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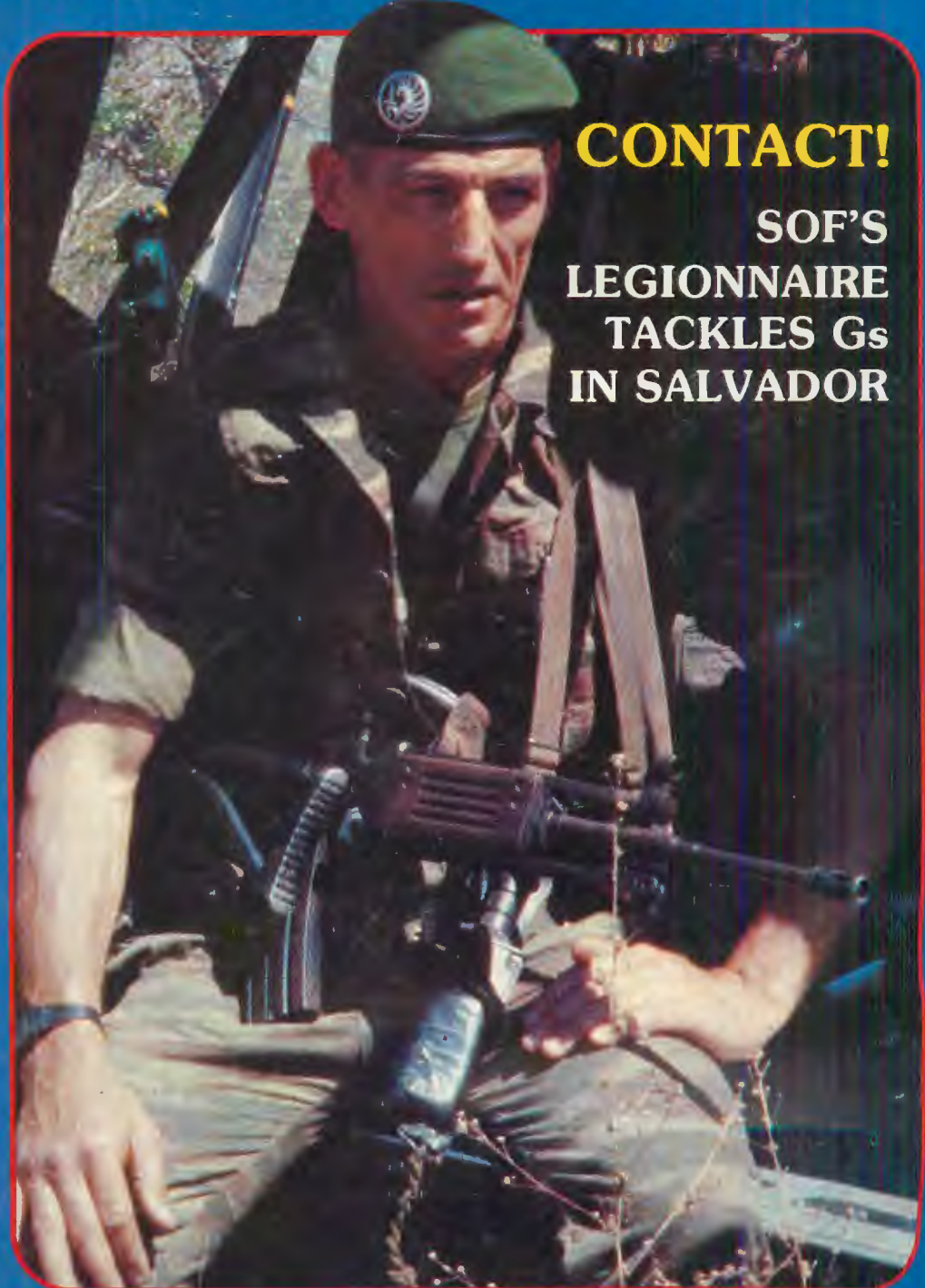
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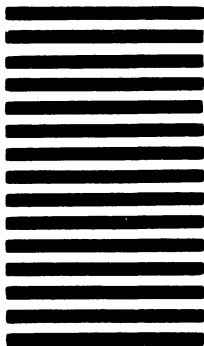
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**COVER:** SOF's French Foreign Legion vet, Paul Fanshaw, rests in UH-1 command chopper during a quick breather during days of village clearing ops with El Salvador's brush-beating *Cazadores*. Fanshaw says sight of Legion beret and French cammies let Salvos know they weren't alone, elevating unit morale. Photo: Paul Fanshaw

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**W**E didn't say so at the time, but SOF agreed with presidential hopeful Jesse Jackson when he suggested that the U.S. Marine peace-keeping force was too big to be a suicide squad and too small to be an army. Unfortunately, Jackson has spoiled the brief romance with the following statement of what he wants to do to the Bill of Rights. Since it is unlikely that most of *Soldier of Fortune's* audience is on Rev. Jackson's mailing list, we thought you might like to read part of his position paper on handgun control:

"... The unnecessary loss of life due to handguns must be curtailed.

"If elected President of the United States, I would support federal legislation to register, control and ban the use of handguns in the following manner:

"I support federal legislation to establish a national waiting period of at least 21 days so that law enforcement agencies can make a background check on prospective handgun buyers.

"I support federal legislation to provide for a minimum mandatory sentence for persons arrested for carrying a handgun without a license.

"I support federal legislation to close the loophole in the Gun Control Act of 1968 that currently allows the importation of handgun parts for assembly in the United States.

"I support federal legislation to establish a nationwide ban on handgun ammunition capable of piercing the bullet-proof vests worn by most police.

"I support federal legislation to require all handgun owners to be licensed on the basis of their competency and suitability to possess handguns.

"I support federal legislation to ban the sale and possession of handguns with a barrel length of three inches or less, whose concealability makes them the favored weapon of criminals.

"I support federal legislation to establish a domestic arms freeze by which the manufacture and importation of all handguns (except for police, military, target shooting, collecting and other categories where possession would be no threat to public safety) would cease on a specific date.

"I support federal legislation to ban the sale and possession of all handguns, with the exception of the police, military, target shooters, collectors and other categories where possession would be no threat to public safety."

Unable to believe that a national office-seeker would publicize such a document after the Proposition 15 defeat in California last year, I phoned the Jackson for President Committee to give them a chance to retract.

Identifying myself, I was put on hold for 15 minutes. Finally, a staff-member named Evan Cox came to the phone.

SOF: We just want to verify that the document in SOF's hands outlining Jesse Jackson's position on handguns is a true document, and was issued by your office.

COX: Yes.

SOF: Yes, it's a true statement?

COX: Yes, that's correct. It's a true statement.

SOF: Well, thanks for your help.

COX: Just a minute: Did you say you were with *Soldier of Fortune*?

SOF: Yes, I did.

COX: Well, I guess you don't agree with the statement.

SOF: I think you could say that. As a matter of fact, I know you could say that.

COX: Oh.

SOF: Thanks again for the help.

And thanks to you, SOFers, for reading this parable.

— Kevin Steele

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## COMBAT CROSSCUT?...

Sirs:

As you probably reach more professional military men, survivalists, and maybe even a real mercenary or two, you could help stop a very serious problem before it costs someone their life; perhaps it already has.

Two years ago a customer in England requested a large fighting knife made of stainless steel with a saw-type blade on the spine — the type Jimmy Lile made for the movie *First Blood*. I made and sent the knife to him, and he wrote to me again a little while ago. His letter stated that he had used his fighting knife in hand-to-hand combat earlier this year. The knife worked superbly when it was thrust into the upper torso of his enemy. But when he tried to withdraw the knife, the upper blade (with the saw teeth) caught on bone, ligament or muscle; he was not specific. When he pulled vigorously to free his tightly stuck knife, his hand was not only pulled free from the handle of the knife, the lanyard around his wrist also broke free, leaving him empty-handed. Before he could regain his balance, he was gravely injured before he could resort to his second knife. He did not elaborate on his injuries. From the dates, I can only guess my customer is SAS or SBS and used the knife in the Falklands. In this latest letter, he did request two more knives, this time without the saw teeth.

From this I can only concur that saw-tooth knives can be hazardous to the user's health. I hope that there could be some way that you could make it known to your readers that trick knives with saw teeth can be hazardous to their health, also.

Dennis Casey  
Redwood City,  
California



# FLAK



## BILLY KNOWS...

Sirs:

I and many of the Marines here in the barracks enjoy SOF. It helps us keep tabs on our brothers in Beirut and Grenada. But I was extremely angered by the cartoon displayed in your March Flak which depicted "Billy" and "Abu." I must say that Billy does know why he went to Beirut, the same reason he *volunteered* for the Marine Corps: To help all peoples attain the same freedoms he has, hopefully as a peacekeeper, but if not, then as a rifleman.

Billy was doing his job. He didn't die for the State Department. He died for his country and for the people he was trying to help. If I die as a Marine in a combat zone, I sure don't want my family and friends to think I died for the State Department or for President Reagan. If I die I will die fighting for my own beliefs in freedom and justice.

I hope you realize now that that cartoon was against what I have always perceived as SOF's ideals. You have the right to publish what you want, but I hope that cartoon was published accidentally and does not reflect the true feeling of SOF.

Benjamin L. Todd  
L/Cpl U.S. Marine Corps  
NSB Bangor  
Bremerton, Washington

*SOF apologizes for any offense, and none was intended. The comparison reflected well on the Marines. To our minds, it was good that "Billy" grew as a man in a reasonable culture. "Abu" was labeled a terrorist. "Billy's" confusion seemed reasonable enough: The war in Lebanon is difficult to understand, and Americans may never know if we helped or hurt. His motivation was not called into question: The final frame symbolizes the dilemma and difficulty of a reasonable man sent to fight for policy when his opponent is an unreasoning fanatic who fights under "divine" orders.*

*We found the comparison chilling: not to the discredit of America or the Marines, but for what it says about the sanity of our enemies. If their minds are not accessible to reason, mutual destruction may be our future. — The Eds.*

## DID COMPLACENCY KILL?...

Sirs:

Regarding "Why Did Pvt. Tingley Die?" in March '84 issue: The picture of the squad coming up the railroad track on page 69 is a perfect example of complacency. Walking uphill on tracks, weapons slung and in single file, is courting disaster. The high embankment on both sides and the need to look down to keep from tripping over the railroad ties is certainly a bad move.

Some old lady careening down that grade in a rickety old wheelchair with an SMG in her lap could take that squad out before they could get their shit together.

But then the order probably came from some archaic politicians who forgot that the good guys always get ambushed by the Indians in a ravine. It's a damn shame that our guys should suffer due to a lack of leadership. Politicians should stick to politics and let the military take care of their own.

Bill Stolz  
Brandon, Florida

## FLAK ON FANSHAW NOTE...

Sirs:

I was disappointed to see that Mr. Fanshaw in the March Editor's Note makes the same mistake that editorial writers in most other publications have been making: that of mistaking the Shi'ite Muslim terrorists in Lebanon as "too cowardly to engage [American troops] in battle."

It is much more likely that the terrorists' actions are not motivated by cowardice, but by their masters' (the Syrians and Soviets) keen understanding of how to manipulate American public opinion.

They are aware that America has never shied away from directly confronting its enemies, and that direct attacks on U.S. soldiers and U.S. positions will only result in a strengthened American resolve — and in many Shi'ite funerals.

Instead they rely on the kamikaze-type attack made on our Marines, which allowed the liberal press and many elected officials to

*Continued on page 98*

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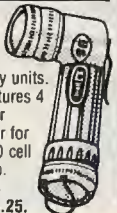
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Let's face it, there are very few things we would like to think about less than dental emergencies. But there are few things more painful or discomforting than oral distress. And pain is a debilitating factor which can greatly reduce your chances of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

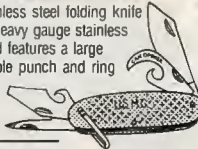
Our Mini Emergency Dental Kit contains the same materials and instructional booklet as its big brother. However it has no mirror, and a little less material (although there is still plenty of dental preparation for repeated applications). The Mini Dental Kit comes packed in a crush proof, water proof,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

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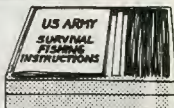
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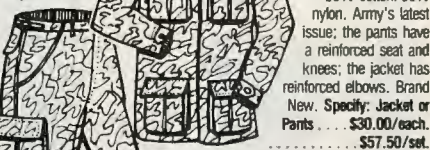
## Survival Fishing Kit - GENUINE GI

This military fishing kit is a current issue item to military pilots, and select recon troops. Designed for the individual soldier's survival under adverse conditions, it assumes no knowledge of fishing techniques by the user. The complete step by step instructions are waterproof and the case is sturdy plastic. Contents of the kit include: a packet of 8 assorted flies; an assortment of hooks in various sizes; over 100 feet of line in various weights; leaders, swivels; 6 spinners; 3 spoons; pins; needles; and a single edge razor blade. The sealed kit measures only 4 1/2" x 2 3/4" x 1 1/8". This item is a must for the outdoorsman or the survival kit... \$19.75/each.



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**Day Desert Pattern Camouflage** - 50% cotton/50% nylon. Latest issue to Airborne Troops of the Rapid Deployment Force. Brand New. Reinforced as Woodland Pattern above. Specify: Jacket or Pants... \$34.00/each; \$65.00/set.

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**Tiger Stripe Pattern Camouflage - Commercial Manufacture** - these are made by a US Government contractor to military specs. The tiger stripe pattern is true. They are reinforced as the Woodland Pattern Camouflage, above. Regular lengths only (no longs). Specify: Jacket or Pants... \$34.00/each; \$65.00/set.

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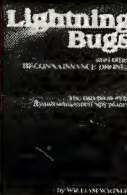
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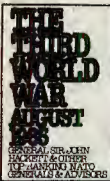
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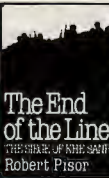
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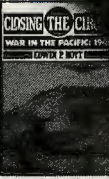
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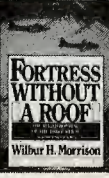
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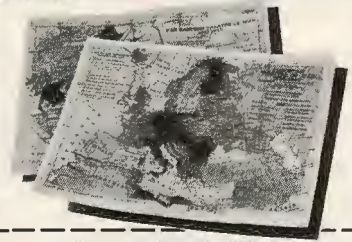
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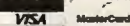
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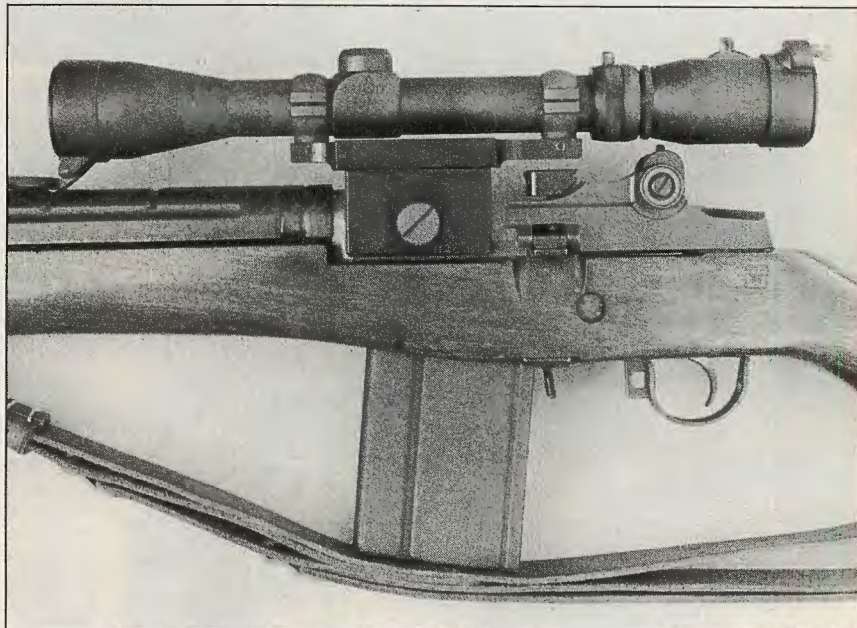
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Eager to find out how it worked, I fitted the ART IV to my match M1A. I know how it shoots, so any surprises would have to come from the scope. There weren't any surprises. Springfield Armory told me that the lens coatings were designed to prevent light reflection and encourage light absorption. That seems pretty straight, because the view

**Deadly duo: M1A with Springfield Armory's ART IV. Photo: Ken Hackathorn**

seemed unusually bright for such a compact scope.

A Swan G3 scope base allowed me to mate the ART IV to my HK 91. Once again, the ranging scope performed as advertised.

Still, the real test would be with the ART IV mounted to a real sniper's rifle. I finally installed it on my Winchester Model 70A. Aiming a bolt-action rifle is where you really see the difference with a well-designed ranging scope. Remembering tables and figuring drop may be just as accurate as an ART, but the ART gives confidence because of the simplicity of use. All you do is figure the range with the reticle, follow the scope's directions, and let 'er rip.

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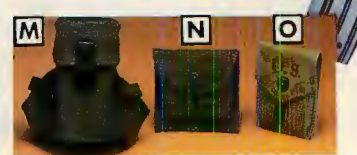


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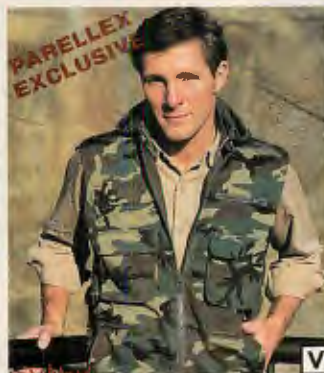
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# BULLETIN BOARD



## AFTER ACTION: MORAZAN...

"House-to-House in Morazan" (p. 50) will cheer most SOF readers, but there's still more good news.

As we go to press, Salvadoran Army sources inform us that the guerrillas driven out of Estanzuelas were tracked by civilian reports and aerial observation to a rendezvous at Torola, El Salvador, which has a Red Cross station.

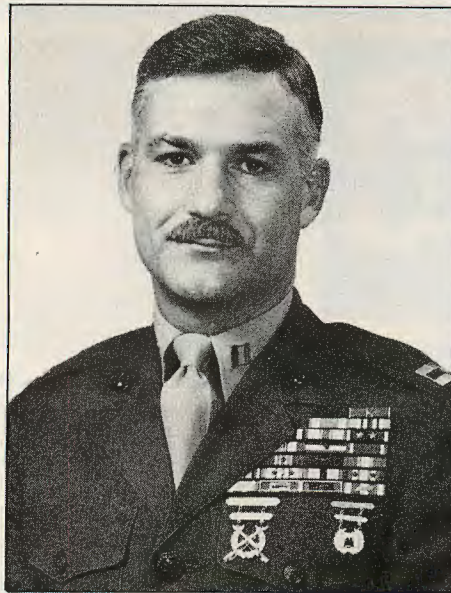
Number estimates of the Gs rose to nearly 400 as they retreated over 40 km to safety. Health workers must have lost a lot of sleep since the guerrillas carried an estimated 150 wounded with them.

## WEST SNAFU...

SOF's May '84 issue carried the West's first technical description and user evaluation of the Soviet Union's latest composite body armor. In the rush to press we printed information from an outside source which we did not have time to corroborate.

You can imagine what happened: It turned out to be guesswork instead of lab-work.

While everything else in the article "West Wins Vest War" was true, the dark fibers were not lubricated with anything, there was no trace of coconut oil, the fabric is probably of Soviet manufacture and we have no evidence — beyond that unverified report — connecting any Japanese concern with supply sources for the vest's materials. The dark stain on the warp fibers is still being studied, and a future issue of SOF will tell the whole story.



**Capt. Dale Dye, USMC, will take command of SOF. Photo courtesy of Capt. Dye**

## NEW SOF C.O....

Capt. Dale A. Dye, USMC, will join SOF as Executive Editor as soon as he retires from the Marines — probably 1 June 1984.

Awarded the Bronze Star for heroism in combat in Hue City during the '68 Tet Offensive, Dye served as a Marine 1st Division combat correspondent in 31 major combat operations and was wounded three times. Directing entertainment radio and TV on Okinawa won him the Gold Mike Award for outstanding broadcast work from the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service.

Most of you will recognize Dye from his five-month stint as command spokesman and PAO for the U.S. contingent of the multi-national peace-keeping force in the Middle East.

## PARTICIPATORY CONVENTION...

If there are enough requests, SOF may offer a variety of activities at the '84 Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada. Ideas include — so far — SCUBA classes, buy-your-own-ammo manufacturer's demos, a rappelling course, and paint-pistol survival games. If you're interested in something besides propping up a bar or paying a pretty baccarat-dealer's way through college, send your ideas to: Brown's Best, c/o *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine, P.O.B. 693, Boulder, CO 80306.

## UNION OF SOVIET SOUTH AFRICA?...

The Soviet Union pursues its vendetta against world peace by interfering with a negotiated settlement offered SWAPO by the South African government.

The Soviets have managed the transfer of an additional 9,000 Cuban troops into the area. That makes a total of 30,000 troops on foreign communist government payrolls working with the Angolans and SWAPO. Unsure that it will do any good against the combined democratic forces of Southern Africa (South Africa, Southwest Africa and UNITA), Russia has warned that South African interference in the contested area of Southwest Africa may draw Soviet intervention. Indeed, SADF Chief of Staff, Operations, Gen. Ian Gleeson has announced that intel sources had confirmed early reports that Russian officers had issued original guidelines and had, in some cases, assumed tactical command of Angolan, Cuban and SWAPO during the battle at Covelai, Cunene Province, Angola, this past January.

Not wishing to draw any more difficulties on the South Africans than they already have, it might be amusing to SOF readers to see how a conscript army with bad logistics and the world's worst military alcoholism problem would do against the crack Springboks.

## KARENS FIGHT BACK...

By our copy deadline ethnic resistance against the totalitarian central government of Burma seemed doomed. (See "The Last Battle?" p. 66.)

As we go to press, a salient has formed around Mapokay (Maw Paw Kay, on the Karen National Liberation Army-supplied map, p. 73), touching the Thai border. The Burmese Army holds the vital Nawtaya Pass, but adjacent jungle is contested by Karen Group 5 commandos, and the road is not secure.

The Thais are reinforcing the border, fearing a Burmese incursion to interdict Karen supply of the Mapokay pocket.

## NEW SOV "SMG"...

An SMG only in the sense that it replaces them in supply channels, the Soviet Army has fielded a new ultra-short folding-stock version of the AK-74.

Captured by the Islamic Unity for Afghanistan, the AKR (*Automat Kalashnikov Ruzhya*) was first revealed in the Western press by *Jane's Defense Weekly* (congratulations, Mr. Hogg), but if you want to know how it shoots, look for an upcoming T&E in SOF.

SOF contributing editor David Isby, and Afghan-affairs lobbyist Karen McKay have just returned from an SOF assignment that included several penetrations of Afghan territory.

During their investigative tour of the embattled region, they were offered an opportunity to examine and fire the AKR. You'll read the results of the test in *Soldier of Fortune*.



## RHODESIAN VETS CLUB...

The newly-formed Rhodesian Veterans Association is tentatively planning to meet in Las Vegas at the same time as the SOF convention. Those qualified to join might want to double their fun by contacting them. Mail an SASE with your questions to P.O.B. 1159, 14526 Sherman Way, Van Nuys, CA 91405, or call John W. Coleman (818) 782-9413, or Tim Carmody (415) 564-0261.



## MID-EAST PINCERS...

Fighting around Kharg Island and threats to close the Persian Gulf aren't half the story on manic-depressive Iran's plunge to self-destruction.

Nobody believes the Soviet build-up in Southwest Afghanistan is aimed entirely against the mujahideen. And most recently, over 30 all-arms divisions have been posted to the 300-mile border between Turkey and the Caspian Sea. Nearly all the divisions are within a 100-mile radius of the Iranian trade and natural-gas center of Tabriz.

As if that news weren't serious enough, the Soviet Navy is in full possession of Chah Bahar port, just outside Straits of Hormuz. During the last years of the Shah's reign, the United States built the most sophisticated and probably the biggest naval port facility in the world at Chah Bahar. Situated at the head of the Arabian Sea and commanding the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, Chah Bahar is one of the most strategically located single military installations in the world.

The Soviets now militarily dominate the northern and eastern borders of Iran, and the Iranians have given their most dangerous enemy control of the choke-point for their military and their economy.

Already at war with Iraq, the only way the Iranians could be in a worse position would be if they were to declare war on Pakistan and Turkey. SOF thinks they're capable of it.

## 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.

## WESTMORELAND LEGAL FUND...

CBS grossed over \$4 billion last year, and they can afford to fight Gen. Wm. C. Westmoreland's libel suit.

Westmoreland is represented — at no cost — by the Capital Legal Foundation. Unfortunately, the foundation's commitment to this case has put them \$500 over their budget, already. Curtailing certain kinds of legal preparation is their only recourse, unless you can help with a tax-deductible contribution to Westmoreland's legal fund.

Mail any amount, no matter how small, with your unit designation to Veterans for Westmoreland, Dept. SOF, P.O.B. 264, Locust Valley, NY 11560.

## LOS ANGELES NEXT TARGET?...

Many believe that the United States is in greater danger from terrorist attacks within its borders than ever before. The Summer Olympics, scheduled to begin in Los Angeles soon, present a likely target for terrorists from the Mideast and the United States. Preventing a terrorist attack won't be easy, either, considering the proximity of the inadequately guarded Mexican border and the fact that the Olympic events take place over 160 miles of California land.

Continued on page 103

**PALADIN  
PRESS**



# UP YOURS!

## Guide to Advanced Revenge Techniques

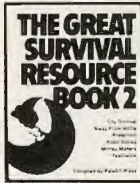
It's 1984 and getting even is a whole new ball game. The well-known master of revenge and author of *Get Even* has sunk to new lows with this latest collection of original dirty tricks and creative scams. In *Up Yours!* you'll find the meanest, nastiest tricks for all those people you love to hate—snakelike salesmen, crooked landlords, bungling bureaucrats and nosy neighbors. *Up Yours!* is categorized alphabetically into over one hundred-fifty different topics—Additives, Air Polluters, Arson, Automobiles, Bureaucrats, Chemicals, College Life, and Fast Food Stores, to name a few. Don't sit back and take it anymore. Start getting even now. *Up Yours!* will tell you how. 5½ x 8½, hardcover, 175 pp. **\$12.95**

Remember, this book is for entertainment purposes only.



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Here is the grim story of Nazi Germany's only organized guerrilla resistance movement. This exact reprint, from the only copy known to exist, instructed Werwolf members. Includes command principles and organization, training, sabotage and more. Also a photographic history of the Werwolf movement. A classic for historians, tacticians and survivalists. 5 x 7, hardcover, illus., 200 pp. **\$16.95**



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### WEAPONS OF THE STREET

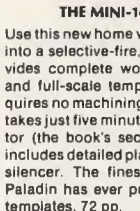
by Dr. Ted Gambordella

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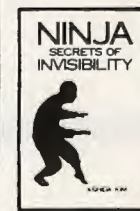
### US ARMY SPECIAL FORCES MEDICAL HANDBOOK

The U.S. Army Special Forces are known to train the world's most accomplished medics, and this book is the reason why. It has everything: comprehensive info on disease diagnosis and treatment, emergency war surgery and paramedical skills, pediatrics, obstetrics, orthopedics, emergency dental treatment, and more. 4 x 7, softcover, illus., 400 pp. **\$14.95**



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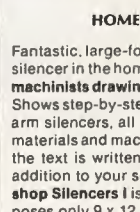
**An Angry Man's Guide to Revenge**  
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by Ragnar Benson

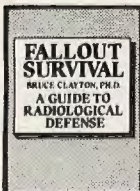
Tells the survivalist how to collect wild game under any circumstances, using Indian secrets. Shows specific poaching methods for deer, elk, bear, moose, beaver, mink, muskrat, trout, salmon, grouse, pheasant, ducks, and dozens more. Includes detailed plans for many traps, snares, deadfalls, etc. Truly a fascinating and useful selection. 5½ x 8½, 250 pp., hardcover, illus. **\$14.95**



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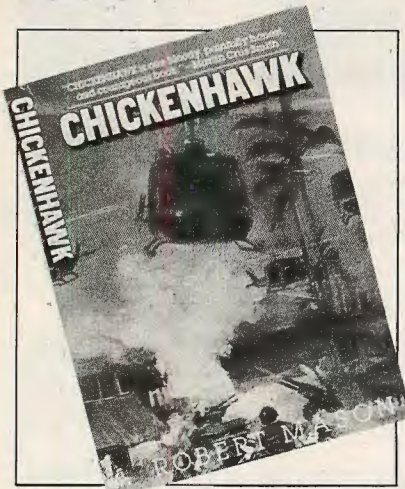
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**CHICKENHAWK.** By Robert Mason. Viking Press, Dept. SOF, 40 W. 23rd St., New York, NY, 10010. 1983. 383 pp. \$17.95. Review by James P. Monaghan.



**“T**HE right stuff in the wrong war,” claims the dust jacket of *Chickenhawk*. “... The most vivid, accurate descriptions of helicopter flying in combat ever written.”

This reviewer partially agrees with that statement. Vietnam was the first war in which the United States made substantial use of the helicopter in tactical combat and combat support operations. The helicopter saw limited duty as an air ambulance in Southeast Asia during the closing months of WWII. It was again utilized in the Korean War for air evac and aerial resupply. Its tactical use was pioneered by the USMC which used it briefly during that conflict.

*Chickenhawk* is an account of Robert Mason's military service, encompassing his voluntary enlistment into the Army, his basic and helicopter flight training and subsequent tour of duty in South Vietnam, 1965-1966. Mason's powerful portrayal of the humor, sorrow, fear and bravery that was day-to-day existence for him and his fellow pilots in Vietnam is worthwhile reading. But there are some problems I wish to point out.

The author is accurate and informative in his narrative of combat flying, but his lack of knowledge or understanding of the airmobile concept is evident. Perhaps this gap was a result of his late introduction into the 1st Air Cav, shortly before its scheduled deployment from Ft. Benning to South Vietnam.

The 1st Air Cav faced a gargantuan task in Vietnam. First, they had to secure, clear and construct a base area from which to operate. Second, they were expected to fight in swamps, jungles and mountains. Third, their numbers were not enough to occupy and police those areas which were

## IN REVIEW



conquered and pacified. Thus the war, as seen by Mason, was unpredictable, arduous and apparently unending.

But lessons learned from the French colonial forces, and later the ARVNs, enabled U.S. military planners to conclude that the secret of success in counter-guerrilla warfare lay in the use of the airmobile vertical envelopment concept. To win in combat, one must act and react swiftly and brutally. In the Cav's case, recon patrols, both foot and helicopter, would find the enemy; headquarters would digest the intelligence, analyze it, plan an operation and the Cav would “pile it on.” Time and time again, the Cav decisively engaged and defeated mainforce Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units using this technique.

Granted, the concept was not always successful. Weather, machinery malfunctions and a stubborn, resourceful enemy accounted for loss of life and materiel. But the author fails to realize that what he describes as “these disastrous, incompetent airmobile” techniques enabled U.S. forces to avoid costly, large-scale enemy ambushes that were the bane of the French effort there.

Mason is also remiss in his type-casting of the ARVN soldier. He consistently negates their performance in combat, although he had limited contact with them. The ARVN soldier was in for the duration. He served until seriously wounded or killed. He fought for his country long before Mason arrived in South Vietnam, and long after he left.

Mason describes his return home and subsequent duty as a helicopter flight instructor. He felt betrayed by the war, but his claim that he was ignorant of the enlistment stipulation that he could be sent to a combat zone (other than in a national emergency) stretches his credibility to the limit.

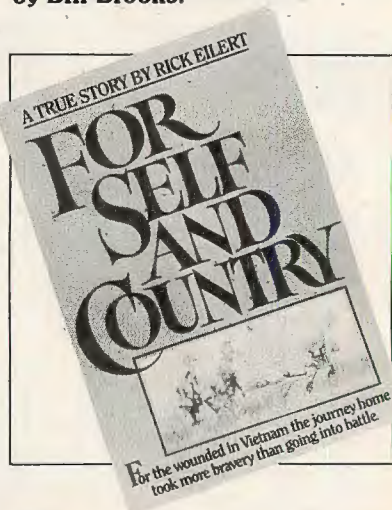
Mason left active duty in 1968. In 1970 he was given a V.A. rating of 50-percent disability for post-traumatic stress disorder. He attended school at the University of Florida; however, he could not “face a campus filled with young, smiling faces, while guys still leapt screaming out of helicopters, killing and dying for a cause unworthy of their bravery. They deserved to be heroes, but they were fools.”

In January 1981, Mason was arrested and charged with smuggling marijuana into the country. He was

found guilty of possession and sentenced to five years in prison. He is currently free, appealing his conviction.

The reader wonders... who was the hero and who was the fool?

**FOR SELF AND COUNTRY: A True Story** By Rick Eilert. William Morrow & Co., Inc., Dept SOF, 195 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016. 1983. Sketches by Jack Fournelli. 304 pp. \$13.95. Review by Bill Brooks.



**T**HE true story of L/Cpl. Rick Eilert, Mike Co., 3rd Bn., 26th Marines, is told in *For Self and Country*. Eilert was severely wounded in Vietnam on 26 November 1967. To date, his wounds have required 40 operations. This is a vivid personal account of infantry combat, death, hope and survival, and the story is a fitting memorial to all those who fought and were wounded in 'Nam. Eilert's book provides a hauntingly accurate picture of what these grunts had to endure and how they were changed by their unique experience, focusing on the alienation 'Nam vets felt from their peers who stayed at home, especially those who actively protested the war.

For Rick Eilert, “The Crotch” (USMC) meant five months of infantry combat and 11 months in Ward Three South at Great Lakes Naval Hospital. When he left the hospital he was 20, the oldest man on the ward. In Vietnam the average age was 19; it was a

*Continued on page 97*



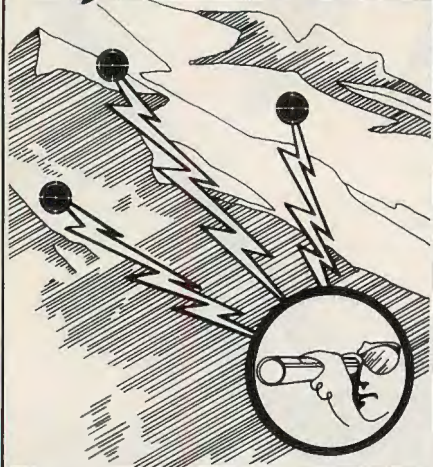
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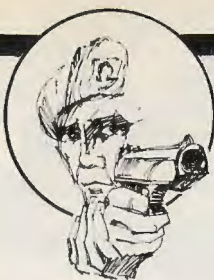


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# I WAS THERE

## Dead Wrong

by Cpl. Tommy R. Kovach  
as told to M.L. Jones

*Cpl. Tommy R. Kovach is back in the Army. Having first served from 1963-66 with a Vietnam tour in 1965-66, he returned to civilian life where he studied journalism and applied his learning as a free-lance writer. In 1982, he re-enlisted. As he says, "I'm not sure what I was looking for. Change of pace? Travel? Adventure? At any rate, it's not what I expected. Peacetime armies are different." But Kovach remembers the wartime army:*

**A**CCIDENTS will happen in wartime. And we certainly had our share in Vietnam. Things are not always as they are supposed to be. My artillery battalion accidentally dropped rounds three times on friendly troops. Each time it resulted in death.

But I was witness to one accident that could have been avoided. It involved using people for a job they were not trained for. Even though we were in the artillery, located near the village of Phouc Vinh, and firing support for operations and sorties being carried out by the Big Red One — the 1st Infantry Division — someone way up on the chain of command decided artillery people needed experience in carrying out night patrols.

So we began doing a job that was primarily an infantry mission. And the result was tragic. The patrols would go out into the jungle just before sunset and return in the morning.

One day in May 1966, a patrol was sent out from A Battery, 6th Battalion, 27th Arty. First Lt. H\_\_\_\_, who had just been made the Battery Commander (BC) of A Battery, was in charge. They had some new men and they were jumpy.

The patrol stopped to rest on a narrow jungle trail, and the BC trod slightly ahead to check things out. As he returned, he removed his helmet, seeking relief from the humidity, but his bushy hair, silhouetted against the setting sun, made him look a lot like a Viet Cong. One man jumped up from his resting spot, raising his M14.

Another fellow yelled, "BC!"

meaning, "Don't shoot; it's the Battery Commander." But BC is darned close to VC and that's what the frightened soldier thought he'd heard.

The man tried to knock the rifle down, but it was too late. About five rounds of 7.62 slugs tore into the officer's chest. I doubt if he suffered much, since it was determined he died instantly.

Meanwhile, the soldier who'd tried to knock the M14 down had part of his hand blown away. Total confusion followed. I was on radio watch that night and we thought they had come under enemy fire. The battalion commander finally sent in his personal chopper to evacuate the wounded man, a dangerous operation since by then darkness had fallen.

The lieutenant's body was brought out the following day. We lost a damn good officer, well-liked by the men. One man lost his hand, and the other poor devil was sent back to the States, a basket case who'll probably never recover from having killed his commander.

The patrols were then halted indefinitely. Someone sitting behind a desk in Saigon finally decided to leave them to the men who were trained for it. We went back to firing artillery support.



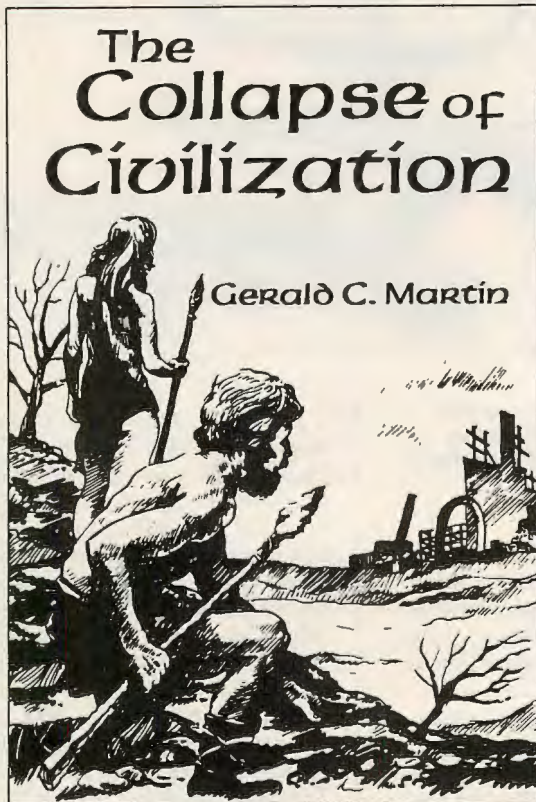
**I**F you have a personal adventure for "It Happened to Me" or "I Was There," triple-space type it and send it to SOF, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306, Attn: M. L. Jones. All stories should be 500 words or less. Upon publication, SOF will become owner of all publication rights. Submitted articles are subject to editing and revision, although their content and theme will not be changed.

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**E**VERYONE acknowledges the Kalashnikov to be a sturdy and reliable design, but few realize to what extent this is true. Noticing that the top portion of the right-side locking recess in the receiver of my North Korean AK-47 was starting to peen rearward — along with its mating face on the bolt's locking lug — I carefully stoned these surfaces and set the rifle aside.

Several weeks later, I learned that John Leatherwood had observed the same phenomenon on his brother Charlie's Egyptian Maadi AKMS. Checking further, Leatherwood discovered that these critical parts are not heat-treated or case-hardened. Inspection of Dragunov (SVD) sniper rifles and PRC (People's Republic of China) Type 56 Kalashnikovs confirmed this to be a universal ComBloc characteristic, although it has been masked by chrome-plating on some variants.

Aha, you say, another example of communism's failure to produce quality-controlled products. Oh no, I say. Rather it is more evidence of the Kalashnikov's amazing robustness that it operates so reliably over its programmed life span of 15,000 to 20,000 rounds without requiring the sophisticated heat-treating processes lavished on Western Bloc small arms.

As a final anecdote, Leatherwood informed me that a captain in his tech intel section in Vietnam loaded a 30-rd. magazine of sabotaged ammunition (the propellant had been replaced with C4) and fired it through an AK-47 in the full-auto mode. The empty steel cases were cracked, but the rifle was unscathed! (Please don't try to duplicate this experiment.)

The trigger mechanism components of the PPSH-41 submachine gun are not heat-treated either. Eventually the sear will become battered enough to cause the weapon to run away in both the semiautomatic and full-auto modes. The problem can be remedied by having a competent armorer resurface the sear's rear face.

Runaways can also result from firing low-powered ammunition in blow-back-operated submachine guns as I discussed in the November '83 issue of this column ("Performance Choices for SMG Ammo").

A reader, *having this problem* with his recently acquired M1 Thompson SMG, assumed it was the recoil spring instead of the PMC .45 ACP ball he was firing and proceeded to whack four turns from the recoil spring. Getting self-loading weapons to function properly can be a tortuous, frustrating procedure that should always be approached in an orderly, cautious manner. Our man with the hacksaw first should have tried a number of different makes of ammunition — cer-



## FULL AUTO

### AK, Thompson, MG-34: Caring for the Classics

by Peter G. Kokalis



**Top to bottom: sensitive and oily MG-34, persistent AK-47, and an unmodified Thompson. Photo: Peter G. Kokalis**

tainly including some G.I. ball for which the Thompson was designed. Reloaders would be well advised when using a 230-gr. cast round-nose bullet to propel it with either 6.3 gr. of Unique or 5.6 gr. of Winchester 231.

If the doubling or short cycling cannot be attributed to weak ammunition, an inspection of the weapon is in order. An M1 Thompson's trigger mechanism should be examined for debris, burrs and signs of excessive wear on the rocker, trip, sear, rocker pivot and pivot plate assembly. The sear, sear lever and disconnector springs should be scrutinized and replaced as required. Under no circumstances should the recoil spring be chopped or the bolt lightened! Always work toward a solution within the design framework as originally fielded — especially with eminently successful systems like the Thompson.

Still at its killing work in places as far removed from one another as Guatemala and Lebanon, the MG-34 *Einheitsmaschinenengewehr* (universal — general purpose — machine gun) is a much coveted possession for German WWII weapons buffs. Its acquisition is only a matter of several thousand dollars. Getting it to function properly is another proposition.

Probably the most elaborate machine gun ever built, the MG-34 is blend of Mauser, Rheinmetall and Solothurn designs. The gun contains over 100 individual components. The bolt mechanism is a machinist's nightmare. The heavy mount for sustained fire had more than 200 parts. Beautifully finished and of substantial construction, the MG-34 was, and is, impressive looking.

But, this Nazi-memorabilia lover's wet dream is more than a little sensitive to adverse operating environments. The only manual in English is the U.S. TME9-206A reprint, which states, "Insufficient recoil may be due to reduced blast boosting or to obstruction in receiver. Adjust the blast booster the required number of notches until sufficient recoil is obtained." Not true.

The flash suppressor should always be turned down snug against the barrel jacket. Only by changing the gas nozzle (*duse*), which is contained within the flash suppressor and available in several orifice sizes, can the recoil energy be modified.

Lubrication is the key to success with the MG-34. Oil must ooze from the bolt mechanism and the belts must be drenched in light oil just before firing. The fly in this ointment is, of course, the dust and debris collected by the gooe mess. All of which, in its own small way, no doubt helped expedite the Afrika Korps' demise. ☒

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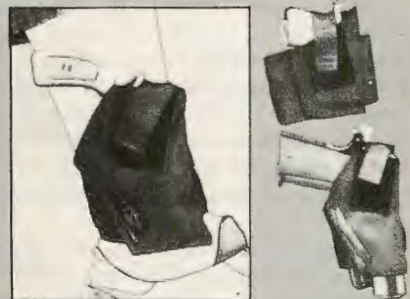
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**A**MERICANS have long yearned to be on the "right side" of a truly popular revolution in Latin America — one in which the United States is not obligated, in the name of anti-communism, to prop up the repressive regime under attack. But now that there is just such a revolution in Nicaragua — the *New York Times/Washington Post* wing of the media is demanding we oppose it and "finally accept" the old 1979 Sandinista revolution instead.

The fatal flaw in this argument is that there is nothing left in the earlier revolution for an honest civil-libertarian to accept. It has devolved into nothing more than a grisly dictatorship of the gestapo left — a fact which is becoming so obvious as to begin causing doubts among even the most pro-Sandinista of journalists.

Between the lines, all but the very most pseudo-liberal of them seem increasingly haunted by an honorable impulse to hold their noses when trying to explain why it is "acceptable" to hold hands with such vicious illiberals — such fascists — as the Ortega brothers, Tomas Borge and Fidel Castro. But they still do recommend the old revolution over the new one.

Could it be that many of these journalists (just like the House of Representatives, which has twice voted to prohibit U.S. aid to the New Revolution) fail to recognize:

- The Sandinistas' total repudiation of the democratic goals which constituted their former legitimacy?
- The Sandinistas' total subservience to the Cubans and the Soviets?
- The pluralist, civil-libertarian sentiments of most of the New Revolution's political leaders — most of whom were leaders of the 1979 revolution as well?

Many lawmakers and journalists continue to hope naively that the Sandinista junta is merely "leftist," which falsely implies that it is liberal. Such people would do well to listen instead to what the Sandinistas say about themselves, to themselves, when they think Americans are not listening. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a 21 July 1981 speech to fellow Sandinistas by Humberto Ortega, minister of defense and brother of Daniel Ortega, chief of the junta:

"We are not going to give ourselves a false name. Our revolution has a profoundly anti-imperialist, profoundly revolutionary, profoundly class nature. We are anti-Yankee, against the bourgeoisie . . . We guide ourselves by the scientific doctrine of revolution, by Marxism-Leninism . . . Without Sandinism we cannot be Marxist-Leninists, and Sandinism without Marxism-Leninism cannot be revolutionary . . . [so] we are making the effort to transform our society in a revolutionary way, not a reformist way."

**Translation:** Make no mistake about it, comrades. We believe in doing things the way Lenin did. We are dyed-in-the-wool communists, and we are going to stay that way.

Jose Esteban Gonzales, longtime enemy of Somoza and now exiled director of the Nicaragua Permanent Commission on Human Rights, explains what this means to the now "liberated" people of Nicaragua:

"During the first few days of the revolution we refused to make comparisons (between the new government and Somoza) because there was a different situation. Now I say *clearly* the situation is much worse. During the Somoza regime the repression didn't affect the whole community but only those who were in conflict with the government. But now everybody in Nicaragua is affected — not just those who are directly political."

**Congressmen** and journalists who applauded Gonzales when he condemned Somoza now seem deaf, dumb, and blind to his testimony that the Sandinistas are much worse. They condemn him and the whole "Contra" group of revolutionaries as "thugs, thieves, and brigands" — the words of Rep. Tom Downey (D-N.Y.). They talk of Nicaragua's admittedly communist dictatorship in such powder-



## EDITORIAL

### Nicaragua's Progressive Revolution

by Jim Guirard Jr.

puff terms as "non-pluralistic socialism" — the words of *Washington Post* reporter on Central America, Karen De Young.

In effect, the House and the press are listening still to the hollow echo of a "revolution" which has lost the right to be known by that honorable name. And they turn a deaf ear to the cries for help from those who desire the democracy and pluralism which gave that earlier revolution its legitimacy — its soul. Such people are:

- Alfonso Robelo, a leader of the first revolution and member of the original Sandinista junta;
- Eden Pastora, military hero of the first revolution and ex-deputy defense minister;
- Arturo Cruz, ex-member of the junta and ex-Sandinista ambassador to the U.S.;
- Jose Francisco Cardenal, former vice president of the Sandinistas' Council of State;
- Edgard Macias, anti-Somoza militant and head of the Popular Social Christian Party;
- Jose Esteban Gonzales, head of the Nicaraguan Permanent Commission on Human Rights;
- Violeta Chamorro, ex-member of the original Sandinista junta;
- Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Jr., ex-Sandinista supporter — publisher (like his father before him) of *La Prensa*;
- Humberto Belli, anti-Somoza editor of *La Prensa*;
- Jaime Montealegre, ex-vice president of the Sandinista Council of State;
- Agustin Alfaro, ex-Sandinista consul general in New Orleans;
- Miguel Bolanos, ex-official of the Sandinista security police;
- Adolfo Calero, head of Nicaraguan Conservative Party, jailed by Somoza, now head of the Contras;
- Archbishop Obando y Bravo, head of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church and former Sandinista supporter;
- Carlos Coronel, former Sandinista ambassador of fisheries;
- Alvaro Taboada, ex-Sandinista ambassador to Ecuador;
- Francisco Fiallos, ex-Sandinista ambassador to Geneva;
- Herald Montealegre, ex-Sandinista alternate governor of the World Bank;
- Steadman Fagoth, leader of the Miskito Indians and former anti-somocista.

The list goes on and on. Indeed, it grows each day as the Contras and allied groups gain recruits. The point is that in the defection of such leaders the "human rights" legitimacy of the old revolution (now deceased) has been transferred in the New Revolution — the "Nuevolucion," we should christen it.

If the revolution of 1979 merited "liberal" and "progressive" support, then the Nuevolucion of 1984 merits it all the more. First, because the tyranny against which it is directed is more oppressive to Nicaraguans than was the Somoza regime. Second, because the Sandinista dictatorship is far more dangerous to neighboring peoples than Somoza ever was. Third, because so many of the same good people (absent the perfidious communists, of course) are leading this New Revolution as led the old one.

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**SOF VIETNAM**

# DIEN BIEN PHU

## Vietnam's Maginot Line

by Lt. Col. Patrick X. Turnbull



Photo: Howard Sochurek, Life Magazine © 1953 Time Inc.

**13 MARCH 1954:**

"The day began just like any other: digging fatigues, working on defense. That afternoon I was having a drink with a friend: a tin, United States model, half-liter content, concentrated (24-proof) wine. It was 1655 hours when we finished the last drop, and I began to walk back to my pillbox, my usually brilliant brain a bit hazy.

"And it was at that very moment, without warning, that I felt the end of the world had come. The whole of strong-point *Beatrice* went up in smoke. All around me the ground heaved, spouted, and I saw men falling and lying still. . . ."

That is how Sgt. Kubiak of the 3rd Battalion of the Foreign Legion's 13th Demi-Brigade described the opening moments of the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Though dramatic, the picture he paints is not exaggerated. Dien Bien Phu was the largest-scale battle ever fought in the history of "colonial" warfare, involving some 15,000 French troops and at least 60,000 Viet Minh, the Indochinese communist People's Army.

Today the decision of the French high command not merely to accept, but actually to invite a battle, occupying a defensive position in a valley, making no attempt to hold the crests of the tightly encircling hills, and separated from the nearest French post by 300 kilometers of mountain and jungle traversed only by primitive tracks, is generally considered one of the greatest strategic and tactical blunders of all time. And yet in the early planning stages, certain aspects of the proposed operation seemed to make sense.

The year 1953 was one of crisis not only for the French, but also for the Viet Minh, led by the dyed-in-the-wool communist Ho

Chi Minh. In France the unpopularity of the war was growing rapidly. No conscripts were allowed to be drafted to the Far East. Military supplies were being sabotaged by communists in the port of Marseille. The media kept up a constant attack on the cost of the war, pointing out that every year the equivalent of a whole "promotion" of officer cadets was being lost in Indochina's swamps and jungles.

Though after seven years the original Viet Minh guerrilla bands had been welded into a "regular" army of five field divi-

sions, complete with supporting arms supplied by the Soviet Union and Red China, the army commander, ex-schoolmaster Nguyen Vo Giap, was worried. The Viet Minh soldier (*Bo doi*) showed a kamikaze-like contempt for death, yet he was slow to master the techniques of the modern weapons with which he was so liberally furnished, and disquietingly inept when called on to deal with well-constructed field works defended by professional soldiers like the Foreign Legion, the Colonial paratroops, or Moroccan and Algerian native

### WELL-TRAVELED WRITER

Lt. Col. Patrick Edward Xenophon Turnbull has had an even more peripatetic career than his Greek namesake.

Born in South Africa, Turnbull attended the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, England, and after graduation journeyed to India as a second lieutenant with the 2nd Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, stationed first at Rawalpindi (Punjab) and then at Landi Kotal at the Khyber Pass.

In 1932, Turnbull left the army for a writing career and to explore Morocco, where he stayed for a time with the French Foreign Legion cavalry at Bou Malem in the Moroccan Sahara.

When World War II broke out, Turnbull rejoined the army and was part of the British Expeditionary Force sent to France in 1940 and evacuated from Dunkirk. During the 1940 campaign he

was awarded the Military Cross.

Turnbull later served in Gibraltar. When Japan entered WWII, he was sent back to India and attached to the Indian Army. Turnbull saw service in the Burma campaigns and the war there gave him material for his books; *One Bullet for the General*, a novel, and *The Battle of the Box*.

Postwar service took Turnbull to Beirut and Greece. At his retirement in 1957 he lived in the south of France until returning to England in 1973.

Turnbull's 31 published works include a history of the French Foreign Legion and three novels of the postwar Legion, two set in Indochina and one in Algeria. A new work, *Solferino*, the story of the 1859 Italian campaign, is due for publication later this year.

SOF is pleased to add this account of Dien Bien Phu, written to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the siege, to Lt. Col. Turnbull's bibliography.



infantry (*Tirailleurs*). Because of heavy losses, Ho Chi Minh was trying to find a compromise to bring the shooting war, albeit temporarily, to a halt.

In 1952, the French had established an entrenched camp — more popularly an *herisson* (hedgehog) — near a village called Na San. The position was soon cut off, but garrisoned by a mixed force of 10 battalions, it was able to beat off a series of massive assaults by the Viet Minh 308th and 312th Divisions, since an air strip had been built in the camp's center, enabling the garrison to receive a constant flow of reinforcements and supplies. This success gave the French the idea of setting up bigger and better hedgehogs against whose perimeters the Viet Army would, in theory, destroy itself.

This idea was passed on by the then-commander-in-chief, Gen. Salan, to his successor, Gen. Henri Eugene Navarre on 28 May 1953. Navarre was under considerable pressure from Paris to "end the war speedily," and had been ordered to protect the little kingdom of Laos — the only one of the Indochinese states which had remained consistently loyal to France — from a Viet Minh invasion threatened for the following spring. Laos is locked in by mountain and jungle. Only one route seemed available for an invading army from the north, that designated as Route 41, which followed the valley of the Nam Yum River, passing by the little village of Dien Bien Phu.

After a tour of battle areas and prolonged conferences with his staff, Navarre concluded that despite its isolation and location — it lay in a *cuvette* (bowl) hemmed in by mountains — Dien Bien Phu could serve a

November jump by 6 BPC and 2/1 RCP signals beginning of Operation Castor. Photo: Howard Sochurek, *Life Magazine* © 1953 Time Inc.

Gen. Rene Cogny (center), commander of Tonkin District, confers with Gen. Henri Navarre (left), CIC-French Indochina. Cogny, Navarre's XO and a soldier's general, called his commander "that air-conditioned general." Photo: Howard Sochurek, *Life Magazine* © 1953 Time Inc.



Paratroop company establishes CP after Operation Castor jump. Castor marked first phase of Dien Bien Phu battle. Photo: AP/Wide World

double purpose: block the road to Laos and provide a site for a "super hedgehog" against whose perimeter Giap's divisions would — hopefully — be annihilated.

In principle Navarre's plan to evacuate Na San and establish a massive entrenched camp at Dien Bien Phu seemed sound. It was submitted to and approved by the National Defense Committee on 24 July.

Navarre was a professional, experienced officer who had risen to command the 5th French Armored Division at the end of World War II and, on the creation of NATO, been given command of the Central European Land Forces. But by nature he was an introvert, by preference a desk rather than a fighting soldier, possessing none of the appeal to the man in the ranks which had so distinguished Gen. (posthumously, Marshal) de Tassigny. Because his special interest was military intelligence, it is surprising that he allowed himself to be so hopelessly misled by his own intelligence staff regarding the strength of the Viet Minh artillery and its mobility.

Maj. Gen. Rene Cogny, Navarre's second-in-command and commander of the northern (Tonkin) sector, which included Dien Bien Phu, had grown up in the shadow of de Lattre, whom he venerated. A handsome giant, 48 years old, Cogny was a soldiers' general. Although he owed his promotion to Navarre, the two men never saw eye-to-eye. Antipathy, due to so violent a clash of personalities, was mutual. "That air-conditioned general froze me," Cogny was to say later.

Na San was successfully evacuated on 12 August, a treaty guaranteeing Laos against aggression signed on 22 October.

On 20 November, 55 aircraft, crammed with men and materiel, took off from Bach-Mai and Gia-Lam airfields: destination Dien Bien Phu. Operation Castor, the installation of a super hedgehog, had begun. Directing the operation was Brig. Gen. Jean Gilles, a one-eyed, seasoned, 49-year-old paratrooper.

First to drop were Cmdt. Marcel — better known as “Bruno” — Bigeard’s 6th Colonial Parachute Battalion (6 BPC) and Cmdt. Jean Brechignac’s 2nd Battalion of the 1st Colonial Parachute Regiment (2/1 RCP), these two battle-trying units having been specially selected, since it was suspected that elements of the Viet Minh were established in the area of the drop zone.

Accounts of Dien Bien Phu pay little attention to the events of that day, so it is not generally known that the first hours contained anxious moments. One of Bigeard’s companies immediately came under heavy fire, but its mortar platoon could not locate its ammunition. Fortunately, Bigeard was able to call an air strike on the village in which the Viet Minh, men of the 148 Independent Infantry Regiment, had been able to take up defensive positions. The strike caused substantial damage and enabled the paras to make a bayonet attack which wiped out the survivors.

In the meantime, Brechignac’s men were dealing with sporadic resistance but were unable to stop many of the enemy from escaping to the surrounding hills.

By 1300 all the objectives had been attained. A total of 1,827 paras had established themselves some 350 kilometers behind the Viet Minh front. Viet Minh losses were counted as 98 dead and an unspecified number of wounded. French casualties totaled 11 killed and 52 wounded.

By nightfall a third parachute battalion, the 1st Foreign Legion (1 BEP), together with two batteries of airborne artillery, a mortar company and a surgical team, had joined the colonials, while Bigeard, temporarily in command, set up his HQ in the battered village.

The following day the remainder of the 2nd Airborne Battle Group (2 GAP) with Gilles and his staff arrived, thus completing the force originally designated to hold the entrenched camp. Although everybody else was satisfied at the operation’s rapid success, Gilles himself was far from happy. He had commanded at Na San throughout the six-month siege, during which time, as he put it, he had “lived like a rat.” He did not wish to do it again, and told Cogy frankly that he wanted to be relieved of command as soon as was convenient.

The replacement choice fell on Col. Christian Marie Ferdinand de la Croix de Castries, 52 years old, sprung from one of the oldest families of the French aristocracy. A superb horseman — he had broken the world’s *puissance* record in 1933 — a noted gambler and Don Juan, he emerged from WWII with an enviable record: twice wounded, 14 mentions in dispatches, *chevalier* of the Legion of Honor. Posted to Indochina in 1946, he picked up four more



Three dead Viet Minh lie on riverbank after December battle. Photo: Howard Sochurek, *Life Magazine* © 1953 Time Inc.

mentions in dispatches before severe wounds in both legs caused his repatriation to France. He begged to be allowed to return to active service and so found himself once more in Indochina in 1953, a full colonel and officer of the Legion of Honor.

But despite his brilliant career, de Castries was to prove a failure as commander of the entrenched camp. Without equal in mobile operations, he was temperamentally unsuited for the claustrophobic conditions caused by a prolonged siege.

Once the French troops had established themselves on the ground, immediate planning errors became apparent. Although in early December it had been decided to increase the garrison to nine battalions, four batteries, three mortar groups and a tank troop (which would be strengthened still further by March 1954 to include 14 battalions, six batteries, a heavy mortar regiment and a tank squadron) the area to be defended was far too great. The Nam Yum Valley covers 200 square kilometers. The camp’s overall perimeter extended for 80 kilometers. It is now generally agreed that an absolute minimum of 30 battalions should have been deployed.

As French intentions gradually became evident, neither Giap nor Ho Chi Minh could believe their good fortune. It did not seem credible that experienced officers like those on the French staff could seriously contemplate such a move. Both men could see that the destruction of the picked force and the effect of this destruction on French morale might well bring the war — which had been dragging on for over seven years — to a speedy conclusion. Furthermore, since a top-level conference on Indochina’s

Lt. Col. Charles Langlais (center), commander of 2 GAP and leader of “the para mafia,” prepares to launch counterattack in March ’54. Photo: AP/Wide World





future, which Ho Chi Minh was to attend, was to be convened at Geneva in the summer, such a victory would provide the Viet Minh leader with a major trump card.

The Herculean task of concentrating a modern army with the most modern weapons so far from its bases and over such forbidding territory was immediately taken in hand.

The mass of men and materiel, including guns of up to 105mm, had to be transported in some cases for distances of up to 600 kilometers. At first, the move was made by Russian-supplied trucks, traveling only by night, all lights extinguished. But for the last stages Giap employed what he later referred to as his "secret weapon," a vast army of coolies (*dan cong*). These men and women toiled, it was estimated, a total of three million working days. They hauled guns and all heavy material over muddy, barely existent tracks, up precipitous slopes, across raging torrents. They pushed bicycles specially fitted with double panniers, each bicycle carrying a 100-pound load. To provide cover from French spotting planes, they dragged down and tied together the branches of the jungle trees to form a continuous leafy tunnel.

Thanks to this sweating army of human ants, the Viet Minh stood poised to launch its first massive assault at 1700 hours on 13 March. The force assembled comprised five fully equipped divisions: the 304th, 308th, 312th and 316th Infantry Divisions, the 148th Independent Infantry Regiment, reformed after its decimation in the action of the previous 20 November, and the 351st Heavy (Russian-type) Artillery Division. Eighty 37mm AA guns were included in the

351st's weapons, and these, by neutralizing the air strip, served as nails in the garrison's coffin. In all, by mid-March Giap had positioned some 43,000 men and over 200 guns and heavy mortars.

Through greatly inferior numerically, the French garrison was made up of elite units. In a static role manning the fixed defenses were 10 infantry battalions — four Foreign Legion, three Algerian, one Moroccan and two T'ai (Vietnamese). Four batteries of 105mm guns, two of 105mm howitzers and one battery of 155mm howitzers, and three Foreign Legion mortar groups of Lt. Col. Pierre Charles Langlais (a highly professional, deadly serious officer known for his heavy drinking and violent temper) consisting of one Foreign Legion, one T'ai and two Colonial parachute battalions, was held in the central area to act as a mobile reserve and counterattack force, and supported by a squadron of 10 Chaffee tanks. With engineers and signal personnel, there were 10,814 men.

Because of the area to be held, it had been agreed that the principle of a continuous perimeter, as at Na San, should be abandoned. Instead, a series of bastions were constructed, so sited as to give each other mutual support, and strong enough individually to be able to resist the most powerful assault the enemy could hurl at its ramparts. These bastions, eight in number, were rumored to be named after de Castries' former mistresses. Gabrielle, perched on high ground, guarded the northern approach. To the east, Beatrice dominated Route 41. Ringing the air strip, the command post and the hospital were Dominique, Claudine, Eliane, Huguette, and Anne Marie. Well to the south was Isabelle.

Isabelle's siting was a grave error of judg-



**MAT-49-carrying Vietnamese soldier, attached to French forces, searches for Viet Minh after initial success of Operation Castor. Photo: Howard Sochurek, *Life Magazine* © 1953 Time Inc.**

ment. Its garrison, the 3/3rd Foreign Legion Infantry, 2/1st Algerian *Tirailleurs*, a Moroccan detachment, a T'ai battalion, a battery of 105 howitzers and a troop of Chaffee tanks, under the command of Col. Andre Lalande, was in itself a mini-army. But stuck out on a limb, a good six kilometers from the nearest strong point, it was soon completely isolated from the main system and never able to lend its weight to the general battle.

Rather than keeping the plan secret, the French government ensured that Dien Bien Phu received world publicity. During the months of January and February 1954, a visit to the entrenched camp became something of a jet-set event, one of the many visitors of international fame being Gen. "Iron Mike" O'Donnell.

It is difficult to understand France's smug optimism for there were many signs that Giap's army was closing in on the *cuvette* in strength. On 15 January a salvo landed accurately on the air strip. This performance by an unspotted gun, which became known as the "Jap cannon," was repeated on each odd day of the month from mid-January until mid-March.

Patrols, mostly furnished by the GAP, that pushed up toward the crests were meeting with earlier and increasingly stiff opposition. On 15 February one such patrol lost 13 killed and 98 wounded.

Nor did everyone share Navarre's confidence. Visiting air force officers were the first to voice their doubts, stressing the frightening vulnerability of the air strip, the garrison's life line, and pointing out that following the policy of holding the valley rather than the crests, the encampment could be subjected to direct fire from any Viet gun, at any time, from anywhere. Navarre responded that the Viet Minh had only a "few antiquated pieces which they did not know how to serve in any case," and that it was physically impossible to drag a significant number of guns over such terrain. Col. Piroth, de Castries' artillery commander, boasted, "No enemy gun will be able to fire three rounds without being destroyed by my artillery."

Nevertheless, at the last conference held in the entrenched camp at which both Gen. Ely, chief of the general staff, and M. Pleven, minister of defense, were present, Air Force Gen. Lauzin urged that the plan be cancelled and the entire garrison withdrawn before it was too late.

He is said to have repeated the words of Gen. Ducrot on the eve of the battle of Sedan in 1870 as he watched Prussian camp fires blazing on the surrounding hills: "*Nous sommes dans un pot de chambre et nous y serons emmerdes* [We are in a chamber pot and will be shat on in it!]"

Navarre and his staff must also be blamed for not ensuring that the field-works could stand up to shelling. One critic asserts that the battle was lost not *so much* in "the field of intelligence or aerial study, or even in artillery, but in combat engineering."

Though the actual number of guns and mortars Giap would be able to bring into



action came as a shattering surprise, the caliber of Viet Minh artillery was well known, and fixed defenses should have been constructed to resist a direct hit. Frank warnings were received when a Cmdt. Sudrat took command of the garrison's engineers. He informed de Castries that to "protect" an infantry battalion required 2,550 tons of "engineering material" and 500 tons of barbed wire. Thus, for the whole garrison 36,000 tons, which meant 12,000 flights of C-47 aircraft, were needed.

But only 30 C-47s were available. Assuming nothing else but engineering material were flown into Dien Bien Phu, it would have taken five months to make the valley into a reasonably defended position. Sudrat did not lack the courage to disclose these unpalatable facts to his superiors. When told by de Castries what exactly was available, he replied, "In that case I can protect the command post, the signals center and the X-ray room of the hospital, nothing else."

Nor was Sudrat exaggerating. Not one of the bastions was able to stand up to bombardment. Lack of barbed wire enabled the Viet Minh to move freely between strong points. When the monsoon broke, inadequate flooring and revetting meant that trenches and dugouts were permanently flooded.

On the morning of 12 March, Cogny paid the garrison a last hazardous visit. He brought a sobering message which de Castries passed on at the usual evening briefing: "Gentlemen, it's for tomorrow, 1700 hours."

Col. Gaucher of the 13th Foreign Legion Demi-Brigade, a tough veteran of Indochina who commanded the central sector, was not perturbed. "We shall fight as at Verdun," he assured de Castries. Cmdt. Pegot, commander of the 13th Demi-Brigade's 3rd Battalion, holding Beatrice, was not so optimistic. Sickness and patrol casualties had reduced his original strength of 700 to just under 450.

It is doubtful if any of the legionnaires on Beatrice would have quarreled with Kubiak's description of the opening bombardment as being "like the end of the world." Giap was determined that nothing be spared to make this first move in the battle a world-shaking success. After the hail of shells and mortars reduced most of the fixed defenses to dust, the first wave of assaulting infantry was thrown in. It was preceded by death squads, volunteer groups carrying bangalore torpedoes, who charged into the entanglements, blowing themselves and the wire to pieces to clear the way for the assaulting infantry. At first, the legionnaires held their own despite the murderous battering and being outnumbered by ten to one. Their steady fire tore bloody gaps in the Viet Minh ranks, whose dead began to pile up high in front of the trenches. At 1830 the battalion command post received a number of direct hits. Pegot and his whole staff were killed outright.

At 2000 hours, Col. Gaucher, who had managed to contact the companies to give



Napalm explodes over trenches occupied by Viet Minh besiegers. Photo: AP/Wideworld

French S-55 ambulance helicopter flies low through Viet Minh bombardment. Enemy occupation of outlying fortifications soon prevented medevacs. Photo: AP/Wide World



Troopers guard landing strip. By end of March Viet Minh controlled surrounding ground and prevented resupply except by air drop. Photo: AP/Wide World

them the simple order, "Hang on!", called his second-in-command, Cmdt. Michel Vadot, to come across for a rapid conference. Just as Vadot arrived, the dugout received a direct hit, the shell smashing through the flimsy roof and exploding in the interior, killing the wireless operator and two staff officers. As the smoke cleared, Vadot saw Gaucher stretched out on the ground, his arms hanging from their sockets, his legs pulp, his torn tunic revealing a ruin of mangled flesh and shattered ribs. Yet he was just alive and able to ask for a drink — "If a bottle has been spared."

He died before he could be carried to the dressing station.

Realizing that it could not be long before the battalion's survivors were swamped, Vadot picked up the telephone which by some miracle was still functioning. Calling de Castries, he said, "Vadot here. Gaucher dead. We will hold to the last but it can't be for long. Request bring down maximum fire on our own positions."

By midday, 14 March, a shocked, stunned France had learned that in less than 24 hours one of the main bastions of the supposedly impregnable entrenched camp had fallen, and one of the army's most famous battalions had been annihilated.

Giap was determined to follow up this immense tactical and propaganda victory with a second devastating blow. Undeterred by the fact that possession of Beatrice had cost him over 3,000 dead, he ordered a similar attack on Bastion Gabrielle, held by the 5/7th Algerian *Tirailleurs*.

But though de Castries was rocked by the initial disaster and guessed that Gabrielle would be the next target, he awaited the attack with a cautious optimism. In Sudrat's opinion, Gabrielle was the only bastion constructed with adequate material. The Algerians were battle-experienced; their commander, Cmdt. de Mecquenem, and his second, Cmdt. Kah, were both veterans of the Indochinese war.

The Viet Minh bombardment opened at 1800 hours. Unfortunately, Sudrat's judgment was at fault. By 2000 hours, many of

## VANDENBERGE OF THE BLACK PAJAMAS

by Hilaire du Berrier

There were many legendary figures in the French war in Indochina whose names will never go down in American military history, simply because there was no one to translate their stories into English. One of the most colorful characters of that war and of Gen. de Lattre de Tassigny's year of 1950, with its heroism and its victories, was undoubtedly Vandenberg with his band of black-pajama-clad raiders.

Vandenberg was the son of a Flemish father and a Spanish mother, a strange and fearless man who seemed locked up within himself. Friendless and alone, he enlisted for the war in Indochina. De Lattre was fascinated by the tall soldier with the wild yellow dog who waited for him one day at an airport. The soldier asked permission to organize his own commando group out of hard-core Viet Minh prisoners and make night raids on the enemy, dressed like the Viet Minh in black pajamas. De Lattre gave his permission, more interested in the dog (of a race considered untamable in Indochina) than he was in the man. The bond between Vandenberg and his dog was surprising. A perfect understanding existed between the two, perhaps because both, in a sense, were outcasts.

Gradually the fame of the tall Fleming and his black-clad killers spread. Pressed to explain his methods, Vandenberg's logic would never have been accepted by his superiors were it not for the fact that he and the former Viet Minh prisoners who paraded with him in black pajamas were the pride of de Lattre de Tassigny in the year that they worked together.

"The trouble with other commando groups," said Vandenberg, "is that the choice of men is dictated by prudence; consequently, the group is no good. Other native groups are inefficacious, because they are composed of Vietnamese who have never done anything." Vandenberg chose murderers who had been trained by the Viet Minh, and after a night raid on their former comrades, they did not dare desert him. Gen. de Lattre de Tassigny swore by them.

Vandenberg explained his technique: "I took the Viet Minh's own methods to kill the Viets — their meticulous system. Did you ever watch a column of ants carrying a carcass to their ant-hill? The Viets arrive at the same degree of automatism. For each enterprise a chief sets up his scenario, and its execution has the blind force of precision. A raid like mine takes days to prepare. First, I must know everything.

My spies go for a look. I use children — ravishing little urchins who are at the same time full of ruses and innocence.

"The delta is full of them. They are so nice that even the Viets are not suspicious of them. They are so natural! They beg and they laugh; they cry, 'Vive Ho Chi Minh!' They go everywhere and they observe everything. The force of dissimulation of these bambinos is frightening. How they love the game of espionage! What pride they take in it! They know perfectly what it is going to lead to, but they are so proud of their role! I think that these youngsters have a genius for evil. They are born spies, much more precise than women and even lots of men. While they are playing, they register everything with the eye of their memory, with absolute exactitude — all of the details; where the sentinels are, the command post, which is the village garrison, what the plan of fire is, if there are breaches in the bamboo barricades, if the Viets seem reassured or suspicious, whether they feel that they are safe. When the youngsters return they tell me everything, and then I make my plan."

After the long night in which Gen. de Lattre de Tassigny listened to radio calls for help from the outpost held by his son, Bernard, until at last the calls ceased, it was Vandenberg who was sent to fight his way to the fallen post and bring back the body.

A Foreign legionnaire tells of a raid in which Vandenberg's group participated. As they were mounting a ridge where the Viets were entrenched he saw a Viet aim his rifle at Vandenberg's head. Suddenly there was a yellow streak through the air as the wild dog who never left Vandenberg's side leaped for the killer's throat.

The stories are endless. That sooner or later they would have to end, even Vandenberg knew from the start. When the end came, it was in the best of Viet Minh tradition. A volunteer permitted himself to be captured. He wormed his way into Vandenberg's group and two former comrades were sacrificed in his first raid to win Vandenberg's confidence. Having proved his loyalty to the band he was no longer watched, and when an opportunity presented itself, de Lattre's favorite commando leader was killed.

Erwan Bergot, who was taken prisoner at Dien Bien Phu and later wrote *Les Heros Oublie* (The Forgotten Heroes), has written a complete book on the career of Vandenberg, the raider. (Erwan Bergot's books on Vandenberg and the war in Indochina may be ordered through Mme. Vernet, Secretary of the *Association des Combattants de l'Union Francaise*, 26, rue St. Joseph, Paris 2, France. The Vandenberg book costs \$10, including airmail postage.)

the bunkers and trenches had caved in under the weight of shells. The 4th Company had been almost totally wiped out, the Viet Minh quick to infiltrate the positions. The main infantry assault did not follow the previous evening's pattern. Giap had had second thoughts about the cost of suicide tactics. Though the force allotted was even more massive, two full infantry regiments (six battalions) of the 308th Division, their orders were to encroach and strangle rather than overwhelm the opposition in one wild onrush regardless of casualties.

To begin with, Col. Piroth's counterbattery fire showed signs of living up to his boast, taking a heavy toll of the Viet infantry and knocking out a number of their guns with the result that at 0230, the assault was halted. The Algerians, however, were given short respite. Precisely one hour later, the Viet Minh artillery opened up again, and again the fixed defenses showed themselves incapable of taking punishment.

In touch with de Castries, the worried de Mecquenem was assured that every gun within the *cuvette* was supporting him and that, if necessary, a counterattack would be thrown in. Shortly afterward, there was a recurrence of the previous evening's tragedies. The battalion command post was hit by a shell which penetrated the roof before bursting inside. Every inmate was either killed or seriously wounded, the radio set destroyed. De Mecquenem, bleeding from multiple shell fragment wounds, found himself staring at a familiar object. It was his left leg, torn off by the explosion.

Command was assumed by a Capt. Gendre who was able to contact de Castries to ask for the counterattack *immediately*. It was 0445 hours, but the counterattack did not get under way until 0530.

This muddled delay was fatal.

Cmdt. Seguin-Pazzis of the Legion paratroopers, who was in charge of the operation, received three sets of orders. When this was sorted out, instead of the whole of the Legion and the BPVN (Vietnamese Parachute Battalion) being committed, only one company from each and a troop of tanks were detailed.

This decision to limit the force employed was made by Lt. Col. Langlais. He did not believe it possible to hold on even if the entire bastion were retaken, and was not prepared, therefore, to waste the lives of his precious paras for no valid purpose.

Because of the delay the Viet Minh were waiting. As the head of the column closed to negotiate a ford of the Nam Yum River, it was subjected to heavy, accurate fire. Tanks and most of the Vietnamese halted, then turned back. But the *legionnaires* pushed on, battling their way up the slope to link up with the remnants of the Algerians still clinging desperately to a few trenches. They could make no further headway. By then it was a question of too little too late. Seeing that the counterattack *had failed*, de Castries ordered the survivors to fall back on the main position.

Continued on page 80

# ALLIED DOG FIGHT



## Brit Battles Yankee on the Ground

by Col. Glenn E. Wasson

NOT all great aerial combat takes place in the clouds. Some of the most fiercely fought battles rage in barracks, barrooms and gloomy hangars on rainy days.

In common with other types of competition, a hierarchy naturally develops. I flatter myself that when it came to engaging in the verbal exchange of derring-do, I would have qualified for the Black Belt if such recognition were accorded to this activity. As a combat veteran of three wars, numerous lesser campaigns and rescue missions in various parts of the world, I have gathered an impressive armory of aviation minutiae. When it came to hangar flying, I had never met my equal. Perhaps the greatest threat to my status was the complacency resulting from monotonous victories over unworthy adversaries and the lack of fresh challenges.

You can imagine how avidly I anticipated a luncheon invitation with a visiting delegation of NATO and British Commonwealth senior officers. Seated on my right was a highly decorated Royal Air Force group captain. After a normal exchange of pleasantries, I made what I thought to be a knowledgeable observation of his ribbons and suggested that he might be a fighter pilot.

### BACKGROUND TO BATTLE WITH BRITON

Col. Glenn E. Wasson's linguistic dogfight, recounted here, comes from his 30 years' background as an Air Force navigator, bombardier and pilot. He was editor of *Air University Review* from 1975 to 1978, and later became director of public affairs, U.S. Forces, at Yokota Air Base, Japan, before his retirement in 1979.

A resident of Mountain View, Calif., Wasson is editor of *Defense Electronics* and a free-lance writer. SOF reprints this article, with permission, from the January '82 issue of *The Retired Officer*.

"Quite right you are. Just picked up a group of *Lightnings*. But I've paid my dues. Flown every derelict craft in the RAF and a couple which I suspect are unknown even to *Jane's*."

Hmmmm. Perhaps an adversary who could provide me with some momentary amusement. I led him on.

"I guess flying for you Brits has been pretty humdrum since World War II. Must be quite a letdown to bore holes through the air and never fire a shot in anger for years on end."

How easily he took the bait.

"*Au contraire*. Can't go into details but some of our chaps take sabbaticals as exchange pilots and mercenaries wherever there's a bit of a scrap going on."

He then alluded to dogfights with MiGs, daring jungle rescues and deep reconnaissance missions into areas best left unidentified. The tempo of the dialogue picked up, and the topic narrowed to landing aircraft under the most harrowing of conditions. Our rank dictated that unverifiable war stories were unworthy of mention, and that competition be limited to incidents confirmed by reliable witnesses or published in official dispatches. Without so much as a single word or gesture between us suggesting that we were now combatants, we both knew that the battle was joined and that it would be fought under the guidelines we had tacitly established.

Tally ho! Bogies at 12 o'clock. How my blood raced.

For openers I tested him with an account

of a C-123 transport in Vietnam with a nose gear cocked completely crosswise that could not be retracted nor straightened. The transport was fully loaded with pallets of explosive ordnance and drums of flammable chemicals destined for delivery on the rough assault strip of an outlying base. Compounding the difficulties, the flight crew was informed that the base was taking incoming rocket and mortar fire from the Viet Cong entrenched in the surrounding hills.

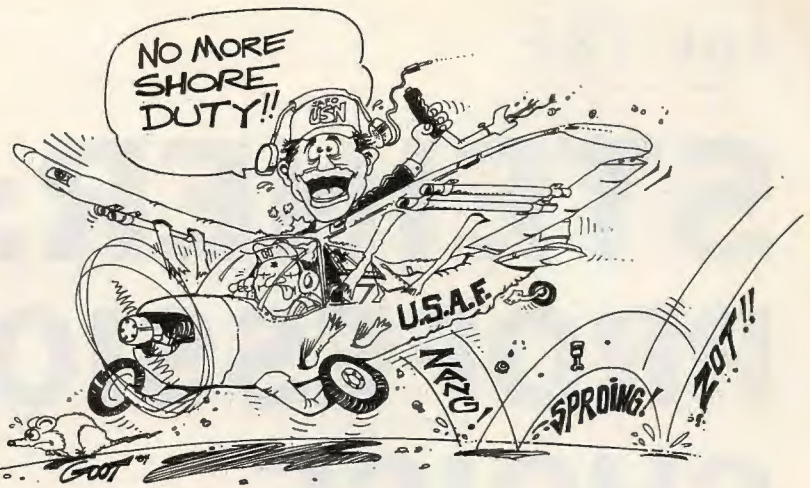
What to do? The airfield had no foam to lubricate the runway. The transport had sufficient fuel to return to its home base, but the cargo of ammo was desperately needed by the beleaguered defenders of the outpost. A crippled transport sitting on the runway with a load of explosives in view of the Viet Cong was an invitation to disaster.

But there could be no turning back. Air strikes were called in to suppress the enemy fire. Five-gallon containers of powdered laundry soap were scattered over the last 500 feet of runway and wet down with a sprinkler truck, followed by broom wielders who lathered the mixture to a slippery mess.

The C-123 landed normally, but held the nose wheel off until hitting the lather. Then the plane glided to an uneventful stop. While the ground crew rolled the pallets of explosive cargo out of the rear, the flight crew put a bar through the yoke of the nose gear and straightened it out.

Less than five minutes after touchdown, the transport had lifted off for the relative security of its home base.

My dinner companion listened patiently, with the air of a husband taking down the weekly shopping list. He countered with an account of a low-flying acrobatic team member who knocked off his left main gear on an airfield lighting support that was obscured by tall grass. The configuration of his prop-driven plane was such that on landing it would surely ground-loop, probably roll and likely rupture a fuel tank and burst into flames. The pilot was not wearing a parachute.



"No problem, chum. We just adjusted the rails of our airfield lorry to the right height, drove it down the runway at the right speed at the point of touchdown, and that blighter laid his left wing on the lorry like it was an everyday affair. They both slowed to a stop in complete unison.

"We found the wheel in the weeds and had the plane ready to go before the pilot finished drinking his beer."

I made a point of suppressing a yawn. But before he knew it, I did a quick wingover, pulled the stick back into my guts and caught him in my sights with this zinger:

A U.S. Air Force fighter pilot flying air-ground missions in the desert area of the United States taxied in from a morning mission and parked the aircraft on the flight line. He left his gear in the shade of the wing on the concrete ramp, and strolled into the air-conditioned ready room. After an interval of about two hours, he returned to his plane for the second mission of the day. As he donned his gear, he was thankful that he had sheltered his 'chute and helmet from the broiling heat of the sun.

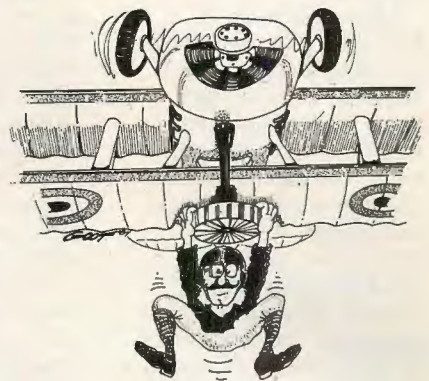
The mission was normal in all respects until he returned to base and made the break in the overhead traffic pattern. As he pulled the familiar three to four "Gs," watching the airspeed bleed off until he could drop the gear and flaps, he felt the strange sensation of some foreign creature slithering slowly down his neck.

By the time he rolled out on the final approach, the thing had slowly circled his torso under his flying suit and glided over his genitals. The pilot was now in the most critical phase of the landing, with the dive brakes, gear and flaps extended, power off, and approaching the stall. Whatever his instincts told him to do, he had no choice but to land.

As the plane touched down, the creature entered a pant leg and continued to wriggle down the bare skin of his leg, lodging in his boot about the time the plane came to a complete stop. The canopy popped open and one wild-eyed pilot exploded out of the cockpit and was on the ground before the servicing crew could place the ladder. Slipping off his boot, the pilot poured out a

12-inch rattlesnake in front of the startled ground crew.

For the first time, my antagonist revealed a slight reaction when he expressed curiosity about the singular placement of the snake. In reconstructing the incident for him, I explained that the snake had apparently sought refuge from the hot concrete when the pilot had been relaxing in the ready room. It crawled into the helmet and found a convenient space between the webbing and the outer shell. The motion of donning the helmet and the pilot's head movements during the mission did not sufficiently disturb the rattler to induce it to move. However, the strong force of gravity on the overhead break forced it out and began the sequence of events. Needless to say, ever since this incident was published in a flying safety magazine, pilots who leave their equipment unattended on the ramp for just a few minutes look it over pretty closely before putting it on.



By this time I was confident that Her Majesty's representative was ready to strike his colors, but he was a persistent devil and returned fire.

"Before you chaps decided to join us in the First World War, we had quite a tea party going, you know. The Royal Flying Corps had a considerable history of combat long before you Yanks ever fired a shot in anger."

*Continued on page 91*

# STEINER: THE PROFESSIONAL'S CHOICE

## A Binocular Tough Enough for El Salvador

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

**T**HERE can be no sterner test of optical equipment than the steaming bush of El Salvador. It was into this humid, harsh environment that I recently brought two remarkably different models of the Steiner military binocular line (see "Field Commander," SOF, January '83) for evaluation by the elite Atlacatl Immediate Reaction Battalion.

Steiner-Optik of Bayreuth, West Germany, is Europe's largest binocular manufacturer. Since its inception after WWII, Steiner's design thrust has been directed toward the military, police and marine markets. Steiner binoculars are used by military and security forces in 110 countries. Their exclusive U.S. importer is Pioneer & Co., Inc., (Dept. SOF, 216 Haddon Avenue, Suite 522, Westmont, NJ 08108; for further information call 1 [800] 257-7742).

All Steiner military binoculars are housed in Macrolon® a

fiber-reinforced polycarbonate. Macrolon is corrosion-free, saltwater-resistant, shockproof, heat-resistant and unbelievably lightweight. Steiner military binoculars are tested for vibration resistance at 11 Gs (11 times the force of gravity). Conditioned humans, such as astronauts, can survive only 8 Gs.

For additional protection against the rigors of military use, the binocular housings are covered by a NATO olive-green, ribbed rubber armor. Each binocular is equipped with protective caps for the eyepieces, lens caps for the objectives and a button-on carrying strap.

Of porro-prism design, Steiner's lenses and prisms are made from the finest optical glass available. Only certified lensmakers work on Steiner lenses and prisms (it takes 15 years to become a lensmaker in West Germany). The lenses are precision-aligned in shock-proof mounts. Tough hinges and individual focusing rings are installed so nothing will ever move out of

alignment. Every surface of the binocular's optics is multi-coated by an evaporation process which achieves high luminosity.

Steiner military binoculars are so well sealed that their flawless performance is guaranteed under every conceivable climate condition — dry heat, humid heat, tropical, subtropical and arctic environments exceeding 15,000 feet above sea level (as demonstrated during the recent assault on Kanchenjunga in the East Himalaya). Nitrogen-filled to prevent fogging from extreme and sudden temperature changes, dust or moisture cannot obscure visibility.

Individual focus is a requirement for totally waterproof binoculars and all Steiners are so equipped. All diopter adjustments are precisely graduated. The vertical-image-collimation error does not exceed one degree. The optical axis of both monocular halves is exactly parallel and parallax has been held to  $\pm 1$  minute.

Steiner's image-quality testing assures the very highest edge and center resolution, contrast, light-transmission power and the total absence of color-fringing. The bottom line is the lightest, toughest, brightest-image binoculars in the world, bar none.

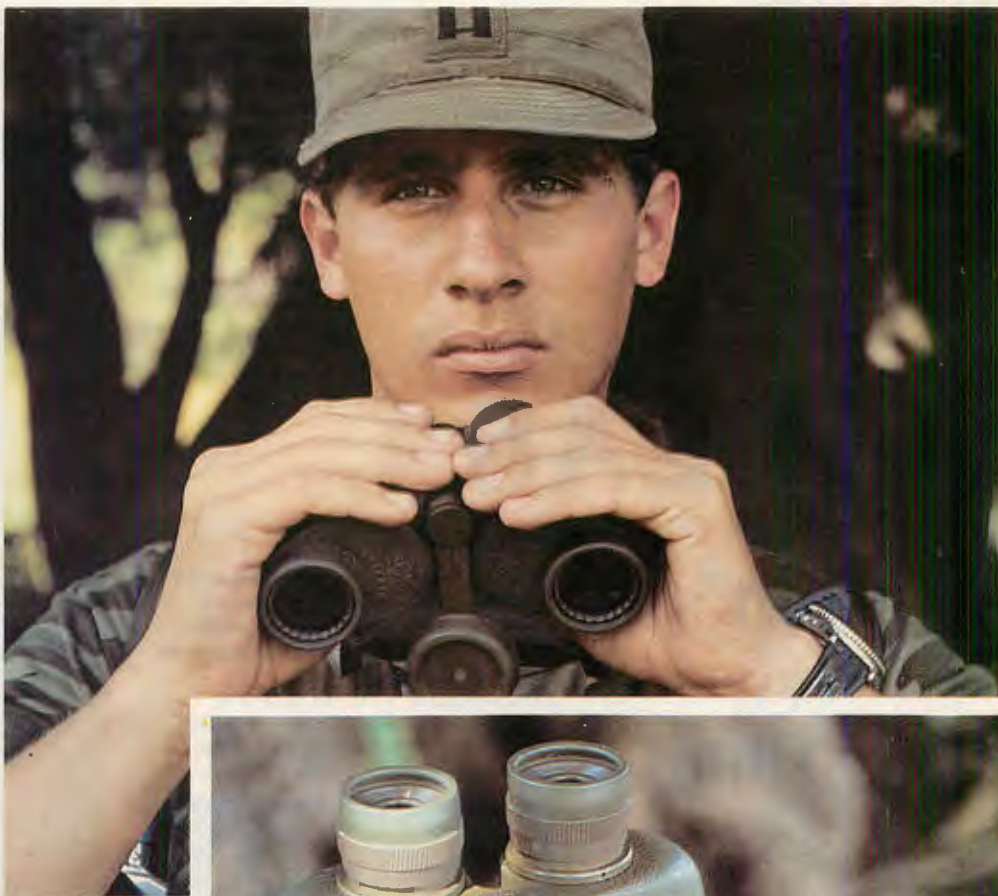
Most useful for the dense jungles of El Salvador is the superb 6x30 VWST model. With a field of view of 450 feet at 1,000 yards (8.58 degrees), their wide-angle qualities are perfect for combat operations in the bush. Weighing an incredible 19.7 ounces, this six-power binoc is vibration-tested at 20 Gs! All Steiner Combat Tested binoculars are totally waterproofed to withstand the constant rain and humidity of tropical rain forests (VW = fully sealed and tested to military specifications). The 6x30 VWSTs retail for \$349 and come with the NATO-norm horizontal mil graticule (ST), unless

otherwise specified. Those who do not anticipate falling off a fast-moving Panhard armored car or maneuvering in the rain for days on end will be well served by the 6x30 Military/Marine model which lists for only \$199. Unfortunately for me, the 6x30 model I brought to El Salvador is still hanging around the neck of Atlacatl 7th Company CO 1st Lt. David Koch, who would not part with it.

At the opposite end of the optical spectrum is Steiner's amazing 15x80 long-distance observation binoc. It has the strongest magnification of the Steiner binocular line and can be employed to view objectives at distances of several kilometers. The field of view is 195 feet at 1,000 yards (3.72 degrees). Such magnification and brightness in a 56.5-oz. package is phenomenal. While it can be hand-held, the 15x80 is at its best when stabilized on a tripod or vehicle. A tripod bracket is provided for this purpose. The 15x80 has no peer for extreme distance viewing and its military potential in El Salvador and on other battlefields is enormous.

In addition, this potent optical giant is unsurpassed for police surveillance, border observations, coast guard and airport applications, forestry, engineering, construction and even astronomical use. It's priced at \$599. A Commander version with built-in magnetic compass has just been announced. Directional bearings appear right through the lens over the target image. With this feature, other observers can be instantly directed to objects spotted from your position. Called the 15x80 "Observer," its retail list price is \$699.

Steiner's position in the arena of military/Marine binoculars rests secure. They are the best. At this time no one else is even close. ☒



**Kokalis provided test-samples of Steiner binoculars to members of El Salvador's elite Atlacatl Bn. The favorite was 6x30 military binocular: waterproof, fogproof, impact resistant.**

**Steiners in the Salvadoran bush: 15x80 long-range observation binocular and the 6x30 VWST Combat Tested glasses.**



## SOF FEATURE

# S.H.O.T. IN DALLAS

## What's New in 1984

Text & Photos  
by John Metzger

“IF this building was 50-feet wider on both floors, we’d all be dead,” panted SOF Advertising Director Ralph Bicknell as he sagged into a chair in the Omega Group booth. No one died, but we were exhausted, and overwhelmed by the tons of guns and gear. The SHOT Show gives SOF staffers a three-day pass to see what’s new in the business, and we can usually be found bounding up and down the aisles like kids in a fun house.

Once again, Dallas, Texas, was the site for the annual SHOT (Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade) Show, sponsored by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, 12-14 January 1984. Over 900 exhibitors showed off their wares to over 25,000 trade people: manufacturers, distributors, dealers, press. Just about everyone who has anything to do with the shooting and outdoor equipment industry was represented. If that sounds like a big show, you’re right.

But there were fewer new items this year. Most of the “New!! Improved!!” was little more than — literally — new paint jobs for old gear. But if you looked hard enough, the new stuff was hiding. There were space-age refinements in bows and crossbows, laser and night-sighting devices, a few new knives, and plenty of new clothes designed with the revolutionary Gore-Tex and polypropylene materials.

The state of the economy certainly must have contributed to a slowdown in research and development in 1983. Nevertheless, we found a few items that we think will be of interest to SOFers:

RIGHT: Kevin Steele examines the Oakland A.I.G.P. vertical and horizontal crossbow with built-in cocking mechanism. Time between shots is minimized to the limit with this fine-crafted weapon from England. Contact Oakland Ltd., Dept. SOF, 49 Harbour Hill Rd., St. James, NY 11780.



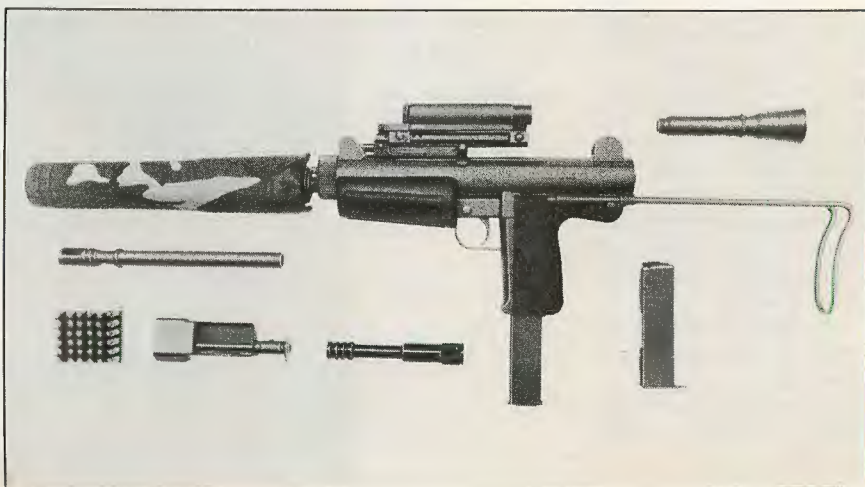
BELOW: One of the big questions at the 1984 show was whether or not there is anything left not available in camouflage. Believe it or not, now you can buy cammie climbing rope from Brigade Quartermasters, Ltd. The pattern is surprisingly effective. Write to Brigade, Dept. SOF, 266 Roswell St., Marietta, GA 30060.

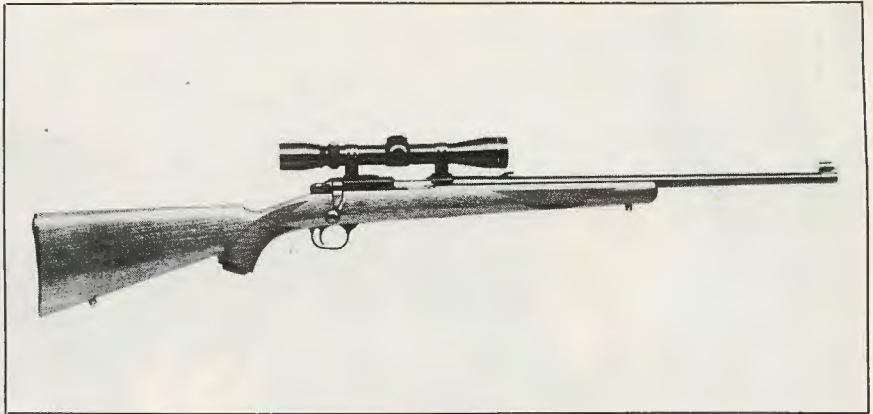


BELOW: If the Rhody track suits weren’t enough, Tink Nathan’s camouflage hunting shoes will drive cammie nuts completely crazy. Some SOF staffers have got them, and I’m wondering if they ever take them off. Write to Safariland Hunting Corp., Dept. SOF, Box NN, McLean, VA 22101.



BELOW: The Viking SMG from Weapons Systems, Inc., is now available in a long-barrel survival version. And that little gadget in the lower left-hand corner loads 9mm SMG magazines faster than anything I’ve seen. For information on the Viking line of weapons and accessories, contact W.S.I., Dept. SOF, 662 Cross St., Malden, MA 02148.





**ABOVE:** Ruger now offers the new .22-caliber rimfire 77/22 bolt-action rifle. A blend of the M-77 and 10/22 rifles, the 77/22 represents the high quality and exceptional value that we have come to expect from Ruger. Write to Sturm, Ruger & Co., Inc., Dept. SOF, Lacey Place, Southport, CT 06490.

**BELOW:** With the high-intensity Pelican flashlight, you can just about pound nails underwater at night — and still see what you're doing. The excellent features incorporated into this watertight wonder make it an excellent choice for diving and field use. Pelican Sabrelite (shown), battery charging kit and the smaller Pelilite are now available through SOF Exchange, P.O. Box 687, Boulder, CO 80306.



**ABOVE:** Similar to the Model 20 and 950 Series Berettas, the double-action Beretta Model 21 in .22LR is new and ready for 1984. For a free 24-page catalogue on the entire Beretta line, write Beretta U.S.A. Corp., Attn: Warren Barron, 17601 Indian Head Hwy., Accokeek, MD 20607. Phone: (301) 283-2191.



**ABOVE:** Tink Nathan of Safariland offers a real collector's item: This genuine Rhodesian cammie warm-up suit, imported from Zimbabwe, was originally made for Rhody reserve and police units. It's now available in the U.S. in limited quantities. For the whole story, contact Safariland Hunting Corp., Dept. SOF, Box NN, McLean, VA 22101.



**LEFT:** The ultimate paperweight? This miniature 1919A6 MG is 30-inches long, and may be the world's first belt-fed .22-cal. weapon. Write to Tippmann Arms Co., Dept. SOF, 12708 Parent Rd., New Haven, IN 46774.



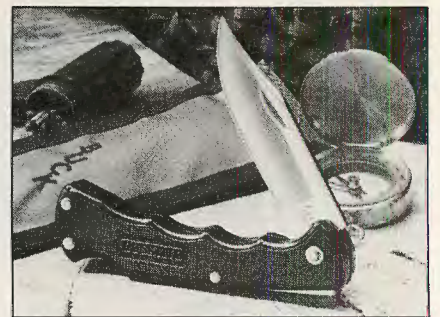


ABOVE: John "The Shotgun Wizard" Satterwhite shows off H&K's new PSG 1 Counter Sniper Rifle.

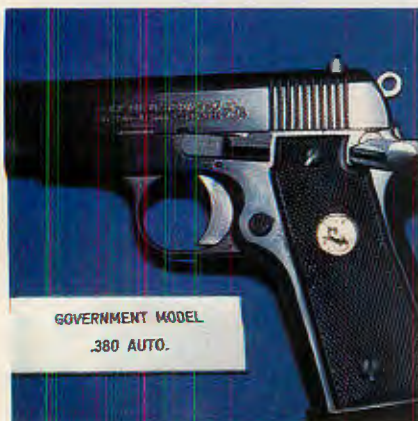


ABOVE: Despite all the guns and gear, the most popular items in Dallas were the Winchester twins. Shown here is SOF's Ralph Bicknell failing to observe the 'look, but don't touch' warnings.

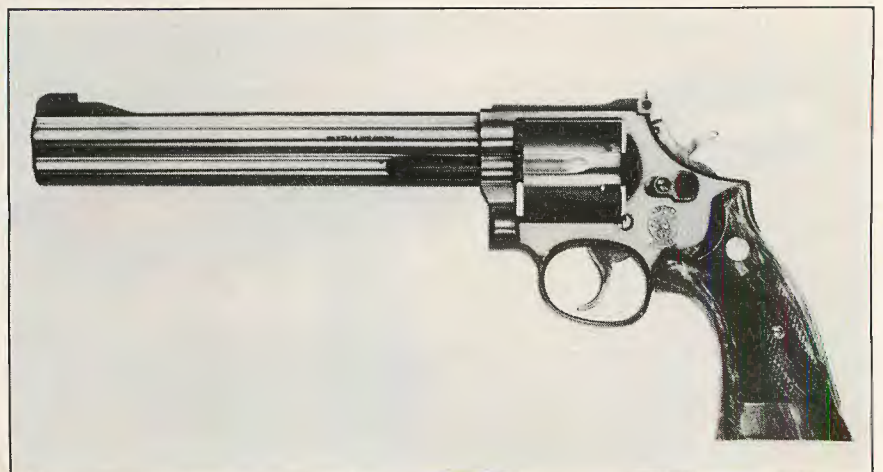
BELOW: The "Bucklite" Model 422 from Buck Knives is a rugged locking folder with thermoplastic handle weighing only 3-1/2 ounces in its nylon sheath. For information on all the new blades from America's favorite knifemaker, contact Buck Knives, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1267, El Cajon, CA 92022.



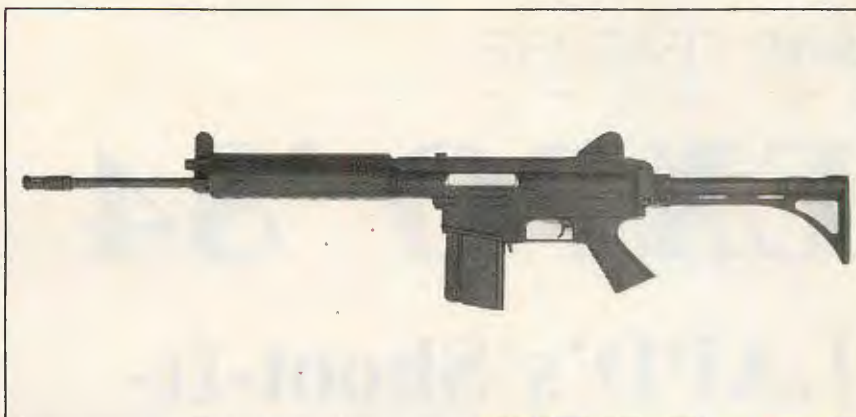
BELOW: Smith & Wesson now offers new versions of the popular .357 Mag. L-frame, 8-3/8-inch barrel revolvers. The blued Model 586 Distinguished Combat Magnum (shown) is now available, as well as the Model 686 stainless version. Contact S&W, Dept. SOF, 2100 Roosevelt Ave., Springfield, MA 01101.



ABOVE: Colt Firearms had the new Government Model .380 Auto on hand. See Ken Hackathorn's report in "Combat Weaponcraft," SOF, April '84.



BELOW: Sterling Armament's Patrick Giles gives SOF a sneak peek at Sterling's prototype .357 Magnum revolver. Contact Lanchester U.S.A., Inc., Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 47332, Dallas, TX 75247.



ABOVE: Holloway Arms Company has built a new assault rifle for 1984. Shown here is the left-hand version of the Model 7 in 7.62mm NATO. Contact HAC, Dept. SOF, 3959 W. Vickery Blvd., Ft. Worth, TX 76107.

BELOW: What will they think of next? Pete Shepley of Precision Shooting Equipment, Inc., can shoot from the hip with his laser-sight-equipped crossbow. Write to PSE, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 5487, Tucson, AZ 85703.



ABOVE: Innovative Pachmayr product design continues to evolve with the "Professional." This handgun grip has no backstrap, making it easier for small hands to hang on to Smith & Wesson revolvers. Write to Pachmayr, Dept. SOF, 1220 S. Grand Ave., P.O. Box 15053, Los Angeles, CA 90015.



LEFT: Champion shooter Mike Dalton recommends this firing simulator for .45 autos to practice follow-through. Air pressure cycles the slide, recoils, and cocks the hammer. Contact Advanced .45 Technology, Dept. SOF, 1031 Elder St., Oxnard, CA 93030.



BELOW LEFT: Kevin Steele fondles the new Krico Super Match Sniper Rifle Model 650 SS. Designed in America and built by Krico's West German master craftsmen, it's available in .222, .223, .243 and .308. For information on the Krico line, write to Beeman Firearms, Dept. SOF, 47 Paul Dr., San Rafael, CA 94903. ☒

# EXPO '84

## LAPD's Shoot-It-Yourself Gunshow

Text & Photos by Tom Smith

**W**HEN did you last hear Gen. J.K. Dozier talk about kidnapping at a gun show? Never? Well, that's because you haven't been to the Los Angeles Police Revolver and Athletic Club Expo. Expo '84 was a "gun show" beyond your wildest dreams.

Dozier — hostage to the Red Brigade in Italy — was just one more show-stopper at America's most spectacular weapons and equipment exhibition. Refurbished classics, state-of-the-art and weapons systems of the future were available to personnel with a need to see the best American police suppliers have to offer. In fact, that's the only thing wrong with this exhibition; if you don't work for a police department, or for the police press, it's nearly impossible to see it.

To prove how serious they were, the organizers ejected at least one journalist who posed as an LAPD photographer. This is an exhibition for experts only. Your SOF correspondent got in by being a working cop. Goers and doers.

You can see guns on card tables at your county fairgrounds, but who's going to let you shoot them? That's the best thing about the Expo: You can shoot anything there.

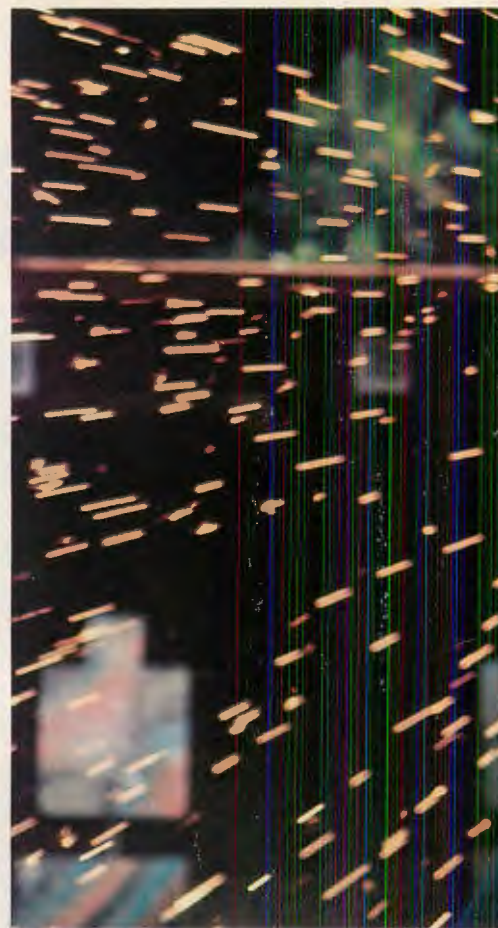
When a police department sends a buyer or an armorer to look over equipment at the L.A. Expo, and the dealers smell money, it is to their mutual advantage that a little blasting gets done. The LAPD Academy cooperates by providing access to their 25-yard range, and arms merchants take full advantage.

Not only can you arrange to fire your favorite SMG, you can watch the experts test weapons to the limit of man and gun. John Satterwhite, SOF's Shotgun Wizard, is one of many experts who make a manufacturer's wares perform ballistic magic. (Satterwhite is currently doing a promo stint with Heckler & Koch.)



**ABOVE:** Unbelievable: plastic-cased reloadable .38 ammo. United States Ammunition Co., Dept. SOF, 19014 Des Moines Way South, Seattle, WA 98148, (206) 433-8850.

**RIGHT:** Tim LaFrance brought several goodies, including this revolutionary silenced .45 pistol (watch for the T&E of this exciting weapon and its related non-baffled silencer family in a future issue of SOF), and Nova pistols, for police and military sales, only. La France Specialties, Dept. SOF, San Diego, CA 92117, (619) 293-3373.



**ABOVE:** John Satterwhite impresses cops, just like SOF conventioners.





ABOVE: SOF's Shotgun Wizard peddles his favorite, the Benelli 12-bore. Imported by Heckler & Koch, Dept. SOF, 14601 Lee Road, Chantilly, VA 22021-0801, (800) 368-3658.



ABOVE: Special Weapons Products one-ups everybody else in the nylon gear bag and holster business, with ideas like a bullet-resistant insert in chest-mount mag pouches. Special Weapons Products, Dept. SOF, Building 601, Space Center, Mira Loma, CA 91752, (714) 685-7401.

LEFT: Survivor I converts your .45 Colt auto to a seven-shot .45 carbine, and Survivor II turns it into a .223 single-shot! From M-S Safari Arms, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 23370, Phoenix, AZ 85063, (602) 269-7283.



ABOVE: Everyone had heard ... now they wanted to handle the Pocket 9 Detonics 9mm. Detonics Mfg. Corp., 2500 Seattle Tower, Third & University, Seattle, WA 98101.

LEFT: Bob Scroggie shows SOF friend Al Mar H&K's revolutionary P7.



Since the idea of being a cop has a lot to do with saving lives — even when the “victim” may not deserve the favor — non-lethal weaponry is something you don’t see at your everyday gun show. Many manufacturers exhibited goods we would like to test for SOF, but there were far too many to give all a fair shake here.

MB Associates, in particular, markets a surprising array of largely non-lethal (they more accurately refer to them as “less-lethal”) weapons, which mainly consist of different methods of propulsion of different sizes of shot-filled bags. The smallest and fastest bags, in .357 pistol ammo, are devastatingly lethal near the muzzle, but fall off to about 200 fps and very limited lethality at 100 feet. Sounds a lot safer to bystanders than standard pistol ammo.

Their big guns are the size of grenade launchers (one is a belt-fed, 250 rpm, semi-auto, tripod-mounted, 40mm shot-filled bag projector!) and are featured in newsfilms of major riots from Berkeley '71 to the present day. I don't know anybody who wants to get hit by one, but most of a policeman's professional acquaintances would prefer a hit from an MBA Stun-Gun than from a duty pistol.

This is hardly equipment for the home arsenal, but interested police and military agencies should contact MBA, Dept. SOF, San Ramon, CA 94583, (415) 837-7201.

Seminars, alone, are a good reason to attend. Dozier was certainly the biggest celebrity, but other lectures were just as valuable. Jeff Cooper told us all about police survival tactics, and Dr. Manfred Schreiber, chief of the Federal Republic of Germany national police, spoke on Olympic Game security. Needless to say, we all had things to learn.

You don't need to be told any more to know that the LAPD Expo is the best gun show in America. LAPD Sgt. Dick Newell started it all in 1982, and the Expo has become the best and most important police equipment exhibition in the world. ✂

**ABOVE:** Sirkis probably brought more wild stuff than anybody else, like this 7.62 NATO bullpup sniper rifle. Sirkis Industries, Ltd., Dept. SOF, 12 Rokah St., P.O.B. 644, Ramat-Gan 52105, Israel, (03)721353, Telex 361111 BEDO IL.

**ABOVE:** At 22 oz. each, Responder tactical boots must be champs in their class. Rainier Athletics, Dept. SOF, P.O.B. 2409, Carson City, NV 89701.



**ABOVE AND LEFT:** Sirkis nearly stole the show with new weapons, like the SQP pistol (a 9mm compact squeeze-cocker) and the S.D. ° pistol (a double-action-only, no external safety, full-power 9mm pocket pistol Sirkis plans to market for about \$200 retail). Sirkis Industries, Ltd., 12 Rokah St., P.O.B. 644, Ramat-Gan 52105 Israel, (03)721353 or 798033, Telex 361111 BEDO IL.



ABOVE: Flexible body armor can be the best friend you'll ever have, and Silent Partner's is the best of the best. Silent Partner, Dept. SOF, 230 Lafayette St., Gretna, LA 70053, (504) 366-4851.

BELOW: All the luggage you'll ever need, only better: It's camouflaged! Assault Systems, Dept. SOF, 869 Horan Dr., St. Louis, MO 63026-2478.



ABOVE: Gary Belson shows some of EUO's right stuff: They manufacture this Quick and Ready Vest (QRV), many of which were worn in U.S. operations on Grenada, and provide consultation and training for police and security personnel. Elevated Urban Operations, Dept. SOF, 1904 Limbus Ave., Sarasota, FL 33580, (813) 753-2913.

# GARCIA ON GUERRILLAS

## RMTC Colonel Tells How to Beat Gs

Text & Photos by Jim Graves



**Gospel According to Garcia: COIN troops' job is to win back land and people by saturation patrols.**

**Commo links are one edge an army should have over guerrillas.**

**C**OL. Reynaldo Garcia — Cuban Military Academy, 1955; anti-Castro Cuban Army platoon commander, 1959; member of the 2506 Brigade at the Bay of Pigs invasion, 1961; enlisted man in the United States Marine Corps, 1962; Special Forces Vietnam in the late '60s; commander of the Central American Regional Military Training Center (RMTC) in Trujillo, Honduras, and philosopher on guerrilla warfare, 1983 — was just getting to the good part when he had to break off for dinner with some mufti types out of DOD.

His audience, a couple of young sergeants, a first sergeant with 27 years in the Army and I, had sat enthralled in the RMTC mess hall for hours — so long, in fact, the sand fleas which infest the Caribbean coast of Honduras had grown tired of the sport and flown off — listening to Garcia talk about Central American guerrillas.

I mulled over what Garcia had said as I drove back through the totally dark and nearly empty countryside and later as I lay on the cot in my \$6-a-night beachside cabana at La Cueva del Pirata near Trujillo, being alternately lulled to sleep by the undulating waves and kept awake by the swarming insects.

The lecture on how to fight guerrilla war had evolved from a discussion about how crazy it was for the Salvadoran troops to carry 90mm recoilless rifles in the bush. Garcia pointed out that it was not just the 35-pound weight of the rifle, but the weight of the ammo as well that made the 90mm a poor weapon for a light-intensity guerrilla war.

"If I were there, I would make them get rid of those 90s and replace them with 60mm mortars," promised Garcia.

I knew Garcia had not done a tour in El Salvador yet, but he knew a hell of a lot about guerrilla tactics, so I asked, "Does the counterinsurgency war in El Salvador differ from previous counterinsurgency wars?"





Basic bushcraft of all kinds are essential to COIN ops, but camouflage is an RMTC specialty.

"Not at all," he said, "there is no difference. It's a fairly typical, low-intensity, light-infantry, counterinsurgency war. If the troops know how to do patrols, movement-to-contact, secure a military crest and put up a good defense there, they've got it licked.

"Saturation patrols. To me that's the cure for it. I don't believe in body counts. Go out and bag a thousand guerrillas and, yeah, that might look good to the press and to people in the United States — that might look fantastic — but I don't think that's the cure for guerrilla war.

"Take the population away from the guerrillas. That's the way you win.

"It's like the malaria in this area. You can do two things: You can treat people with malaria for as long as you stay in this area, for the next 3,000 years maybe, or you can drain the swamp and not have to worry about malaria anymore. Which way do you want to do it?

"Killing guerrillas by itself is like killing mosquitos one at a time to try to get rid of malaria. You want to get rid of the mosquitos, not breed them.

"The swamp. Get rid of the swamp.

"What breeds the guerrilla? First, lack of respect for the population by the army and two, motivation. You have got to get the army to respect the people and then take away the motivation to be a guerrilla."

"Do you tell that to the Salvos coming through the RMTC?" I asked.

"Of course," said Garcia, "over and over again. And so they don't forget, I give them a book to take with them. It's all in there in Spanish."

Switching to tactics, Garcia said, "And I keep hammering the fact that you do not use roads and trails, big or little. You go through the woods and you never use machetes to go through the woods.

"You go on the road, tell me, what type of security are you going to have? You can harden the truck and

put sandbags on it, and put the shotguns out and have everybody facing out. But have you got gun jeeps to send ahead? Helicopters to mobilize troops — to put them on the high ground and extract them as you go by? Air cover?

"You got all that? Because, if you don't, you're a dead duck.

"O.K., you have all that, but when you spot an area you don't like, you still have to dismount the truck and search, and if it's a harassment ambush, they're going to kill two or three of your troops.

"The old Chinese [Mao Tse-tung] wrote you need 15 soldiers per guerrilla and I believe the old Chinese. They kill three of yours and you kill three of theirs — they are winning. They kill three of yours and you kill 20 of theirs — they are still winning.

"The game is to not get anybody killed and zap one of theirs every once in a while. But don't get ambushed. "You have to take the initiative against the guerrilla. That's the only way you can win. Don't give anything away.

"If you're in a position and know — or suspect — that you're going to be in there over a half an hour, start digging. The moment you sit down, the second you put your ass on the ground, send security out.

"You have to guard a bridge or a *finca* [farm], don't put your army in there. The guerrillas see a couple of guys in the *finca* — in blue uniforms, looking pretty, with full-shined boots, walking around like they own the place — and they want to attack the *finca*. Let them attack. Now, when they have the *finca*, I'm going to come out of the woods and get them. You've got to play their game to the hilt.

"The guerrillas move at night so I'm going to move at night. They don't want to trample the woods at night because it's too damn difficult and too slow. What do the guerrillas use to move at night? They use roads and trails.

"Where am I going to send my army? I'm going to send my army to ambush the roads and trails and I'm going to zap some guerrillas.

"I think I've read every manual and every book ever printed on guerrilla operations," said Garcia. *Then he* paused and continued, "Maybe not all, but I've read a whole lot of them. And guess what? They all tell you the same thing. Guerrilla tactics are the same no matter where you go: raid, ambush and harassment. That's it.



In one situation, or at one specific time, the guerrilla might concentrate a little harder on the economy or on destroying the morale of the troops or the population, but that is a *strategy* change. The tactics to achieve the strategy are exactly the same: ambush, raid, harassment. They have nothing else to do.

"If the guerrillas want to go against the economy, they drop bridges, power lines, telephone lines, cut highways and isolate provinces — the highly productive provinces so they can deplete sources of employment and break the economic back of the country."

The purpose of such an operation, as Garcia explained, was to create problems between the civilian population and the government because that is how guerrillas get troops.

"That's where guerrillas get their soldiers: the guys who can't take it any more, the son whose father was murdered, or someone who was picked up five times at 0200 and tortured. And they get people by compromising them.

"In any town in Latin America — or in Southeast Asia or Africa — there's going to be two or three individuals who, in fact, run the town. The mayor, the doctor, the guy who runs the country store. Directly or indirectly, they run the town. They're well-respected, they have some money and some brains, and they have the political structure.

"Suppose they [the guerrillas] want to compromise Dr. Rodriguez? Everybody loves the guy because he trades health for chickens. Your wife is sick at 0300 in the morning, he gets on his mule and comes to your farm, rain or shine. Because you're poor, you give him a couple of chickens and the doctor takes them. He's a real nice guy, the old-time doctor. You find them all over the place in Central America.

"But the guerrillas want to get him. First, they talk to him. The guy doesn't want to join, they keep pressuring him. If he still doesn't want to join, they get a couple of old .45 pistols and three or four magazines and wait for him to go out of town. Then they get the maid or gardener, who works for them, to bury the pistols under Mrs. Rodriguez' rosebush and smooth the dirt so it looks like nobody has touched it.

"One of them goes to a telephone booth to call the police station and says, 'I'm not telling my name, but I know who's providing weapons for the guerrillas: Dr. Rodriguez.'

"The police march out there, check it out — even though they don't believe it — and they find nothing.

**After soldiers have mastered arms, they must learn to discriminate targets against complex backgrounds: RMTC rifle range.**



"Then they send the maid to talk to the doctor again. If he still doesn't want to join, they call the police again, 'Look, dummies, I told you already that the doctor was cooperating with the guerrillas, but you don't know what you're doing. Now, I'm going to do your job one more time, but I'm not going to call you again. Check under the roses.'

"Two o'clock in the morning, normal SOP: The police search the house and push the kids around; everybody's crying; the wife is scared; all the lights go on in the neighbor's house. A couple of policemen go to the rosebush and bingo! There're two .45s and three magazines.

"Guess what happens to the doctor? He goes to jail. And they're going to give him the first-, second- or third-degree interrogation, depending on the level of the commander's dedication. They whack him around a couple of times, but the guy knows nothing so they turn him loose. Or maybe another dignitary intercedes for him.

"One of two things will happen: One, the doctor leaves town because he can't take the harassment anymore. But, now, the town has no doctor so people are pissed. Or, two, the doctor stays there. But, if the doctor, who is the idol of the town, is being harassed by the police, what do you think the reaction of the townspeople is? The guerrillas might never get the doctor to join the guerrillas, but, then again, that might not have been their objective, anyway. What they want is people, numbers.

"Or they send a guy out to kill the doctor. Who do you think is going to get blamed?

"Suppose their target is the economy. They want to wipe out the sugar-cane fields. Simple, they get a cat — or a dozen cats — and attach a piece of wire to his tail. At the end of the wire, they tie a burlap sack, soaked in gasoline and oil. They drive along the sugar cane-field, light the sack and turn the cat loose.

"The cat's going to run away from the fire, right? When he gets tired, he's gonna stop, but he's going to see that fire burning and take off again. Meanwhile, he'll leave pieces of burning burlap all over the place.

"Or maybe it's controlled sabotage they want to do. On Sunday night, they get a bunch of guys together, each with a sock full of sand, not a weapon, and go down the streets. When they come to a car, they bust the headlights. The next morning, there's not a working headlight on any car or truck in town.

"The next Sunday, they give everybody one nail taped to a piece of wood, an ice pick, if you will. As they go by a car, they punch a hole in the radiator or the tire.

"Not only are they harassing the hell out of these people, but the people who own the cars are demanding, 'O.K., policemen, I'm paying you with my taxes, now protect my goddamn car.'

"The young kids who did those things feel like heroes. All they're doing is vandalism. There're a lot of vandals — 14-, 15-, 16- or 17-year-olds — who would love to do it.

"If they get caught with an ice pick or a sack full of sand — God bless 'em. The police might even kill them. But the guerrillas have created another martyr for the revolution. They name the next guerrilla band after that kid — who didn't even know what he was doing.

"And the family of that kid, and the people who knew him and thought he was a good kid, hate the police. You think they're not going to pass information to the guerrillas? Even if they haven't got the guts to join the guerrillas, at least, they'll protect them.

"You've got to look at everything the guerrillas do as a trap. They don't waste anything. Every step has an

ulterior motive. They have to kill one of their guys who's about to turn tail, they'll get you do it for them if you're stupid. They give him to you so you can create another martyr and then they have a big mass to celebrate his death.

"You can kill Gs until hell freezes over. All you're going to do is run out of bullets. You're going to have to kill the whole population because the more you kill, the more hatred you create. Because that G is in somebody's family and the moment you kill him the whole family is against you.

"There's no money in body counts.

"The Japanese had a good army but were they able to eliminate the guerrillas in the Philippines? The German Army was known throughout the world as a hot-shit army, but did they ever stop the Magyar guerrillas, or the Greeks, or the Yugoslavians, or the Czechoslovakians, or the Russians, or the French?

"Were we able to cope with the South Vietnamese? Were the French? Was Chiang Kai-shek able to cope with Mao Tse-tung?

"You go for body counts, that's what you get.

"You think a guy becomes a guerrilla because he likes to get shot at? There might be a couple of cuckoos out there who like adventure and enjoy that. But how many of those guys are there?

"The typical guy becomes a guerrilla because he's pissed. If you know why he's pissed, you can do something. So have somebody sit in one of their meetings when the guerrillas take over a town and listen carefully to what they say. Take a little tape recorder and tape the whole thing. Tape 10 or 20 of them. Then carefully analyze what the guerrillas are saying. What are they telling people to piss them off, to get them to join the guerrillas?

"If you find out what the guerrillas are preaching and get yourself the same sheet of music, you can take the motivation away.

"Let's say the problem is religion. That is one of the typical problems. The people have no freedom of religion and the guerrillas tell them, 'Take this AK-47 and go shoot it up. That's the only way you're going to get freedom of religion.'

"The government should go to the people and ask, 'Is that what you want? You want a church?' Then they should give them the wood and bricks, and tell them, 'Build yourself a pagoda.' They could even give the people a couple of majors from the Corps of Engineers to help build it. Why not, if that will keep them [the people] from getting mad enough to go shoot at somebody and get shot at.

"Agrarian reform? Governments shouldn't just give the *campesinos* land, they also should give them a couple of engineers and some agricultural experts to go out there and tell them how to farm and how to plant. Give them a market and give them some seed.

"You know what people like to have? They like to have a school to send their children to, a place to work and a steady paycheck — some security so they know they're going to eat tomorrow. And a little aid station, not a hospital, but an aid station so when the kid cuts his finger they don't have to wait until the finger's about to fall off before they can scrounge up a politician who can get him medevacked to a hospital."

How can the governments give people those things in Central America? Garcia's approach was interesting. He suggested that the Central American governments go to the large landowners and tell them unless they want to see their *fincas* confiscated in a half-assed land reform — which will solve nothing — they should 1) build a school and hire a teacher; 2) build an aid station; 3) pay the people a fair wage all year round.



**Body counts don't tell the story, but RMTC candidates still learn to search dead Gs for intel materials.**

"Now the landowner is a nice guy," said Garcia. "He runs an aid station and a school for the farmers, and they get paid regularly. Everybody wants to work for him.

"What's in it for the landowner? He doesn't have to worry about guerrillas, he gets to keep his land and he deducts the cost from his taxes.

"Do that and you *can't* have guerrillas," said Garcia. "Let the guerrillas talk to the farmer, but he won't have anything to do with them. He doesn't want to get shot at.

"The guys who like to get shot at, you know what they're gonna do? They'll join the army and they can wear uniforms and trample through the woods. You know, there's always a bunch of yo-yos who like to do that. But governments can provide even for that guy. He wants to jump out of airplanes. He's stupid, but get him to join the airborne battalion. No problem, he can jump out of airplanes. Provide for him so he doesn't become a guerrilla and get his own airborne outfit.

"It is up to the government to watch out for the interests of the poor sons of bitches. And that is what they're not doing.

"And that is why I don't have a country anymore. And God knows I tried.

"I was a youngster, but I tried with the only thing I knew how to try. I shot at people and I got shot at. I thought that war was the solution.

"I realize now it was not the solution, it was never the solution. It should never have happened. But it did. I was only 19, 20 years old and I didn't read as many books then and I didn't have as much experience."

Since I knew Garcia was trying hard to work himself out of a job at the RMTC and get over closer to the gunsmoke — El Salvador — I asked him what he would do when he got his assignment there.

"First," he said, "I'm going to get me some mules." As soon as he said that, I saw it coming — as would any former Marine. Chesty Puller, the USMC commander of the famous "M" Company, which was instrumental in putting down the revolution of Augusto Cesar Sandino in Nicaragua in the 1930s, was famous for his fondness for using mules as transportation in the jungle.

You have to like any guy who starts off talking about bush tactics in 1983 with mules. They are a lot cheaper, more dependable and can go places helicopters can't even begin to reach.

That was the good part that the DOD folks interrupted. ✕



# SOF's Legionnaire with the Cazadores

Text & Photos  
by Paul Fanshaw

Fast-moving  
*Cazadores*,  
supported by  
choppers,  
provide the  
only security  
known to  
farmers and  
townspeople of  
northern  
Morazan.



**SOF EXCLUSIVE**

# HOUSE-TO-HOUSE IN MORAZAN

**T**HERE are 217 men in the *Cazadores* (hunters) company I worked with in Morazan Province, El Salvador. Over 300 guerrillas held a village in the northern part of the province, and I was with the *Cazadores* when they drove the Gs out. The story will tell you something about the war for El Salvador that you won't read in the papers, since I didn't see anybody else's press card when we moved into the village.

SOF had placed me with the *Cazadores* at San Miguel as a observer, reporter and trainer. I saw lots, can tell you most of it and ended up learning a few things.

The *Cazadores* loaded into the trucks at San Miguel. We had been told we were going into combat, but from years in the Legion, I had learned to relax when I could. I got on the truck, shed my pack and sat on it, M16

muzzle pointed to the sky. The *Cazadores* pulled me to my feet and told me to put my pack on. In a country like this you have to be ready every minute.

Most of our intel came from civilians. That's how we knew 300 guerrillas had walked into the village this morning. If some civilians were telling us where the guerrillas were, you could bet others were telling the Gs we were coming. That meant the road wasn't safe — anywhere.

I had patrolled with the *Cazadores* and trained them, but this was my first operation. They all carried their rifles pointed out the sides of the truck as they faced away from the center of the bed with their packs on. You never knew when you would have to return fire or bail out. It's not like a chopper assault.

We rode most of the 25 km. on the trucks. We were lucky. Many Salvo units lack transport and they walk.

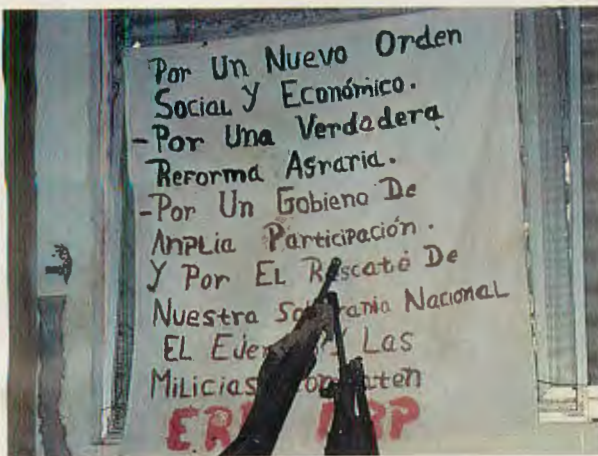
We stopped by a cornfield just as a Huey set down and Col. Monterrosa got out. He explained to the officers what had happened.

The army had set an ambush down the road a ways. The Gs had stumbled into it with five trucks and a civilian passenger car that was the command vehicle. The army was outnumbered, but they sprang the ambush aggressively. Four trucks got away, he said, but they were all hit, and the Gs had to leave the



Fanshaw braces against twin-.50 mount in Dakota as he orients map to terrain below. Photo: John E. Padgett

*Cazador's* G3 and Fanshaw's Galil rest against ERP propaganda in recently-cleared Morazan village.



RRII's John Padgett settles back into Salvo Socata Rallye scout plane after dropping Fanshaw in San Miguel.

command car and one truck.

The Gs get along pretty well in Morazan. Right up next to the uninhabited Honduran border they can get mortars and other materiel you don't see in most of El Salvador. Because of the rough country, sparse population and short supply lines, they move pretty freely in the northern half of the province.

We drove along another couple of clicks, and you'd better believe we watched the bush. When we entered hotly contested territory, we jumped out the back of the trucks. Every man moved to his prearranged position around the convoy and we moved out.

We moved in a column, the CO in the middle of the formation so he was immediately in touch with all platoons. Two platoons moved forward of the CO and two platoons went behind him in a big box formation.

On contact, the two closest platoons engage the enemy under the immediate direction of the CO. As soon as these platoons begin to fix the enemy, the CO assumes command of the movement element.

*Norte Americanos* can't understand the personal nature of leadership in a place like El Salvador. There aren't a lot of orders in the field. Soldiers are careful to stay in sight of officers whenever possible because their job is to follow. U.S. or European observers might look at this and think it's unprofessional.

The only thing I am is a professional soldier. Aside from construction day labor for two short stays in the States, I haven't held any job but soldiering for 20 years.

Journalists might not think the Salvo officer corps is professional. I do, and I don't think most of the press corps has been around enough to know the difference.

We moved pretty fast for four kilometers and found the ambush site. The truck had no bullet holes in the body, but the windshield was blown out. The car was shot up, with the doors open, and there was a lot of pretty fresh blood on the pavement.

The army had come off without a scratch, but there was no point in sticking around since they were outnumbered about five-to-one. Col. Monterrosa explained that the Gs had loaded their dead and wounded onto the other trucks and run back to the village just ahead. The colonel led us 500 meters down the road, gave final orders, and returned to the chopper to coordinate air support.

Monterrosa directed fire from the Huey as we began the 300-meter approach along the line of the road, still in box formation. The two M60s on the Huey weren't much, but the Gs are scared of choppers.

A little '60 fire starts an organized pull-out of some of the Gs. We reach the edge of the cover, and two platoons spread to the left. I go right with the other two.

We're going after them.

Radio tells us that some of the Gs appear to be preparing resistance in the village, but most of them are pulling out on our front, since their withdrawal can be covered by uncut corn.

About a hundred of us are going to chase nearly 300 Gs through the corn. Everybody's excited, but we advance on line across 300 meters of corn stubble, without drawing fire. No one fires. The guerrillas aren't going to know where we come from.

When we reach the line of the uncut stalks I can't see a thing. Vision is less than three feet. From the sound on either side of me my comrades are still moving on line. There's nothing else to do, since the usual hand signals can't be seen. If you see somebody in front of you: Fire. The first man who fires will probably live.

By this time, a Loach with a minigun has showed up to support us. More Gs decamp.

Soon real fireworks start. A camouflaged OV-10 fires from just above the cornstalks and rockets blow dirt in the air a couple of thousand meters to our front. That's where they are.

I hear the line sweep toward the rocket bursts.

Several '16s blast at once as the sound of choppy AK fire fades away through the stalks. The line closes interval near me, concentrating on the sound of fire.

I nearly step on a body as I walk into a small bunch of *Cazadores* searching it for weapons and papers. It used to be a guerrilla.

We trot back on line while the minigun and rockets can still be heard. I'm afraid we're going to stumble into something as we move fast across the field. We still can't see a thing but the stalks in front of us, smoke from rocket bursts and burning corn ahead.

Detonations shake the corn stalks as 500-pounders drop from an invisible jet.

By the time we reach the guerrilla position there's nothing to see but holes. The bombs have left craters five meters across and piles of dirt. There are no bodies visible, but you can see equipment and some blood on the ground. One crater has a little bag of coffee, some rags and a broken-up AK in it.

The colonel appears again in the Huey, and directs one squad to track the retreat for a few hundred meters. The rest of us form up and move back to the village for some house-to-house.

The *Cazadores* really know their business on clearing villages. It's a dirty job, and one man who doesn't know his assignment makes everybody else a target.

We move one at a time, doorway to corner and corner to tree. It's tense, and a little fire would relax us. But there are civilians and other soldiers out there, so you've got to identify your targets.

The radio tells us the few Gs left are running, and we

**Gs teach field-expedients, too. This assembly is a remote demo detonator.**



**Cazadores relax after village-clearing in northern Morazan combat zone.**

**Incapable of beating prepared Salvadoran units, and failing to win the people, communists blow bridges to ruin the economy and hamper troop movements.**



can hear the Loach chasing them with the minigun.

We don't find much but papers and slogans painted on the walls, so we head back to the square. Col. Monterrosa tells the civilians to report everything directly to military authority, since the *Cazadores* are going to take care of things for the day they're in town. The villagers act relieved and cheerful, and nobody tries to sneak away.

At the end of the day the trucks come, and we climb on. On the way back to San Miguel we still ride at the ready. Nobody wants to die.

That's what a day in the *Cazadores* is like.

We got one confirmed kill, and — because we were lucky — none of our guys died. The Gs probably got hurt more than it showed. They also got run out of town.

We would find that humiliating, but the Gs know their game. At any given time, the army can drive the Gs out of any given place. The guerrillas may have overrun a couple of installations, but even they know those are flukes.


The only people really fooled about guerrilla capabilities seem to be most of the press corps.

The Gs don't hold anything. Their only safety is in movement or disappearing into the uninhabited bush. There are "guerrilla villages" but no base of support.

In a way we're lucky. If it weren't for remote "safe" areas the Gs might have to come to terms with their own population, and then they'd be more effective. As it is they only take a village here and there for a day, blow up bridges, ruin the local economy and murder a few people.

It's bad that it happens, but it's showing the average Salvadoran what the Gs are: terrorists. ☒



A black UH-1H helicopter is the central focus, parked on a dirt field. The number '0 270' is visible on its side. Several soldiers in blue uniforms are seen near the helicopter, some handling equipment. In the foreground, a soldier's hand is visible holding a rifle. The background shows a hazy, open landscape under a bright sky.

**SOF** EXCLUSIVE

# ATLACATL ASSAULT

**SOF in Combat  
with El Salvador's  
Elite Immediate  
Reaction Battalion**

**Text & Photos by Peter G.Kokalis**

**I**NDIAN country — just east of the Rio Lempa in Usulután Province, El Salvador. The rugged terrain is infested with communist guerrillas, swarming gnats, tall grass and choking heat. I'm part of a 217-man relief column, commanded by 1st Lt. David Koch. Our objective is the Atlacatl Immediate Reaction Battalion TOC (tactical operations center) established the day before, after fierce and bloody fighting, on a hill called Hacienda El Carmen 4.5 clicks from the village of San Marcos Lempa where we have left the trucks which carried us from the battalion *cuartel*.

**Bundles manhandled on board UH-1H for Atonal Bn. resupply sortie.**



Waiting for a truck of rations to be brought up from the city of Usulután, the troops lie in the meager shade of the village square. I sample strips of dried, candied papaya and sip Coca-Cola out of a plastic bag as I listen to 105 rounds screech overhead. The artillery battery is located on the west bank of the Rio Lempa next to the railroad trestle bridge we have crossed moments before. They're pounding guerrilla forces fleeing to the northeast in the sector on our right flank that is occupied by the Atonal Immediate Reaction Battalion. Like killer bees, swooping A-37 Dragonflies repeatedly unload more presents for the Gs, which impact with thunderous cracks on the nearby hills, turning at least 16 of the bastards into meat for the vultures.

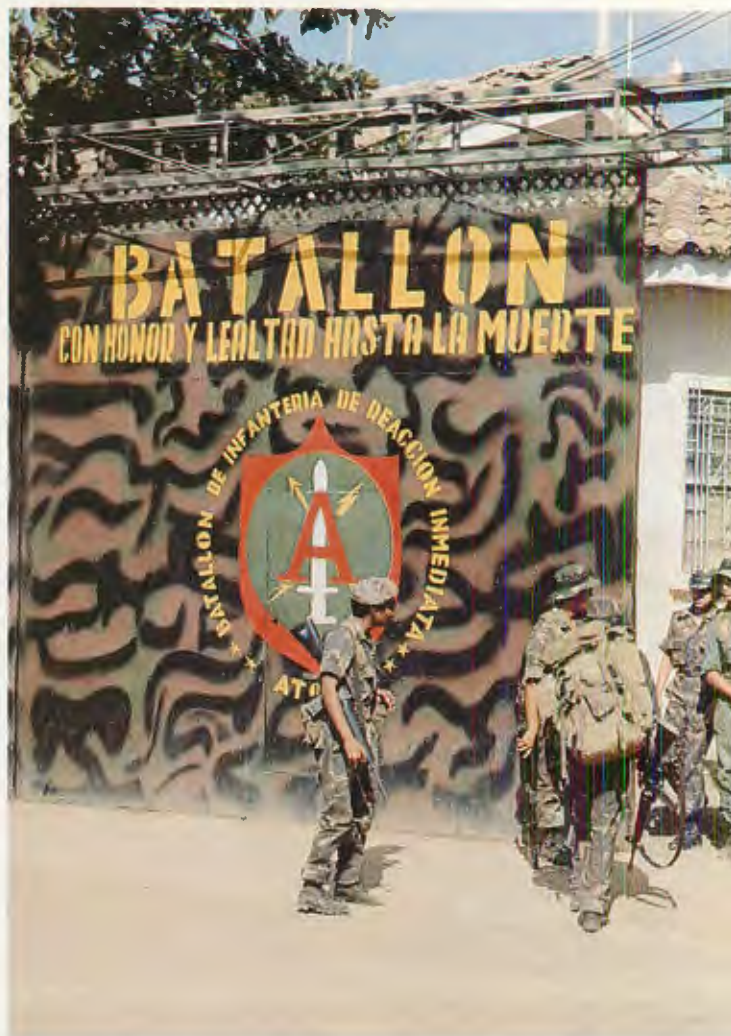
Sixteen hundred guerrillas have massed to destroy the remaining bridge over the Rio Lempa. Our job: Interdict the enemy advance on the bridge, engage and eliminate as many of them as possible, wipe out their nine base camps in our area of operations, capture a cache of weapons reported by intelligence sources and begin the pacification of Usulután Province.

My part in this effort began the day before the battalion left for the operation. All of the battalion's machine guns and crews were assembled in the Plaza de Armas for my inspection. All weapons had been superbly maintained. The training they had received from me in August '83 had paid life-saving dividends. Equipped now with the safety-wire pliers and stainless-steel wire I had provided



As with their own officers, Atlacatis provided orderly to carry Kokalis' field gear. Soldier humps Lowe-pro Vector I pack.

Atlacatl 7th Co. CO gets a little more firepower from Redi-Mags, donated by JFS, Inc.



Pride and security represented by front gate of Atonal Bn. cuartel in Usulután.

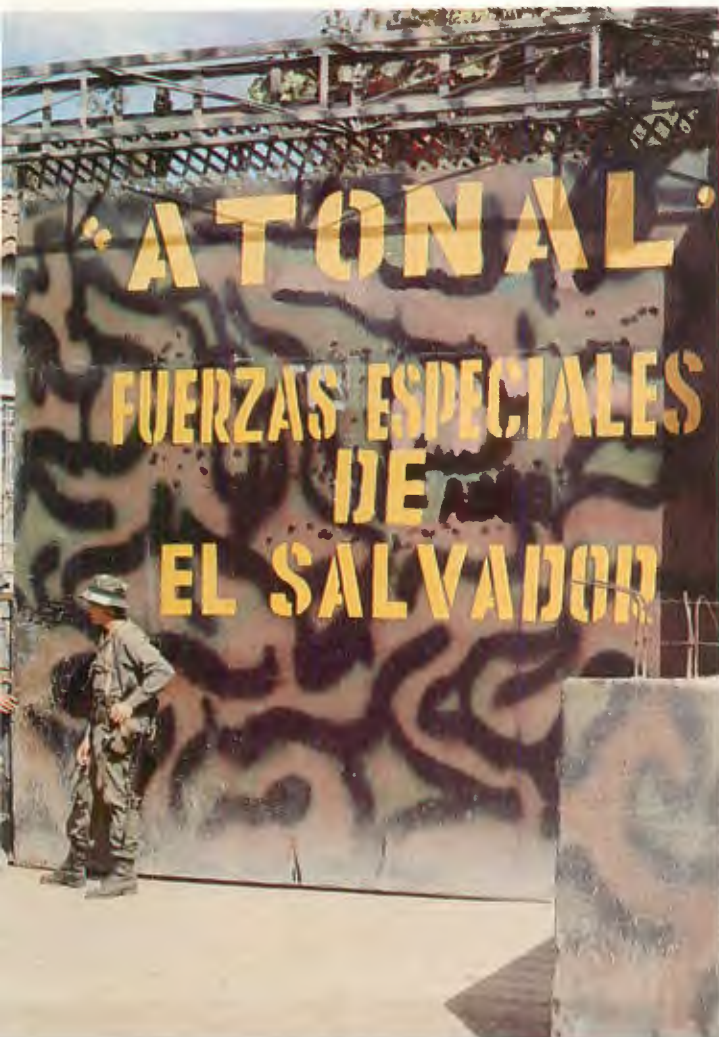
them, the crews were no longer inhibited from disassembling the M60 gas systems.

I have never seen cleaner M60s! I needed only to swiss-file some operating rods and bolts, straighten a bent trigger spring, and replace the parts usually found missing or defective on this system: cocking lever guide screws, trigger-housing retaining leaf springs, actuator rollers, bolt plug pins, recoil springs and gas plugs. I discovered two bolt assemblies which had been incorrectly assembled.

The .50-cal. Browning M2 HB machine guns were also well maintained and, of course, no parts needed replacement in this finest of all heavy machine guns. A refresher course on use of the headspace and timing gauges satisfied me that these crews were also competent with *La Cincuenta*.

As the M60 crews safety-wired the barrel assemblies, I walked away, feeling confident neither they nor their weapons would fail us in the days ahead.

While still in the *cuartel* I was able to examine and fire an unusual captured FN FAL. One of the Cuban contract, this FAL's flash suppressor had been discarded and the barrel chopped back about six inches to the front sling swivel's retaining groove. Sling swivels and butt plate were missing and the wood buttstock had been shortened as well. The inner recoil spring had been removed, and the rifle fired without stoppages of any kind. As expected, the muzzle blast was ferocious and controllability in the full-auto mode diminished even



further. But hit probability remained high and felt recoil was not appreciably increased. All in all, it was an interesting experiment in reducing the FAL's bulk and weight. The usual hole had been cut with an end mill to obliterate the Cuban coat-of-arms (see "The Cuban Connection," SOF, September '83).

The Atlacatl Battalion moved out the next morning at 0300 under the able and experienced command of their new CO, Lt. Col. Armando Azmitia, their former XO. The operational area was a strip of highly dissected topography eight kilometers wide. Flanked by the Rio Lempa on the west and the Atonal Battalion to our immediate east, we would approach from the south. With guerrilla movement to the flanks thus inhibited, the situation was a textbook hammer-and-anvil set-piece begging for a blocking force to the north. We could smash the entire guerrilla concentration in one classic maneuver.

But this was not to be, since 80 helicopters would be required to execute such tactics. The entire inventory of the Salvadoran Air Force consists of only 18 well-worn UH-1H helicopters — only half or less of which may be flyable on any given day.

This one frustrating incident serves to spotlight the real dilemma of the Salvadoran Army. While many of the U.S. press corps sit in the Camino Real bar, gloating over each new guerrilla spectacular, sneering at the "incompetence" of the Salvadoran Army officers and playing the same tune they composed in Vietnam, the truth (as usual) can be found elsewhere. To force "immediate reaction" battalions such as the Atlacatl, Beloso and Atonal to move their troops by truck and then hump



In Central America, "immediate reaction" often translates "walk faster." Hobbled by lack of chopper transport, Atlacatl reserves advance to op area over remaining Rio Lempa railroad bridge.

10 to 20 clicks through the bush to reach an operational area is more than just a macabre joke. (Meanwhile, the press insinuates the four to eight hours such response takes is a demonstration of "poor leadership" and "lack of the will to fight." That smacks of KGB disinformation.)

Give the Salvadoran Army the assistance and equipment they need to become airmobile and they will crush the communist rebel forces.

Contact with the enemy was not expected until the battalion moved eight kilometers north of San Marcos Lempa, but within two clicks guerrilla fire met our advance units. Moving slowly, the Atlacatls encountered sporadic resistance until they arrived at the base of Hacienda El Carmen, 300 feet from the summit.

Firing from defensive trenches surrounding the hilltop's perimeter, the guerrillas cut loose with all the firepower at their disposal. A withering hail from their M16s, Cuban FALs, M60s and grenades fell upon the assault units at the hill's base. While the main force pushed upward, one platoon was able to flank the enemy to the north and reach the summit unnoticed. The guerrillas counterattacked almost immediately. Engagement distances were less than 30 feet. The platoon was forced to withdraw, leaving three of their comrades holding the hilltop forever. One of those killed was the battalion's most popular sergeant. Men wept openly at the news of his death.

Meanwhile, the Atlacatl assault unit continued its drive up the south slope. Every tree on the summit was scarred by fire. The guerrillas fled northward, taking, as usual, their dead and wounded to prevent accurate body counts. Our snipers, delivering farewell wishes with deadly precision, watched bodies fall through scopes, only to see them dragged off by others. We suffered seven KIA and 18 WIA, but the guerrillas lost many more. They had not expected to fight the feared Atlacatl Battalion that day, and would not soon forget who had bloodied their noses.

Two of those killed were in Dave Koch's 7th Company. The battalion's best sniper, also a member of the 7th Company, had his kneecap blown off. He will be hard to replace.

The Atlacatls have the best sniper program in the Salvadoran Army. The snipers were chosen by a rigorous selection process that clearly defined the battalion's top marksmen. They were then run through an intensive two-week course by one of the world's most competent military small-arms instructors. Twenty-six snipers are

now trained, equipped and employed with excellent results.

The weapon system stresses cost effectiveness and ease of training. Large quantities of G3 rifles were already inventoried. Since its 7.62 NATO cartridge is fine for this purpose and in general issue, the G3 was adopted — in spite of its trigger's inadequacy for precision shooting. Bases constructed in El Salvador were machined from industrial steel and spot-welded in four places to the G3 receiver. The superb Leatherwood MPC/ART scope (see "State-of-the-Art Scope," SOF, May '82) was purchased. With its unique universal-ranging cam, the MPC/ART scope allows the user to "curve-fit" and fine-tune the optical system to whatever caliber or load he is shooting. Special lots of West German ammunition are supplied to the snipers.

The MPC/ART uses a set of standard crosshairs with a finer wire in position below the scope's horizontal crosshair. The distance suspended between these two horizontal lines is 18 inches at 200 meters. After initial zero has been accomplished, the sniper looks through the 3-9X scope at his target and proceeds to increase or decrease the power of the scope until 18 inches of the target is fitted between the two stadia wires. The scope

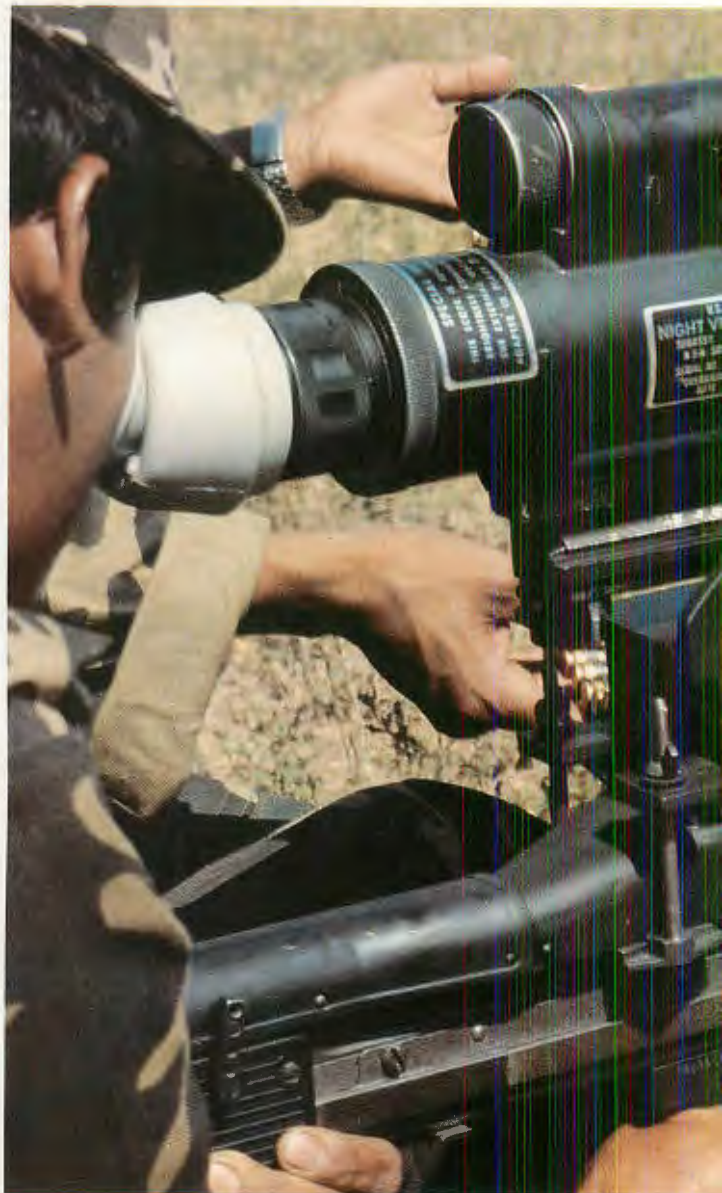


**Modified WWII .30 Browning — made by Buffalo Arms Corp. of Buffalo, N.Y. — captured from communists by Atonal Bn.**



**Effective sniping is recent Atlacatl development, with help of Leatherwood ART.**

**Chopped Cuban contract FAL — captured by Atlacatl Bn. — handed surprisingly well, and was lighter and shorter than author's Para model.**



**Atlacatl's sight-in M60 after Kokalis installed tripod and mount, and AN/PVS-2 night sighting device provided by USG.**

has then been zeroed at this particular distance and the shooter may take dead-on aim without any hold-over. Weeks of extensive training in range estimation, ballistics and hold-over techniques are no longer required.

I fired one of these G3s with an MPC/ART scope at the battalion range. Even with its 15-lb. trigger pull, the combination consistently produced 4 MOA. Some careful work on the trigger might cut this to 2-3 MOA.

I roll out with the relief column at 0500, just about the time the press corps has finished turning the FMLN's (Marti National Liberation Front) daily propaganda into the hot, smoking poop after a rough night downing Pilsners at Gloria's, the local cat house.

Intelligence reports indicate that some of the guerrillas have slipped past the Atonal Battalion and moved south to intercept us. Consequently, the convoy moves slowly once we pass Zacatecoluca and Koch stops the trucks several times to send out flankers at likely ambush points. We arrive at San Marcos Lempa without incident.

After the two-day rations have been distributed, the troops are formed up and, with the help of a local tracker, we begin to move north through the bush toward the Atlacatl TOC atop Hacienda El Carmen. A solid mat of



vines underneath the tall grass awaits the unwary, and to avoid tripping constantly I'm forced to walk like a ballet dancer. Try this sometime with a "Fritz" helmet (the current issue U.S. ballistic helmet), flak jacket, chest pouches, canteens and FN FAL in the ready position. Within two clicks I'm reconsidering the wisdom of wearing the flak jacket. I become convinced it was designed for Marines guarding static positions in Lebanon and airmobile troops who are flown to the point of engagement, but definitely not for humping the hills of Usulután.

After three clicks, the searing heat, stifling humidity and cumbersome flak jacket are really getting to me. Koch trots back and informs me that I'm slowing them down. He puts on the flak jacket and over the next two days loses six pounds.

Shed of this millstone, I begin to match their pace. In this environment, gringos need at least a gallon of water a day. Crossing the Rio Roldán — actually nothing more than an intermittent stream — I replenish my canteens with its tepid, brackish water and pop two Halazone tablets into each quart. We continue grinding out the kilometers, ever conscious that hard contact may be only steps away.

Eventually, as in all COIN ops, you begin to pray the guerrillas will show themselves: first, to relieve the tension of not knowing where they are and second, you'll

get to stop, at least momentarily. All the while, the 105 rounds continue to pass overhead and the A-37s work away. Now 60mm and 81mm mortar rounds can be heard plopping out of their tubes. Soon I hear the hard knocking sound of a Ma Deuce, fired in well-regulated three-shot bursts. I smile inwardly, as my .50-cal. gun crews have learned their lessons well and we're closing on the TOC.

We arrive at the command group by late afternoon and Azmitia debriefs me on the previous day's events. We discuss the need for faster reaction time from the A-37s on tactical air-support missions and better coordination between the artillery batteries and the infantry battalions.

After a dinner of meatballs in barbecue sauce MREs (Meal, Ready-To-Eat, the new U.S. Army field rations), dusk settles in and the Salvadoran gnats signal their fellows that a *Norte Americano* has arrived. They move in by the hundreds to drink gringo blood and the insect repellent proves to be mere frosting on their cake. The A-37s bomb the adjacent hills after sunset and Azmitia chortles as fiery shit rains down upon the *putas*. Koch checks his perimeter defenses and we retire to the tent to listen to Radio Venceremos from Nicaragua.

Four hours later we're up and on our way to join 7th Company, about one click to the northwest. The terrain deteriorates with every step northward. As we move deeper into the foothills, the topography becomes more

crenulated and steep hills loom before me every 100 meters.

We arrive at an abandoned ranch house — the 7th Company's temporary CP — and Koch immediately holds a debriefing with his second lieutenants. I examine obscene graffiti the guerrillas have scrawled on the walls of the building, and then begin to assemble our M60 night sniping system. The 7th Company already has an AN/PVS-2 night vision scope provided by the U.S. government, but the scope lacks a mount. I attach the proper scope mount and an M122 tripod, complete with pintle and T&E mechanism.

Disgruntled, I am attached to the 4th (weapons) Platoon, along with the M60 night sniping system. We will march in reserve behind the three rifle platoons to our objective, the first guerrilla base camp 3.5 kilometers to the north.

The searing Salvadoran sun is overhead now and the humidity saps my remaining reserves as I trudge slowly up and down the seeming infinity of volcanic hills. Sporadic fire to the front and flanks constantly reminds me that there's only one way to hell — north.

As the day drags on, I reflect on the Para FAL I'm carrying. An impressive classic, it would warm the

## ARGIE GOLFBALL

by Peter G. Kokalis

While on the Usulután combat operation, I carried an innovative Argentine grenade that is now in general service throughout the Salvadoran Army, although the U.S. M67 is still more commonly encountered.

Designed by Fabricaciones Militares of Argentina,



Argentine FMK2 dual-purpose hand grenade.



this *Doble Proposito Granada De Mano* (Double Purpose Hand Grenade) is called the FMK2 Model 0. The grenade body, about two inches in diameter, is slightly larger than a golf ball. It follows the mini-grenade pattern of the Belgian MECAR 60mm anti-personnel grenade. The body is cast, but acquires its excellent fragmenting characteristics from a special after-casting heat treatment. This heat treatment makes the 5.8-oz. grenade body break regularly into three- to five-gram fragments.

The explosive charge consists of a 2.7-oz. mixture of recrystallized hexogene and flaked TNT. This combination has considerable brisance (shattering effect) and the chemical proportions can be varied to suit differing fragmentation characteristics.

The fuse assembly, a 2.1-inch aluminum tube, is permanently attached to the grenade body. It contains the detonator and firing mechanism. The 1.1-inch detonator is removable and can be stored upside down, in which position the grenade is inert. To arm: Unscrew and remove the fuse assembly cap along with the coil spring and plastic guide plug, drop out the detonator and replace it with the red end down (an arrow and the word *abajo* — down — on the side of the detonator indicate the correct position). The inert end of the detonator is painted black. When the spoon is released, a brass bar is pulled from the fuse tube and the spring-loaded detonator is driven downward onto a fixed firing pin. The time delay varies from 3.5 to 4.5 seconds.

The FMK2 has two additional safety devices. A red-painted spring-steel wire is wrapped around the grenade body and spoon and can be removed at any time by thumb pressure. A cotter pin on a safety pin ring also holds the spoon in place. Its removal is the final step taken in arming the grenade. A spare cotter pin is attached to the ring. Should the first be damaged in removal, this spare can be used to make the grenade safe again. I found this 3-safety system to be foolproof and comforting. Over the years, all too many grunts have been vaporized into a red mist through mishandling of their own grenades.

Because of its superior ergonomics, the FMK2 can easily be pitched 30 feet from the prone position and up to 100 feet while standing or kneeling. Although 100-percent lethality is assured within a 15-foot radius from the point of detonation, by 30 feet the casualty capacity has fallen almost to zero due to the extremely small size of the fragments. This fits the salient parameters required of a modern dual-purpose offensive/defensive grenade. In comparison, the U.S. M67 has a maximum casualty radius of 50 feet, which handicaps its versatility. Inside a contained area, the FMK2 will produce at least severe concussion within a 10-foot radius and within a four-foot radius, steel helmets will be penetrated.

A tail assembly is available for rifle launching with ballistite (blank) cartridges. With this device, the FMK2 can be fired to 400 meters. But this component is not in use by the Salvadorans.



Kokalis' abandoned flak jacket protects 1st. Lt. Koch on UH-1H extraction from op area.

SOF's Kokalis watches TOC and guerrilla camps fade as he leaves combat zone by chopper.



cockles of the heart of any armchair expert. But, to me at this moment, it has become a device of infernal torture. *Pesa* (heavy), the Atlacatl keep telling me. At 8.6 lbs., empty, it's all that — and much more, with 240 rounds of 7.62mm NATO ball strapped to my web gear. I curse the day I selected it — my final attempt to justify its existence on the modern battlefield.

In the last several days, men all around me have fallen — silent for eternity — to the M16, as they have for more than 20 years now. Yet, this does not satisfy those who unload their treasures from the trunk of a car and waddle 10 feet to the firing line to shoot at paper silhouettes. Their sarcasm, fed by the faulty memories of deeds decades past, casts doubt on the manhood of poor wretches unwilling to carry the iron burdens endorsed by the toy soldiers of the popular gun press. A pox on them.

As I top another hill and drop to its military crest, I come upon Koch who points ahead. There I see his M60 gunners raking the guerrilla base camp with reconnaissance by fire. Our objective is clearly in sight and my only bitterness now is that this time I have not counted coup over the enemy.

The summit above the guerrilla camp, which appears so close, is four grueling hills beyond. I climb the last incline to the cadence of a UH-1H rotor and by these means, I extract. With satisfaction and frustration, mixed, I leave an operation that has begun well. Hobbled by a lack of modern equipment that is available, but forbidden, the Atlacatl have taken the fight to rebels whose suppliers feel no such curbs of misguided conscience. Only the weeks to come will tell exactly how effective this campaign will be.

As we dust off, I watch the men huddled below shield their faces from the swirling clouds of debris and fade from view, but not from my heart. In the silence imposed by the engine's roar I reflect on the plight of the brave Atlacatl.

Scorned by the media and poorly equipped by the U.S. government, they will fight on.

The Reagan administration will determine what assistance the Salvadorans require to win. And a vacillating Congress will just as surely fail to provide the funds required for victory . . . only enough to continue the stalemate . . . only enough for the war and the killing and the destruction to go on, for another decade, or more, until the countryside lies charred, the people scarred and ravished in body and spirit, and all hope is obliterated.

We off-load in the city of Usulután, home base of the Atonal Battalion, so the helicopter can fly a *resupply* sortie for them. While waiting in the *cuartel*, I examine a display of captured weapons. From the wall a sad-faced icon of Christ looks incongruously down upon the menacing assemblage. In my mind's eye I see a tear roll down His cheek — and I know why. ☩

# MORAZAN SITREP

## SOF A-Team Reports Gains in El Salvador

Text & Photos by John E. Padgett



Salvadoran battalions train their own troops. These recruits march for morning drill in San Francisco Gotera.

**I**n mid-January 1984, *Soldier of Fortune* and Refugee Relief International, Inc. (RRII) dispatched a small team to El Salvador and the border areas of Honduras/Nicaragua to follow up on last August's efforts (see "Medcap Mission In Morazan" and "Update From El Salvador," SOF, January '84), to deliver 24 cases of medical supplies and equipment donated by SOF readers and to lay the groundwork for a larger SOF team arriving in late February.

Different members of the SOF Central American A-Team have their favorite units in the Salvadoran armed forces; it's natural that individual aspects of a combat element impress them in different ways. Some favor the Airborne Battalion; Kokalis busts the bush with the Atlacatl, while I unashamedly admire the grunts of the Morazan Battalions, who have joined voluntarily to protect their homes and families, and who daily carry the fight to the enemy. I consider their commander, Lt. Col. Jorge Adalberto Cruz, an *hermano en armas*, having shared part of what he feels toward the suffering of his people, and having walked (run and trotted) through the mountains of Morazan with him.

The same venerable C-47 that had taken us into Morazan in August '83 stirred itself once again from its

Salvadoran-manufactured armored trucks form up to move out behind modified M113 APC.



berth at Ilopango Airbase outside San Salvador, wheezed down the runway and finally became airborne. Just in time — Ilopango's runway terminates with a cliff-face dropoff!

Forty-five minutes later we landed in San Francisco Gotera in Morazan and the six SOF representatives offloaded boxes of medical supplies and field gear for our friends and then trucked into town. We were met at the gate of the *cuartel* by the colonel. Far from the

### DEATH SQUAD

by John E. Padgett

During SOF's January trip to El Salvador, 11 corpses turned up on the streets of San Salvador one morning. The gruesome body count in itself would provide most representatives of the American press with more evidence of "right-wing death-squad" activity, more ammunition for the leftists to pressure the U.S. Congress for a cut-off of aid to El Salvador.

But wait: Where did the bodies come from? What were the circumstances of their deaths?

The facts may surprise some: Of these 11, five were members of the National Police or National Guard who had been shot from ambush; four were civilians who had

died in traffic accidents, some hit-and-runs. Only two deaths were mysterious: One had been shot, while the remaining body had no marks, probably having expired from illness.

The same morning that the 11 deaths were recorded in San Salvador, neighbors and friends of the Rivera family of Las Garcitas ran to the local police post to tell authorities that all five members of the family had been brutally murdered. The witnesses identified the killers as members of the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front) faction of the FMLN (Marti National Liberation Front) communist-guerrilla organization. Not content with murder, the terrorists had first tortured the males and raped the females, one a 13-year-old.

Anyone care to bet that the activities of this *left-wing* death squad will go unreported in major newspapers?



self-important stereotype of a Latin commander, Col. Cruz is a soft-spoken man who usually wears no rank on his plain OD fatigues, and has longer-than-regulation hair. In the field, he usually sports a couple of days' growth of beard, just like everybody else, and the snipers have a helluva time finding him.

Our friend took us into his office and, although there was still a war going on, insisted he had time to give us a briefing.

One of the most significant things he told us was that during the holiday period of late December 1983 and early January 1984, the Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas, primarily the ERP (Revolutionary Army of the People, heavily Maoist and very violent), had tried to consolidate their forces in Morazan and Cuscatlan Provinces for a push on the population centers and strategic targets. The enemy's plan, according to captured documents and prisoners, was to secure and hold the capitals of the two districts and declare the area under their control a "liberated zone." This was to be immediately followed by a propaganda blitz in the United States and elsewhere, appealing for

## GRACIAS, AMIGOS

by John E. Padgett

All right, you guys. Yes, you. You know who you are.

- You reserve and National Guard types who have been scrounging from your supply rooms and cleaning out your equipment lockers, and sending what you find to the El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund.

- Those of you on active duty, who, when faced with the task of throwing out or destroying surplus items, have instead sent them to Refugee Relief International, Inc.

- The ladies and gentlemen among you who have written letters to, and camped out in the offices of, drug companies and medical supply wholesalers to ask them to donate whatever they can to the refugee effort in Central America.

- Those of you who have sent your hard-earned cash to pro-American forces in Central America.

I suppose you think that what you have sent us has made a difference in the death and suffering that we see here every day. You probably also think that your generosity is appreciated, and that the people who receive this aid know who sent it.

Well, you're damned right! You *have* made a difference. I personally delivered approximately \$12,000 of medical supplies in January into the hands of the Salvadoran Military Hospital, the Refugee Hospital Project in Salvador's Morazan Province, and the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters. SOF readers have donated everything from heart monitors to band-aids to refugee relief (one American disabled vet even donated a reconditioned wheelchair, from one vet to another), and the El Salvador/Nicaraguan Defense Fund has given badly needed essentials directly to those who need them most: the soldiers carrying the war to the communists. Our friends know who sent these supplies, and as they cannot thank you personally, they have assigned me to extend their thanks through *Soldier of Fortune*.

An example: When we came to Morazan Province Hospital, there was among the patients a 6-year-old boy hospitalized with malnutrition and parasitosis. Listed as probably terminal, he could only lie in bed and cry without tears, as his dehydrated body didn't have water to waste on weeping.

We treated the child with vitamins someone had included in a shipment to RR11 — probably without think-



**SOF rep Ralph Edens directs transfer of your donations to the Salvadorans for distribution. They still need more: Send your donations to Refugee Relief International, Inc. and *Soldier of Fortune's* El Salvadoran and Nicaraguan Defense Funds, c/o SOF Warehouse, 5721 Arapahoe Ave., Boulder, CO 80303.**

ing much about it — and with anti-parasitic medicine purchased with donated funds.

When we returned from the field (chasing guerrillas) a week later, this Salvadoran child was chasing his nurses around the hospital! Nicknamed *Tortuga* (the turtle), he doesn't know who his benefactors are. But I know, and his family knows that someone in the faraway United States cared enough to save the life of their child.

There are many similar stories: Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters who will live to carry on the struggle because you provided the lifesaving I.V. fluid. Salvadoran soldiers who can walk again because of orthopedic devices provided by SOF readers. Weapons which are now functioning properly and defending our allies, because of lubricants you sent.

We did it — SOFers, RR11, the Salvadoran/Nicaraguan Defense Fund — working together. Too bad our politicians can't accomplish the same with all their resources.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the communists don't like us very much, and Jane Fonda probably never invite us to her exercise class. Pity.

Thanks for your help. Keep it coming — and *dios los benedicta* (God bless you).



the assistance of the world (read: leftists in the U.S. Congress and press) to help the "revolution of the people against the military dictatorship." Never mind that the Salvadoran people voted for their present government in March '82 while the communists did their best to disrupt the elections.

To keep the enemy strategy from succeeding, Col. Cruz enlisted the help of the *Cazador* (hunter) battalion Santa Ana, and together with his indigenous Morazan and Lenca battalions hit the guerrillas before they could get organized. Using small-unit tactics, raids and ambushes, he hit the enemy columns and base areas again and again, never allowing anything larger than an enemy platoon to form.

Unable to achieve their primary objectives, the guerrillas turned to secondary objectives that would gain them maximum propaganda value, hitting and destroying the 4th Brigade base camp at El Paraiso and the suspension bridge at Cuscatlan. Front-page stories with graphic pictures and conjecture of the collapse of the Salvadoran armed forces showed in early January that the guerrillas had achieved their secondary goal, Cruz told us.



SOF and RRII representatives deliver supplies to El Salvador's Military Hospital. Left to right: Sylvia Quijana (physical therapist), Lt. Francisco Monterrosa, author Padgett, Col. Guillermo Iraheta (hospital administrator), and Alex McColl.

The day we arrived, Morazan troopers, reacting to intelligence reports that a cell of ERP had been newly infiltrated into San Francisco Gotera, began a security sweep. Before nightfall, they had bagged one enemy KIA and three captured. Three others escaped.

That night the SOF team slept with tight security that Col. Cruz insisted on placing around us. We kept our, er, field gear close at hand.

The next morning, the good guys scored one for our side. Using well-placed intelligence sources with close links to communist agents, Col. Cruz knew that a political cadre of the local FMLN organization was holding a strategy meeting to plan a general strike during the March presidential election that would undoubtedly cause headaches and embarrassment for the government. A strike of this nature is not a labor action, as we in North America think of it. In a general strike, *everything* closes down. Even if one were not inclined to go along with the strike, chances are good that he would have his business vandalized if he remained open. Conversely, if he closed, the government would consider him siding with the opposition.

The enemy political agitators didn't get to the execution stage. Troops from the Morazan Battalion surrounded the safe house where they knew the guerrillas were meeting. Two of the cadre, one an elementary teacher, resisted, which brought about their immediate departure to join Lenin, Che and Bishop. Three were captured, along with documents listing information on troop strength and deployment, government arms and equipment, and local defensive positions. Cruz's men also captured tactical radios and a quantity of explosives.

We were later introduced to three ERP defectors to the government side, who are now working as guides for the Salvadoran armed forces. The use of defectors is relatively new to the struggle. The former guerrillas act in much the same way as the "Kit Carson Scouts" did for the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam. Usually at the head of the column, they provide information about probable ambush sites, enemy base areas, caches, field fortifications, and known political contacts and sympathizers among the civilian populace. They are

## NEAR-MISS

by John F. Padgett

On 20 January 1984 the SOF team departed from Morazan Province by Socata Rallye aircraft — a tight-fitting, four-seating, French-made trainer plane — to San Miguel. Since there were six of us, complete with field gear, the small plane had to make three trips. We were soon to find out how dangerous these trips could be.

Sometime during the previous night, a guerrilla sapper team had infiltrated the dirt airstrip at San Miguel and planted six mines on the runway. During the morning, traffic — including our three lifts from Morazan and an Israeli-made Arava with a load of badly needed new M16 rifles — landed without incident.

About 1330 hours, three hours after our last lift touched down, an unfortunate civilian pilot hit just the right (or wrong) spot on the runway and detonated a mine, ripping the engine completely out of the front of the plane, and tossing the rest of the aircraft to the side of the runway in a crumpled heap. The explosion left a three-foot-wide, 2½-foot-deep crater — and two dead civilians. Another unfortunate victim among the five passengers on board the civilian plane was a 12-year-old

boy with a traumatic amputation of his left leg, a crushed right leg, and other injuries.

Another glorious victory for the people's revolution. We can only speculate why the civilian aircraft was blown up. It probably was simply a matter of chance since there was no indication the mine was command-detonated. Another possibility is that the guerrillas were after replacements for the U.S. advisory team who came in that day. Or they may have been after our team. Last August, the Salvadoran rebel Radio Venceremos had broadcast: "... No *Soldier of Fortune* team member would leave El Salvador alive." This is highly unlikely, however, because they would not have known our flight schedule.

The obvious reason may be the correct one: The guerrillas are continuing their terrorist tactics and intimidation of the civilian populace. The message is that civilians are safe nowhere — not on the roads, in public places, in their homes or on primarily civilian airstrips.

Terrorist tactics such as these have proven in the past to be counterproductive. For each person martyred to democracy, two more volunteers join the armed forces to stop such random terrorist attacks. While the Gs may score transient terrorist gains, they are continuing to isolate themselves from the civilian populace. They should read their Mao — a fish can't swim without water.

valuable for detecting mines and booby traps, and are generously rewarded for their successes. The money they take also ensures that they can never return to the guerrillas. Their choice becomes irrevocable.

In contrast to the January '84 report in SOF, things are now going much better for Col. Cruz's battalions. Cruz attributes this in part to the generous contributions of SOF readers, which have allowed him to equip more of his men with essential field gear.

Other good news is that the *Estado Mayor* (General Staff) in San Salvador has listened at last to Cruz's urgent requests for more equipment and funds to raise additional troops. Never short on volunteers to protect their homeland — he has in the past turned away hundreds of volunteers because of lack of funds and equipment — Col. Cruz has recruited and is in the process of training another complete battalion.

The new troops are primarily young men from the refugee population (over 90,000 so far in Morazan alone) who know that the only way to go home is to return and take it back from the communists. The new troopers are drilled by tough, veteran NCOs, and by cadets from El Salvador's military academy in their final-semester OJT phase. Eight weeks into their training when we arrived, these young troops already had a lean professional look.

But our friends in Morazan are still plagued by chronic equipment shortages, lacking items that many of us would consider routine: socks, foot powder, insect



Commando shield decorates gate of San Francisco Gotera cuartel of Morazan Bn.

repellent and, most urgently, all types of web gear and field equipment. (SOF continues to collect the aforementioned items. Please send donations to El Salvadoran Defense Fund, c/o *Soldier of Fortune* warehouse, 5721 Arapahoe Ave., Boulder, CO 80303.)

When we were in Morazan Province in August 1983, government forces had enough resources to control the southern half of the province, divided roughly north-south by the Torola River. In the past, whenever the Morazan units attempted to hold a city or strategic point in the north, the guerrillas would withdraw and bypass the soldiers and strike in the lightly defended southern region, forcing the government units to withdraw because of the enemy threat at their rear.

The situation is changing. With the recruitment of the new battalion, Col. Cruz has enough strength to secure the southern half of the province, as well as the capability to move to recapture and hold the territory in the north, where the guerrillas have held sway for more than a year.

Expecting the communists to keep their promise to obstruct the presidential elections in March '84, the Morazan units are aggressively patrolling, following up on intelligence leads, and maintaining tight security to ensure that the citizens in their district can exercise their franchise for a true democratic presidential election in El Salvador.

And there you have the bottom line of the war for El Salvador: The Salvadoran armed forces are fighting and dying to protect free elections. The communist insurgents, who rejected an opportunity to participate in these elections, are fighting and dying to destroy the democratic process. The next time some liberal starts carping about cutting aid to El Salvador, hit him with *that* one. Nothing shuts them up like the truth! ✕



SOFers off-load badly-needed RRll medical supplies from old Dakota at Usulután airstrip.

## NEW SALVO WEAPONS SYSTEM

by John E. Padgett

Helicopter pilots in the Salvadoran Air Force have told SOF of plans for a new type of gunship being developed locally to meet El Salvador's unique counterinsurgency needs.

The weapons system is to be composed of two forward-firing, .50-caliber machine guns, one on each side, controlled by the pilot. The doorgunners on each side of the aircraft would have 7.62 multi-barreled mini-guns, a considerable increase in firepower from the M60s that they currently use.

This system is to be mounted on the UH-1H, or H-model Huey, providing more closely integrated air-ground fire coordination, and allowing the gunship more time over target than fixed-wing air support. Another advantage of a heliborne gun platform, as Vietnam vets can tell you, is that choppers can follow terrain features, allowing them to put their ordnance directly on target, and to reach spots that are hidden from fast-moving fighter-bombers. This is especially important in El Salvador's jagged, mountainous terrain.

Certainly helicopters have disadvantages, vulnerability to small-arms fire being the primary one, but courage and panache are two items that the Salvadoran Air Force is *not* short on, and they will see that their soldiers on the ground receive the fire support they need.

We are not only fighting the Burmese Army. We are also fighting lack of world awareness of our situation, and of our struggle for democracy. We are fighting Marxism. We are against foreign economic and military assistance to the totalitarian central Rangoon government effort to eliminate our culture. We are fighting against Israeli arms and ammunition . . . Swedish arms and ammunition . . . Russian arms and ammunition . . . even American helicopters. We are fighting the whole world. — Gen. Bo Mya, President, Karen National Union, December 1983.



Young KNLA trooper, M16 slung, waits to board boat for transport to battle with Burmese. Photo: Jim Coyne

**SOF KAREN UPDATE**

# THE LAST BATTLE?

**Burmese Onslaught Crushes  
Karen Resistance**

by Jim Coyne

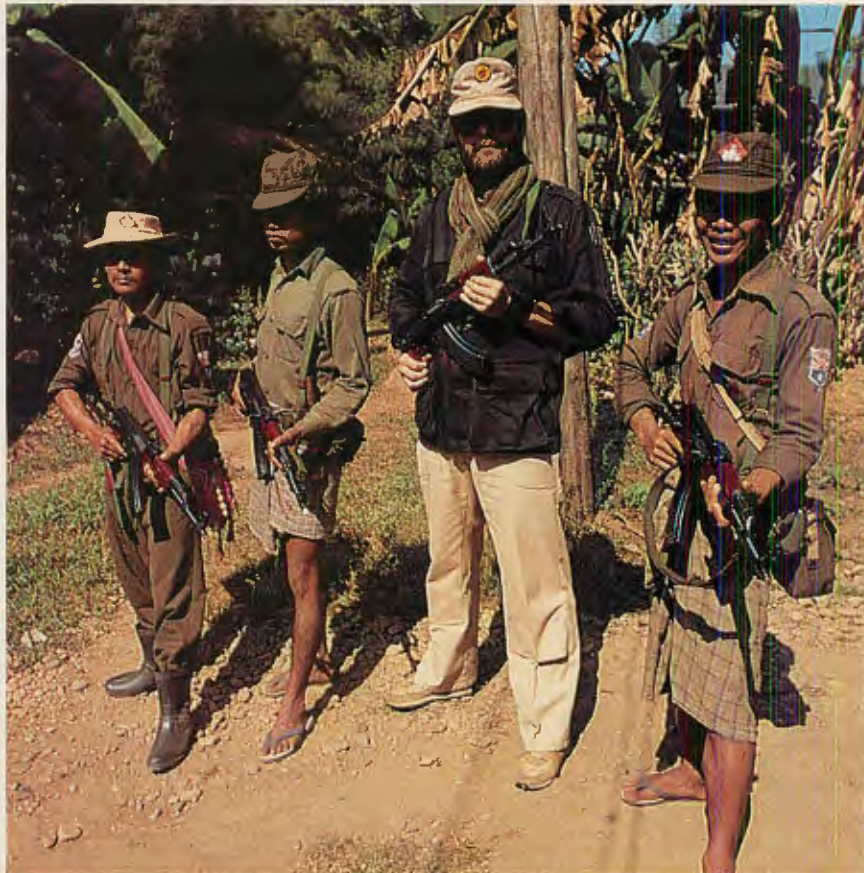
**T**HE arrow-shaped long-tailed boat accelerated through the swells of the narrow, turbulent water — north, down the Moei River, past the last Thai Border Patrol Police (TBPP) checkpoint, toward the general headquarters (GHQ) of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). “Not Burma,” we are reminded. (See “Karen Rebels in Burma,” SOF, April ’84.)

The unmuffled roar of the modified four-cylinder Toyota automobile engine echoed and rolled off the steep cliffs and narrow karst gorges carved by the cold, quick current. We sped downstream, deep into Karen State territory toward the Salween River junction. White water hissed with every twist and roll as we rocketed from shadows to light, only to be swept beyond the next bend — spooks on a border where it’s not important who you are, but who you’re with.

It was one week before Christmas, 1983, but the Karen were celebrating in a subdued, almost somber way. A recording of “Silent Night” was playing in the home back at Mae Tah Wah where we waited for the boat — eerily appropriate in the early morning river mist. Mae Tah Wah was a large Karen river town and market of over 300 sturdy wood and corrugated-metal buildings. Mae Tah Wah was also the second biggest KNLA military base on the Moei River and the main river link with KNLA GHQ at Manapler, 80 kilometers downstream. In this mountainous section of Southeast Asia, the Dawna Range to the west (peak, 6,822 feet) appears as a high wall protecting Karen State against Burmese Army (BA) GHQ at Moulmein, 75 kilometers to the southwest. Everything seemed normal, but it wasn’t.

“Jimmy the Belgian” braced crossways in the skinny boat. He buttoned the collar and tightened the hood of his Thai Special Forces battle jacket against the raw river wind and made himself comfortable. He wore the only pair of Katanga jump wings I have ever seen. He served for 12 years with the Belgian SAS. The almost imperceptible bulge beneath his left arm concealed a custom Browning 9mm competition automatic pistol. I like Jimmy. If I need help where things are likely to go from bad to weird in a hurry, Jimmy is welcome on my side anytime, anywhere. We arrived at the KNLA GHQ at Manapler near dusk without incident. It, too, was a large base, but there were no civilians — only troops.

We stayed at the KNLA GHQ for four days — talking with the leaders and the men during the day, and sleeping on the hardwood floor of the GHQ officers’ quarters at night. (English is taught in Karen primary and secondary schools.) On one balmy evening a video cassette of *Goldfinger* was shown, dubbed in Thai, at the main mess while the men puffed on cheroots and watched 007 dash across the screen to save Fort Knox. The British colonial-style square formations in the evening and bugle



## STATE DEPT. HELICOPTERS: USE AND ABUSE

by Robert K. Brown

Gen. Bo Mya, commander-in-chief of the Karen National Liberation Army, has said: “Without the helicopters, the Burmese Army attack on us would be impossible.”

For nearly four decades the Karens have kept the Burmese at bay at the edge of Karen State, by a combination of discipline, good terrain for defense and an unflagging love of freedom. Our staunch allies in WWII, the Karen officers are largely British-educated, English is taught in their schools as a second language, the population is nearly all Christian and they are vindictively anti-drug.

The Burmese have attacked the Karens in their homeland. We have heard no statement, even from the duplicitous Burmese government, that the genocidal attack on the Karens has anything to do with drug suppression. Yet the Burmese are using American UH-1 helicopters, supplied to stop drug production in the Golden Triangle, for transport and — the Karens say — fire support on their mountain-protected strongholds.

John Miller of the U.S. State Depart-

ment Burma desk tells SOF that it is unreasonable to suppose that the Karens are not at least tangentially involved in drug smuggling. The State Department position is that since the Karens are involved with other kinds of contraband traffic (like teak wood) according to Burmese law, there is no reason to treat them as anything other than smugglers.

I have visited the Republic of Kawthoolei. I have seen enough evidence of Karen justice exercised against drug-runners. I do not think the State Department can believe what they told us, if they are as well-informed as they are supposed to be.

Questioned, Mr. Miller told SOF that UH-1s are being used for medevacs in the Karen fighting, but they had neither knowledge of nor comment on our sources’ reports that the choppers were being used for other purposes.

If the Hueys are being used in military operations, State’s only defense is that the choppers don’t belong to us anymore, and it’s not State’s business what the Burmese want to do with them.

The Burmese government is tyrannical and oppressive. Freedom is all the Karens want. America’s work used to be the promotion of freedom and the destruction of tyrants. I don’t remember when our policy changed to oppression of minorities and allegiance with tyrants.



ABOVE: M79 and M16-toting KNLA skirmishers deploy around Mae Tah Wah. Photo: *Bangkok Post*. LEFT: SOF Foreign Correspondent Jim Coyne with Chinese AK at KNLA GHQ. Photo: Jim Coyne



ABOVE: Karens march Burmese Army porters to interrogation. Photo: *Bangkok Post*



ABOVE: If Karens are old enough to carry a rifle, they're old enough to fight. Photo: Jim Coyne. BELOW: Thai Border Patrol Police watch helplessly as Mae Tah Wah is captured and burnt. Photo: *Bangkok Post*

calls were offset by an unusual Karen rendition of "Lili Marlene" (a popular WWII song), sung by KNLA troops each night. The situation, in view of later events, was surreal.

Early every morning, Brig. Gen. Saw Hla Too, adjutant-general of the KNLA and GHQ commander, came over to where Jimmy the Belgian and I were staying. Jimmy offered to play Gen. Hla Too a game of ping pong the first day we arrived and lost. Since then, every day, the general beat Jimmy — sometimes they battled for two or three hard-fought games, but Jimmy could never win. The general didn't even sweat.

"Goddamn, shit," Jimmy laughed loudly. "I'm going to buy a table, and when I come back I'm going to beat you, I tell you that for sure." The general laughed and slapped his sides with the paddle. The serious business of why we were there, the fate of the Karen people and the formation of the new National Democratic Front (NDF) comprising eight other ethnic minority groups opposing the central Rangoon government occupied our afternoon discus-



ABOVE: One-armed KNLA still ready to fight for self-determination. BELOW: Brig. Gen. Saw Hla Too, possible successor to Bo Mya, if there's anything left. Photos: *Bangkok Post*



sions. (The NDF totals nine groups: the Karen National Union (largest), the Karenni, Mon, Pa-o, La Hu, Palung, Eratin, Shan State Progressive Party, and the Kachin People.) Very few, if any, of these minorities are known outside Southeast Asia, and yet they claim to represent over 20 million people — the majority of what is known as the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma (SRUB).

"Why," Gen. Bo Mya and the representatives of the other NDF groups wanted to know, "was the United States helping a Marxist, socialist government, headed by scum who had been trained by the Japanese to fight against the Allies during WWII, rather than helping a democratic national movement which fought with distinction on the side of the Allies in that war?"

"Why," they asked, "is the United States providing helicopters for use in narcotics suppression, when the Karen are totally anti-narcotic — possession of heroin or opium brings the death penalty — and the



KNLA troops in long-tail boats leave for battle. Photo: Jim Coyne





Americans must know that helicopters are being used for military suppression of a brave and good people?"

I cannot explain American foreign policy. I tell them nobody in the United States seems able to explain it either.

(American Bell helicopters have been supplied to the Rangoon government by the State Department Narcotics Control Unit for seven years. Two helicopters were shot down by KNLA troops in June 1982, and a third has reportedly been downed in the recent Burmese Army offensive. There are also reliable intelligence radio intercepts of Russian "advisers" in these helicopters. Once the aircraft are turned over to Burma, control becomes impossible. Narcotics and insurgent groups in Burma are inseparable, but, because there has never been any evidence that the Karen have been involved in narcotics trafficking, the Rangoon government has violated the spirit of the State Department agreement.)

We sat, sipping tea on the porch of the spacious wood building, the Moei River flowing silently by in the darkness below. In a few days it would be Christmas.

"Before you go back to Bangkok you must see the Salween River. Tomorrow morning we will go there, then you can go back," Gen. Saw Hla Too said with authority. "I'll take you there myself."

At 0630 the following morning we were again headed downstream toward the junction of the Salween River. The Salween has its headwaters in China, far to the north. It runs cold and quick all the way to the gulf of Martaban in the Andaman Sea. The race where the two rivers meet was fast.

"I'll tell you a story about this river," Gen. Saw Hla Too said. "It is very deep, and always cold. When we were fighting here in 1945, we spotted a raft full of Japanese soldiers trying to escape down to the gulf. We stopped them and told them they could not go all the way by raft—there was a big waterfall downstream. They didn't believe us. They thought we were trying to trick them. So, they went away. They all died on the rocks 30 meters beneath the waterfall." He shrugged, as if the whole world was stupid.

The point of the Salween and Moei Rivers seemed deserted, but above us were KNLA snipers.

"Up there," the general said, waving his hand in the general direction of the hills, "is a man with a Mannlicher and a nine-power scope. No pictures," we were told.

After leaving Gen. Saw Hla Too at GHQ, the river trip back was silent. We headed up-river, south toward Thailand and our final stop in Karen territory at Mae Tah Wah. Our plans were to come back two weeks later, after the holidays, to accompany one KNLA unit to the front 35 kilometers inland. It was not to be. In 30 days the front would come to Mae Tah Wah. The river would become impassable, and the KNLA scattered in ragged disorder.



## CURRENT MILITARY/POLITICAL SITREP

by Jim Coyne

As this issue goes to press, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) have suffered severe military setbacks to rapid-order Burmese Army attacks. The loss of Mae Tah Wah, Doi Kham and Klerdey to BA attacks, the abandonment of a crucial Maw Poh Kay base, and the sudden Burmese Army northern offensive launched 23 February 1984 against KNLA positions opposite Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, combined with the determined southern advance of Burmese Army troops from secure bases opposite Mae Sot may spell doom for the Karen forces under the command of Gen. Bo Mya.

The Burmese have a standing army of 200,000 troops, many of them deployed in the current action against a maximum of 25,000 Karen troops. The National Democratic Front (NDF), comprised of eight other minority groups allied with the Karen, is unlikely to change the balance of events.

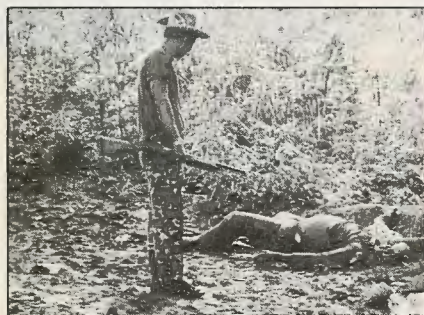
The Rangoon government is provided military assistance on a government-to-government basis by almost everyone. Artillery, small arms, ammunition, aircraft and helicopters are all available to Rangoon. The KNLA, on the other hand, has lost its key supply bases near the Thai border during the recent Burmese onslaught. The KNLA is fighting with captured equipment, black-market weapons and ammunition, outdated tactics, and is now faced with the prospect of military defeat. The order to the troops transmitted from KNLA GHQ at Manapler near the end of February was "go to the bush," and "harass the Burmese from the rear, using guerrilla tactics." Then the KNLA was forced to move the radio transmitter.

There are, as of 27 February, over 10,000 Karen refugees who have already crossed over to the safety of Thailand. With the continuing intensity of the Burmese Army offensive, many more refugees can be expected. Malaria and malnutrition are now another enemy stalking the makeshift refugee camps in Thailand.

Without outside help the Karen are, as Gen. Bo Mya said, "Fighting the whole world."



ABOVE: KNLA troops rush to trench positions as Burmese advance. Photo: *Bangkok Post*. LEFT: Jimmy the Belgian accompanied Coyne on Karen journey. Photo: Jim Coyne



ABOVE: Gen. Bo Mya, president of Karen State, attends Christmas celebration. Photo: Jim Coyne. LEFT: Winchester Model 12- and S&W .357-armed guerrilla checks dead Burmese commando for arms, ammo, papers. Photo: *Bangkok Post*

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

by Jim Coyne

Monday, 23 January 1984: Burmese Army shelled a Karen market town with phosphorus as 3,000 troops from the Burmese 44th Light Infantry Division attacked Mae Tah Wah from two directions. Thai Border Patrol Police reinforced the border with armored personnel carriers.

Tuesday, 24 January: Thailand warns Burma to respect borders during Karen action.

Friday, 27 January: Eight Burmese soldiers driven back across Moei River by Thai Border Patrol Police after Burmese attempted to set up an artillery base in a Thai village. Soviet advisers are reported with Burmese Command 442 as Burmese use American-supplied helicopters to transport troops to the battle zone. Thais begin evacuation of Thai nationals from border areas adjacent to fighting.

Saturday, 28 January: The Burmese overrun Mae Tah Wah as attacks on Klerdey continue. Over 4,000 Karens

flee into Thailand. Karens claim to have inflicted 200 casualties. Burmese soldiers blew up Karen explosives and munitions dump.

Monday, 30 January: Burmese attack two more bases: Mapokay village, base of the Karen 7th Brigade.

Monday, 13 February: Burmese bombard Karen base. Burmese bombard Klerdey, opposite Maysalid.

Wednesday, 15 February: Over 2,000 Burmese take Klerdey. Village burned after being shelled with WP rounds. Choppers move troops, artillery and ammo.

Friday, 17 February: Burmese Army moves 91st Division to Moei to support attacking troops.

Saturday, 18 February: Karens assaulted by 2,000 fresh Burmese troops brought in to attack KNLA 20th Bn. Fighting rages along Moei River.

Tuesday, 21 February: Thai Border Patrol Police report KNLA shot down U.S.-supplied UH-1 near Kam Malong, between Manapler and Klerdey.

Wednesday, 22 February: Intense fighting at Mapokay. Three-prong attack surrounds remains of Karen resistance in Karen State.

The intensity of the Burmese offensive was stunning; the attacks well-planned. In fact, as we roared up the river that last day and crossed into Thailand from Mae Tah Wah, Burmese commandos were already in place, watching as we passed. It was meant to be a surprise attack, and it was. The news from inside KNLA territory as we go to press is confused. The KNLA is reported to have downed another Bell helicopter between 12 and 15 February. Only the plaque at GHQ remains clear in my mind: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Bo Mya asked me, "Do you know who said that?"

I admitted I did not.

"It was the motto on Thomas Jefferson's seal," he said. He smiled, and we shook hands, saying goodbye. ✕



BELOW: Karens count their bullets while Burmese infantry fire salvos of Belgian MECAR 40mm rifle grenades. Photo: *Bangkok Post*



As the troopers of the 3/5 Cav humped to finish their night defensive position (NDP) by erecting the chain-link anti-RPG screens, they ignored the coils of razor wire attached to the sides of their Sheridans and APCs. "Why," an observer asked the seasoned troop commander, "don't you deploy the wire around your position like the other troop commanders do?"

After all, the rolling, grassy terrain overlooking the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam provided little else that could slow NVA assault troops who might hit the unit under cover of darkness. The commander said simply that, in his mind, the drawbacks of deploying barbed wire around an NDP were greater than the benefits. Specifically, he felt that the troops were a hell of a lot less likely to sleep through their watch or to let their minds wander if they knew there was nothing to protect them from sappers but their own vigilance.

That conversation took place in 1970 in Quang Tri Province about two kilometers south of the DMZ. In the course of 27 months in Vietnam, I was involved in more than a dozen separate defenses of firebases or SF camps against NVA assaults. The NVA managed to penetrate the perimeter defenses in three of those attacks.

My last assignment in Vietnam was running a Kit Carson Scout school for the 1/5 Mech. My Vietnamese cadre were all ex-NVA and one, Sgt. Maj. Nguyen Van Tran, had been an NVA sapper unit commander prior to his changing sides. As part of our responsibilities there in Quang Tri, we put on sapper demonstrations for U.S. troops.

My experiences with defensive wire tended to underscore the point that cavalry captain made up on the DMZ.

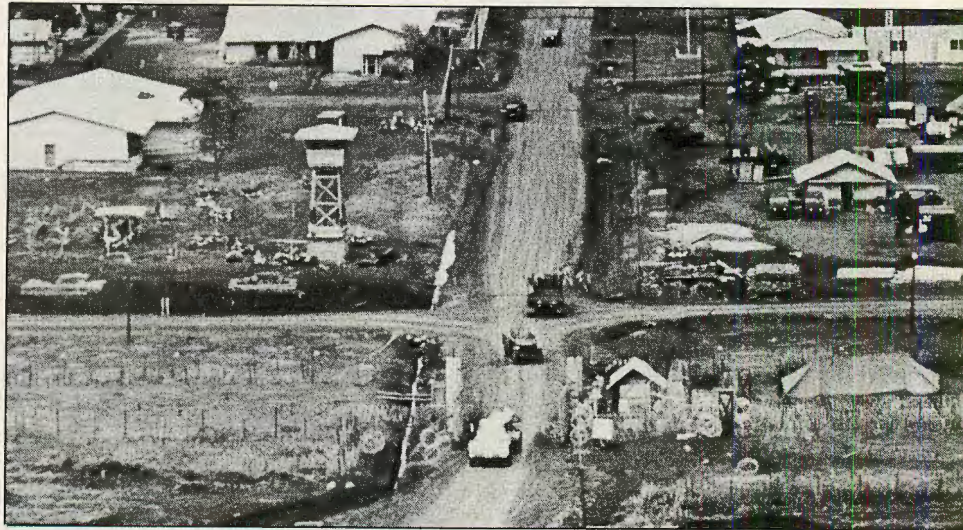
Barbed or razor wire does serve a valuable role if properly installed and monitored. The value of defensive wire is recognized in Army FM 5-15. It says simply: "Barbed wire entanglements are artificial obstacles designed to impede the movement of troops and in some cases, tracked or wheeled vehicles."

The Army teaches that there are three types of wire entanglements: tactical, protective and supplementary. The type used primarily in Vietnam was the protective entanglement "located to protect against surprise assaults..." But the factors that make for a successful protective wire placement apply to the other types as well even though tactical and supplementary wire entanglements are more applicable to conventional warfare scenarios than to counterinsurgencies.

The most important thing is to watch your wire at all times.

Rows of triple concertina layered over tanglefoot supplemented with double apron fence have a tendency to lull the troops into thinking they're well protected without the need for their personal vigilance. Troops — especially rear-echelon types, who view sentry duty as a pain in the butt and think of the wire in front of them as "impenetrable"

# BARBED WIRE DEFENSES



## WELL-WIRED WRITER

Randy Harrison joined the U.S. Army in 1966, graduating from OCS in 1967. He has also completed the U.S. Army Special Forces language and intelligence schools. He served two tours in Vietnam, the first with SOG Command and Control-South, the second as information officer for 1st Brigade, 5th Mech.

Harrison is now a journalist in Orlando, Fla. His first SOF article, "SOG Combat in Cambodia," appeared in our August '82 issue.

— tend to spend their time with their eyes everywhere but on their assigned sector.

As part of the demonstrations we put on for just such young soldiers, Sgt. Maj. Tran would go through a representative section of wire in broad daylight. It usually took him about 20 minutes to squirm and crawl through a section of the base perimeter approximately 75 meters wide. We explained to the disbelieving troops that Tran would be moving a lot slower under hostile conditions at night. But his movements still gave them a good idea of just how permeable the wire defenses in front of them actually were.

To underscore the need for vigilance, at the end of Tran's demonstration we would direct their attention to one side of the area in front of them and, at my command, another of our cadre would stand up where he had — unobserved by the troops — also penetrated the wire. He would hold his AK aloft in silent testimony to his deadly skill.

The need to check the wire regularly if

Ban Me Thout, RVN, 7 June 1969. HQ Command and Control South.

Foreground shows triple concertina and tanglefoot. Smoking ruins on right are remains of arsenal hit the night before by VC 122mm rockets.

not daily is perhaps best illustrated by an experience that took place on 28 February 1969 at the Dau Tieng basecamp of the 25th Infantry. At the time, our small Special Forces detachment was using a part of the sprawling compound as a launch site for our daily reconnaissance missions into Cambodia. We had neither perimeter security responsibilities nor any other obligations to the host unit.

At about midnight, a massive NVA assault began, and within an hour the NVA had successfully penetrated the defenses at three different locations. At about the same time, the 25th ran out of cooks and clerks to plug into the holes. We complied to their frantic request to move our recon teams to the end of the runway, retake two bunkers and hold them until relieved.

The following morning we swept the wire in front of our position and noted with disgust how easy it must have been for the NVA sappers to open the wire for the assault troops to follow.

The terrain was sandy and runoff from the rains had carved a series of knee-deep gullies directly under and perpendicular to the wire. The enemy soldiers had merely crawled under the sagging wire stretched over those gullies. The problem was that we were in the middle of the dry season, which meant the wire hadn't been checked for weeks. That suspicion was confirmed immediately by an NCO, who discovered that

## SOF FEATURE

# How To And Not To

Text & Photos by Randy Harrison



Two Kit Carson Scouts from 1st Bn., 5th Mech., burn vegetation growing in wire.



American lieutenant and 'Yard inspect wire and mines at Song Be in March '69.

on the outer sections of the perimeter, the cut ends of the wire were already rusty. The closer he got to the inner wire, the fresher the cuts, while the inner wire — cut within the last 24 hours — was nickel-bright.

If that wire had been checked daily, somebody would have picked up on the fact long before the assault that there was a skunk in the works. One of the prisoners we took that morning told us that his unit had begun probing the wire several weeks prior to the assault.

To penetrate wire entanglements, the Vietnamese relied on three simple tools: wire cutters, "stretchers" and "loops."

The stretchers were 10-inch to 12-inch pieces of steel used to lift up and hold a section of tanglefoot wire strung close to the ground. After bracing two stretchers under a strand, the sapper simply crawled under.

The loops were nothing more than three-inch sections of steel with loops twisted into each end. The top loop was secured to a lower section of concertina, which was then pulled gently down until the bottom loop could be attached to another piece of wire strung close to the ground. The result was a widened gap big enough to admit an NVA soldier. With all three devices, an NVA sapper had the option of cutting through, crawling under or crawling over wire between him and the objective.

The stretchers and loops were tucked into the sapper's loin cloth, which was all most of them wore, in order to reduce the chance of snagging. To decrease the possibility of visual detection, the sapper covered himself with ash. The sappers were not deterred by such hoary tricks as hanging tin cans full of pebbles on the wire. They simply dropped a handful of sand into the nearest can to muffle the sound — if they bothered at all.

At our own compound, Sgt. Maj. Tran supervised the following steps to supplement the effectiveness of our own wire:

- Lace the wire with claymore or antipersonnel mines set to cover vagaries of the terrain such as depressions that could be used for cover or avenues of approach.
- Check the mines daily. Relocate them at least weekly.
- Clear grass and weeds as often as they appear in the wire.
- Illuminate the perimeter with mortar flares or other sources at irregular intervals to avoid setting a predictable pattern.
- When checking the wire, alternate your routes to give different angles and perspectives.
- Insist that duty officers and NCOs perform their rounds frequently but *not* on a predictable schedule — to make sure your own troops don't relax when they think you're not around.
- Be ruthless with anyone caught sleeping. We found that being ejected from a guard tower or having a burst of M16 fired an inch or so from a sleeper's ear were good motivators to stay awake.

And above all remember, your protective wire is only as good as the eyes behind it.



# FEEDING THE FIGHTING MAN

## From Firecakes to MREs: A Brief History of U.S. Military Rations

by Dennis Weber



“C-RATIONS!” snorted one old-time veteran when asked about army grub in the good old days. “I ate too much of that stuff. Of course, you have to remember that eating C-rations once is already far too often.”

Although this man’s opinion is typical of what a lot of soldiers felt about combat rations, not everyone disliked the various types of canned and packaged nourishment. After all, the Army had spent a lot of time and money developing the meal packages, including many hours of tests by “volunteers” who were asked to pick between the things they liked or disliked. At all times, the foods developed were supposed to be savory, but apparently the definition of “savory” varies widely from soldier to soldier. But there was one point on which all soldiers agreed: No matter how much you liked one item or another, they all got monotonous when they were eaten day after day for weeks on end.

Combat rations are not just a recent development. Armies throughout history have always had problems feeding themselves during hostilities and virtually every American schoolchild has heard of the terrible hardships the first American soldiers suffered at Valley Forge. In those days, starvation rations were more than just a mild Army joke. The troopers at Valley Forge survived as much on pure courage as anything, with their only reliable source of food being “firecakes.” These simple cakes were made by mixing flour and water together into a paste that was smeared onto a hot rock next to the fire. When it was burned

sufficiently on the outside, it was peeled off and eaten.

No one could deny the Army had done a less than sterling job of feeding itself during the Revolutionary War, so afterward, Army provisioning was turned over to private contractors. Unfortunately, the allocations of these contracts became something of a license to steal, as many of the contractors delivered food that was decidedly substandard. But as soldiers have traditionally griped about their food, whether good or not, complaints went unnoticed.

Even Congress did not seem to be on the soldier’s side at this time; in 1790, they revised the basic ration, which was supposed to include fresh beef or pork, vegetables, cornmeal, flour and cider or spruce beer. They took out all mention of vegetables and added rations of rum, brandy or whiskey. Even by 18th-century standards, this was recognized as a dangerously unbalanced diet. Sadly, it was the standard military diet for the next 100 years. It was only after the War of 1812, when knowledge of half-rotten food from unscrupulous contractors finally came to the attention of Congress, that the contractor system was legislated out of existence.

Although Congress had created the Army Commissariat system in 1818, the basic diet of the fighting man changed little during the Civil War. Despite the fact that many troops were fighting on “home ground,” as it were, most food delivered to them in the field was tainted or spoiled. Bread, in the form of hardtack, was usually infested with bugs and mold. As one Union soldier wrote

in his diary, “If not for the presence of coffee, which we drink at all hours of the day, I don’t think we could survive.” The unending supply of coffee at least kept the Union soldiers alert, although they were often still hungry.

As bad as things were for the Union troops, conditions in the South were much worse. Without even coffee to cheer them, they suffered through some of the most appalling malnutrition in the history of organized warfare. Several historians have pointed out that the poor nutrition of the Southern troops may have been a major factor in their defeat.

With the dawn of the 20th century came new methods of canning and preserving food and increased use of refrigeration in the form of ice. While these advances should have meant much better food and eating conditions for soldiers in the Spanish-American War, the opposite was actually true. The intense tropical heat spoiled a great deal of the canned food as it sat on the docks. By the end of the war, it was reported that 385 men had died of wounds received in battle, while an astonishing 2,485 men had died from disease and nutrition-related illnesses. It was a major disgrace in the history of the fighting man.

Perhaps the reaction to these conditions finally spurred Congress into action. With unusual decisiveness, it gave the president virtually a free hand in setting up a new system of rations in 1901. There were now five different official rations, covering everything from a light snack to a full garrison dinner. In 1905 the Army decided they needed trained personnel to prepare the food for the new rations system, so the first School of Cooks and Bakers was established at Ft. Riley, Kan.

All of these new programs paid handsome dividends in World War I, when the U.S. fighting man was far and away the best-fed soldier in the war. Because of advanced methods of refrigeration, perishables regularly reached the front line and troops no longer had to rely solely on hardtack and water to get them through the day.

C-rations finally came into being at the beginning of World War II. After prolonged experimentation with quick, easy-to-eat meals, by 1940 the Army had perfected the C-ration (C stands for canned). C-rats normally came in six-packs of cans that included everything necessary for a balanced meal. There were canned meat, vegetable and even bread products. Normally, the meat and vegetables came in some sort of combination, such as beef stew or hash. Although the beef stew was seldom mentioned by veterans reminiscing about their C-rations, the canned hash was remembered by one and all.

“Of all the canned rations,” said Leo Myer, 53, “the canned hash had to be the worst. And it didn’t make any difference whether it was hot or cold. My own favorite was the scrambled eggs and ham. Now that not only was edible, but downright good. I always used to trade the hash for the ham and eggs. Hell, I’d even eat those ham and

eggs today."

The C-ration was designed to be eaten when the soldier had a little time to relax and heat something. There were also emergency rations, called D-rations, meant to be eaten

on the run, although the standard joke was that only an emergency would force a man into eating them. D-rations consisted primarily of a couple of chocolate bars that had only one redeeming quality: They would not

melt at any temperature up to 120 degrees. As one veteran commented, "They may have looked like chocolate bars, but any resemblance in taste was strictly accidental."

Because D-rations were universally unpopular, the Army came up with the K-ration, named after its inventor, Dr. Ancel Keys. Lighter and less bulky than the C-ration, K-rats came in little boxes that looked like Cracker Jack cartons.

Packed in both the C- and K-rations was a powdered lemon drink that eventually became famous worldwide for its multiple uses. "It was the greatest cleaning agent ever invented," enthused one retiree. "When I first came in the military, they still had leggings that had to be white. Once diluted, the lemon drink cleaned them perfectly and it was also marvelous for mopping up wooden floors, as it really left them spotless. It also wasn't bad to drink." He never did say whether they drank it before or after mopping the barracks floor with it.

In Korea, the troops were supplied with 5-in-1 rations, which were hot meals provided to the front, as well as C-rations, which were still in wide use. In Vietnam, troops had to learn new letters for meals: MCI (Meal, Combat, Individual) and LRRP-rations (Long Range Patrol Ration). It is estimated that 91 percent of the meals served in Vietnam were hot.

Space-age technology is also overhauling the combat-ration field, much as it is everything else. Future meals for GIs will come in little plastic packages capable of withstanding plenty of heat, so the food can be heated in almost any manner.

"They can be heated by slipping them inside the shirt, next to the body, by dropping in hot water, or even by laying them on the hot manifold of a truck," says Art Reardon of the U.S. Army Natick Research and Development Laboratory in Massachusetts. "Like the meals developed for the astronauts, they will come in thin, flexible plastic pouches, so they can easily be carried in the pockets. Each meal comes with its own plastic spoon and fork and our testing indicates these meals are going to be better liked than the rations of the past." They'd better be, as the Army has already ordered 24 million of the "Meals, Ready to Eat," as they are called.

"We've got 12 different menus," Reardon says. "Some of them are really good, especially the turkey, ham and chicken dishes. We also have accessory packs to go with them, such things as salt, pepper, etc. There's no doubt these meals are better than the old C-rations of the past, although I'll have to admit I always had a real fondness for the canned hash."

MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat — see Galen L. Geer's article on the new ration on p. 78), will replace the much-beloved/hated/accursed/praised C-rations by the end of this year. Although it appears the quality of food is now better than ever, is it possible to have the same fondness associated with the canned C-rations for food that comes in disposable plastic bags? ❧

## CRUELTY IN A TIN CAN

by Fred Reed

Of the many crimes attributable to the military, C-rations and getting up at ridiculous hours are the worst — and of the two, Cs are the more odious.

You don't notice it at first. The recruit usually encounters C-rats sometime in boot camp or basic training — say at about noon after he has been humping a 75-pound flame thrower for three hours along the hot dusty ranges of Camp Lejeune, Ft. Jackson or somewhere else equally as bad.

Aside from the flame thrower or mortar or whatever his assigned vicissitude might be, he has been up and running since oh-dark-30. By this time he is ready to gnaw bark from trees.

Whereupon, the sergeant finds the most uncomfortable spot in all of North Carolina or wherever, declares chow time, and falls the troops in. He holds up a small cardboard box about six inches on a side.

"Listen up, men, we are going to learn to eat C-rations. If you pay attention you may understand, though I doubt it. This box contains them. Wake up, Flannigan, or I'll break your arm. You will eat many Cs in this man's army. You will hate them. First, you open the box. No, Tolbert, the top, you idiot, the flap-looking thing . . ."

Tolbert eventually overcomes the flap and discovers a bunch of small cans painted OD green. OD means olive drab and that's the color the Army is. The cans have stenciled on them things like Ham Slices, Turkey Loaf, or Ham and Limas, which suggest — somewhat disingenuously — that there might be food inside. There are also a brown cellophane bag and a P-38 can opener (also known as the John Wayne), widely said to be the only worthwhile object associated with the military. Cute, Tolbert thinks, and perhaps bites the can without bothering with the opener. Recruits get very hungry.

Tolbert probably likes the stuff. If recruits had more brains, they'd be somewhere else, and if they had less brains, they'd be second lieutenants. He takes the cellophane bag apart and discovers many small wonders: two Chicklets, salt, toilet paper and the like.

How marvelous that the Powers That Be should have thought of all this, Tolbert muses.

A year later, he looks at a box of Cs with a sense of dull tragedy and wonders

whether to eat his boots instead. The bloom is off the ham slices forever. He has had too many of them and there are too few kinds — a dozen, actually, some of which no one has ever seen. He is sick of C-rations. In fact, he regards them as the chief evidence against the existence of God. They are.

He has learned, for instance, that the ham slices consist of a weird sort of fibrous pork lard that only by effort can be imagined to have had an acquaintance with a pig. The beef patties resemble a hockey puck mixed with granola. The ham and eggs don't resemble anything. The turkey loaf is unthinkable. And they never change.

Certain ceremonies accompany the eating of Cs. One is cutting your losses. Everyone regards some meals as wretched inhuman gunch, only slightly preferable to death. Others, comparatively speaking, approach the edible.

Wherever a fire team squats for a meal, the cry goes up, "Hey, who's got turkey loaf? I'll give you a crackers and peanut butter for fruit cocktail. . . . Come on, you commie prevert, I lent you \$5 when you needed it. . . ."

The other ceremony is heating the damned things. Warming C-rations produces an amazing change in their character. For example, ham slices turn into pure 40-weight oil. It isn't something you would want to eat, but you can lube a helicopter with it. If you heat beef slices, the hockey pucks begin to float around in a sort of asphalt.

There exist only two proper ways of heating Cs in the bush — and a man who will eat them anywhere else is crazy. In each case you punch holes in the top and bottom of your cracker can to make a stovelet. In the first method, you place a trioxane tablet beneath the can and light it. A trioxane tablet burns with a pale blue flame that is hotter than the hinges of hades. The chief drawback of trioxane tabs is that you never have one. In fact, I never saw one outside of boot camp. The Army no longer procures them.

The second and usual way is to burn a piece of C-4, a vicious explosive. C-4 has a high activation energy so it will burn without exploding, although considerable faith in that is necessary at first. Thus the former boy next door finds himself crouching in the hills of Laos or El Salvador stewing nauseous glop in a blue flickering bomb. Only in the military, I tell you.

*Reprinted with permission from the 30 September 1982 issue of the Washington Times.*

# SPACE-AGE RATIONS

## Marines Meet the MRE

Text & Photos by Galen L. Geer

**“THIS is dinner?”** The big Marine reserve sergeant looked at the long brown-plastic package in his hand with distrust. “I’ve never even seen this crap before.”

It was fall 1983 and I was at a weekend Marine reserve training exercise in the Colorado mountains. Most of the old-timers there were encountering Meal, Ready to Eat, the space-age replacement for the C-ration, for the first time. The introduction wasn’t going too well. The old olive-drab C-ration can suddenly seemed like a homely, familiar, old friend as opposed to these plastic packets that looked like something out of a science-fiction movie. Most of the reservists couldn’t even figure out how to heat them up. By the end of the weekend many MREs could be found in the trash, pitched there by some bull-headed (and presumably hungry) troopers who refused to make the switch from canned meals.

The MRE is modern technology’s solution to some of the complaints voiced by the grunts in ‘Nam. The old rations were heavy and difficult to transport, you couldn’t open them if you didn’t have a can opener and they tasted — well, it’s impossible to describe their taste. If you’ve had them you know what I mean, if not you probably never will.

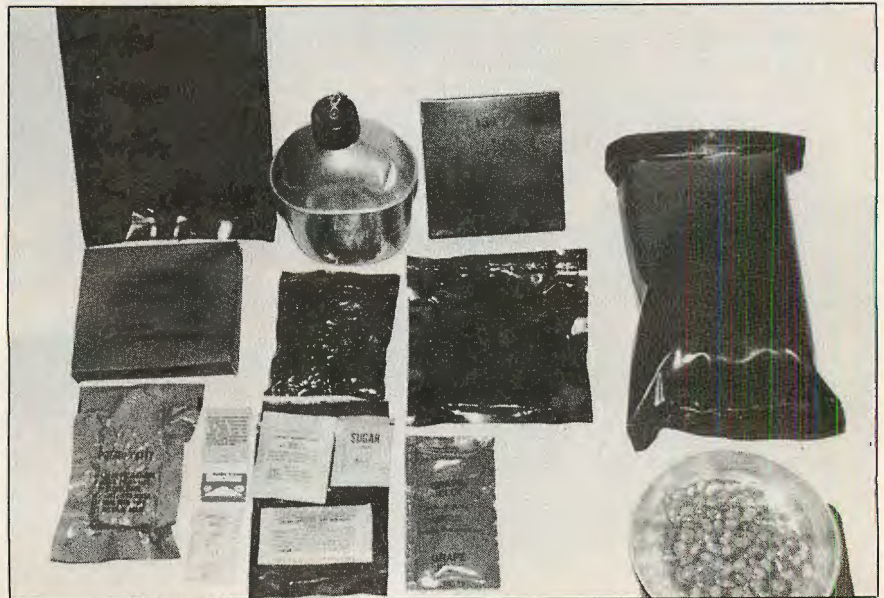
MREs weigh an average of .7 pound less per meal than C-rats, and a full case of the new rations weighs less than 14 pounds (a case of Cs weighed a hefty 22 pounds, not including the box). The eight-pound difference per case can be a matter of life and death in combat. They can be opened with the teeth and new techniques of freeze-drying and thermostabilization provide meals that are supposed to look, feel and taste like what you might prepare in your own kitchen. Both methods are designed to retain at least 80 percent of the nutritional value of the food.

These improvements, much ballyhooed by the creators of the new rations, are undeniable. But what about the effect of space-age technology on an old soldier who has



**Yum-yum.** Marines in the field can chow down on new MRE meals “straight,” but the author presents some more attractive alternatives for a grunt gourmet.

**Large brown-plastic packet in upper corner carried this whole meal: main-course packet, freeze-dried potato patty, matches, gum, salt, instant coffee, sugar, cream substitute, toilet tissue, accessory packet, cocoa powder, chocolate nut cake, crackers, grape jelly, plastic spoon and beans in tomato sauce. All a creative grunt has to add is a canteen, a serving plate or canteen cup and some seasonings and he can eat like a king.**



spent years learning how to make corned beef hash edible? Grunts have been working on making Cs palatable for over 40 years, passing culinary secrets on from generation to generation.

Once the easy-to-open MRE is opened, the veteran finds himself in unfamiliar territory. It is immediately apparent that there are no cans to make into small stoves. The entire MRE is packed in plastic pouches, and the entree pouch is packed in a box as well. How in the hell do you cook them? Well, you must either carry some type of stove (a wing stove or folding mountain-type stove will do), or dig a small trench stove and burn your heat tab in the trench. Once you’ve got a fire going, fill a canteen cup one-third full of water, put the unopened pouch in the water and place the cup over the heat tab. The water will keep the pouch from burning. Once the meal is hot, throw away the water you used for heating — the hot water releases chemicals on the outside of the pouch which can cause diarrhea when used for coffee or hot cocoa. I suspect some old timers will learn about this the unpleasant way.

A few of the meals, such as beef stew or chicken a la king, do not need much help and heating is all you’ll need to do. But don’t throw out that bottle of tabasco sauce. For those of us who used to amaze the young troops in the field with our culinary skills with the old C-rats, the MREs can present a whole new set of challenges. For those times out in the field when you really long for a good meal and have the time to try to make one, I would suggest keeping the following extra items in your kit:

1. An extra canteen cup reserved for cooking meals.
2. Either a folding mountain stove or sterno stove.
3. 2 fl. oz. of Tabasco.
4. 1-oz. can garlic powder.
5. 1-oz. can onion powder.
6. 1-oz. can black pepper.
7. Zip-loc bag to carry the above plus extras saved from meals.



All the ingredients for a gourmet meal: MRE meatballs in barbecue sauce, oriental noodles, a Korean cook pot and, most important, the author's rucksack spice rack: Heinz 57, Tabasco sauce, pepper, and onion and garlic powders.



Korean cook pot and Hank Roberts mini camp stove are excellent combination for turning MRE meals into canteen cup *piece de resistance*.



Author's Korean cook pot can be used with folding mountain stove, which is light and works with issue-type heat tabs.

## GOURMET RATIONS

by Galen L. Geer

### CHICKEN TAHITI

#### Ingredients:

Ham & Chicken Loaf from Menu 2 or Chicken Loaf from Menu 23  
Strawberries from Menu 2 or 12  
Heinz 57  
Sugar packet  
Caramel square

Open loaf packet and break into cubes. Place in bottom of canteen cup. Open strawberries and sprinkle over loaf, add water to cover both and heat to bubbling. Add sugar packet and caramel square. Continue heating. When caramel is melted add one spoonful of Heinz 57 and continue heating one to three minutes.

### BEEF STROGANOFF

#### Ingredients:

Beef slices from Menu 4  
Onion powder  
Salt  
Pepper  
Cream substitute

Open beef slices and place in canteen cup. Add water to fill 1/2 canteen cup. Add cream substitute, pinch salt, onion powder to taste. Cook until bubbling and add pepper to taste. Cook two minutes. If mixture becomes too thick add a little water. Eat as is or over oriental noodles.

### FRANKFURTER CASSEROLE

#### Ingredients:

Frankfurters from Menu 6  
Beans in Tomato Sauce from Menu 3, 6 or 8  
Cheese Spread from Menu 1, 3, 8, 9 or 10

Onion powder  
Tabasco sauce

Catsup packet from accessory packet

Heat beans and frankfurters in their pouches in a canteen cup of water. When hot, remove from water and set aside. Rinse out cup. Open beans packet and

spread half the beans in bottom of canteen cup. Open frankfurter packet and place frankfurters on beans. Open catsup packet and sprinkle 1/2 packet over frankfurters. Open cheese spread and pour 1/2 cheese spread over catsup and sprinkle onion powder over cheese.

Add a few spoonfuls of water, no more than three, pouring water around edge of beans near edge of cup. Repeat process, starting with beans on top of onion powder. When completed return canteen cup to heat and heat until bubbling.

### PEACH COBBLER

#### Ingredients:

Any MRE cake except fruit cake  
Peach packet from Menu 4 or 11  
Sugar packet  
1/4 canteen cup water

Heat cake in packet until warm, then set aside. Clean cup and pour 1/4 cup water into cup. Add peaches and 1/2 sugar packet. Place over heat and while warming open cake packet and break cake into pea-sized pieces and sprinkle over peaches. Add remaining sugar in packet: If it cooks dry, add water a spoonful at a time until peaches bubble under cake. When peaches are boiling hot remove and eat.

### APPLESAUCE SUPREME

#### Ingredients:

Applesauce from Menu 1  
Strawberries from Menu 2 or 12  
Sugar packet  
1/2 canteen cup water

Heat water in canteen cup. When hot pour water into strawberry packet to cover strawberries and set aside. Open applesauce packet and place in canteen cup and return to heat. When the applesauce is steaming hot remove from heat.

Add strawberries to applesauce and stir until mixed. Return to canteen cup and heat again. Sprinkle sugar over top of mixture and heat until sugar is hot.





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## DIEN BIEN PHU

Continued from page 33

Gabrielle had resisted some hours longer than Beatrice, but the balance sheet made equally grim reading. Over 500 *Tirailleurs* had fallen; all the senior officers were dead or wounded prisoners. Two of the four tanks had been knocked out. The supporting Legion mortar company had been decimated, though two legionnaires, Pusch and Zimmermann, had made the Viets pay dearly for their success: "Picking up automatic rifles found in an abandoned position they laid down a withering fire on the communist assault waves. Within a short time the wire ahead of them was covered with dead enemy bodies. Just as they were about to be submerged both men and an Algerian sergeant threw eight hand grenades in quick succession and hacked their way in the direction of Dien Bien Phu."

The theory is now held in some Legion circles that the loss of Gabrielle was one of the deciding factors in final defeat. More than any other of the outer bastions, Gabrielle dominated the air strip. Its retention would have meant that, though hazardous, use of the strip would have been possible. Men and vital supplies could have been flown in rather than dropped by parachute with resulting heavy loss. It should be remembered that the entrenched camp was not stormed. It was only because its defenders were starving, most of them having only their bayonets for resistance, that a cease-fire was ordered.

A third disaster followed rapidly. The night of 15 March was quiet, but the T'ai



Wounded trooper from Dien Bien Phu reaches Bach-Mai Airport near Hanoi. Photo: AP/Wide World

battalion holding Anne Marie had had enough. During the hours of darkness the men jettisoned their weapons and slipped away. When dawn broke the bastion was deserted except for a handful of NCOs and the French officers.

Morale was certainly very low on the morning of 17 March. The chief of staff, Col. Keller, was discovered by de Castries sitting in his dugout, his steel helmet jammed firmly on his head, refusing to venture outside. Col. Piroth, the artillery commander, who had expressed such confidence in "his" artillery, said to a fellow officer, "I

am dishonored. I promised de Castries that the enemy artillery would be powerless. But now I can see that we are going to lose the battle. I am leaving." His departure was very final. Entering his bunker, he took a hand grenade, held it to his chest and removed the pin.

But the air strip's frightening vulnerability was de Castries' greatest concern, and that of the chief medical officer, Cmdt. Paul Grauwin. Because the seriously wounded could not be flown out, hospital accommodation was woefully inadequate from the beginning. The underground hospital had been constructed to shelter 40 beds. Before the siege ended it would be holding some 3,000 casualties. They would be crammed in between the beds, and cluttering the passages leading from the exterior, lying in "the muck and stench of their own blood and excrement."

Hospital staff was equally understrength,



French soldiers run for cover as Viet Minh shells pound battered fortress. Photo: AP/Wide World

and Grauwin pointed out that but for aid from an unexpected quarter his task would have been impossible. The establishment of the entrenched camp provided for two *Bordels Mobiles de Campagne* (mobile field brothels) "staffed" by Annamese girls and Algerians from the Ould Nail tribe. Since they could not be flown out, one and all volunteered to serve as nurses. Grauwin pays a very warm tribute to their devotion to duty under the most dangerous and trying conditions. Sadly, these virtues went unrewarded. As soon as the cease-fire came into force, the puritanical Viet Minh executed the Annamese; prison conditions imposed on the Ould Nail were so harsh that none survived.

Grauwin was also helped by the fact that on 28 March, the last plane to touch down on the air strip, destined to take off wounded, had on board a nurse, Genevieve de Gallard. The plane was destroyed on the ground by a Viet shell. As a result, Genevieve remained throughout the siege at Grauwin's side, eventually earning a high decoration and the title of *l'Ange de Dien Bien Phu*.

The fact that the perimeter was not subjected to further mass assaults before the end of March was not due to Viet Minh casualties but because Giap, now confident that victory was well within his grasp, had

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decided on a basic change of tactics. Rather than seeking to clinch matters regardless of losses, he adopted a classical Chinese maneuver. Saps would be pushed out from a number of bases toward selected objectives.

This method had a double advantage; the attackers could approach to within a few meters of their target in comparative safety, while at the same time the objective was cut off from the main body of the defense. The first sap, begun on 25 March, may be said to mark the second stage, and the longest, of the battle for Dien Bien Phu.

The third, inaugurated 1 May, was to last a bare seven days.

An extraordinary event took place in the secrecy of the command post on 24 March. Perhaps due to his wounds and the growing sense of claustrophobia engendered by the entrenched camp, combined with the shock of the events of the last 10 days, de Castries had been showing signs of mental strain. This weakness soon became apparent to the GAP commander, Lt. Col. Langlais. Though no exact details are available, he obviously held preliminary talks with the other para commanders, Cmdts. Guiraud and Seguin-Pazzis of the Legion, Bigard and Tourret of the Colonials, and Botella of the BPVN, a clique frequently referred to as the "para mafia." The six men then marched to the command post where they found de Castries sitting with Keller's replacement, Col. Voinot.

Acting as the mafia's spokesman, Langlais stated bluntly that as from that moment he, Langlais, would assume actual command of the camp. De Castries would retain his position in name, but his actual functions would be limited to "transmitting our messages to Hanoi."

Apparently de Castries raised no objections when confronted by this ultimatum, which by any standards must be seen as mutiny. Voinot, however, deeply shocked, protested vigorously. Langlais flew into one of his famous rages, filled a glass with whiskey from a bottle on the camp table and threw the contents in Voinot's face, inviting him to "step outside and settle the matter man to man." This roused de Castries to a mild rebuke, which resolved the dispute. Characteristically, Langlais' fury evaporated. He and Voinot shook hands.

There was no question, however, of Langlais retracting, and Voinot probably recognized the necessity for a shake-up. As well as taking on overall command, Langlais retained control of the eastern sector, entrusting the western to Voinot. Seguin-Pazzis took over the GAP, while Bigard was made responsible for the organization and direction of all future counterattacks.

By 27 March Viet Minh saps had virtually isolated bastions Dominique, Eliane and Huguette. Instead of a single massive work, each of these bastions consisted of a series of mini-strong-points (*points d'appui*) designated by the bastion's initial letter followed by a number. Huguette, for example, had seven, classified H.1 to H.7. This system undoubtedly gave the defense greater resilience, and before the assault could be pushed home on any one of them, the gari-

son scored one of its very few offensive successes.

An AA battery in a village called Ban Ong Pet, about 2.5 kilometers to the west of Bastion Claudine, had been making the dropping of supplies particularly dangerous by day. In his new role, Bigeard called on the 1st Legion, and the 6th and 8th Colonial Parachute Battalions, supported by a troop of Chaffee tanks, to deal with the menace.

The well-coordinated attack took the Viet Minh completely by surprise. By 1300 hours on 28 March the village had been cleared: 350 Viet dead littered the ground. Five 20mm guns and 12 .50-cal. heavy machine guns had been captured. Viet Minh attempts to recover the lost ground were beaten off. But both Langlais and Bigeard soon concluded that to retain a village that far from the perimeter would be too difficult. Reluctantly, at 1530, the order to fall back was given, after having first destroyed all captured materiel.

Possibly to counteract the effect of this momentary setback, Viet pressure was stepped up on Huguette where, it was becoming apparent, some of the garrison's non-Europeans were losing heart. A company of Algerians and a company of T'ais broke. The whole position might have been lost but for the steadiness of gunners of the 4th Colonial Artillery Regiment — mostly black Senegalese — who stood their ground, firing their guns over open sights.



War artist sketched this 16-year Foreign Legion veteran near the end of French rule in Indochina. Art: Howard Brodie

The same day two platoons of Moroccans abandoned their trenches on the vital Eliane. 2. There the situation was saved by a detachment of the Legion paras under Lt. Luciani, who rallied a handful of Moroccans, and then, though outnumbered by 100 to one, managed to hang on, throwing back attack after attack by the 98th Regiment. Reinforced sometimes by a platoon, sometimes by a couple of sections of the Legion and Colonial paras, and of the 1/13 Battalion of the Legion Demi-Brigade, they held their ground for a further 105 hours of close combat described by one survivor as a little Verdun. When the exhausted 316 Division finally broke off the attack, they left 1,200 dead fringing E.2's trenches. It was worked out that this represented four dead *Bo dois* per square meter.

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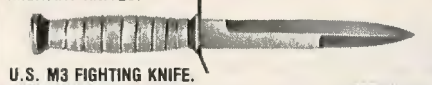
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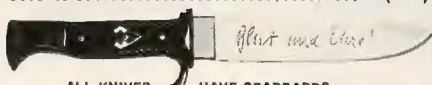
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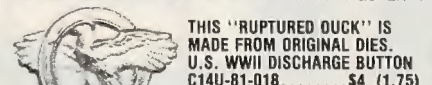


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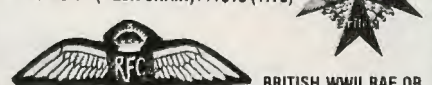
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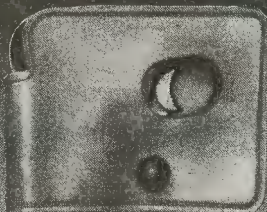
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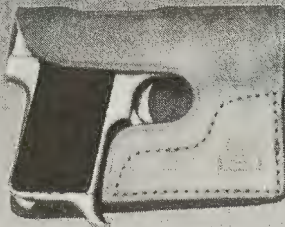
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Elsewhere, however, the Viet Minh could not be dislodged from ground they had gained. As a result, the perimeter continued to shrink remorselessly. Not spectacularly as after the first 48 hours, but slowly, steadily. As Giap boasted, it was a question of "strangulation and asphyxiation."

Nevertheless, men and supplies continued to be dropped by night during 10 and 11 April. While a furious battle was raging for E.1 and E.3, the entire 2nd Foreign Legion Parachute Battalion (2.BEP) ran the gauntlet. Not only were the troop-carrying planes greeted by a hail of fire as flares and explosions lit up the sky, the DZ itself had become so restricted that some men fell on waiting Viet bayonets, others on the wire or in the middle of a minefield.

To quote one survivor: "After the shock of the parachute opening the first thing that usually strikes one is the silence following the roar of the plane's engines. In this case there was just a change in the nature of the din: the whistle of passing mortar bombs and seconds later the crump of the explosions, and the cracking of bullets splitting one's eardrums. . . ."

Yet barely had the remnants of the battalion been regrouped, than they were thrown into the battle with such effect that the enemy was driven from E.1.

But by mid-April, in spite of occasional local successes, it was plain that the garrison faced either annihilation or surrender. The total number of fighting men within the perimeter had shrunk to 5,000, whereas, despite his huge losses, Giap could still

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muster 25,000 with another 20,000 en route. Not being dug in so as to allow an all-round field of fire, most of the French guns and howitzers had been knocked out, while from its well-camouflaged, dugdown emplacements, the Viet Minh artillery was able to continue its merciless pounding of the *cuvette* in comparative immunity.

The problem of supplies was also a matter of the gravest concern. It was impossible to drop the daily tonnage required to maintain combat efficiency and keep the men reasonably fed. To add to the general misery the monsoon rains began unseasonably early in April, so the men had to stand and fight in the trenches, knee, often thigh, deep in mud, slime, blood and entrail-polluted water. And as the rain invaded the hospital, Grauwyn reported that he was fighting a losing battle with over 800 wounded, 300 surgical cases among them, and that 80 had already died as drugs and medicines ran out.

Viet Minh sapping tactics brought about the fall of Huguette as, one by one, the *points d'appui* were first cut off, then overrun. H.1 was the last to fall after an heroic resistance by 4 Company of the 1/13th Demi-Brigade, commanded by Capt. Chevallier.

At dawn, 17 April, Chevallier took over H.1 from 4 Company of the 1/2nd Legion, but by dusk the position had been completely isolated by Viet Minh saps, some of which had actually tunneled under the wire. When darkness fell, the Viet Minh swarmed into the open "like rats from broken sewers," only to be driven back before they could reach the Legion trenches. From that moment Chevallier's company was completely cut off; no reinforcements, no ammunition, no rations, no water could reach them. Yet the decimated company held out against three Viet Minh battalions, reinforced each night, hurling back repeated attacks, until 2300 hours of 22 April, at which time radio contact with Langlais' command post suddenly ceased. At dawn one man staggered into the central position: Legionnaire Unterleschner. The last clear picture in his mind was that of his "captain, alone, upright, on the roof of his command post, disappearing beneath a mass of black uniforms, like the captain of a battle cruiser torpedoed on the high seas."

During April a separate battle was being fought round isolated Isabelle. By late March the Viet Minh had established themselves firmly across the track leading to the central position, so that the garrison was unable to join the main operation, but its strength and firepower was such that Giap saw no advantage in wasting lives in bringing about its immediate reduction. Instead the bastion was subjected to frequent heavy bombardments, which proved so effective that by 19 April, the little hospital was badly overcrowded and only 1,400 men were capable of manning the ramparts.

At this stage Lalande made up his mind to try to reopen communications with the main body. The 2/1st Algerian *Tirailleurs* were ordered to breach the encircling ring, after which the Legion and tanks would push through the gap and link up with the center.

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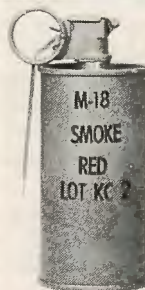
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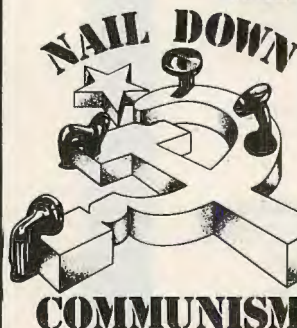
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Unfortunately, the Algerians were unable to make any impression on the well-dug-in enemy and soon stopped dead in their tracks, then, beginning to fall back, called frantically for tank support. The enraged Lalande was finally persuaded not to have a number of *tirailleurs* shot for alleged cowardice. His anger, however, abated when, on the 27th, a similar attempt by the Legion and the T'ais also failed.

Back in Saigon, Navarre tried to produce a face-saver as the inevitability and the scale of defeat became more and more manifest. The result was Operation Condor. A Col. Boucher de Crevecoeur — an unfortunate name since *crevecoeur* translates as "heart-break" — was given command of a four-battalion-strength column with orders to link up with the besieged garrison, or failing that to create a diversion on Giap's flank so as to relieve pressure on the *cuvette*. The column duly set out but failed in both its objectives. The distance was too great, and the force too small to divert Giap

What is not so well-known is that another column, 6,000 Meo tribesmen, led by a Col. Vaudrey (who was married to a Meo girl) came within earshot of the battle on 7 May, the day of the cease-fire. It was a gallant effort. But as the Meos were only lightly armed, even if they had arrived in time, they would probably have only prolonged the agony.

(Possibly because he had little faith in Condor, Navarre issued a final operation order, Albatross, which authorized survivors in the *cuvette*, should all else fail, to attempt to smash a way through the Viet Minh back to the French lines. The plan was never seriously considered. To begin with it would have meant abandoning the wounded, and in addition neither de Castries nor the tough Langlais could ignore the fact that the defenders were so exhausted that they were quite incapable of carrying out a fighting retreat of 300 meters, let alone 300 kilometers. Their strength had been reduced to 3,000. Only one tank remained operational. It would not be long before the few undamaged guns would have fired their last shell. Stocks of small-arms ammunition were dangerously low.)

On 1 May, the siege entered its final phase. Giap had decided the end had come. That morning Viet Minh artillery laid down a smothering bombardment, all the more devastating as its firepower had been increased by the addition of a rocket-launching (*Katyusha*) regiment, the main targets being the still resisting *points d'appui* of Claudine and Eliane. That evening the mass-assault tactics of the opening phase were resumed. By dawn, 2 May, E. 1 and C.5 had been overrun.

That morning Cogy received a bleak message — "No more reserves left. Wear and tear on units terrible. Require fresh battalion of highest quality."

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near and could in no way be averted even if he had had four or five elite battalions to throw into the cauldron. By his action he was condemning a first-class unit to speedy destruction for no practical purpose.

Two companies, the 1st and 3rd, were dropped on the nights of 3 and 4 May. Casualties were surprisingly light, but less than 70 of the 150 tons of supplies and ammunition parachuted at the same time could be recovered. Though during the course of the next three days these companies virtually ceased to exist, they fought with a fury which surprised even Giap.

In fact a wave of despairing heroism seemed to pervade the whole camp. A survivor remembered, "Suddenly firing broke out from a blockhouse and I saw Viets falling. I ran across and went in and could scarcely believe my eyes. It was a couple of wounded men who were firing a machine gun. 'I've just got an odd hole in me,' said one, 'but I still fight.' He had a huge bandage round his belly, and as he staggered to his feet, blood began to ooze through. As for the other who had been acting as loader, he had only one arm and a shell splinter in a lung."



Wounded T'ai trooper is carried to dressing station during March battle. Photo: AP/Wide World

The night of 5 May, de Bazin's HQ group and a detachment of the 4th Company were dropped. De Bazin never took command. Within an hour of reporting to the command post, a bursting shell shattered one of his legs. Next day, the 6th, saw the end of the battalion. Having fired their last rounds, the men were left with only two or three grenades each. Capt. Pouget, at one time Navarre's ADC but who had requested an "active" posting, was the only officer still on his feet. The survivors raised a barricade of dead bodies, then from behind this flimsy, macabre shelter hurled their grenades at the oncoming Viets. The few not killed — all wounded, among them Capt. Pouget — were taken prisoner.

On Eliane men suddenly fell, untouched, dying on their feet from hunger and exhaustion.

That same night Cogny radioed permission to attempt Albatross.

By this time actual command was back in de Castries' hands. His reconciliation with Langlais may have been caused by his having been promoted brigadier general or, be-

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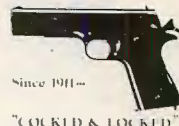
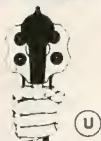
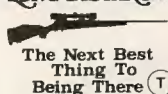
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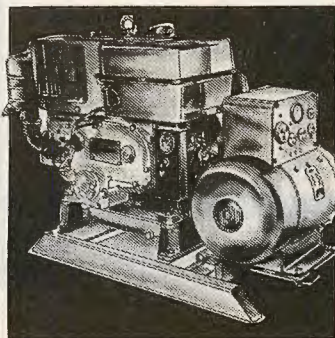


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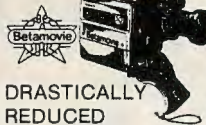
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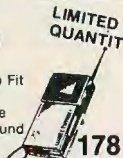
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cause by 1 May, Langlais was so physically exhausted that he welcomed de Castries' resuming his official position. There was no recrimination. Later, de Castries even recommended Langlais for promotion!

One last problem faced de Castries on the morning of the 7th. Albatross had been rejected, but he had given his word that there would be no surrender. Yet the guns had fired their last shell. The skeleton units were out of ammunition. Despite a last suicidal bayonet charge by the survivors of the Legion paras, the Viet Minh were "within shouting distance" of the command post. After a hurried conference with senior officers, a compromise was reached. There would be no official act of surrender, but Giap would be informed that, as from 1730 hours that afternoon, the French would be ordered to cease fire.

Contacted by radio, Cogy hesitantly agreed, but stressed that there must be "no white flag." The last exchange of words took place at 1720, de Castries announcing, "I'm blowing up all the installations," adding, "au revoir." To which, somewhat resignedly, Cogy replied, "Well, then, au revoir, mon vieux."

Soon after the cease-fire had been announced, a squad of five heavily armed Viet Minh, led by a Capt. Ta Quang Luat, edged their way cautiously into the command post. Their attitude was threatening. Many of the French officers admitted later that they expected to be gunned down on the spot.

Silence was broken by the captain asking, "Which of you is Gen. de Castries?"

De Castries stepped forward and identified himself, requesting permission to inform his troops that the cease fire was in operation.

"No need," sneered Ta Quang Luat. "They have already stopped fighting without waiting for your permission."

At precisely 1740, a huge red flag, which had been specially woven for the occasion, was raised over the command post.

Isabelle, however, still held out.

Lalande had called the command post at 1600 hours to be informed of the cease-fire, but assured that it did not affect him and that, if he saw fit, he was free to attempt Albatross.

Though it meant leaving the wounded, Lalande felt it was his duty to try to save something from the wreck. He was also encouraged by the belief — proved to be false — that leading elements of Condor were within a day's march of the perimeter. Having destroyed the last operational gun and the remaining tank, the garrison was split up into three columns to make the bid for freedom.

The first, consisting of T'ai auxiliaries and a company of the Legion, reached the bed of the Nam Yum River without being spotted. Working their way downstream, they covered nine kilometers before bumping a road block. In the short ensuing action all were mown down, with the exception of 10 T'ais, a Legion sergeant and two legionnaires, who eventually reached the French lines.

The second column, a Legion platoon and members of the tank crews, had only progressed a kilometer when they ran into an ambush. Wisely, instead of trying to batter a way through, they turned into the hills, thus outflanking the enemy. After a number of minor clashes with marauding Viet bands, they gained the nearest French post, so becoming the only organized body to escape the trap of Dien Bien Phu.

The third column, the Algerians, Lalande himself and his staff, with the walking wounded, had barely left the cover of their own wire when they came under heavy fire. Lalande made the instant decision to turn back and try to organize a last-ditch resistance in the ruins of the bastion. In the morning a group of Viet Minh officers approached the perimeter, waving a flag of truce, calling on Lalande to surrender and thus avoid pointless slaughter. The hopelessness of his position being only too evident, Lalande felt obliged to agree.



Brig. Gen. Christian de Castries was released in September '54, after four months as Viet Minh prisoner. Photo: AP/Wide World

In 55 days the whole of the garrison of Dien Bien Phu had been lost. Of the 16,000 who had been involved, 5,000 were dead; 11,000 — of whom a great number were wounded — prisoners of war.

The more seriously wounded were held in the camp, waiting to be flown out once agreement had been reached between the Red Cross and Ho Chi Minh, but for the rest the horrors that lay ahead exceeded those of the siege. With the exception of de Castries and a handful of senior officers transported by truck, the prisoners were forced to march every centimeter of the way to the POW camps, some of them 800 kilometers distant. Since the rations provided were tragically inadequate — 14 ounces of rice daily and 10 peanuts every 10 days — the agonizing trek soon degenerated into a death march, especially as it was expected that 20 kilometers would be covered every 24 hours. Of the 10,000 who set out on this "incredible Calvary," some 7,000 died by the roadside or within a few days of reaching their destination.

Even the more serious cases awaiting evacuation were not immune from the

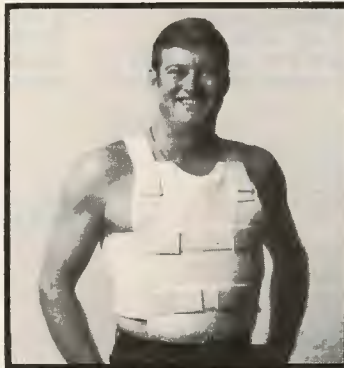
harsh, often brutal, treatment meted out by their captors. Sgt. Kubiak, who had many near-miraculous escapes during the 55 days, was hit in the leg by grenade fragments within a couple of hours of the cease-fire. The wounds were serious, necessitating an operation.

Before he was carried into the *ad hoc* operating theater, a Viet Minh doctor remarked that it was fortunate that he was "a tough legionnaire" since there was a shortage of anesthetics. Then, firmly strapped to a bamboo table, Kubiak remembers seeing the surgeon approaching with "a small glittering object in his hand."

"For a time," he wrote in his diary, "I could not make out who it was who must be keeping the whole camp awake yelling his head off. Then I realized it was me!"

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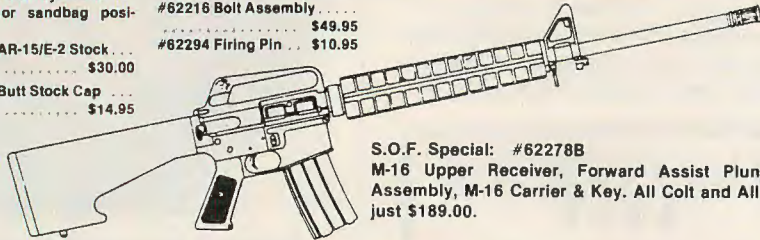
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## SPACE-AGE RATIONS

Continued from page 79

cakes found in the MREs are tasty. They include orange nut, cherry nut, pineapple nut, maple nut, chocolate nut and fruit cake. I've eaten all of them (except the fruit cake, which I hate from my Christmasses in 'Nam) and can vouch for them. They can be heated in the canteen cup like the rest of the meal. If you want to add icing you can make chocolate icing by mixing warm water with one spoonful of instant cocoa mix until it forms a paste. For a white-sugar icing mix half the contents of the cream substitute with the sugar packet in warm water until it is a paste and add it to the cake.

The new rations have a few flaws. The first problem I noticed was that, although lighter, the MREs take more space in the pack. The old rations occupied 90 cubic inches, the new 169.91 inches. In addition, the MRE cases are packed so that after pulling a few meals out it is impossible to cram them back in — and at high altitude the problem is compounded since the air inside the sealed MRE pouch expands. During elk season in Colorado I carried MREs for myself, the guide and a client. We had some serious packing problems with the meals until we punched a small hole in the main pack and squeezed the air out.

Another problem with MREs is that for some reason even the cold meals leave you very thirsty. I have found myself going through two-thirds of a canteen of water with a meal, hot or cold. Although I do not know if this has affected troops in the field, I have a hunch it will create more than a few problems for small-unit commanders.

One complaint I heard at the reserve training was that MREs aren't as filling as the old rations. While attending Operation Alpine-Warrior, Marine cold-weather survival and mobility training at nearly 11,000 feet, I questioned all of the troops I met, and none of them were dissatisfied with the amount of food. MREs provide 2,200 calories per day, and I suspect that the complaints reflect resistance to change rather than real hunger pangs.

I'm sure that the military mind will soon take to the challenge of making MREs interesting, and our fighting men will be gaggling over who gets the strawberries to fix a strawberry-glazed ham. But it will take some time. And there will always be those who resist the new.

Late the first night of that weekend training exercise last fall, the first sergeant, a veteran of more than 30 years of active and reserve service in the Marine Corps, drifted into our tent. "I hear you have some real C-rats here," he said, looking around furtively, and speaking low so that his voice wouldn't carry. The man he addressed nodded his head, pulled an old meal from his pack and handed it to him.

The "Top" thanked him and headed guiltily out into the darkness, clutching his ham and limas to his heart. ☘

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# ALLIED DOG FIGHT

Continued from page 35

I tried not to give visible notice that he had picked up my language and was taking pot shots at me with it. He was perhaps going to be more difficult to humble than I first supposed.

He then proceeded to relate a witnessed account of a pilot who had broken contact from the Boche because the ammunition drum of his Lewis machine gun was empty and needed changing. The drum resisted removal and the pilot resorted to clamping the control stick between his knees so that he could use both hands. While he was preoccupied in wrestling with the balky drum, the plane stalled and flipped over into a spin. The pilot was thrown out of the cockpit, but managed to keep both hands in a vise-like grasp on the ammunition drum. A split second before he had cursed the drum because it would not come off; now he prayed that it would hold on forever.

Except for his grip on the drum and his chin hooked over the top wing, his body was floating outside the aircraft. Flailing his legs with wild desperation, he succeeded in catching the toe of his boot in the rim of the cockpit. With this momentary purchase, he was able to fight the slipstream and centrifugal force of the spinning plane until he muscled his other foot in and wrapped his legs around the stick. The pilot wrenched the stick with full opposite aileron, followed by slight up elevator.

The machine rolled out steady with an upward surge and the pilot plopped neatly back into his seat. The return to base and landing were otherwise uneventful.

I presented a practiced countenance, calculated to convey that I would not have bothered to tell such a commonplace tale, but then softened it a bit to suggest that since he was a guest in my country I would listen politely.

I selected my riposte with deliberate care and related an incident from Vietnam involving a Forward Air Controller (FAC) flying the tiny O-1 observation aircraft. It was a tandem-cockpit, high-wing plane with the tail-wheel configuration of World War II-vintage aircraft. The control stick in the rear cockpit fitted into a socket on the floor that was interconnected to the stick and its connecting controls in the front cockpit. For the convenience of the passenger or crew member in the rear seat, the stick was normally removed and strapped inconspicuously to the edge of the cockpit.

On this particular mission a non-flying naval officer assigned to his first FAC mission was strapped into the back seat of the O-1 to observe and adjust naval gunfire. On the way to the target the plane was diverted to some friendly forces being ambushed.

Calling for air cover, the FAC located the combat locale and rolled in to plant a smoke rocket and mark the target for the strike aircraft holding above. As he pulled out of his run, a stray round of ground fire hit him

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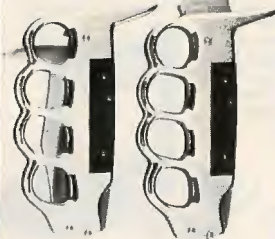
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in the forehead and he slumped immediately over the stick. The weight of his body forced the plane into a deadly dive, a condition that the terrified back-seat occupant was powerless to correct without a stick. Reaching up with one hand, he pulled the dead pilot upright, and with the other he pulled back on the stick barely in time to stop the onrushing jungle from engulfing the plane.

Not realizing that he had a stick in the back seat, the passenger attempted to keep the plane in a level altitude by restraining the pilot's body and reaching over his shoulder to grasp the stick. The effort required in the cramped space was more than the naval officer could sustain, and he knew that he would eventually submit to fatigue unless he could get the plane down soon. Bailing out was not an option because parachutes were not worn in the belief that it was safer to attempt a crash landing in any condition than bail out of an O-1. Fortunately, the acting pilot spotted the extra stick in the back cockpit and after some fumbling, succeeded in inserting it into the socket. Now he could fly from the back seat as long as he held on to the collar of the pilot's flight suit.

But a funny thing happened on the way to home base — the engine quit. In the "deafening silence" that followed, the hopeful pilot poked, pulled and jerked every knob, button and extrusion in both cockpits with no results. Then he remembered that on the outgoing leg the pilot had fiddled with some rotary handles over his head on the wing panel.

The back-seat survivor randomly did the same. The windmilling prop encouraged a rough cough in the engine, and then it roared back to life. By sheer chance, the fledgling pilot had discovered the fuel valves and manipulated them in the right sequence — the only corrective action possible when the engine stops because of fuel starvation.

But the roughest part of his first solo flight still lay ahead. The O-1 is notorious for landing with all the reliability of a football, and even experienced pilots never feel a safe landing has been completed until the engine has been shut down, the wheel chocked and the tiedowns firmly secured to the ramp. Veteran instructor pilots who have to make a living teaching the idiosyncrasies of this machine are easily recognized by their premature aging. One of their unique hazards is that they cannot see the runway from the back seat, and must react to the visual reporting of student pilots in the front seat to get the aircraft down.

However, the enterprising first-time pilot had reported his predicament on the radio, and friendly aircraft had been sent out to escort him back to his home base. Veteran O-1 pilots were stationed in the tower to help talk him down, and emergency equipment had been prepositioned along the runway to put out the fires, remove the debris and render first aid in the unlikely event that he should survive the crash. En route to the base, he had been given a "crash course"

Continued on page 96

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# SOF CONVENTION 1984

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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE will hold its fifth annual convention at the Sahara Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nev., 19-23 September 1984. The headquarters hotel has 800 rooms available at \$43.00 per single or double occupancy. The Sahara reservation line is (800) 634-6666. One-hundred

additional rooms are available at the El Rancho Hotel at \$40.00 per single or double occupancy. Phone (702) 739-2222. You must identify yourself as an SOF Conventioneer. The entire Sahara Hotel has been reserved for this convention, but you must register early.

## CONVENTION SCHEDULE

Three Gun International Combat Match .....	19-21 September
Seminars by Noted Experts and Authors .....	20-22 September
SOF Arms Show '84 .....	21-23 September
Operation Headhunter .....	20-21 September
Parachute Jump School .....	20-21 September
Firepower Demonstration .....	22 September
Awards Ceremony .....	22 September
Convention Banquet .....	22 September

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

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- **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.

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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.

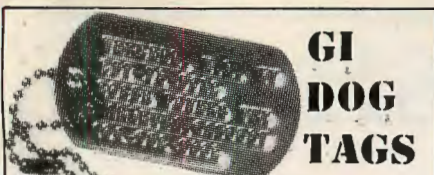
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## ALLIED DOG FIGHT

Continued from page 92

(how else can I say it) in flying by O-1 pilots over the radio.

After making the rough approximation of a traffic pattern, the fixed-gear O-1 approached the runway erratically. Despite careful coaching over the radio, the pilot drove the plane into the runway at a fearful angle. The sturdy steel struts flexed incredibly and catapulted the wobbling plane high into the air. A chorus of voices screamed into the pilot's headset to give it full throttle and take it around. The plane appeared to shudder on the edge of a stall. The panic-stricken pilot had to let loose of the dead man to free his other hand long enough to jam the throttle forward, and then quickly grab the body again to relieve its weight on the front seat stick. Narrowly averting a full power dive into the ground, the plane staggered around for another attempt.

Five times the desperate back-seat pilot undertook to get the plane on the ground,

with each approach a hair-raising variation of the first ping-pong contact between the plane and runway. On the sixth landing, the would-be pilot drove the plane into the runway so desperately that the gear collapsed and the plane tumbled over and over into a twisted ball of wreckage.

When the firetrucks and ambulance converged on the pitifully small pile of debris, a naval officer crawled out, brushed himself off and was heard to say that he would never ask for shore duty again.

I was not prepared for the outward composure displayed by Britannia's standard-bearer. He must surely be searching for a worthy rejoinder. But he smiled benignly and asked if I had ever heard of the RAF pilot who had torn the wings off a *Zlin*. I confessed I hadn't and settled back complacently to hear his story. I didn't realize it, but my adversary was screaming down out of the sun for the kill.

My colleague in the profession of arms queried me if I were acquainted with the *Zlin*. I admitted that the plane was a rarity in the United States, but went on to identify it in some detail, just to put him on the alert that my aeronautical background encompassed anything he was likely to discuss. The *Zlin* is a Czechoslovakian-built acrobatic aircraft that caused a sensation when it was introduced a few years ago by Iron Curtain acrobatic teams, who took a lion's share of honors flying the machine at international competitions.

After my knowledgeable discourse, my unruffled opponent continued with the account of an off-duty RAF pilot who rented a *Zlin* for a weekend of acrobatics. In exploring the limits of the aircraft, he overstressed the wing structure in a high "G" pull-out. With a rending crunch, the right wing appeared to break at the wing root and began to fold over the canopy.

The quick-thinking pilot rolled the plane upside down, which reversed the wing load and forced the wing back into place. The pilot flew the plane with extreme delicacy back to the airfield and entered a normal traffic pattern, except for being inverted. On a wide-base leg he extended the gear up and turned very gently to line up with the runway. He continued down the final approach upside down and completed a half roll in time to start his normal round out.

As the landing gear touched down smoothly on the runway, the right wing broke off and clattered noisily alongside the decelerating *Zlin*.

To express incredulity was, of course, unthinkable, but I'm afraid a slightly raised eyebrow betrayed me. My luncheon companion must have noticed for he added gratuitously that this incident was witnessed, photographed and reported in an official government publication. He leaned back comfortably in his chair, as though to invite my next salvo.

Toying for a moment with my dessert, I asked him how he enjoyed his tour of the United States. And with that pusillanimous withdrawal from the fray, I slunk from the field of valor. ✕

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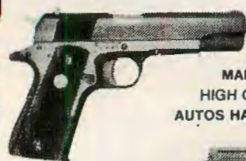
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# IN REVIEW

Continued from page 20

teenagers' war and **For Self And Country** is an account of teenage attitudes, teenage love and despair and of innocence lost. Eilert has done for the Vietnam War what Erich Remarque and Guy Sajer did for World Wars I and II.

Rick Eilert's story is horrifying and inspirational, written in a style that makes the reader feel the pain, the frustration, the confusion and the tenderness — "When I'm lying in a rice paddy up to my ampits in mud and leeches, and I am tired and scared, lonely and being eaten alive by mosquitoes, who has the right to say I am a murderer, a baby killer, or anything? Charlie might have an opinion worth hearing... but the guy who went to Canada? Some rich kid who is living off Daddy for everything including pizza and car? Some ass-wipe that hides in college or trade school, then comes out on Saturday to call every poor kid a stupid shit for being drafted? Those are the people that belong up here. God has His eyes closed. I really wish I knew what was going through God's mind."

**For Self And Country** shows the real face of war and the sacrifices made by the wounded combat veteran: "I could see sweat rolling down Dennis's face. Or was it tears? I heard the doctor instruct the nurse and corpsman to change his dressings three times a day and strip the wound. Dear God, I thought, I never realized how much pain and suffering you have to go through to get well. This sure isn't like the movies." ✕

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## FLAK

Continued from page 8

label our presence in Lebanon a "no-win" situation that is "reminiscent of Vietnam."

I agree that we should learn from Vietnam: First, let's not underestimate our enemy again (as Mr. Fanshawe seems to have done), and secondly, let's not ever again send our troops anywhere where they're not permitted to do their job for political reasons.

Steven Rombom  
Brooklyn, New York

## SALVOS NOT BAD OFF...

Sirs:

After reading "Arms and the Atlacats" (January '84) I just had to write. The weapons and maintenance conditions described sounded better than most units I've seen in the U.S. Army.

Only five M60s down after three minutes of firing? At least those five fired a few rounds before quitting. It sounds as if they have a fairly good maintenance program to me. So what if a few M60 pistons freeze fast? At least they don't put them in backyards.

Think you saw some old rifles down there, do you? Well, how many more worn-out XM16E-1s, Hydro Matics, and H & Rs would you like to see?

Are you trying to tell us those people use reworked AC .50s? I was wondering where all the good stuff was going. Did you see any four-digit Colt MGs? How about High Standard? What do the replacement parts look like? Have any re-Parked .50 barrels that are shot out? Maybe some re-Parks with a projectile stuck halfway down the barrel?

People are going to get the impression we ship them junk. It sounds no worse than our equipment.

As an aside, ruptured cartridge extractors are worthless. Take a flat-tipped screwdriver and tap it into the brass. Twist it to break it loose, and it will pop out.

Sgt. Jeffrey Schmoeyer  
Fort Riley, Kansas  
Sgt. Schmoeyer's letter is discouraging. However, he can be consoled by the prospect of new M16A2 rifles and replacement of the M60 GPMG at squad level by the M249 SAW — all within the next few years. The Salvadorans can expect neither — only our worn-out weaponry.

# USMC

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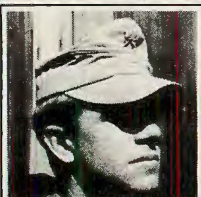
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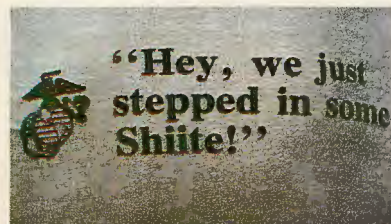
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BACK

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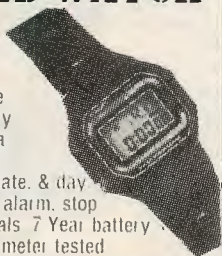
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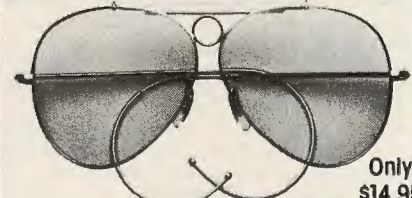
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I must take exception to the statement concerning ruptured cartridge extractors. Over the last three decades I have seen too many chambers — from RPDs to M60s — gouged and destroyed by impatient wielders of screwdrivers and cold chisels. When improperly headspaced, the .50 cal. Browning M2 HB will rupture cases with a frustrating inevitability. The .50-cal. broken-case extractor, and nothing else, should remove the necks. Besides, who in his right mind would carry a screwdriver large enough to accommodate Ma Deuce's chamber on a combat operation, instead of the proper case extractor? —Peter G. Kokalis, Military Small Arms Editor.

**FAVORITE COMMANDER...**

Sirs:

I read with interest your article on 32 Battalion SADF (SOF, February '84) which has its headquarters at Rundu in Southwest Africa.

Your readers may be interested to know that 32 Battalion was started by the same South African officer who began the SADF Recce Commando & Special Forces and the Pathfinder Company of HQ 44 Parachute Brigade. (See Ken Gaudet's article in SOF, December '83.)

I served as this highly decorated and controversial officer's second in command in 44 Parachute Brigade. For security reasons I will just call him "Carpenter." There are many stories of Carpenter's deeds in Southern Africa, some highly amusing, some extremely brave, but all showing his determination to deal severely with the enemies of his country. On Operation Protea in November '81 Carpenter's Sabre vehicle was blown up on a TM47, but he was uninjured. (The vehicle machinegunner, David Barr, an ex-Marine, was severely injured but has since recovered.) This was typical of Carpenter leading his Parabats from the "sharp end." The SADF generals have tried to put this amazing officer in a staff job in Pretoria, but without success. Even now Carpenter will be on an operation somewhere on South Africa's border (or over them) teaching her enemies to tread warily. Alistair MacKenzie  
Waiau, New Zealand

**FOREIGNERS IN RHODESIA...**

Sirs:

My compliments on Glen St. J. Barclay's article, "Rhodesia's Hand-Picked Professionals" in your April issue. It was well-researched

and -written, but I feel Mr. St. J. Barclay overlooked an important factor which greatly contributed to the success of the Rhodesian Security Forces.

In my unit, 1st Battalion Rhodesian Light Infantry, representatives from 38 foreign countries served as active members within the various commandos. The majority of these men had prior service in their own military forces, and a great number had combat tours in areas as diverse as Vietnam and Northern Ireland.

These RLI "Troopies," NCOs and officers brought to Rhodesia years of specialized training and experience which was put to good use in every aspect of the bush war.

House-to-house clearing ops, convoy movement and security, air/ground liaison, ambush/counter-ambush techniques, patrolling; all of these lessons learned in distant wars helped subtly shape the COIN teachings in Rhodesia.

The Rhodesian commanders weren't always thrilled to hear "there I was" stories from foreign members, but they were sharp enough to pick up on useful information when it came their way.

John W. Coleman  
Rhodesian Veterans  
Association

## SAFARI SAFETIES...

Sirs:

In a reply to a letter from a reader inquiring about an ambidextrous safety for the AR-15/M16 series of rifles, you stated that you knew of no one who manufactured such an item. Our company has been making AR-15/M16 safety/selectors for over three years and had them on display at the SOF convention in Scottsdale in 1981.

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The man to contact is Mike Winey, Curator, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17012. If you send photos, he will copy and return them in about 90 days, plus send you a free 8x10.

Additional inquiries should be directed to the U.S. Army Ranger Association, National Headquarters, Camp James R. Rudder, Eglin AFB, FL.

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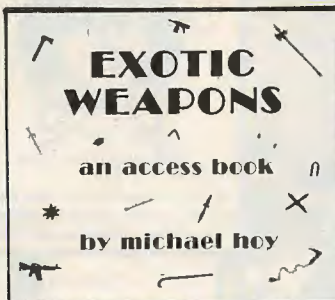
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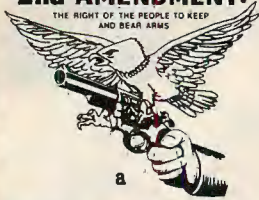


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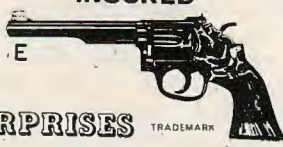
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# SKS OR CKC?...

Sirs:

In response to Curt Rich's question in his February '84 article ("Nam Souvenir Hunt") as to why the ARVN called the SKS carbine a CKC, I would guess that a number of your readers have already written, but here goes:

The original Soviet designation for this weapon is Semi-automatic Karbine Simonov. The Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet equivalent of the letter "S" is the same as the English letter "C." So, in Russian, the weapon is a "CKC" carbine. The NVA/VC habitually referred to this weapon as a CKC in their reports and inventory lists, because the packing boxes and shipping documents carried that designation. And the ARVN picked up this information from the numerous references in captured documents. However, the CHICOM version of the SKS is properly called the "Type (or Model) 56" carbine. This designation is stamped, in Chinese characters, on the left side of the receiver, preceding the serial number.

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# CANADA'S UNKNOWN SOLDIERS...

Sirs:

For almost two years, I have been researching a book about Canadians who served in Vietnam. Estimates of the number of Canadians who enlisted or were drafted into the U.S. military during the Vietnam era run as high as 40,000. As you can imagine, I am having difficulty confirming that estimate with both the Canadian and American governments. A senior Pentagon official swears there were no Canadians in Vietnam, but to date I have located about 200 and confirmed several deaths that are not among the 56 Canadians listed KIA by the U.S. General Accounting Office.


I think your readers would benefit from an article about the Canadians who went south while so many Americans fled north. (The USMC says Canadian recruits outnumbered Marine deserters by 10-1).

Doug Clark  
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# BULLETIN BOARD

Continued from page 17

## BEIRUT BLADE...

Jim Pugh of Azle, Texas is making a knife to be etched with a design by legendary combat cartoonist Bill Mauldin, commemorating the U.S. Marines slain in Lebanon. The National Knife Collectors Association (NKCA) commissioned the work to be sold at auction (\$20,000-range bids are expected), and profits will be turned over to the Beirut Families Relief Fund.

NKCA is negotiating with manufacturers to produce a factory-made version of the commemorative to be sold at "consumer level" prices.

Donations to the Relief Fund are being solicited by the Association, and contributors of at least \$25 will receive a free subscription to *The National Knife Magazine*. Contributions should be sent to Marine Relief Fund, c/o NKCA, Box 21070, Chattanooga, TN 37421.

## SURPRISE, SURPRISE...

Even the Nicaraguans are worried about the plight of the Miskito Indians. Marta Patricia Baltodano, president of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Committee, proclaimed that their mistreatment of this minority is Nicaragua's "most tragic problem." She also charged the Sandinista government with hampering the commission's access to the Miskitos' border refuges, and to uncensored information.

Don't forget: Your best chance of helping the Miskitos is to send your contributions of field gear, medical supplies and money to SOF's Nicaraguan Defense Fund, c/o SOF Warehouse, 5721 Arapahoe Blvd., Boulder, CO 80303.

## ARGUELLO FIGHTING FOR CONTRAS...

Alexis Arguello, the Nicaraguan former welter-weight champion of the world, has given up the boxing arena to join Eden Pastora's ARDE guerrillas on the southern border of Nicaragua. His opponent from now on will be the Sandinistas. Arguello, who has been boxing for 20 years, hasn't lived in Nicaragua since '79 when the Sandinistas seized all his possessions, including homes, cars and boats. Since then, he says, he has been waiting for a chance to fight, and *Comandante Zero* has given him the chance.

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With little notice in the West, Polish General Yaroslav Jaruzelski was decorated by the Cuban government for his "renowned merit in modelling the socialist society of his country."

The Order of Jose Marti was presented to Jaruzelski last October in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Polish People's Army.

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## ATTENTION RANGERS...

Were you one of the original Rangers? If so, you might be interested in a new association being formed by and for remaining members of the original Ranger group. For more information, contact E.J. Therens, 3204 Oykey Trail, Weatherford, TX 76086, phone (817) 594-8293.

## WHO READS SOF?...

The editor-in-chief of the *Palestinian Military Review* of Tunis, Tunisia, has requested a subscription and back-issues of SOF. We just hope they don't have us confused with *Newsweek*.

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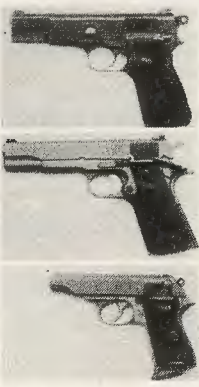
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**FOR THE RECORD**

In the April, 1984, issue of *Soldier of Fortune Magazine* the WEAVER ARMS, LTD. ad that appeared on page 13 carried the incorrect price of \$395. The correct price of the NIGHTHAWK 9m Carbine is \$525. We regret any inconvenience that this may have caused.

— The Publisher

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