normandy invasion to succeed.
- Modern Special Operations Forces trace their origins to these WWII partnerships. The cooperation forged in occupied France became the blueprint for modern special operations forces worldwide.
- Allied unity remains critical today. The alliances formed during World War II remain vital, and collective defense remains the strongest deterrent against aggression.
- Admiral Bradley's central message was simple: the courage of the French Resistance helped make D-Day possible, created the foundation for modern special operations forces, demonstrated the power of allied unity, and serves as a reminder that freedom must be defended by every generation.



Stained glass window in church at Angoville-au-Plain, France

We traveled to the hamlet of Angoville-au-Plain. The hamlet is centered around a church built around the eleventh century. During the invasion, SSG Robert Wright and PFC Kenneth Moore became separated from their unit during their airborne insertion.

On their own initiative, they established a casualty collection point inside the church. There, they treated wounded American soldiers. At one point, retreating German forces approached the church, and a standoff ensued. Rather than engage the enemy and put their patients at risk, both men began treating the German soldiers, too.

In total, SSG Wright and PFC Moore treated and saved the lives of approximately eighty American, French, and German souls. The bloodstains from that day still remain on the church pews as a silent reminder that compassion can exist even in the midst of unimaginable violence.

From Angoville-au-Plain, we traveled to the bridges and locks that men like Jake McNiece, Jack Agnew, and Jack Womer fought to secure during the opening hours of the Normandy campaign. Both were members of the "Filthy Thirteen," the demolition section that loosely inspired *The Dirty Dozen*. Their reputation stemmed from their disregard for military convention. They often ignored grooming standards, earning the nickname "Filthy Thirteen," and later joked that

keeping a clean uniform in reserve meant they could head straight into town to meet the local girls when operations ended. It became part of the legend that followed them throughout the war.

These bridges and locks played a critical role in the battle for Normandy. German forces had intentionally flooded the lowlands surrounding Utah Beach, restricting movement for both infantry and mechanized units and funneling advancing troops onto a handful of elevated roads and causeways. Controlling these crossings meant controlling the flow of the battlefield itself. Had they remained in German hands, Allied forces pushing inland from Utah Beach would have faced even greater delays, bottlenecks, and vulnerability to counterattack. The actions of the airborne troops who secured them ensured that men and supplies could continue moving inland, preserving the momentum so vital during those fragile first days after the invasion.



Delegation member Connor Wynn kneeling besides statue of Jake McNiece, famous "Filthy 13" member.



Dead Man's Corner June 6, 1944

From there, we traveled to Dead Man's Corner. The site served as a terrain feature for navigation during the fighting. Unfortunately, it earned its name because an American soldier's body had been left partially hanging from the turret of a destroyed tank. Soldiers would simply say, "Go to Dead Man's Corner and 'Make a left' or 'Make a right.'"

I came here expecting to learn more about history. Instead, I found myself understanding it in a way I never had before. The stories I grew up hearing about the OSS, Jedburgh's, Resistance fighters, and the origins of Special Forces stopped being names in a book and became real people who stood on this same ground and made impossible decisions under extraordinary circumstances.

On the way home we stopped by a memorial to Dick Winters. On D-Day, Lieutenant Dick Winters of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, jumped into Normandy near Sainte-Mère-Église, losing his weapons and equipment in the chaotic night drop but quickly gathering scattered paratroopers and leading them toward their objective near Sainte-Marie-du-Mont.

Discovering that a battery of four German 105mm guns at Brécourt Manor was pouring artillery fire onto the men landing on Utah Beach, Winters improvised an assault with barely a dozen men, positioning machine guns for covering fire and personally leading a three-direction attack down the trenches, clearing position after position with rifles and grenades.

Under intense fire, he organized small teams to take and destroy each gun in turn, capturing the first three pieces with explosives and coordinating with another unit that seized the fourth, effectively silencing the battery and greatly reducing the deadly shelling on the beach.



The Richard D. Winters Leadership Monument

That night, after surviving the drop and the assault that would later be recognized as a model of small-unit leadership, Winters recorded in his diary that he thanked God for seeing him through “that day of days” and prayed he would live to see D-Day +1.

6 June 2026 – Aaron Brandenburg

Dark and grey, a light misty rain represents a somber moment in history.

We arrived at the cemetery with VIP access, by passing the long lines of those paying their respects. The fog and mist covered the once blood-soaked beaches below, adorned with a dual rainbow in the distance, Mother Nature’s way of saying, “Today is a day of remembrance, pride, and love of country.”

We were welcomed to our seating just rows from the speakers. Flanked by the reflection pool and soldiers dressed in their best. Jump boots tight and medals gleaming, our paratroopers stood rigid, their body language saying, “Send me.”

As the officials began to take their seats, the clouds turned dark. The wind began to whip, and the rain once again peppered our faces, shielding the tears welling up. Pride and sorrow, a mixture uncommon to most, were overtaking us.

Overwhelmed and caught up in the moment, we bowed our heads as the invocation began. The phrases, “The spirit of American youth, an enduring spirit, a fight for liberty, our country’s youth remaining steadfast and unyielding,” that broke me.

Following the powerful invocation, Arthur Rose (107) was wheeled onto the stage. Eighty-two years earlier, Arthur had commanded thirty-six vessels supporting the invasion off Omaha Beach, helping sustain the men fighting their way ashore during history’s largest amphibious assault. As he spoke, the cost of that day became painfully real, reminding all of us that behind every statistic were young men whose lives were forever changed by war.

He began to read a handwritten letter that he had mailed home eight long decades ago. With broken, strained speech and unplanned pauses, he clearly carried the weight of the losses to this day. For

us, for me, it was a portal into the past. His words were chosen with care so as not to worry his mother, but we could feel the pain, the anguish, and the dismay that a young man was trying to navigate.

Following Arthur, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Dan Caine took the stage. To be fully transparent, I am a fan of his. He opened by thanking Arthur and the other twenty-seven veterans who honored us with their presence. He then thanked the 9,387 souls who rest in the cemetery and acknowledged the 1,557 names inscribed on the Walls of the Missing.

One line he spoke shook me. He referred to the headstones as the “silent sentinels.” For reasons unbeknownst to me, I felt a rush of warmth and emotion come over me. It was a moving moment. General Caine spoke about the Greatest Generation’s unwavering selflessness, their resolve, and their willingness to act when freedom was at risk. How ordinary people answered the call, showing us what extraordinary looks like.

The sands of the Norman beaches were awash with the blood of our heroes that fateful day. The guns have gone silent. The tides have washed the sands clean. Yet upon the bluffs of Omaha Beach, the souls of the silent sentinels who once said, “Just Send Me,” remain.

From the American Cemetery, we drove to the UDT/SEAL monument on Omaha Beach. The UDTs received little recognition for their contributions during World War II, but the Monument to them is a tribute to their critically important role in the D-Day invasion.

Before there were Navy SEALs, there was Draper Kauffman. A Naval Academy graduate initially denied a commission because of poor eyesight, he volunteered as an ambulance driver in France before eventually serving with the British during the Blitz, disarming unexploded German bombs. When America entered the war, Kauffman brought that hard-earned experience home and was tasked with creating a force capable of clearing the obstacles that threatened Allied amphibious assaults. In doing so, he built the Naval Combat Demolition Units, the direct ancestors of today’s UDTs, EOD technicians, and Navy SEALs.



Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth addressing the crowd at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, on June 6, 2026. (War.gov)



U.S. Naval Combat Demolition Units/Scouts and Raiders Monument Park

On D-Day, those men entered the surf under machine-gun fire, carrying little more than explosives, knives, and determination. Their mission was simple in concept and nearly impossible in execution: blow gaps through Hitler's Atlantic Wall so that the waves of soldiers behind them had a chance to reach the shore. At Omaha Beach alone, they suffered casualty rates exceeding fifty percent, yet they pressed forward and completed their task. Their success was not measured in ground taken or enemy killed, but in the thousands of lives that moved through the lanes they opened. They embodied a truth familiar to anyone in special operations: often, the most important work is done by men whose names history rarely remembers.

Standing there overlooking Omaha Beach, it was impossible not to appreciate that legacy. Another group of quiet professionals who saw a problem, accepted the risk, and simply went to work because others were counting on them.

Closing out the evening, we returned to Sainte-Mère-Église for the Liberty Banquet hosted by the Amis des Vétérans Américains.

The town was alive and bustling with foot traffic. Vendors lined the streets alongside food trucks and musicians. Hundreds of people, both young and old, were dressed in WWII uniforms and period-correct civilian clothing. Once again, it had a way of transporting you back in time. For a few moments, it wasn't difficult to imagine what the town may have looked and felt like in the days following liberation.

As we made our way toward the Airborne Museum, the large banquet hall erected for the evening's event came into view. Outside, an estimated 150 to 200 people waited patiently to pass through the entry point. Then the Jacks arrived.



The Liberty Banquet hosted by the Amis des Vétérans Américains.

Led by "The Pair of Jacks," the crowd began to open up like Moses parting the Red Sea. Conversations stopped. People stepped aside without being asked. One by one, applause broke out and quickly spread throughout the crowd until the entire gathering was on its feet, giving the two men a standing ovation they had more than earned.

For all the attention focused on reenactors, dignitaries, and ceremonies throughout the week, these men were the reason we were all there. They had lived the history that everyone else had come to remember. They had been young men when the world asked everything of them, and they answered without hesitation. Eighty-two years later, they returned not as celebrities, but as reminders of what duty, sacrifice, and courage look like.

The ceremony itself was like the one we had attended earlier in the week. The venue was different. The master of ceremonies was different. Even the food was different. But one thing remained unchanged: the overwhelming gratitude and admiration shown to our “The Pair of Jacks.”

It served as another reminder that, while time marches on, the sacrifices of their generation have not been forgotten. More than eighty years later, people still line the streets, rise to their feet, and say thank you to the young men who answered the call when freedom needed defending.

I came here expecting to honor history. Instead, I found myself understanding it in a way I never had before. The monuments, ceremonies, and speeches were powerful, but it was the people who changed me. The French families who continue to remember. The reenactors who dedicate themselves to preserving the past. The young students were learning why these sacrifices mattered. The veterans who still carry the weight of memories formed as teenagers in war.

I grew up hearing about the OSS, the Jedburgh's, and the resistance that shaped modern special operations. I was proud of that heritage, but pride and understanding are not the same thing. Walking the same ground, standing in the rain among silent sentinels, listening to the trembling voices of men who were there, and watching entire crowds stop to honor them, finally connected the dots for me.

History stopped being something I studied and became something I felt.

7 June 2026 – Aaron Brandenburg

Similar to the feeling inside the château, waking up this morning and gazing out over 300 acres of green fields, there was a layer of fog hanging beneath the Norman sky. Sadly, today was our last full day in Normandy. Looking out the window, drinking my morning coffee, I couldn't help but think back to when this building was at its prime.

The long, wide stretch of green carved through the forest framed a picturesque swath of history.

Construction began in 900 A.D. by a clan of Vikings; the original foundation stones, still supporting this mighty structure, are still visible. Final construction was completed in the 11th century, and remarkably, it has remained in the hands of the same family since.

The halls are draped with paintings of the past. Unique tapestries hang from the walls and windows, while the furniture creates an unmistakable aura of nostalgia. Showing the wear of time and proudly displaying the scars of years gone by, Château de l'Isle Marie is the perfect setting to fully experience Norman history. Temporarily inhabited by curious guests and historians alike, this building and these grounds have etched a place in our hearts that will remain unforgettable.

As we gathered for coffee, biscuits, and fruit, a subtle change in the atmosphere became apparent. A realization we all shared: this was it. This would be the last time we would all have breakfast with our new family of 33. Rather than sulk over the inevitable, we loaded up and headed back to La Fièvre Bridge to watch the paratroopers jump initially from C-47s and later C-130s, then share lunch with Helen Patton.

As the winds increased, airborne operations ceased, and we decided to head back to Sainte-Mère-Église. I wanted to pick up a few more prints for my collection. Walking toward the town square, you could see towering plumes of smoke rising and hear the crowd's howls and cheers. Thankfully, rather than artillery shells and burning buildings, this time it was sausages and sweet treats.

With full pints of beer in hand, soldiers embraced and sang songs. Our history, American paratrooper history, was not lost, but celebrated. Memorialized in the hymns that tell our story, the story of those who will never be forgotten.



Paratroopers Jumping from a C-47.



Paratroopers Jumping from C-130s



The Drop Zone



Chapter Member Tom Turney on the Drop Zone with active-duty troopers

Later that evening, after returning to the Château, we gathered around the dinner table one last time. Friendships had formed in a matter of days, as though they had been forged over decades. Shared experiences, tears, laughter, and a common purpose have a way of stripping away the superficial and reminding us what truly matters. Somewhere between Normandy's hedgerows and banquet halls, strangers had become family.

Dinner was served: perfectly grilled chicken breast, greens, and spiced potatoes to die for. As we laughed and relived the week's events, there was a knock at the door. I noticed Jeff speaking with a few people before eventually inviting them inside.

Standing before us were two men, a woman, and a young girl, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old. After brief introductions, the father and daughter stepped forward to tell us their story.

After following Walk Among Heroes on social media, they had decided to drive blindly from the Czech Republic in hopes of finding us and, more importantly, the "Pair of Jacks," the two World War II veterans they had grown to love from afar.

After driving more than 1,300 kilometers, followed by another 200 kilometers through Normandy, they had finally found them. Nervous, emotional, and dressed in WWII Czech Air Force uniforms, they approached what we had come to affectionately call "our veterans" and embraced them. Unplanned and unexpected, it became yet another perfect moment in a trip full of perfect moments.

After our new Czech friends departed, we wrapped up dinner and shared our most memorable experiences from the journey. As the torch passed from person to person, so too did the anxiety.

How could I possibly package all these emotions and experiences into a few short sentences? More importantly, how could I control my emotions long enough to say them? In full transparency, you can't.

With a significant event awaiting me upon arrival home, for Kath and me, this trip was the perfect setting to keep us occupied. It was a walk-through history that cannot be recreated anywhere else. The packaging and delivery from Walk Among Heroes are unparalleled, and I firmly believe no other organization could have executed them with the same level of professionalism, care, and personalization.



Last dinner at the Chateau



A surprise visit from a family from the Czech Republic.

From the nine Walk Among Heroes volunteers, eighteen guests, two World War II veterans, and four family members, our new family of thirty-three reminded us that love does not always come from blood. Sometimes it is forged through shared purpose, mutual respect, and extraordinary experiences. We arrived in Normandy as individuals from different walks of life, but we leave carrying pieces of one another's stories.

In conclusion, the Chapter 78 Members who attended the 82nd Annual Anniversary of D-Day speaking as a group: we all came away from this amazing experience that has given us all:

- A much better understanding of the magnitude of Project Overlord;
- Some of the individual stories of those who participated in the invasion but unfortunately so many of those stories will never be told;
- The immensity of mission that the soldiers who landed were charged with;
- But, most of all, the number of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom on D-Day and the days that followed.

Always remember: Freedom is not Free! ❖



Walk Among Heroes team after receiving Chapter 78 challenge coins.

WALK AMONG HEROES



walkamongheroes.org

Every one of the staff members associated with Walk Among Heroes were unbelievable hosts and hostesses not only to the WWII Veterans they were hosting (the "Pair of Jacks"), but also to the rest of us who helped underwrite the mission of Walk Among Heroes to recognize and honor those who have served our country. A LOUD SHOUTOUT to ALL OF YOU for an AMAZING TRIP from Chapter 78 – Special Forces Association.



During our visit on 4 June 2026 with Helen Patton at her Chateau at La Fièvre Bridge, Jeff Wells, a co-founder of Walk Among Heroes, received an award presented by Rich Barbado, a former 82nd Airborne Trooper. The award was a Public Service Commendation Medal from the Department of the Army for the work that Jeff has done for Veterans with Walk Among Heroes.



By Marc Yablonka

Little did San Francisco area radio station KGEI know, but in February 1939, it would soon become the model for Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS), later, Armed Forces Radio and Television. KGEI's parent company, General Electric, had just developed a short-wave transmitter and antenna with the ability to reach Asia and Latin America.

But while GE had the technology to launch a radio station that could broadcast that far, it was not versed in the art of radio programming. GE's public relations representative Buck Harris changed that when he created programs and broadcast them via KGEI.

According to a Defense Department publication documenting the history of the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS), the electronic giant's only guidance for Harris was to "broadcast unbiased news and music to Asia and Latin America three hours a day and to develop good will."

As the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor fast approached, listeners in Asia wrote the station, urging it to compete with Japan's Radio Tokyo.

It did so, and caught the attention of Pacific Forces Commander Douglas MacArthur. The general sent out an urgent request from Bataan for KGEI to broadcast warnings about counterfeit Philippine currency the Japanese were pouring into areas they had overrun.

"They are doing this in order to strip your stores and farms at no cost to themselves. Do not accept this counterfeit money made in Japan," warned KGEI's public service announcements. The PSAs made an impact.



Bob Hope and Lola Falana doing a song and dance at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, Vietnam during the Vietnam War (Photo courtesy National Archives).

THE VOICE OF HOME

Within weeks, Radio Tokyo beamed out the counter warning that anyone questioning the money would be shot.

As the war entered its first year, the station became the primary source of news and information for American troops fighting to save the Philippines. The GIs had moved a 1,000-watt transmitter from Manila to Bataan and, after picking up the signal out of San Francisco, proceeded to relay it throughout the Philippines.

Though not the first Army radio station in existence, AFRS soon became so critical to the morale of our troops in World War II that several Hollywood actors, including Bob Hope and Clark Gable, performed live for them over the station's airwaves. Ironically, Gable—who thrilled millions on the Silver Screen and later served with distinction as a B-17 door gunner in the Eighth Air Force—was initially frightened of the microphone and had to be coaxed by his friend Hope into going live.

Hollywood and AFRS soon developed a close-knit relationship. Many actors took to the mic, both in Hollywood and overseas, to entertain our service personnel. In fact, many of these celebrities spent their war years in uniform attached to AFRS.

One link between the film capital and Armed Forces Radio—by 1943 called American Forces Network (AFN)—was Loretta Young. The actress was married to advertising executive Tom Lewis, who, soon after Pearl Harbor, was commissioned a major in the Army and tasked with fine-tuning AFN.

Lewis set up shop at the 20th Century Fox Studios on Western Avenue in 1942. Once the word got out, he began hearing from the radio industry's top writers, producers, and technicians. His task was simple: boost the morale of GIs overseas. Always the realist, Lewis acknowledged that "neither radio nor any other media can completely reconcile a boy from Grand Rapids to a military life in Persia, but we can help his adjustment."

The key was programming around-the-clock news and entertainment that kept the GIs in touch with the world they had left behind.

Tom Lewis died in 1988, but he is considered today to be the father of American Forces Radio and Television. As of 2004, when this writer visited the AFN Broadcast Center at March Air Reserve Base in Riverside, Calif. for the first time, his photograph was hanging in the lobby.

After World War II, while the Cold War troop buildup was occurring in Europe, the Japan-based Pacific branch of AFN (then as now called Far East Network) began dismantling its relay radio stations in Pusan, Chonju, and Kwangju, South Korea. By 1948, only the FEN station in Seoul remained operational.

That all changed in June 1950, when North Korean forces burst across the 38th Parallel to start the Korean War. Three months later, after United Nations troops retook Seoul from the North Koreans, Gen. MacArthur, supreme commander of US Forces, signed a general order creating the American Forces Korea Network. The following year, MacArthur was relieved of his duties by President Truman, with whom he had been at odds over his operational view of the war.

Ironically, since the president's emissary had not yet arrived because of bad weather encountered after a refueling stop, MacArthur learned of his dismissal while listening to the very radio station he had mandated,

"Much like its World War II predecessor, AFKN's staff and broadcast facilities moved with the battlefields," wrote Trent Christman, author of the book *Brass Button Broadcasters: A Lighthearted Look at 50 Years of Military Broadcasting*.

He wrote, "Reporters with portable tape recorders went wherever the fighting took place. They'd cover all phases of the conflict—a mile behind enemy lines, on a combat patrol, and over enemy targets in Air Force planes."

By the time the ceasefire took effect in 1953, television had already gone from being the rage to being commonplace. AFN felt that if it did not incorporate the new medium into its programming, both enlistments and troop morale would suffer. Moreover, with the onset of peace and the Cold War buildup, the implementation of TV had become a necessity. Thus, in April 1954, AFN evolved into Armed Forces Radio and Television.

Television continued to play an important role with the onset of hostilities in Vietnam.

TV announcers like mini-skirted Bobbie "The Weather Girl" Keith played a big part in boosting the morale of GIs in Vietnam. But it is the radio side of the American Forces Vietnam Network that Americans are most aware of—due in large part to the film *Good Morning Vietnam*, in which the late actor/comedian Robin Williams portrayed one of AFVN's most famous disc jockeys, the late Adrian Cronauer.

But Cronauer, for several years after the war employed by the Pentagon's POW/MIA office, was not the only morning jock to utter those famous words. Every morning man did, including former ABC-TV's *Wheel of Fortune* game show host Pat Sajak. "I joined the Army looking for that golden experience in broadcasting," the former Chicago disc jockey and Nashville TV weatherman joked with me over the phone in 2004. "The Army in its infinite wisdom stationed me at Long Binh in 1968 and made me a clerk typist. And I was a damn good one, too!"

Sajak was eventually reassigned to AFVN, but it took four attempts on his part and a letter from his congressman, who had owned the first radio station Sajak had worked for, to affect the transfer.

Working at AFVN did not evade the possibility of peril. At one point during the war, Viet Cong sappers had destroyed much of its Saigon studios when a car bomb went off outside. Three Americans were killed by North Vietnamese Army regulars at AFVN's detachment at Hue during the Tet Offensive in 1968, and five AFVN staffers were taken prisoner and spent the next five years in North Vietnamese



Pat Sajak in Saigon. (Photo courtesy Pat Sajak).



Pat Sajak, top row third from left, at AFVN with fellow staffers. (Photo courtesy Pat Sajak)

prisons before being returned home safely in 1973. Elsewhere, at Udorn Airbase in Thailand, five more would lose their lives in 1970 when an F-4 fighter jet crashed into the AFTN radio station there.

Despite the dangers, Pat Sajak enjoyed his tenure as AFVN morning man—so much so that he re-enlisted and stayed in Vietnam until 1970.

"It was funny and strange," he recalled during our phone conversation. "There was a war going on. Barbed wire was everywhere and I was playing records and going to restaurants every night. It was a fairly normal life. Given the circumstances, mine was a pretty lucky duty. It was the height of the buildup, and I had half a million civilian listeners."

Those listeners—as well as the men and women in fatigues—were able to hear Sajak via in-country affiliates to whom his shows were relayed. The signal reached the entire Republic of South Vietnam between 6 and 9am. From 9am to 10pm, AFVN cut its power to include only Saigon.

The station operated like one stateside. "We played Top 40 since the listeners were mostly young men," Sajak explained. "We didn't have commercials, but we did have snappy PSAs: 'Be sure to keep your M16 cleaned.' That kind of stuff. We produced our own jingles and ran very tight shows."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Pacific, actress-turned-deejay Chris Noel had been broadcasting her show *A Date with Chris* from the AFRTS Studios in Hollywood since 1966. By 1971, she was so dedicated to the cause that, with a bit of coaxing from her then-boy-



Chris Noel with American troops in Vietnam in 1967. (Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons, US Army, Public Domain)



Chris Noel speaking with the late British photojournalist Tim Page, who photographed the Vietnam War for UPI, at the Vietnam Memorial in 1997. (Photo by Marc Yablonka)

friend singer Jack Jones—who had been over to Vietnam with Bob Hope—Noel soon found herself face to face with the GIs who had been listening to her show from afar.

Unlike Sajak, who was mostly posted to Saigon, Noel always took her AFVN show on the road to places like Cam Ranh Bay and Pleiku. Everywhere we had troops. “All I did was go out there and say hello. They didn’t have anybody,” she told me during a phone interview in 2004.

Apparently, those hellos mattered greatly to the grunts in Vietnam because, as of 2004, Noel was still getting letters, emails, and tearful hugs at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial from soldiers who told her how much it meant to them for her to have been there.

Being “there” meant grinding out her shows, ten a day, because AFRTS had to have shows on the air when she was in Vietnam.

Chris Noel—who, for many years, has operated Vetsville Cease Fire House, a shelter for homeless Korean and Vietnam War vets in West Palm Beach, Fla.—remembered her Southeast Asian experience as “the most interesting, dangerous, exciting, on the edge time” of her life.

No doubt many of the “brass button broadcasters” who found themselves behind a mic or out in front of a TV camera for AFN could say the same thing.

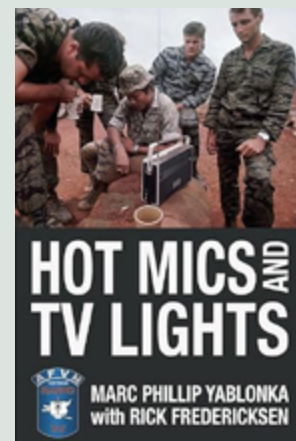
AFN TODAY

Today, the American Forces Network (AFN) remains the official broadcast network of the United States Armed Forces. Headquartered at Fort Meade, Maryland, it provides stateside news, sports, and entertainment programming to U.S. military personnel, Department of War civilians, and their families stationed overseas and on naval vessels. AFN features several key services and platforms: AFN Now, the official video streaming app and IPTV service is available on iOS, Android, and popular streaming devices like Roku and Amazon Firestick. It delivers top-rated US network television, movies, and dedicated sports and news channels. AFN also operates AFN Go, an internet-streaming radio service that connects listeners to local “AFN The Eagle” stations worldwide. It does so, having transitioned its land-based transmission method from traditional bulky satellite dishes to internet protocol (IP) delivery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Yablonka is a Burbank, California-based military journalist and author whose reportage has run in the US Military newspaper the *Stars and Stripes*, *Army Times*, *Vietnam* magazine, and many other publications. In addition to being a contributing writer for the *Sentinel*, he is also the senior reporter for the Sacramento-based *Hmong Daily News*. He has written four books on the Vietnam War, the most recent of which are [Vietnam](#)

[Bao Chi: Warriors of Word and Film](#), about combat correspondents and photographers who served in the US Military during that war, and [Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network](#).



SFA Chapter 78 July 2026 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Debra Holm and How Miller

**Guest Speaker,
Sean Singleton**

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1 Guest speaker Sean Singleton shared insights from his career at the intersection of Special Operations, defense innovation, venture capital, and national security. His latest article, "Homecoming: A Framework for Harnessing Venture Capital for Strategic Advantage," explores how stronger partnerships between the DoD, VCs, and entrepreneurs can accelerate critical tech development and help America maintain its edge over strategic competitors. Read the article at: <https://thescif.org/homecoming-a-framework-for-harnessing-venture-capital-for-strategic-advantage-2d72a474563e>.

2 Chapter President James McLanahan presented challenge coins to members of the Chapter delegation for the recent Normandy tour. The coins were from Chuck Walton, a retired Navy SEAL and member of the Walk Among Heroes team, who served as their driver for the week.

3 Mike Jameson spoke about the recent graduation ceremony for the Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy and also discussed some details of the program.

4 5 Richard Simonian's 94th birthday was celebrated at the meeting.

6 President James McLanahan greets guest Jordan Wykoff.

7 How Miller and Jim Lockhart

8 Travis Mayfield, and Mark Miller

9 Chapter VP Don Deatherage, Mike Jamison and Nimo



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