



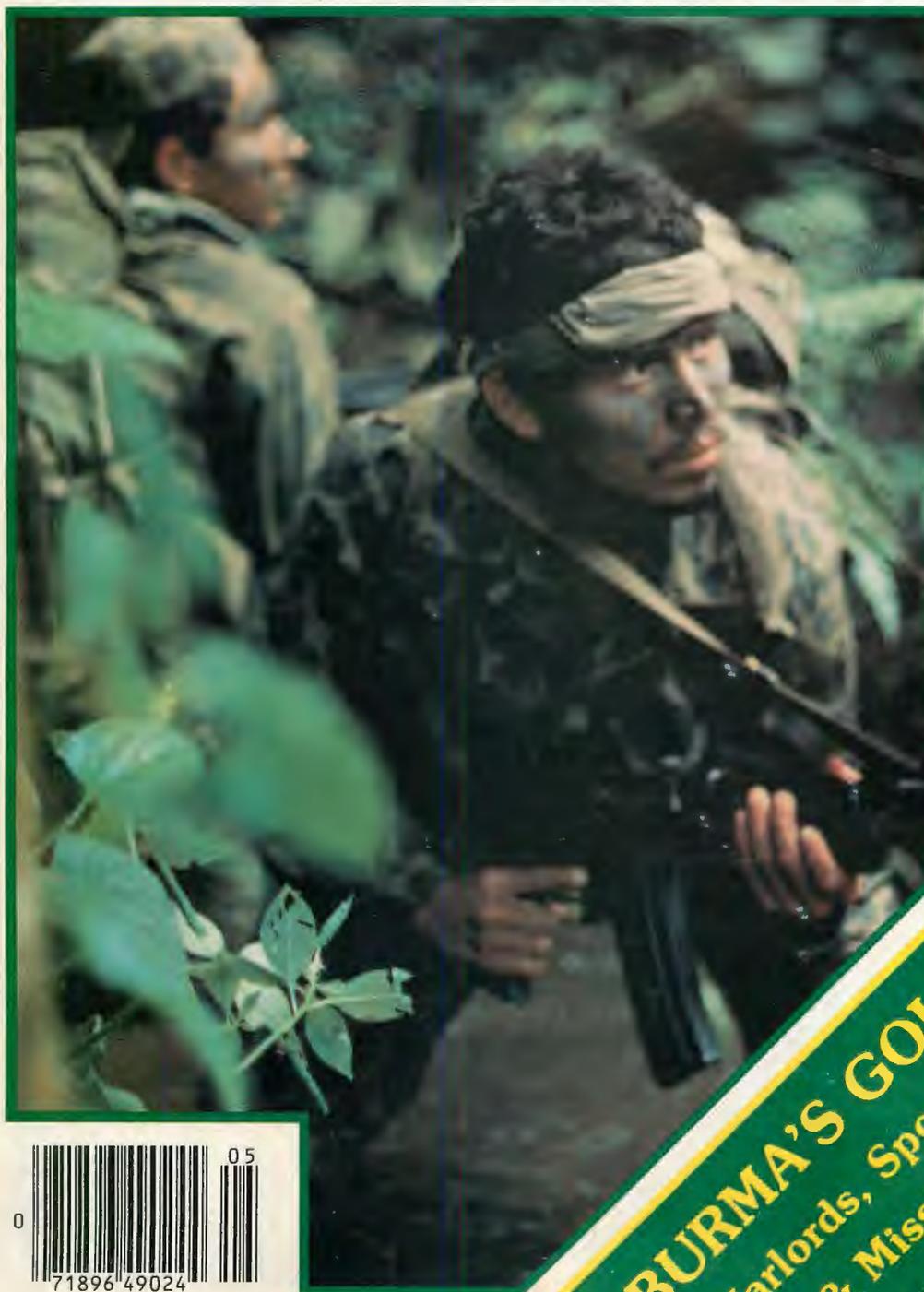
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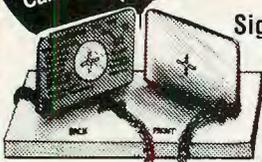
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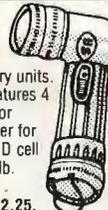
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Let's face it, there are very few things we would like to think about less than dental emergencies. But there are few things more painful or discomfiting than oral distress. And pain is a debilitating factor which can greatly reduce your chances of simple survival.

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**EDK. No survival or first aid gear is complete without one.** A must for campers, boaters, hikers, hunters, birdwatchers, accountants and survivalists... **\$19.75/each.**

## Mini Emergency Dental Kit, also available!!

Our Mini Emergency Dental Kit contains the same materials and instructional booklet as its big brother. However it has no mirror, and a little less material (although there is still plenty of dental preparation for repeated applications). The Mini Dental Kit comes packed in a crush proof, water proof, plastic cylinder that weighs only three ounces.



If space or weight is a consideration, choose our mini EDK... **\$10.95/each.**

## Military Pocket Knife - GENUINE GI

Genuine GI, current issue, this stainless steel folding knife is of indestructible construction of heavy gauge stainless steel. It measures 3 3/4" closed, and features a large blade, bottle opener, can opener, hole punch and ring for affixing to the belt. Specify whether US or USMC imprint is desired... **\$13.75/each.**



**Nylon Knife Sheath -** Ours are government spec polypropylene webbing constructed with attention to detail. They will fit on any width belt and feature velcro closure. Specify olive drab (OD) green, black, or camouflage... **\$5.00/each.**

## SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

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## Battle Dress Uniforms - GENUINE GI

Pants feature: 6 pockets (high pockets are belted); draw-string cuffs; adjustable waist tab. Jackets feature: 4 pockets, bellow style. Tell us your chest, height, and waist measurements when ordering.  Woodland Pattern Camouflage - 50% cotton/50% nylon. Army's latest issue; the pants have a reinforced seat and knees; the jacket has reinforced elbows. Brand New. Specify: Jacket or Pants... **\$30.00/each; \$57.50/set.**

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## Poncho Liner-Camouflage—GENUINE GI

The poncho liner is an extremely lightweight quilt of polyester fiberfill. It is a waterproof blanket, camouflage on both sides, that traps and maintains the body's heat. Provides warmth and protection under the harshest, most frigid conditions. Brand new... **\$33.75/each.**

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**COVER:** Honduran soldier returns from patrol in Olancho. Honduran Special Forces company of 250 men wiped out Cuban-trained, Sandinista-supported guerrilla band in August-September campaign, killing Honduras' leading communist, Jose Maria Reyes Mata. See "Death in Olancho," p. 62. Honduran SF is armed with Galil 5.56mm folding-stock assault rifle. Photo: Rick Venable

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**I**F you read *Soldier of Fortune Magazine*, you probably know that Jake Jatras, U.S. Regional Director of IPSC, and I are running for a seat on the National Rifle Association Board of Directors. But you probably wonder why, and with which faction.

Most of you know about the pitched battle of the last several years between the "Old Guard of the NRA" and the "Federation for the NRA." We have never before witnessed such a can of worms. The policies, activities and personalities of both sides leave something to be desired. But there is not space in this column to discuss adequately this interne-cine conflict.

You do not need to be told how important Second Amendment rights are to me. First, my business is based on the right to bear arms. Second, my politics are shaped by the idea that a man who governs himself has to be ready to protect himself: Nobody is going to take care of him. Third, the life I want to live, the nation I want to live in, and my pursuit of liberty would be compromised by any compromise of our Second Amendment rights.

The NRA is the biggest, broadest based and most effective gun-law lobbying organization in America, although there are smaller groups more closely aligned with my stand on American gun law.

Our main quarrel with the NRA is with their seeming desire to avoid "unpopular" issues like handguns and concealed weapons. The average homeowner who wants a handgun for self-defense, the businessman who keeps shop in a high-crime area, and the military arms collector are not adequately represented by the NRA.

We know the vast majority of NRA members who join the NRA do so because they see the NRA — through the Institute for Legislative Action — as their only bulwark against the invasion of their rights by oppressive anti-gun legislation. We will do our best to ensure that the NRA intensifies its effort to protect these rights . . . and that includes handguns!

We want to go to Washington for you, so we all can demand the right we have already been granted. Jefferson, Paine and the like didn't have hunting and target shooting in mind when they advocated that every private citizen should be armed.

It is my political philosophy — which emanates from the work of 18th-century English and French theorists — that it is the right of the people to overthrow an oppressive, tyrannical government. You cannot do that without arms. Indeed, the only substantial difference between the plights of the Poles and the Afghans is that Afghan civilians are armed and the Poles are not.

We want to represent what the *average* gunowner wants out of the NRA. The only plank in our platform is pursuit of the right to bear arms. It is our only reason for running, and it is our only claim on your vote. — Robert K. Brown

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**SOLDIER OF FORTUNE** (ISSN 0145-6784/USPS 120-510) is published monthly by Omega Group Limited, Boulder, Colorado. Controlled Circulation Postage Paid at Boulder, CO. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE**, Subscription Department, P.O. Box 310, Martinsville, NJ 08836. Subscription rates for twelve monthly issues: \$26.00 — U.S.A., Canada, Mexico. (Save \$10 off Newsstand Price.) \$50.00 — 1st Class (sealed envelope) U.S.A., Canada, Mexico. \$70.00 — Airmail. All other countries, \$33.00 — Surface, all countries except U.S.A., Canada, Mexico. Single Issue Price — U.S., \$3.00; United Kingdom, 1.50; Canada, \$3.50.

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Manuscripts, photographs, drawings are submitted at the contributor's own risk. Material should be mailed to **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE**, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306, and cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient postage. Any material accepted is subject to such revision as is necessary to meet the editorial requirements of **SOF**. All manuscripts must be typed double-spaced. All photographs should be credited and be accurately identified. Payment will be made at rates current at time of publication.

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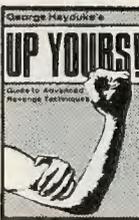


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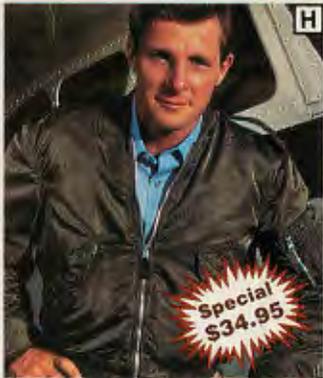
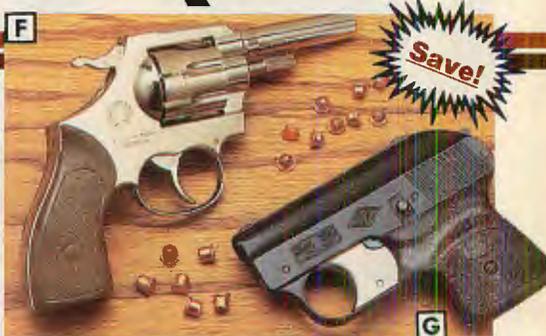


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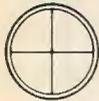
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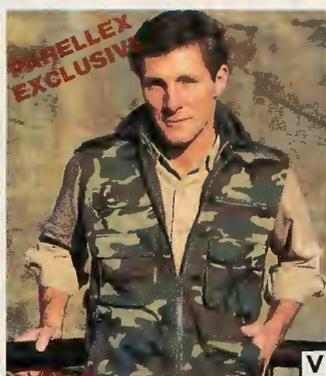
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## YOU CAN DO YOUR BIT...

Sirs:

About eight weeks ago I sent a small care package to a battery of Marines in Lebanon. From the reply I received you'd have thought I sent them a million dollars.

The package contained nothing more than my treasured back issues of SOF, all 36 of them, and some canned food. Come to think of it, it would have been worth a million dollars to me in 'Nam. I remember receiving 20 comic books from my dad and weeping for 30 minutes; it was something real and tangible from "the world." I don't have to tell those of you who are vets about the empty aloneness we felt while fighting. Let's not bring these guys home from Beirut soured and bitter because we didn't care enough to think of those things that are small to us but mean the world to them.

I challenge SOF readers to send reading materials, words of encouragement and anything else. A dried salami would bring a howl of joy to some grunt. Can you remember the guy who didn't have any family or just didn't get any mail? We can do something.

Though your time of active duty may be over, it's *not* time to forget those who've taken our places. Brighten up their lives. The reply and feeling you'll get is worth a million bucks.

Bill Hunt  
Grants Pass, Oregon

*Because SOF must be composed months ahead of time, it is possible that the U.S. Marines may have left Beirut by the time you're reading this. If not, send your packages and letters to Commanding Officer, 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit, Detachment M, 6th Fleet, FPO NY 09502. —The Eds.*

## MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY...

Sirs:

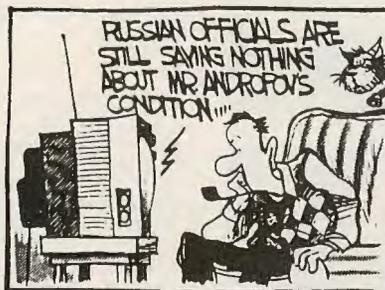
It was as if SOF came to life. My evacuation from the Grand Anse campus on Grenada, preceded by a pounding barrage of artillery from A6 Intruders and helicopter gunships to secure the periphery of the campus, was made less traumatic due to the fact that SOF has provided me with impeccable descriptions of warfare and weaponry.

"The Grenada Papers" (see SOF, February '84) further compliments your commitment to excellence as it was not only accurate, but riddled with behind-the-scenes details.

I would like to thank all the members of the U.S. Armed Forces who participated in our evacuation. True, it was uniquely exciting, but the sight of a chopper billowing smoke and slamming into the harbor made me realize the death war brings. To these unsung heroes, you will never be forgotten.

Carl Mazzara  
Brooklyn, New York

# FLAK



RUSSIAN OFFICIALS ARE STILL SAYING NOTHING ABOUT MR. ANDROPOV'S CONDITION!!!



"EXCEPT THAT HE IS STILL SUFFERING FROM THE SNIFFLES."



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DANA SUMMERS FOR THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

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## YURI'S ILLNESS NOT SERIOUS...

Sirs:

I have a reliable contact in the Kremlin who informed me of the exact nature of Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov's illness. He acquired it working with the KGB's military export division. Yuri Andropov has a Kalashni cough. Ahem.

Kevin Goebel  
Janesville, Wisconsin

*Just at press-time, the Soviets announced Andropov's death — but the joke still stands. — The Eds.*

## SPREAD YOUR WINGS...

Sirs:

In March '81 you kindly published a letter on my behalf, requesting readers to forward me whatever badges and patches they had available from their various police agencies so I could build up a collection for our officers' club. I am pleased to say I have received well over 4,000 patches and 200 badges for which I convey my greatest thanks. I used the same method through *Guns and Ammo* and received about 180 items, which proves SOF is the magazine read by most police officers throughout the world.

The curator of the South African Police Museum, who is compiling a collection of

parabat wings, has asked that I approach you, requesting readers to kindly forward wings to add to the museum's collection. I assure you every donation will be highly appreciated, and if there are friends who would like to add any spare cap badges, these too will be highly thought of.

Keep up the good work.

Roy V. Moore  
South African Reserve Police  
Force  
P.O. Box 78  
Wynberg C.P.  
Cape Town, South Africa 7824

*SOF translates the South African "parabat wings" to be what we call jump wings. — The Eds.*

## RESEARCHING THE RPG...

Sirs:

The Terrorism Research Centre is compiling a wide-ranging case study on the RPG weapons family, especially the RPG 2, 7 and 16, and would much appreciate hearing from SOF readers who could send any information, data, stories, vignettes, diagrams or photos relating thereto. All

*Continued on page 103*



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Photo: Tony Gaccione for Penthouse 1981

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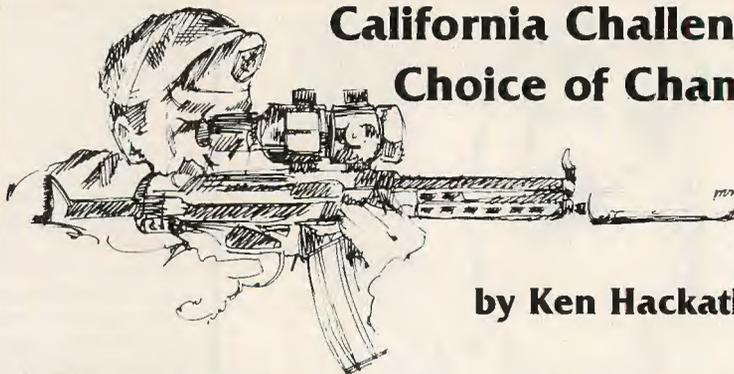
—**Robert O. Muller, Vietnam Veterans of America**

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# COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

## California Challenger: Choice of Champions



by Ken Hackathorn

"**P**RACTICE what you preach" should be Gordon Davis' motto. Gordon is an IPSC competitor who's an acute critic of holster designs. But he doesn't just talk about holsters, he makes them. Right now, one of his patented designs is sweeping IPSC, and may change the way everyone else makes holsters.

The California Challenger is the Davis Leather Company's (Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 446, Arcadia, CA 91006) state-of-the-art offering in modern holsters. It is beautifully made from an original Davis design. Thick hand-stitched leather holds the heavy shaped-steel insert and protects your handgun.



**California Challenger, by Gordon Davis, may be the most popular new holster design among IPSC competitors. Photo: Ken Hackathorn**

Perhaps the major improvement Davis has made on the standard IPSC-type holster is the positioning of the tension adjustment. Most tensioners are set low on the holster to allow the end of the slide to clear the tightest part of the holster as soon as the shooter begins to draw. This arrangement does allow the easiest draw, by a small percentage, but the low tensioner doesn't give the holster the best grip on the pistol.

Replacing the conventional tensioner closer to the grip end of the holster minimizes the pistol's tendency to rock back and forth when the shooter moves. That rocking not only can shake the pistol loose from the holster, it also puts the

grip in a slightly different position, relative to the shooter's body, for every draw.

The higher tension adjustment grips the slide close to the ejection port, just in front of the trigger guard. This means that there is tension along most of the length of the slide during the draw, but it doesn't really slow you down. For this trade-off the shooter gets unparalleled security in a competition holster.

In spite of the firmness of the Challenger's grip on the pistol, it is still an extremely fast holster. Detail-perfect forming of leather and metal are more responsible than tension for this holster's security. A deep cut in the leading edge allows the shooter to sweep the pistol up to the line of sight in a smooth and natural motion with the least possible movement of the upper body.

Each holster is individually pressure-molded to the dimensions of the pistol it is designed for. If you have a Colt Government Model, Browning P35 or any Smith & Wesson 9mm auto the Davis Leather Company has a standard holster that will fit your pistol. Pin guns or compensated .45s can be fitted on special order.

At the request of Chuck Taylor, Davis has begun to make a muzzle-to-the-rear holster for normal defensive wear. Called the Model No. 13450, it makes the California Challenger more appropriate for non-competitive wear. Still, it is important to remember that such a holster is entirely inappropriate for police use, since it lacks a safety strap.

In the last few years, holster competition has become as hot as IPSC competition. The best have made the top while the less accomplished fall by the wayside. Gordon Davis has obviously made the cut, and we'll see his holsters for a long time.

Like other Davis Leather Company products, the California Challenger is made of the finest materials with the greatest care. I recommend it, along with all other Davis leather goods, for functional design and durability. ☞

# YOURS FREE WITH MEMBERSHIP INSIDE THE GREEN BERETS

**INSIDE THE GREEN BERETS**  
The First Thirty Years  
Charles M. Simpson III

A HISTORY OF THE  
U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES



Photo courtesy of U.S. Marine Corps.

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**D**ECADES before Heckler & Koch rocked the submachine-gun world with their delayed-blowback closed-bolt MP5, Harrington and Richardson introduced an SMG based on a similar principle. It proved to be a doomed harbinger of their dismal production performance with the M1 Garand and M14 rifles.

The H&R Model 50 SMG was designed by Eugene G. Reising. Production began at H&R's Worcester, Mass., plant in December 1941. During WWII about 100,000 Model 50 and folding-stock Model 55 submachine guns were made. Most went to the USMC where they were much despised. Marines commonly upgraded their Reising SMG inventory by stealing Thompsons from the Army and Navy. In this instance I can sympathize with the poor wretches.

A few were sold to the British Purchasing Commission and thence traveled to Canada and the USSR (a pity the Soviets did not get all of them). A smaller amount were used for war-plant security. A tiny lot of Model 50s with military phosphate finish was manufactured in the early 1950s for potential police sales and it is these, along with blued "commercial" specimens culled from police-department armories, that currently circulate through the inventories of Class 3 dealers.

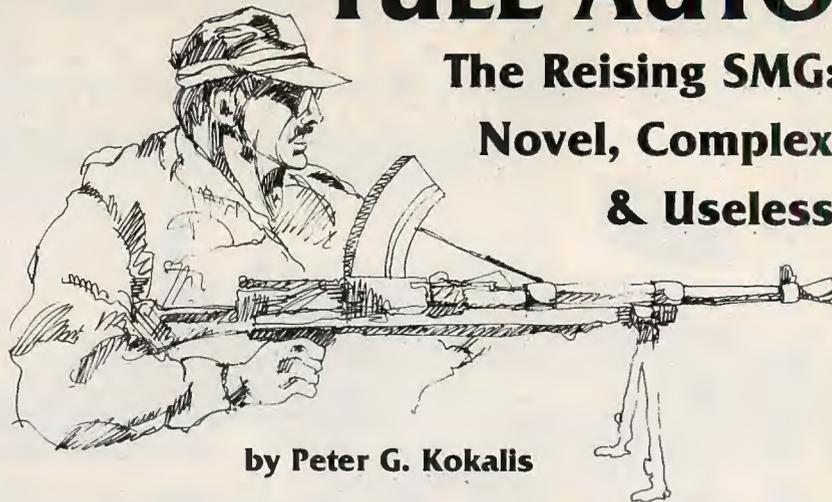
The cycle of operation of this novel and complex weapon merits detailed examination. The weapon is cocked and a cartridge is placed in the chamber by pulling a peculiar, inaccessible "action bar" (located in a recess on the underside of the forearm) fully rearward and releasing it smartly — no mean feat with the gun in firing position. When the trigger is pulled, a nub on the disconnecter bar hits the sear, causing it to rotate and release the hammer. The strange cylindrical hammer is spring-propelled forward to strike the floating firing pin and fire the round.

The bolt's rearward thrust is delayed until the gas pressure has dropped to a safe level by camming itself down a sloping ramp and out of a recess cut into the top of the receiver body. A notch milled into the bolt engages a lug at the rear of the action bar. As the bolt and action bar move to the rear, the action bar compresses the recoil spring and pushes the disconnecter bar out of engagement with the sear. The released sear grabs the hammer, which has been forced rearward by the bolt. As the recoil spring drives everything forward, a round is stripped from the magazine and chambered as the action bar cams the bolt into its recess in the receiver.

In semiautomatic fire, release of the trigger permits the disconnecter to re-engage the trigger and sear. The cycle is identical in the full-auto mode except that a connector bar pivots on the sear, catches on and is pulled forward by the action bar, causing the sear to again release the hammer. Full-auto fire with the Reising SMG is, in essence, a series of semiauto shots fired in rapid sequence by a mechanism which repeats the same cycle of events as

# FULL AUTO

## The Reising SMG: Novel, Complex & Useless



by Peter G. Kokalis



**Reising Model 50 SMG: H&R's ingenious failure combined innovation with unnecessary complexity. (Author's collection.) Photo: Peter G. Kokalis**

long as the trigger is held back.

All of which is far more complex than necessary for a submachine gun, even though it fires the omnipotent .45 ACP cartridge. The Reising is an unqualified failure. Its inclination to malfunction through introduction of the slightest speck of dust into its frail body would call up images of the princess and the pea, were it not that the Reising is certainly of more abject lineage. Debris entering the bolt's recess in the receiver prevents lockup and leads to frequent stoppages.

The small-diameter recoil spring is easily distorted and rests in a deep, debris-trapping, blind hole. Moving parts are mostly held together by staked screws rather than pins. Many components show evidence of having been selected to fit and Reising parts can rarely be interchanged with success. Much of the Reising SMG is fabricated from stamped, sheet-metal pressings. Although acceptable by today's standards, it was too innovative for Americans in 1940 and looked insubstantial

when compared to forged and milled masterpieces like the Thompson.

The Reising Model 50 is fitted with a muzzle compensator. The end of the barrel is threaded to accept this device, which can be removed by hand. It can also be removed by firing and this happens with disturbing frequency. The compensator is 3.25 inches long.

The 11-inch barrel has six grooves with a right-hand twist of 1:16. The barrel has 14 radial cooling fins at the chamber end — a macabre expense on a weapon usually fitted with a 12-rd. magazine and chambered for a pistol cartridge.

The Parkerized M50s manufactured in the 1950s were equipped with a creased magazine well that accepts only the single-column 12-rd. magazine. The *raison d'être* of the 12-rd. magazine is not clear. It could be the designer feared cook-offs because of the closed-bolt operation. Flat-sided magazine wells which will take both the 12-rd. and 20-rd. magazines can be installed, but are becoming increasingly difficult to locate. The magazine well latch is awkward to manipulate rapidly. The poorly designed, double-column, 20-

*Continued on page 102*

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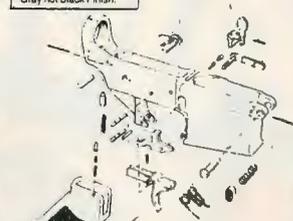
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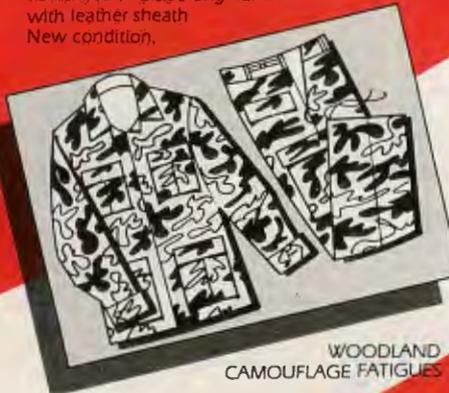
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## KAREN LAST STAND?...

The Karens are locked in battle with the Burmese government as the May '84 SOF goes to press. It may be their last battle, and the Burmese will probably win because of U.S. support.

Helicopters supplied to the Burmese by the narcotics office of the U.S. State Department have been turned from pursuit of the Shan opium lords to a genocidal campaign against a dissenting minority.

Intercepts of Burmese Army radio traffic have convinced the Karens that the final siege on the last southern Karen stronghold shall have begun on 16 February 1984. Two SOF correspondents are already in Karen HQ. *Soldier of Fortune* will feature exclusive on-the-spot reporting of the battle in the June issue.

Largely Christian and with historical ties to the West, the Karen National Liberation Army has threatened the Burmese dictatorship's grip on the tin-and-tungsten-rich Tenasserim region for the last 35 years. The Karens have developed their own government, army and educational system. Diplomatic efforts to achieve Western recognition of their "Republic of Kawthoolei" have steadily increased over the last few years.

American-made Bell UH-1 helicopters are enabling the Burmese to concentrate superior numbers of troops and heavy weapons in previously inaccessible positions. Heliborne Burmese soldiers can now move faster than foot-and riverboat-mobile Karens. Lines of resistance are smashed from behind in the thinly-populated area as American-supplied choppers leap defensive positions to put Burmese units in the Karen rear.

In the last few weeks the Burmese Army has stormed and burnt the Karen strongholds of Metharaw and Mepale in a steady thrust designed to concentrate defenders on their base of supply and support north of Mae Sot. Fighting and casualties are heavy, since both Burmese and Karens see the end may be near.

Thailand — never on good terms with the Marxist Burmese — is alarmed by the Burmese campaign. The Thais anticipate a battle that will disregard borders and have reinforced their Border Police near Mae Sot.

By the time you read this, American Hueys may have helped the Marxist Burmese crush the Karen rebellion, destroying their hopes of self-determination, scattering the few remaining Karens into the millions of Southeast Asian refugees fleeing tyranny, and wiping Karen language, culture and freedom from the face of the earth, forever.

# BULLETIN BOARD

by Donna DuVall



## RRII BACK IN SALVADOR...

Tom Reisinger, president of Refugee Relief International, Inc., informed SOF that a medical-survey team has just returned from El Salvador where they conducted an updated study of the situation and assessed current needs. They took 1,200 pounds of medical supplies and equipment donated by SOF readers with them. Members of SOF's A Team accompanied RRII to get an update on the military situation and to make plans for the return of the full A Team later.

RRII plans increased involvement in all of Central America during 1984, with long-range plans calling for expansion into Kampuchea and Pakistan.

Although donations of medical supplies have been substantial, financial contributions have fallen off, creating an urgent need. SOF encourages its readers to send whatever money they can — and remember no amount is too small. Without continued support, RRII cannot sustain any worthwhile effort in El Salvador.

No RRII staffer is paid a salary. Last year well over 70 percent of all monies went into direct project-related channels and *not* for so-called "overhead" or administrative expenses. And all gifts are tax-deductible. So please send what you can today to Refugee Relief International, Inc., 6340 Nelson St., Arvada, CO 80004.

RRII medic John Padgett (center) and SOF Special Projects Director Alex McColl (far right) present donated cardiac monitor and wheelchair to personnel of San Salvador hospital: Chief of Staff Dr. Guillermo Iraheta (right of center); Director of Physical Therapy Silvia Quijano (far left) and Assistant Administrator Francisco Monterrosa (left of center). The cardiac monitor, valued at \$950, was donated by Thomas Helmcamp, president of PACE Medical Electronics, Inc., of Miami, Fla. The wheelchair, with its Spanish-language bumper sticker: "I'd rather be killing communists," was donated by an anonymous Disabled American Vet. Photo: Ralph Edens

## AFGHAN FREEDOM FIGHTER FUNDS...

Sources inside Afghanistan report that despite the 100,000-plus Russian soldiers in Afghanistan and the hostile anti-American rhetoric of the Karmal regime, it is the American dollar, and not the Russian ruble, that is the welcome exchange currency there. And one of the products Afghans and Russian soldiers, albeit clandestinely, buy with their American greenbacks is Coca-Cola, that great capitalist refresher found all over the world.

But, although the American dollar may be plentiful in Kabul's markets, it is not nearly plentiful enough in the coffers of the Afghan Freedom Fight-

ers. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan has entered its fifth year and, much to everyone's surprise, the Afghans are still resisting. But to keep resistance up, they need money to buy weapons and materiel. So please send your American dollars for the brave Afghans to defend their home against Russian communists. Although contributions are not tax-deductible, they could be considered charitable. All money is sent directly to the Afghans; none is used for personnel or administrative costs. Send your donations today to: Afghan Freedom Fighters Fund, Soldier of Fortune, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306.

## AFGHAN AUCTION NETS \$25,000...

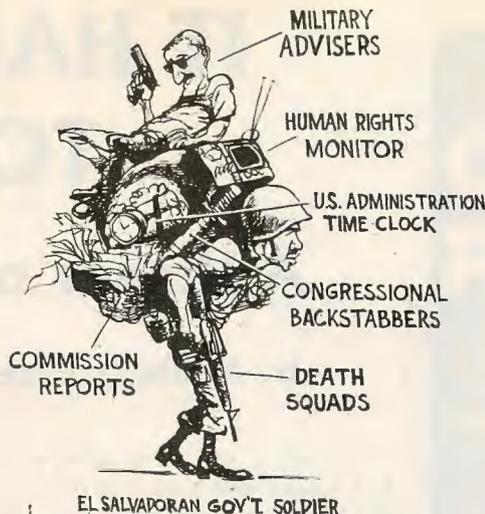
Don Weidenweber, director of the American Aid for Afghans (AAFA), presents high-bidder Aaron Embree with an instrument donated by SOF to the AAFA auction. The instrument is one of several items liberated from a Russian Mi-24 in Afghanistan, and brought out by SOF. The auction netted \$25,000 for the Afghan Freedom Fighters. AAFA is located at 6443 SW Beaverton Highway, Portland, OR 97221.



Don Weidenweber, director of American Aid for Afghans, congratulates Aaron Embree of Portland, Ore., on his new acquisition: an instrument taken from a Russian Mi-24 in Afghanistan that SOF donated to the AAFA auction.

## RECOGNITION FOR CONTRIBUTORS...

Any individual who contributes 1) funds, medical supplies or medicine to Refugee Relief International, Inc., 2) funds to the Afghan Freedom Fighters Fund or 3) equipment to the Salvadoran Army or Miskito Indians has the option of having his name mentioned in SOF with the amount of money or equipment donated. If you wish to be so recognized, please indicate this with your donation.



EL SALVADORAN GOV'T SOLDIER  
DAVID HEROLD ©1984 Copley News Service



EL SALVADORAN COMMUNIST GUERRILLA

## ON THE ROAD TO SARAJEVO...

Don Nielsen, America's best biathlete, moved closer toward bringing home a medal from the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo by qualifying for the six-man U.S. Olympic team in Lake Placid, N.Y., in early January. Nielsen's training program, combining cross-country skiing and shooting, was sponsored in part by *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine and SOF readers (see "Biathlon: SOF Lends Hand to Olympic Hopeful," SOF, November '83). Nielsen, who qualified by the narrowest of margins, joked about his close call, saying that if he hadn't won, "The folks at SOF would think I had sold out to the commies."

SOF congratulates Don and wishes him the best of luck on his road to Olympic gold. Don still needs your continued support and assistance not only for the Olympic Games but also for the World Cup competition that follows. Send a tax-deductible contribution today to Don Nielsen Fund, c/o Ken Rogers, Colorado Track Club, P.O. Box 12124, Boulder, CO 80303. Tax number: DN 0261395.

## THAI COMMIES SURRENDER...

Exchanging their red flags and AKs for white truce flags, 5,800 Thai communists surrendered to the Thai government in Nan, Thailand (the provisional capital 350 miles northwest of Bangkok), last January. The truce ending the 16-year insurgency in Thailand's northern mountains was celebrated by a crowd of 30,000 with marching bands, dancing in the streets, and parachute demonstrations.

The surrender came as a result of a generous government amnesty program that provides offers of land and job assistance to former guerrillas, and a tough military counterinsurgency

program during the past two years that destroyed most rebel strongholds.

## GRENIADIAN PRESS CHEERS REAGAN...

The weekly *Grenadian Voice* of St. George's wasted no time in telling the world how it felt about the U.S. liberation of Grenada — and about Ronald Reagan. Operating again after being shut down for two years because of criticism of Maurice Bishop's Marxist regime, the newspaper wrote in its 20 November issue: "We rise from the ashes and are proud to be the first local newspaper to herald the liberation of our country." The paper termed the operation as a "necessary rescue operation on behalf of the vast majority of Grenadians" and bestowed upon President Reagan its "order of valor."

## ALL ROADS LEAD TO SOF...

Covering the world's hot spots is what we do best and SOF readers can look forward to first-hand reporting by our professionals from the following places: Contributing Editor Rick Venable and David Mills, England, West Germany and Northern Ireland; Soviet Analyst David Isby, Afghanistan; Southeast Asian Correspondent Jim Coyne, South Korea and with the Karens in Burma; Contributing Editor Jim Perry, Panama; Central American Correspondent Steve Salisbury with the ARDE and FDN Contras in Costa Rica and Honduras (and likely Nicaragua); Chief Foreign Correspondent Jim Graves reporting from Bangkok, Singapore and Beirut; and, of course, SOF's A Team, headed by Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, back in El Salvador training Salvadoran Army units and providing much-needed medical care for soldiers and civilians.

Continued on page 101

# HKS REVOLVER SPEED LOADER

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# IT HAPPENED TO ME

## A Hisser of an Ambush

by Armin D. Cate as told to M.L. Jones

Armin D. Cate's fellow cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., have nicknamed him "The Grunt," perhaps because he's told them stories like this about his Army career:

THE story begins on a hotter-than-hell, typically boring day out in the "boonies," as the field environment out behind Ft. Campbell, Ky., is affectionately referred to by both officers and enlisted. I was assigned to the HQ Battery of a 105mm towed-howitzer battalion as a recon sergeant to set up ambushes and harass the gun bunnies from the line batteries as they moved around on hip-shoots. Nothing oppressive about this job except for the blistering July sun and waiting on the cannon cockers to move out.

During one of these slack periods, Smitty, a PFC in my section, and I decided to grab a few Zs beneath a small wooden bridge which the convoy would have to cross. We had just settled down comfortably in the cool shade when we were both rudely torn out of Z-land by an ominous-sounding rattle directly above us along the uneven framework of the stacked timbers. Not being one to jump to hasty conclusions, I passed it off as an overly active cricket.

I was about to sack out again when Smitty, who had gotten up to investigate, let out a piercing scream. I stood up to find myself face to face with a forked-tongued serpent which I had already gotten to meet closer than I cared for. Fortunately, the bastard was still a little groggy, having no doubt been napping itself, so I had enough time to engage my brain. Ducking right and grabbing my trusty M16, I joined Smitty, who had already established a secure OP several yards away.

The next question: Do we vamoose or do we play with this reptilian character? It still hadn't entirely emerged from the crack it had been sleeping in but was already well over two-feet long. Since it was a terribly boring day, we decided to have a little fun at the snake's expense. In my ruck I had enough pyro to keep this scaly customer occupied. The question was whether to smoke and choke it or to stun it a bit.

I decided on the latter, since I was getting worried that it might get away and ruin our fun. I popped a grenade simulator

and managed to get close enough to toss it onto the ledge in the immediate vicinity of the snake.

The snake didn't get a chance to get too interested in the simulator as it exploded almost instantaneously, throwing the reptile down along the ledge. Smitty went after the dazed, almost-dead snake with a stick and beat the shit out of what was still moving. He then picked it up (he was very fond of snakes) and bit it behind the head, grinning triumphantly.

Meanwhile, the PRC-77 that we'd hastily abandoned came to life as our platoon sergeant called: "What the hell's going on? Don't you know the Gamma Goats are converging on the ambush site?"

Right about this time all hell broke loose under the bridge as a whole shitload of rattling erupted from the crack in the embankment. Not wanting to take on all the members of the dear departed's family, I grabbed the "prick" and boogied behind Smitty and the dead snake.

To add to the already climbing excitement, I heard the low, dull roar of the goats as we caught our breath. Setting up what had to be a truly hasty ambush, Smitty and I split up and ducked into the brush on both sides of the bridge. I was busying myself with my assortment of pyro when I looked over and saw Smitty standing behind a tree, swinging the dead snake over his head like a frantic cowboy. Remembering that the rest of the brood was under the bridge, I went back to readying the "fuses" on some artillery simulators, hoping that the snakes would stay there a little longer.

As we were the point element of the area ambush, we had to let the first two vehicles pass unmolested. First one goat and then another crossed the bridge in rapid succession. I pulled the strings on three artys and tossed them, one at a time, under the bridge. Three shrill whistles followed and almost immediately the next vehicle came around the bend.

The poor bastards never knew what hit 'em. As the artys burst in an explosive inferno beneath the bridge, Smitty finished his wind-up and threw the carcass of the snake onto the back of the goat. I think several world records were set by those guys unassing from it.

Air Assault! ☒

# THE SPECIALIST WILL BLOW YOU AWAY

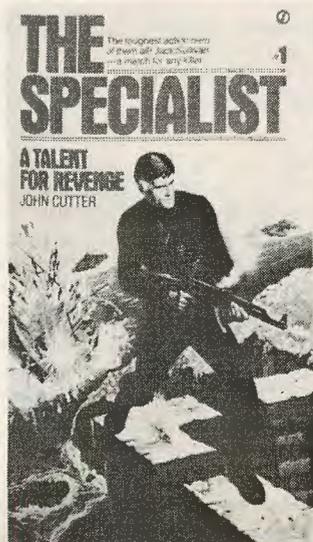


Jack Sullivan is The Specialist. Killing is his specialty. His price is as high as the risk he takes. But it takes more than money to send him into action.

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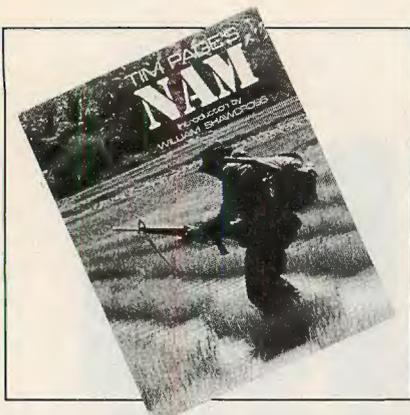
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**TIM PAGE'S 'NAM.** Introduction by William Shawcross. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Dept. SOF, 201 E. 50th St., New York, NY 10022. 1983. 119 pp. 86 photos. \$22.50. Review by Bob Poos.



**H**IS friends, who include *Dispatches* author Michael Herr, have, or have tried to, make something of a cult/folk hero of Tim Page: bravest and best of all the combat photographers and correspondents in Vietnam. Reckless. Would go where other newsmen didn't dare. Spent more time in the field than any of them. An idol of other war photographers. Beloved by the combat troops that he covered. Witty, charming, popular among the combat press corps.

He was really none of those things except, perhaps, reckless — and all combat photographers (including most reporters, who carried cameras as well) had to be that in order to get good pictures. They simply had to expose themselves even more than most of the soldiers they covered. Page certainly was not as good a craftsman nor any braver than Henri Huett of the AP, Larry Burroughs of *Time/Life* or Kent Potter of UPI, all of whom received for their work the highest prizes journalism can offer and all of whom were killed in action.

What Page was, simply, was a good, hardworking war photographer. There is no need to romanticize him any more than that, because what he and his colleagues did speaks for them well enough. All told, 50 some either were killed or are still reported missing in Southeast Asia.

I think Page himself will acknowledge that he had one great advantage over most of his fellow photographer/correspondents: Working a great deal as a contract freelancer for *Time/Life*, he had the opportunity to take — and see used — many color photos. Most cameramen were almost entirely limited to black and white.

I knew Tim Page quite well and frequently worked with him on the same operations in I, II, III and IV Corps from early 1965 through '68. In fact, we were hit by the same grenade while covering the 1966 Buddhist uprising in Da Nang (see "Bad Night at Tien Hoi Pagoda," SOF, November '83).

Combat newsmen in Vietnam did what

# IN REVIEW

the name implies: They gathered news in combat. All of them. It is senseless to intimate that any one of them was any braver or more cowardly than the rest who did it regularly for a living. That is why virtually all of them got wounded at least once and why so many were killed. And just about every single one of them turned in excellent photos and honest stories. If anything got changed, and it did, that happened back in air-conditioned offices in New York, London, Paris or wherever.

Page's book is an example of good color-photo craftsmanship. But for some reason, I could identify very few actual combat photos. Page certainly took plenty of them. These run more to shots out of Huey doors, the gunner in the foreground; soldiers' faces, tanks, medevacs, columns of troops on the march and the dead, some covered with lime in order to lessen the stench.

One notable series is of life and action aboard the carrier *Midway*, flagship of the Seventh Fleet. I happened to get out on the same ship sometime later and a PIO officer told me a story about Page: Seeking a camera platform, he asked if a rescue chopper would hover just ahead of and below the carrier flight deck as it sped through the South China Sea. That was too much to ask even of the air/sea rescue pilots and they were about the most daring lot one could find. But it was a vantage point and photo possibility that would occur to any superior photographer seeking the shot he wanted.

The text is pretty honest too, although some of it is exaggerated: "... white and black fought a segregated conflict . . . . Junk was so cheap it was snorted out of M16 barrels."

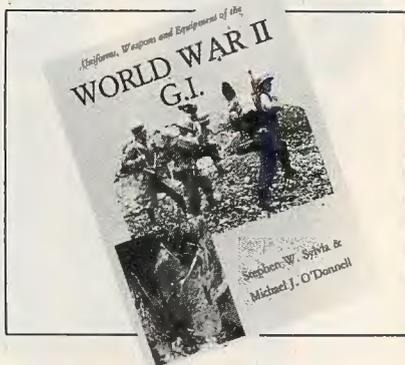
That's nonsense. When the shooting started, skin color vanished. Page may have seen dope snorted from rifle barrels, but it would have been in the rear. It certainly was not done by fighting men, or about to go into, combat. I have no idea who wrote the copy. Probably introduction writer Shawcross, who I vaguely recall as a British reporter who briefly visited Southeast Asia. Page may have dictated it to another writer.

I don't know what Page is doing now. The cover jacket says he is "living between London, Los Angeles and Southeast Asia." I do know that he is through covering wars. He told a mutual friend recently, who was much closer to him than I was, that he was finished with that.

I found the book mildly interesting because I had seen all of the same things and been to all the same places. I do think it is a good example of how a cameraman with a bent toward the artistic and working in color saw the war: colorful and bizarre. It was that, but it was also something more and I don't think Page quite captured it.

At \$22.50 plus tax, I can only recommend it to those with a deep interest in Vietnam War photography.

**UNIFORMS, WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT OF THE WORLD WAR II G.I.** By Stephen W. Sylvia and Michael J. O'Donnell. Moss Publications, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 729, Orange, VA 22960. 1982. 223 pp. Over 500 B&W photographs. \$19.95. Review by Bill Brooks.



**N**O other single book contains as much illustrative material on American WWII uniforms, equipment and weapons as the *World War II G.I.* It is certain to become a favorite of American military historians, collectors of war memorabilia, wargamers and World War II enthusiasts in general.

The book is organized into five chapters, each dealing with a major area of goods and services: Quartermaster, Uniforms, Gear, Weapons and Personal Items. Topics covered range from dog tags to barracks bags, Garands to grenades, goggles to glasses — and everything in between.

As stated in the preface of *Uniforms, Weapons and Equipment of the World War II G.I.*, "The purpose of this book is to illustrate the results of that labor [of the Quartermaster Corps] through photographs of the many and varied uniforms, weapons and gear of the World War II G.I." Illustrating the results has been accomplished, and each photo is accompanied by an explanation and short background history.

My only criticism of this work is the lack of suitable cross-reference information, as some items appear in different chapters. And as a camouflage nut, I would have enjoyed some information and illustrations of hand-painted camouflage designs as they appeared on U.S. helmets in the Pacific theater and on paratroop clothing in Europe.

*Uniforms, Weapons and Equipment of the World War II G.I.* is a good reference work with excellent photographs of the American G.I. wearing and using his issued equipment. I'm looking forward to reading equally good future editions. ✕



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When your package of coded dated mail arrives at our office, we will count the number of pieces in the package and send you a check the same day along with another special package for your next group of coded dated mail. We then match the mail you sent us and forward it to the proper list owner for his use.

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We want you because we have a current need for agents with decoy addresses all over the United States. Our address is so well known that it could never be used as an effective decoy. Not to mention, many of our list owner clients are involved in regional mailings, thus we need decoys in all 50 states. Consequently, it doesn't matter where you live, you can become a Mailing List Protection Agent as long as you have an address in the United States or Canada.

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REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE. The fee covers all the computer costs of getting your code name and address integrated into the system, setting up your file for payment in our office, and start-up kit we will send you as soon as you register.

Your start-up kit consists of easy-to-follow instructions, an easy-to-complete form you must fill out one time for our files, and your first special package to forward coded dated mailing pieces back to us for payment.

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The amount of openings we have for Mailing List Security Agents is severely limited. We only need a few honest dependable individuals in each area. Therefore, you must register within the next two weeks to qualify. You have 14 days to forward to us the LIFETIME REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE along with your payment. If you send your registration in after that time, we reserve the right to refuse your request and, of course, immediately return your remittance, if you're rejected because you didn't meet the deadline.

Now is your chance to get in on the easiest way of accumulating extra money that has never been made available. For the next 14 days, you have the chance to join others who are reaping the financial rewards by acting as a Mailing List Protection Agent. Don't lose out on this opportunity to cash in. Say "YES" and ACT NOW before time runs out and it is too late!

Offer good in Canada - U.S. funds only.

Sincerely, *Susan Williams*

Susan Williams, U.S. List Protection Co.

P.S. Please do not request that we register you without payment and later deduct it from your first check. We do not operate in such a manner because there are too many people willing to pay in advance. Furthermore, it creates an unnecessary bookkeeping problem if we have to keep records to remind us to make such deductions.

SF4-84

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Code Name (Select any name you want to use) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

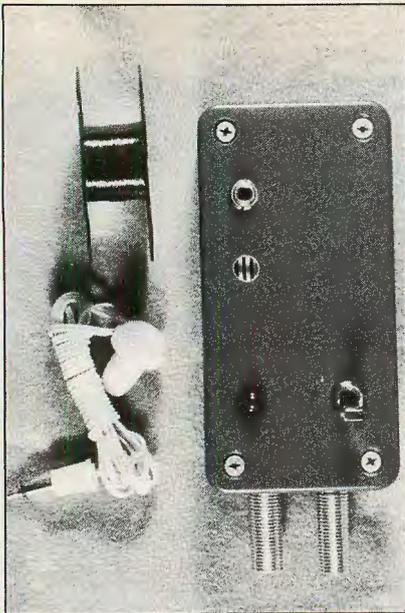
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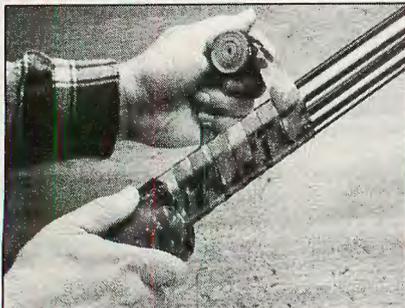
# ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER

by John Metzger



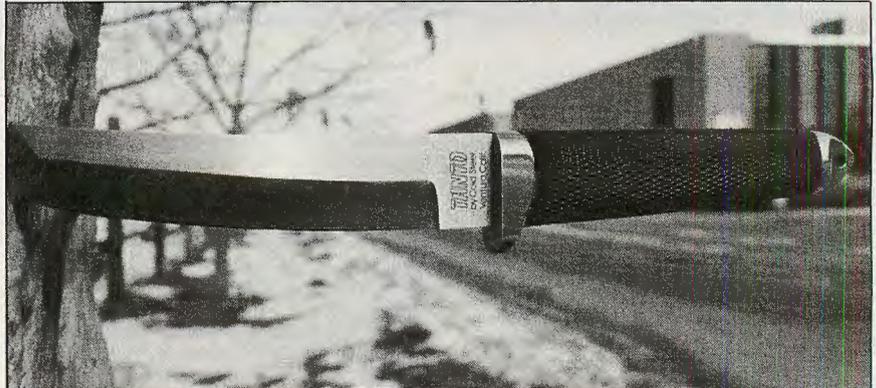
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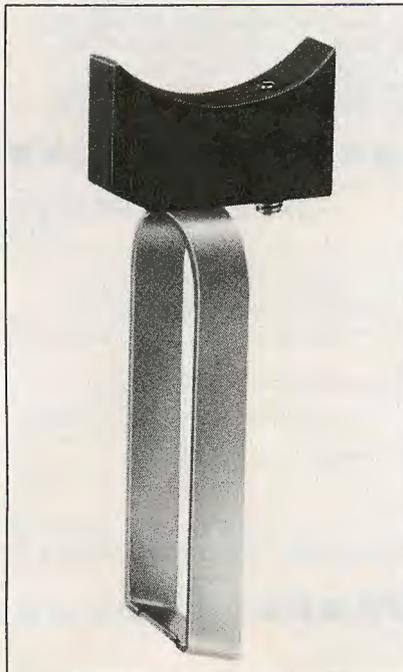
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Based on a medieval Japanese pattern, *Cold Steel's* "Tanto" fighting knife is designed for close-in combat. The non-slip neoprene grip (which won't slide even when wet) combines with a 3/16-inch-thick blade for incredible penetrating power. *Cold Steel* reps get a kick out of driving the Tanto through 55-gallon drums at demonstrations. Balanced to fight, the knife features skull-crushing pommel, extra-long handle and quick-draw leather sheath with velcro fastener plus upper and lower belt loops. The Tanto is all business and is a lot of knife for \$125. Contact *Cold Steel, Inc.*, Dept. SOF, 2128 Unit D, Knoll Dr., Ventura, CA 93003. Call toll-free: 1(800) 255-4716.



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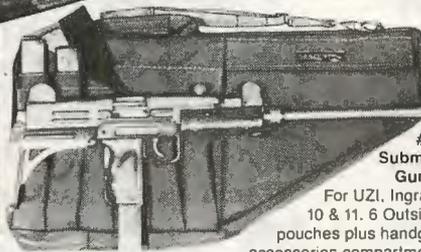
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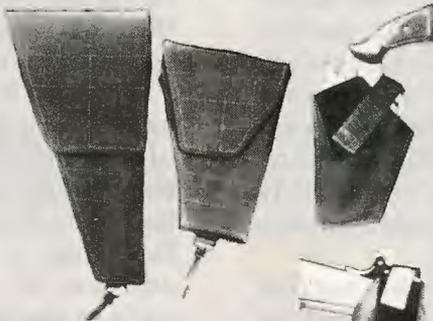
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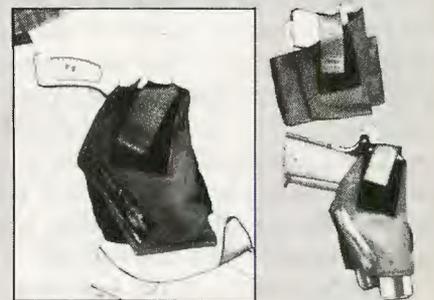
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# EDITORIAL

## Death Squads and U.S. Policy

by William F. Buckley Jr.

**I**T may be vain even to hope, but this being the season of good will, I write these words hoping I will not be identified as favoring death squads in El Salvador.

In discussing the business of terrorists and death squads and U.S. policy in general recently, *Time* magazine emphasized an intensifying U.S. consensus. It wrote that Vice President George Bush "was in El Salvador for just seven hours, but his warnings about 'these right-wing fanatics' were stark and powerful. 'Your cause is being undermined by the murderous violence of reactionary minorities,' he said to an assembly of the country's politicians and military men, '[that] poisons the well of friendship between our countries. [Do not] make the mistake of thinking that there is any division in my country on this question.'"

Now let us concede that the death squads are composed primarily of sadistic opportunists who, taking cover in the civil war, pursue their acquisitive and sanguinary interests relatively unmolested because of the preoccupation of civil authority with that civil war. Is it a strategically decisive question that they are unregulated? One on which plausibly hangs the question whether we should aid the government of El Salvador?

One's instinctive feeling in the matter (perhaps I should not go so far as Mr. Bush by suggesting that there is "no division in my country on the question") is that the world would be better off if a dozen Salvadoran government sharpshooters, in the middle of the night, were to visit the homes of the leaders of the death squads and, in the brisk style of Charles Bronson in the movie *Death Wish*, simply do away with them.

To be sure, there would then be those who accused El Salvador of commissioning a super death squad; but we would leave that discussion to the American Civil Liberties Union to fret over, and go to sleep a little bit more peacefully for the knowledge that the country we were sending military and economic aid to

was not co-existing peacefully with squads of men who go out at night and murder missionary nuns.

But what one must guard against is the notion that our alliance with the government of El Salvador is a function of its civilized deportment.

A generation ago we joined hands with Joseph Stalin, whose entire government one might charitably refer to as a death squad. He would not have welcomed any advice on how to reform Gulag; which advice, for the record, nobody in the government of Franklin Delano Roosevelt felt any compulsion to tender.

Twenty years later, we began telling President Diem in Vietnam to amend his ways sufficiently to keep Buddhist monks from immolating themselves in protest against his policies. What we ended up with, in due course, was the boat people.

A half-dozen years ago we decided we had better begin running Iranian internal policies, and began inveighing against the (demonstrated) cruelties of the representatives of the Shah of Iran. In due course we got the ayatollah.

Ten days ago, the newly elected president of Argentina indicted a handful of military figures whom he will hold responsible for the 6,000 *desaparecidos* wasted during Argentina's civil war. This grand gesture toward a historical reconciliation between Argentina and justice does not belie the chronological point, namely that at a time the Argentine death squads were operating, either the government could not, or if it could, chose not to, impede their activity. And now Argentina is being run by a democratic government.

It would be glib to suppose that that would necessarily have come about if the counterrevolutionary activities against the Montoneros, the Argentinian version of the Sandinistas, had been conducted according to rules of warfare that nowadays satisfy the refined consciences of American congressmen. Argentina is in the hands of democrats, not totalitarians. How that came to be is a subtle question, deserving of subtle analysis.

We are in El Salvador because its government, for all its impurities, is geopolitically allied with us in the great cosmic effort, however disheveled, to give freedom and democracy and decency a chance against the communist monolith. To suggest that U.S. support should be contingent on El Salvador's regulation of its grisly death squads is, simply, to miss the point; and to invite to primacy in the formulation of foreign policy considerations that are, simply, extrinsic to strategic U.S. concerns. ✕

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# INSIDE THE SANDINISTA GULAG

## Eyewitness Accounts and Photos Document Nicaragua's Nightmare

by Steve Salisbury  
Photos by Adrian Wecer



**R**AUL Quinto, 36, is a tough Indian, an ex-Somoza National Guardsman and anti-Sandinista rebel. He is also a survivor of an almost two-year ordeal in the Sandinista version of the Gulag Archipelago.

When I talked with him last August in a guerrilla encampment of Eden Pastora's Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) in southern Nicaragua, I asked about rumors of executions of Americans and Europeans in Nicaragua, and about Cuban participation in reported Sandinista torturing of prisoners.

Quinto reported that sometime in 1980 he shared a cramped, dingy prison cell with an American, a German, a Costa Rican and a Peruvian in the southwestern town of

**Anxious relatives of detainees confront Sandinista guards at the prison gate.**

Jinotepe. He could not remember the exact date; he marked no calendars during his years of captivity. The American was short and stocky, with blond hair, blue eyes. The German was taller, skinny, with sandy hair and blue or green eyes.

"We were all naked," said Raul. "The gringo and German were beaten very badly. Bruises were all over their bodies. They didn't speak much Spanish, but it didn't really matter because we hardly talked for fear someone in the cell was an informer



... I don't know what happened to them. I was transferred that night."

I became very curious about this American and German. Why were they imprisoned and whatever became of them? And how many more might there be that no one knew about? I asked questions of anyone I met who might be able to give me more information about imprisoned foreigners in Nicaragua.

In September at another encampment I met a former Sandinista police official who is now an ARDE guerrilla *peleton* leader. Erwin Barberena (*nom de guerre*, Oscar) served in the Palo Alto security base in Managua before he defected to an early Contra group on 30 August 1980. He also recalled having seen a German-American pair who matched Quinto's description in mid-1980. He reversed the nationalities, however, saying the German was short and stocky and the American tall and skinny.

"A couple of State Security officers boasted they had caught two spies and pointed out a gringo and a German to me," he said. "They were caught taking pictures at the Diriomo garrison near Jinotepe. It's an old fort, a historical place . . . They could have been tourists. They also had pictures of markets and Indians."

That did not matter, according to the hefty former Sandinista trained in Cuba. He saw the security people laminating photographs of the American and German on fabricated CIA cards.

"We would do this when we didn't have anything on a suspect," he said.



Political prisoners held by Sandinistas in Esteli stare forlornly through the bars as a guard keeps watch.

Ragtag Sandinista militia. The original Augusto Sandino is portrayed on the wall behind the militia members.



This was not the only time Barberena witnessed such activities. A month after this incident Sandinista soldiers at the Miramar swimming pool in Leon supposedly discovered a CIA card in an American's sock and found incriminating documents and a large sum of money in his attache case. The American was traveling on three passports: American, Colombian and Costa Rican.

"He didn't speak Spanish well, but he was saying he was a tourist. The Sandinistas claimed that when he was confronted with the 'proof' he confessed," said Barberena.

Barberena does not know for certain what happened to the foreigners he saw arrested, but he said simply, "Normally, spies are shot." (*Editor's Note: According to the U.S. Department of State 110 Americans have been detained by the Sandinistas since they took power in 1979. State says it has no knowledge of any Americans who were executed. However, there have been persistent rumors since 1979 that an American named Steven Lyon-Fox was arrested and subsequently executed by the Sandinistas in 1980. It is possible that Lyon-Fox, if that was the American's correct name, could have gotten into Nicaragua, been arrested and executed without the U.S. government ever knowing.*)

Barberena told other, more gruesome stories. First there was the torture of Roberto Espinoza, a 20-year-old former lieutenant in Somoza's National Guard. In mid-July 1980, the starving Espinoza was strapped to a chair in a small room in the bowels of Palo Alto.

"There were two interrogators and I was present to take down what the prisoner said," said Barberena. "We injected him with a truth serum, but it was soon obvious that the interrogators weren't interested in obtaining information. They just wanted to beat him. They taped his mouth and demanded he answer. Of course he couldn't, so they pummeled him with steel knuckles. They said he had misbehaved and threw him into *la chiquita* to learn good manners. *La chiquita* is a box with only enough room to stand, a vertical coffin. Prisoners would be left for days. When they got out, they were ugly — yellow, bearded, all bones.

"We had six *chiquitas* at Palo Alto and they were always filled . . . The *moreno* [Espinoza] died drugged up four days later."

Barberena then gave a gruesome account of a husky Cuban adviser, a captain in his late 30s nicknamed Cono. Cono personally tortured Alex Santana Guido, a Sandinista dissident in his mid-20s.

"Santana was chained to the wall by his wrists," he related. "The Cuban and a guard punched him furiously, calling him dog and asking where the Contra and their weapons were. He passed out twice, but they revived him with water.

"He still wouldn't talk, so they turned him around and Cono burned his back with a cigarette. The prisoner screamed. It frightened me. Cono jabbed the cigarette into his ears. He passed out again and they revived him, then pried off his thumbnails with steel splints. Another guard and I didn't like what

was going on, but we couldn't contradict the Cuban.

"Finally they injected him with a truth serum and he said he had hidden the weapons but forgot where he put them. They shot him in an abandoned field and blamed it on the Contras.

"One day Cono came in with State Security officers, bragging about how they burned a Contra alive."

Cuban advisers were still torturing political prisoners in the notorious Palo Alto in February 1982, according to Alberto Ali Araya Montoya, 25, a former Sandinista Army captain who was trained in Cuba for three months. He is now an ARDE guerrilla, too. I talked with him, other disillusioned Sandinista security personnel and former political prisoners on the veranda of a guerrilla safehouse in Costa Rica in December.

"Two Cubans — I believe their names were Capt. Garcia and Lt. Mendosa — were teaching interrogation to me and another State Security officer. A kid, perhaps 17, was chained spread-eagled to the wall. They beat his body with fists and sticks, then attached a cable to his balls and gave him jolts of electricity. He died after three days. The irony was he didn't say a word."

This plus the other cases of cruelty he had seen as an assistant warden in La Polvora Prison in Granada provoked Araya Montoya to send a protest note to his superiors. He was reprimanded and transferred to the Montelimar artillery base on the Pacific coast. Disillusioned, he made contact with the Contras and diverted 150 Galil rifles and money to them. The Sandinistas grew suspicious and imprisoned him that April. He shared a cell with other dissident soldiers, one of whom he said the Sandinistas later froze to death in an ice locker. He was lucky enough to escape to Costa Rica due to a bureaucratic slip-up before he met the same fate. His imprisonment cost him three broken ribs, but he considered himself lucky to be alive.

"You want to know about torture? I'll tell you about torture," said a small, well-built, 41-year-old guerrilla, wearing civilian clothes. His face looked almost Indian. "The *piricoacos* tortured me!" He grinned and threw an accusatory finger across the table at Araya Montoya, the security man, who, ironically enough, had escorted him and 50-odd other prisoners off a bus and into La Polvora one October night in 1980.

The ex-National Guardsman — who would only give his *nom de guerre*, Vulture (family members were still in Nicaragua) — showed no animosity toward his one-time keeper, but he still seethed about what the Sandinistas had done to him.

"Three months after the war, State Security found me in New Guinea," he sputtered. "One *hijo de puta* stuck a .45 in my mouth and told me to tell him where the rest of the Guardia were. *Putá!* How was I to know? I was scared to the point of shitting. They hauled me to jail and threw me in a little cell with six other prisoners, all Guar-

dia or Milpas. Ahhh, it was bad — *la mierda!* We were always naked and wet. They'd beat us frequently, put ground glass in our food. Every few days they'd wrap wires around my hands and give me electric shocks by cranking a machine. Do you know how that feels?" He shook his body and laughed grimly. "Then they put me in a hole.

"It was worse for one of my cell mates — they castrated him. I had to care for him afterwards.

## COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHER

by Robert J. Caldwell

Like so many other Vietnam veterans, combat photographer Adrian Wecer found "the world" less real than Nam. That's why he walked out of a graduate class in Spanish literature at New York University one day 11 years ago and never looked back. Since then he has free-lanced and worked on assignment all over Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. He has photographed war in Morocco, Zaire, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and Nicaragua.

His photographs of Polisario guerrillas and Moroccan troops appeared in SOF's December '83 issue. Wecer's North African swing was followed by trips last winter and spring to Ethiopia's Eritrea region and later to Nicaragua.

Wecer was no stranger to Nicaragua when he arrived there last spring for a look at what the Sandinista revolution had brought. In 1979, he covered the final guerrilla offensive against the late Anastasio Somoza and his Guardia Nacional. Taking pictures from the guerrilla side on the northern front, Wecer had made friends among the Sandinistas.

In Leon, a city north of Managua, Wecer renewed old acquaintances among the former guerrillas. One in particular — let us call him "Manuel" — was bitterly disillusioned. "We didn't think we were fighting to overthrow Somoza just to get another dictatorship," he said to Wecer when they were alone. He offered to provide Wecer with first-hand evidence of the new government's repression — a prison jammed with civilians suspected of sympathizing with or helping the anti-Sandinista guerrillas known as Contras.

Getting a foreigner, never mind a foreigner who was also a photojournalist, into the little Gulag the Sandinistas were running in Leon would have been impossible without Manuel's contacts and bravado. He knew the guards; in fact Manuel might have been one of them, although Wecer was deliberately vague on this point.

Wecer, who was born in Argentina

"After perhaps six months they took me at 2:00 in the morning, head between legs, to the Humedades command in Juigalpa for another six months. There they gave me more electric shocks, beat me with rifle butts and took me to a hole full of prisoners' corpses. It smelled awful and they threatened the same to me."

Over the next 10 months Vulture was transferred to La Polvora and then to Modello, a penitentiary 27 kilometers east of Managua on the Tititata Highway.

and has lived in Spain, speaks fluent Spanish. But his accent would have betrayed him as a foreigner and his camera would only have attracted added suspicion. So Manuel took the direct approach, glad-handing his way past the guards while introducing Wecer as "our old friend" from '79. The guards passed them through but it was obvious that taking photographs would be risky.

Photographs of a prison with political detainees was hardly the kind of publicity the Sandinistas were seeking. And the guards were tense anyway because hundreds of relatives of the prisoners were causing a near riot outside the gates. They had been waiting for hours in the sun to deliver food to their friends and family members inside.

At the very least, Wecer risked having his film confiscated; at worst he and Manuel could have been arrested and jailed for espionage or counter-revolutionary activity. Wecer started clicking away, trying to be reasonably discreet, but putting journalism ahead of discretion.

Most of the prisoners he saw fell into two categories. First were those suspected of aiding or sympathizing with the Contras. The second category included hundreds of locals picked up as *de facto* hostages. Manuel told Wecer how it worked. If a male disappeared from his family's home, the Sandinista militia would arrest another member of the family. According to Manuel, the Sandinistas would say, "We'll let you go when your brother [father, son, husband] comes back and explains where he has been." The Sandinistas' working assumption apparently was that any male who disappeared had gone off to join the Contras.

After they had left the prison, Wecer said he could hardly have the photographs published abroad without jeopardizing Manuel's safety. "Don't worry," Manuel said to Wecer, "by that time I will be on the other side and my family will be gone too." Getting Adrian Wecer into the prison to photograph the truth about Nicaragua's "liberation" seems to have been Manuel's last act before this former Sandinista once again became a guerrilla. The Contras have no doubt found him a very good man indeed.



**ABOVE:** Prisoners in holding cell beg for a cigarette.

**RIGHT:** Among the prisoners, a boy of 10. Amnesty International, where are you!

"I saw four big Germans there," he said. "None was older than 30. They were mercenaries for Somoza. They spoke Spanish okay and said they were beaten and given electric shocks.

"I was beaten in Modello too. The *piris* grabbed my hair and slugged my face." Vulture's nose looked broken and he had cauliflower ears. "They also injected me several times with a yellow liquid. It made me drunk and then they questioned me."

"That's the truth serum," said Araya Montoya. "We'd mix a little packet of clear liquid with an equal-sized packet of white powder and the solution would turn a light yellow."

A bushy-haired, skinny ex-Sandinista lieutenant, who claimed he was instructed by Cubans on the technique, said the liquid was distilled water. [ *Editor's Note: SOF's Contributing Editor on Medicine, Dr. John Peters, verified an older form of sodium pentothal, or truth serum, was a powder which when mixed with distilled water*



*Continued on page 100*

# BOBBY MULLER'S VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

## Troubled Past, Uncertain Future

by Tony Bliss, Jr.

THE first time I heard of the Vietnam Veterans of America was when I read of their pending trip to Vietnam on the front page of *The New York Times* in December 1981.

I was immediately skeptical about the motives of a group of Vietnam veterans undertaking such a journey. But my first inkling that something was definitely amiss came when Richard Harbert, the brother of then-VVA Associate Director Michael Harbert, visited the Foreign Desk of *The New York Times* where I worked. I asked him if he too was a Vietnam veteran. "No," he replied, "I was protesting the war."

In subsequent days I became more and more incredulous as I read how VVA Executive Director Bobby Muller embraced Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, and how the group collected 40 bucks to pay for a wreath marked "With Respect" that was placed at Ho Chi Minh's tomb. I was shocked when they visited a "war crimes" museum and stood for pictures in front of a MiG 21 with 14 kill stars that perched triumphantly over the wreckage of a B-52 bomber. What greater slap in the face could there be for our POW-MIA families? Here, I thought, are our own fellow veterans following in the footsteps of Jane Fonda and Cora Weiss.

The Vietnam trip placed the VVA squarely in the center of a storm of controversy that has not yet ended. And it has left Vietnam veterans and others asking: Who the hell are Bobby Muller and the Vietnam Veterans of America?

Robert Olivier Muller was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1945. His father, a precision-machine-tool engineer, immigrated to the United States when Bobby was a young child. The family lived first in New York City before moving to Great Neck, an affluent, liberal community on Long Island's north shore. Here, Bobby went to junior high and high school where he was a star runner and pole vaulter. He enjoyed athletics so much that he first went to college to become a coach before switching to Hofstra University and majoring in business.

Like many immigrants, Bobby's father lauded the United States and constantly impressed upon his son the obligations of citizenship. Bobby accepted his father's views totally and felt duty-bound to serve his country in Vietnam. This was Bobby Muller's primary motivation for joining the Marines. A second motivation was more pragmatic. Muller remembers his management professors stressing the importance of having military experience on his resume.

Bobby Muller still remembers the tears in his eyes at retreat ceremony. He was Gung

Bobby Muller (right, seated), John Terzano (left, seated), Michael Harbert (center) and Tom Bird (right) hold news conference after 1981 *Penthouse*-sponsored trip to Vietnam. Bird's POW story, told in *Everything We Had*, was later revealed as hoax. Photo: AP/Wide World



Ho and the platoon honor graduate at the platoon leaders class in Quantico. "I demanded infantry, demanded Vietnam," he says. And, of course, he got it. In September of 1968 Muller arrived in Vietnam, "a total fucking fanatic," he says. There is no doubt that Muller served well and honorably there. His former commanding officer of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 3d Marines, Lt. Col. J.M. Hargrove, remembers being "favorably impressed with his professional competence, leadership and aggressiveness."

Statistics caught up with 1st Lt. Muller on 29 April 1969 while serving as an adviser to an ARVN unit. About six miles west of Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province a rifle bullet severed his spine as his unit pushed against a hilltop NVA position. The courage of an Australian adviser, a quick medevac and the nearby position of the hospital ship *Repose* saved Bobby Muller's life. But the NVA round left him a paraplegic with no feeling from the chest down.

"At no point in my entire tour of duty in Vietnam," says Muller, "did I ever have one political discussion. Not once did I ever question the worthiness of our involvement there — never, never, never!"

But Marine 2nd Lt. Don Bowles, who received his Purple Heart in the same Guam hospital ceremony as Muller, remembers vividly Muller's bitterness. "I felt like telling the colonel to pin it on my ass, I couldn't feel it anyway," he recalls Muller saying. At that time Muller blamed his wounding on the ARVN for cowering during the hill assault.

Muller needed an outlet for his bitterness, and "I'm sure," said Bowles, "the first time Muller was put in a position where he felt nobody cared," his bitterness would find new direction.

Muller found that direction when he was transferred from St. Albans Naval Hospital, where he was accorded respect and treated by sympathetic peers, to the Bronx VA hospital. "The day I went to the VA hospital — the first day I was there — I just broke down and cried for the first time since I was hit. It was an overwhelmingly depressing place. My mother came and they carried her out of the hospital. She was fucking hysterical," Muller recalled while smacking his fist into his palm in anguish.

The spinal-cord ward of the rat-infested Bronx VA hospital with all its squalor of overflowing urine bags and patients lying unattended for hours was featured in the famous 1970 *Life* article. It was here that Muller's sense of disillusionment, abandonment and rage began to grow.

"After catching a fucking bullet in defense of your fucking country, you have to beg a goddamn GS 5 who's been slow-shuffling for 30 fucking years to get you a glass of water! You're discarded like a piece of shit! You want a graduated set of steps so you can learn how to ambulate, or you need another set of parallel bars and they say they can't afford it! When I called in hundreds of thousands of dollars of ordnance to kill peo-



VVA's first Vietnam trip netted media attention. Here John Terzano (left) and Tom Bird (right) appear on NBC-TV's *Today* show in late December 1981. After 1982 trip Bird's POW story was exposed as a lie and he resigned his VVA position. Photo: AP/Wide World

ple, don't turn around and tell me that you can't afford proper medical care and rehabilitation to put it together for me! That's what really started the rage."

Muller was soon heavily involved in the antiwar movement, telling people: "We fucked up; we were wrong" about Vietnam. It was largely because of his advice that the Jane Fonda movie, *Coming Home*, turned out as it did. Muller became one of the most visible antiwar speakers for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War although he never actually joined the organization. He enrolled in Hofstra Law School because he thought that being a lawyer was the best way to effect change in the system — a change that he hoped would be a "social revolution," as he said in the VVAW book, *The New Soldier*. But his disillusionment soon extended to the law and he has yet to pass his bar exam.

It is during Muller's college speaking tours, for which *Penthouse* put up an initial \$12,000 for posters, buttons, brochures and other marketing materials, that Muller can leave his personal views of Vietnam indelibly stamped on a young, impressionable audience that has little knowledge of Vietnam. His "Vietnam War Stories" speech describes the Tet offensive as a "massive uprising," an inaccurate and misleading statement since the whole point of the Tet offensive was that there was no "uprising" let alone a massive one. He claims the troops assaulted and secured Hamburger Hill five times, only to be told to abandon it and let the NVA "resume their positions." The truth is that the 187th Airborne Infantry and other elements of the 101st Airborne Div. and a South Vietnamese battalion took the top of Hamburger Hill (Apbia Mountain) only once after several unsuccessful infantry assaults.

The VVA is Bobby Muller's brainchild

and he remains the primary power within the organization. Although Muller is the most outspoken and, at times, outrageous of the VVA leaders, there are several others who, Muller admits, share his view that Vietnam "was a waste and we were wrong."

First, Albany VVA Chapter President Patrick Finnegan. Finnegan told me he refused to go to the field after seven months in Vietnam. In addition, his name is appended to a virulent piece of anti-American communist propaganda passed out at the Vietnam Memorial services in Washington in November 1982.

Next, Ed Murphy, the former Northeast regional coordinator of the VVA. In 1982, Murphy, along with two other Vietnam vets, was tagged by a Nicaraguan group called the "Nicaragua Peace Committee" for a trip to that country. The purpose, Murphy told me, was to "look at the possibility of U.S. intervention and what it would mean for us and for them" and "to make some inroads into the American public" by opening a dialogue. Inclusion on such a trip indicates where Murphy's sympathy probably lies.

Third, John Terzano, the VVA vice-president, legislative director and Washington office manager. Shortly after the first VVA trip to Hanoi, Kay Bosiljevac, whose husband is missing in action, called the VVA to inquire about the motives of their trip. Mrs. Bosiljevac, who is also a regional coordinator of the League of Families, says that Terzano told her that a purpose of the trip was "to bring forth the Vietnamese point of view." Terzano also announced on the Phil Donahue show that he "didn't need to go back to Vietnam to realize that Vietnam was not a noble cause."

Fourth, Tom Bird, one-time VVA vice-president and president. Bird claimed he had been captured for a day by NVA while serving as an infantryman in the First Cavalry Div. during the battle of Ia Drang Valley in 1965. Bird embellished this story during an interview with Al Santoli for the book, *Everything We Had*. In fact Bird was lying; he was never captured.

Bird told me that the POW story first



started in his home town and he "never had the moral courage" to deny it because "people's reaction was always very sensitive, sympathetic and supportive." Bird resigned his position after the truth became known following the VVA's second Vietnam trip in June 1982.

Bird runs the Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theater Company in New York City, which has mostly put on anti-Vietnam productions because "those are the only ones that have been written," he told me. Company productions include *In Pursuit of Liberty*, an account of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War takeover of the Statue of Liberty; *V.f.w.*, a play in which a veterans' press conference to promote their lawsuit against governmental and chemical-company pollution is ignored because it takes place on the day John Wayne died; and *A Few Good Men*, a fictitious account of three enlisted POWs who refused to return to the United States for fear of standing trial for unbecoming conduct while POWs. Larry Mitchell, a self-acclaimed POW who worked as the VVA minority affairs director, briefed the cast for three hours.

Based on Mitchell's credentials as an apparent emerging black Vietnam veterans' spokesman, Muller asked him to come over to VVA, which he did. On the eve of the first VVA Vietnam trip, Mitchell put out a letter to "fellow veterans and former prisoners of war" asking them to support the trip.

Mitchell persuaded three legitimate former POWs into cosigning the letter. He also said that the trip had the "sanction and enthusiastic support of the State Department," a blatant lie. State Department spokesman Warren Magruder says the trip was "purely private and had no official sanction." The State Department did, however, warn the VVA of the "propaganda pitfalls of the trip."

Larry Mitchell, in fact, apparently was neither a POW nor a former Special Forces captain as he claimed. Mitchell perpetrated a huge fraud on the VVA as well as the national media.

Bobby Muller showed me a photostat of Mitchell's DD-214. It was typed with two different typewriters. When questions started coming in on Mitchell, Greg Kane, then-VVA secretary-treasurer, asked Mitchell to bring his original DD-214 into

the office. "He stalled and stalled," Kane told me, "and ultimately I said either you come in with the original or don't come in. And he didn't come in. To this day I don't know what Larry Mitchell's history is."

On the DD-214 Mitchell submitted to the VVA, his Social Security number is listed as 162-30-9987. A spokeswoman for the Army National Personal Records Center in St. Louis, Mo., said there is no record of a Larry E. Mitchell or Larry Mitchell with a number even close to the one he gave. Nor is he listed in the U.S. Army Register of officers for the years of service he claims. The Department of the Army has no Larry Mitchell on any POW roster. Defense Intelligence Agency spokesman Ken Gieson says, "The name is known but he was never on a DIA list as a POW."

## FROM RANCHING TO WRITING

Tony Bliss, Jr.'s background ranges from two tours in Vietnam as an infantryman to working as a cowboy in Montana. Bliss's 'Nam tours were in 1965, when he was first a rifleman and later an acting platoon leader in the 101st Airborne Division, and 1967, when he was a team leader with the Division's Long Range Patrol Company. He got a Silver Star at Dak To the first tour and a Bronze Star at Song Be the second.

Between tours, he was an honor graduate of the 101st's Recondo School and later a cadre/instructor in the school. He has taught patrolling, mountaineering, survival and mine warfare with the Recondo School at West Point. He left the Army as a staff sergeant (E6).

Prior to Army service, Bliss, 36, worked as a Montana ranch hand and veterinarian's assistant and lemon picker in California. He has a B.A. in English from C.W. Post College on Long Island and an M.A. in journalism from New York University.

Bliss worked on the foreign news desk of *The New York Times* for five years and now free-lances from his home in New York. His hobbies include backpacking, judo, rifle and pistol shooting, and study of Southeast Asian history and affairs — he is a member of the Asia Society and the Association for Asian Studies.

Bliss's previous SOF articles include "Behind our Backs," February '81, "An American with a Mission," September '80, "SOF Critic Bombs in UN Charade," July '80, and reviews of the movies, *Apocalypse Now* (February '80) and *The Deerhunter* (September '79).

With leadership so blatantly critical of the Vietnam War, there is little wonder then that Hanoi readily agreed to the VVA request to travel to Vietnam. Indeed, Vietnamese expectations were quickly mirrored

by Radio Hanoi, which announced that "the purpose of the delegation's visit is to gather information about the effects of the U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam in order to denounce it before public opinion."

There is no doubt the Vietnamese were pleased with the media exposure the VVA trip received around the world. Muller chalks it up to creating good will and says that the Vietnamese hold all the "chips" in the MIA-POW issue. The Vietnamese, he says, were extremely sensitive to the criticism they received both from the U.S. government and others when the remains of Ron Dodge were released. Muller says he made it clear to the Vietnamese that the VVA is not interested in berating them or in obtaining an accounting of why it took them eight years to release Dodge's remains. In return, Muller quotes the foreign minister as saying: "We'll work with you. We're not going to work with the Reagan administration, but we'll work with you."

My first interview with Bobby Muller was in early August 1982 at the VVA's New York office at 212 Fifth Ave. One of the first things he told me was: "We've just gotten evicted." The eviction was for failure to pay rent. Both the Fifth Ave. office and the smaller two-room office several blocks away into which they eventually moved can only be described as utilitarian and threadbare.

In August 1982, Muller said, the Vietnam Veterans of America is "dead broke. We've gone missing payrolls and are all pressed to the absolute limit of our ability." The problem was that except for membership dues there was no recurring revenue base.

An analysis of VVA's tax returns shows that since 1978 the Vietnam Veterans of America has taken in well over a million dollars. The lack of accounting for how this money has been spent has been one of the major points of criticism by VVA chapter heads, members and disgruntled former members. In fact, some claim it was only pressure from these individuals that prodded the VVA to finally file three years of tax returns in the spring of 1982.

"We didn't have books. We had our check book and we kept batches of receipts. It's just that we have been that chaotic and that bonkers," says Muller, who graduated from Hofstra University with a 3.2 cumulative average in business administration with a specialty in management.

Where has the bulk of VVA money come from and how has it been spent?

Bobby Muller says he will "take money from any source because the use of the money justifies whoever the sponsor for the monies [is]." Such willingness makes for some strange bedfellows who consider the VVA platform worthy of their contributions.

Cora Weiss, prominent visitor to Hanoi during the Vietnam War years, heads up the Samuel Rubin Foundation. Through Weiss, about \$1,000 went to the VVA in 1982 from the Rubin Foundation, according to Muller.

Millions of dollars from the Rubin Foundation have gone to the Institute for Policy Studies, an ultra-left think tank based in Washington, D.C. The foundation has also contributed to the Bach Mai Hospital Emergency Relief Fund in communist Vietnam.

While *Penthouse* kicked in \$20,000 for the first trip to Hanoi by the VVA, the Christopher Reynolds Foundation picked up the tab for the second trip. Jack Clareman, executive director of the foundation, says their files show a \$25,000 grant to the VVA in the foundation's 1981 tax year and grants of "about \$55,000" in 1982. The foundation has long had an interest in communist Asia with other major grants going to the Bach Mai Hospital, American Friends Service Committee, Foundation for the Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam, Volunteers in Asia and the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

And, of course, not to be forgotten in the leftist category is Jane Fonda, who kicked in \$500.

The majority of VVA revenue, however, comes from more traditional sources. VVA tax returns through spring 1982 include contributions from Exxon Corp. (\$25,000), *Playboy* (\$7,500), Timothy Mellon (\$75,000), Ford Foundation (\$24,180) and Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Assoc. (\$79,457 — part of which consists of a forgiven loan). Royalties and benefit-concert donations include \$42,000 (*Everything We Had*), \$75,000 (Bruce Springsteen), \$59,971 (Pat Benatar), \$26,607 (Charlie Daniels). In addition, Lisa Kennedy, a public-relations representative for Daniels, says that part of the proceeds from Dan Daley's hit, *Still in Saigon*, is going to the VVA.

The total income of the VVA is now considerably more than a million dollars. From its inception until spring 1982, VVA tax returns showed a gross revenue of \$921,439. Expenditures exceeded that amount by \$192,400, giving the VVA a net loss.

But the major financial coup for the VVA was its inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign beginning with the fall 1982 campaign. Under the CFC program, federal civilian employees and active military can donate cash or designate a portion of their payroll check to the charitable organizations of their choice that are approved to participate.

The VVA applied for participation in a letter to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, dated 19 July 1982, which stated that the VVA was an organization "exclusively devoted to the welfare of Vietnam-era veterans." Only one sentence of the 11-page letter mentioned that the VVA is "working to ensure that the lessons that have been learned in the Vietnam experience are considered as future decisions in foreign and defense policies are made."

Through 31 October 1983, the VVA received from the CFC \$538,740, according to Kent Bailey, a staff assistant with the

Office of Personnel Management. The VVAF should receive a similar amount this year, pushing the annual VVA budget close to the million-dollar mark.

The "30-word statement" describing the VVA in the CFC booklet makes no mention of what "lessons" the VVA thinks were learned in Vietnam. Most likely, few of those contributing through the CFC know much about the VVA.

Money obtained through the CFC has finally given the VVA a solid, recurring revenue base from which to allocate program funds. Inclusion in the CFC has probably done as much as anything to ensure the VVA's survival.

Where has all this money gone and what has it done for Vietnam veterans? A look at VVA expenditures through April 1982 gives some indication. Expenditures are listed under three general categories: fundraising, management and program services. The money spent on program services has been used mostly to build membership and the infrastructure to hold that membership together.

How is this program service money being eaten up?

Some of it supports the preparation of testimony for Congressional hearings. VVA has in the past testified before various Congressional committees such as budget, commerce and veterans. In 1982 the VVA testified mostly on veterans' employment.



Bobby Muller polishes his campaign speech to delegates in hotel lobby before November '83 VVA board of directors election. Muller won by a landslide but some of his cohorts did not fare so well. Photo: Tony Bliss

The VVA lists their legislative lobbying campaign as one of their strongest accomplishments. But there are many, including officials of the Veterans Administration, Small Business Administration, American Legion and VFW who say privately that VVA lobbying has actually been counterproductive for the Vietnam vet because of the almost antigovernment advocacy approach taken by the VVA.

Much of the VVA resources go into chapter support: sending out the how-to-form-a-chapter package, shepherding the chartering process, mailing membership cards, and

sending out newsletters. Rick Weidman, the VVA membership services director, is chiefly responsible for chapter liaison. It is also his responsibility to let the chapters know what the VVA position is on upcoming legislation so members can write their legislators.

The VVA also supports a toll-free hotline to provide information on Agent Orange, post-traumatic stress disorder and the VVA organization itself.

Focusing media attention on the VVA and veterans' issues is another prime concern of the VVA national. The publicity generated by the Hanoi trips is a case in point. "It didn't harm us at all," says John Terzano, VVA vice-president. "If anything it helped us because it got our name out across the country a little bit more."

But publicity is a double-edged sword. When Bobby Muller appears on the *Today* or *Donahue* shows, as many as 4- to 5,000 letters are received, he claims. "The demand that puts on you in trying to be responsive is not even begun to be offset by the maybe \$2,000 in contributions from the public," Muller says. "We simply cannot handle the volume of mail, inquiries, calls and walk-ins. We are really besieged." Those are the burdens, Muller points out, that don't advance the growth of the VVA but which "come with the territory."

The lack of services provided to members entangled the VVA in another dispute — this time with a government agency. On 13 August 1981 the Veterans Administration granted formal recognition to the VVA as a service organization. Yet it wasn't until January 1983 that the VVA finally began to put together a service program.

Recognition of an organization by the VA is solely for the purpose of allowing it to have its accredited representatives represent VA claimants before the VA for benefits. The requirements are trained personnel, a plan for organizing a claims service and a sound financial footing to be able to carry out that plan. Muller readily admits the VVA was not in a position to implement a claims service when it was accredited. "The accreditation was essentially a political move," he says. The VA wanted to see VVA accredited to show that the VA was working for veterans and they "moved on our accreditation within half an hour."

"The process of perfecting the application was simply a minor technicality," Muller says, despite the fact that it took 18 months to complete. Part of that application, a financial statement, claimed that the VVA was "on solid ground financially" and projected "a minimum commitment over the next 12 months of \$50,000 toward a claims-service program." Muller now admits the statement "made the organization look better than it would have under a strict analysis of the financial statement that at that point we didn't even have," since, he says, the VA only wanted a general statement and an estimated projection.

The VA recognized it would take about a year for the VVA to train representatives



and bring the program on line; however, the VVA fully expected to be kept abreast of VVA progress. On at least two occasions in the fall of 1981 VA officers asked for progress reports but VVA response was negligible. A formal letter, dated 25 January 1982, from the VA Assistant General Counsel to the VVA, also went unanswered. Finally, in June 1982, the VA received a general progress report, indicating the VVA was setting up a program to train service officers at the National Veterans Law Center (NVLC), a public-interest law firm in Washington, D.C. But the VVA response lacked specific details requested by the VA.

In late summer the VA sent out another letter, giving the VVA 30 days to forward these details. It too went unanswered. A meeting set up by the VVA between Muller and the VA for the last week in September was canceled by the VVA.

Not until early 1983 did the VVA make any progress when it contracted with the NVLC to produce a VVA claims-service manual, which was completed and distributed in November.

Presently, the VVA has authorized some people who are already accredited with the VA and working for a state veterans-affairs department to handle VVA claims. In Virginia's Department of War Veterans Claims, for example, at least 18 of the department's claims officers are certified to handle claims for the VVA. In most cases these claims officers are not VVA members. The VVA is seeking to expand this approach to other states because VVA personnel are not expected to be trained by the NVLC until later this year.

In addition, the VVA has a limited capability to handle claims through the NVLC, although, in most cases, claims will be restricted to delayed stress, discharge upgrading, Agent Orange skin disorders, and contesting VA claims of large overpayments.

Though the VVA is now making progress in the area of claims representation, its early lack of cooperation with the VA illustrates the adversary/advocate approach to the government that Muller and some of the national leadership espouse. Critics of the VVA, both inside and outside the government, question the effectiveness of that approach.

The VVA, however, was not originally designed to be service-oriented. Instead, it was formed to organize political clout to

influence policies in Washington — and not only on issues relating directly to veterans.

In 1977, Bobby Muller was working for the Eastern Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. In December of that year, he petitioned the Board for seed money to form a lobby organization on behalf of Vietnam veterans. He was given \$42,000 and, on 15 February 1978, the Vietnam Veteran Coalition was incorporated. On 9 June 1978 the name of the organization was changed to the Council of Vietnam Veterans. Neither was a membership organization, nor were they ever envisioned as such.

Muller's advocacy campaign kicked off in Washington with an introductory article on the Op-Ed page of the *Washington Post*. From that introduction and dozens of subsequent pieces in the *Post* over the next year, many doors were opened. Muller had access to the White House; he actively lobbied Congress; he was instrumental in bringing about the Vietnam Veterans in Congress Caucus and he appeared on most of the TV talk shows.

But at the end of the year, says Muller, "Despite all the ink, all the coverage, we failed to realize even one single legislative victory."

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**“...No membership cards, no charters, no receipts — all we got was a sham and a ride.”**

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Muller realized that the only way to exert real influence in Washington was to build a membership organization. So the Council of Vietnam Veterans became the Vietnam Veterans of America on 15 June 1979.

Initial funding was tough. A direct-mail approach was tried, but out of 25,000 mailings to proven contributors, 72 replies came back. Fifty of those were from Vietnam vets.

"I personally had the additional benefit of being in a wheelchair, being a sympathetic figure and, therefore, if anybody should have been able to turn the funding on, it should have been me. Frankly, it didn't happen," Muller said.

Muller was introduced to Winston Lord, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, and to McGeorge Bundy, then-president of the Ford Foundation. Muller raised his new campaign at a luncheon attended by many influential people from business, government and the press. The response was disappointing, but after much wrangling, Muller extracted a \$25,000 grant from the Ford Foundation.

The grant was approved for a service project — a toll-free number offering an

information package on Agent Orange. And when the Agent Orange information packets were sent out, a VVA application was included. "That is how we got our initial membership — on one issue: Agent Orange," Muller acknowledges.

Muller was loath to go to a membership organization because he realized his group would be judged on the basis of numbers. With the American Legion having 750,000 Vietnam-era vets and the Veterans of Foreign Wars with almost 550,000, there was "no way to be near those guys in numbers."

He readily admits, "We really didn't have the ability or desire to deal with the problems that attend a membership organization when our focus was on trying to get something done specifically.

"We have been as haphazard and as screwed up as you can imagine. We lost membership applications. We didn't respond to mailings. We didn't service a lot of requests from our people because we did not have the capability to do so," he says.

The lack of responsibility to their own members who coughed up nine bucks was another source of bitterness against the VVA. For some, such as Marc Ward, a Marine veteran of Khe Sanh who now lives in Indiana, it was like throwing nine bucks into a void. Ward, like many other Vietnam veterans, was "looking for that umbrella organization that could draw us together on a national level." When Muller was appearing on all the TV talk shows in late 1980 and early 1981, Ward was impressed. "He really came on strong," Ward remembers.

So Ward and other veterans in Indiana signed up with the VVA and formed chapters. By early 1982 there were eight chapters with about 850 members. Because there was no state-wide VVA organization, Ward was acting as an unofficial state director, trying to drum up members and form a network between chapters in hopes of moving toward a state convention and the election of directors.

"We went for a long time with no membership cards and no charters and we started to become skeptical," he says. Ward claims he wrote Muller and the national offices numerous times and got "absolutely no response from him or any of the other guys. The only thing we got was more membership applications."

Telephone calls elicited various excuses. Ward next sent national a registered letter so he could be sure his letters were getting through. National signed for the letter but still did not respond. Finally, in frustration, Ward sent in his letter of resignation in March 1982.

"In essence we got nothing from them — absolutely nothing — no membership cards, no charters, no receipts — all we got was a sham and a ride."

Ward's experience is far from unique. Max Taylor of Pampa, Texas, who organized a VVA chapter, is another who had the same problems with national. Taylor's group ultimately left the VVA and formed the Top of Texas Veterans Assoc. Art

McGowan, president of the Contra Costa VVA chapter in California, claimed the same problems: no accounting for money sent to national, no charter after a year and lack of response from national. That chapter also dissolved.

There is a Catch-22 situation here. Muller repudiates some of these critics: "We've got a lot of guys who are representing themselves as VVA chapter presidents. We wound up getting guys who were crazy, con artists or rip-offs." Certainly there were a few, but the criticisms are too numerous to dismiss. However, when these prospective chapters were stonewalled by national and turned critical of the VVA, Muller could brand them imposters because they were never "officially" chartered VVA chapters.

The VVA's initial organizational snafu probably hurt their early growth as much as the leadership's political stance. At one point when VVA coffers were benefiting from the Springsteen/Benatar/Daniels concerts, Muller told *Rolling Stone* that a goal of 50,000 members by spring of 1982 and another 100,000 by the end of that year was realistic.

But such was not to be. Muller, Terzano and Weidman all put the VVA enrollment at about 9,000 through the fall of 1982, the same figure they give for December 1981, the month of the first Hanoi trip.

In other words, the VVA had not been growing — at least not until the fall of 1982 when the gathering of Vietnam veterans attending the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., gave all veterans' organizations a tremendous boost. "That's what made this organization," says Muller, who now claims 17,000 members.

Prior to 1983 there was a big turnover of members. In 1982, for example, the VVA sent out just under 8,000 renewal notices. About 2,700 renewed, the great majority being affiliated with chapters. The chapters — 116 by November 1983 — remain the foundation for future VVA growth.

Though operating under the VVA constitution, the chapters have an enormous amount of autonomy. They are involved in their own community projects and social functions which give their members a sense of belonging and accomplishment. Some of these chapters are quite wealthy. "One of our chapters got a \$175,000 grant out in Colorado," Muller claims.

The chapter leaders are elected, which until November 1983 contrasted with national, and those I interviewed were quick to distance themselves to a certain degree from national VVA policies. Frank Vollmer, the president of the Western New York chapter, says, "Maybe we don't go along with their statements, but we feel that there is a lot we want to do as a local chapter."

Gary Beikirck, a Special Forces Medal of Honor winner who is president of the Rochester, N.Y., chapter and was chairman of the New York State VVA Council, feels the same way. Beikirck is one of a new



**Although Tom Bird, here chatting with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach in Hanoi, and other VVA national leaders continued to accept Hanoi party line during second trip to Vietnam, local chapters didn't necessarily agree — as shown by Gary Beikirck, New York delegate in spring '82 visit, who led memorial service for American dead and MIAs in Southeast Asia. Photo: AP/Wide World**

breed of upcoming VVA leaders — those elected and responsive to their membership. He has an MA in counseling and is an ordained Baptist minister who works as a high-school guidance counselor and as a volunteer counselor for the Veterans Outreach Center formed in 1973.

Within the 160-member Rochester chapter there is a great deal of diversity about the Vietnam experience. But, says Beikirck, what is "molding us together is a resurgence of a tremendous amount of pride in the 'Nam vet."

Gary Beikirck went to Vietnam on the second VVA trip, but he stresses that he went not as Muller's representative, but as an elected leader who had been given a mandate by the New York State Council: "What Bobby says is not necessarily the opinions of the 'Nam vets that I went over to represent."

It is a good thing for the VVA that Beikirck went to Vietnam, for when the group arrived in Saigon after visiting Hanoi, the Vietnamese had an agenda that included a trip to the "war-crimes museum." Beikirck's first thought was that he was in Vietnam representing veterans in his state. How would they feel if he went? His second reaction was, "Hey, I'm not a criminal and I have no desire to go and see a war-crimes museum because I don't believe anything I did in Vietnam was a criminal action."

So Beikirck told Tom Bird, who was leading the delegation, "Tom, I'm not going." He then conferred with other dele-

gation members individually and they concurred with him.

Instead, Beikirck held an outdoor memorial service for those Americans who died in Vietnam and those still listed as MIAs.

The point is an important one because it illustrates the difference between the elected VVA leaders and those who had been handpicked by Muller to run the VVA nationally.

In 1982 the Vietnam Veterans of America entered a transition phase as the elected membership put increasing pressure on Muller to allow for more input on a national level. This led to the formation of the state councils and a National Executive Advisory Committee made up of the elected heads of the state councils. This committee and the state councils had only advisory powers, but were able to make some inroads into taming national. The resignation of Tom Bird as VVA president is a case in point.

Immediately after returning from the second Vietnam trip, Bird's POW story was exposed as a lie. When Muller put the issue before the N.Y. State Council, they advised that Bird resign his VVA position. Muller did not want Bird to go and planned to convene the full Executive Advisory Committee, but before that could happen Bird stepped down.

Muller's visions for the Vietnam Veterans of America, however, extend far beyond helping what VVA calls "the 2,800,000 American immigrants from Vietnam." Muller would like to see the VVA speak out on issues like the draft, the defense establishment and U.S. foreign policy in areas such as El Salvador. Muller says that the first VVA move that can be "attributed to political persuasions is our willingness to approach the Vietnamese."

In *The Wounded Generation*, he was quoted as saying, "The activists in the Viet-

*Continued on page 96*

## Reunion for Special Warriors

# SOAR VII

by J.C. Pollock

ON 9 December 1983, in a convention room on the second floor of Maxim's Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nev., a group that would total approximately 150 men began to gather for the three-day annual reunion of the Special Operations Association.

On the floor below them, hundreds of other men, hunched over green felt tables or perched on stools before slot machines, noisily wagered their money on games of chance. The men bathed in the soft light on the casino floor were gamblers with a fever to win and a fear of losing.

The men gathering in the convention room on the floor above were gamblers of a different sort. They had gambled their lives on the frozen, barren ground of Korea and in the hot, steaming jungles of Southeast Asia. Theirs had not been a game of chance, but a game of skill and courage against a cunning and resourceful enemy. They had wagered their lives, not their paychecks; and they had done it not for the hope of material gain, but for Duty, Honor, Country.

The Special Operations Association is a fraternal organization of men who served in combat with the Special Operations Group

in Southeast Asia, but also includes some illustrious members from other special operations units of the Korean War and World War II. U.S. Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, and Marine Corps Force Recon, veterans of the Vietnam War, make up the majority of the membership, supplemented by various support units from other branches of the service. They are men with a special place in history, men who participated in a shadowy, secret and always deadly side of the war — a side still fully known only to those who fought it.

They had traveled from all over the world to be with friends — some not seen in many years, or last seen in Vietnam under far less comfortable and secure conditions than the luxury of a resort hotel. And, as the now mostly middle-age warriors drifted in, arriving alone in most cases, there were tentative nods of heads in vague acknowledgment from those already in the room, then hardy handshakes, and often heartfelt embraces at the moment of recognition of old comrades.

The reunion had begun. For many it was

**LEFT: SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown presents Honorary Col. Martha "Maggie" Raye with a \$1,000 check for SOA Scholarship Fund at the SOAR VII in Las Vegas.**



**BELOW: "Special warriors" gather in Las Vegas. From left to right: Clyde Sincere, past president of SOA; SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown; Gen. Robert C. Kingston, commanding general of U.S. Army Central Command, McDill AFB, Tampa, Fla.; and Col. Chuck Allen, director of Center for POW/MIA Accountability and publisher of *National Vietnam Veterans Review*.**



their first, and for them as well as those who had been able to attend some of the six previous gatherings, it was a time to renew their friendships, relive harrowing experiences and fondly remember those who never came home. It was a reaffirmation of what they had been and would always be, and what they would proudly carry with them for the rest of their lives — and that they were indeed special.

With the room almost full and the initial greetings over, the milling crowd formed into small groups that had served under the same command or on the same recon teams. Together they had shared the pride of accomplishment of successful missions, and together suffered the loss of friends and battles. And many had suffered the frustration of not being allowed to win when they knew victory was within their grasp — and further suffered the ultimate humiliation upon returning home when they were denigrated by a purposely misinformed civilian population who understood nothing of the sacrifices they had made for their country.

These were men who had served multiple combat tours in Vietnam and were highly decorated, and there were the inevitable war stories — some that would raise the hair on the back of your neck. Some were elaborately embellished, but not to enhance the status or courage of the teller (there was no need for that; these men had nothing to prove), but rather to add humor to frightening experiences that were only funny in retrospect, not when the sheer terror of the missions was still fresh in their minds.

A former Green Beret captain and a Navy SEAL reminisced about a joint mission

### MISSING AUTHOR

J.C. Pollock is known to SOF readers as the author of the best-selling novel, *Mission: M.I.A.*, the story of former Green Berets who attempt to rescue American prisoners of war left in Southeast Asia (see *In Review*, SOF, March '82). When asked by SOF to cover the Special Operations Association Reunion, Pollock protested, "I'm a novelist, not a reporter. I can't do it."

He reluctantly agreed to give it a try, however, and decided to describe what it was about these men that made him want to write about them in *Mission: M.I.A.* and his new book, *Centrifuge*, another military adventure thriller about a fight to the death between a team of ex-SOG soldiers and an elite Russian military team. (Look for a review of *Centrifuge* in an upcoming SOF.) To show that his commitment to the cause of freedom is more than words in best-selling novels, Pollock has generously donated his fee for this article to the Salvadoran Freedom Fighters Fund.

Pollock, who lives in Charlottesville, Va., is a member of Special Operations Association (SOA) and Special Forces Association.

## LARRY THORNE SCHOLARSHIP FUND

by Jim Butler, Secretary  
Special Operations Association

The Special Operations Association Scholarship Fund was formed in memory of Maj. Larry A. Thorne (Lauri Torini), the Special Operation's first listed Missing-In-Action casualty. The first scholarship was awarded in 1983 to Benjamin S. Redman of Norwalk, Iowa, the son of Darrell Redman, who was assigned to CCC, MACVSOG. The scholarship is restricted to the children of former SOG members.

Maj. Larry A. Thorne, Headquarters MACV Studies and Observations Group, was born on 28 May 1919 in Finland. He enlisted in the Finnish Army at the age of 19 and served with incredible distinction. During World War II and the attempted Russian annexation of Finland, Thorne earned every award of valor that Finland had, including two Mannerheim Crosses, the equivalent of the American Medal of Honor.

As a member of Special Battalion 4, Thorne led parties of four to 10 men, penetrating as far as 200 miles behind Russian lines, being inserted by parachute, amphibious vehicles or skis. In one of his most dangerous adventures, he spent six months with 60 men behind Russian lines, attacking communication systems and ammunition dumps. On one operation, he led his unit 12 miles behind Russian lines, where he engaged and completely demolished a 300-man Russian element without suffering a single casualty.

When the overwhelming odds and sheer numbers of the Russians forced Finland to capitulate, then-Capt. Thorne organized an underground army and waged a guerrilla war so devastating that the Russians offered a \$75,000 reward for his capture, dead or alive.

Later, Thorne sought German help in combating the Russian takeover of Finland. Germany trained Thorne at its School for Sabotage and Guerrilla Warfare in January 1945. He was scheduled to return to Finland after completing the course, but the Germans could not provide transportation.

Thorne, unable to return to Finland, did the next best thing. He joined a group of Germans on the Eastern Front. This group continued fighting for three days after Germany's surrender. The German Marines stopped fighting and surrendered to elements of the 17th Airborne Division. As the prisoners were marched back through the British zone, Thorne was recognized by British Intelligence and imprisoned to appease the Russians.

Thorne escaped less than one month

after his capture and covered the 200 miles to the Danish border on foot, before making his way back to his homeland.

Reaching Finland in August 1945, his joyous homecoming was interrupted by the Russians again. They coerced the Finnish government into arresting him for his wartime activities and he was again imprisoned. He escaped twice and was recaptured, but his third attempt was successful and he escaped to Sweden.

He left Sweden as a crewman on a ship to Venezuela, remained there for six months, and then, because he wanted to fight communism, made his way to the United States where he tried to enlist in the U.S. Army. He contacted a friend of his in New York City, who was a former Finnish diplomat. His fellow countryman arranged for him to stay in America while Congress considered his application for U.S. citizenship.

On the day Thorne received his citizenship papers, 28 January 1954, he enlisted in the U.S. Army for six years. He took basic training at Ft. Dix, N.J., and was a mountain-climbing and winter-warfare instructor at Ft. Carson, Colo., before being assigned to the 77th Special Forces Group at Ft. Bragg, N.C., in late 1954.

He was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the fall of 1956 and was assigned to the 10th SF Group from 1958-1962.

Thorne was an expert boxer, skier and mountain climber. He became the first American to graduate from the Italian Carabinieri Mountaineering School and commanded the Special Operations team that recovered the bodies of three Americans lost in a plane crash in Iran's highest mountains in 1962.

He returned to Ft. Bragg in 1963 and was assigned to the 7th SF Group, but went under the Operational Control of Combined Studies Group, the parent of SOG. His valor earned him a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. As soon as he returned home he requested to be re-assigned to Vietnam and was assigned to Headquarters, Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group. This extraordinary fighting man, who spent 28 years of his life fighting oppression, continuously volunteered for the most hazardous missions with SOG. It was while he was on one such mission near Kham Duc that Maj. Larry A. Thorne disappeared and was reported Missing-In-Action on 18 October 1965.

It is in Thorne's memory that the Special Operations Association (the survivors of MACVSOG and other related units) proudly dedicate this scholarship fund. SOF is proud to be able to contribute to a cause that honors an American hero and MIA, and helps a deserving youth get an education.

deep into North Vietnam to locate an underwater bridge. They inadvertently had run into a regiment of NVA troops and had spent 14 hours in the water before escaping with their lives. The laughter came easily with the description of their appearance when they finally made it back to the SOG compound at Da Nang: "When we stripped off our wet clothes, our skin was so wrinkled that we looked like giant prunes."

There was a chorus of laughter in response to further recollections of the mission, and to details of other stories that flowed more smoothly as drinks were refilled and the men relaxed and settled in to once again share and enjoy the camaraderie found among those with common experiences and backgrounds.

But there was occasionally something different about the laughter brought on by the stories being told. Subtle nuances: a distant look or a change in the timbre of the voice. Things not apparent to the casual observer or the uninitiated. If you listened carefully and watched closely, there were momentary pauses—a searing flash of pain or sorrow that transcended the laughter, seen for only an instant on the faces as one story brought recollections of another mission, one that had not ended well. One that reminded those in the group that friends had been killed, or entire recon teams had vanished without a trace. The pain and the sorrow went unspoken, but they were there, visible for barely a second, just behind the eyes, rising from the dark chambers of the subconscious where we store the things we know are best not thought about too often. The stories continued, but each man for a brief moment had felt the presence of friends they had lost and would never see again.

There were stories of a less serious nature: of R&R in Bangkok, Hong Kong and Tokyo; of parties in SOG safe houses where the men would relax and unwind during stand-down time to relieve the stress of missions; of parties that would make the debaucheries of Roman emperors seem like church socials.

And knowledgeable men of experience spoke of the current situations in the world: how the same misguided, incompetent politicians were using half-way measures to lead us back into another quagmire that had the familiar stench of the lies and betrayal that had led to "peace with honor."

A former Force Recon Marine from Connecticut had an important reason for attending the reunion. It was his first. He had traveled across the country to "fill in the gaps," he told me. He had spent two tours in Vietnam, running recon missions, and he wanted to talk to other Force Recon people who could help him put it all in perspective: the significance of what he had done; what had happened to former comrades with whom he had lost touch and some justification for the sacrifices he and his friends had made.

*Continued on page 93*

# BURMA'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE

## Warlords, Spooks, Narcs, Mercenaries & Missionaries in Poppyland

by Sterling Seagrave

*This is the second in a three-part series on the situation in Burma as it has evolved since WWII, and the struggles of the Karen, Shan and Kachin tribesmen to gain some measure of self-government from the repressive Burmese government. In last month's issue, Seagrave described the plight of the dauntless Karen tribesmen, who, with the friendly Mons, occupy and control de facto the Republic of Kawthoolei, the southern tail of Burma from Moulmein south to the Thai border. The conclusion will deal with the Kachins and the OSS during WWII. The Kachins occupy northern Burma.*

*The Shans, the subject of this article, for centuries have controlled the eastern plateau of Burma, best known to the world as the Golden Triangle, the richest opium-producing region in the world.*

**I**T comes as something of a surprise these days to find a war which doesn't pit a "liberation front" against the "imperialists." For those of us who feel a certain twinge of nostalgia for the old-fashioned battle between good and evil, I offer the opium warlords of the Golden Triangle. To be sure, this is the same war, in the same place, that raged 30 years ago — when Air America was still called CAT, and its pilots, like "Earthquake McGoon," all seemed to be characters from the comic strip, "Terry and the Pirates."

During the Indochina War, the CIA and four European secret services maintained electronic listening posts in the same village (called "Little Switzerland") in the peaks of the Burmese panhandle, where the borders of China, Laos, Thailand and Burma come together. This is the heart of the Golden Triangle, the richest opium-producing region on earth. From Little Switzerland, they could monitor what was going on across an arc from Hanoi to Kunming.

Periodically, teams of CIA agents or saboteurs would be dropped into China's



Yunnan Province to supplement the ordinary spy missions flown out of Guam, Taiwan and the Philippines. When their planes were shot down by the Chinese, black-operations experts from Ban Houei Sai in Laos would go up the Mekong in dugout canoes to retrieve the pilots or their bodies and bring them out through Little Switzerland.

From the Eisenhower administration to the Nixon administration, the CIA maintained small teams of Chinese Nationalist — or Kuomintang (KMT) — agents throughout the Triangle in an effort to keep tabs on Chinese Communist troop movements across the border. This might have looked good on paper in Washington, but in practice it was a waste of time and money. The intelligence that came out of the KMT was notoriously unreliable. Gen. Li, chief broker and overlord of the KMT opium armies, once confided to me over dinner in Chiangmai, Thailand, that the KMT “just



ABOVE: Shan State Army troops train constantly.

LEFT: Equipment upgraded to modern standards helps Shans fight in their native environment.

told them what they wanted to hear.” But the CIA seemed committed to the principle that bad intelligence was better than none at all.

To the uninitiated — in fact to anyone without a score card — it was impossible to keep track of what was really happening in the Triangle. People were getting murdered left and right; spies were vanishing without a trace; warlords were rampaging through the opium villages, helping themselves to



ABOVE: Shadowy Shan patrol moves in file behind Bren gunner.

the local Shan girls; there was some kind of civil war going on with so many “rebel armies” that it was like alphabet soup; and an awesome quantity of opium was being turned into heroin in jungle laboratories and then into gold on the streets of New York.

Now, decades later, the only thing that has changed on the surface is that the CIA has been succeeded in the Triangle by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and other of its incarnations. Only the initials have changed. The same civil war is still being fought between the mountain Shans and the lowland Burmans. People are still getting clubbed to death with teak bludgeons to save ammunition. U.S. choppers are still clattering over the rain-forest canopy — six presidents after Eisenhower — although now they’re flown by Burmese pilots. Hill-pony pack trains of raw opium are still being swum across the Salween River to reach processing plants along the Thai border.

Many of the drug warlords are new faces; but they are all, without exception, ethnic Chinese, and always have been. They masquerade as “Shan freedom fighters” or “Shan rebels,” in order to give themselves legitimacy as local patriots. But the closest they come to being Shan is that several of them are Chinese born inside the Shan State. They have nothing to do with the real Shan rebels, who are members of the Shan State Army (SSA). But by posing as nationalists, the opium warlords have given

a bad name to everything that goes on in the Shan State, creating a public-relations obstacle that the real anti-communist freedom fighters have never been able to overcome.

The people who are fooled by this patriotic pose are foreign journalists or American officials who then propagate the misinformation through the mass media and government reports. As a result, the legitimate cause of the Shans gets obscured and tainted.

The Shans are an ancient people, from whom the people of Thailand are descended. Their culture goes back 2,000 years to a civilization centered on Lake Tali in the eastern foothills of the Himalayas. They were forced out by pressure from the Han Chinese and spread south. Those who lingered in the soft green hills of the Golden Triangle created a loosely linked confederation of *sawbwas* (princes) who defended their territory successfully against the lowland Burmese for over a millenium. The conquering British found them there and gave them the name “Lords of the Sunrise.”

Unfortunately, when the British pulled out of Burma after World War II, they turned over governmental authority exclusively to the lowland Burmese, without adequate safeguards for minority groups like the Shans. The Burmans bullied the minorities until, one by one, they all went into rebellion.

The Shans rebelled in 1958, and have been fighting the Burmese now for 26 years. They have carefully avoided having their rebellion taken over by any communist movement. But the Shans have never been able to get any encouragement from the United States. The reason is simple: Although the real Shan rebels refuse to deal in opium, and rely on the local population for 90 percent of their support, they continue to be confused in Western eyes with the ethnic-Chinese opium smugglers.

There have been some interesting changes over these 26 years. The original Nationalist Chinese opium generals that we used to hear about have grown old or died. Their kids have finished college in the States. And their notorious “opium armies” have broken up into rival factions.

The regional equation has changed subtly also, far below the surface. China today is not the same China it was during the Vietnam War. Burma is at last shaking itself out of a long coma. And thanks to the fantastic rise in the use of cocaine imported from Latin America, Asian heroin is no longer exclusively the drug of choice. In other words, the background circumstances are changing rapidly, and the warlords may soon be left behind.

What I always found missing in reports about drug dealings in the Triangle was a cast of characters. It would have been so much easier to understand *Who-Struck-John* in this little corner of paradise if you could keep the warlords straight. The newspapers never offered more than a one-line

description of each bandit, usually inaccurate at that. So, after all these years, I decided to prepare one myself, drawn from many long sessions of drinking Mekong whisky with the characters involved. As the running battles continue along the Thai border, we can all keep track. And we can tick off the big names as they are gunned down. These are, after all, the last of the great Chinese bandits on earth. They have been an institution. We have to mark their passing carefully.

A quick chronological look at them also provides a thumbnail history of Opium Country.

● **GEN. LI MI** — When the Chinese Communists took over in 1949, remnants of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's KMT armies fled into Burma under the command of Gen. Li Mi. They seized control of the rich opium fields of the Triangle, where they were supported by Taiwan and the CIA for many years. Flights of B-26s kept them in regular touch with Taipei, and the CIA provided weapons and aircraft, plus sophisticated communications gear.

But Gen. Li Mi soon discovered that raiding the communists across the border was difficult and unproductive. Instead, he settled into a new role as the opium kingpin of the Triangle. Through Chinese merchants in the Bangkok underworld, KMT generals moved tons of opium out of the Triangle, and processed it into Number Three and Number Four heroin at plants on the border. Their powerful Chinese buyers in Bangkok then injected it into world markets.

As Li Mi grew older, he was reassigned in the '60s to a high government post in Taiwan, where he continued to supervise KMT affairs in the Triangle. He was directly responsible to the Generalissimo's son, Gen. Chiang Ching-kuo, who is now president of Taiwan. In the field, Li Mi was replaced by two of his senior officers, Gens. Li and Tuan.

● **GEN. LI WEN-HUAN** — Chief broker and overlord of the KMT opium armies, Gen. Li was a fine-looking patrician who could have been successful heading an international conglomerate — which, in fact, is what he was doing. His appearance and demeanor were flawless; he wore beautifully tailored suits and was impeccably groomed and well-spoken. He struck me as a remarkably intelligent business executive with refined tastes.

He had a heavily guarded mansion in Chiangmai and other mansions elsewhere in the Thai kingdom. His sons and daughters were all attending good schools in the United States and Europe. The first time I had dinner with him at one of his safe houses in Chiangmai, my car was halted by a knot of armed guards, while others flitted like rhesus monkeys around the rooftops. The food was Hunanese and sublime by any standard.

I recall that he explained the changing situation inside China in rather poignant terms. He said that, early on, his soldiers had been sent on a mission back to their



**ABOVE:** Chang Chi-fu, better known in Asia by his Shan name of Khun Sa, is currently considered the most powerful opium warlord in Golden Triangle.



**LEFT:** Photographer hid eight hours in a tree to get this photograph of Lo Hsing-han's opium caravan.

● **GEN. TUAN HSI-WEN** — While Gen. Li brokered the opium and heroin from the Triangle, field operations were headed by Gen. Tuan. He was a sad-faced man with a balding, almond-shaped head, who seemed to be content only when he was directing his troops. For two decades, he was able to move around northeast Burma by air like a hummingbird, drawing the nectar out of the poppy.

I remember, when my father died in north Burma in 1965, and 26,000 people came on foot and by ox cart to the old American doctor's funeral, how Gen. Tuan suddenly appeared on the doorstep to pay his respects. He came just a few minutes after the Burmese Army officers and a few minutes before the Chinese communist delegation. While we sat on the couch and talked, I wondered precisely how he had got there so easily from his base in Thailand.

The KMT had a lot of bases in Burma till the Burmese Army teamed up with the People's Liberation Army to force them out. The CIA staged a well-publicized airlift to remove the KMT soldiers to Taiwan, but only the old men actually left. The young ones stayed and Tuan built a new headquarters on the mountain above Fang, near Chiangmai. He died there of old age and a weak heart in 1980.

As warlords go, Tuan was a rich man, but

native villages in Yunnan Province, expecting to rally the peasants in an uprising against the communist cadres that had taken over administration of the countryside.

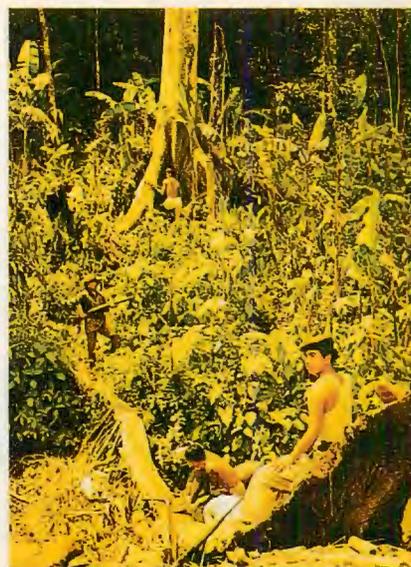
"Our own people told us to get out," Li said. "They did not want us to bring down the wrath of the cadres, and they said they were a lot happier and better off now than when we were in power. It came as quite a shock. Since then, we have not gone back. We say we go, because it is expected of us, but we do not." This was why they concocted their intelligence reports for CIA consumption, he said.

not a happy one. He will be remembered a long time by the Shan farmers who were badly treated by his soldiers. But there are those who liked and respected him a lot. Among his admirers were the lesser Chinese warlords who owed their survival and prosperity to him and Gen. Li: Moh Heng, the one-armed bandit, who now commands about 400 of Tuan's soldiers in Kengtung State, and my old friend Prince Jimmy Yang, whose fabulous family opium holdings in Kokang State have been taken over by the communists.

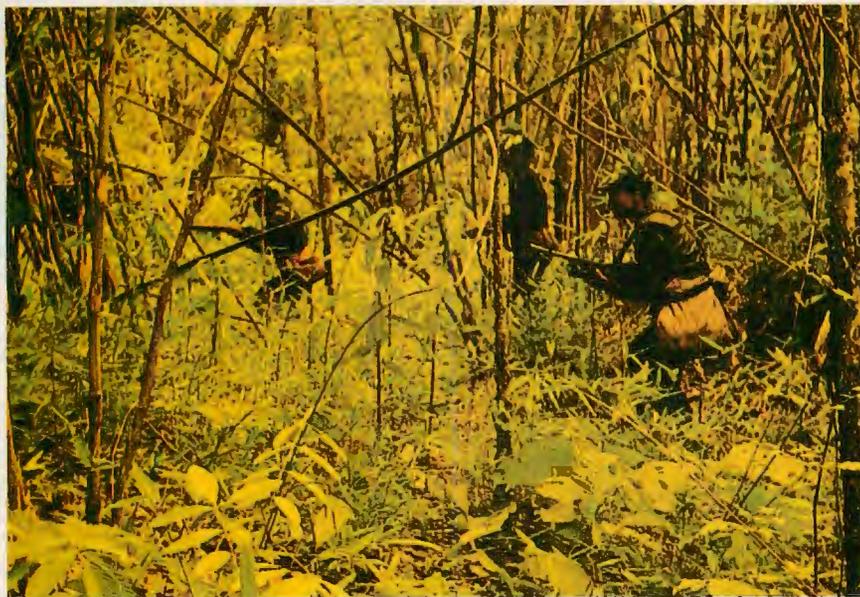
In a way, all the opium warlords, big and small, were at one time or another Tuan's lieutenants. When Tuan died, they took command of his troop remnants, and now

dictatorship in Burma. The Burmese regime seemed to tolerate Lo because he was the closest thing to a rising political star in the Shan Hills. He was not one of the idealistic young rebels out fighting in the rain forest for the cause of Shan independence or self-rule. But he was potent politically in the manner of a ward boss.

He was also a smart and agreeable man, with a quick wit and the kind of charisma that made him effective with his men and popular with a lot of the Shan hill people. He had free access to the road network, and was able to move caravans of opium and heroin by truck to Burma-Thai border towns such as Mai Sai and Tachilek. In that wild frontier region, he provided something of a



ABOVE: Some guard as others wash at Shan outpost.



ABOVE: Shan State troops constantly patrol Burmese jungles.



LEFT: Mk.4 Enfield does the job in the '80s as it did in the '40s.

counterbalance to the KMT generals, and was also a check against the Burmese Communist Party (BCP), which was trying aggressively to establish itself in the hills.

But Lo also had many jealous enemies in Rangoon and Bangkok — people who wanted to take over his business, or who resented his competition. They began to pass the word that Lo was the biggest heroin broker in the Triangle, which simply was not true. That honor actually belonged to Gen. Li Wen-huan's Bangkok connection, who lived not far from the U.S. ambassador. Nevertheless, Washington chose to believe the misinformation.

Several Congressmen on the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, who were making a career out of the heroin issue, mounted a campaign to bring about Lo's downfall. It was unfortunate in a way, because Lo was really not the man to go after if Congress wanted to turn the heroin tide. But the Congressmen and DEA were looking for a scapegoat. They did not want to stir up a hornet's nest by going after the

real kingpins. They seldom do.

As the only truly valuable, exportable commodity produced in the Shan State, it was inevitable that Shan farmers in the midst of a civil war would rather grow opium than coffee beans. They saw nothing wrong. Most of them had never heard of New York or Marseilles, and as far as they were concerned, opium was strictly a local trade that brought in only a modest income. No Shan peasant farmer ever got rich off opium.

The big money was made in Los Angeles, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Amsterdam. So far as profits were concerned, the buck stopped at Chiangmai. From the viewpoint of the opium generals, if the drug caused grief when it was converted into heroin and sold on the streets of Manhattan, that was a crime perpetrated by U.S. drug merchants, not by the people of the Shan hills. If Americans wanted to get upset about it, they argued, they should nail their own pushers before they started throwing their weight around in the Triangle.

With this whimsical attitude in mind, Lo good-naturedly announced that he would be happy to sell all his opium to the U.S. narcs to keep it out of illicit channels. It was all the same to him; he didn't care who bought it.

Instead of pursuing pushers at home, U.S. narcotics agents and Thai border police ambushed Lo as he crossed the Thai border with 200 heavily armed men near the sleepy little town of Mae Hong Son on 17 July 1973. After being beaten badly enough to leave his face looking like a rugby ball, he was turned over to the Burmese military regime for trial and probable execution. Eventually, Lo was sentenced to death and Rangoon confiscated all his family holdings. Then, to everyone's surprise, after keeping him in jail for eight years, the Burmese let him go in a general amnesty in June 1980.

He was allowed to return to Lashio, to form a new, heavily armed homeguard force in support of the Burmese Army, to

operate as small, rival bands, buying, transporting and processing the candy.

● **LO HSING-HAN** — The chief competition for the KMT generals for many years was a powerful Chinese merchant named Lo Hsing-han, based in Lashio on the Burma Road. His clan had a strong political and economic base in a bus and trucking business at Lashio. This was quite a feat of free enterprise under the strict socialist military

restart his bus and trucking business, and to resume his career as a leading political figure of the Shan State.

The only reasonable conclusion was that the Burmese had regretted his arrest in Thailand, but were embarrassed into carrying through with his trial and conviction. Burma and Thailand receive \$10 million U.S.

## TALES OF THE BURMESE WOODS

by Jim Graves

"Mekong" Jim Coyne was obtaining the life story of a young Thai hooker on my right while I was nodding through the Vietnam war stories of a lot of former military types at the Las Vegas Hilton lobby bar when something set my antenna to twitching.

My reporter's instinct went *buzz* when one of the storytellers was hailed by a long-lost friend and congratulated on his release from jail in Nepal. I still don't know who the Vietnam-era Green Beret really was because I'm certain the name he was introduced by (which I've since forgotten, but let's say it was Paul Smith) is like many of the others he has used: one of convenience. Many of the people attending this convention, which I can't name because my invitation had strings attached about publicity, had disposable identities. But even if Smith wasn't *who* he said he was, he was *what* he said he was. I was assured of this by a friend I know has done some strange things — like being locked up in Nepal.

After establishing rapport — with the intercession of our mutual friend and a few comments about Vietnam — I got Smith to give me a tight-lipped description of how he came to wind up in a Nepalese jail, sharing straw, cold rice gruel and fleas, and fighting over cockroaches (they flavor rice) with Tibetan guerrillas, Nepalese dopers and other Himalayan desperadoes.

Smith was thrown in a Nepalese jail when he was caught working in a base camp in Nepal with Tibetan guerrillas, trained by the CIA in Colorado, who were fighting the Chinese communists in Tibet. I knew of this CIA project because a good friend of mine had been involved in the late 1960s.

Although he characterized the Nepal adventure as a "trip," Smith went on to say his idea of a *real* time trip was Burma's *outback*. To illustrate, he described two trail encounters in Burma's bush.

The first came as he and his men were brewing tea at the base camp they had set up for the night. One of his bearers spotted a man standing very still at the edge of the jungle — in Burmese woods you can get shot crashing someone else's camp.

"He was like something out of a travel book from the 18th century," Smith said. "He wore leather clothing

dollars a year from Washington to underwrite what is supposed to be an opium-suppression program. Burma uses its share, including Huey helicopters, not to suppress opium trafficking, but rather to suppress the idealistic rebel forces of all the ethnic minorities (see "Karen Rebels in Burma," SOF, March '84). It would be foolish to

over the strange tatoos that covered his body and a pointed hat with a big brim like the Tennessee hillbillies wear in cartoons. He was carrying a rifle that was obsolete before the turn of the century and a wicked-looking, handmade knife. He gestured to indicate that he just wanted something to drink so we let him in the camp," Smith continued. "I had almost every kind of Southeast Asian you can imagine with me and not one of them spoke the old man's language: They didn't even recognize what it was.

"I learned later from people who knew the area that he was a professional hunter and, even though he had been in this area of Burma for years, no one knew who he was or where he came from. He came down out of the hills from time to time to trade what he had shot or captured for necessities in the villages and then disappeared again."

It suddenly hit me that Smith's presence there was just as mysterious as the anonymous hunter's, so I said, "Wait a second. What were you doing in a jungle clearing in Burma with a menagerie of Southeast Asians?"

"Oh, I used to go there a lot," Smith hedged. "Another time, I had a small team out in north Burma and was going uphill on a trail through thick bush. Before reaching the top, we got jumped by a lot of guys with guns, but there was no shooting."

He went on to explain that he and his men were disarmed and herded off the trail, where they were told to sit. From there, they observed a huge pack train of heroin, complete with lots of armed guards, going downhill. Once the column had passed, the leader of the ambushers told Smith's group he had no desire to kill them and would leave their guns at the bottom of the hill. However, he pointed out that the trail and hill belonged to him and if the American ever came back, he wouldn't hesitate to kill him.

"What were you doing in the Golden Triangle?" I asked.

"Well, I never went back to that hill. I went to Nepal."

"Ah, come on now. What were you doing in Burma?"

"When I finally got out of that jail in Nepal, I burned my passport and, if any SOB tries to get me to go outside this country again, I'll kill him."

I never could get an answer. Someday I'll write a story about the stories we never got enough information to print.



throw away such a freebie. Lo Hsing-han was punished as a gesture to Washington, pure and simple.

When the Burmans let him go, and helped him get back on his feet in style, it was to make use of him once more as a lever against the Burmese Communist Party, and against the new heirs to the KMT opium generals. In effect, they put Lo Hsing-han back into the opium business, following the old adage that you set a thief to catch a thief.

● **CHANG CHI-FU** — Currently considered the most potent and infamous opium warlord in the Golden Triangle, 50-year-old Chang Chi-fu is also known by the Shan name Khun Sa. He was born in Mong Yai, southeast of Lashio, Shan State, the son of a Chinese village headman in the opium center of Loi Maw. His mother, with whom he was close, evidently vanished under mysterious circumstances when he was a boy, and he was raised by a relative.

Each time the KMT opium armies came to Loi Maw to buy poppy tar, it was customary to dragoon young village boys to serve as porters. Each porter had an 80-pound pack of opium chained to his back so that he could not abandon it and take to the jungle if the caravan were ambushed. Chang Chi-fu was an exceptional youth, handsome and tough. When he was dragooned in his early teens, he distinguished himself immediately. He was given a chance to join Gen. Tuan's ranks as a soldier, and quickly rose to become a captain, based at Tuan's headquarters on the mountain above Fang in Thailand.

By the time he was 30, Chang Chi-fu had learned all there was to know about military operations in the Triangle, and about how to acquire and process opium into morphine and heroin. He deserted Gen. Tuan and went back to his home town to organize his



**Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) wounded during 1982 attack on Chang Chi-fu's SUA headquarters at Ban Hin Thek, Thailand.**

childhood friends and relatives into a private army of his own.

He called it the Shan United Army (SUA) and it remains today one of the main apolitical forces in the Triangle. At its height, the force numbered about 1,400 men, but by 1979 its strength had been reduced by numerous battles to about 400 men. Larger numbers are cited rather cynically by officials, in order to make the SUA seem more ominous. In terms of manpower, it is trivial compared to the real Shan rebel force, the Shan State Army (SSA), which numbers more than 4,500 men.

Although Chang Chi-fu's SUA opium force did include a few Shan nationalists among the men, and claimed to be dedicated to winning Shan independence from the lowland Burmese, it wasted little time on politics. Instead, Chang set up 15 heroin refineries of his own at points along the Thai border. He seized control of a rich growing area in eastern Hsenwi district, and also controlled a major smuggling zone in southeast Kengtung district, along the borders of Thailand and Laos. There, Chang operated out of the border town of Tachilek and kept a main base nearby at a village called Hin Taek, on a mountain wreathed in clouds along the border. He also traded jade and weapons, and some of the minerals mined inside the Shan State, which is rich in lead, wolfram, copper, silver, coal, antimony and uranium. The town of Hin Taek grew into a bustling community with a main street, bars, gambling dens and even a warehouse for pay days.

Early in the morning of 21 January 1982, at the urging of DEA, 1,000 troopers of the



**Lo Hsing-han was sentenced to death in Burma after Thai police, at instigation of U.S. narcotics agency, ambushed his opium train in 1973. After serving eight years, he was released and is now number-two opium warlord.**

Thai border police staged one of the biggest drug busts in history when they stormed Hin Taek. Gunfire broke out, and mortars, recoilless rifles, AK-47s and M16s tore up the foliage. The fire fight lasted three days. Thai helicopter gunships were called in, along with Thai Air Force Broncos that

strafed and bombed the SUA fortifications. The town was obliterated. Thai officials claimed that only 17 police were killed and 50 others wounded. They claimed that as many as 200 uniformed SUA soldiers were killed. A few sporting ladies from Chiang Rai got zapped as well.

Apparently, Chang Chi-fu held out as long as he did so that he could remove most of his heroin stocks, dismantle his laboratories and remove other valuable loot. The Thais found no opium or heroin in the ruins, but they did find 13 tons of SUA supplies worth \$3 million, including 60,000 plastic bags ready to hold units of 700 grams of heroin. There was also a printing press and an arsenal of small arms.

Chang Chi-fu got away unscathed with a sizable force of his men, and was soon re-established on another border mountain to the south. For the last two years, he has been making the newspapers regularly.

There has been lots of work for him to do because the last several years have seen the biggest poppy crops in history, each year over 600 tons of raw opium, enough to produce more than 14 metric tons of heroin. Depending on the weather, and therefore how much opium is available each year, the price of a kilo of Number Four heroin costs about U.S. \$6,000 in Chiangmai, and jumps to \$11,000 by the time it reaches Bangkok.

Chang has struck new alliances with the various lesser warlords. He continues to own profitable mining, timber and other businesses in Mae Hong Son, Bangkok, Chaingmai and Tachilek. He freely visits his minor wives in both countries, scattered from Bangkok to Mandalay. His eldest daughter came back after the completion of her education in England, and his eldest son pursued his studies at a college in the United States.

The net result of that widely publicized raid at Hin Taek was exactly zero. Like the capture of Lo Hsing-han, this too had been set at the urging of the U.S. narcotics people. Both were grandstand plays that accomplished nothing, except to get more funds for DEA. The sorry fact is that DEA can't touch the real brokers in the Bangkok underworld because their connections in the Thai power structure are too powerful. So, costly efforts are directed at guerrilla groups in the jungle in an effort to make it seem as though the grand scheme for opium suppression really is working.

Angriest of all are the real Shan freedom fighters. Their efforts to win self-rule are being sabotaged by narcotics agents and Congressmen who cannot tell the difference between a Shan rebel and a Chinese bandit.

Recently, one of the Shan leaders told me how the Hueys were chewing up Shan villages with rockets.

"We have always considered America our spiritual ally," he said, speaking better English than I had heard outside of the Old Vic in London. "We have tried to remain friends. But with friends like America, who needs enemies?" ❧

“YOU can’t go in there!” The Lao officer threatened me, blocking the open door to Prince Boun Gum’s office. I could see the prince at his desk, a demitasse of coffee in one hand.

“My district adviser is in Vientiane,” I tried to explain. “There’s a problem with the issue of equipment and I need the prince’s approval to open a warehouse.” The Lao officer, a young captain, was St. Cyr-trained, a graduate of France’s West Point. He tried to use an old aide-de-camp’s ruse.

“He’s in a classified conference at the moment,” he tried to delay me. “Come back in an hour.”

“Now,” I breathed in exasperation through clenched teeth. “I can’t wait an hour.” The prince heard me, looked up and crooked a beckoning finger in my direction.

“Passez-vous, capitaine,” he said softly, violating his own order that none of the American advisers were to be addressed by their military rank.

It was 1959. We were covert Green Berets in Laos: “technicians.” Sometimes I tired of being called mister and the prince’s use of my title suddenly brightened my morning. I grinned and the Lao captain stepped aside. The prince’s small office was militarily austere. I stopped in the middle of the room and touched my finger tips to my chin in greeting.

“Sinbai dee, baw,” I said softly, respectfully. He stood to shake my hand.

“Seewai dee krop,” he admonished, shaking a finger at me. “I’ve been told you must practice Thai instead of Lao, though I don’t know why.” He looked a little saddened at that thought.

“We sometimes must cross into Thailand, Your Highness,” I smiled. “Our commander wants us to be understood in each language.” He nodded, understanding. That made sense.

“How can I help you?” he asked, as his orderly poured me coffee and I sat.

“I’m building the rifle range at *Kilometre Cinq*,” I began. He nodded, knowing.

“A useful project. It is badly needed.”

“Yes . . . but we must have some dynamite.” I used the French pronunciation of the word.

“*Dee-nah-meet?*” he asked. “We have such a thing?”

“I’m told there are a few boxes in the warehouse where they keep the agricultural supplies.”

I lied deliberately. I was already positive the dynamite was there. It was the one sure method by which to pin a Lao down. If my sources told me the demo was there, the prince couldn’t deny me the right to at least look for it.

“What will you use such a thing for?” he asked. He took another sip of his coffee and lit a *Galois Bleu*, a French cigarette. He offered me one and I took it, thanked him. His orderly lit it for me.

“We have come to the point where we need explosives to continue our work.” I shrugged my shoulders. There was little

# FIRE IN THE HOLE!

## White Star had its light moments. Building a rifle range in Laos was one of them.

by Capt. James M. Perry, USA, Ret.



sense in trying to explain to him how difficult it was to remove boulders by hand. I had reached the point where I needed to dig target butts.

"It is dangerous, no?" he said. "One must be a specialist."

"I have such a man, Your Highness," I answered. "An explosives expert." That

satisfied him, apparently, and he began to scribble my authority to open the warehouse. Somewhere in between words he paused.

"You will be careful," he cautioned. He signed his name and handed the paper to me.

"Perhaps I will find time to come and

## OPERATION WHITE STAR

by Jim Graves

Operation White Star, which ran officially from 1959 to 1962 — and unofficially until 1964 — was one of the first of the "classified projects" run by Special Forces in Southeast Asia and remains today one of the least-publicized.

The 107 men sent to Laos in 1959 under Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simons went to take over a job the Central Intelligence Agency originally was tasked with: upgrading the training of the 25,000-man Royal Lao Army to prevent the communist-backed Pathet Lao from overrunning the country. At the time, the Pathet Lao totally controlled two of Laos' 14 provinces and were threatening several others.

But — as tended to happen in Southeast Asia — White Star became much more than a simple instructional mission and many Green Berets, who later became famous for their feats in Vietnam, got their first taste of combat in Laos.

By 1961 the civilian clothes worn by the first U.S. troops were exchanged for uniforms and the original 107 men had swelled to several hundred. Some White Star veterans estimate that by 1962 as many as 400 were assigned to it or other Special Forces operations, such as Project 404. At one point, White Star strength had increased to two C teams with attached PsyOps personnel. Although the CIA had a lot of influence over White Star at its inception, later it became more an SF operation, albeit unconventional.

For example, there was the operation at Nam Tah, about 30 klicks south of the Chinese border. The Pathet Lao and other assorted communists were pressing in on Nam Tah and had the airfield interdicted with what was reported to be a German 88. The Laotian 1st Parachute Battalion went in without advisers and got shot up on the strip.

When the decision came down to send in the 55th Parachute Battalion, the senior U.S. adviser to the unit, Capt. Robin Luketina, wanted to go in with his men.

"We had been pulled out of the 55th by then," said Luketina "but when I heard they were going to go in on their own, I went to the Bull and begged, and he said: 'Look, don't come talking to

me. Anything you're man enough to do, do. Just don't screw up.' "

That's how Luketina found himself and his team squeezed into C-47s over Nam Tah. "We jumped at 500 feet," said Luketina. "It was fogged-in and that covered us. And they allegedly dropped us in the end of the valley that wasn't interdicted. Jumping at 500 feet, you swing about three times and then get your legs crammed up your rear end.

"That was the first time I ever saw the Lao in their tin hats that hung down around their noses. After we landed, we had a lot of Laos laid out on the DZ unconscious. One guy woke up and pulled off his helmet, and that's when I found out they didn't have helmet liners. Their helmets were knocking them out as they hit the ground.

"We moved out in the hills, took up positions and went on the attack. We had some infantry battalions with us, but when we went on the attack we couldn't raise them on the Angry 86. We sent somebody back to get another radio and found out the infantry battalions had taken off. So we said, 'Wait a minute, folks, there's no way to win this war by ourselves.' So we joined the exodus."

Jim Perry, working out of Pakse, had similar observations about the Lao. "It was like pouring sand down a rat hole," said Perry. "The Lao were lovers not fighters. I've seen them back up and fire a goddamn 75mm howitzer at a sniper in a tree top. They didn't mind killing his ass, but they didn't want to see the blood."

The popular conception is that White Star ended in 1962 when the United States admitted it had military advisers in Laos and, under pressure from the International Control Commission, agreed to pull them out.

In fact, some were pulled out — about 66 according to Perry — and some, possibly as many as 200 to 300, drifted off into the Chu Porn Mountains where they continued to work with Gen. Vang Pao's "secret army."

"The Chu Porns were at about 4,000 feet," said Perry. "They grew opium up there and Charley/India/Alpha went up there and told them, 'If you'll work for us, we'll fly your opium out of here.'

"All kinds of high-jinking was going on then," Perry said, laughing.

White Star folded in 1964 when the CIA abandoned Vang Pao and the Special Forces men were needed next door in Vietnam.

watch you explode this *dee-nah-meet*," he smiled. "We Lao have much to learn from you *americaines*." He shook my hand again and I started to bow out of the room, a proper thing to do when leaving a Lao prince. He stopped me with a wave of his hand.

"You may salute, *capitaine*," he smiled slyly. "Homage is not required between soldiers." I thanked him with my eyes and saluted, though I wore no uniform to complement it.

"*Merci, mon General*," I said. "*Au revoir*."

I wasn't sure whether Boun Gum was a general or not. I knew that his brother, Souphanouvang, the Red Prince of Laos, was. He held the grade of general in the Pathet Lao, the communist army. If Souphanouvang was a general, then surely Boun Gum was a general, too. King Vathana would not have his royalist soldiers serving in a lesser capacity than the enemy. Boun Gum was not a son of Vathana. He was a prince of the old king, a short, rotund man of about 50 who had a passion for French customs and who would stand, sometimes for long moments, his hands thrust deep in his hip pockets, while you explained something to him. He was one of the strongest pro-Western members of the royal cabinet.

Boun Gum's military district, the fourth, was located in the Mekong River town of Pakse, where my team, A-34, was stationed. A member of Bull Simons FC-3 detachment, A-34 was one of three teams assigned to the south. We had been in-country since May and it was now September. Our work with the 25,000-man Royal Lao Army was going well, though by now a little slowly with the coming of the winter monsoons.

I found the dynamite just where my weapons man, Rocky Nesom, said it would be. Only there weren't two cases. Just a dozen or so loose sticks.

"Damn!" I spat, disappointed. "We can't blow a wart off a frog's ass with this!" Nesom grinned at me.

"Did you really believe there was enough demo in here to do all the cratering?" he asked. I was miffed.

"What else?" I asked. "Gunpowder went out with the Brown Shoe Army."

Besides, there wasn't anything like blasting powder in Laos. And the team was down to about 20 pounds of TNT. And TNT didn't make a good cratering charge. Nesom nodded at the corner where a huge stock of five-gallon cans of liquid fertilizer rested.

"Nitro-humus," he said seriously. "The AID people [Agency for International Development] add it to the irrigation water."

"And who in the hell is going to blow a hole in anything with liquid fertilizer?" I asked. I was disappointed that I'd gone to all the trouble of getting the prince's approval to open the warehouse.

*Continued on page 77*



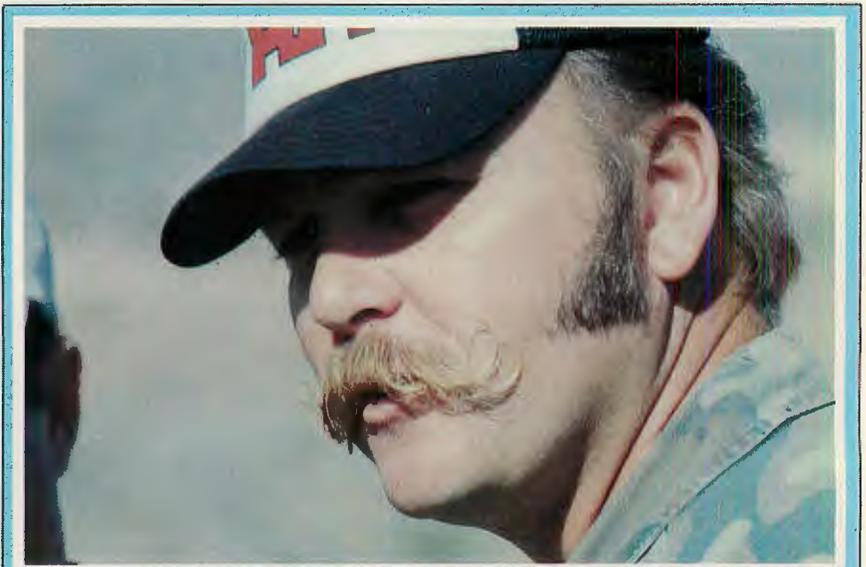
**T**HE West German firm of Heckler & Koch has introduced a new rifle to their line of ultra-reliable weaponry. The PSG 1 Counter-Sniper Rifle is designed to fill the need for a semiautomatic precision sniping piece for use by antiterrorist units and law-enforcement special-weapons teams.

Many of today's terrorist confrontations require the long-range specialist to engage more than one target in a very tight time frame. The traditional bolt-action guns have been the mainstay of most snipers, but today's terror tactics often force the sniper to take out several opponents in rapid succession in order to save a hostage's life or up the odds for insertion teams to enter a building or penetrate an opponent's perimeter.

Peter Senich's book, *The German Sniper* (Paladin Press, 1982), recounts several intriguing interviews with the most successful German snipers in WWII. Their discussions of range, armament and tactics led to some interesting conclusions. Most riflemen would have preferred a semiautomatic weapon if the rifle's precision were comparable and the weapon virtually jam-proof. Body movement while operating the bolt increased the probability of detection and greater time between shots made it difficult to address multiple targets rapidly.

With today's increased accuracy capabilities, it appears the time is right for a precise, semiautomatic sniper rifle.

The PSG 1 is, to say the least, impressive

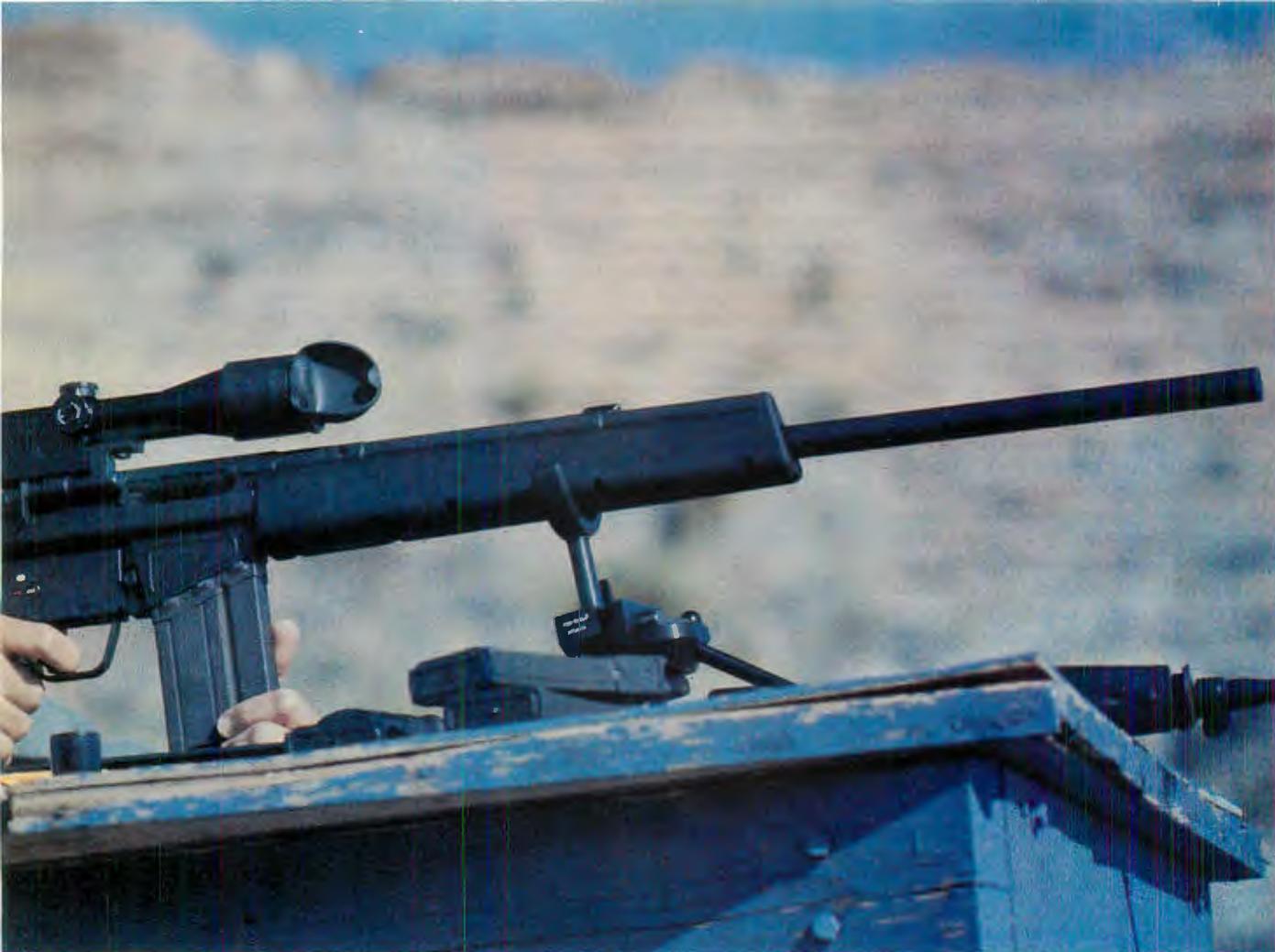


The Shotgun Wizard, John Satterwhite. Photo: John Metzger

### SURE SHOT

John Satterwhite hardly needs an introduction. "The Shotgun Wizard" can usually be found teaching at his American Shotgun Academy (Dept. SOF, 1579 W. Gurley, Prescott, AZ 86301), or touring the country with his now-legendary trick-shooting exhibition. A former U.S. Air Force marksmanship instructor, Satterwhite was three-time

U.S. International Shotgun Champion (1974-76) and dual Gold Medalist in the 1979 Pan-American games in Puerto Rico. His awards and accomplishments are literally too numerous to mention here. For a more in-depth account on the only man alive who can blast seven pigeons out of the sky in one throw, see "SOF Interviews Shotgun Wizard," SOF, September '81.



Champion shooter Bill Rogers kicks off SOF convention range demonstrations with PSG 1. Photo: John Metzger

# TERRORISTS BEWARE

## H&K Takes Aim with New PSG 1

by John Satterwhite

in appearance and performance. The rifle looks as though it came straight from *Star Wars*. Its 25.5-inch bull barrel, .875-inches in diameter at the muzzle, tapers straight back into the semiauto receiver where it meets the H&K roller-locked bolt assembly. The receiver features a forward assist not found on the 91 or 93 model firearms.

A Hensoldt Wetzlar telescopic sight is bolted to a mount welded atop the receiver. As has become typical of H&K, attention to

detail, durability and foolproofness is exemplified by the easy-to-read, easy-access adjustment controls. Numbered from 100 through 600 meters in 100-meter increments, the elevation offers fast compensation for projectile trajectory once the range has been estimated.

Today's counterterrorist marksman must face targets that are often only partly visible. In such cases, in-scope range finders which depend on the total view of the target

are useless. Range determination is an art in itself, and whether an external device or shooter judgment is employed, the Hensoldt Wetzlar scope offers minimal target-acquisition time.

Whatever method used, the shooter not wishing to employ hold-over at extreme range needs only to click the elevation to the appropriate distance, hold dead on, and drop the hammer. The elevation adjustment is also marked in a separate set of yellow

marks for close-range shooting in the event the sniper is faced with the exception rather than the rule. Ten through 75 yards are marked, making the .308's trajectory a matter of dialing in the numbers.

The scope is equipped with a light, collapsible rubber block to be used in solid contact with the shooter's eyebrow, and the forward lens carries a rubber cap for protection against the elements. Exposing the left side of the telescopic sight will reveal a rubber-coated activator button which illuminates the crosshairs for low-light shooting. Tuning this unit will increase or decrease cross-hair intensity. Once the button is depressed, the crosshairs stay illuminated for approximately two minutes; then the unit turns itself off. The battery pack powering it is located beside the control and access may be gained easily with a coin or screwdriver. The impressive clarity, design and precision manufacture of the scope is typical of German craftsmanship.

I took the PSG 1 out to the range for testing. At first I felt that the gun should have been capable of far greater accuracy during rapid-fire sequences — but I found that the shooter must learn how to hold the rifle. Pressure placed on wrong parts of the stock, or inconsistent pressure, will cause group variation. Obviously, handloads would have performed better, but even with Federal Match ammo, the out-of-the-box PSG 1 consistently shot less than one minute of angle.

But I was not satisfied with this method of evaluation — this rifle is built for action. Since I couldn't get to Grenada or Lebanon for some serious combat testing, I figured that the next best thing would be to take it in the field hunting. A call to Omega Hunts, Ltd., (P.O. Box 1647, Boulder, CO 80306), put me 10,000 feet up in Colorado's Sangre De Cristo Mountains pursuing *Odocoileus Hemionus* — the magnificent mule deer.

Even though it was intended to be used as a position weapon, the 18-pound PSG 1 does, fortunately, come with a sling. And boy, did I use it! Many of us remember the BAR man who carried some 20-odd pounds of gun across many a mile of hard-earned real estate. No one, however, can truly appreciate this man's task until he's actually walked a few days with that much gun.

Camp was already pitched at the 10,000-foot level with wall tents, great food and all the comforts of home. In addition to helpful, friendly guides and cook, all the necessities a hunter needs to support his dawn-'til-dusk search for game was provided. Glassing canyons, thickly wooded hillsides and small openings in trees (the Colorado folk call them parks) becomes an almost comfortable experience when one has a rifle capable of hitting nearly anything visible. Although quick response in close cover becomes laborious, it is more than offset by the gun's accuracy. This "anti-stalk" (or "ridge gun," as my friends began to call it) seemed especially suited to open-terrain areas.

After hunting the first two days and glas-

sing only does, I spotted a buck carefully picking his way down a ravine. The first shot followed the crosshairs to its mark behind the shoulder and staggered him. But he regained his footing, wheeled and started away. The instantaneous follow-up shot brought him down. The two shots struck within inches of each other. I might have missed had I taken the time to work the action on a bolt gun.

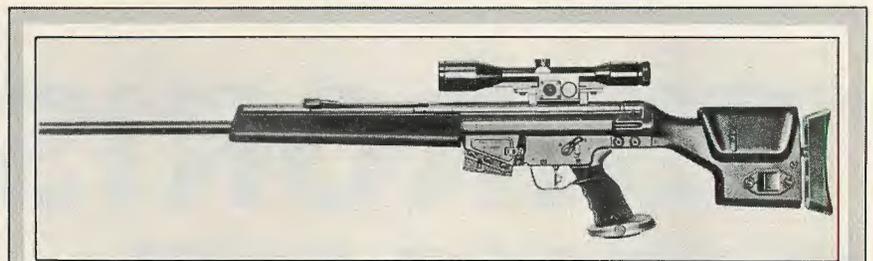
Muzzle blast and rearward movement of the gun are major contributors to close mis-

ses, but anticipation of recoil is always a factor. The PSG 1 is a chore to carry; it becomes a dream to shoot once in position. Recoil is negligible and the weapon really stays on target.

Assault rifles and hunting rifles have traditionally been used with little, if any, attention to personalized gun fit. The average grunt cannot have his rifle fitted to him. H&K has incorporated an ingenious adjustable stock into the PSG 1. This stock features a spring-loaded adjustable cheek rest



.308 slug from PSG 1 removed from deer — H&K magazine and .308 Federal Match ammo. Photo: Russ Miller

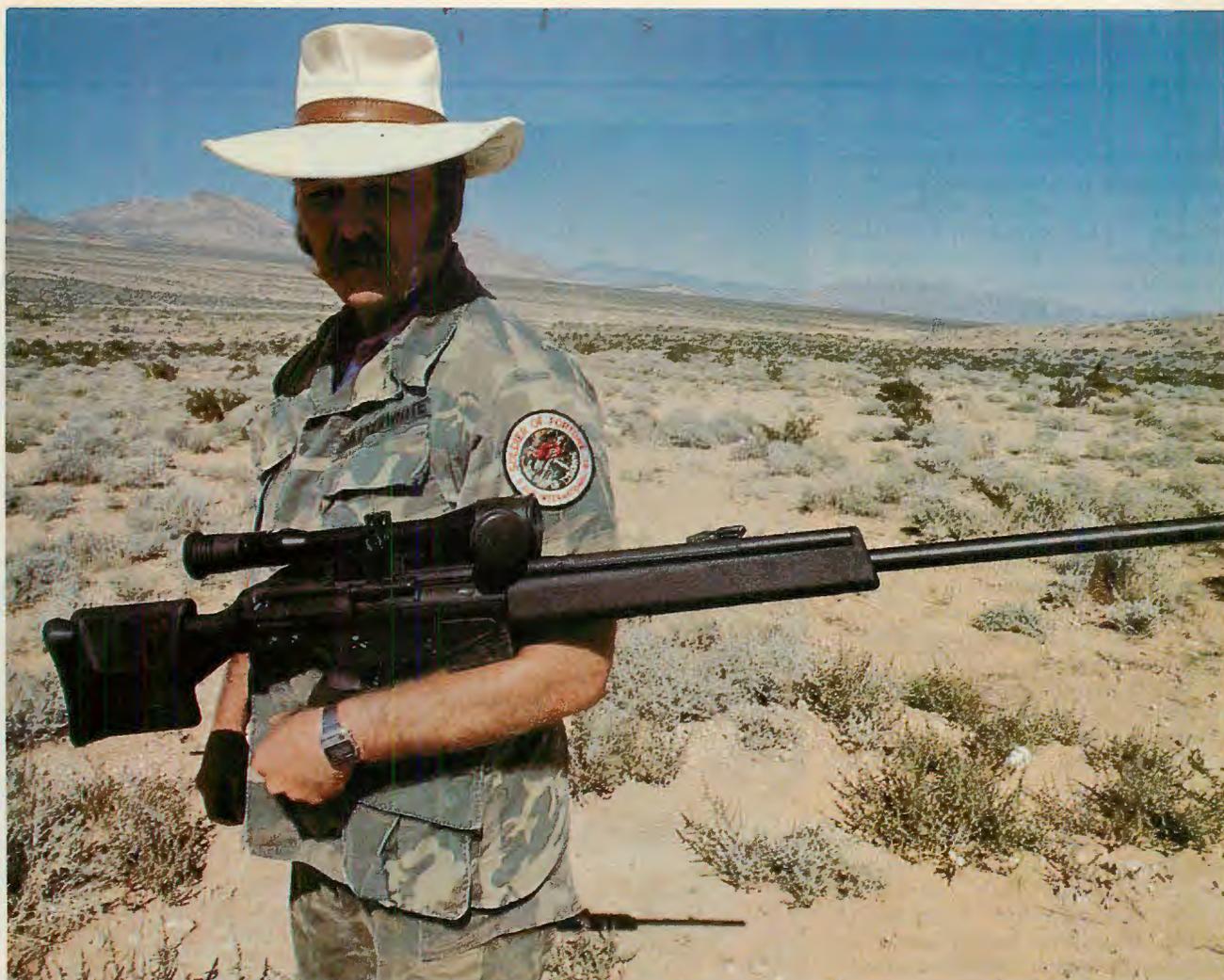


## SPECIFICATIONS

### HK Model PSG 1 Counter-Sniper Rifle

<b>CALIBER:</b>	7.62mm NATO
<b>OPERATION:</b>	Recoil operation via delayed roller-locked bolt system (semiautomatic only)
<b>LENGTH:</b>	47.55 in.
<b>WEIGHT:</b>	17.8 lbs. unloaded
<b>BARREL:</b>	25.5 in. (bull) .875-in. muzzle diameter. Four-groove, one-in-10-in. right-hand twist
<b>MAGAZINE:</b>	5- and 20-round box
<b>SIGHT:</b>	6x42 Hensoldt Wetzlar telescope adjustable as follows: one click = 1cm. at 100 meters; six sight settings 100 meters through 600 meters in white prints with point-blank shot-firing adjustments 10 meters to 75 meters in yellow print
<b>FINISH:</b>	Parkerized with synthetic overcoat
<b>TRIGGER:</b>	3.5 lbs. with adjustable shoe
<b>AVAILABLE TO:</b>	Civilian or law enforcement
<b>SUGGESTED RETAIL:</b>	\$5017.00

Contact HK for more information: Heckler & Koch, Dept. SOF, 14601 Lee Rd., Chantilly, VA 22021. Phone: (703) 631-2800.



Satterwhite brought his PSG 1 to Nevada desert for SOF's Fourth Annual Convention. Photo: John Metzger

## WHY SO MUCH?

by John Metzger

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in room 313 at the Sahara Hotel. SOF's Fourth Annual Convention was just starting to brew downstairs in the Casino. John Satterwhite was pulling something out of a gun case on the coffee table.

"Like to see the new HK sniper rifle?" he asked. Sure we did. Everyone in the room liked guns. All eyes turned to the large black case on the table. Satterwhite pulled it out. A hush fell across the room. Even the drunkest among us caught himself in mid-stutter and shut up. The convention staff-types, range officers and match shooters filling the room slowly staggered toward this amazing-looking weapon, now propped up on its tripod on the glass table. Everyone picked it up, held it, dry-fired it, stared at it, and inevitably asked, "How much?"

Satterwhite answered, "Five thousand dollars."

He wasn't kidding. Everyone looked sort of disappointed.

When Satterwhite sent in this story,

Brown left a cryptic note scribbled in the margin: "Why does the gun cost so fucking much?" Indeed. Why five thousand dollars? The question ate at me. But about four months later at the S.H.O.T. Show in Dallas, I finally got a straight answer right from the H&K people themselves.

"Hey, guys. Why the high price?" I asked the reps at HK's booth.

"Because it's an HK."

"Ha, Ha. No, really?"

Well, they *really* didn't have an answer.

"It will shoot under one minute of angle out of the box," the reps continued. "The scope alone is worth between \$1,200 and \$1,500. We guarantee that the gun will at least equal all ammo manufacturers' accuracy claims." (It is typical of European ammunition manufacturers to market ammo with specific accuracy claims.) Do those answers justify the price?

Five-thousand dollars is a lot of money. But the PSG 1 is a lot of gun. My conclusion? If you are not interested in owning one of the most accurate semi-auto .308 sniper rifles in the world, don't buy it.

to regulate comb height of the rifle and a variable-length stock which will allow the gun to be fitted to virtually any physique. An adjustable pistol grip on the fire-control handle allows the shooter to fit the ergonomic wooden handle to the size of his hand, enhancing precise control.

A collapsible tripod is included in the case. This well-made unit allows the shooter to crank up elevation, swivel laterally, and cant right and left for comfort and stability. Also included are a cleaning rod, brush for optical sights, screwdriver for adjustments, stock adjustment tool, carry strap and magazines.

If there has been one point all H&K lovers agree on, it's the need to eliminate some of the inherent trigger resistance. Those of us who own and shoot H&K rifles already will be pleasantly surprised with the great progress made on the PSG 1's trigger. The beautiful 3.5-pound-pull trigger will not allow *full auto*, yet presents the shooter with a real rifleman's trigger. Perhaps the best news of all is the rumor that these trigger units drop right into the 91 and that H&K will bring them in if the demand is there.



# CENTRAL AMERICA

I was peering into heavy bush, eyeballing my ambush position to ensure I would not be sharing it with a *fer-de-lance* — common in the area, they say — when all thoughts of snakes and such minor matters were dispelled by an offhand comment from a Special Forces instructor at the Honduran Regional Military Training Center.

I was with a company from El Salvador's Sierpe Battalion and the instructors were putting the men into position to ambush another company from the battalion that would be passing through this maneuver area after finishing their training in an outlying area.

The ambush seemed well-laid-in when one of the Special Forces NCOs from Label Cerro Mobile Training Team (MTT) said, "I sure hope none of them have any live ammo on them."

"Whoa there, friend!" I thought, realizing that I've never enjoyed being in heavy jungle with lumps of lead flying randomly around. "What are we talking about when we say *live ammo*?" I asked.

"It's one of the problems we have with the Salvos," said the SF instructor. "Since they are pulled out of combat to come here, there is no way to prevent them from having a few live rounds in their pack. Sometimes they'll get excited in these drills and use some live rounds. Usually some guy decides the blanks aren't realistic enough, so they pull off the blank adapter and run through some live rounds. Then someone gets pissed because he's being shot at and shoots back."

"So far, they've always shot high, though," chipped in another instructor cheerfully. "The only time they get to me is when they get mad and start fighting each other. When they whip out those machetes, it's clear-out time."

I excused myself and went to look for *fer-de-lances* behind a small hill on the opposite side of the trail from the ambush.

That the United States is training combat-experienced soldiers in combat techniques is paradoxical, but understandable, considering the situation in Central America today.

The Central American Regional Military Training Center (RMTC) near Trujillo, Honduras, initiated its training program in June 1983. It is designed to allow the United States to upgrade the training of Central American military units economically. While only Salvadoran and Honduran units have gone there so far, in the future units from Guatemala may also train there. At the present time Guatemala is just supplying some instructors since it has the



## CENTRAL AMERICAN TRAINING CENTER



# Making Combat Vets Combat-Wise

Text & Photos  
by Jim Graves



**ABOVE, RIGHT, BELOW:** Salvadoran soldiers respond to instructor's signals in immediate-action drills. Drills are first conducted in open areas for skill evaluation and then in heavy jungle.



**LEFT:** Special Forces instructor watches while Salvadoran M60 crew lays down base fire for platoon live-fire drill.

smallest army in Central America — except for Costa Rica, which does not have one — and its units are busy fighting guerrillas. The RMTC was actually established under the auspices of a little-known Central American treaty organization, called CONDECA, rather than as part of the joint United States-Honduras Big Pine II maneuvers.

Prior to the opening of the RMTC, entire units (like El Salvador's Belloso Battalion) and/or groups of officers were sent to the United States for training at American military bases.

Although that scheme had its advantages, the cost of transporting large numbers of troops to the United States was prohibitive, since both Honduras and El Salvador have far more important things to do with their Foreign Military Sales aid than spend it flying troops to Ft. Bragg, N.C. Additionally, it makes far more sense to train soldiers in the climate and terrain they will be fighting in.

The RMTC at Trujillo, a small city located on Honduras' isolated Caribbean coast, is unimpressive from the road but is quite substantial inside. The base is fairly typical in its layout — considering its purpose — and organization: Litton Industries, America's 11th largest defense contractor, has contracted for the base construction; base security is handled by the Honduran Army; actual training is handled primarily by six-month TDY U.S. Army personnel, mostly Special Forces from Ft. Bragg, and RMTC headquarters staff manages the operation.

Physically, the RMTC consists of the usual mix of temporary (tents) and semi-permanent housing (wooden huts), aid station, mess halls, rifle and machine-gun ranges, an impact area for crew-served weapons like mortars and 90mm recoilless rifles and immediate-action and maneuver areas for squads, platoons, companies and battalions.

At the time of SOF's visit, the RMTC had trained one Honduran battalion and six Salvadoran battalions. In 1984, plans call for 11 Salvadoran battalions and six Honduran battalions to go through the RMTC. El Salvador sends more through because of its ongoing communist insurgency and because its army battalions are smaller.

El Salvador began reorganizing its army unit structure in 1983 by creating what were first called *Cazadore* (Hun-

# CENTRAL AMERICA

ter) Battalions, but were later renamed CS or Countersubversion Battalions. The *Cazadore* concept, which was pioneered in Venezuela, maintains that light, 350-man battalions (11-man squads, nine platoons of 35 men each plus headquarters staff) are more effective in counterinsurgency roles than larger, 1,000-man traditional battalions, which are designed to operate with or be supported by armor and artillery.

The war in El Salvador is a low-intensity conflict fought primarily with light weapons — rifles, machine guns and mortars. It's a war where success comes as a result of quick movement, good basic tactics and surprise more than fire power and numbers on paper.

The approved statement of mission for the RMTC is: "To train invited Latin American military and security elements in conventional and counterinsurgency tactics, which will permit the overall improvement of the internal defense of participating nations and contribute to a climate of stability and security in the region."

The grunt's translation: to teach the men to clean and fire their weapons; move quickly, quietly and safely; and fight when they make contact.

That's why Cuban-born Col. Reynaldo Garcia, the senior American, describes the five-week RMTC program as a mix of Basic, Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) and Unit Training.

And that's the paradox. Salvadoran units could easily be in a major operation against communist guerrillas in Morazan or Chalatenango Province one week, shooting and being shot at, and in Trujillo the next week, learning how to react under fire or keep the M16 rifle clean and unjammed.

A number of factors have created the necessity of sending soldiers to the RMTC after they have been in combat. Until recently, Salvadoran soldiers were drafted for 16-month tours, trained by the unit that they were assigned to, when that unit was not in combat, and usually didn't re-enlist because of the low pay. And, because of the poor retention rate, the Salvadoran Army had no NCO corps, which is the backbone of any army — fighting or training. Furthermore, the war against the 8,000 communist guerrillas had forced the government of El Salvador to expand its army from 10,000 to almost 35,000 in four years.

The Salvadoran concept of training soldiers in the unit to which they are attached does have some advantages. Soldiers are trained to the unit's specifications and it builds unit cohesiveness, but in war-time there is little time for training.



**ABOVE:** Salvadoran soldiers move along trail through bush on live-fire platoon assault course.

**BELOW:** Salvadoran units going through RMTC are issued 40mm M79 grenade launchers. Called the "Blooker" or "Bloop Tube," weapon is considerably more reliable than M203 grenade launchers currently used by U.S. Army.



El Salvador is moving to solve these problems. A Basic and AIT facility has been built in La Union Province and should be operating by now. The term of service has been increased to 24 months and pay scales have been increased for enlisted soldiers.

In the meantime, Col. Garcia and the SF trainers have to compress an awful lot of training into five weeks: In 1984, they hope to extend the training cycle to eight weeks.

At the present time, soldiers reporting to the Trujillo RMTC are given physicals while Garcia's instructors look over their equipment and weapons: M16s, M60s, 81mm mortars and 90mm recoilless rifles. Garcia hopes in the future to have a fully equipped weapons inventory on hand at Trujillo so the units can leave their heavier weapons behind, since they are expensive and difficult to transport. The two major problems Garcia's men initially

*Continued on page 54*

## LIBERTY HOUR

by Jim Graves

I figured it would take a day of tortillas, beans, Cokes, "Una cerveza, muy frio, rapido, hombre," mountains, heat, dust and vistas of banana fields everywhere, with an occasional hair-raising dodge-'em contest with the horses and cows that graze on what passes for roads down here.

It's approximately 500 kilometers from where I started, Tegucigalpa, to Trujillo, a small city on Honduras' Caribbean coast and the site of the Regional Military Training Center (RMTc).

I knew the first 120 kilometers of the road were bad (San Pedro Sula to La Ceiba), and Hondurans spoke in terms of fear and loathing of the 160 kilometers from La Ceiba to Trujillo, so I knew it was going to be a long day.

But my rent-a-car turned out to be a Japanese rent-a-wreck, so my trip took three long days. But that's a story too horrible to tell.

Since the FUSEP — Honduras' fuzz — rarely gets out of the cities, I was making good time when I spotted the sign outside Comayagua near the big military base at Palmerola:

Liberty Hour  
Bar Restaurant  
English Spoken

After sliding to a stop, I whipped the car over into the dirt-road entrance, went about 100 meters and rolled up to a large, thatch building, with some jeeps in front and a tent pitched nearby.

Inside were a dozen American soldiers seated on obviously homemade chairs at homemade tables, or homemade bar stools at the long bar, listening to Willie Nelson tapes on the stereo and drinking cold beer. It was cool inside — thatched roofs do have some advantages.

The genius behind the Liberty Hour is Arkansan Larry Staley, a medically retired E-6 who ducked the wrong way on his third tour in Vietnam (one with the 11th Marines and two as an adviser to the 51st ARVN Rangers) and picked up one of his three Purple Hearts for a wound that hurts forever.

As Staley tells it, he got tired of the States three years ago — missed the jungle, he claims — so he packed up and moved down to Honduras with a girl friend in tow to prospect for gold in Miskitua, where the Miskito Indi-

ans live in the provinces of Gracias a Dios and Olancho. There is gold there, but there are also man-eating jaguars, snakes too numerous to name, treacherous swamps, zillions of sand fleas, sometimes-hostile natives, lots of armed folks and beaucoup jungle.

"Jim, there's some of the nicest jungle I've ever seen out there," said Staley, with that faraway, golden gleam in his eyes.

Using a three-inch dredge and sluice box, Staley took enough gold out of the placer deposits he found "to make a living," but when the United States started moving troops into Honduras as part of Big Pine II, he decided to build the Liberty Hour next to Palmerola, the base with the largest contingent of U.S. troops.

Lots of people had the same idea, but Staley was the first to snatch the required Honduran partner (since shed), the papers to operate and 900 acres of land to build on.

Living out of a tent, to keep a close



Liberty Hour bar sign and the bar itself (off to right) outside Comayagua, Honduras.



Liberty Hour bar in Comayagua is owned by former Marine Larry Staley (second from left). The bar is more of a club for U.S. troops from nearby Palmerola than an off-base bar and Staley gets a lot of off-duty help from the 549th MPs out of Panama, three of whom are in the photograph.

eye on his Honduran work crew, Staley put up the main building (which consists of the bar, kitchen, two bathrooms, a shower and five bedrooms) in less than a month. By now, he's probably finished the barbeque pit he was working on when I was there, installed a hot shower and begun the swimming pool and 20-unit motel.

The menu is pretty basic — hamburgers, hot dogs, ham sandwiches and french fries — and the beer and hard liquor is supplied on a day-to-day basis. Staley started on a low budget with a small stock of alcohol and never anticipated the size of the demand.

For a U.S. serviceman in Honduras, the Liberty Hour is attractive: Country-Western music, VHS movies, five waitresses to look at — but no touching; Staley wants no problems with the MPs — and the occasional blowout. The night before I arrived, a bonfire cookout had drawn 150 soldiers.

The Liberty Hour draws a steady lunch traffic all day from Palmerola, about two kilometers down the road, and big crowds at night. As a result, Staley's first chore of the day is to run into Comayagua and buy more beer, soft drinks and ice. "They have drunk me out every day," said Staley.

While he's gone — and sometimes when he's there since he likes to mix with the troops — the U.S. Army takes over. A soldier, usually one of the "Dirty Dozen" from the 549th MPs out of Panama, gets behind the bar and pitches in as chief bartender. The place operates most of the time on the honor system. If the girls can't remember who ordered what, the troops do — and they pay. Since none of the girls speaks English, and almost none of the Americans — including Staley — speaks Spanish, you've never seen as much gesturing in one place as in the Liberty Hour. The troops have also pitched in muscle and know-how to improve the place.

Liberty Hour has actually become more of an unofficial Army club than an off-base bar, and business is so good Staley figures by spring he'll be able to head north from time to time for Lake Yojoa, home of some monster bass.

Or he might have time to head back into the golden rivers of Olancho, with me along as company.

Some people like jungles, some don't. I don't unless there's gold in 'em. ✕

# CENTRAL AMERICA

encounter from new units are the health of the men — malaria, dengue fever and infections too numerous to name — and broken sights on the M16s.

Under normal circumstances, the first week is spent on weapons instruction. For the rifleman, the fine art of disassembling, cleaning, assembling and firing the M16. Because the large rifle range, up to 300 meters, is still under construction, the soldiers are taught to zero their weapons at 25 meters. In addition, riflemen go through a grenade-range course. While riflemen do that, the M60 machine-gunners, mortarmen, recoilless-rifle teams and snipers go through similar courses for their weapons.

While at Trujillo, I was surprised to see soldiers walking around with M79 40mm grenade launchers — the famous “Blooker” or “Bloop Tube,” named after the sound it makes when fired, so loved by Marine grunts in Vietnam. Garcia explained that the Salva-



## WILLIAM WALKER: YANKEE CONQUISTADOR

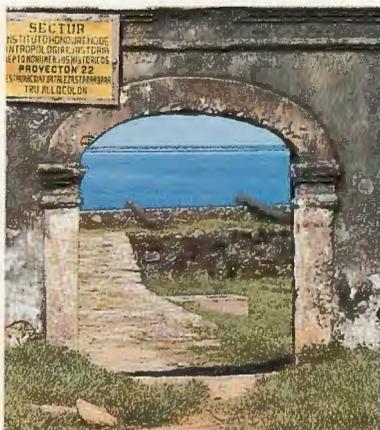
by Jim Graves

There was no way I could leave Trujillo without attempting to find the grave of the “Green-eyed Man of Destiny.”

Dead now 123 years, William Walker is still an intriguing character. Since his death, the 5'4", 120-pound lawyer-turned-journalist-turned-soldier of fortune has had 140 biographers. Most have acclaimed him a brilliant warrior, but some have pointed out that his campaigns smacked as much of comedy as they did of combat.

Walker, tabbed also as “The King of the Filibusters” by newsmen of the time, launched three expeditions aimed primarily at conquering a kingdom for himself and, according to legend then and now, establishing a system of slavery in Central America. It's debatable as to whether Walker really believed in slavery or was just using the then-controversial cause to recruit pro-slavers into his army (most of Walker's recruits came from slavery states).

He left a San Francisco reporting job in 1853 and led a band of 45 soldiers of fortune down to La Paz in Baja California. The city was captured quickly but Walker's coup attracted the attention of the United States and Mexico, and he was



**Main entrance to the old Spanish fort at Trujillo. Soldier of fortune William Walker captured this fort in August 1860 and was held there the following month, waiting to be shot.**

forced out of Baja almost immediately.

In pursuit of fame and fortune, Walker tried to get a piece of the concession for taking gold miners from America's east coast to California across Nicaragua (the three possible routes were overland across the American plains, which involved encounters with several hostile Indian tribes; sailing down to Panama, crossing and then moving back up to California, which exposed travelers to Yellow Fever, often fatal; and crossing Nicaragua and up). Walker showed up in Nicaragua with 58 Americans in 1855 and, in a four-

month campaign replete with some rather remarkable derring-do, captured the then-capital, Granada.

After winning the war, Walker had enough sense to name a Nicaraguan as president and himself as commander-in-chief of the army. The various leaders of Central America didn't like his exploits in neighboring Nicaragua and soon armies from Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Guatemala, as well as Nicaraguan rebels, were in the field against him. He survived the attack because he had been joined by hundreds of soldiers of fortune of some talent and remarkable courage, including Charles Hornesby and Col. Charles Henningsen (who became a Confederate general in the Civil War).

However, Walker started sending both his Nicaraguan allies and his American troops to the firing squad for petty offenses and then made the mistake of having himself “elected” president in June 1856. Becoming *El Presidente* brought him into conflict with the United States government and several prominent U.S. businessmen.

Working behind the scenes to oust Walker was Cornelius Vanderbilt, because Walker was backing a group of businessmen competing with Vanderbilt for the concession to transport gold miners through Nicaragua. It may have been Vanderbilt who actually brought about Walker's downfall since Vanderbilt hired soldiers of fortune Sylvanus Spencer and William Webster to



**ABOVE:** Salvadoran soldier goes through prisoner-handling drill following surprise ambush of another unit. Note that soldiers are working in a team. Two riflemen cover the "wounded prisoner" while a third searches him and then prepares to secure the prisoner with rope.

**LEFT:** Salvadoran soldiers rush through target area in live-fire assault course.

doran Army units were being issued and trained on the M79s as they rotated through the RMTC. U.S. troops are issued with the M203 over-and-under (5.56mm barrel on top and 40mm on bottom) rifle/grenade launcher, but many grenadiers out there will tell you one M79 is worth a bunch of M203s. It can't all be nostalgia.

It is also during the first week of training at the RMTC that troops are taught individual and fire-team movement under fire and how to select a firing point. They also learn how to dig a two-man firing position.

In the second, third and fourth weeks, the training advances from squad, to platoon, to company, to battalion training — depending on how quickly the unit progresses. The training routine is from 0500 to 1700 during the first week, but as the intensity increases, the training day gets longer and there is a con-

*Continued on page 82*

lead a series of armed raids from Costa Rica against Walker in 1857 which forced him out of the country.

But by the spring of 1860, Walker was back in Central America with another army. A long-standing dispute between Great Britain and Honduras over the Bay Islands, just off Honduras' Mosquito Coast, was settled in 1859 when Honduras got possession of the islands. This pleased neither the English landowners nor the English-speaking Black Caribbean natives on the islands.

Walker set out in the spring of 1860 with 100 men to Roatan, the largest of the three Bay Islands, with the idea that he would take the Bay Islands first and then use them as a launching site to take back Nicaragua, of which he still considered himself president.

The Brits, somewhat suspicious of the influx of Yankee tourists to Roatan, sent ships of war.

Walker decided to move onto an uninhabited island named Cozumel, just across from Trujillo, Honduras. Then on 5 August, Walker's 100 men, with 40 cartridges per man and no artillery, decided to capture Trujillo, which was protected by a garrison lodged in a fort built in the time of the *conquistadores*.

Walker's men landed in a small cove some three miles from Trujillo and marched to the fort, then took it in a 15-minute battle.

Since Walker's conquering army was composed more of pirates than real soldiers of fortune, it fell apart



**After his execution, William Walker was reportedly buried in a shallow grave on the beach which was obliterated by the ocean. If true, it would appear his body was later moved: He now lies in cemetery in Trujillo. Townspeople said headstone was put up a long time ago, but iron fence was added recently.**

quickly. The British moved in a warship commanded by Norvell Salmon, and Honduran President Santos Guardiola, fondly known as "The Butcher," brought up 700 troops to pressure Walker. On 22 August Walker broke out of Trujillo with the intention of marching south to Nicaragua. By 3 September, Walker's force had been whittled down to fewer than 50 by the Honduran soldiers in what has been described as "desperate fang-and-claw fighting" in the jungles of the Mosquito Coast.

Walker surrendered to Salmon, who promptly forgot his word of

honor and turned him over to the Hondurans. Guardiola, "The Butcher," signed the execution order and on 12 September Walker was taken out of the fort and shot in a field near the beach. The legend is that Walker died well; he certainly handled it better than the firing squad did. They failed to kill Walker with two volleys and a *coup de grace* was administered.

All the books I have read on Walker say he was buried by Catholic priests in a shallow grave on the beach, soon obliterated by the sea. That "shallow-grave-by-the-sea" story may need a new ending, however.

Using my "border Spanish" I was able — with some difficulty — to find a cemetery, tucked away in a section of Trujillo where the streets were still paved with cobblestones probably laid down in the last century. The overgrown cemetery was surrounded by a stone wall and locked tight, but after a little negotiation with the neighbors, I went over the wall with a youngster for a guide.

There I found Walker.

Even though Walker is hardly loved by Central Americans, he had a nice tombstone put up by the church a long time back and, quite recently, some of the townspeople had *gone together* and paid for an iron fence to protect his tombstone.

Whether one agrees with what William Walker perceived as his destiny and that of Central America, one has to admire his courage. ✕

# CENTRAL AMERICA

**T**EGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS — This morning was strange. A bit before noon I sat in the deserted bar of the Hotel Maya, toying with a luke-warm Salva Vidas beer and remembering other wars and other places. The muzak system was playing "Proud Mary," the same number that tuneless Vietnamese bands thumped out endlessly at BOQ 1 in Saigon, in the last days of '75 just before the collapse. I was getting quietly soused. It was pleasant, thinking about sitting in the Asian darkness, talking to whomever I was with that evening and listening to the guns at Ben Cat. But that's another story.

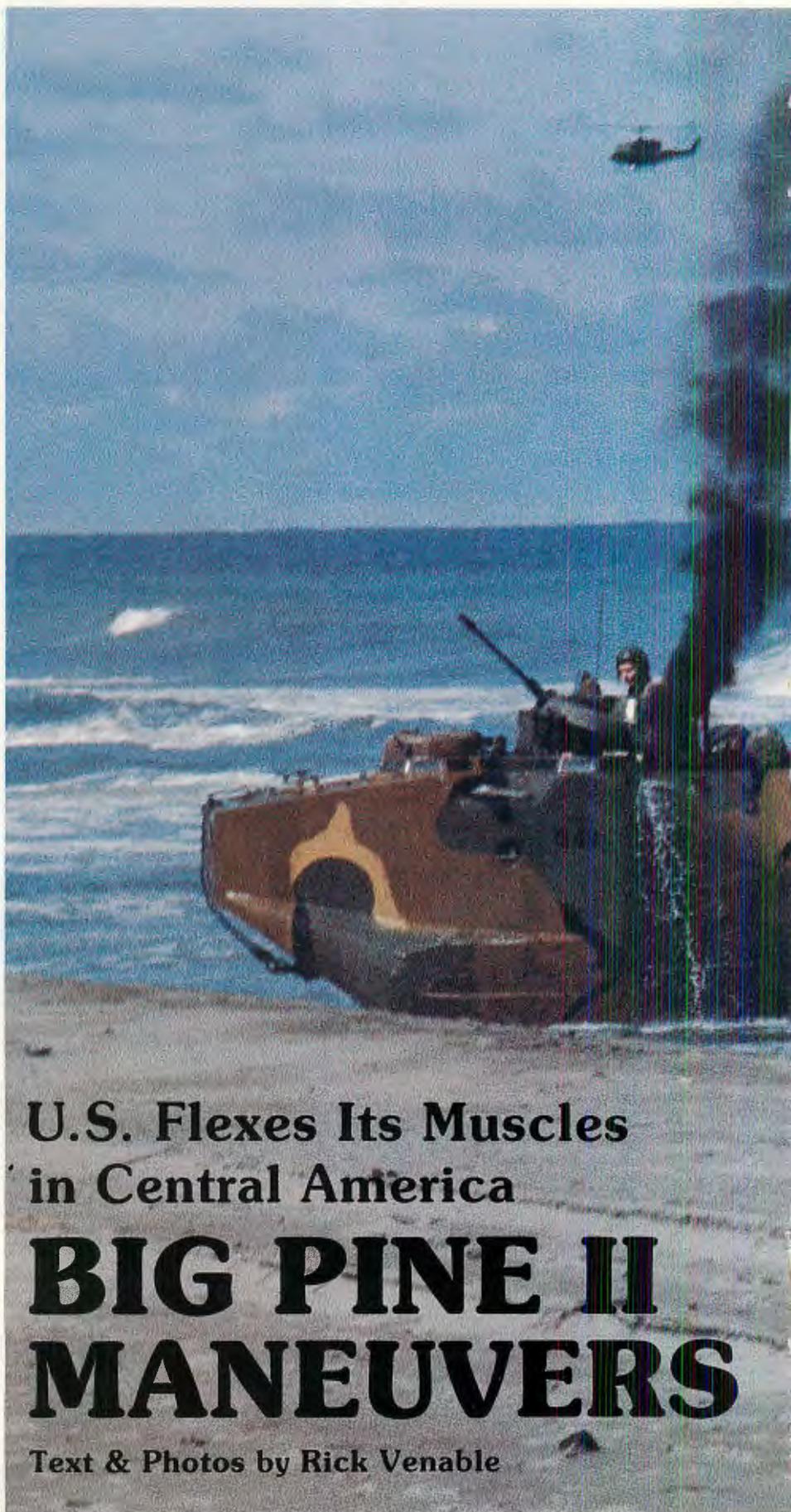
Then a muscular G.I. — not young — walked in, wearing a T-shirt that stopped me in my tracks. It showed a huge yellow Vietnamese moon over dark jungle, with two choppers silhouetted against it. They looked to be early Cobras and they were flying low, tight and fast. The legend above said, "Running Hot and Black," and below, "Sin Loi, Victor Charlie." That shirt had been washed a thousand times. The guy had been there.

'Nam was written all over this place, at least in a superficial sense. G.I.s congregated in the lobby just as they did in Saigon — the same physically fit, short-haired, confident young studs I used to know. Even the terrain was familiar. Through the plate-glass window the mountains rose jagged and steep, covered with ragged vegetation, somehow familiar. The slopes, brilliant green and patched with darker growth, glowed in incredibly clear tropical light that I think of as Asian because I first saw it in Da Nang. The peaks were disappearing fast into a gathering storm. Lightning flickered, outlining them with a sullen red light. The vegetation took on darker hues as the light failed. The rain came. Peaks grew blurry in the downpour.

The Central Highlands, I thought. The Central everloving Highlands.

Puerto Lempira — A Chinook came fwoop-fwooping into this forsaken, flat, swampy, essentially roadless expanse of nowhere and hovered toward the ground. The flightcrew were U.S. Army. A mob of Hondos rushed toward it, bent over against the rotor wash. A few Hondo troops, small and brown, stood around with M16s. They were friendly, like most of their countrymen. A hook descended from the Chinook and the ground crew attached a cargo sling. Turbines whining, blades cracking, the chopper lifted and sailed off toward distant Indian encampments. Another one came in a few minutes later.

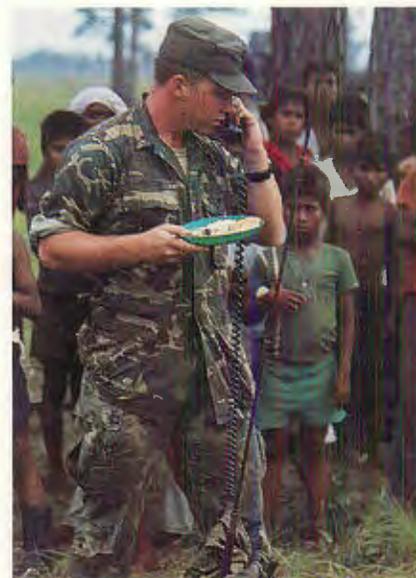
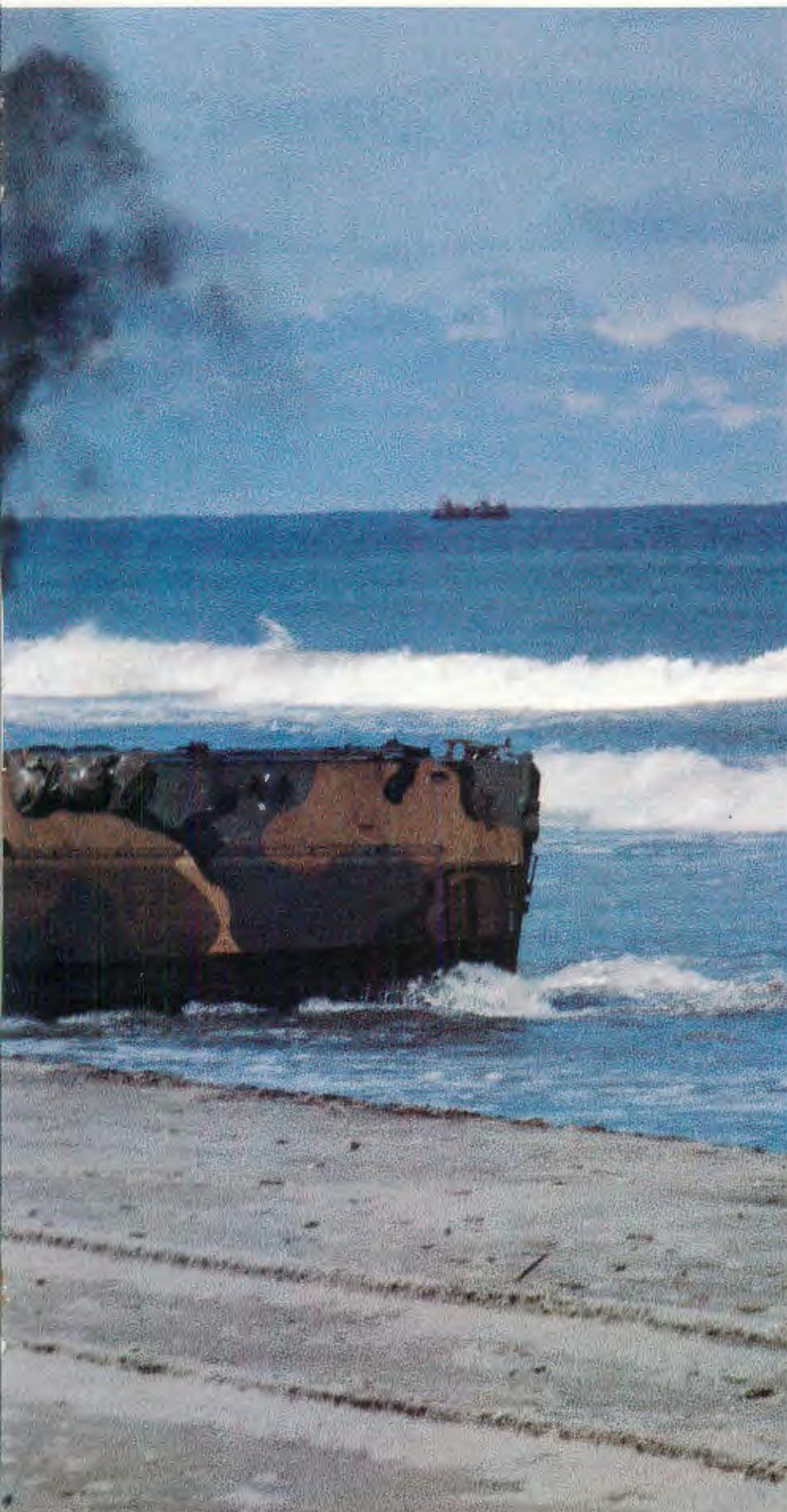
The U.S. Army was flying supplies to



## U.S. Flexes Its Muscles in Central America

# BIG PINE II MANEUVERS

Text & Photos by Rick Venable



**ABOVE:** Army Staff Sgt. Proctor gets pulled away from lunch to communicate with another unit during Civic Action program in Miskito settlement.

**LEFT:** Marine LVTP-7 rolls out of waves onto beach at Trujillo during 28th Marine Amphibious Unit exercise at Trujillo. The LVTP-7 has a crew of three, can carry 25 combat-equipped Marines and has a range of 300 miles. Photo: Jim Graves

the Miskito Indians in the northeast to keep them from starving. The chow was from CARE, and it reached the Indians slung beneath CK-47s. The Miskitos lived quietly in Nicaragua until the Sandinistas decided that the Indians should live like good Marxists, which the Indians didn't want to do. Brutality, Central America's most readily available product, followed. The Indians fled. Away from their farms, they would starve without help.

Except for the monotonous arrival and departure of choppers, it was a typical military day, long and slow: Hurry up and wait. In the operations shack, I chatted with the men and women running the airlift. Woman, I should say: A female G.I. was working the radios, running air-traffic control in native Spanish and native English. A bilingual. I've seen a lot of that down here. If we get into another war in these parts, we will have a hell of a lot of troops who speak the language and know the culture. It should make a big difference.

An officer told me things are going well. They've been at it long enough now, using the equipment hard, to know how well the system works.

"This really gives us a chance to stretch our wings and see how well we do what we are supposed to do.

# CENTRAL AMERICA

Stateside training is OK, but realistically it has drawbacks. The trouble is that you've always been to the training ground before, so you know what to expect."

Despite the impression given in the press, the Army is looking at the maneuvers here mostly as a chance to do some realistic training. Nicaragua may be thinking more deeply about what it all means. Anyway, our logistics people seem to be getting the most out of it. Somebody once said, "Amateurs talk strategy; professionals talk logistics." There's something to it: no bullets, no shoot. And in a war in this roadless country, logistics will be crucial.

"And you've always got resources that aren't there in the real thing," continued the officer. "You know that if the radio doesn't work and you don't have the right part, you can go down to Radio Shack and get something resembling what you need. Maybe you have to do some weird tricks to make it fit, but the techs can do it. Here you'd better have the part. In fact, here you'd better know what the hell you're doing."

They seemed to know what they were doing. This isn't the Army of ten years ago.

As I was boarding a UH-60 to go to the Indian areas, a C-130 droned in, a bladder-bird — nice phrase — bringing gas for the helos. Before it had stopped, a man-high bladder of gas started rolling off the tail-ramp. I watched it and thought about how much is written in Washington about the incompetence of the military. Funny, in a few days the Army can slap a runway into untouched jungle, toss up maintenance facilities, quarters, revetments, gas points and the works, and be moving a potload of cargo through. It would take Washington six months just to decide to do it, three years to litigate the contract, two years to build the runway wrong, and a year to realize it was no longer needed. Oh well.

From a few thousand feet over this jungled country, you realize that it's pretty much empty. We raced for a long time over green nothingness marked by slowly twisting brown rivers, very occasionally seeing three or four huts on the banks. There are zero roads. The side doors were open so our feet hung over several thousand feet of nothing, a good feeling. Finally our Blackhawk settled down in a clearing, and there were the Indians.

Half were barefoot, a sure-fire way to get hookworms. They looked like a bunch of brown pirates dressed in a wild collection of rags and odds and ends. Outside of Africa, I have never seen people so weather-beaten. They



**ABOVE:** Marine CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters orbit above the USS Nassau off Honduran coast during Big Pine II exercises. Landing Helicopter Assault ships like the Nassau can carry 1,903 troops, up to 19 CH-53 or 30 CH-46s or a mix of these two, and AV-8A Harrier VSTOL jets. They also have a flooding-type loading dock. LHAs, which are actually larger than WWII Essex-class carriers, have a range of 10,000 miles. Photo: Jim Graves

**RIGHT:** Army troops perform traditional "character building" chore: Pots and pans for the mess sergeant.



swarmed up to the choppers, used to them by now. A few months back they had never seen an airplane near the ground.

A few Pathfinders out of Ft. Campbell squatted in the field, bringing in the birds. Chinooks roared in at frequent intervals and hovered 30 feet above a makeshift log platform, positioning the cargo nets over it. The crew hung out the windows like kids in a hayloft, watching the drop. The supplies had to get in quick before the rains made flying dangerous. By the time the net hit the ground the bird was off for another load and the Indians scrambled for the goodies. It was a funny thing to watch, modern helicopters and Stone Age people.

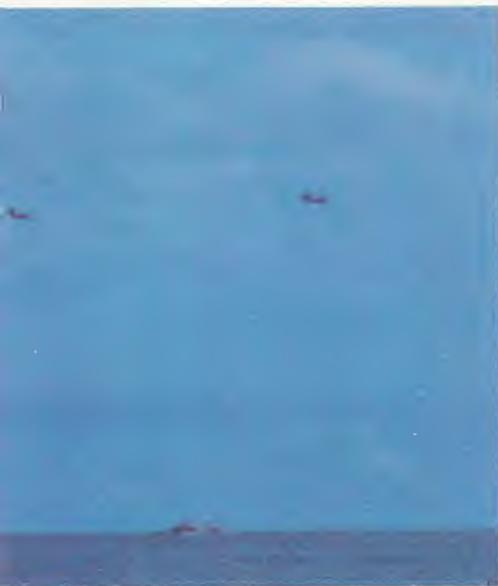
The Indians were healthy as Indians go: If an American had their problems he would check into the hospital for an extensive refit. The pot-bellies of starvation were not in evidence. For the most part their only problems are malaria, several kinds of worms, rotting teeth, untreated infections, parasites, skin diseases, tuberculosis, high infant mortal-

ity, eye diseases, weird fevers — little stuff.

Other camps are not so well off. Medtechs say they die like flies in some places because they refuse to come in for treatment until they are too far gone to save. They're all madder than hell at the Sandinistas. Things don't grow well here, they told me. They want their own land back. A lot of them join the anti-communists in the bush.

Rain began. I ducked into the chopper to wait it out, joined by the crew and an Indian dog that decided he liked airplanes. The pilot broke out a case of Seven-Up. You sweat a lot of water away in the tropics. There being nothing else to do, we started shooting the breeze about the UH-60: one slick, fast machine. A typical pilot would throw his girl to a pack of sexually deprived huskies before he'd give up this plane. Everybody who flies them has tales of their maneuverability.

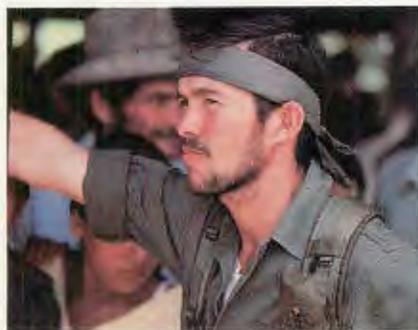
"Yeah, we have fighter jocks come through, mostly talking about how they



**ABOVE:** Inflatable MASH hospital takes six turbines burning chopper gas to keep it up.



**LEFT:** In the "New Army" women are showing up everywhere; here a female trooper holds tent peg in place while her male companion wields the sledge hammer.



**ABOVE:** Honduran soldier assigned to security unit near Puerto Lempira watches over food distribution process.

**BELOW:** Soldiers offload transportable fuel bladders delivered by C-130.



fly the only real airplanes," said one fellow who flies them. "Uh huh," we say, 'let's go for a ride.' We don't really do much. Just go down in the trees a little. Well, sorta under the trees, maybe. I guess most fighter guys don't look up at leaves at 150 knots. Hell, the only way I can stand to look at a leaf is close up, so I can see it. Anyway, the pipejacks usually take it pretty well, only puke a couple of times, 'cause after that they're in shock. I just love a fighter pilot."

Even in the rain, a steady line of Indians carried sacks into their village. Kids were jumping off the bridge over the creek into the stream. The creek served as swimming pool, sewer, and source of cooking water. See why they have problems?

Puerto Lempira — I boarded a C-130 for a flight to the field. Somehow a junior *Time* correspondent had gotten aboard. She was a little girl about four feet high, maybe 23 years old, and couldn't have weighed more than 90 pounds, including her training bra. She had on high heels. We were off to a camp in triple-canopy, for God's sake, and she was wearing high heels. She turned to me on the troop seats and said — so help me, I'm not making this up — "Is this a chopper?"

Oh God, I thought. This is how *Time* gets its news? "Yeah," I told her. "It's a four-engined lateral chopper. New type. Flies frontways. It's still got problems hovering, but they're working on it."

OK, so I'm a wise-ass.

Over Olancho Province — Even from altitude this place scared hell out of me, imagining I got drafted and had to be a grunt. It was mountain country. The peaks were high and wild, with ridges sharp enough to shave with. The valleys usually weren't really valleys: The slopes come together in a V with no flat space between. Patches of mist hung everywhere. The chopper was flying at the height of the peaks. For an instant we raced over thick foliage with branches just below the wheels. The next second we were way the hell up over deep valley. It was like jumping off a high building over and over.

And those slopes, friends and neighbors, were triple canopy. That jungle was as awful as any I have ever seen, nasty, roadless, steep and hot. There is only one way to fight a war in that stuff, at least if I have to do it: Nuke it into glass, and wash it with Windex.

The terrain flattened some and we landed in a Hondo military camp in jungle. The sun was now out but the ground was patched with mud as thick and goopy as chewing gum. The base was a primitive affair of ramshackle huts with soldiers wandering around. A military spokesman showed up and told me we would go see the fruits of victory against the godless communists. At that point I realized I was going to get the standard Third-World show-and-tell, a routine that I have seen in slight variation in Israel, Angola, Cambodia, Vietnam, Taiwan and a few other places.

First comes the lecture about the extreme patriotism of the local peasants, their deep love for freedom, democracy and all the rest, and their loathing hatred of the evil enemy. It may even be true, but you get it even if it isn't. In a hot, cramped hut the officers went over maps while a hundred or so local villagers tried to squeeze in and watch. The villagers were not the least frightened of

# CENTRAL AMERICA



the soldiers, suggesting that the Hondo army has not been brutalizing the population. Then we heard about the wonderful work of the military doctors in fixing up the locals. It was probably true. Still, after enough of these things you notice that the only time a government gets medical urges is when there's danger of insurgency. If they had med teams out in the bush all the time, insurgencies would never get off the ground.

Next comes the display of captured weapons. There were lots of them on ponchos out back—mostly M16s, a few M79s, grenades, some RPGs, and a Galil. The best guess is that the bad guys are using U.S. stuff from North Vietnam so they can pretend that they are Honduran citizens in rebellion, not infiltrators from Nicaragua. I copied down serial numbers for Pete Kokalis, to find out where the weapons really came from. The Galil was probably from the PLO or captured from Somoza's troops.

The Hondos say they have been cooling a fair number of bad guys by the simple but ballsy process of hunting



**Miskito refugees from Nicaragua hauling CARE supplies across bridge into their camp.**

**CH-47 helicopter lifts off with slingload of supplies donated by CARE for Miskito Indians.**



**ABOVE:** U.S. Army UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

**RIGHT:** Aviation mechanic works on UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

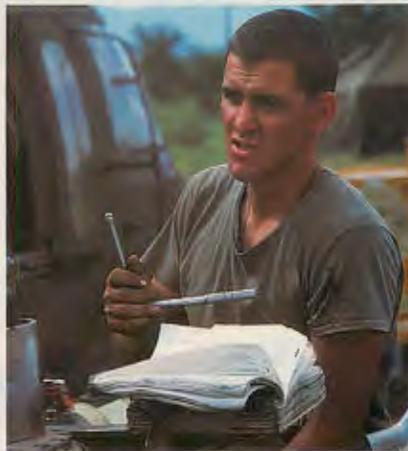
them down in the jungle. A few men go out together, stay for days and, if they're lucky, zap a couple of guerrillas. The commander says that some of the guerrillas have died of hunger and exhaustion: The terrain, as I said before, is not the best. They also say they found one guy who had been shot by his own people, perhaps in a disciplinary discussion.

For what it's worth, the Hondo intel people said that something like a hundred guerrillas were training in Nicaragua for infiltration in coming months.

Next we saw three alleged Nicaraguan prisoners, smallish brown kids in fatigues. Since I got to talk to them only with armed Hondos around, the interview didn't amount to much.

Finally we went into the jungle to meet a patrol which was coming in. The jungle interested me more than the patrol. It was grim: shallow creeks overhung with vines, bugs in clouds, mud, steep slopes, foliage so thick you couldn't see ten feet. Within five minutes of walking I was streaming sweat, and I'm not out of shape. I'm not sure why even a snake would live in this stuff, but lots of them do.

The patrol appeared more or less where it was supposed to, five guys in paint and cammies. Their boots came out of the mud with sucking noises. They had slop from the swamps up to their knees, and the rest of them was wet from sweat. Most wore headbands because there is no other way to keep from being blinded by the constant trickle of sweat. They seemed to know what they were doing. The trouble is that the guerrillas may know what *they're* doing too.



I had forgotten what real jungle is like — the funny silence that sucks up noise and strangles it, the dim eerie light that makes photography almost impossible, the nervousness that comes with not knowing what's behind lush plants with leaves the size of fans. And wet feet. Thirty seconds after stepping into the growth, your feet are wet. They'll stay that way for the duration.

Back into the Blackhawks for the trip back to Tegucigalpa. The jungle below us turned murky and indistinct as we flew through rain. I wish the Hondos well, but I'm glad it's them and not me.

Comayagua — This is the headquarters for the whole operation, located aboard the Hondo airbase of Palmerola. Very little here smacks of maneuvers. It is a staff operation of a size to support a major influx of troops. The Public Affairs Office says yeah, that's exactly what it is: We're just practicing. They point out that there are almost no U.S. combat troops in-country. There is some artillery up around Trujillo in the far northeast, but that's really combat support. The SF outfits are for training, not combat. Only maybe 3,500 gringos are here at all. Just big pretend exercises, see?

Yeah. And just practicing, we're putting in several 3,500-foot runways, which will handle C-130s. The tent city here at Comayagua is attached to the national electric grid, and is tapping into sewage lines. Wooden hooches of the kind we had in 'Nam are going up. Some buildings have air-conditioning. Practicing... right?

There is pressure for more U.S. involvement. The Spanish-language papers were saying American aid was inadequate. The Hondos, having received intel reports that the Sandinistas have 20 or so Soviet tanks, want anti-armor training. Only a small part of the Nico-Hondo border is tank country, but the Hondos are upset.

I went to the chopper-maintenance area to talk with the mechanics. One of them was female. It's a different army these days. They reported that the Blackhawks were doing well, seeing the beginning of harder maintenance problems that come with weeks of brutal use, but not a real trouble. It's a complicated bird, they said, and you had to have good mechanics, but the Army did. I wondered what would happen when the U.S. economy picked up and the services had to take dummies again.

The last stop of the show was one of those inflatable hospitals that look like rubber quonset huts. You blow them up like beachballs and, presto, 65 beds, operating rooms, the whole works. I had never seen one, having left 'Nam before they came into use. One of the nurses spoke Spanish: That will be important before long. The trouble is that keeping the damned thing inflated takes six turbines burning chopper gas. A six-engine jet hospital. The director said that the first ward could be put up in an hour, though, which is good news in bush country.

As I was getting ready to leave, a colonel came up holding a piece of wire.

"Wire tap," he said half annoyed and half amused. It seems that some of his troops had been unable to get use of a certain phone line that was always busy, so... a field expedient. The Army runs on a mixture of larceny and coffee.

Back at Tegucigalpa. The Maya is a great hotel. Every morning I'd chow down while the fog drifted in, rolled across the rumpled slopes, and swallowed whole villages in creeping mist. It was like those gray monsoon mornings in Da Nang when the cloud cover hung 12 feet off the ground for hours. Later the Honduran sun burned the fog from the higher elevations and the peaks glowed with that eerie light, so sharp you could count trees on the ridgeline. And in the lobby the GIs were coming through. ☒

**I**N September 1981, Mario Aguirre Rodriguez, an illiterate bread seller from Olancho Province, Honduras, got the chance of a lifetime.

Teofilo Martinez, the German-born leader of a peasant group in Olancho, sent Mario, who had never been to school, off to study "literacy." For a Central American *campesino*, the ability to read and write is the difference between being poor and rich.

Twenty-two months later, in July 1983, Mario returned to Honduras. He and 96 companions made their way to Olancho on little-used trails, at night, wearing dark-green uniforms, carrying rifles and headed for an area marked on aviation maps: "relief data incomplete." Mario was headed into some of the toughest, meanest terrain in Central America: a land of jagged, jungle-covered mountains, no roads, few trails, almost no people, little drinkable water and even less food.

Mario was now a Honduran communist guerrilla.

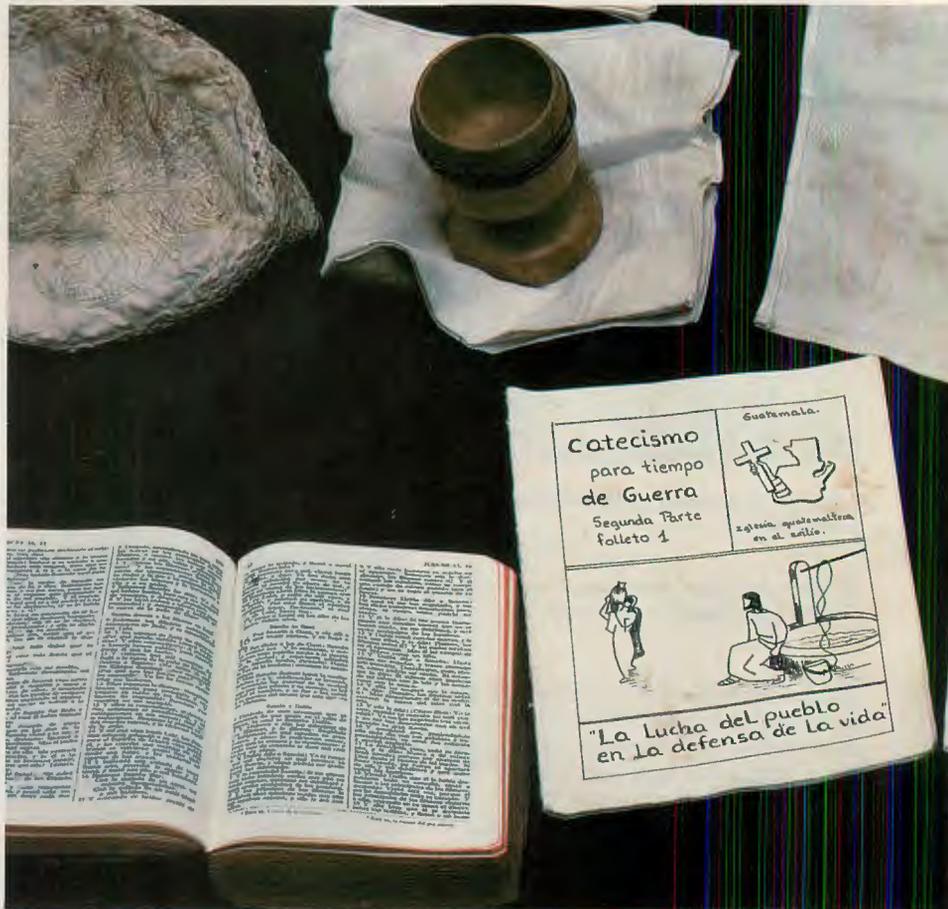
The mission of Mario and his comrades was to establish a camp in the mountains. They were not to fight; in fact, they were to avoid contact with the Honduran Army, and concentrate on building bunkers, safe houses, food- and arms-storage facilities, and training guerrillas. Their *comandante*, Pablo Mendoza (all the guerrillas used a *nom de guerre*), working through his agents like Teofilo Martinez and two Catholic priests, one named "Mario" and another named "Father Guadalupe," planned to recruit more guerrillas in the villages of Olancho Province and send them up to the mountain camp to be trained.

On 1 August, Mario and a companion were sent some distance from the main camp to build a rest hut.

They never returned. Mario and his comrade walked to Juticalpa where they surrendered to Honduras' 11th Infantry Battalion. Mario told the army he wanted to surrender because "I never agreed with what they were going to do — to come and fight in Honduras."

Later in August, Mario, Jose Nicolas Castro Flores (who left another group of guerrillas in July) and Lt. Ramon Arturo Colindre (who deserted on 8 August from the Olancho group) were selected from a group of 15 former guerrillas by *Soldier of Fortune Magazine* Publisher Robert K. Brown and me to be interviewed. Their story agreed with information told to other journalists by the other 12 former guerrillas being held in protective custody by the Honduran Army.

All three had been recruited under false pretenses, sent to Managua,



## Shanghaied Honduran Guerrillas Defect and Tell

# DEATH IN OLANCHO

by Jim Graves

**UH-60 helicopter sweeps over river in thick-jungled Olancho Province, Honduras. Photo: Rick Venable**

Nicaragua, and then to Cuba, where they were enrolled in the Ernesto Che Guevara, or P-30, School. Mario and Ramon were returned to Nicaragua in 1983, armed and became part of a communist band which was sent across the Honduran border to set up the communist base camp in Olancho. Jose had a similar experience.



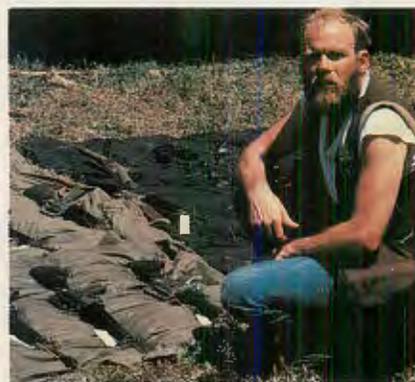


**ABOVE:** At least three Catholic priests were involved in recruiting communist guerrillas in Olancho. These propaganda materials, "Catechism For War Time" and "Reflections on Honduran Marxist-Christianity," and a wooden cup used in administering the Catholic Eucharist sacrament were probably from the personal possessions of "Father Guadalupe," the *nom de guerre* of Canadian Jesuit priest James B. Carey, who died as a result of starvation and dehydration while running from Honduran soldiers. Photo: Rick Venable

Jose, 21, single and clean-shaven, had been a farmer. Mario, 29, not married but father of four, sold bread. Ramon, 31, single and father of two, was also a farmer. All were born and lived in Olancho Province, which is generally east and north of Honduras' capital, Tegucigalpa. Olancho is sparsely populated, underdeveloped and not completely mapped. Olancho and the province to the northeast, Gracias A Dios ("Thanks To God"), are part of Miskitia (the land of the Miskito Indians that generally comprises the Atlantic coasts of Nicaragua and Honduras), and have jungles thick with mahogany trees and rivers laced with



**ABOVE:** SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown takes notes while translator Marty Casey (right) talks with former Honduran guerrillas Mario Aguirre Rodriguez (second from left) and Jose Nicolas Castro Flores. The two young men essentially were shanghaied from Honduras, transported to Nicaragua and then Cuba, where they were forced to go through a guerrilla training school. They turned themselves in to Honduran officials when they crossed illegally into Honduras. Photo: Jim Graves



**ABOVE:** SOF's Rick Venable with M16s taken from communist guerrillas. Photo: Rick Venable



**ABOVE, BELOW:** These Nicaraguan guerrillas were captured in Honduran Special Forces sweep of Olancho. Photos: Rick Venable



gold. Both these valuable natural resources are there for the taking — if you have the equipment and a way to get them out of Olancho. *Campeminos* have neither.

Ramon, like Mario, was recruited by Martinez. He told Ramon he had arranged for him to attend a school for political- and agrarian-reform training in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Traveling together, Mario and Ramon were sent first to Tegucigalpa. There, they were told that their destination had been changed to Managua. Passports were obtained for them by collaborators in Tegucigalpa and they were sent on to Managua.

This did not bother either of them. Although some people had become suspicious of Nicaragua's two-year-old Sandinista government by 1981, that suspicion had not worked its way to rural Olancho Province. To the *campeminos* in Olancho, Nicaragua was just a Central American country with which Honduras had enjoyed friendly relations for a long time.

# CENTRAL AMERICA

Jose's story was similar. He had been introduced to a Catholic priest named Bernardo Gulian through his cousin. Gulian, a Frenchman, was a member of a Catholic sect called Celebrators of the Word. Gulian told Jose he could arrange for him to attend an auto-mechanics school in San Pedro Sula; his destination was also changed to Managua after Jose was en route. Jose said he was never worried; that he actually looked forward to traveling to another country and "besides the church was responsible, so it was okay."

Jose arrived in Managua on 3 July 1981 (Ramon and Mario, in a group of 12, came on 20 November). The next day, Jose was taken to Augusto Cesar Sandino International Airport in Managua and put aboard a *Cubana de Aviacion* airplane. Even that did not worry Jose. It was his first airplane ride and he thought the plane was going to another city in Nicaragua.

Once they were off the ground, the destination was announced: Havana. "That's when I got nervous and started to cry," said Jose, "I thought they might kill me." Jose had joined Latin America's "disappeared."

In Havana, Jose learned he was traveling in a group of 20 Honduran "recruits." They were met at the airport by a man named Osmani, who shepherded them first to a hospital for a physical, and then on a bus for a two-hour ride to Pinar del Rio Province. Jose said the camp they were taken to was near the town of San Cristobal, between the Loma del Taurete and Loma del Solon ranges, which would place it about 80 miles west of Havana.

The new recruits were lined up in front of one of the barracks and found out that they had arrived at School P-30. They were told that in two days their political/military training would start. By then Jose knew that he would not receive "literacy training." He was in a school for guerrillas.

He did not know — and never learned — that he had actually landed in the Ernesto Che Guevara School. Nor did Ramon or Julio ever know that they were being trained at a school named

**TOP: Russian F-1 and American M67 hand grenades were taken from dead or captured guerrillas in Olancho Province. Photo: Rick Venable**

**CENTER: 40mm rounds for M79 grenade launchers taken from shanghaied guerrillas. Photo: Rick Venable**

**BOTTOM: Weapons taken from guerrillas included Israeli 5.56mm Galil assault rifle, M60 machine gun, Russian RPG-2 grenade launchers and PG-2 grenades. Photo: Rick Venable**





Map by Kyle Smith



for the infamous Latin American guerrilla. To them, it was known simply as P-30. The official name of the school was revealed in 1981 by some captured Columbian M19 guerrillas, who had gone through the school in 1980.

P-30 rules forbade the Hondurans from talking to students in other barracks; in fact, they were not allowed to go more than 25 meters from their barracks unescorted. However, the Hondurans learned that the camp consisted of 30 barracks designated "School P-1, P-2," etc. The camp housed Costa Ricans, Panamanians, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Bolivians, Chileans and other groups of Hondurans.

The training routine was similar for all the schools. Each morning the recruits studied politics (the history of Cuba, Marxism and Leninism) for three hours, and spent the rest of the day in practical classes on military tactics, communications, reconnaissance, topography, military sanitation, first aid, engineering, marksmanship, weapons familiarization, demolitions, heavy-weapons training and one subject called "enemy army." All instructors were Cuban.

Based on Ramon's description of the courses, the training was thorough and weapons training was incredibly comprehensive.

In the area of infantry arms, the troops learned to disassemble, clean, assemble and fire the U.S. M16, M1 Garand, M1 and M2 .30-caliber carbines, M3 .45-caliber submachine gun, Browning .30-caliber machine gun, M60 machine gun, M2 .50-caliber

*Continued on page 87*

**Map 1 (top) shows area of Honduras where communist guerrillas operated. Map 2 (middle) shows approximate route of guerrillas into Honduras from frontier crossing west of Bocay, Nicaragua. Guerrillas crossed over near Siminca River, then went northwest to near *Portel del Inferno* (Gate to Hell) and finally north along Patuca River.**

**Jose Maria Reyes Matta was leader of communist guerrillas tracked down by Honduran Special Forces in Olancho Province last August. Mata (photo in inset was taken in 1970s) was killed in action. A Honduran, he attended Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow and according to communist sources fought with Che Guevara's band in Bolivia.**

# HURED GUNS

## Special Missions Group Arms the Canadian Film Industry

Text & Photos

by Richard of S.M.G.

“HELLO, Special Missions Group? I need 20 foreign automatic weapons to be used by the CIA on a training program at The Farm. I also need eight handguns for a CIA pistol range. Can you supply four AK-47s and your men to train four terrorists to take over an American Embassy? In addition, we need 75 Com-Bloc weapons for an arms cache in Czechoslovakia. Can you deliver?”

“Of course.”

Double-agent spooks negotiating triple-cross schemes against American and Russian governments? No. This is “Hollywood North” in Toronto, Canada, and the person placing the order is prop master for the film, *The Amateur*, starring John Savage, Marthe Keller and Christopher Plummer.

The order is typical of many placed with Special Missions Group, Ltd. (SMG) — three firearms collectors who rent weapons and expertise to Canadian film makers.

About three years ago, tax breaks designed to develop the nation’s film industry attracted movie makers to Canada. When they set up shop, they found that they would be unable to bring firearms from American rental companies across the border. Guns were being written out of scenes and companies were limited in the types of action films that they could attempt.

When the producers of *The Amateur* came to Canada, they hired prop master John “Frenchy” Berger. Weapons were required, so Berger phoned his friend Richard, a gun collector and well-known small-arms expert, to see if he could help. And it was with this phone call that SMG was born. Richard and two of his friends, Ron (a former RCMP and Ontario Provincial Police officer) and Rocky (a helicopter

### MOVIE MERC

Richard of SMG is the *nom de guerre* of the founder of Special Missions Group, Ltd. Since establishing SMG in 1980, he has worked with the Canadian film industry in many capacities: renting weapons, providing technical advice, orchestrating stunts and battle scenes and even appearing before the cameras.

Richard also owns a construction company in Toronto and holds a B.A. in Political Science from York University. He has given lectures and demonstrations as a civilian adviser to the Canadian Army, and he was an observer with the Israeli Army during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, spending time in the Golan Heights and Suez. He was in Lebanon recently as a guest of the Israeli Army.

Richard has written articles for the *Canadian Defense Quarterly*. This is his first contribution to SOF.

BELOW: Actor Ed Lauter, leaning against tree with M16A1, prepares to assassinate John Savage in Czechoslovakian border-crossing scene.





**ABOVE:** Actress Chappelle Jaffe rounds up hostages in *The Amateur* with Czech vz.58 assault rifle.

**LEFT:** An example of the type of uniforms that SMG can supply: original PLO camouflage fatigues, kafiyyeh and Romanian AKMS with plastic magazine.

pilot with 10 years' experience in the Canadian armored and reconnaissance corps), had new jobs.

To the movie people, it was clear from the beginning that Richard, Ron and Rocky were professionals. In the first scene of *The Amateur*, the terrorists were to walk into the "embassy" and call out, "Line up against the wall!" SMG was determined to make this scene convincing. They put it to the actors simply: "If you're terrorists, you terrorize!" So they trained actors Nick Campbell, Miguel Fernandes and Chappelle

Jaffe in the methods and tactics of real-life terrorists — weapons use, dealing with hostages and cover and movement techniques.

Actor Campbell later said in a television interview, "Without these guys' help, we couldn't have had the explosive introduction to the film. Thank God they came along to teach us about the weapons and how they were used. The film wouldn't have hung together at all without the proper terror in the first 11 minutes."

Psyched up after SMG training, Jaffe became the German terrorist she played, spending the next several days terrorizing the film crew and extras on the set. She crept around corners and climbed down fire escapes, stalking and attacking unfortunate crew members who would suddenly find themselves looking down the muzzle of a Czech vz.58 assault rifle.

Campbell was trained to immobilize and

manipulate prisoners by grabbing them by the scruff of the neck, bending them over backward, and shoving an AK-47 into the small of their backs. When he demonstrated this new-found technique to the actress who played his victim, she said, "Oh, darling, that's too violent. We won't do that. We'll just play it by ear."

Campbell turned to SMG's Ron and confided, "That's too good a move to leave out. Let's do it anyway." On camera, Campbell swiftly carried out his moves, causing the terrified actress to whimper hysterically — and realistically.

SMG learned something about their own skills when actor/terrorist Fernandes said, "Why do you look more professional and at home with the weapon than I do?"

Richard answered, "It's because you use it as a prop and I use it as a weapon. I think about how I would have to employ it and you're just holding it."

SMG training techniques are based on the understanding that most actors have never fired a gun, and if they have, it was only with blanks. They must be taught to balance themselves to counteract recoil and to respond to the action of their weapon. They must also learn to be alert and prepared for peripheral threats and to turn with the muzzle following the direction in which their eyes are moving — all basic stuff to anyone with military weapons training.

SMG also arranged for the equipment necessary to various scenes. AK-47 blanks were imported from Finland. Blank-firing adaptors (BFAs) had to be tapped with metric threading. Much experimentation was required to size a BFA for each caliber.

One scene, ostensibly on a CIA range, used 20 automatic weapons, all different, all shooting different blank calibers, all fitted with different BFAs. Among the weapons were M16s, AR-10s, CAR-15s, Galils, AK-47s, vz.58s, vz.25s, Sterlings and UZIs. The blanks came from Norway, Finland, Sweden, the United States, Canada and France. (Unfortunately, the scene was cut out of the final picture.)

Another scene would take place at a police indoor shooting range. The special-effects man was all set to rig targets with explosive squibs to simulate bullet hits. When Richard discovered that squibs cost seven dollars each, he told Director Charles Jarrott, "Why not use real bullets? I'll charge you 35 cents a shot."

Film people never use live rounds on a set and were petrified at the thought. All personnel firing on the range were experienced SMG marksmen. The only actor on the range, John Savage, was given blanks to fire and Richard stood in the next firing position to him, firing live rounds into Savage's target. From 10 yards, Richard placed every shot in the 10 ring with his Colt Gold Cup. Savage was thrilled, saying, "When you do that on camera, my fans will love it and I'll look great!"

Unfortunately for Savage, the director took Richard aside and said, "Remember, Savage is an amateur. I want you to hit



ABOVE: SMG specialists portray CIA trainees at "The Farm" in rifle range scene from *The Amateur*. Note Sterling SMG, G3 rifle and AKMS.



LEFT: Richard (on left) wears Egyptian uniform and carries Russian AK-47. Rocky (in middle) wears Rhodesian camouflage and carries M16 with M203 grenade launcher. Ron wears British DPM camouflage and carries Armalite AR-10 with heavy barrel and bipod as made for Portugal. On board across top: German MP 44 assault rifle. Vertical on board, left to right: AKMS, AKM, Czech vz. 58V, East German MPiK (AK-47), Chinese Type 56-I (AKMS), Chinese Type 56 (AK-47). On ground, left to right: Degtyarev DP, Chinese RPG-2, Russian PPSH-41, German MG 42.

anywhere on the target except in the middle." In the finished film, you can see the dismay on Savage's face as the targets are brought back.

In a scene which was supposedly located on the Czech border, SMG equipped 30 border guards with ComBloc weapons. It was the first of many sad experiences the group had with gun-carrying extras.

Two men in a jeep had to be real Czechoslovakians who spoke the language; therefore, SMG men could not be used. The two extras were required to leap from the jeep, run to a hilltop, fire a burst from one weapon, then run down the hill.

Terrified about the danger of an accidental discharge, SMG taught the extra (with blanks in his AK-47) to remove the safety only after he reached the firing position. Finally, after many frustrating struggles and three ruined takes, he was able to manipulate the safety within a reasonable length of time. He was so proud of himself that he opened fire — as his comrade stepped in front of him. The authentic Czech actor turned to his gun-shooting comrade and screamed, "SHEE-IT!"

Needless to say, several more takes were required.

For the film, *The Wars* (a World War I epic based on the book of the same name written by Timothy Findlay), Ron gave advice on such things as what a batman

would wear and how he would address his officer. Unfortunately, the film company had hired a female researcher who would not listen to any advice.

She had seen a picture in a book and mistook walking-out dress for combat dress. She sent soldiers into battle without canteens or spare ammo pouches, even though the film company had imported mountains of WWI webbing and equipment from England. SMG fought with the director and got their way some of the time, but only when they felt it was vital.

The film was based on a book in which the hero uses a 455 Webley automatic (not the revolver). Not only is this gun very rare, but it had to be engineered to fire blanks. (It was necessary to have special dies and brass made to make blanks.) Other guns supplied for this movie were 455 Webley revolvers, No. 1 MK III Lee Enfields, Lugers, a scoped German Mauser sniper rifle, and Lewis and Maxim machine guns.

During all filming, SMG men sleep and eat with their guns, never letting them out of their sight. This is standard procedure. Guns are not sent to the set to be used by actors without supervision. They are taken by SMG people to be properly secured and their use supervised. And with good reason.

One of the gun-rental calls which SMG



**LEFT:** Infantry section outfitted by SMG as WWI Canadian soldiers in film, *The Wars*. Note Lee Enfield No. 1 Mk III's and Lewis Gun.



**ABOVE:** Ron (in middle) and film crewmen prepare for house-clearing exercise during gold mine robbery.

**RIGHT:** Ron (standing at left in padded jacket) with Czechoslovakian border guards. Note PPSH-41 submachine guns, AK-47 rifles, and Degtyarev light machine gun.

received was from the *First Blood* film, starring Sylvester Stallone. SMG was asked to supply 60 weapons for a Vietnam flashback scene. The film was to be shot in northern British Columbia, away from home base. The only security which the film company would supply for the guns was a locked prop van. This was totally inadequate. SMG refused to supply the movie unless the location for this one scene was shot closer to home base where security could be guaranteed.

After SMG's refusal, the film company received special dispensation from British Columbia's attorney general to bring in



automatic weapons from a Hollywood-based company. The Americans shipped the guns with no advisers and no security. A total of 54 firearms were stolen from the locked van, including M16 rifles and M60 machine guns. They have not been found.

The film, *Police Academy*, starring Kim Cattrall and Steve Guttenberg (both of *Porky's* fame), made movie stars out of Ron and Rocky.

Ron and Rocky were hired to teach actors how to play rough-and-tough drill instruc-

tors on the model of Lou Gosset in *An Officer and a Gentleman*. The director, Hugh Wilson, watched Ron and Rocky coaching the actors who were to portray the police drill instructors.

Suddenly he said to them, "You do the scene. When I say, 'Action!' both of you start dressing down the recruits. The scene goes for three minutes. Make up your own lines."

They began, one at each end of the line of recruits (extras), heaping abuse on them. Within moments, the entire film crew, who had never seen how a real DI can mercilessly torment some unfortunate recruit, was convulsed with laughter. As they finished, everyone broke into applause. Two stars had been born.

In one scene, five-foot-seven-inch Rocky was required to berate the famous six-foot-eight-inch football player, Bubba Smith (in the role of a recruit). Rocky, finding it disconcerting to speak to a belt buckle, screamed, "You come down here so I can give you hell!" Bubba Smith contorted his body down for the nose-to-nose confrontation.

Ron and Rocky were each given dressing rooms with their names and stars on the doors. The company masseuse began massaging their necks and backs before and after scenes to "ease the tension." Company cars with chauffeurs were put at their disposal. Their meals were sent in from the finest quality caterers.

*The Dead Zone*, a film starring Martin Sheen and Christopher Walken, provided SMG with considerable excitement. The prop man, Peter Lauterman, required one rifle. He had been taking various types of old rifles to Canadian director David Cronenberg, but none of them suited Cronenberg's vision of what he wanted.

Lauterman was desperate as there were only three days left before the rifle was needed. He called SMG and described in detail his understanding of what the director wanted. Richard's only solution was to custom-make the rifle from an old military piece. SMG's gunsmith, Al Hobbs, worked all night creating a masterpiece which matched Cronenberg's vision exactly. The director was so pleased that he asked SMG to do other work on the set such as supplying special handguns, rifles, blanks and uniforms.

Martin Sheen had to commit suicide in one scene. Richard demonstrated to the director that the HK P7 pistol was empty and was about to do the same for Sheen. Cronenberg, a firearms enthusiast, played with the gun before handing it to Sheen. Sheen then picked up the gun and placed it against his temple.

"If he shoots himself like that," Richard told the director, "there's a chance that the

*Continued on page 94*

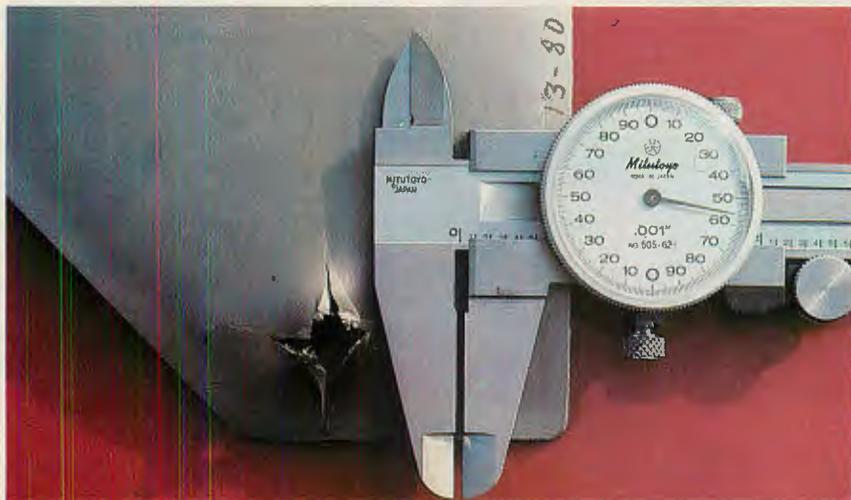
# SOF CONDUCTS FIRST TEST OF NEW RUSSIAN BODY ARMOR

**Text & Photos by Tom Smith**

panel is dark-olive-drab nylon and each panel has 12 nylon envelopes which hold overlapping titanium-alloy plates to cover the layered, Kevlar-like fabric body of the vest. The vest weighs 10 pounds.

The designation of the new Soviet military vest is unknown. Although SOF has learned that Russian vests constructed of Kevlar-like cloth have been collected in the past, the "Afghanistan Vest" is different from previous types. The "Kevlar" in SOF's vest is not the same as the aramids in other Soviet vests, and this is the first time the Russians have combined ballistic cloth with titanium plates. SOF, calling on scientists and experts in body-armor design and materials, set out to determine the ballistic properties of the vest, metallurgical composition of the plates and origin of the Kevlar-like material. In addition, direct ballistic tests were conducted on the vest. Finally, I conducted a wearability test to compare "theirs" versus "ours."

The titanium plates in the vest are contained within nylon envelopes and are attached to each other by thin cloth straps that keep the plates in an overlapping fish-scale configuration, increasing the ballistic cloth's strength while keeping some of the cloth vest's flexibility. Slightly curved to better fit the contour of the torso, each plate



## POLICE PROFESSOR

Tom Smith is an old friend of SOF. Experienced in all police weapons and tactics, Tom has made a special study of ballistic armor. His advice in these matters is sought by large and small police departments all over the United States.

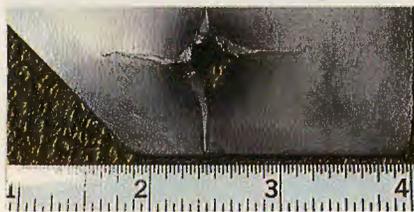
Some of Smith's most interesting work is with police-related psychology. Part of his career, at present, is composed of a series of consultant's contracts for teaching hostage psychology, and the care and treatment of the policeman who has killed in the line of duty.

He is certainly the man to tell you and us what's what with the latest Soviet ballistic armor.

**I**N October 1983, SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown was presented with a Soviet body armor vest liberated by Afghan Freedom Fighters from a high-ranking Soviet officer who had no further need of it — or anything else for that matter.

SOF's first examination revealed an exit hole in the upper-right rear quadrant which — we learned from our Afghan friends — was caused by a .303 British full-metal-jacketed bullet. From the angle of incidence illustrated by the bullet's scar on the plate, the bullet must have entered the front of the soldier's neck, just above the armor. A well-placed shot.

The vest consists of two panels joined together at the shoulder by a hook-and-pile fastener like Velcro, reinforced by nylon straps and double D-rings. This alone was interesting in that, so far as SOF knows, it is



**TOP:** Titanium plates in vest miked at .056 inch.

**ABOVE:** Evidence of Soviet vest's last official duty: .303 British exit hole starred with regular fissures typical of titanium.

the first piece of Soviet equipment built with hook-and-pile fasteners. The vest covers a five-foot, ten-inch male from neck to groin in front and neck to top of the hips in back. The front and rear panels do not meet at the sides of the torso. The outer cover of each

## BALLISTIC PLATE ANALYSIS

Analyte	Result
Iron	0.11
Silicon	0.02
Copper	0.01
Aluminum	4.5
Molybdenum	3.6
Vanadium	1.6
Tungsten	5.5
Sulfur	<0.002
Carbon	0.027
Phosphorus	0.007
Titanium	Balance

Results are reported in percent by weight.

< = less than



measures 4.7x4.2x.056 inches. The plates nearest the shoulders are concave and have the outermost corner clipped to reduce restriction of movement. The titanium plates account for six pounds of the vest's total 10-pound weight.

The body of the Russian vest consisted of 30 layers of cloth made from 300-denier (denier is the measure in grams of the weight of 9,000 meters of a particular yarn) aramid yarn woven into a common diagonal twill. The exact chemical composition of the Soviet ballistic fabric is not yet known, but its physical characteristics — high tensile strength and low elasticity — suggest it is a fiber much like Kevlar.

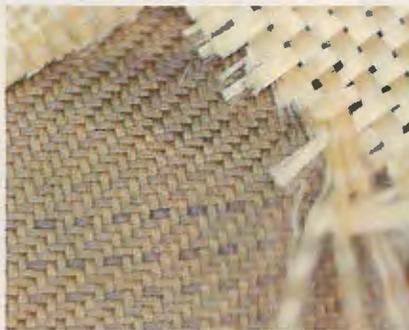
Kevlar was invented some 18 years ago by Du Pont research scientist Stephanie Kwolek. Du Pont named this nylon hybrid, generically referred to as aramid, Kevlar. It is widely used in the aerospace industry and in the manufacture of automobile tire belts. In 1971 Du Pont discovered that certain weaves of Kevlar were capable of defeating bullets.

Most Kevlar is woven so that yarns alternately pass over and under each other at 90-degree angles. This "plain cloth" has the same strength and elasticity in either axis. Since its strength is not directional, plain cloth can be layered for increased strength without regard for alignment. When used in body armor, 1,000-denier Kevlar 29 is usually woven 31 strands to the inch vertically and horizontally. In this construction, its bullet-defeating properties are amazing.

Excluding the consideration of velocity,

**ABOVE:** SOF challenges Soviet vest with 9mm UZI.

**BELOW:** Two captured rounds of 9mm NATO steel-jacket ball, still caught in American Kevlar-fabric vest.



**ABOVE:** Fabric comparison: Background is darker Soviet ballistic cloth, medium-texture fabric is 1000-denier-yarn Kevlar and coarsest weave is Kevlar plain cloth made of flattened 1500-denier strands.

which will make a difference in capturing ability of Kevlar, a Level I vest employing eight Kevlar layers will defeat a .38 special 158-grain round-nose bullet. A Level IIA vest (14 to 16 layers) will defeat most .357 magnums, 9mm soft and hollow points, and some American-manufactured full-metal-jacketed 9mm bullets fired from four- to five-inch barrels. Level II vests (17 to 20 layers) will defeat all the aforementioned rounds plus the hottest .357 magnums, all U.S. 9mm rounds, and most .41 and .44 magnum rounds. Level III vests (22 to 26 layers) are able to defeat nearly all standard handgun ammunition. Tactical vests (24 to 30 layers) are reserved for heavy-duty situations and are designed for hostage-rescue teams, counterterrorist units, tactical teams, and military and paramilitary units. They are bulky, heavy and restrict mobility, but offer more coverage and will usually defeat foreign 9mm rounds fired from submachine guns. Level III vests and tactical vests with hard plate inserts, steel or ceramics usually, will defeat 7.62mm and 5.56mm, or similar, bullets fired from rifles.

The Soviet ballistic fabric is woven in a twill, passing each weft (horizontal) yarn over two or more warp (vertical) yarns. This makes a diagonal pattern on the fabric, and allows the more loosely-woven yarns to slide relative to one another, making the fabric more elastic in one axis than in the other. Plain cloth fabrics have equal strength in either axis. Thus 30 layers of Soviet 300-denier "Kevlar" is not as strong as 30 layers of Western 1,000-denier Kevlar.

To determine how well the Russian vest of titanium plates covering the ballistic cloth worked, SOF conducted ballistic tests, firing a number of rounds into the vest from both submachine guns and rifles.

When the experts blasted the Russian vest, they learned that it was capable of defeating foreign and domestic 9mm full-metal-jacketed bullets fired from a variety of submachine guns, but was incapable of defeating more powerful rounds.

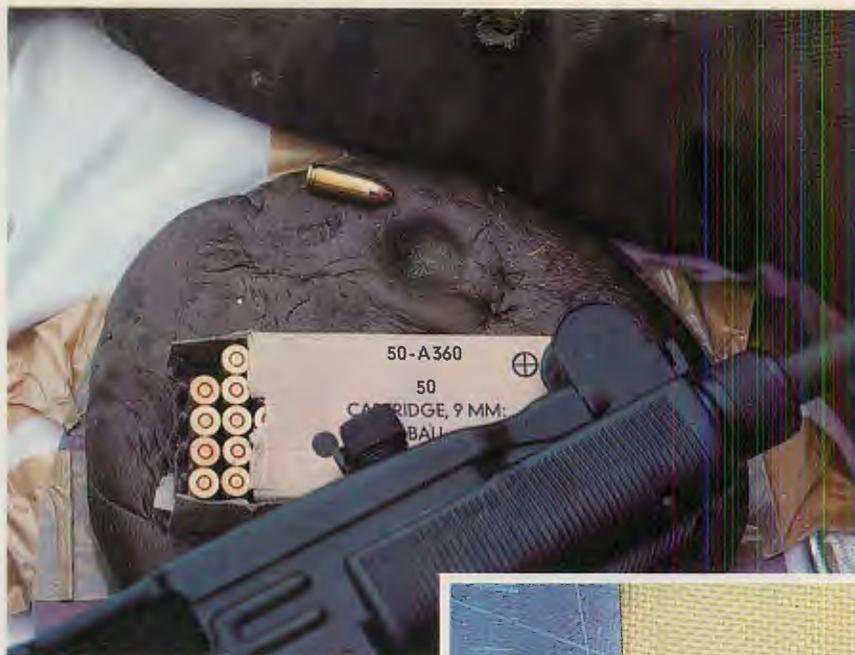
U.S. 9mm ammunition is loaded to lower velocities compared to foreign 9mm rounds, many of which are high-velocity, high-pressure rounds for submachine-gun use. Many of the foreign bullets feature a mild steel jacket and, since steel is harder than copper, the round tends not to deform upon impact, but to keep on penetrating.

Without the titanium plates, the ballistic cloth of the Russian vest was penetrated by a Winchester-Western 9mm 115-grain full-metal-jacketed round fired from an UZI submachine gun at 15 feet, using ballistic gelatin as a backing material. With the titanium plates, the 115-grain Winchester round and the Canadian 115-grain submachine-gun ammunition fired from the same UZI was defeated with little backface signature, or deformation in the gelatin. Dynamit-Nobel-manufactured NATO steel-jacketed 9mm rounds were also defeated.

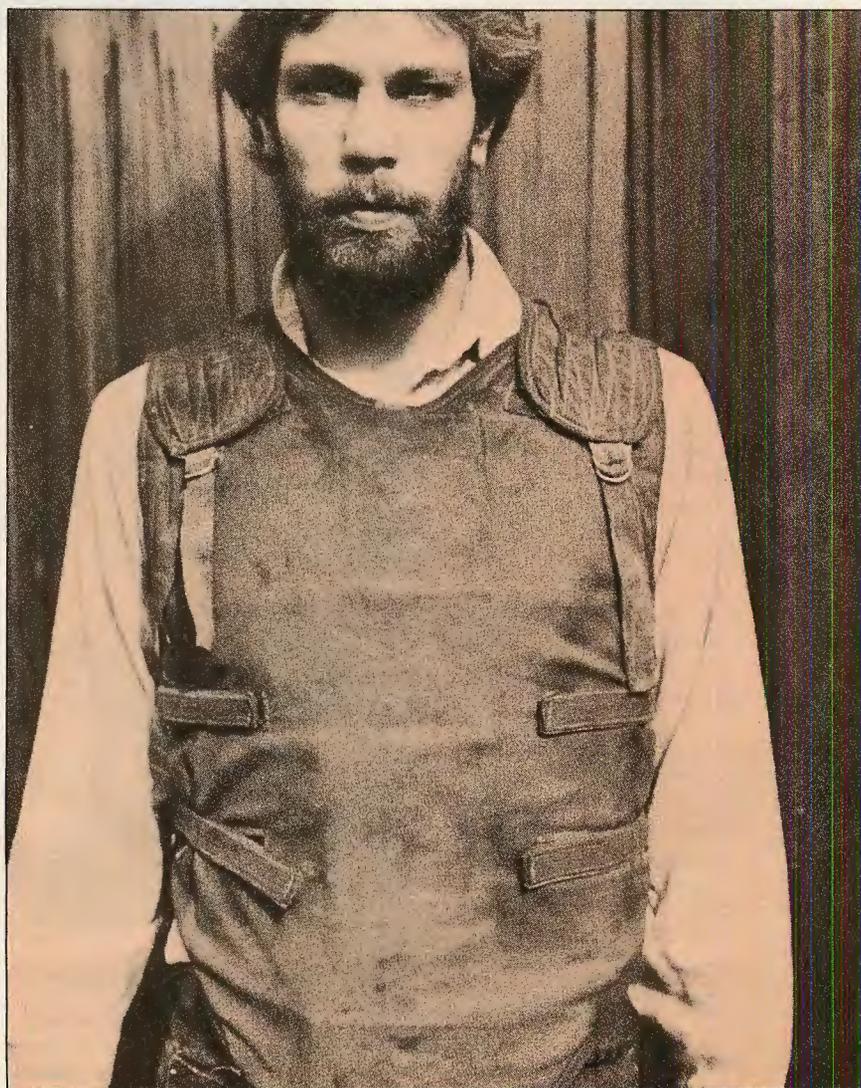
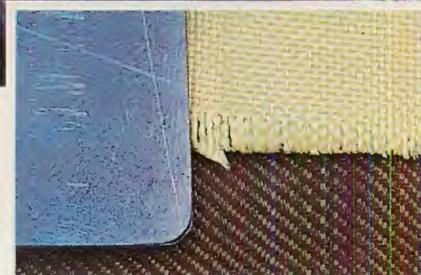
Thus, the titanium performs its function — for a great price in wearability and comfort since it adds six pounds to the total weight and its rigidity severely restricts movement. One major question that has yet to be answered is what happens when tiny, high-speed fragments strike the titanium. Past tests of many types of hard armor (vests enhanced with ceramic or steel plate inserts) indicate a propensity for the projectile to be deflected off the plates into a different direction rather than being captured. This would make the Soviet soldier's extremities targets for these secondary missiles.

Because of the exit hole in the vest when it arrived, we already knew that .303 British penetrates the vest and tests showed so would .308 Winchester (7.62mm NATO), .223 Remington (5.56mm NATO), .30

**LEFT:** SOF art assistant Kyle Smith tries on Soviet ballistic vest. **BELOW:** Russian flak jacket is covered in nylon, with strength provided by titanium plates in nylon envelopes and layered ballistic fabric.



**ABOVE:** SOF and U.S. labs tested the latest Soviet body armor. UZI and ammo used in SOF tests rest on bullet-dented ballistic gelatin. **RIGHT:** Soviet vest components: titanium plate and four-ounce twill fabric contrast with light-colored Kevlar swatch.





ABOVE: Side view of vest shows under-arm chink in Soviet armor.



Shoulder detail illustrates vest attachment: first known Soviet use of hook-and-pile fasteners similar to U.S. Velcro. Note lack of neck protection.

Carbine or the USSR's 7.62x39mm and 5.45mm rounds. All are in common usage worldwide and all penetrated with ease.

Thus, the Soviet vest is basically a ballistically enhanced "flak vest" rather than a "bulletproof vest."

A side-by-side examination and comparison of the Soviet vest and the standard U.S. flak vest was our final step.

The U.S. vest, which does not have hard plates, has 16 layers of 1,000-denier Kevlar and weighs from 6-10 pounds, depending on the size. It is capable of defeating American 9mm and some foreign 9mm, but not penetrating 9mm from submachine guns. It does, however, offer full protection from the waist to neck and has a collar which gives some protection to the head from re-directed fragments.

One of the most overlooked aspects of tactical body armor is the wearability. I wore both the U.S. and Soviet vests for eight hours each. Even after this brief period of time it was painfully obvious that the Reds simply haven't done their homework in the area of human engineering. While it offers a slightly higher level of ballistic protection

over its U.S. counterpart, the price one pays in the form of added fatigue, muscular strain and overall discomfort, to say nothing of dramatically reduced mobility, makes it clear that the U.S. "flak vest" is a better choice.

In addition, because of the way the Russian vest fastens at the shoulder, there is absolutely no protection for the shoulder, neck or collarbone area. It should be further noted that there is virtually no coverage for the wearer's sides.

Another disadvantage of the Soviet vest was its heat-trapping characteristics. The American flak vest, which is loose-fitting, allows a large measure of body heat to dissipate with evaporated sweat, while the Soviet vest traps body heat and allows no heat dissipation because the vest straps so tightly to the body. This may not be a major problem in winter in Afghanistan, but in warmer climates, the Russian vest will undoubtedly create a high number of heat-fatigue casualties.

The Russians have produced a vest which will stop all 9mm fired from submachine guns but the trade-off is that it is heavy, hot, restricts movement, is uncomfortable for extended wear, and leaves shoulders and sides unprotected. And in vests the old rule is: "If you can't wear it what good is it.?"

SOF can guess why the Russians have it.

Since they don't place a high priority on the comfort or continued existence of individual soldiers, the vest project probably developed with materials from other, higher-priority technologies with the usual minimum of human engineering involved.

Titanium — which is stable at high temperatures, lighter, stronger and more expensive than steel — is used in the construction of MiG 25s and Russian Alpha Class submarines. Since the USSR has large titanium resources, price on Western markets is not a factor. Leftover titanium from those projects is a cheap way of enhancing the vest's ballistic properties with the trade-off of increased weight and decreased mobility.

Where did the technology to make the Soviet "Kevlar" come from?

From the beginning, SOF was puzzled by the fact the Soviet aramid cloth was woven from yarns of two different colors, and there was an unusual feel to the fabric.

In most of the West, petroleum-base lubricants are used to weave the fibers together. A chemical examination of the fibers in the Soviet "Kevlar" revealed that the Russians were using coconut oil.

Coconut oil lubrication of aramid fibers is a process used by the Teijin Chemical Company of Japan.

The USSR is famous for "borrowing" technology from the West and it would appear the boys from the KGB may have gleaned the information on how to manufacture and weave aramid ballistic cloth from Japan. Or could the Japanese company be supplying the finished cloth to the Russians? Some of the experts who have looked at the cloth and the chemical analysis believe the latter.

Ah, so. Got'cha Ivan. ☘



**ABOVE:** Al Nordeen — dressed in current-issue Czech sniper's smock — test-fires Kokalis' "Communist Cadillac." This unusual photo shows propellant burn illuminating bore after bullet leaves barrel.

**LEFT:** Good design in action: in full recoil, no moving parts touch the hand.

**RIGHT:** Photo of grip shows solid, smoothly modeled safety and ergonomic grip tang.

**BELOW:** CZ 75 ready for action.



## SOF WEAPONS

# CZ 75



## Canadian Connection Makes Czech Pistol Accessible

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

**A**DMIRED by all, imitated by some and previously thought attainable only at exorbitant cost, the much-coveted CZ (Czech) 75 pistol is actually readily available to those willing to untie some red tape.

Designed by the brothers Josef and Frantisek Koucky at the Ceskoslovenska Zbrojovka, Narodni Podnik in Brno, the vz. (model) 75 is a successful blend of innovation and the best features of several other well-known pistols.

The CZ 75 owes little to its immediate predecessor, the Model 52 pistol, which operates with a locking system taken from the German MG42 GPMG and is chambered for a more potent loading of the ComBloc 7.62x25mm bottleneck cartridge. Chambered in 9mm Parabellum, the Model 75 does not seem to have been engineered for the Czech military, but for Western and Third World police and military markets. That's not really surprising, since the Czechs have been major arms merchants to the world since the inception of their nation in 1918.

The CZ 75 is short-recoil-operated and the locking system has been modified from the Browning Model 1935 (HiPower) and Swiss SIG P210. Two lugs on top of the barrel fit into corresponding recesses in the slide when the weapon is in battery. A barrel nose, which is part of the barrel forging, is slotted and retained by the slide stop pin. As the slide moves rearward, the

barrel is forced downward and unlocked by the slide stop pin. This is an improvement over the swinging link and pin used on the Colt M1911A1 pistol. The recoil spring and its guide seat into a hollow below the barrel, just as with the HiPower. The head of the guide is dimpled to fit a depression on the front face of the barrel nose. The pinned, pivot-type extractor has also been gleaned from the HiPower.

The hammer mechanism is a removable sub-assembly — a composite of those found in the Russian Tokarev T-33 and SIG P210 pistols. Like the SIG P210, the slide rides on rails machined inside the receiver. This system reduces side-play, provides a longer bearing surface and enhances the pistol's inherent accuracy potential. Current versions of the CZ 75 have side rails an inch longer than earlier models.

The CZ 75 can be carried either cocked-and-locked — the method prescribed by aficionados of the venerable M1911A1 — or with the hammer down on a loaded chamber, in which case the first round can be fired double-action. The double-action mechanism differs from all others: A wrap-around trigger bar engages an L-shaped interrupter pinned to the hammer and connecting the two components. Pulling the trigger in double-action pushes the trigger bar and interrupter to release the hammer at the end of the cycle when the upper surface of the trigger bar is forced down by the sear housing's shoulder.



After the first round has been fired, the slide recocks the hammer and forces the disconnecter to release its connection with the lower portion of the sear. This allows the sear to pivot rearward to re-engage the full cock notch. A unique, yet simple system, it provides the CZ 75 with the smoothest double-action trigger pull (at just about nine pounds) I have ever encountered on a semiautomatic pistol.

The single-action pull, however, was scratchy enough to grind the enamel off your teeth. A condescension to safety frequently encountered in military pistols, this irritation was quickly remedied by Burke C. Hill, Jr., one of the Southwest's premier pistolsmiths, who carefully reduced the sear's depth of engagement on the hammer. The unchecked trigger now breaks cleanly at exactly four pounds on single action. A half-cock notch was recently added to current production models.

The thumb safety is located in the proper place on the left side of the receiver above the grip panel. Of adequate size and comfortable shape, it can be activated only with the hammer at full cock and doing so will not drop the hammer. Using a modified Weaver hold, with both thumbs over the lever, the safety is easily deactivated. Placing the lever back on safe from the Weaver hold is far more difficult. A facility hole has lately been added to the safety lever, expediting disassembly of this part.

The 15-rd. magazine has been cloned from the Browning HiPower. It differs only in capacity and construction of the follower, which is plastic. The magazine-release latch is located where it should be, immediately to the rear of the trigger guard on the frame's left side. But herein lies my only serious criticism of the CZ 75. Magazines do not fall freely out of the magazine well (which is not beveled, as others have stated). They must be manually extracted with some effort. Inherent in the design, there appears to be no quick fix for this defect.

The high-profile fixed sights are excellent. The tapered ramp front sight is 0.105-inch thick. The rear sight's square notch is 0.110-inch wide. The rear sight's exposed corners are well-rounded to prevent snagging.

The steel frame, which contributes to the CZ 75's overall weight (empty, 2.2 lbs.), appears to be a machined forging, not a casting as reported by *Jane's*. The fit and finish are flawless. Again, not surprising, as the Czechs have had 65 years to get their act together. The exterior surfaces are polished to a high luster and all milling marks removed. All radiused surfaces exhibit perfect alignment. The blued finish is superb.

Everything fits together with just the right amount of tightness. The barrel's rifling cuts and chamber dimensions have been fabricated to the closest

possible tolerances. The barrel's exterior finish is absolutely peerless. The barrel, slide, frame and two issue magazines all carry the pistol's serial number, in the Teutonic fashion.

The ergonomics applied to this pistol's design are of the very highest order. The grip tang is exactly the right length to prevent the hammer from abusing the web of your hand. The grip frame's distinctive hump melts into the hand as though it were a custom-fitted prosthesis. The grip-to-frame angle is perfect and target acquisition is consequently swift and positive.

## CZECH CZ 75 SPECIFICATIONS

**WEIGHT:** with empty magazine 2.2 lbs.

**LENGTH:** overall . . . . . 8.12 in.

**BARREL LENGTH:** . . . . . 4.73 in.

**CALIBER:** . . . . . 9mm Parabellum

**OPERATION:** Short-recoil; semi-automatic only; two-lug locking system; exposed, double-action hammer; can also be carried "cocked-and-locked" for first-round single-action fire.

**MAGAZINE:** Staggered box type, single-position feed, 15-rd. capacity

**SIGHTS:** Fixed, high-profile, square notch rear, ramp front

**PRICE:** With plastic grips, approx. \$624; with walnut grips, approx. \$656 (includes 55-percent duty) plus transportation charges

**MANUFACTURER:** Ceskoslovenska Zbrojovka, Narodni Podnik in Brno, Czechoslovakia

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Pragotrade, Dept. SOF, 307 Humberline Drive, Rexdale, Ontario M9W 5V1, Canada. Phone: (416) 675-1322

Those accustomed to Browning-designed pistols will find no enigmas in disassembly of the CZ 75. Remove the magazine and make certain no cartridge remains in the chamber. Bring the hammer to full cock. Pull the slide rearward about 0.25 inch until the disassembly notches on the left side of the frame and slide are aligned. Press down and inward on the slide stop pin protruding from the right side and withdraw it from the left, using the lip of the magazine's floor plate as a pry. Ease the hammer down completely and pull the slide forward to remove it from the frame. Separate the recoil spring, guide and barrel from the slide assembly. The firing pin and spring are retained by a firing-pin stop identical to that of the M1911A1. Take care when disassembling these components as the firing-pin spring is considerably stronger than the Colt Government Model's and capable of propelling the firing pin with almost lethal

force. Reassemble in the reverse order.

My CZ 75 has now consumed more than 1,000 rounds without a single failure. The ammunition included Federal 115-gr. jacketed hollow-points, Remington 124-gr. full-metal jackets, Israeli Military Industries' black-tipped FMJ submachine-gun ammo and some corrosive Yugoslav SMG cartridges. The absence of felt recoil is quite noticeable. However, it appears to be a function of human engineering rather than weight, as the pistol weighs but an ounce more than the Beretta 92SB.

The CZ 75 also scores high marks for accuracy potential and hit probability. Rapid two-shot sequences with the first round fired double-action and the second single-action produce consistent two-inch groups at 15 meters. The pistol shoots to point-of-aim at 25 meters.

But, can you obtain this communist Cadillac for anything less than the \$1,100+ scalper's price? Yes indeed. Brno firearms are imported into Canada by Pragotrade (Dept. SOF, 307 Humberline Drive, Rexdale, Ontario, M9W 5V1, Canada). Their price for the CZ 75 is \$390 (U.S.) which includes an extra magazine and plastic grip panels. The military version, with phosphate (Parkerized) finish, a Colt Commander-style hammer, lanyard ring and wood grips is not available from Pragotrade. Walnut military grip panels are \$20 extra if ordered with the pistol. Additional magazines are \$24 each. That's the good news. The bad news is that Czechoslovakia has "Unfavored Nation" status with the United States and their products are subject to a 55-percent duty.

To purchase a CZ 75 from Pragotrade, a licensed firearms dealer must write to the BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Washington, DC 20226) and obtain an ATF Form 6, which is an Application and Permit for Importation of Firearms, Ammunition and Implements of War. It takes about three to six weeks for the Form 6 to be processed and approved after return to the BATF. All the form's questions are self-evident, except that paragraph 8g, Serial No., should be answered, "to be submitted on Form 6A."

When it has been approved, the Form 6 will be returned to the dealer with two copies of ATF Form 6A. Xerox the approved Form 6 and send it along with your payment to Pragotrade. Within two weeks the pistol will be shipped (by air freight, F.O.B. Ontario) to your local U.S. Customs branch. The dealer must then clear U.S. Customs by properly executing the Form 6A and paying the duty. He then sends his copy of Form 6A back to the BATF and that's the end of the matter. The total cost will come to about \$624 plus shipping charges. At this price one of the world's primo 9mm pistols becomes a palatable proposition. ☒

# WHITE STAR

Continued from page 45

"If it's material and gaseous," Nesom said softly, "it's explosive. Nitro-humus is both of those. It's a low-order explosive. I can blow it."

"It's USAID property," I replied. Nesom shrugged.

"Have it your way. You wanna blow a hole, we need one can of that for each position."

"What are you going to use for an initiator?" I asked. He picked up one of the loose sticks of dynamite.

"About 900 feet a second, I think." He searched his memory for a demolition figure. "One stick to each barrel." I took the stick from him, its paper wet with glycerine.

"It's coming out of solution," I said. "Stuff's probably a hundred years old."

"It still makes a bang."

"What if we don't have enough?"

"Maybe we can make some more," he thought out loud.

Sometimes it's necessary to back off and take a long look at field ingenuity — "expediency," they call it. We had come in-country with only a few pounds of demo per team. No one had seen a necessity for it. Someone had said, "If you need demo, get it from your district warehouses ... or make do." I ran down the pharmaceutical list in my explosives manual to see if there was anything we could buy on the open market.

Dynamite is a damned fine cratering charge because it shakes instead of shatters. It's composed of 75-percent nitroglycerine and 25-percent infusorial earth, decomposing organic matter. If I were to attempt to make something, it would be "Bend-Rock," a little more difficult to put together, but what the hell. If you're going to take a chance, you might as well take a chance. Forty-percent nitro, 40-percent nitrate of potash, 13-percent cellulose, seven-percent paraffin. Cook it.

Any of you terrorists out there expecting to sit down and make this formula, be careful. It has to be combined under heat. Like the nuts who put pressure and heat to ether in order to make PCP, the end result can often be dangerous. I decided not to take the chance.

Before I found out about the dynamite in the warehouse, I had tried across the Mekong where they were building a new road in Thailand. We crossed in the middle of the night, Ranger-fashion, in two Lao canoes, and trudged the long 10 miles up a dirt road to the construction ganghead. No one was there.

Good thing. No one had seen us. Bad thing. There was nothing that looked like a demo shed. But there was a small D-3 bulldozer.

"Christ!" everyone said, "let's take it! We'll paint it pink on the other side!"

But the bulldozer operator must have anticipated our coming. He'd removed the



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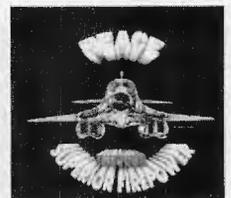
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fuel pump and taken it with him. I kicked the tractor in disgust.

"Anyway," I reasoned out loud, "how would we ever get it back across the river?"

Because the little bulldozer figures in later, and the construction company might still be looking for their property, it's best not to reveal how, one night about a month later, we found a fuel pump and the little D-3 *did* disappear. It was still clanking away merrily when I left Pakse in 1960. It had been painted pink.

A well-trained Green Beret never leaves the objective without something to show for his efforts. We burdened ourselves with everything not tied down. Then we trekked the 10 miles back to the Mekong, loaded our canoes, and slipped back into Laos. The Bull would have commended us for our "raid," but he would have locked all of us up for jumping the frontier. If caught, we might have given away the secret that there were Green Berets working in Laos under cover.

Nesom and I took the nitro-humus. The word "Nitro" was underscored with an evil-looking sign that meant it might be something dangerous; the humus was decayed organic material. Our alternative demo was coming out of a fertilizer can. I don't really like to remember the day we tried it.

Dynamite can be exploded with a high-velocity bullet, but there was no way of knowing what speed we had to reach to ignite the nitro-humus. We would treat it as a gas and prime each can with one-half stick of dynamite, hoping that the subsequent explosion didn't simply rupture the can and scatter its contents.

There was also the question of safety. Nothing in the book indicated how many foot-pounds of pressure nitro-humus would exert. We went to the tables for a "hell-devil" machine, a dust initiator, and found that grain bin silos burn (explode) at a rate depending on compression. If we tamped the charges with wet sand and rock though, the subsequent explosions might bring the whole hillside down on us. I lengthened the firing wire to 300 yards.

"I heard about a guy in Korea that went in a field latrine and lit a cigarette," Nesom joked. "Threw the burning match in the hole under him. Forty boards later and a ball of flame, the guy staggered out, barbecued asshole and smelling of shit." We laughed.

"Gas is gas," he added. "Confine it and it's gotta explode. Me, I'd never throw a lighted match in a shitpit." He bent over and tightened the seat of his trousers. "See? My ass is too big. Works like an oversized gasket."

I've never understood the propensity of some demo men to add hazard to an already hazardous job. A simple explosion never seems to be enough. It has to rend, shatter, rip apart with violent force. Destroy totally. It wasn't just good enough that we only had to loosen the earth in order to scoop it out. Nesom winked slyly.

"I'm gonna throw rocks into the next military district."

"God, I hope not," I said to myself.

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“That’s 50 miles away!”

The Day of the Big Boom was festive. Prince Boun Gum was there to watch, as were some high-ranking French legionnaires from Savannakhet, just off the morning supply plane with a few hours to kill. Our French counterparts had brought them out to see the range, which by now was beginning to look like a miniature Stateside installation. The little pink bulldozer was shaving away sand from the abutments and one of the French — I had a feeling he was a colonel or better — nudged me with his elbow.

“Pourquois?” he asked. “You do not have those little clasped hands stenciled on *le tracteur*. You know. The sign which say, ‘Donated by the *Etats Unis*.’” He winked to one of his comrades in arms. He had a feeling we had appropriated the bulldozer. I used tact.

“*Jamais*, General.” His shoulders straightened that I would call him a general. “It was red, a communist tractor. In painting it white, the color came out pink.” I laughed, a bad lie perhaps, but as a military man who’d most probably “appropriated” a few things in this lifetime, he understood.

“*Bon!*” he laughed, and looked down-range. “And now, the explosion?” Nesom dragged the 20-cap hellbox to the Frenchman’s side. He pulled up the handle, attached the wires, and gestured to the plunger.

“You care to do the honors, Sir?”

I don’t know why I think of the poem, “Casey At The Bat,” each time I remember that day, but I do. There’s something in the suspense of the last stanza about the opposing team at Mudville as Casey stood up to the plate. Our apprehension was electric. No one knew what would happen. The “general” smiled and took the plunger’s handle in both hands. I cautioned him to wait. Nesom cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted for everyone to take cover.

“*Nuong luong!*” he yelled in Lao, “*Ying dai!* [Everyone take cover! We’re going to fire this thing!]” And then to the Americans there, “Fire in the hole!” I nodded to the officer.

“*Feu, mon General* [fire].” The plunger went down.

Sometimes things hang in suspended animation, quietly for a moment. Those who have been in a hard fire fight have known the feeling: For a brief moment of silence before the first round was fired it was as if God were playing umpire, studying His watch and waiting for the second hand to come around. Then, all hell would break loose. It was so with us.

The air seemed to buzz as the electrical shock ran down the 300 yards of firing wire to the hole where the first charge was primed. Not just primed, but double-primed. From there, the other 10 charges were linked to the first with det cord. They would ripple off the first at the rate of 6,500-feet-per-second, a micro-second later, imperceptible in time. Instantaneous.

The current reached the first cap.

There was an underswelling of earth. Even here, three football-field lengths

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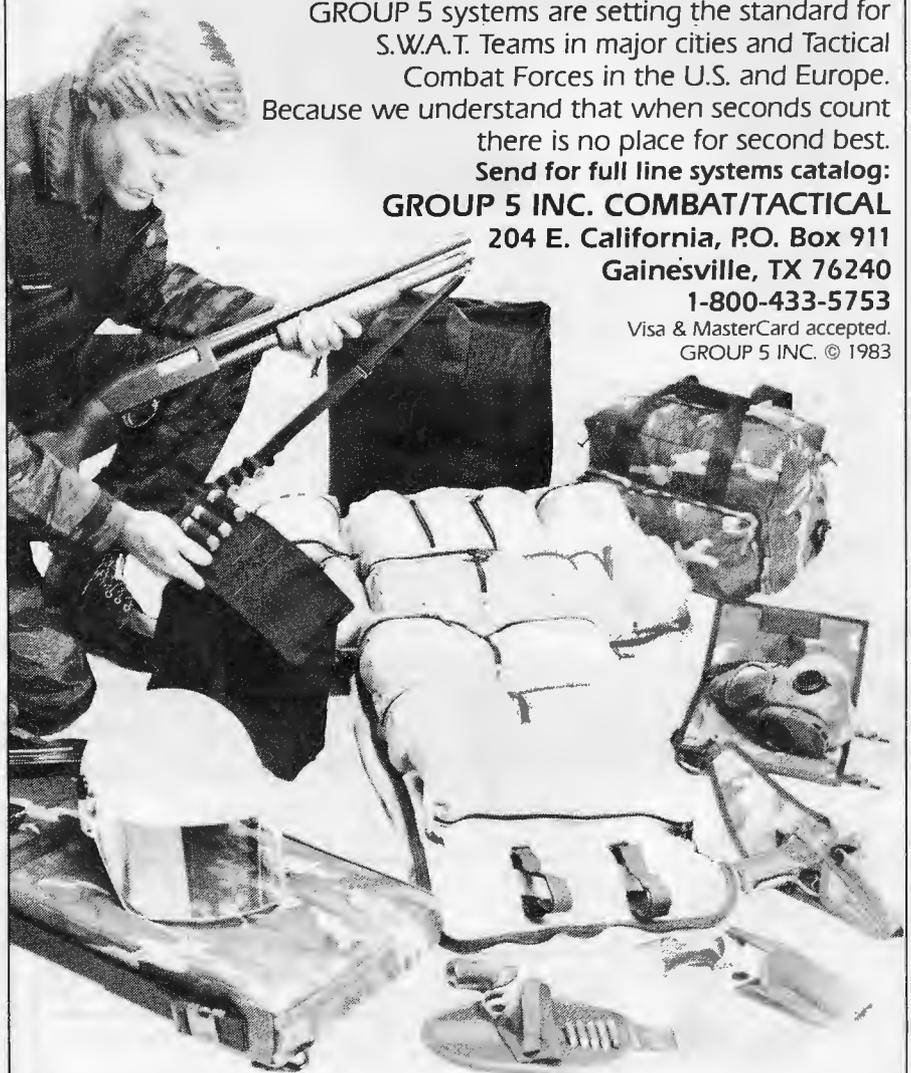
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away, the ground trembled. The combined efforts of nitrogen, fecal waste, potassium and building gases went to work. They exploded within themselves, one initiating the other, a veritable chain reaction. They gripped the wet tamped rock and sand around them and began to shake it, struggling to reach the surface and a new supply of oxygen.

The first orange-green sign of exploding gases pimpled out of the rock bed that held them and wrested free, ripping and tearing as they sought escape. There was a secondary explosion as flame ignited that. And then came a thundering, a deep-throated rumble, as the ultimate explosion tore the granite-hard rocks from their foundation and sent them skyward, up toward the little fluffs of cumulo-nimbus rain clouds that hovered over the range. Up and over the little hillock that separated *Kilometre Cinq* from populated Pakse.

The French general made a little circle at his temple with one finger as he boarded the waiting C-47 for Savannakhet.

"*Les Americaines sont fou!*" he said. His aide-de-camp translated for the rest of us.

"The general enjoyed the day," was all he said, and then quickly climbed on board. The engines coughed, caught, and the plane taxied away. We watched it take off, then went to the little tin shack beside the runway that served hot *Bierre LaRue* poured over dirty ice. I sipped. Team A-34 sipped with me, all of us deep in our own thoughts. Finally, someone broke the silence.

"A rock went through the restaurant roof."

"Anybody hurt?"

He shook his head. "Scared hell outta the mamasan though."

"Anyone see where the prince took off?" I asked.

"Across the river," someone else answered. "I think he went to his ville."

I rubbed the ice-sweat from the glass with a finger, idly. Then I stood, gulped the last of the beer and headed for the jeep.

"I've got a report to write." Several of the team followed me. Later that night, in the quiet of my room, I sat at my desk and picked up a pencil to begin the first draft.

"After-action report No. 21-59," I began. I thought a moment and gave it a title: "Nitro-Humus Liquid Fertilizer When Used As A Primary Explosive."

"... the preliminary precaution of calling 'Fire in the hole,' when demolitions are ready to be exploded, should be preceded by having all personnel first take deep cover whenever nitro-humus fertilizer is being used within 300 yards of personnel as an explosive."

For Capt. Perry's account of the Green Berets' arrival in Laos for Operation White Star, see "White Star Warriors," which appeared in our April '84 issue.

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Recently, I came across a fairly new way to make big bux, but after a thorough study I discarded it because it required too much investment of time, money and personal effort. But my study did serve as inspiration to develop yet another fantastic and unusual wallet-fattener — something that until now has never been done — yet fully complies with the tough set of standards I'm noted for demanding of any potential wealth-producing concept:

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- Must be able to be started and run initially by one man or woman
- Must require only a few hours of spare time per week
- Must have realistic annual profit potential of \$40,000 or more

Well, this one goes way beyond my usual rigorous test. Get this: This extra-ordinary money-maker® allows you to:

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Naturally, you're wondering what all this is — but I'm not going to tell you here. No, it's going to cost you ten

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His writings have been used in numerous style and content workshops and accredited courses at such institutions as California State University, UCLA, Fordham, University of Illinois and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

smackers to find out. But I will tell you what it *isn't* so you'll not be off on some wild goose chase:

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Finally, let me make this clear: Once you have my report, that is all you need to get going! I have nothing else to sell you for this deal. Your purchase of this extraordinary report is NOT a "foot in the door" to get you to buy some extra or expensive "course" or whatever ... this is all you need from me!

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2. Do the only sensible thing. Send me the ten bux and get started on wearing in that path to the bank.

P.S. One more thing (say, this Du Vall is a windy so and so, isn't he!). There are lots of people right now in bad financial straits. I hope you're not one of them, but if you are, having read this ad you now have absolutely no excuse for being broke, because as the saying goes, "This is it!" This could truly be the once-and-for-all solution to any money miseries you have. I guess you'll have to take my word for it until you receive these fabulous reports — but if it eases your mind any, over 1,000,000 men and women worldwide have been, over the years repeat buyers of my books, courses, reports, cassette tape programs and newsletters. There must be a reason . . .

— Dean F. V. Du Vall

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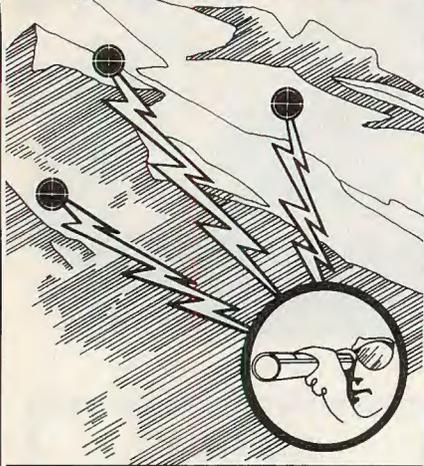
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# TRAINING CENTER

Continued from page 55

siderable amount of night training in the third, fourth and fifth weeks. Individual and squad movement training is done with blank fire, but once the platoon level is reached, the units run some live-fire drills.

"When we get to company-level training, we put a tremendous emphasis on ambushes and patrols," explained Garcia, "We set up a patrol base, train on movement-to-contact, hasty defense and organized base defense. Meanwhile the platoons are given a section of the jungle and they patrol there during the day and set ambushes at night.

"Finally, we work with the battalions on convoy techniques, crossing danger areas, village attack, village cordon and search, village defense, movement-to-contact and position defense."

While the troops are going through those training exercises, the battalion staff is run through a series of Command Post Exercises (CPXs) — paper, maps and communications — until they know by heart the fifth-week FDX which completes the RMTC cycle.

"When they get to the fifth week, they know how to control the troops," explained Garcia. "They know how to select terrain. They know how to do movement-to-contact. They know how to set up defensive positions with overlapping firing plans. They know how to fire their TO&E weapons, how to concentrate the fires, how to use the M79s effectively, how to use plunging machine-gun fire — the whole works.

"And while the battalion staff is being trained and the soldiers are receiving basic training, the battalion is also receiving training on how to train people.

"When they leave here, they've got to be in a position to train their own troops," said Garcia. "Otherwise, the units will have to come back here every three years.

"So we teach the battalion staff how to organize, conduct and evaluate training."

In addition, the RMTC trains the troops how to interact with the civilian population, gather intelligence and use specific tactics against guerrillas.

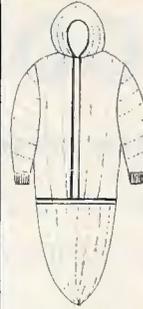
"For example," said Garcia, "we know the enemy is more active at night; therefore, we intensify night training. Salvadoran troops are known to bunch up at night, and have bad noise and light discipline. We place a lot of emphasis on that."

Because the Salvadoran Army has shown it is unable to defend vital installations (except in large-mass units and sometimes not even then, since the guerrillas have massed into some large units with a force superiority of 10-to-1

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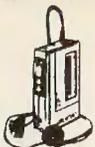
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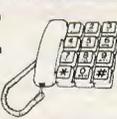


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over government troops at specific locations), the RMTC is stressing all elements of active defense: the use of economy of force, early-warning systems, booby traps, saturation patrols and night ambushes.

Garcia said the most obvious weak point he had observed in Salvadoran battalions was a lack of NCOs and battalion staff officers.

"Some reporters have decided to call the war in El Salvador the 9-to-5 war," said Garcia. "It makes me mad to hear that because I know better." Although in some cases the 9-to-5 tag is warranted, the reason is not because the Salvadorans have no desire to fight, Garcia explained.

"If the lieutenant is the only person in a platoon who can run a patrol, you're going to have a 9-to-5 war, or 5-to-9, depending on which way you want to operate," explained Garcia, "because that lieutenant is going to have to hit the sack sometime. If he has no one else who can run a patrol, he's got two choices. He can run a patrol for eight hours and then take a break with the whole platoon. Or he can split it up and run the patrol with half the platoon while the other half is in relief. Without an NCO, he can't keep the platoon going all day.

"They know they have a problem in that area and they're working on it. It's just a matter of time, but you can't build an NCO corps overnight."

The battalion-staff problem has also resulted from the war. Garcia pointed out that the shortage of trained officers in El Salvador — caused by the rapid growth of its army — presents the battalion commander with the difficult choice of where to place his experienced officers: on the staff or with the fighting units. He had observed that the best and most-experienced officers got the company and platoon commands — inexperience in those slots can get people killed — and staff slots were filled with what was left, usually low-ranking lieutenants with little experience.

"He [the battalion commander] becomes a sort of one-man show," explained Garcia. "He puts his money on the command structure rather than the staff and I don't blame the guy. I would probably do the same thing if I were in that war. I would do the staff job myself and take the hottest captains I had and let them have the companies.

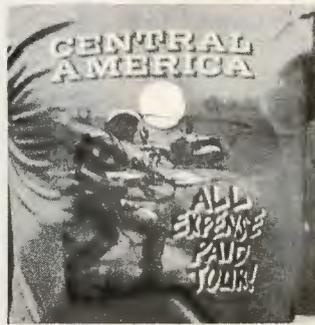
"It's hard on the battalion commander, but it can be done."

Before leaving the Trujillo RMTC, I went out with a Salvadoran platoon on a live-fire drill on a heavily jungled slope — I don't mind live bullets when I know where they're going to impact. As part of the drill, a platoon crossed a stream into an open area and separated into three squads, with one squad laying down a base of fire on the target across the clearing, while the other two made

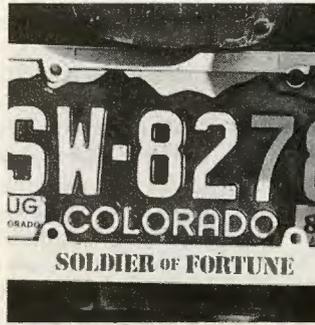
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a flanking movement to the left and then assaulted the target. At the same time, overhead fire from M60s and M79s (simulators only from the 79s) was laid down to our front. Both sections in the drill used live ammo. When the flanking movement started, the M60 fire was redirected to our left and the assault squads made their turn into the assault only 10 meters or so from the impact zone. I was impressed.

You need some pretty good grunts to run that kind of drill. The saving factor in El Salvador could well be those grunts, the snuffies, the group Garcia indicated was the strongest.

"What do I think of the soldier — the snuffy?" Garcia said when I asked him that question. "Super. Those guys will do anything you tell them to. They walk their butts off. You can put a rucksack on them and hump them on the hills all day long, with no chow and no water. They drop, but, at least, they do drop; they don't just quit. You can look into their eyes and see they're not quitting.

"And they don't complain. They are cheerful, agile and good. They don't require a lot of pampering, either. They're not accustomed to it. They don't need a cold beer at night; they don't need ice cream; they don't need three squares a day. Give them a couple of sardines, an orange and a few crackers, and move out. No questions asked.

"I think they're pretty good troops."

The Salvadoran Army's present situation consists of officers in the process of learning, an NCO corps in the process of being created and good troops short on solid, fundamental training.

All that can be supplied at the RMTC. How the units will be employed after their training is another question — and a critical one.

To determine how effective it has been in training troops, the RMTC depends on reports coming back from the MilGroup in El Salvador and the Defense Attache Office in San Salvador.

The usefulness of those evaluations to the RMTC depends on what mission the unit was assigned to when it was returned to El Salvador and whether it was allowed to operate in the manner in which it was trained.

"If they're missioned properly, and I hate to use that word *properly*, but if they are missioned the way they should be, it's one thing," said Garcia. "But we aren't training them to guard bridges or radio sites. I know there's a need to guard things like that, but I hate to see a battalion that is well-trained guarding a radio site."

"Some of them [units trained at the RMTC] are doing pretty well; some of them are not," summed up Garcia.

While the RMTC could play an important role in the outcome of El Salvador's war, in the final analysis, it will come down to the decisions made in El Salvador. ✕

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# DEATH IN OLANCHO

Continued from page 26

machine gun, Colt .45-caliber pistol, M79 grenade launcher and 81mm mortar; the Russian AK-47, SKS, RPK 7.62mm light machine gun, DShK 12.7mm heavy machine gun, Tokarev 7.62mm and Makarov 9mm pistols, 82mm mortar, RPG-2 and RPG-7 rocket launchers; the Belgian FN FAL rifle, FN MAG machine gun and Browning 9mm pistol; the German G3 rifle and 9mm MP-40 submachine gun; the Israeli UZI and Galil rifles; Czechoslovakian 9mm Model 75 and 7.62mm Model 26 submachine guns. Students also learned grenade throwing, practicing with Russian F1s and RGD-5s.

Because of ammunition shortages for some weapons, not all students fired weapons such as the Russian RPG-7 or M2 .50-caliber heavy machine gun. To substitute experience in firing the M2, they fired the 12.7mm. A training device called a PU-7 fired from an AK-47 simulates the effect of firing an RPG. The best shooters with the PU-7 then fired RPGs. Similarly, the students were trained to handle mines and explosives, but never did any live firing.

Most of the marksmanship training was with either the AK-47 or the M16 rifle. Ramon estimated he fired a total of 300 rounds for each of those two weapons, and from 60 rounds (G3, FN FAL) down to 20 rounds with some of the more exotic weapons (12.7mm, RPK).

Targets (half-body and full-body, electronically controlled pop-ups) were engaged at ranges of 100 to 600 meters. In addition to live-firing the rifles, the Hondurans were schooled by their Cuban instructors in dry-firing techniques.

Tactical training appears to have been fairly standard and sound. In patrol movement, stress was placed on keeping intervals of 8-to-10 meters, establishment of flank-watch zones, and hasty ambushes both in front of a patrol and behind it when a stop was called. In addition, extensive time was devoted to night movement and night ambushes.

One tactical-training area SOF found interesting was the "projectable-charge" defense against helicopters. The guerrillas were taught to dig a hole in the middle of a probable landing zone. In the bottom of the hole, they placed a command-detonated explosive charge with a layer of dirt and set an ordinary soft-drink box with 24 hand grenades (pins pulled but levers held in by the box's dividers) on top. The device would then be camouflaged. If a helicopter overflew the area at low altitude, the charge would be detonated,

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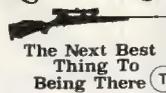
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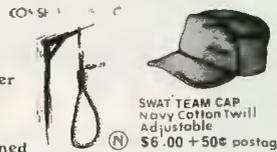


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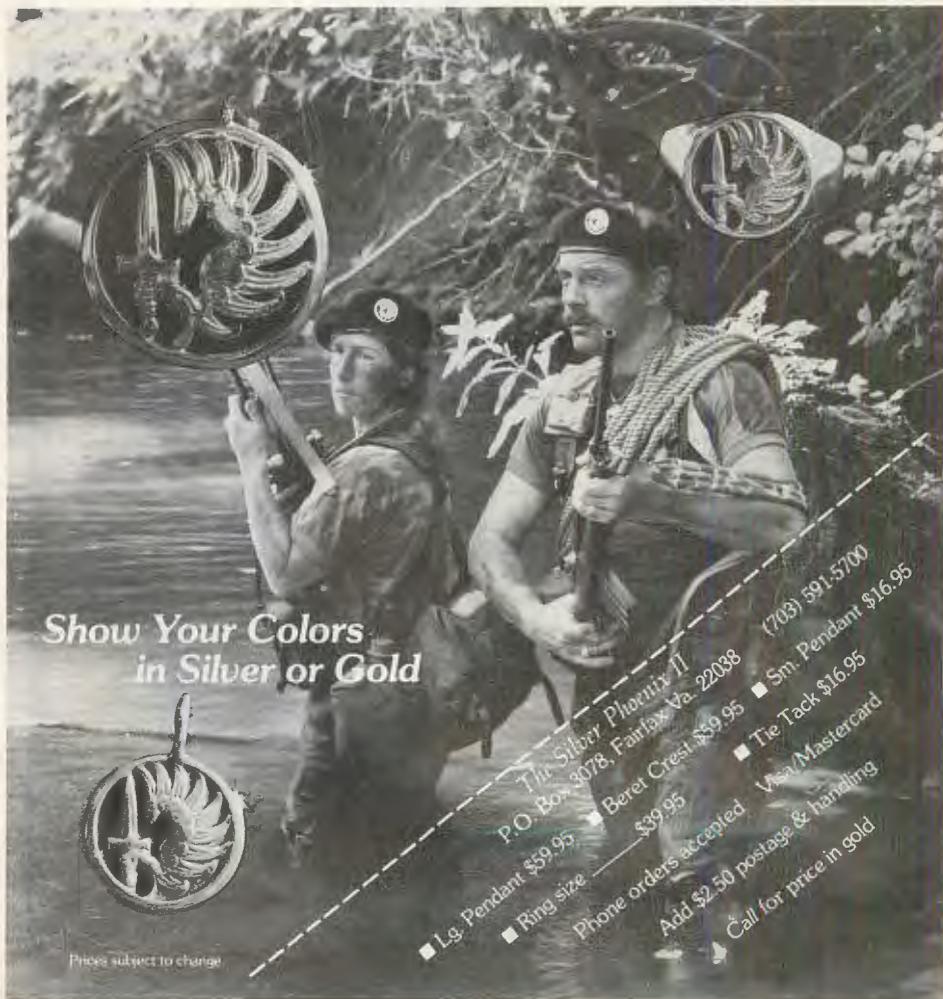
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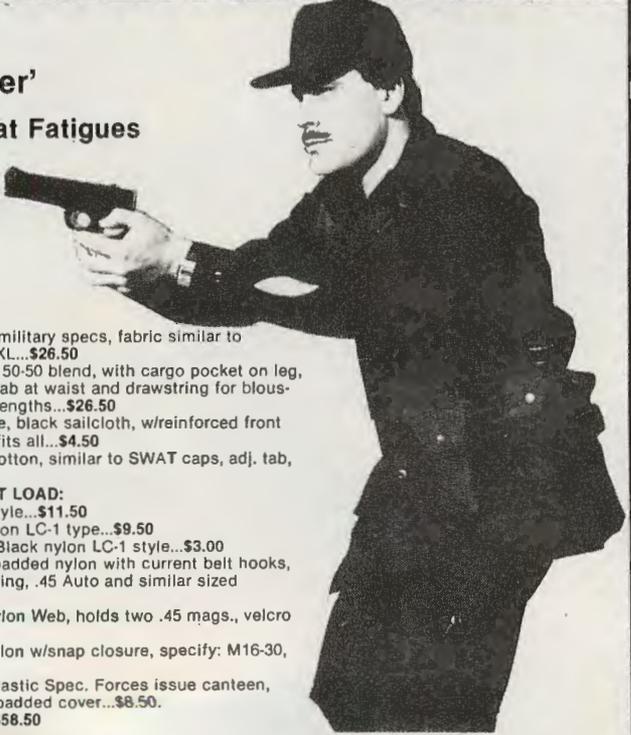
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throwing the grenades into the air, resulting in 24 scattered air bursts. Ramon said they were told by the instructors that, depending on the strength of the command-detonated explosive charge, the grenades could be projected as high as 100 meters into the air.

Discipline in the school was predictably severe. "Intractable" students who resisted the training program were sent away to a special prison on the Island of Youths (the Island of Pines, pre-Castro), off Cuba's southwest coast. Mario, accused of trying to kill *Comandante* Pablo Mendoza, was sent there. Mario denied trying to kill Mendoza, and claimed that he was imprisoned because "I was never in agreement with the things they said." At the prison, he was reunited with Doreto, a friend from his village, who was still imprisoned in 1983 because he refused to submit to the training.

Jose finished his six-month training period in January 1982 and was sent to Managua. But as the group of guerrillas he was traveling with walked down the stairs at Sandino International Airport, a Nicaraguan security officer spotted a man taking photographs of the guerrillas. The photographer was grabbed and beaten as he was hauled away and the Hondurans were hustled back onto the airplane and returned to Cuba. Jose and his comrades were sent back to P-30 and repeated the course. It was during his second term that he broke out and managed to get into the P-29 barracks.

There he met members of *Los Chincaneros*, a Honduran terrorist group that took over the Chamber of Commerce building in San Pedro Sula in September '82 and took 105 hostages. After a week of negotiations, *Los Chincaneros* were talked into giving up the building and hostages in return for transportation out of Honduras. The Cubans did not approve of the deal: They thought *Los Chincaneros* should have blown up the building and killed the hostages and themselves if the government refused to meet more of their demands. The group, named after an obscure 19th-century Honduran peasant leader, were not being treated well at School P-29.

Jose paid dearly for his visit to P-29 because security caught him. He was beaten with a wooden club by the chief Cuban instructor and then locked in a tiny cell with no food or water for three days.

Mario, with an additional two months for his trip to the Island of Youths, finished his guerrilla training in July '82 and "volunteered" to work in Cuba's fields.

Ramon, after seeing what happened to his friend Mario and others for being "intractable," dedicated himself to being a good student and graduated in May. He also "volunteered" to work in Cuba's fields until he was transported to





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course followed by the guerrilla group since that particular area of Olancho is virtually uninhabited and poorly mapped. From the descriptions it is probable the guerrillas hit the Rio Coco north of a spot known as *La Portal del Inferno*, "The Gate To Hell."

Ramon explained they began having serious problems immediately after crossing the border because of the difficult terrain and the limited quantity of supplies they carried. They had been resupplied via a helicopter lift on the Nicaraguan side of the Rio Coco just before they crossed, but because their movement was so slow, they soon expended their food supply and what little medicine they had. The group had only one battery (they used an automobile battery) for the radio and it had been cracked en route, so they had no communications with their headquarters in Nicaragua. Most serious was the shortage of food.

"There just wasn't any food," said Ramon. "In fact, one guy died of hunger."

"Didn't the people provide food to you?" SOF asked.

"There weren't any people in the areas we were in, or very few, and they wouldn't have supported communist guerrillas," replied Ramon.

On 1 August, Mario and another companion were sent on a working party some distance from the main group to construct a hut. They never returned, heading further into Olancho and giving themselves up to the 11th Infantry Battalion in Juticalpa. The same day another man deserted the group.

The next day, Ramon said Pablo Mendoza called a formation and asked all who "wanted to resign" to announce themselves. Wisely, no one accepted Mendoza's offer. He picked out a man whom he believed was the "intellectual leader of the three deserters and executed him," said Ramon. Mendoza announced that all who tried to desert would be shot.

Six days later, Ramon and a friend were sent to scout toward the village of Palestina. Along the way they buried their rifles, Ramon's pistol and their grenades. From a villager, they obtained civilian clothing and then Ramon and his friend turned themselves in to the Honduran police. Ramon said he and his friend began plotting their escape the day they had arrived in Cuba, "but from there it was impossible."

In the next week, they were followed by 11 of their comrades.

Based on information supplied to Honduran military authorities by Jose, Ramon, Mario and the others who surrendered, a counterinsurgency operation was launched by a 250-man company of Honduras' Special Forces on 11 August.

By early October, the Honduran Special Forces and other troops had

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accounted for 94 of the 96 guerrillas in the group. A total of 17 surrendered, eight were captured; one was executed by the guerrillas; 68 were either killed or died (11 are reported to have starved to death) and their bodies recovered.

The leader of the group that crossed into Honduras on 19 July, Pablo Mendoza, was identified as Jose Maria Reyes Mata. A Honduran, he was a graduate of the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, USSR, and a leader in the Central American Workers' Party, a group whose Salvadoran branch is affiliated with the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador. There is a widespread, but unsubstantiated, rumor that he operated with Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967, but many believe that rumor was deliberately spread to enhance his legend among Central American Marxists. Reyes Mata was killed in action and his body recovered. In addition, the Hondurans recovered his diary and from it learned one of his assistants, Wilfredo Gallardo Museli, was scheduled to bring in another 166-man group late in 1983.

Another leader in the group was the Canadian Catholic priest "Father Guadalupe." His real name was James B. Carey. He attended Marquette University in the United States and served as a Jesuit priest in Honduras until 1979 when he was deported because of his contacts with the communists. Carey, according to POWs taken in October, died as a result of starvation and dehydration while the band was being pursued by Honduran troops. His body was left unburied in the jungle, but was not recovered.

"Mario," the other Catholic priest with the band, whose real identity is unknown, is presumed to have escaped across the Rio Patuca with another leader known as "Serapio Romero."

Teofilo Martinez, the peasant leader and guerrilla recruiter, was killed in action, body recovered.

Bernardo Gulian, the French priest from the Celebrators of the Word sect, was not in the mountains with the band. He escaped and is presumed to be in Nicaragua.

Ramon, Jose, Mario and the others in protective custody were still being held in November by the Honduran government. Since they had committed no actual crime, plans were being made to give them new identities and relocate them in Honduras.

Military observers and journalists familiar with Honduras were puzzled by the attempted guerrilla infiltration. They give the communists little chance of being able to launch an effective insurgency operation in Honduras supported from Nicaragua — a la El Salvador — at this time.

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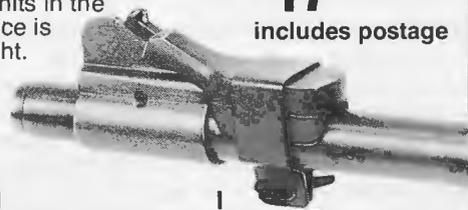
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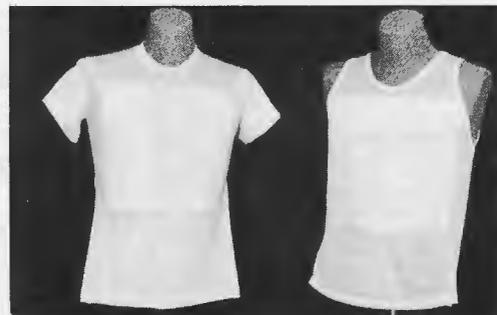


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standard of living is poor by Western standards and the country has had serious economic problems brought about by declining agricultural prices. But there is little to indicate that the human-rights violations which fueled the revolution in Nicaragua and are now creating problems in El Salvador occur on a significant scale in Honduras. Honduras has a democracy which works, albeit in Central American fashion. Additionally, it has effective counter-guerrilla and counterterrorist forces to deal with its home-grown communists and receives considerable military support from the United States.

As one long-time U.S. resident of Honduras explained, "Hondurans are just not into being guerrillas and they know they don't want to turn their country into another Nicaragua. They know what's happening in Nicaragua since their country is full of refugees from Nicaragua."

So the Cubans and Nicaraguans must resort to trickery for recruits.

One frequently heard explanation is that the Cubans were trying to force the Honduran government to scale down its support for the Contras, who are having a significant impact in Nicaragua. But old Central American hands are still puzzled as to why the Cubans selected Olancho Province to place the guerrillas. One journalist who has spent many years in Honduras observed, "Instead of giving them six months of military training, they should have given them two years of survival training to operate in that area. There's nothing there but bad water, snakes and man-eating jaguars."

It's not likely that Fidel, the Sandinistas and the errant priests will quit so easily. They will probably retrench and go at Honduras again. Hopefully, they'll try in the same place. ☒

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## SOAR VII

Continued from page 37

I later saw him in the company of a recently retired Force Recon master sergeant who had spent four tours in Vietnam and was able to answer many of his questions. The three short days of the reunion were filled with meaning for all who attended. Each came for his own reasons. They all seemed to have found much of what they had come for.

Guests of honor addressed a banquet held for the members and their wives on the second day, and that evening, a wedding took place that was, without a doubt, the most unique and hilarious I have ever attended. SOG members lined both sides of the convention room, forming an aisle leading to the altar. A former commanding officer of Delta Project gave away the bride, escorting her down the aisle to the off-key humming of "Here Comes the Bride."

The minister, following explicit instructions, addressed the groom as he was told to do: "Do you, Animal, take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife..." To which the groom responded by shouting to his fellow members, "What do you guys think?"

We all shouted our answer in the affirmative and the wedding proceeded with Animal producing the ring from his mouth at the solemn moment. At the conclusion of the ceremony, 100 men sanctified the occasion with the SOG hymn: *Hymn. Hymn. Fuck Him!*

The seriousness and meaningfulness of the ceremony was not desecrated by the manner in which it was conducted; it simply reflected the depth of friendship, the outrageous sense of humor and the camaraderie of the participants. The minister, however, seemed unable to grasp the esoteric sense of occasion, and bolted, wide-eyed, from the room at the conclusion of the hymn.

On Sunday morning, the final day of the reunion, members gathered at the bar in the convention room for one last drink, and to say their goodbyes — some only until next year, others until time and circumstance would enable them to attend again. They were from all walks of life: doctors, lawyers, investment counselors, a newspaper publisher, successful and unsuccessful businessmen, and a few just hanging on by a thread. But they all shared a common bond: They had served in combat with the Special Operations Group and had been weighed on the scales and not found wanting. They had served their country with honor and integrity and exceptional courage. And they all left their reunion with the reaffirmed knowledge that they had been a part of something very special before it faded.

If you do nothing else, acknowledge their contributions. You will not likely see their equal again. ☘

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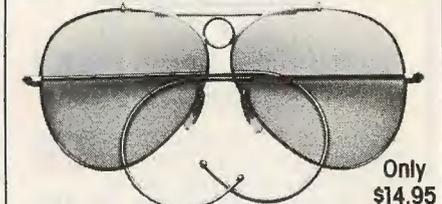
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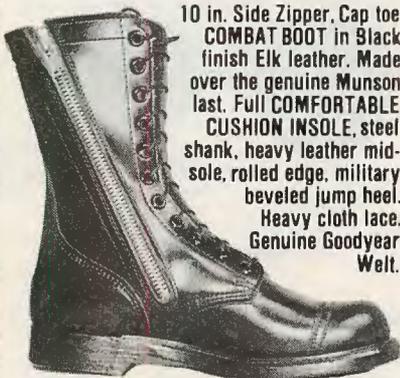


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## HIRED GUNS

Continued from page 69

bullet will take out his eyes without touching his brain. A better way would be to place the gun underneath his chin and shoot straight up."

Cronenberg turned to Sheen. "My suicide expert has just advised me that the best way to kill yourself is to place the gun directly beneath your chin and shoot up. That'll take the top of your head right off."

Sheen placed the gun under his chin, contemplated his own demise — then turned to Richard and said, "Are you sure it's not loaded?"

"Don't worry, Martin," Richard replied. "You wouldn't feel a thing. You'd be dead before you hit the ground."

A flashback scene of the 1939 German invasion of Poland was to be filmed in Yugoslavia. SMG convinced Cronenberg that all the weapons and vehicles needed for the scene could be supplied in Canada by SMG at a huge savings. The scene turned into SMG's biggest day (or, actually, night) as they equipped both sides, supplying weapons to 75 Polish and German troops plus seven armored cars and a truck. A tank was obtained by the movie company since SMG's two tanks were both under repair at the time.

The location was an abandoned brick factory which provided an ideal setting — a group of old brick buildings which could be set on fire and blown up. The scene was filmed at night while it poured rain (at a degree or two above freezing). This pleased Cronenberg no end as he thought it would look great on camera; however, the performers did not appreciate it.

SMG interspersed 10 of their experts among the 75 extras in order to operate the automatic weapons. Ron, Rocky and Richard were all dressed as German soldiers and placed on armored cars with MG42 machine guns rigged to fire blanks. Several MP40 Schmeissers were distributed among the infantrymen who carried 50 Mauser rifles. The Polish troops carried BARs and wooden-stock submachine guns as well as Mauser rifles.

This logistics nightmare meant SMG had to modify all of these different weapons to fire blanks. An example of the complexity of the operation was that three of the five MG42s in use were in 7.92mm and two were in 7.62mm, therefore requiring different BFAs and totally different blanks. The 7.92mm blanks used in the MG42s were of a different type than those used in the 7.92mm Mausers.

Although the film company had promised to hire a reservist regiment to portray the soldiers, the casting director was not able to do so and, worse, he did not admit that he couldn't obtain trained personnel until the night of the shoot.

As a result, SMG found themselves standing in the pouring rain with 65

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amateurs who had never fired a weapon in their lives. Trying to teach them to manipulate the bolts on their rifles and to convince them that they could blind or deafen each other with the full-power blanks being used in their Mausers was a complete nightmare.

Two quick walk-through rehearsals of the scenes were done and then the cameras were ready to roll. Using propane gas tubes, the buildings were set on fire. By the eerie light of the flames, the director gave the order to load.

The extras turned to one another, shook hands and wished each other luck. The CO of the Polish troops (an assistant director dressed for the role) crossed the battle line to the German side and challenged, "SMG, Berlin or bust!"

Suddenly, the director yelled, "Action!" The armored cars went rolling across the battlefield, MG42s blazing away at the Polish Army who were crouched behind a barricade. Without warning, buildings began to explode all around, the fragments striking the armored cars. This made SMG even more determined in their charge to overwhelm the Polish enemy.

In the midst of the confusion, 15 horses, brought in to play the Polish cavalry, charged the armored cars and tank. The horses raced past, presenting an irresistible target, and were blasted by both sides. The Polish BAR gunners caused the most havoc, scaring the horses into a stampede.

Suddenly one of the Polish BAR gunners was blown up in a blinding yellow flash and sent hurtling 20 feet through the air. The crewmen of the armored cars, seeing this, commented, "Wow! What a stunt!" It wasn't a stunt, however. A poor unsuspecting extra had seated himself in a small fox-hole which had an explosive charge placed inside (he was hospitalized for burns and a rupture, but no permanent damage was done).

The stampeding horses rushed into a bottleneck between obstacles and the tank. One of the stunt riders (brought from Alberta) realized that he could only get around the bottleneck and to his appointed position by crossing in front of the tank. Unfortunately for him, as he passed directly in front of the tank, special effects fired the cannon's black-powder charge, blasting the hapless horseman right in the face. The now-black Polish cavalryman then galloped on past the tank, his white teeth gleaming in the dark.

As the MG42 barrels glowed in the dark from the heat of firing at the cyclic rate of 1,200 rounds per minute, the director called, "Cut!"

Cronenberg walked, grinning, over to Ron, saying, "How did you like that, Ron?"

"If I'd known it was going to be so much fun," he replied, "you could have got me to do that for free!"

Making movies isn't all fun and games. For that night scene, filmed in freezing rain, SMG began preparing at 0800. Filming began after dark that evening and work ended at 0800 the following morning. Hours on the set are usually long and unpredictable.

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vention feeling positive: Their input had produced the constitution and resolutions, and elected officers and directors. Dick Heim of Ohio, who was so furious about the POW issue, says, "I have confidence in these people [directors] and I think they are going to be answerable to us."

Muller has dedicated years of advocacy work to the Vietnam veteran and he is quick to point out that he is not about to "credential somebody else's agenda and points of view. If I weren't the one running this organization, I wouldn't join."

Muller served honorably and with pride as a Marine infantry officer in combat. But he is still at the bottom of a well of bitterness at his wounding and what he sees as his government's betrayal. To go from the awesome responsibilities of combat to a civilian world where few cared or understood that experience is something all combat vets have felt.

For Muller the experience was extreme: "To have jet strikes, to have artillery, to have the battleship *New Jersey*, to have extraordinary fucking firepower, to make life-and-death decisions — it is such a fucking pump! You're like God! Bam! Because you catch a bullet, you're rendered to being a piece of shit!" This rage and bitterness have made it impossible for Muller to act as a truly representative leader of what is billed as a group of veterans spanning the political spectrum.

The mechanism is now in place, however, for the VVA to overcome the self-made controversy which envelopes it and mature into a true consensus group. Without doubt, there are talented men and women of all political persuasions who are members of VVA. But Muller is still president, although he is now answerable to a board of directors. It is too soon to say how strongly the board will control Muller's public statements and political bias. The national convention was a major watershed for the VVA and this year will clearly set the future direction for VVA policies.

One thing is certain. The Vietnam Veterans of America is now bigger than Bobby Muller and his hand-picked crew. In Muller's words to the delegates: "The VVA is what you have made it from this day forward."



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**THREE GUN MATCH:** The world-famous Three Gun International Combat Shooting Match will be held at the Desert Sportsman Rifle and Pistol Club 19-21 September. Entrance is by invitation only and competitors must write for an application. Send SASE to Bill Brooks, 4901 Indian Trail, Wilmington, NC 28403. This year 175 shooters will compete for \$50,000 in cash and prizes. All shooters wishing to bring a guest to the range must purchase a range guest pass for \$35. Range guest passes will also allow the guest free access to the banquet Saturday night. Transportation to the range will be provided for all shooters and guests. Shooters must register at the Sahara Space Center lobby between 1200 and 1900 hrs. Tuesday, 18 September.

**CONVENTIONEERS:** Preregistration fee is \$100. This provides free admission to all activities and events and includes one banquet ticket. All convention activities, with the exception of the SOF Arms Show, are closed to the public. Preregistration forms must be postmarked NLT 31 August 1984. You may pick up your convention schedule and badge

anytime between 1200 hrs., 18 September and 1400 hrs., 22 September at the Sahara Space Center lobby. Requests for refunds must also be postmarked NLT 31 August 1984. All conventioneers must preregister.

**OPERATION HEADHUNTER:** Off your ass and on your feet! This year the Great Plains Shooting Association, Inc. will host the first annual "Operation Headhunter." The Headhunter is a military obstacle course covering approximately five miles of rough desert terrain. It may include running, climbing, rappelling, load carrying and the use of map, compass and knife. Only 70 conventioneers can compete. This is strictly for professionals; the arm-chair commandos need not apply. For information send a large SASE to ALECTO Group, P.O. Box 253, Elkhorn, NE 68022.

**PARACHUTE JUMP SCHOOL:** As of this printing we have not found a jump school host. Keep your eyes open for jump information in future issues of SOF.

## 1984 SOF CONVENTION PREREGISTRATION FORM\*

Mail to SOF CONVENTION '84, P.O.Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306

\_\_\_\_\_ Find my convention check or Money Order (\$100 per person). Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(List each Conventioneer's name, address and telephone number)

(ARMS SHOW EXHIBITORS SEE FORM ON P.99)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\* Preregistration form and refund requests must be postmarked NLT 31 August 1984.

# 1984 SOF ARMS SHOW

21-23 SEPTEMBER



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The fifth annual Soldier of Fortune Arms Show will be the largest dealer and retailer modern arms show on the west coast. Dealers and retailers of top-quality contemporary paramilitary and police armament and equipment, communica-

tions gear, security systems, custom-made knives, parachute products, books, surplus and militaria will occupy 130 booths and 170 tables, for exhibition and sales, in the beautiful Sahara Hotel and Casino Space Center.

## 1983 SOF ARMS SHOW DEMOGRAPHY

- **ARMS and ACCESSORIES:** 63 dealers and retailers, including Choate, HK, Beretta, Bianchi, A.R.M.S., Ruger, Sterling, L.L. Baston, Springfield, Detonics, Rogers, Leatherwood, Arminex, Omni and Spyderco.
- **SWAT — Military, Parachute, Rescue Clothing and Equipment:** 33 dealers and retailers, including Silent Partner, Federal Ordnance, Cadre and Lancer.
- **CUSTOM KNIVES:** 14 dealers and retailers, including

Al Mar, Bagwell, Cam III, Cold Steel, Collins, Wells Creek, Nordic, Terzuola, Timberline and Daniel Valois.

- **INSIGNIA, MILITARIA and BOOKS:** 27 dealers and retailers, including SOF Exchange, Paladin Press, K&S, Eagle and International.
- **COMMUNICATIONS, SECURITY and NIGHT-VISION EQUIPMENT:** 8 dealers and retailers, including AN/COM, Critical, Laser, Northwest and Silence.

**DON'T WAIT! The 1983 show was a sell-out, so make your 1984 room and space reservations early. Room rates at the Sahara are \$43.00 per double. Phone**

**1(800)634-6666 and identify yourself as a Soldier of Fortune Magazine Convention Exhibitor. The exhibition space reservation form is below.**

## SPACE RESERVATION FORM

Mail to **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE ARMS SHOW — P.O. Box 693 — Boulder, CO 80306**

I wish to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ 8x10 ft. Booths at \$200.00 each. \$ \_\_\_\_\_ enclosed.

I wish to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ 6 ft. Tables at \$75.00 each. \$ \_\_\_\_\_ enclosed.

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE ( )** \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPANY** \_\_\_\_\_

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I understand that I am responsible for the exhibit area in my name and do not hold SOF Convention, Inc. responsible for my property. I also agree to abide by all federal and state firearms laws and the rules set by SOF Convention, Inc. I also understand that two badges will be

issued per table and four per booth. One additional badge will be issued per each additional table and two per each additional booth. All booth exhibitors will receive an exhibitors brochure listing prices for electricity, shipping, etc.

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

I will sell ( ) ; I will display only ( ). Type of items to be exhibited:

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Closing date for reservations is 1 September 1984. No refunds will be given after 1 September 1984.

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## SANDINISTA GULAG

Continued from page 29

turned into a light-yellow solution. Peters also said an overdose would be fatal.]

Araya Montoya explained: "Oh, this was common," he said. "We'd inject prisoners like pigs. Not only political cases, but delinquents, too. No sanitation; the same syringes were used. Just stick them and push them in a seat. Almost every little security chapter had a kit."

Barberena had told me three months earlier that prisoners were sometimes overdosed with "truth serum" to give death the appearance of natural causes. Araya Montoya agreed.

Women are not spared from Sandinista torture, according to a shaggy-haired, 21-year-old ARDE guerrilla called Alcaravan, whom I interviewed in late November in a jungle encampment in southern Nicaragua. In September 1981, he was a member of the *Brigadas de Choque*, a Sandinista community police force in Managua and part of a patrol that arrested a young woman.

"She was from the C.U.S. — a union — and making a lot of noise," he recounted. "We got her in the afternoon and took her to the Plaza del Sol building. We received orders to take her to El Chipote [Somoza's old bunker. Ironically the Ortegas have offices there now].

"There two State Security intelligence officers tied and blindfolded her. One put his hand on her neck and threw her into *la chiquita*. After a half-hour they threw her into a dark room with a dim red light. They stripped and hit her — in the face, then the stomach — and said if she didn't talk, they'd yank out all her fingernails. She was crying. With pincers, they pulled out a thumbnail. We were waiting at the doorway and they told us to scram."

Alcaravan does not know what happened to the woman. Nor does he know what happened to a dissident sailor whom he said the Sandinistas tied to an iron T-bar and beat in the courtyard of the Police of Internal Order (POI) base in March 1982. Alcaravan was a prisoner himself then (due to a falling out with his superiors) and saw the incident through his outdoor pen.

"They disappeared him," he said.

The former Sandinista officers say hundreds of "*desaparecidos*" are buried in clandestine cemeteries near the rice washing factory at Asese de Diamante in Granada, at Mombacha hill, also in Granada, at Santiago hill in Masaya, at the Masaya volcano, and at many other places.

Whenever I travel through their encampments in southern Nicaragua, I find dozens of peasant guerrillas, humble in their rags, eyes ablaze, who tell stories of Sandinista savagery. Some may be exaggerated due to a combatant's zeal, but I have found over the months that the stories corroborate each other. It definitely merits further investigation by human-rights organizations.

So, okay, Amnesty International, the ball is in your court. ☹

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# BULLETIN BOARD



Continued from page 17

## 101st AIRBORNE REUNION...

The 101st Airborne Division Assn. will hold its 39th annual reunion in Sioux Falls, S.D., 15-18 August 1984. Membership is open to anyone who wears or has worn the "Screaming Eagle" patch. For further information, contact George M. Rosie, 101st Abn. Div. Assn., P.O. Box 101 AB, Parchment, MI 49004, or call (616) 388-5801 or (616) 349-5765.



Iranian postage stamp drew a few comments at California State University at Sacramento when received from a foreign applicant to the school. It bears Iranian writing as well as English caption: "The Takeover of the U.S. Spy Den." Photo: AP/Wide World

## CIA: SATISFIED CUSTOMER...

SOF recently received a check from the Central Intelligence Agency Mailroom Library for another subscription to SOF, bringing their total subscriptions to 11. It's nice to see that the CIA is keeping up with SOF's intelligence coups. It is sort of sad, however, that the CIA can't afford as many copies of SOF as the KGB.

## TERRORISTS TARGET U.S. CORPORATIONS...

The alarming rise of anti-American terrorism in the Mideast has made American businesses acutely aware of how vulnerable they are in that troubled area. In fact, the fanatical Shi'ite Moslems who bombed the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait last December also had targeted the offices of Raytheon, one of the largest defense con-

tractors in the United States. After a relatively peaceful lull of several years, U.S. corporations operating overseas fear that terrorists will again target them for attacks to protest the U.S. presence in the Mideast. As a result, sales of anti-terrorist insurance policies, bullet-proof body armor, armored vehicles, specially designed security courses, and the employment of protection services has risen to record numbers.

## SOMETHING FISHY IN NICARAGUA...

Residents of the small Nicaraguan fishing island of La Concha claim that a fishing cooperative, Mario Carrillo, has been used for the past three years as a transshipment point for arms being sent to El Salvador, 40 miles to the north, according to a *Miami Herald* article.

The Nicaraguan government denies the charge, but many of the residents of villages scattered about the small island say that soldiers in military vehicles regularly unloaded wooden boxes at the water's edge and a 14-boat fleet made fortnightly departures from the island with the boxes bound for El Salvador. Village fishermen also reported finding some of the wooden boxes containing "bazookas" on the shoreline.

When reporters visited the state-owned "fishing cooperative," they could find no evidence of any fishing-related activity; instead they found a Sandinista Army banner, a firing target, dozens of spent rifle casings, a radio antenna and empty wooden boxes like the ones described by the villagers.

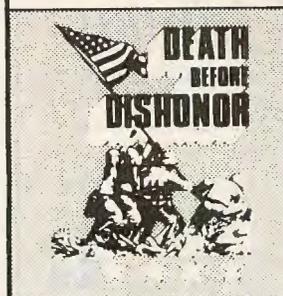
## SIERRA MAESTRA COMPLEX...

Twenty-five years after Castro's revolution, the guerrilla spirit still lives in Cuba. In fact, it's fueled by Castro's regime with such things as the Territorial Troop Militia, a paramilitary group of 500,000 irregulars who don't qualify for regular military service. In 1981, the Militia published its Basic Handbook, a guerrilla handbook full of combat tips for civilians.

For instance, it tells the proper way to throw a hand grenade: First, toss a grenade or two from 35 meters and then advance to enemy trenches while shouting, "Fatherland or death!" The handbook also covers the possibility of nuclear war, advising Cubans to close their eyes, avoid looking in the direction of the fireball, hide behind something or hug the ground, wait for the initial impact to end — then "continue carrying out your combat mission." And don't forget to yell, "Fatherland or death!" ☒

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## FULL AUTO

Continued from page 12

rd. magazine is of the single-position feed type with easily-distorted feed lips.

The unprotected front sight is adjustable for deflection zero by lateral movement in its dovetail. It is held in place by an allen set screw. It sits below and is thus partially obscured by the receiver. The aperture rear sight is a sheet-metal stamping, adjustable for elevation only by means of a sliding ramp below. Although not marked, the elevation positions are 50, 100, 200 and 300 yards.

The Model 55 was the para version. The muzzle compensator was eliminated and the stock redesigned with a pistol grip and folding wire butt. Although the Model 55 is racy-looking and not encountered as often as the Model 50, it's even less desirable. The wire stock is unstable and frequently collapses during firing.

The Reising Model 60 Carbine is similar in all respects to the M50 SMG except that it has an 18-inch barrel and is capable of semiautomatic fire only. Most were made without radial cooling fins on the barrel. Several variations of rear sights were fitted. The Model 60 is not a Title II firearm. It was made in small numbers, supposedly for police use (in competition to the Thompson Model 1927 semiautomatic carbine).

When it's functioning, the Reising sub-machine gun's cyclic rate is 550 rpm. The selector switch is a sliding bar on the right side of the receiver just below the rear sight. The aft position is marked "SAFE." The middle position is "S.A." (semiautomatic) and the forward position is "F.A." (full auto).

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So, who cares about the Reising SMG today? Novitiate automatic weapons collectors, that's who. Like the MAC 10, it can be had in excellent condition for under \$400 — an inexpensive, and therefore tempting, entree into the fascinating world of machine guns. But alas, we usually get what we pay for, don't we? And, as we have seen, the Reising is a classic case of *caveat emptor*. ☒

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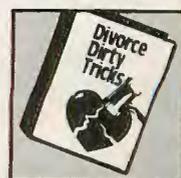
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# RUGER®

## Redhawk®



### Now available in a Variety of Calibers

The Ruger Redhawk revolver signals the most important advance in the design of heavy frame double-action revolvers in many decades. It is the first double-action revolver designed from the start to withstand the stresses imposed by the most demanding revolver cartridge ever made — the potent .44 Magnum. In addition, the Redhawk revolver is now also chambered for the .357 Magnum/.38 Special and .41 Magnum cartridges to make it responsive to a wide variety of sporting and service requirements.

Based on an entirely new mechanism and design philosophy, the Redhawk revolver encompasses a series of unique improvements and *exclusive* new features which make it a truly outstanding firearm. *No other revolver made can compare to the Redhawk revolver in these important details.*

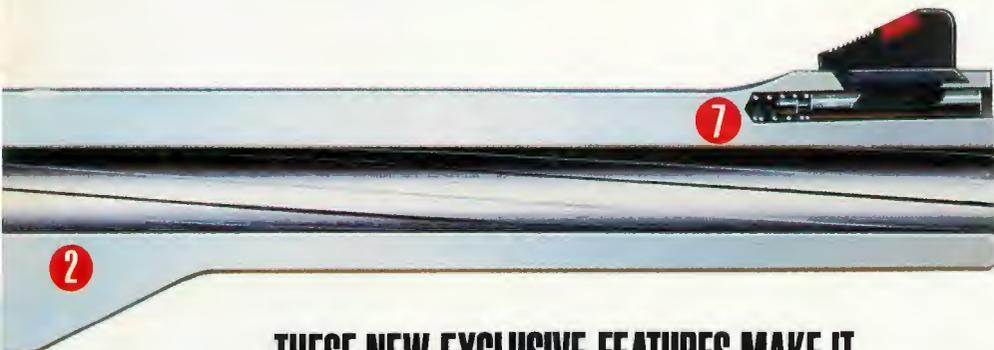
The rugged construction of this revolver ensures a service life in excess of many thousands of rounds with no appreciable signs of wear — a durability that has yet to be fully measured. The great strength inherent in the Redhawk design is accompanied by a velvety smoothness and elegance in the function of its components which represent the unmistakable mark of quality — the outcome of creative Ruger engineers reaching for perfection. The Ruger Redhawk revolver demonstrates its superiority by the results it produces at the target. A simple comparison of the Redhawk revolver, point by point, with any competitive model will convince even the most critical user of this superiority.

This detailed cross-section of the REDHAWK mechanism shows this massive double-action revolver actual size.

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# More Than World-Class--

# World's GREATEST!



## THESE NEW EXCLUSIVE FEATURES MAKE IT THE BEST DOUBLE-ACTION REVOLVER EVER MADE

- 1 Heat-treated 416 stainless steel with extra metal in top strap and critical areas around barrel threads.
- 2 Barrel forged with integral rib and ejector housing. Note thick walls of barrel breech and largest diameter threads of any production revolver made ( $3/4" \times 20!$ )
- 3 Massive cylinder with wall thickness greater by 25% than that of comparable competitive models. Locking notches are offset — not cut into thinnest part of cylinder wall over center of chamber.
- 4 New, patented Ruger Single-Spring Mechanism — hammer and trigger are powered by a single heavy coil spring that provides reliable ignition with a light, controllable double-action trigger pull. Parts linking hammer and trigger transmit spring energy with minimum friction loss.
- 5 Strong solid side-wall frame eliminates need for removable sideplate and contributes to the great strength of the Redhawk revolver. Field stripping for cleaning and maintenance is quick and simple — entire mechanism is readily removed from frame without tools.
- 6 Grip frame contoured to provide full Magnum-style grip for security and comfort, results in better control and less perceived recoil. No need for adapters, spacers, or overhanging grip panels.
- 7 New Front Sight System features interchangeable front sights. Standard steel red insert front sight mounts with spring-loaded plunger and is matched to adjustable steel rear sight with white outline notch. Colored Nylon front sights or gold bead front sight with matching "V" notch rear sight leaf are optional accessories. Scope sight model incorporates patented Ruger Integral Scope Mounting System, with one inch stainless steel scope rings included.
- 8 New, patented Ruger Locking System locks cylinder in firing position by bolting crane directly into frame at front, with a strong pilot bearing at rear of cylinder. No reliance on ejector rod for locking.

### SPECIFICATIONS:

Calibers: .357 Magnum/.38 Special, .41 Magnum, and .44 Magnum/.44 Special; Barrel Lengths:  $7\frac{1}{2}"$ ,  $5\frac{1}{2}"$ ; Overall Length ( $7\frac{1}{2}"$  Bbl.): 13"; Weight ( $7\frac{1}{2}"$  Bbl.): approx.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  Lbs.; Sight Radius ( $7\frac{1}{2}"$  Bbl.):  $9\frac{1}{2}"$ ; Scope Sight Model: Equipped with Ruger Integral Scope Mounting System, with one inch stainless steel scope rings furnished; Finish: Stainless Steel, satin polished.



REDHAWK REVOLVER WITH OPTIONAL  $5\frac{1}{2}"$  BARREL



EXCLUSIVE RUGER LOCK SYSTEM BOLTS CRANE INTO FRAME AT FRONT; LOCKS CYLINDER AT REAR



SCOPE SIGHT MODEL  
INTEGRAL SCOPE MOUNTS WITH ONE INCH  
STAINLESS STEEL RINGS



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WRITE FOR A FREE COLOR CATALOG OF THE ENTIRE LINE OF FINE RUGER FIREARMS. SINGLE COPIES OF INSTRUCTION MANUALS FOR ALL MODELS OF RUGER FIREARMS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST — PLEASE SPECIFY MODEL FOR WHICH YOU REQUIRE A MANUAL.

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# The New HK 94 Carbine from HK

The HK 94, 9mm Para, Carbine demonstrates once again that the proof is in the performance.

This new firearm, which provides rifle-like accuracy out to 100 meters, is a direct offspring of HK's renowned family of MP5 submachine guns. The MP5 has gained international reputation as one of the basic arms of elite European and American special operations units.

Key features of the HK 94 carbine are:

- Performance proven delayed roller lock bolt system
- Hammer forged 16.2 inch barrel
- Choice of two stocks: A2 fixed buttstock, A3 sliding retractable buttstock
- Diopter rear sight adjustable to 100 meters
- 15-shot detachable magazine standard with the carbine; 30-shot detachable magazine, an optional extra
- As with all HK rifles and carbines, scope mounts are available for the HK 94 Carbine

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