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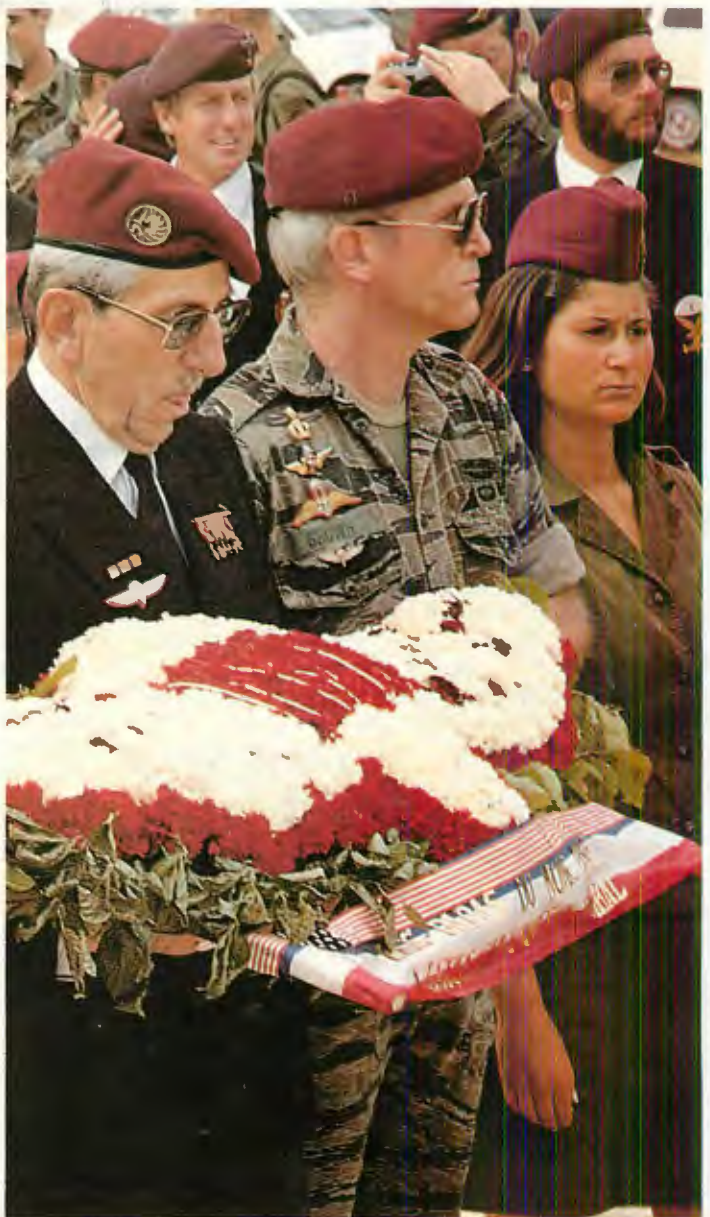
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# DE-BRIEF

by Dale A. Dye, Executive Editor

**A**FTER 20 years of traipsing around the world and following fire fights from Asia to the Middle East, you'd think it would be foolish for a former-Marine to be floored by culture shock.

Like so many others I've made over the length of my life, that's a bad assumption. Since I packed away my pisscutter and traded the eagle, globe and anchor for SOF's beret and crossed daggers, I've been constantly in the throes of culture shock. Only three guys I know ever had cases as bad. The other two died.

Eventually I'll get hold of the stacking swivel and recover. In the meantime I'll have to deal as best I can with such problems as deciding what clothes to wear each morning

and the devastating itch that appears when you don't get your hair cut every six days. With the help of the dedicated, enthusiastic and professional staff here at SOF, I'll likely survive the shock of transition from Marine to Executive Editor.

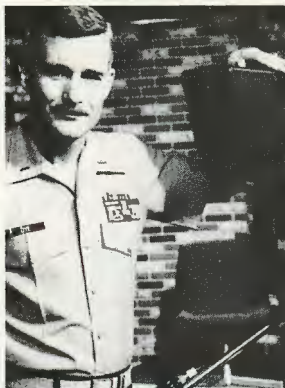
Handling the challenge of making SOF more readable, incisive and effective for our readers — both current and former military types as well as civilians who want a first-hand, bush-level look at what's going on in the world's hot spots — may be another matter. To pull that off, I'll need to call in supporting arms. That amounts to an appeal for reader support of SOF in a lot of ways.

Those of you who enjoy our coverage of world political and military events can help by continuing to let us know what you like (and don't like) about the way our magazine functions. Those of you who have writing ability and a background in the sort of things we feature between our editorial pages can get on the typewriter and tell your story. I know from experience that there are thousands of American veterans and adventurers around today with excit-

ing, insightful stories to tell about their lives and times.

Usually, it costs me the price of a cold beer in a military club or veterans' organization bar to hear these stories, but many of them would make interesting reading in the pages of SOF. The return on an investment of the time and effort it takes to tell these stories might buy several beers . . . and maybe put the occasional steak on your table.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to fire and maneuver, using both our in-house editorial staff and our correspondents around the world. In future editions of SOF, we'll be zeroing in on a number of stories that have generated high reader interest in the past. Within our pages over the next



few months you'll be getting first-hand reports on the continuing, internecine fighting in the Middle East, the plights of beleaguered freedom fighters such as the Karen tribesmen in Burma, the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua and the mujahideen in Afghanistan.

Of course, you can get a daily summary of many such struggles in

daily newspapers, but the coverage in SOF will take you into the jungles where most reporters either can't — or won't — go. We will attempt to give you a view of these situations from "over the rifle sights" with special emphasis on weapons, tactics and action. If getting such stories involves active participation on the part of SOF correspondents, don't expect any apologies or quibbles.

The vast majority of readers who spend increasingly hard-earned bucks to see what we've got to say have not been afraid to go in harm's way once or twice in their lives. We shouldn't be afraid to lay it on the line for the kind of stories they want and demand. It's that sort of front-line, grunt-level coverage that

*Continued on page 72*

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# BOUNTY HUNTER

by Bob Burton

Adventure is his occupation; a hefty commission is his reward. He is a professional bounty hunter, and he stalks the most elusive of all prey—a wanted man. For the love of money he tracks the bail fugitive through bars and bus stations, arrests him in the name of justice and surrenders him to the police. Here is the business of bounty hunting told by a pro. Learn how to become an agent of a bail bondsman, how to get your first job, how to track a fugitive, how to arrest him peaceably, and how and where to turn him in to the police. Included is a state-by-state listing of laws pertaining to bounty hunting. "This can be a very lucrative job for the intelligent, mature, daring man," says author Bob Burton. "All it takes is the desire for an extraordinary job and the know-how." 5½ x 8½, softcover, photos, 136 pp. **\$10.00**



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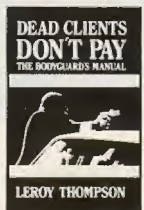
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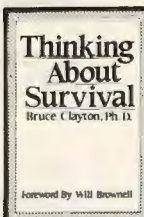
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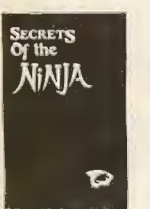
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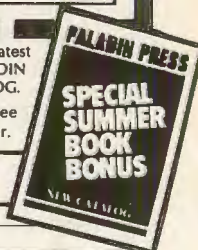


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## TOO MUCH TOO FAST...

Sirs:

Time sometimes answers all puzzles, if one can wait long enough. For example, it is said by James Fallows and other armchair armorers that Army Ordnance screwed up the Perfect M16, paragon of all combat rifles. Others claimed that filthy ball powder gummed it up. Why did ball powder mess up the M16?

Calcium carbonate used to neutralize the stuff did no harm in other arms, and since it laid down an ablative coating in the bore, even made them last longer. The same coating in the M16's teeny-weeny gas tube crudded the delicate thing up and made it cough and splutter badly. Perhaps in the AR-10, it would not have hurt, but the smaller tube of the M16 was more critical.

A recent *American Rifleman* test of a scope mounting system for people who would like a low scope indicated that the system worked well and did a lot toward straining all the possible accuracy out of the rifle, but it noted an inherent tendency to string groups vertically if sling tension or holding were not consistent. This is due to the short bearing of the barrel in the receiver. It has been known a long time that guns with a long barrel shank solidly fastened to the receiver for quite a piece shot well. The M16 barrel isn't attached by much shoulder at all, being inserted into a holding gadget instead of a screwed receiver. It tends to bend for that reason.

If only Stoner had stuck to a few new notions; by using too many firsts he gave us a cranky rifle. Unfortunately, we didn't have a year of peace to test it as we did the M1. We were in something up to our butts, and defective rifles added to the amusement.

John Conlon  
Newark, Ohio



## FLAK



UH-1 helicopters off-loaded at Ilopango Airbase are U.S. government contribution to medical effort in El Salvador. Photo: Ralph Edens

## SUPERIOR FIREPOWER...

Sirs:

I very much enjoyed your [Pete Kokalis'] comments on your Para FAL in "Atlatl Assault." Your comments on "armchair experts" were appreciated. Several of same have related .223 "failures," and when a .223 fails to stop someone it is, indeed, dramatic and hairy. On the other hand, when a .30-caliber "fails," it's more likely to be blamed on something else.

If a soldier runs out of ammunition because he couldn't carry enough .308 rounds or is hit while running for cover because he couldn't move fast enough because of his load, it is a .30-caliber failure. If a point man, exhausted from trying to maneuver a long, heavy rifle through heavy jungle, loses his concentration and steps on a booby trap a less-exhausted man would have spotted, it is a .30-caliber failure.

Why am I telling you this? You obviously know it already. The whole world is going to lighter, higher firepower, small-caliber weapons of proven lethality despite the armchair experts. Maybe they listened to soldiers who had to carry the damn things instead.

Curt Rich  
Houston, Texas

*Both writers make good cases for the small-bore side of the "perfect infantry weapon" controversy. SOF veterans have always felt there was room on the modern infantry battlefield for both big-bore and small-bore weapons. The key is to have the right weapon in hand when a specific situation arises. That*

*shouldn't be too big a problem for a military establishment that can handle the ordnance and logistics complexities of fielding the M16/M60 combination.*

*But the beat goes on... see the letter below for another view of the situation. — The Eds.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT...

Sirs:

I have enjoyed your concise reporting on the hot spots of the world since 1977, when I first discovered SOF as a member of the 82d Airborne Division Pathfinder Platoon. Your how-to articles and test and evaluation of equipment are far superior to any of the magazines that have tried to copy your format. This is why I have just renewed my subscription to your magazine.

I would also like to express my regards to Mr. Kokalis, whose article ("Atlatl Assault," SOF, June '84) I read with great interest. First, let me say that this is not an attack on Mr. Kokalis' credentials. His reputation as a weapons expert is undisputed. However, his attempt to justify the existence of a 7.62mm NATO assault rifle on the modern "jungle battlefield" was valiant, but unnecessary. Most people who have been on jungle operations know that such terrain and vegetation demand the use of small-caliber, light rifles such as the M16 or the versatile AK-47 family of rifles. After all, if you can't see past 20 yards because of the jungle, why carry a rifle designed to shoot 1,000 meters? The large-caliber rifle does have its place on the modern battlefield, but it must be used in the right terrain (such as sparsely forested mountains or deserts).

This is a fact being proven today by the successful use of the British .303 in Afghanistan and by the fact that the Israelis have designed the Galil assault rifle, not only in 5.56 but in 7.62 NATO. If anyone knows the modern "desert battlefield," it is the Israelis. I don't think they would have wasted their time or money on a round that was not effective in the desert if the average trooper could not carry its weight. At any rate, the article was deeply appreciated.

Keep up the good work and thank you once again for a unique magazine.

Michael D. Ledbetter  
Phoenix, Arizona

*Continued on page 98*



NEW ADDRESS!

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This non-reflective, olive drab (OD) green matchbox was first made for the military in WWII. Constructed in high impact plastic, it seems indestructible. The rubber gasket is in mint condition and it comes complete with striking flint on the bottom \$1.75/each; 3 for \$4.00.

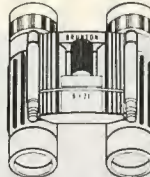
**Waterproof and Hurricane Matches** - these matches will fit nicely into the GI matchbox and are a must for any survival kit. The waterproof matches will light even when wet and the hurricane matches will not only light even when wet but in addition cannot be blown out. There are 47 waterproof and 20 hurricane matches per box. Choose: Waterproof or Hurricane matches 75¢/box; 2 boxes for \$1.25.

**Angle Head Flashlite - GENUINE GI**

This is the heavy duty olive drab plastic flashlite issued to all military units. The flashlight is waterproof, non-glare and features 4 different lenses which can be easily installed or removed. It can clip onto the belt or suspender for hands free operation, operates on 2 standard D cell batteries and comes complete with a spare bulb. Brand new, sold in the GI box. \$6.50/each; 2 for \$12.25.

**Micro Precision 8x21 Binocular** fits in the palm of your hand!!

It looks like a toy - but ours is a state of the art, micro binocular with sterling optical quality. Manufactured by Brunton (the firm that has supplied the precision M2 compass to the US military since the 1940's) our binocular weighs less than 9 ounces and measures a mere 2 3/4" x 4". Yet its 8 power magnification provides the clarity and detail found in much larger (and more expensive) binoculars. It's relatively narrow field allows the user to locate targets almost immediately.



Rubber coated armour makes the binocular water repellent and shockproof. Each binocular comes complete with a carrying case which can be worn on the belt and is warrantable for 1 year by Brunton.

Kaufman's is certain you'll be both pleased and amazed at the quality and effectiveness of this binocular. If you're not completely satisfied return it to us for a full refund plus a \$5.00 credit which may be applied towards any of our merchandise at any time.

Choose: Camouflage rubber armoured or Black rubber armoured.  
 List price \$120.00/each  
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**GREAT GIFT IDEA!** Two great things about our ties:

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These American made hats feature the jaunty, daring style the Aussies made famous. Gull brim that can be worn flat or with one side snapped up. All cotton.

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 Woodland Camouflage  
 Olive Drab (OD) Green  
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**Poncho Liner-Camouflage - GENUINE GI**

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

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**Regulation GI Dog Tags - GENUINE GI**

set of 2 stainless steel tags and 2 stainless chains (4" and 2 1/4") \$3.00/each  
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PLEASE, NO DOG TAG IMPRINTING ORDERS BY TELEPHONE.

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- Toll free telephone lines direct to our Customer Service Department. We're not only glad to take your orders (every firm with an 800 number will do that) but we'll also be happy to answer your questions. Whether you're calling to ask about our merchandise or the status of an order you placed, we guarantee friendly, courteous service.

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 Tiger Stripe Crew (Round) Neck  
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- Khaki (Tan)

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**Woodland Pattern Camouflage** - 50% cotton 50% nylon. Army's latest issue: the pants have a reinforced seat and knees; the jacket has reinforced elbows. Brand New. Specify: Jacket or Pants \$30.00/each; \$57.50/set.

**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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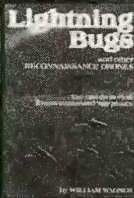
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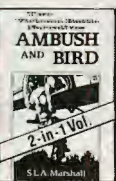
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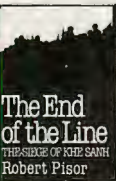
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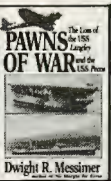
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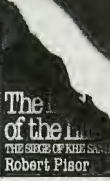
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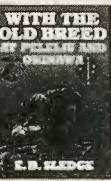
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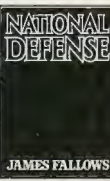
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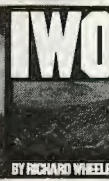
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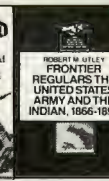
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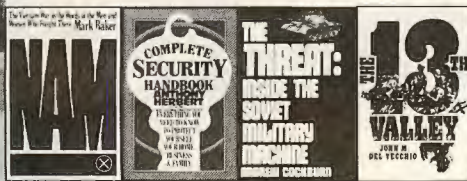


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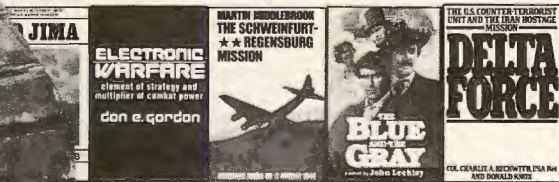
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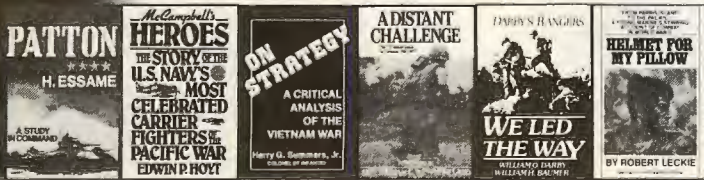
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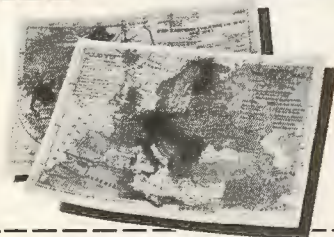
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**S**INCE 1980 when the first prototype Bren Ten pistol was shown to SOF, interest in this new pistol design has remained high. The approach to manufacturing a 10mm caliber service pistol seems quite unique. Serious combat-pistol enthusiasts have waited for word about production and delivery of the Bren Ten pistol. The more you look at the Bren Ten pistol and its 10mm cartridge, the better it looks as an ideal sidearm. As of press-time Bren Ten pistols have not yet been made available to the public.

In the course of putting a completely new handgun into manufacture, many difficult problems must be overcome. Tom Dornaus and Mike Dixon, the men behind the Bren Ten project, have been working very hard to get it into production. While the process of manufacture has been challenging, these men have established a goal to produce a combat pistol that is well made, rugged and reliable.

Some design features have been added to the basic Bren Ten since its inception. The addition of a cross-bolt firing-pin block reflects an effort at a practical sidearm, but one that also meets current liability and safety requirements. A number of variations of the Bren Ten have been developed to include a small Pocket Model Bren Ten, a matte finished Military & Police Model, and the recently introduced Special Forces Model.

At the 1984 SHOT Show, Dornaus & Dixon Enterprises, Inc. displayed the new Bren Ten Special Forces 10mm pistol. It's nearly identical to the standard model except that it has a 4-inch slide and barrel rather than the regular 5-inch slide and barrel. This new variation features an ideal blend of ease of carrying and fast access from the holster.

At a special SHOT Show presentation ceremony, Jeff Cooper was presented one of the Initial Issue Commemorative Bren Ten pistols on behalf of his efforts in concepts of design and technical assistance in the Bren Ten project. Col. Cooper's expertise is reflected in much of the Bren Ten's utility.

FFV/Norma of Sweden, the first manufacturer of commercial 10mm ammunition, has an excellent reputation. To get these 10mm auto-pistol cartridges, contact the U.S. importer, Outdoor Sports Headquarters, Dept. SOF, 967 Watertown Lane, Dayton, OH 45449. RCBS will be making the reloading dies, and Hensley & Gibbs has 10mm auto-pistol bullet molds.

Production of the Bren Ten pistol should provide fans of serious sidearms one of the most desirable combat handguns ever made. Extra effort has been engineered into the Bren Ten to provide a smooth 10-



# COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

by Ken Hackathorn

## Bren 10 Rates a 10



**The Special Forces Bren Ten is one more proposed model of Dornaus & Dixon's 10mm auto pistol.**

pound double-action trigger pull. The single-action pull should be a crisp 4 pounds. Production pistols do sport Hogue pebble-grain-nylon combat-

stock panels. With the selective single-action carry mode (Condition One), anyone preferring to carry their pistol cocked and locked will find the Bren Ten perfect.

Every feature of the Bren Ten pistol reflects the efforts of those who understand what a combat pistol should be. Far too many current-manufacture weapons are the result of design by those who have very little knowledge of how or what the pistol is to be used for.

The big question is when the Bren Ten will be available. The answer is very likely to be late 1984. It has been four years in the making. I am on the list for one of the first production-run pistols; a complete test and evaluation will follow in SOF. If Tom Dornaus and Mike Dixon can produce a quality-made and functional Bren Ten with the features as advertised, then a bit more patience will be well worthwhile.

For more details on the Bren Ten pistols, contact Dornaus & Dixon Enterprises, Inc., Dept. SOF, 15896 Manufacture Lane, Huntington Beach, CA 92649. ✕



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## Announcing THE SEMPER FIDELIS KA-BAR COLLECTION



Glass-top display case: 15" x 7" x 3"

A Limited Edition—  
Only 1775 of each will be made, in honor of  
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Tempered steel, 24-karat gold and polished leather proudly immortalize the battle honors of our U.S. Marines, through World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

**S**emper Fidelis. Always Faithful. That is the motto—and the way of life—of all U.S. Marines. Marines are always faithful to Corps and Country—always willing to face death for their fellow Marines and the American cause.

And when the situation is desperate, the ammo is spent and the fighting is eyeball-to-eyeball, that's when the Marines' fighting skills really pay off. Since 1943, Marines have fought America's enemies in close quarters with the rugged, keen-edged combat knife they call their "Ka-Bar."

Now, The American Historical Foundation is proud to honor our U.S. Marines who, with devotion to Country and Corps, have carried this knife into combat in defense of America's freedom.

Each is a genuine Ka-Bar—what old-Corps Marines call a "real" Ka-Bar. Each is specially made by Ka-Bar Knives—who helped the Marine Corps design the knife in late 1942 and who made the originals.

### A Lasting, Personal Symbol

Each is a lasting, personal symbol of your patriotic pride—and possibly your service—in the United States Marine Corps. You will be proud to display it and to pass it along to future generations of your family.

A beautiful Commemorative Ka-Bar has been created to honor each of the six Marine Divisions. The tribute announced here honors the First Marine Division.

This is a battleworthy Marine Corps fighting knife, with all the heft and strength of the ones first issued to our Leathernecks on Guadalcanal. But you will particularly enjoy owning and displaying this Ka-Bar because of its special features, created for this commemorative edition:

- The Division's battle honors, the Division's motto, the laurel wreath of victory and the Marine Corps symbol are emblazoned on the blade in 24-karat gold.
- The blade is mirror polished and gun blued to a high-gloss black finish. The blade shoulder is deeply struck "USMC" on one side and "Ka-Bar, Olean, N.Y." on the other—proof that each is a real Ka-Bar.
- The heavy butt is turned from thick, solid brass to a special ribbed pattern—unique to the Collection.

- The guard is also extra thick—and formed straight, rather than the usual curved pattern (straight-guard Ka-Bars are rarer and more desirable to collectors).
- Both the butt and guard are mirror polished and richly plated with 24-karat gold.
- The rugged grip is compressed leather, custom finished, polished and waxed to a high gloss.
- In the center of the grip is inset the Division's insignia, enamelled in full color cloisonne and gold plated.

### First Option, With No Obligation

As an added advantage, you may register now, without obligation, for other Ka-Bars in this Collection (a Commemorative Ka-Bar has been created for each of the six Marine Divisions). These knives can be delivered to you one at a time in the months ahead.

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Only 1775 of each will be made, in remembrance of the founding year of the U.S. Marine Corps. Serial



No. 1 of each will be presented to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Each is individually serially numbered on the blade and on the Certificate of Authenticity which accompanies it.

This is presented by The American Historical Foundation and Ka-Bar Knives, in conjunction with participating U.S. Marine Corps Division Associations.

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A furniture finished hardwood case is also available so you can display each Ka-Bar on a desk, shelf or wall. With a glass lid, it makes each Ka-Bar a visible symbol of your pride in the U.S. Marine Corps—and protects the knife from dust and unauthorized handling.

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When you place your reservation, you will also be made a Member of The American Historical Foundation, joining men such as yourself in 29 countries around the world who share an interest in—and who helped make—America's great military history. You will also receive special information concerning the care and collecting of military arms and advance notice of all Foundation military projects.

The only other commemorative Ka-Bars were issued nine years ago. They were quickly sold out, and today they bring more than five times their original price. So prompt action is suggested to avoid disappointment.

The few men, museums and organizations who act in time will own a lasting, tangible symbol of one of the greatest fighting organizations in the world—the United States Marine Corps.

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Please enroll me in a monthly payment plan. (Each knife reserved will be shipped when the full balance is received.)  
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**DELTA FORCE.** By COL Charles A. Beckwith, U.S. Army (Retired) and Donald Knox. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, New York, London. 1983. 300 pp. 35 photos (black and white). \$14.95. Review by James P. Monaghan.



## IN REVIEW

**T**HE tragedy of the aborted hostage-rescue mission in Iran is a story best told by someone who was there. Perhaps no one is better qualified for this than COL Charles Beckwith, creator and commander of Delta Force, and the man who gave orders to scrap the mission at Desert One. His book is valuable not only for its centerpiece — a minute-by-minute account of the ill-fated rescue attempt — but also for its detailed coverage of the legacy, formation, organization and training of the top-secret counter-terrorist unit called Delta Force.

During his 1962-63 training with the British Army's 22 Special Air Service Regiment, Beckwith conceived the idea of organizing a parallel force within the U.S. Army. But when he presented his after-action report to the Special Warfare Center (SF HQ) at Ft. Bragg, N.C., he was turned down flat.

The refusal stemmed from a directive of GEN Hamilton Howze, Commanding General, XVIII Airborne Corps at Ft. Bragg, who in 1959 had recommended deactivation of the 77th (later 7th) SF Group. However, with newly elected President Kennedy's declaration that "the United States would pay any price, bear any burden in the cause of freedom," special warfare took on a new dimension and GEN Howze's scheme was quietly scrapped.

COL (later LTG) William P. Yarborough was given command of SF HQ, and the monumental task of planning, training and enlarging special-warfare capabilities. In June 1963 LTG Yarborough and HQ staff officers were secretly tasked to prepare and deploy the 5th SF Group to Vietnam in early 1964, where it remained until February 1971.

With the massive revamping underway at SF HQ, perhaps it is no wonder that Beckwith's proposal was not well received. Beckwith implies that little was being done on the SF scene until his arrival home, but this reviewer was involved with the project and believes that it was no time to uncork a new concept.

Beckwith makes other arguable points in **Delta Force**. For instance, he claims to have met many SF men who had never commanded or knew anything about rifle companies. Throughout my 19½ years of SF duty, the majority of men I soldiered with were either infantry or related combat-arms personnel with infantry-type training. (Beckwith admits never hav-



ing attended SF-qualification training.)

Another debatable issue is the SF decision to use the nine-man (rather than the conventional 11-man) infantry squad for guerrilla warfare. This smaller unit allowed for better command, control and logistical support. But was Beckwith wasting his time "introducing" infantry training to Special Forces?

Beckwith's introduction to Project Delta began in June 1965 at Nha Trang, South Vietnam. According to him, Delta was in sorry shape, and he began to "rebuild" it with the famous recruiting ploy of sending flyers to SF A-Camps: "Wanted — Volunteers for Project Delta. Will guarantee you two things: a medal, a body bag or both."

From Bien Hoa to A Shau to Plei Me, Delta was on a roll, with the American divisions screaming for their specialty, strategic recon. Four-man recon teams composed of Americans were now venturing into Viet Cong sanctuaries; they hit Charlie coming and going. The kill ratio began to turn dramatically in favor of the U.S. and ARVN forces. And Chargin' Charlie himself, in the An Lo Valley, received a 12.7mm bullet in his gut.

In 1970 during the Vietnamization program, Delta was deactivated. The recon company was integrated with the Rangers, thus becoming an all-Vietnamese unit (with a small American advisory team), and redesignated the 81st Airborne Ranger Group. It left Nha Trang for its new home outside Saigon.

In May 1974 Beckwith, now a full colonel, was assigned as commandant of the SF School at the Special Warfare Center in Ft. Bragg. In late 1975, GEN

Bob Kingston, commander of the Special Warfare Center, informed Beckwith that he was on his way to Washington, and could the colonel put together a paper on SAS capabilities for him? Supported by far-sighted generals like Kingston, Bill De Puy and Ed Meyers, Beckwith began once again to forward-march with the SAS concept.

It wasn't easy, and in **Delta Force**, Beckwith is not kind to his detractors. He recounts the slow build-up of Delta despite obstacles set up by key personnel in the Army bureaucracy. Out went the flyer: "Volunteers wanted for SF Operational Detachment-Delta." Again they came, slowly at first (commanders dislike losing their best troops). But the troops smelled action and adventure. When SF NCOs complained to Charlie that their applications were being sidetracked, Beckwith used his famous tact to kick down that door. And in came the survivors of the original Delta, the Mike Forces, SOG, the A-Camps, and the first SF Group — older, leaner and much, much meaner.

Charlie's Angels was their nickname. To qualify, first they had to pass selection, second the shrink, and third the board. And that was the easy part! (See "The Final Option: Tough Actor to Follow," p. 55, SOF, October '83 for information on SAS selection.)

On 4 November 1979 the American Embassy in Tehran was seized by supporters of the fanatical Ayatollah Khomeini. Delta was alerted, and rescue plans made. However, expertise on combined special operations had been lost since Vietnam, and our JUWTFs (Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force) had been deactivated. Personnel trained in this type of planning had either retired or moved elsewhere in the military hierarchy. These obvious shortcomings contributed to the failure of the rescue. (Special-operations capability has since been upgraded.)

In April 1980, Beckwith briefed President Carter and his National Security Council staff on the proposed rescue operation. To his credit, Jimmy Carter approved this mission, and asked Beckwith to pass a message to the men of Delta: "Tell them that in the event this operation fails, for whatever reason, the fault will not be theirs. It will be mine." (For further details about

*Continued on page 105*



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# IT HAPPENED TO ME

by John Forbes  
as told to M.L. Jones

## Close Shave

*John H. Forbes spent eight years on active duty in the U.S. Air Force. He says, "Being a security policeman on an airbase in Vietnam was pretty boring most of the time." But one night shift was different:*

**A**S I clambered down off the flatbed truck I looked at the sky. No moon, the stars hidden behind the clouds. Almost time for monsoon season. Garcia was waiting for me at the guardpost.

"It's real quiet — nothing stirring except the rats," he said as he left.

The guardpost was a wooden crate half-buried in the ground. Its flat plywood roof was covered with sandbags. About two feet of the box showed above the ground. By standing on the wooden pallets that formed the floor a sentry could look all around. Inside was a field phone hanging on the wall, no chair. We weren't allowed to sit down, as the CO was afraid we'd go to sleep.

Stepping down, I leaned forward to keep from bumping my helmet on the doorway. I picked up the handset and checked in with the controller at Central Security Control (CSC).

Leaning my M16 against the wall, I took off my helmet, picked up the green binoculars and started sweeping the jungle just a hundred yards away. In the 10 months I had been here I had never seen anything at night, but last month a security policeman at the next post had been found with his throat slit, his weapons and uniform missing. I hadn't slept out here since.

Putting down the binoculars, I looked at my watch: Five minutes more, and I'd check in with CSC. I did so every half hour, so they'd know I was still awake out here on the perimeter.

Scanning the green wall again, I thought of what I would do with my next two days off. Payday was tomorrow; maybe I could get a card game going. "The Blue Boy" had a new dancer. Maybe I'd go and check her out.



**Night shifts on an airbase in Vietnam often meant walking in circles around an airplane for hours or staring into the dark, according to Forbes — until something moved. Here sentry and guard dog finish patrol. Photo: Dept. of Defense**

Something moved.

Grabbing the handset, I talked into it. "Post 18."

"Hey, Chuck baby, you're two minutes early."

"Yeah, well, I think something's moving out here."

"Aw, come on. You've only been out there for a half hour. It's a little early for the bushes to be dancing."

"No, I'm serious."

"Okay, take another look and see if it's still there."

Setting the handset in the dirt in front of me, I picked up the glasses. Nothing moved.

Sheepishly, I put the handset to my mouth. "Well, maybe not."

"Yeah, well, give me a call if you do see anything."

Replacing the handset, I went back to wondering what to do with my two days off. . . .

It moved again. This time my glasses had been pointed right at the spot. The bush moved. There wasn't any wind blowing. I moved my line of sight a little to the left.

I saw the leaves wave, and there still wasn't any breeze. Looking straight at the spot, I could see a dark hump down close to the ground.

No, I won't call CSC just yet. I'll wait and make sure this isn't my imagina-

tion. Carefully I selected a couple of landmarks so I could pick out the same spot — then I looked away for a minute. It seemed longer. I rubbed some sweat out of my eyes, then glanced at my watch: 1½ minutes. Looking at the spot again, I could see the hump was still there, but it had moved toward me about 10 feet.

Picking up the handset, I whispered my identification.

"Hey, man, speak up."

"I can't. There is something out there," I murmured.

"All right, I'll call the flight supervisor," came the exasperated reply.

Looking back at the hump, I watched it creep forward toward the first line of concertina wire. Suddenly a figure rose from the ground and jumped over the wire. The man lay on the bare ground, not moving. Slowly letting out my breath, I crouched down, reaching for the phone. The figure didn't have a gun, but the pack on his back, if filled with explosives, could kill a lot of people.

Quickly I described what I had seen to the controller and requested permission to use my weapon.

There was a pause, then the flight supervisor came on the line. That was a shock. I had thought he was headed to my post by now. He had me repeat everything. I did, then waited. Briskly he gave me permission to open fire and ordered the Security Alert Team to my post.

Standing up I lifted my M16, searching for my target. It had moved. He was over the second strand of wire, crawling in the direction of the fuel dump. All I could see was the pack strapped to his back scuttling along the black line of the ground.

The click of the safety switch sounded loud in the dark air. Lining up the front sight on the pack, I shifted ahead of it just a little. Inhaling, I pulled back on the trigger. The muzzle flash lit the dark sky for an instant, and the hump rolled over. It didn't move.

The pickup with the alert team pulled up a couple of minutes later. Together we walked over to where the Viet Cong was lying. My shot had caught him just under the armpit, coming out the opposite shoulder. It had taken most of the meat, exposing the shoulder bones. The sand was soaked with black blood.

The sergeant's flashlight shone on the face, shocking us all. It was the Base Exchange's Vietnamese barber. About four hours ago he had given me a haircut. The pack was full of plastic explosives and detonators.

As the team took away the body in the back of the pickup, I went back to my post. Taking off my helmet I picked up the binoculars. Sweeping the bushes in front of me, I wondered what to do with my two days off. ❧



## S.E.R.E. SEMINAR...

Survival, Escape, Resistance and Evasion will be taught at the SOF Convention this year by Rick Jamison and Mel DeWeese, including camouflage, movement, map and compass, tracking, and ambush. An overnight practical exercise/wargame will be available to participants. Contact: Rick Jamison, 460 E., 130 North, Bountiful, UT 84010.

## WANTED: BOUNTY HUNTERS...

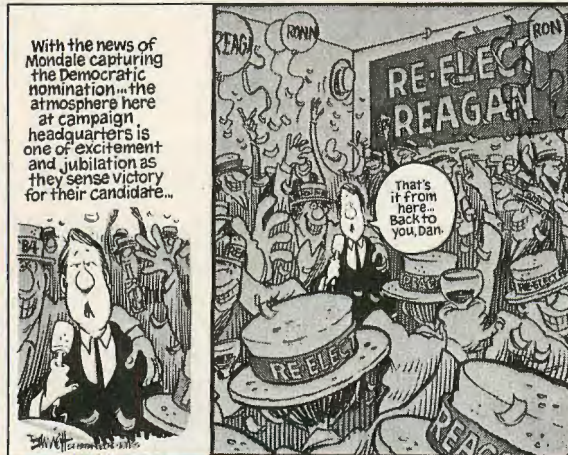
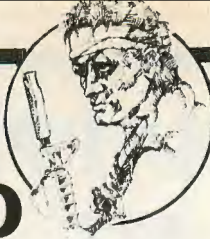
SOF conventioners will be able to get privileged, professional information on one of the most adventurous civilian occupations. Watch for the bounty-hunting seminar by Bob Burton, of Intercept Special Bail Bond Investigations, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 22801, Santa Barbara, CA 93121 at the '84 convention in Las Vegas. For more information, contact SOF Convention director Wm. M. Brooks, phone: (919) 392-2961.

## BARREL BULGER...

A single-character typo in Peter Kokalis' column on the Japanese Type 99 MG could have disastrous consequences. On page 22 of the August '84 SOF the bullet to be loaded into reshaped .30-06 brass is described as being .331 inches in diameter. That is wrong. The correct measurement is .311 inches.

Once again, SOF reminds its readers that ammunition data is provided for general information purposes only, and reloaders assume full responsibility for making and firing homemade ammunition.

# BULLETIN BOARD



## SOVIET EXPORTS...

Iran's weakness is no secret. Ruled by a madman, administered by zealots, locked in a fratricidal war with Iraq, Iran is impoverished by damage to its capacity to deliver crude oil, and still paying a premium for indirectly shipped replacements for U.S. materiel delivered before the revolution.

Since Peter the Great the Russians have wanted to break through to the Indian Ocean, and they see Iran's vulnerability as an ideal opportunity. They have supplied Kurds aligned with Khomeini, and hope to have bought them off with arms. Kurdistan has always been trouble for Iran, but they can begin to look for trouble from another area.

SOF cannot corroborate this, but our sources in Turkey claim nomadic Turkoman tribesmen are being recruited for training camps inside the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. Given Kalashnikov rifles on graduation, the rebels return to the mountains of Northeast Iran to await the signal.



## COLT RECALL NOTICE...

Colt has informed us of the following: "It has come to our attention that some of the small pocket automatic pistols marketed by Colt in .25 ACP between 1957 and 1973 (these have serial numbers ending in CC or beginning with OD) are susceptible to accidental discharge if improperly carried with a round in the chamber, and dropped or otherwise carelessly handled. This is because of the type of firing mechanism in these pistols. Some of these pistols were marked 'Junior Colt/Cal. 25', others 'Made in Spain for Colt,' and still others 'Colt Automatic/Cal. 25.' Colt will modify the firing mechanism free of charge." Send a postcard or note giving your name, address and the serial number to: Colt Industries Inc., Firearms Division, P.O. Box 1868, Dept. RC 25, Hartford, CT 06101.

## FREEDOM FIGHTERS...

El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund Contributors:

Jay P. Gladieux, Jr.; Nicole and Lee Ann Goodrich; Dan Graff; Richard Haar, Rycor Enterprises; Gregory Jacobs; D.Z. Lancer Associates; Ralph Oliviera; Ed Rydberg; Stephen J. Sczurek; Eugene Tinfo; Richard Vilardo; Harvey J. Wilson

Many contributors prefer to remain anonymous.

## WHY ARE YOU HERE?...

SOF contributing editor Ralph Edens tells us he was given a cordial welcome to the 4 May 1984 presentation by the U.S. government of four medevac Hueys to the Salvadoran Air Force. There weren't enough press packets for all the organizations represented, so the U.S. Embassy press liaison asked journalists to line up and take one packet for each news service. Edens was third in line, and when the press officer asked whom he worked for, Ralph told him.

The man with the brochures pushed the whole stack toward Ralph and laughingly told him to take all of them.





RDS "Prowler" by Robot Defense Systems of Thornton, Colo., will be on display at SOF Convention in Las Vegas.

## SENTRY'S SAVING GRACE...

If you're one of those guys who would rather suffer a stab in the butt with a bayonet than stand another long, boring hour of sentry duty, take heart. An innovative group of high-technologists at Robot Defense Systems, Inc. (Dept. SOF, 471 E. 124th Ave., Thornton, CO 80241) has come up with something that may make walking a perimeter wire obsolete.

Called the "Prowler," RDS' intelligent, remotely controlled all-terrain vehicle is essentially a robot sentry which carries TV cameras to give the operator a constant view of activities in a patrol area and on-board weapons to stop intruders dead in their tracks. The Prowler can be operated from a control module at ranges up to eight kilometers and has a cruising range of 250 kilometers.

This answer to the perimeter patrol-walker's prayer will be on display at the SOF Convention, Sept. 19-23 at the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas.

## SHOOTING STAR...

What's that they used to say in jump school? "If you want to run with the big dogs, you've gotta learn to pee on the tall trees?" Translate that to mean if you want to learn to do something right, go to the experts. That's exactly what President-elect Leon Febres-Cordero of Ecuador must have thought when he decided a politician in turbulent South America might need to know something about combat shooting.

Febres-Cordero traveled to the United States to meet with President Reagan recently. When he left Washington, the South American chief of state and five of his aides headed for Hollywood, Miss., where they enrolled in a combat-shooting course run by world champion John Shaw.

Shaw is a former winner of the popular three-gun match at the SOF Convention and finished second last year in Las Vegas. He'll be busting caps with us again this year along with other world-class gunners vying for \$40,000 in cash prizes and more in merchandise.

## "I'M NO HAMSTER"...

Fret Marte was pleased with Dr. John's story in the August '84 issue of SOF... all but the part about him. We printed Dr. John's assertion that he had heard Marte had stranded some American mercenaries in Florida.

Marte insists he has never dealt with mercenaries in this country, and that he had quit the Hamsters (Dr. John's sobriquet for the "soft, cuddly, harmless" Council for the Liberation of Surinam) before Dr. John's misadventures had begun, but he generally and specifically supports Dr. John's assessment of the rest of the Council. Dr. John, meanwhile, has recanted to the extent that he says he had only heard these charges against Marte, and wrote them as such.

Additionally, he says his Hamster sources were reliable only in the sense that "... they were right about fifty percent of the time," which was better than he got from the average member of the Council.

Indeed, Dr. John says the Hamsters castigated Marte as a "hardcore hot-head." Active anti-communist Marte wanted to start fighting on Surinamese soil, and he scared the Hamsters.

Fret Marte now belongs to another organization: He is general secretary of the National Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy and Human Rights in Surinam, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 34517, Bethesda, MD 20817.

## 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.

## COMMUNIST CAMPAIGNING...

We have heard from several sources that the Russians are planning a big election-year celebration for the United States.

Projected targets for disturbance include South Africa, the Persian Gulf, Baluchistan (the southern borderlands between Iran and Pakistan), all of Central America, and the Los Angeles Olympic Village. The Soviets are terrified of the idea that Reagan might win, since they can't get anywhere with him.



## CIVILIAN MARKSMANSHIP...

On 31 January 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger signed Department of Defense Directive 1025.1. It orders that: "The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall encourage the extension of the privileges of rifle and pistol ranges under their cognizance to recognized local police organizations, local rifle and pistol clubs, schools, colleges, and other responsible civic organizations, provided that such use will not interfere with military training and will be subject to local command and range regulations."

Thank you, Secretary Weinberger.



**T**HROUGHOUT Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America, the Heckler and Koch G3 rifle has been adopted by the armed forces of over 50 nations. It has been produced under license by more than a dozen countries. It and its semi-automatic version, the HK91, are proven, reliable designs. The bad guys are still dropping to its thunder from Afghanistan to El Salvador.

Yet it is plagued with the most abominable trigger to be found on any modern battle rifle. Nowhere has this proved more frustrating than in El Salvador. The Atlacatl Immediate Reaction Battalion has been forced by expediency and cost effectiveness to press the G3 into service as a sniper rifle combined with the excellent Leatherwood MPC/ART scope (see "Atlacatl Assault," SOF, June '84). The specimen I fired at the battalion range exhibited excessive creep and a pull weight of close to 15 pounds.

Military sniping rifles are employed to strike at small, moving, irregularly shaped, poorly defined targets at various distances, usually under less than ideal lighting conditions, in minimum time frames and from unstable shooting positions selected by the requisites of combat and terrain. Less frequently, they are also used to cover the movement of friendly troops. This is not benchrest shooting. It demands the ultimate in performance from the sniper and his equipment.

The trigger mechanism of the G3 rifle is similar in principle to that of the FN FAL. Supposedly engineered to withstand a 25-meter drop test, there is little that can go awry with an HK trigger until inexperienced dabblers stick their fingers inside the mechanism. Attempts to reduce the trigger-return-spring tension usually result in failure to pass even the most moderate drop test. If hammer-spring tension is reduced by coil cutting, lock time is increased substantially and hangfires become inevitable due to this hammer's reduced power upon striking the firing pin. Reducing sear-return-spring tension will increase the possibility of doubling or accidental discharge from jarring or shock. Doubling and accidental discharges can also occur if the hammer and sear contact points are honed, since surface hardening is removed and proper engagement is quickly lost.

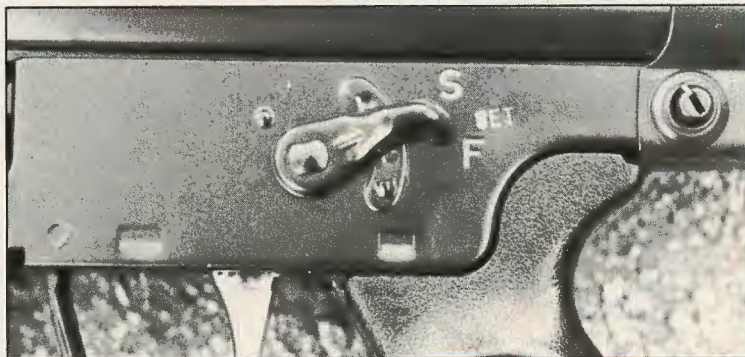
Yet ultimately a sniper's skill level is largely determined by how consistently he can cause hammer/sear disengagement during the limited time the sights are properly aligned with the target. The amount of time and physical effort required to move the trigger and initiate hammer/sear disengagement are paramount. The purpose of trigger gunsmithing should be to eli-



## FULL AUTO

by Peter G. Kokalis

### G3 in the Sniper Role: It Won't Cock Pete's Pistol



**WTS set-trigger system mounted on author's HK91 and soon to be fitted to the G3 sniper rifles of El Salvador's Atlacatl Battalion.**  
Photo: Peter G. Kokalis

minate all unnecessary resistance and trigger movement — thus increasing the probability that hammer/sear engagement will occur while the sights are still properly aligned with the enemy target.

Is this a utilitarian objective with the G3/HK91 rifles? Williams' Trigger Specialties, Inc. (Dept. SOF, RR #1, Box 26, White Heath, IL 61884) now offers a set-trigger system that dramatically corrects this chronic shortcoming of the G3/HK91 (or 93). The trigger is set by moving the selector lever to a detent location halfway between the "S" (safe) and "F" (fire) positions and then pulling the trigger until an audible click is heard from inside the trigger housing. The safety is then moved to the "F" position for firing. The pull weight is reduced from 9-14 pounds to an amazing 2½ pounds! Creep is reduced from .075 inch to only .010 inch. As a consequence there is an almost unbelievable reduction in relative disengagement time and required mechanical energy.

Subsequent shots can be fired either unset (the pull weight in this mode is a clean, crisp six pounds), or the trigger may be once more reset in the manner described. The trigger may be unset at any time by moving the selector lever to the "S" position. The system operates as a two-stage trigger mechanism in the "set" mode. During the first stage, the shooter exerts 1-1½ pounds of pressure over .150 inch of slack. An additional 1-1½ pounds of pressure

are exerted over .010 inch to initiate hammer/sear disengagement in the second stage. Three assemblies were cycled 5,000 times with no apparent wear. Williams' HK set-trigger system will operate reliably for the life of the rifle, if properly maintained. The WTS HK set-trigger job (on customer-provided trigger assemblies) costs \$150 and includes a contoured trigger and trigger stop. WTS also offers a standard-trigger job on the AR 18/180, FN FAL, M1A/BM 59/Garand and Ruger Mini-14 for \$35. The contoured-trigger option costs \$15 extra.

I have installed the WTS set-trigger system on my HK91, which is also equipped with a Zeiss 1.5-6X variable military scope in the HK mount and the HK sniper buttstock, which has an adjustable cheekpiece and internal buffer. I used this combination at a sniper match held during a recent machine-gun shoot of the Arizona Emma Gees. The participants included one of API's premier rifle instructors. Sixteen targets were engaged at unknown distances from 250 to 350 meters. The targets consisted of two sticks of dynamite taped to a small wood post and marked only by red ribbon — altogether no wider than a man's arm. It is a challenging target, to say the least, made all the more difficult by the constantly changing air currents of the lower Sonoran desert. Using match reloads from Arizona Police Equipment, Inc. (Dept. SOF, 1022 Grand Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85007), I detonated five of the targets and walked away in first place.

By the time you read this, WTS set triggers will be wringing maximum potential out of the Atlacatl G3/Leatherwood MPC/ART sniper rigs and waxing Gs in El Salvador. ☒



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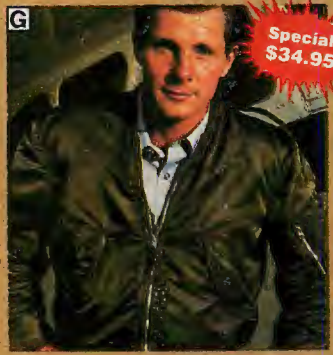
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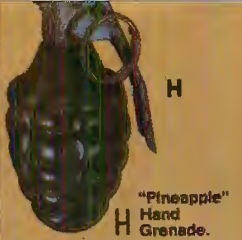


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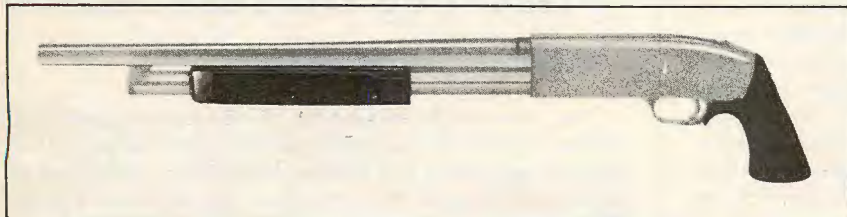
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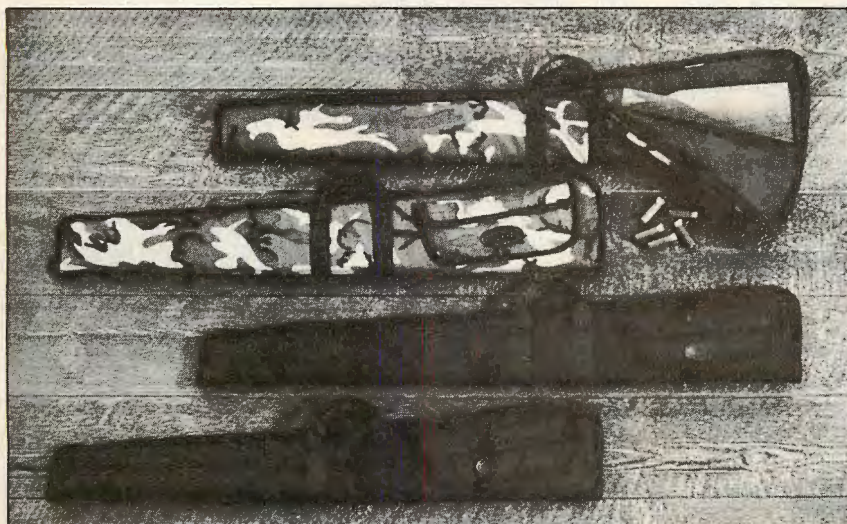


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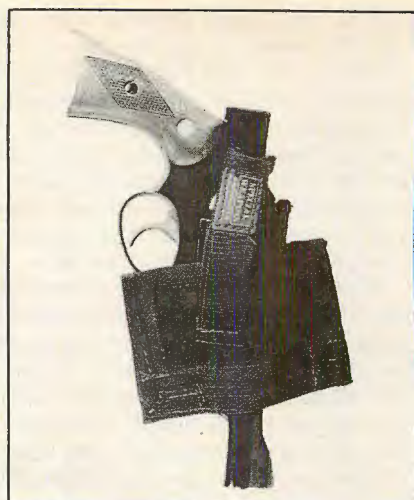
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**T**HE good news about defense spending these days is that mainstream Democrats, Walter Mondale included, agree with President Reagan that it must keep growing. Only the rate of growth is in dispute.

The bad news is that Democrats and liberal Republicans in Congress have already chopped enough out of Mr. Reagan's five-year rearmament program to leave the Defense budget at about what Jimmy Carter proposed spending for the mid-1980s. And no one ever described Mr. Carter as a toady of the Pentagon.

Whether America will be adequately defended through the 1980s and beyond is perhaps the most momentous issue of the current Presidential campaign. And the adequacy of the next four Defense budgets will go a long way toward determining whether the equipment, systems and people will be sufficient for America's continued security. On this issue, among others, the choice is clear. President Reagan wants to spend dramatically more for defense than his Democratic challenger.

Deciding who is right starts with a cold look at the threat. Make no mistake. The massively armed colossus of the Soviet Union, together with its empire and allies, poses the greatest danger to the Western democracies since Hitler.

On land, the Soviets alone deploy 191 divisions, 50,000 tanks, and 24,000 pieces of artillery. The United States: 28 divisions, 11,000 tanks, and 5,000 guns. At sea, the Soviet Navy is now the world's largest numerically: some 288 principal surface combatants and 267 submarines (plus 80 more armed with nuclear ballistic missiles). Against that, the U.S. Navy counts 187 major surface warships and 95 submarines (plus 34 ballistic missile subs).

The Soviet air force and separate air defense and bomber commands together possess about 8,000 fixed-wing combat aircraft, plus 3,450 helicopters and 600 transport planes. If needed, the entire *Aeroflot* fleet of 1,200 airliners and cargo craft is also available. U.S. Air Force strength is 3,700 combat aircraft with another 1,200 planes in Reserve and Air Guard units.

Alarming as these figures are, they do not touch on the most ominous disparities of all — the various measurements by which the Soviet Union leads the United States in strategic nuclear weaponry. Of 41 pertinent categories of nuclear and strategic strength, the Soviets had forged a lead in all but two by the end of the 1970s. The Reagan Defense buildup is only now beginning to restore a measure of balance in some categories.

The anti-Defense lobby in Congress, the media, and the Democratic Party obfuscate the clear meaning of these chilling figures with endless qualifications and rationalizations, putting the best possible face on every disparity. But one central truth cannot be erased: Unless the United States can at least halt, if not reverse, the trends that produced these figures, the nation is heading for a catastrophe.

Imagine a world in which the Soviet Union was indisputably the most powerful nation. One by one, region by region, America's allies would seek their separate peace with the Kremlin. America's options in the world would grow progressively more constrained, as would, in the end, the exercise of effective sovereignty itself. Inconceivable? Perhaps, but then who could have guessed only 20 years ago that America's relative military and economic strength would erode so dramatically in just two decades?

As one might expect, the Soviets lie shamelessly and ludicrously about their arms spending. The CIA estimates that the United States would have to spend a third to half again as much on defense to sustain the force levels and arms production rates the Soviets accomplish each year. If anything, this is a conservative estimate. Militarism and arms building on the Soviet scale are all the more remarkable given an economy less than half as productive as that of the United States. In effect, the Soviet economy has been on a wartime footing for 20 years.



## EDITORIAL

### ELECTION '84

## Dissecting Defense Stands

by Robert J. Caldwell

The same might be said for Soviet society itself. Five million Soviets are on active military duty. Nearly half a million more serve in full-time paramilitary units; half of these in MVD units that constitute the Kremlin's private army for maintaining "internal security." America has three military academies. The Soviet Union has more than 300. Compulsory military training for Soviet children begins in elementary school. DOSAAF, the Soviet organization providing extra paramilitary training — marksmanship, parachuting, flight instruction, survival skills, etc. — to Soviet youngsters claims a membership of 80 million. Soviet military reserves total perhaps 25 million men, of whom about five million have served on active duty within the last five years.

But, of course, Americans hear precious little of all this. Instead, the media provide a numbing diet of careless Pentagon waste plus endless babble about, in a favorite phrase, the "biggest peacetime military buildup in history."

Mr. Reagan's Defense budgets are nothing of the sort. During the mid and late 1950s, America was spending 75 percent of the Federal budget and up to 11 percent of the Gross National Product for defense. Today, the Defense budget consumes 28 percent of the federal total and 6.9 percent of GNP. Adjusted for inflation, Mr. Reagan's supposedly bloated Defense budgets only recently began exceeding what the Kennedy administration allocated for the military in the early 1960s, before the Vietnam buildup.

And the next weak-on-defense politician who suggests that Defense spending is causing the budget deficits should be reminded of this. Since the mid-1960s, domestic spending has ballooned by 400 percent while Defense spending *declined* (that's right, declined) in real terms, as a percent of the federal budget, and as a percent of GNP right through the decade of the '70s.

The Reagan administration, and most especially the President himself, wants Defense spending to grow by seven percent a year. Most Democrats favor Defense growth rates of half that, or less. Jackson-Kennedy-Cranston liberals advocate no growth at all, or even reductions. And Congress has chopped \$70 billion or so from the administration's Defense proposals during the first three years.

Meanwhile, the Soviets go right on, year after year, outproducing the United States in almost every major weapons category. Some examples: tanks 2,100 per year vs. 650; military helicopters, 450 vs. 160; surface-to-air missiles 28,000 vs. 500; intercontinental ballistic missiles, 175 vs. 20; cruise missiles, 800 vs. 250; attack submarines, 6 vs. 4; tactical combat aircraft, 550 vs. 400.

This cannot continue indefinitely without disastrous consequences for the United States. Yes, there is waste in the Pentagon budget. And no, this year's Defense appropriation of \$258 billion is hardly loose change. But the alternative to adequate Defense budgets is a more dangerous, less stable world, and, in the end, possible war, likely defeat, and eventual surrender. For whatever reasons, the nation's Democrats seem not to have thought this through. ✕







# ANOTHER BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI

## The Version You Haven't Heard

by CPT James M. Perry

*This is the third part of CPT Perry's ongoing series of articles on Operation White Star. Part 1 described the Green Berets' arrival in Laos, Part 2 the building of a rifle range there (see "White Star Warriors" and "Fire in the Hole!"), SOF, April, May '84).*

*This month, Perry declares that "getting the heavy guns across at Khone was duck soup. All we had to do was steal a Bailey Bridge from a Lao engineer captain intent on keeping it!"*

**"T**HAT river," Lao Engineer Capt. Prahasit had told me, "will bring your project to a halt. The monsoons are here."

He was referring to my efforts to build a 1,500-meter firing range for the heavy guns at Khone. The Americans, or so it seemed to him, were always building something. A place just to fire big guns seemed a waste of time, especially when it sometimes involved only a few practice 37mm rounds from the district's only M8 armored car.

"The shells could explode on the other side of the frontier," I tried to explain. "The Cambodians might not appreciate that."

He smiled, curling his lip rather arrogantly, I thought.

"*Ca ne fait rein*," he shrugged. "So it kills a few Khmer Rouge. The world is better off without them."

"We could have a war going on both

sides of the river," I said.

"*Les Rouges!*" he snapped derisively, training his binoculars on the other side of the huge falls that marked the spot where the Mekong tumbled into Cambodian territory. "There has been tension here for centuries. They cross the river when it is dry and raid the villages on this side. Why build them a bridge to continue their dirty work during the monsoons?"

I hadn't thought of that. The river provided a natural ecological barrier between forces here, the Lao frontier guards on one side and the Khmers on the other.

But headquarters at Pakse had chosen Khone as the best spot for the long range. My success with the little rifle range at *Kilometre Cinq* made me the prime candidate to build the new range at Khone, this one at Kilometer Fifty, 45 clicks farther down the road. Naturally the French Foreign Legion headquarters at Savannakhet was opposed, their objections multiple:

The Lao are not ready for big-bore firing. They can't even level the bubble on a mortar, much less drop the round down the tube. They are like little children, and you're providing them with some big firecrackers. Someone is going to get hurt.

There was some reason behind the French objections. The individual Lao soldier was very inept. On the other hand, the French hadn't done much to make him better, even though they'd been allowed to remain in Laos to train the 25,000-man Royal Lao Army how to defend itself. Their inability to

do that, they complained, was based largely on the fact that the Lao must first be issued operable weapons and taught how to use them.

That's when Uncle Sam brought in the second team, those of us from the 77th Special Forces Group at Ft. Bragg. We came all at once, 107 of us, and we swarmed over the countryside, A-Teams splitting to six men, then splitting again as the work doubled. My French counterpart, a captain whose smile was an insolent smirk, had been in Laos since 1954.

"You're pissing in the stream to fill it up," he told me. "*Jamais*," he added, as if he already knew we'd fail, "never will you make the Lao into a soldier."

Still, we'd been at it well over five months, and the Lao Army was starting to take shape. They were actively patrolling against a known enemy, the Pathets, and they'd had a skirmish or two in my district, the fourth, which had finally left enough dead bodies on the battlefield to count. Big-bore weapons were going to tip the balance of the war in favor of the Kingdom.

I was much better off in the Fourth District than were other A-Teams around the country. I had Prince Boun Gum for a commander. He wasn't a brilliant leader or even a superior military officer, but he was a reasonable man. He understood the need to vault Lao philosophy quickly into the 20th century if they were going to win.

It was because of the prince that the engineer officer had to give up his Bailey





Bridge, a 120-foot span that would allow us to jump the River Kwai.

I never knew where the Kwai originated, or even if it was the same river made famous by the movie. The Lao called it that, even though my maps showed it as a blue trickling finger that fed the Se Kong. The Se Kong tumbled into the Mekong, and those waters disappeared over the falls at Khone. During the dry season, the Kwai was hardly more than a trickle. But the winter monsoons would change that. We built 20-foot abutments on each side to accommodate our bridge.

Our bridge — what a laugh! It still languished in front of the engineer's house down the road, jumping the same little stream bed and providing him with dry access for his jeep, even in the hardest monsoon period. If I had asked him directly for the bridge, the matter would have died right there. I decided to have the prince ask him.

"Capt. Prahosit tells me that without the

bridge, he'll be unable to reach his house," the prince said to me later.

"But the bridge is royal property," I said, putting the right emphasis on the word "royal."

"That may be," soothed the prince, "but Prahosit is an engineer, and all engineer property is under his control. Perhaps there is an alternative."

I'd already been studying the alternatives. A timber trestle was one of them. It would take more than 200 stout trees to make even a rudimentary trestle, all of them in the coniferous forests high above on the plateau.

"How will you get them down?" the prince asked.

"Perhaps your Highness' elephants?" I suggested. He thought about that for a moment.

"Who will pay for the service?"

"I didn't think we'd have to pay for a service to the Crown," I replied, deliberate-

ly lying. Of course we'd have to pay. Boun Gum wasn't about to provide the king with free elephants! He clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, a speech habit of his when he disapproved of anything.

"Do you know the cost of maintaining a forest elephant?" he asked. "And their knees," he continued, "working logs is hard on their knees. Who will pay for that?"

"There is no other way we can do it, sir," I shrugged. But I was thinking, "Damn his elephants' knees!" If we were going to get the timber down, Boun Gum would have to lend us his entire working herd. That was that.

"Let me talk to Prahosit again," the prince said softly. That ended any more thought of building a timber trestle.

I went down to the captain's house a few days later. An engineer company was already at work dismantling the Bailey. Pra-

*Continued on page 92*



**SOF VIETNAM**

# DODGE CITY SHOOTOUT

## Pipestone Canyon Keeps the Pointy End Aimed at NVA

by Paul Blose

Photos Courtesy of Department of Defense

*Last month Paul Blose described the beginning of Operation Pipestone Canyon in I Corps at the end of May 1969. This Marine's day in hell began when his battalion was ordered to cross a river and sweep through a forest devastated by allied artillery and bombs. Their march across the sulfur-stinking scorched earth was uneventful, but at an open field they were pinned down by enemy fire, taking cover behind a pagoda and a dike. American planes and choppers took out the NVA, and the men again marched through napalm-blasted woods to a Vietnamese cemetery where Blose's unit killed two NVA ambushers.*

**T**HE day was getting on. Soon the light would be gone. We swept past the grave mounds for about 500 meters. There we were told to dig in. The hard dirt lay about 100 feet in front of the next tree-line. We broke into fire teams so we could stand 50-percent watch. With the last trickling of daylight our resupply chopper came in with more C-rations, ammo and mail.

I sat wringing wet from the heat of the sun, physically and emotionally drained from all the close calls I'd had in the last few days. There was plenty of enemy activity around. Smack-dab in front of us, high on a

**Putting on the pressure: Marines engage NVA in a brief fire fight.**







**A walk in the sun: Heavily laden leathernecks comb dense grass fields for signs of the enemy.**

jutting oversized ledge on the side of a mountain, was the ROK Marine compound, complete with ammo dump, refueling facilities and everything else that goes along with it. It looked strange sitting out there in the middle of Indian Country. It's a miracle that it stayed intact as long as it did.

Orders were coming down. "Fifty-percent watch. We're going to get hit. Fifty-percent watch — the shit's going to hit tonight."

We were ready. Jonesie, O'Rock, Reynolds and I had our LAWs handy. We'd laid our claymores, positioned our frags and reloaded all our empty magazines with fresh ammo. We had several white pop-up and two or three red, just in case. We were so tired that we were all wide awake.

I had just received a letter from my cousin, Steve Gasperini, who was on a Mediterranean cruise. He wrote that he wanted to kill gooks. He had tried to get a transfer to 'Nam, but so far, no luck. The next day, I wrote and told him to stay in that Italian port. Right about then I wished I were there, too. Anywhere would do as long as it wasn't where I was.

Dim gray turned to deep black. God, what a black night! It took all my night vision to make out the faint tree-line in front of me. The ROK compound was swallowed up in the darkness. Within 10 minutes, 50-percent watch turned to 75-percent; within 30 minutes it turned to 100 percent. After the brutal day we were all in for a hell of a night.

At 0130, Taps was blown for the ROK compound. Suddenly the pitch blackness turned to bright daylight. Gooks were tossing satchel charges from the top of the mountain into the compound. They had completely wiped out the outpost on top and were blowing everything they could to hell. Their ground support was lobbing in mortar rounds.

To our front, all across the tree-line, there was movement. We called for an illum round to put a little light on the subject. Even before the round lit, simultaneous fire broke out from all positions. Claymores and frags went off everywhere.

Reynolds lobbed a grenade to our front. All of us were shooting semi-auto, covering an arc-shaped tactical area of responsibility (TAOR). As the illum popped, we couldn't see anything — but we heard a lot of movement. No return fire.

The tanks rolled up, firing flechette rounds into the trees. *Boom, boom!* It was thunderous. One tank came up behind our gun team. Little Red and Big Red were shooting up a storm. They didn't hear the engines until it was too late.

*Boom!* The tank fired a flechette round. The gun team was within the arc of the discharged spray. It ripped Big Red to pieces. He fell on top of Little Red and protected him. It was a sad day for 1st Platoon: Our two flaming-red haired comedians would never laugh again. Big Red was dead, and Little Red was in shock.

I don't know how long the firing continued. It seemed as though we had just started shooting and then stopped. But in between the opening and closing of fire, everyone had spent all their rounds, and the

sun was coming up. It was like a time lapse, not just for me but for everyone I talked to the next morning. As the sun rose, the Medevac chopper came in to take Big Red back to the rear along with two dead gooks. Blood trails led into the bush along the line and in front of our position.

About an hour after sunrise, after we'd policed the area of brass and empty C-rats, the order to saddle up was given. Usually it's cooler in the morning, but not this day. I was dripping already. We formed up across in line and started out. The resupply chopper the day before had brought little water, and most of us were dry. We walked for hours without let-up.

Finally, we came across an old well that was covered with debris. The stench of sulfur was putrid, but what the hell, it was wet and it was all we had to work with. To be on the safe side, I put in five instead of the usual three halazone tablets. Whenever we found a well or a large crater with water, it had that sulfur flavor — I can still taste it.

At day's end, we'd had no enemy contact. We'd blown numerous bunkers and hit quite a few booby traps, mostly frags. What a letdown! We were angry that we hadn't made contact. We were angry because of the heat. We were angry because of the water. We were angry because we were tired and couldn't rest.

Across a large tree-line we dug ourselves in, right-angling the guns at either end to cover the flanks, and placing one gun to the rear. It was our first restful night: no incoming mortars, snipers or harassment by the NVA.

We didn't know it yet, but that would all end with the rising sun. Soon I'd meet my









**LEFT:** Always alert: Cold and wet Marines maintain patrol security while taking a break during a battalion-sized sweep.

**ABOVE:** The crackle of automatic weapons sends this Marine to cover as bullets rake the foliage overhead.

**BELOW:** A stream bed offers a convenient trail through the jungle as Marines seek out the enemy.

enemy face to face.

That morning, our radioman left for his R&R, and I found myself with an additional burden. Rivers of sweat saturated our cammies. The full load of a grunt battalion on the move weighed us down. The hot, blistering June sun beat down in a merciless inferno of unprecedented heat.

It was 1000 hours when we first spotted the enemy patrol. We were on line resweeping the territory between the second and third rivers of Dodge City. As we moved out from a tree-line, our point had spotted two crouching NVA moving rapidly to escape detection. He fired several shots but failed to hit them. Lt. Brooks came to the front to find out what was going on and immediately ordered a hot pursuit.

The terrain was rough: a mixture of paddies, low hills, elephant grass, triple canopy, and desolate, shell-riddled, open ground. We pursued the enemy at a fast run for a klick and a half. Suddenly, from all directions of the tree-line to our direct front, automatic fire spat at us.

We charged, M16s blazing. We were about a quarter mile from the tree-line when they started lobbing 82mm mortars on us. Lt. Brooks gave the word over the hook to keep moving and try to outrun the mortars. The first rounds landed far to our rear. Then they started walking in on us. They finally caught up with us when I was about 150 feet from the tree-line. I heard a terrible explosion right behind me, and the screams of the guys who caught it. I kept running.

More rounds landed close, bringing more screams: "Corpsman up!"

I felt a jar on my back as if someone were pushing me hard in one spot. It didn't hurt; I







**Tunnel rat: Volunteer with .45 emerges from enemy tunnel-complex after checking it out.**

kept going. Shrapnel had hit my flak jacket, but I was unhurt. In a flash I saw, directly in front of me, an NVA pop out of a spider hole and take aim at me while another in the bushes kicked the dirt up before me with his AK on full-auto. It doesn't take long to travel 150 feet to a tree-line, but it seemed like an eternity.

Before the spider-hole NVA could crank off his first well-aimed shot, I took advantage of a very shallow shell hole, about eight or nine inches deep and filled with dust. The bullets started cracking past me. I cranked off a few futile rounds — because of my fear and the dirt being kicked into my eyes, I really couldn't see too well.

I picked up the hook and gave a situation report to First Platoon Actual. The gooks picked me as their target because I was closest and their most immediate threat. By the time I'd finished my report, I was drawing fire from three or four NVA Regulars.

The rest of the guys in my squad saw what was happening. Third Squad swung around to the left. Ollie and another fellow came up behind the spider-hole NVA and blew him to shit. Then they swung their rifles up and blew the guy in front of me away — I couldn't see him, but they could. Whoever else had been firing at me stopped. I got up, and we charged the tree-line.

During this entire time, mortar rounds were still coming in on us. When we broke through the tree-line, we came to a dead end: a cliff edge that dropped down into the river. About 25 feet across the water we saw the adjoining cliff with the mortar team on it. We blew them away, and the mortars stopped.

Meanwhile, Eddie Padia and Zeke had located another mortar emplacement which was covered by an automatic weapon to our right. Screaming and hollering, Padia and Zeke charged up with short bursts of full-auto, blowing them to hell. They saved the day for the right flank.

Reports came in that an NVA battalion had been spotted to our rear. We were ordered to about-face and countersweep. The ROK Marines had already set a blocking force, and we were to push the enemy

into the trap. With every step we took, we could see how many of our buddies weren't with us anymore. Our pace quickened.

We traveled without any further contact. Booby traps were the order of the day. There were more heat casualties, more frag casualties. In our walk in the sun, we came across more crispy critters, more fly-infested corpses. I remember one in particular. He was lying on his side on a slight incline, one leg ripped off, eyes still staring and chest ripped open by a burst. Rigor mortis had set in. He still had his arm up in the air, clutching a Chicom grenade.

Night came, and we dug in. We heard rumors that a black guy had turned sides and was leading VC and NVA Regulars into our positions. We were on 75-percent alert for the rest of the operation. Farther down the line in another company, the NVA were probing for weak spots. For a short time, we heard sporadic firing and grenades going off.

Then the mortars started coming in. I hated the incoming. After a while you could judge where they were going to hit. First there was the thump of the mortar leaving the tube, then the sound when it made the arc and started the descent, and last, the whistling whine as it was coming down. The louder the whine, the closer the round. I can still feel some of the really close ones in my mind. I hated the sound of shrapnel flying all over after the hit. It never got any easier; it was always terrifying.

We stayed alert and ready throughout the attack. By now we knew that when we dug in, the hole had better be deep. Although sometimes the terrain was so impossible that we'd be lucky to smash through the ground and dig a hole two or three feet deep, tonight it had been good, soft gravel: easy digging for tired Marines. For us there was no contact, just sporadic incoming. The night passed, and the new day brought more heat. We saddled up early and started the sweep. The terrain turned to giant elephant grass, and we started taking sniper rounds.

We were running into light contact and booby-trapped elephant grass. The best way to get through tall grass, especially if it's all

you can see for miles around, is to call the tanks up. They'd go ahead, taking care of the traps, and we'd follow, taking care of the contact. On the enemy's part it was all hit-and-run tactics.

We moved into the woods. About a klick farther up, the main river separated Dodge City from Go Noi Island. We swept up to the river, then pulled back to high ground to dig in for the night. After we'd dug holes and reinforced the positions, we sat down to our C-4 C-Rat stove for chow. Resupply choppers came in with water that tasted like saccharin and cans of flat, dehydrated hamburgers. We soaked them with water, and they popped up like sponges. They tasted good, a welcome change from C-Rats.

A few hours later, around 2300 hours, one of our gun teams to the right of our position opened up, leading to a chain reaction all around us: Everyone began firing. Mortars were hitting the trees to our front. Out along the beachhead, all the MGs were firing, and the 16s were popping like crazy. Everyone threw grenades; guys were even blasting their claymores and firing their LAWs.

I couldn't be sure if it was enemy movement to our front or our own fire making everything move, but I went along with the program. I emptied one magazine after another, threw one grenade after another. When the grenades were out, Zeke, my squad leader, told me to go to supply for another case. On my way back, I bumped into our platoon sergeant. He was sitting on the hillside, cupping a cigarette and watching the fireworks, 100 times better than any Fourth of July show I'd ever seen. I took a drag and went on. We went through the other case of grenades, and soon were running low on ammo, too. But peace and quiet finally came at 0300 hours. The saddle-up orders came down at 0430.

All of our ammo and explosives from the beginning of the op had been used up. Resupply choppers landed, and everyone was issued fresh ammunition. We swept the area and came up with two or three dead gooks and some blood trailss. Everything was quiet.

Breaking out of the trees, we came to high ground leading to the edge of the water. We were ordered to take a trail there. When the point man hit the first booby trap, it must have been a signal for them to open up. He tripped the frag, and the preregistered mortar started dropping in on us. Doc Freedman made it to him and went to work fast. We hit the deck.

There was nowhere to go: no holes to dive in, no trees to hide behind. We were in open ground with shrapnel flying all around. It lasted 10 or 15 minutes. Then our party blasted the position and silenced it. The point man was sent on his way home; two or three others had minor injuries.

The night was quiet. In the morning the





**Suppressing fire: M60 gunner hammers NVA in a tree-line.**

sky was full of choppers, fitting 14 or 15 men to a bird. They took us up and over the river, where we started taking rounds. In no time, we hit ground and scrambled out into a multitude of 360-degree positions.

When everyone was on the ground, we linked up and proceeded with the sweep. We were taking fire from our front, but our fire superiority silenced it quickly. We finished taking the beach and swept up to the first brush-line of dry shrubbery and skinny trees. There we waited 10 or 15 minutes for the order to move out.

Finally, LT Brooks gave the high sign. "Head 'em up, move 'em out."

We covered the terrain very slowly. Everyone was apprehensive, almost trigger happy. LT Brooks kept reminding us to keep our weapons on safety unless we had a target. A half hour later, one of the guys from 3rd Squad tripped over some bushes. His weapon was on full-auto, and it let loose half his magazines, ripping Little Red's legs to shreds at the thighs. He lived, but that was the last I saw of my friend.

LT Brooks came down heavy on the guy. We continued. Go Noi Island was supposed to be an NVA R&R center. It was an engineer's nightmare: a massive island with maze upon maze of underground tunnels and bunkers. Daisy chains, booby traps, punji pits — you name it, it had it. We kept hearing, "Get down; fire in the hole."

The days and nights passed without end. Each day was the same: hot, blistering sun, long walks through tough terrain, heat casualties, medevacs for booby-trap victims — and snipers and mortar harassment-fire. Back at battalion they were always talking about Korea and World War II and being at the sharp end of things. Now I understood what being at the sharp end meant.

The temperature and water were affecting us. Many broke out with boils, and almost everyone had a bad case of the shits. Guys were mooning whenever we took a break in order to relieve their sore, red asses. Keep-

ing track of the date was a lost cause. After the first few days most of us didn't bother. We knew mission start; now we were interested only in mission finish. We knew it was going to be a long one: When it was over, then it would be over — not before.

I remember one day, though. It started in tall grass. For a few hours, not much happened. When we cleared the grass, we were in triple-canopy jungle. Fire teams were sent out to the front and flanks. A half hour hadn't gone by when there was an explosion on our right flank. We yelled for the corpsman to come up.

For a good hour, we were at a standstill. We did our best to clear a safe LZ. The chopper came in and took one wounded and three dead back. The guy who'd zapped Little Red in the legs was one of the dead. New orders came down. We were to walk single file until further notice.

Our platoon took the left in our area of operations (AOR); 2nd Platoon took the center and 3rd Platoon the right. The weapons and CP took rear and right center. We'd been on the go for about two hours when the world ended: In midstep, a mighty roar and concussion swept us off our feet and threw us down. I remember lying there, feeling all of this wet stuff flying onto me. I looked up and to my horror saw a foot, a hand, a finger, part of a torso. I looked at my arms. They were full of blood and goo. I didn't feel hit, just stunned, with the wind knocked out of me. It took a while to catch my breath.

When I checked myself out, I found that I was all right. I rose to one knee for a better look around. Smoke was still rising from the tree-line to our right. First Platoon was okay. The bits of body, blood and messy guts all came from 2nd Platoon. They'd either hit a daisy chain, or the explosion was command-detonated.

Now I could hear the cries and screams of the survivors. Corpsmen came from everywhere, very slowly probing their way through the bloody mess. We blew an LZ large enough to accommodate two or three

*Continued on page 76*

## STAND EASY AND LISTEN UP



The American political system goes into action 6 November. All supporting arms will be required. Lock and load. Here is your five-paragraph field order:

**SITUATION:** This year members of our Congress and the President will be called on to make momentous decisions on such issues as

- CONTAINING COMMUNISM
- OUR RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS
- AID TO CENTRAL AMERICA
- A STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE

The politicians will vote their own minds unless we press the attack on these and other vital issues. We must call the shots and employ our most effective weapon — **THE VOTE.**

**MISSION:** All concerned citizens will aggressively seek out the position of their representatives on the issues, engage at the polls and **LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD.**

**EXECUTION:** On or before E-DAY, all citizens will register to vote in the national elections, proceed to the polling place and **FIRE FOR EFFECT** by casting a ballot for the person who will **REPRESENT YOUR INTERESTS** in the future of our country and the free world. Voting units will not allow themselves to be ambushed by laziness or lack of concern for the outcome of this vital action. Press the attack with vigor. **DO NOT TAKE ANY PRISONERS AND DO NOT BECOME ONE.**

**ADMINISTRATION:** All periodicals and public media will be closely examined to determine the position of the representatives and your candidate for Commander-in-Chief. Follow the necessary admin procedures to register and vote on 6 November.

**COMMAND AND CONTROL:** It's up to you. **YOU CAN CONTROL WHO WILL COMMAND** America and her interests in the future. **VOTE.**

**THAT'S IT.  
SADDLE UP AND MOVE OUT.**



# LEAN, MEAN CUISINE IN 'NAM

## Some of the Food Was Bad But Some of It Wasn't Food

by Curt Rich

**P**ENTAGON pundits have estimated that 91 percent of the meals served in Vietnam were hot. (See "Feeding the Fighting Man," SOF, June '84). After I was picked up off the floor and slapped out of my hysterics at that statement, I started thinking about how few of those hot meals I got in 'Nam. That statement definitely did *not* apply to advisers. I'm not disputing it, mind you — REMFs and a lot of Army and Navy troops were well-fed. Military advisers have a different story.

Now you'll recall that advisers were those sterling individuals who, through the luck of the Department of the Army draw, didn't get sent to their favorite elite U.S. unit, one whose neaty-keen shoulder patch had a history dating from the Trojan Wars, where they could fight in the company of other Americans. Instead, they were sent to Military Assistance Command Vietnam, which automatically destroyed their military careers: no lifeguard jobs at the MACV Officers' Club swimming pool, but a further application of the shaft. Advisers were sent to Boonieville and told to live with a bunch of little people with bad breath, poor dental habits and funny accents, called ARVN. Some analysts said the ARVNs (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) were possibly the worst army in history, the Keystone Cops of armies. And we taught them everything they knew.

When I got to my first unit, as a very green silver bar (1LT), I learned to my chagrin that the SA (Senior Adviser), a major, had decreed that his troops would eat Vietnamese food with their counterparts.

Thrill. Mom, I don't mind dying for my country, but I really didn't want to die of food poisoning.

The first meal introduced me to Vietnamese rice. Actually it was Houston rice, from the Blue Ribbon Rice Company, since the war had turned Vietnam into a rice importer rather than exporter. No sweat, GI, I thought. I've eaten rice since I was a child growing up in the rice belt of Texas. I like rice with butter, Spanish rice, rice pilaf, rice and gravy, even rice pudding.

Wrong, *nuoc mam* breath. Vietnamese cooked their rice with water, usually nothing else. It was gummy and as appetizing as library paste. I would learn to hate rice. I didn't just hate rice, I *despised, loathed and abhorred* it.

For years, all I needed was rice on the table, and I'd have a flashback and waste everyone in the room wearing black pajamas.

At first they gave me a tin spoon instead of chopsticks. After a while, though, I was expected to be able to use chopsticks. Today I have a black belt in chopsticks, but it was a near thing whether I'd starve before I learned to use the damned things. If you can pick up gummy rice with chopsticks and get enough to your mouth to prevent starvation, you have accomplished something. By comparison, an El Presidente in four seconds with all "A" hits with a .45 is child's play.

Also, one ate Vietnamese food while squatting. Let me tell you, physical-fitness freaks, that if you think you're in good shape, try squatting through your next meal.

For an occidental there is no such thing as a comfortable squatting position. You have to be trained from birth by a mama-san for it to be comfortable. Otherwise your calves turn to strawberry jelly, and the pain of a 12-mile run pales by comparison after two minutes, 36 seconds.

For a Vietnamese, squatting is Prime Position No. 1. They eat, talk, work, wait, and defecate from the squat. From what I've been told by my luckier (or less faithful) buddies, the women occasionally make love in this position. Sadly, I'll have to take their word for it. (Considering the stories of invaginated razor blades and Saigon Suzie the Slasher, etc., maybe not so sadly.)

Back to rice. With it was often a vegetable, totally unrecognizable, but tasting like grass. I don't mean marijuana; I mean the stuff you have to mow. Every Texas boy learns what grass tastes like from standing in a field chewing on a grass stalk.

Then there was the mystery meat, usually stolen chicken, grenade-harvested fish or claymore victim. We got more game than VC with our claymores. For my first meal with the ARVNs, as the new guy I was "honored" with the delicacy, the chicken head. The claws were also a delicacy, I was told.

B.S. ARVNs didn't like chicken heads any more than you would. They gave them to some poor, dumb *Có Van* so they could watch him barf his dinner, which I did.

Their method of cooking the chicken was unique. They would pull off most of the feathers and behead the poor, dumb bird, pouring the blood into a pan, since it was another "delicacy." Then they'd chop up the rest with a dull cleaver in no particular pattern, throw it in a pan with some *nuoc mam* (rancid fish-oil sauce), and fry it till it was half done. So your bowl had a few pieces with bloody, sectioned bone in the middle. Doesn't being an adviser sound glamorous?

*Nuoc mam* deserves a few words, all of them bad. Once AFVN radio came up with a definition of "Numbah ten." A *nuoc mam* meal was numbah ten. Once upon a time I watched them make *nuoc mam*. They had a board which they mounted on a slant. On the bottom was a groove. They sliced up a fish on the board, put a bottle by the groove, and put everything out in the sun near the *Có Vans'* tent, where the heat would force an oily "sweat" from the fish. Oils oozed down to the groove, then into the bottle — at least until we made them move the board across the compound from us. I only had to call in a heavy fire team and threaten to level the fire base to get them to move it. I guess they didn't like the smell, either; they certainly didn't want to move it to *their* part of the compound.

I learned quite quickly to live off the ration Supplement Packs, big cardboard boxes of cigarettes (which could be traded for anything — an acquaintance saved them up and got a stolen jeep), pipe tobacco (cheap, smelly), cigars (which I smoked only when in an armor or mech infantry





role, not on leg infantry or recon work, as they were *bad-smelling cheap* cigars, and Charlie could smell them all the way from Thailand), shoelaces (the single most useful item in 'Nam with the possible exception of the PRC-25 radio), and candy (Hershey's tropical chocolate [melted], M&Ms, which melted in your pocket, not in your mouth, candy bars, etc.). They also had shaving and toothbrushing gear — everything except women and booze. I lived primarily on candy for my Southeast Asian vacation.

When we moved into the field we got ARVN rations — a bag of rice from Houston, a can of tuna or pork, and a can of apricots. After a good hump in the 100-degree temperature and 100-percent humidity, you'd pour the apricot juice over your head, slurp down the apricots, and gag down the rest. If you were hungry enough that it tasted good, you were ready for intensive care.

The ARVNs put hot sauce on everything to kill the taste of rancid meat. I'm a Texan, so I know hot food — Tex-Mex chili (paint remover with meat) and nachos with jalapeños (flame thrower on a shingle). But these guys went berserk with hot sauce. Once we stopped in a village, where my interpreter said a local shop sold French sandwiches, and he would get me one. "Great! French bread, veggies, meat! I'm in heaven!"

Yes, but after the proprietor had poured in enough hot sauce to melt the polar ice cap, I lost my enthusiasm. I felt as though I were biting into a grenade with the pin already pulled.

Then came "field-expedient" rations. We were ambushed and had a fire fight one day while I was with 1/1 ARVN Armored Cav, and I called in enough napalm to up Du

Pont stock 15 points. The site of the ambush was a hill overlooking a road. After the fire fight the hill looked as though the devil had been through, kicking ass and taking names. Everything was black and a burning APC surrounded by unexploded 40mm grenades was the centerpiece.

We decided to form an NDP (night defensive position) there. Crispy critters lay around in the classic, unforgettable pose guaranteed to fill your nightmares: arms bent beckoningly, fingers in twisted claws, and unbelievable smiles on the charred faces.

Fantastic place for dinner, right?

In the middle of all that horror had been a cat, presumably wild. Vietnamese kept cats not as pets, but as potential meals, just as they did dogs. (Once I had a dog as a Vietnamese detector, but that's another story.) The poor thing looked as if it had been running when napalm caught it in mid-stride. It was now blackened and charred. I saw it and was sickened, thinking of my cat at home. I felt sorrier for the poor, innocent cat than I did for the men who got what they deserved. I seldom felt sorry for dead VC.

The ARVNs leapt upon it like a gold nugget. They beheaded it, scraped off the char, chopped it up and fried it. No, they did not gut it. They ate that part, too. They did all this right beside my APC. I ate M&Ms and plain rice for three days in order to avoid having some of that cat slipped into my rations.

Apparently the SF ate very well. The A-Team at Bunard had a concrete-palace fortress with a surplus of supply helicopters. We were near them supplying road security for the Dong-Xoa/Bunard/Song Be road for a while, so we went to visit. They had tons of beer and steaks galore, fresh from

Saigon. They didn't give them away, though. They sold them at two times the PX and commissary prices. We ate well until our money ran out. It beat the hell out of mystery meat and rice. No one ever said the SF didn't know how to make the most of war.

Ramen soup, commonly called Chinese soup, was the savior of many an adviser, including me. It was the only thing we could buy on the local "economy" that was edible to an occidental. Well, there were the 13-day-old fertile duck eggs. They were OK except that the little ducks had feathers by then, and they tickled. Occasionally you would open your eyes and see what you were eating. That could ruin your whole day.

As you can imagine, an adviser's diet would leave you either constipated from the rice, stricken with diarrhea from the veggies, or infested with worms from the mystery meat. Eventually I got hemorrhoids. The doc wanted to send me to Japan. I liked him; he sent hangnails to Saigon and anything worse to Japan. But I had to pass. Could I tell my grandchildren I was medevacked to Japan because Vietnam gave me a pain in the ass?

So when I got my own team, I said we would eat U.S. rations. I would scrounge them myself, something I never had any trouble doing while in normal operations.

However, when we were in Cambodia, I couldn't get to the rear to scrounge. We carried three days' rations because, logically enough, we were resupplied every three days. When you were humping through the woods at near flank, three C-rations a day weren't enough, just as when you were in the rear, two were too many. So we carried nine C-rats in our packs in addition to all the other stuff one carries in a humping role.

In our jobs, carrying extra radio batteries was more important than extra ammunition. Four advisers carried two PRC-25s and four batteries. This doesn't count ammo, frags, smoke grenades, two gallons of water, first-aid kit, compass, strobe light, AF survival knife, switchblade parachute knife, Swiss Army knife, spare socks, Kool-aid packs to make water dipped from bomb craters palatable after filling it full of iodine, CAR-15 or M16, .45, paperback porno novels, writing materials, strands of your wife/girlfriend's pubic hair, and whatever else you were in-ane enough to carry into the bush.

My radio calls for rations were met with less and less cooperation. Then a resupply chopper came with no rations at all. For three days the *Co Vans* ate ARVN leftovers. ARVN leftovers were as rare as chicken molars. After three days I was pissed enough to tell the CO either food came on the resupply chopper, or we got on it and came back.

What could he do, send me to Vietnam?

C-rats for three or four days came, along with a bill. The CO had bought them from a commissary. I was livid. Buying C-rats in

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### SOF ZEROES IN ON A LEGEND

# WHEN THEY CARED ENOUGH TO SEND THE VERY BEST...

## Chargin' Charlie Got the Call

by Tony Bliss, Jr.

COL Charles Alvin Beckwith glanced up at the stars. There was a slight haze, but not enough to block vision. The late April night was cool — about 55 degrees. Ninety men of Beckwith's crack Delta Force were hunkered down at Desert One, about 330 miles southeast of Teheran where 53 American hostages were entering their 174th day of captivity.

The C-130 Hercules transports that landed the small rescue force stood by on the hard-packed desert, loaded with gasoline, supplies and bladders of aviation fuel, their idling engines drowning out all but the closest voice communication.

For most of the flight to Desert One, Beckwith stood just behind the cockpit in the lead C-130. There was no room to sit. Men were bunched on mattresses, and equipment dangled from the ceiling. The transport was jam-packed to its maximum gross load. Now his force worked feverishly, manhandling their rucksacks and equipment about 800 meters along an unimproved dirt road to the helicopter outload site.

Nearby, 44 Iranian civilians from a Mercedes bus, who had been halted by a road surveillance team, were guarded by five men. To the north, a smuggler's gasoline truck burned fiercely, fired up by two of Beckwith's force. The possibility of unwelcome intrusions like these had been foreseen; they were dealt with swiftly and smoothly.

But Charlie Beckwith was starting to get nervous. His troops had been on the ground

for 45 minutes, and still there was no sign of the eight CH-53D Sea Stallion helicopters that would lift the force to a staging area closer to Tehran. Already the choppers were 30 minutes overdue. While en route to the site on the lead C-130, Beckwith got word that two of the giant helicopters were down, yet he knew from rehearsals that choppers could often land, make repairs and push on. But even if two had turned back, where were the remaining six? Beckwith was thinking ahead to the "drop-dead time," the point at which the mission would have to be scrubbed for lack of time.

Ten more minutes passed. Suddenly the first Sea Stallion roared in out of the south. Within 10 minutes, chopper number two settled in, followed quickly by three and four. Finally, one hour and 40 minutes late, the last two straggled in. Six helicopters had arrived at Desert One.

It would be five more days before Beckwith learned the full extent of the pilots' and crews' exhausting ordeal as the choppers pushed through suspended dust so thick that vertigo became common and the special night-vision goggles worn by the pilots were useless.

Beckwith's concern was the mission. Time had to be made up, and he was worried. As he later told reporters, "Beckwith gets paranoid because he likes darkness." And the desert with no camouflage was not the place to be caught at first light.

After a few colorful words to the helicopter commander, he ordered the loaders to get cracking and began walking the line of

choppers from north to south, making sure no personnel or equipment were left behind.

When he got to the third one, the pilot climbed down and reported his chopper un-flyable.

Quickly, Beckwith called over the Desert One commander, Air Force Colonel James Kyle, who clambered into the cockpit and confirmed that they were now down to five flyable helicopters.

Six good choppers was the cut-off point. Continuing with only five meant leaving at least 15 men with equipment behind. Each man was responsible for several jobs, and, without those 15, the lives of the hostages and the rescue force would be endangered beyond an acceptable point.

The shock hit Beckwith hard. The long months of training and planning for one of the most daring and complicated rescue missions ever attempted were lost.

"My god, I am going to fail," thought Beckwith as he recommended aborting the mission to Colonel Kyle. After a short discussion Kyle asked him, "Would you consider taking five and going ahead? Think about it before you answer; you're the guy who's got to shoulder this, Charlie."

But it had all been thought out long before, and seconds later, Beckwith responded: "Jim, there's just no way."

With the watch ticking, the chopper refueling continued and Beckwith's men hustled their loads back to the C-130s. Beckwith or another Delta officer entered every chopper to make sure all their gear was out. His men moved up and down the road,





An exhausted Beckwith contemplates the carnage during a lull in fighting at Plei Me. Photo: UPI

checking that no signatures were left. The Iranians, Beckwith perceived, would be out there the next day. "They were going to muck around the area and see what's happening," he said later, "so I didn't want to leave nothing . . . I got all my stuff out of there, yessiree."

Beckwith walked into the cockpit of a C-130 to make sure the pilot didn't take off

before all his men were loaded. Then the tragedy struck. A Sea Stallion maneuvering to a refueling point sliced into a C-130.

"I looked out to my left," Beckwith said, "and a 130 all of a sudden exploded. And it

## BLISS BACKGROUND

Tony Bliss, Jr. is a freelance writer specializing in Southeast Asian military affairs. He recently left the Foreign Desk of the *New York Times* where he worked for seven years.

Bliss served two tours in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division, the first in 1965-66 as an infantryman and the second in 1967-68 as a team leader with the Division LRP Company. He was awarded a Silver Star at Dak To on his first tour and a Bronze Star with "V" at Song Be on his second.

Between tours Bliss was an honor graduate of the 101st Recondo School and later served as school cadre where he taught mountaineering, survival and mine warfare at West Point.

Bliss first met Charlie Beckwith in 1967 when Chargin' Charlie became the Division G-2 and the Recondo School cadre became the nucleus for the Div. LRRP Co. which would work under the

G-2. It was Beckwith who prompted Bliss to volunteer for his second combat tour when he told him, "Stick with me; I'll show you diamonds as big as horse turds!"

Bliss left the Army as a staff sergeant (E-6). Prior to Army service, Bliss worked as a Montana ranch hand, veterinarian's assistant and lemon picker in California and in the press department at the New York World's Fair. He has a bachelor's degree in English from C.W. Post on Long Island and a master's in journalism from New York University. His hobbies include backpacking, fly fishing, judo, rifle and pistol shooting and Southeast Asian and military affairs.

His previous stories for SOF include reviews of the motion pictures *Deer Hunter* (September '79) and *Apocalypse Now* (February '80), "SOF Critic Bombs in UN Charade" (July '80), "An American with a Mission" (September '80) and "Behind Our Backs" (February '81).

was one hell of a fire."

Troopers started pouring out of the C-130's side jump door, the only exit open, their airborne training and discipline paying them back with the biggest dividend of all: their lives. But in the forward section of the plane, some of the crew were trapped. Four men quickly ran back through the explosions and flames and pulled two badly burned crewmen from the wreckage. Still, the accident cost eight lives. And in the chaos that followed, with ammunition cooking off in every direction, helicopter crews left behind classified documents when they abandoned the choppers.

Not only did the mission fail, but a senseless accident turned it into a tragedy as well. Charlie Beckwith, the grizzled, hardened combat veteran of special operations, sat there and cried.

About 30 minutes after the explosion, Beckwith's C-130 made a unique takeoff. Following a long 90-second roll, the heavily loaded Hercules hit a four-foot road embankment, shot up and was airborne.

Elapsed ground time for Beckwith was four hours, 58 minutes.

Next day when his name surfaced as the commander of Delta Force, reporters found that even his middle initial had been classified by the Pentagon. But for those who follow the shadowy world of special operations, hard-chargin' Charlie Beckwith was already a legend.

Many of those who knew him couldn't believe that old Charlie, with his reputation for driving on through any obstacle to accomplish his mission, could really have been the one to recommend aborting the rescue.

Myriad speculations appeared in the press about what "really" happened in the desert. But, at a Pentagon press conference following the mission, Beckwith quickly acted to dampen this speculation.

"As my old daddy used to say," Beckwith growled to a group of slightly awed Pentagon correspondents, "perception is a very dangerous thing.

"Who dares, wins," he continued, using the famous motto of the Special Air Service, "but it was a no-win situation.

"I'm not about to be party to a half-assed loading on a bunch of aircraft and going up and murdering a bunch of the finest soldiers in the world."

Beckwith, of course, wasn't in command at Desert One, and "rightly so," he said, "because I am not an airplane driver and not a helicopter individual." The next stage would have been Delta's show, and Beckwith is confident they could have done the job. By all accounts, his men had performed superbly on the parts of the mission they carried out.

"They did a supermasterful job," said a high Washington military official, who worked on planning the operation. "Charlie was extremely professional and very, very good at preparing his people, and having everything ready right down to the ant's eyebrow." With the chaos caused by the explosion, "we were damned lucky to have



him and his seasoned people in place" to expedite the pullback, he continued.

Depression and disappointment are inadequate words to describe the feelings of the men after returning to the States. "They were very low," said Beckwith. "A lot of people were very unhappy. We were very disappointed."

But the greatest disappointment was for Charlie Beckwith himself.

Not only was it to be the first combat test of a unit Beckwith had visualized and striven to command for most of his 29-year military career, but the results were totally beyond his control. For a man who lets nothing get in the way of completing his mission, the despair and frustration were almost unbearable.

Said one friend from Ft. Bragg, "He could hardly speak to anybody when he came back."

I first met "Chargin' Charlie" Beckwith late in the summer of 1967. He had just been promoted to lieutenant colonel and came up from the Florida Ranger Camp to take over the G-2 intelligence slot of the 101st Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell, Ky. We had only two brigades of the division left at Campbell, and both — the 2nd and 3rd Brigades — were on alert to join the 1st Brigade which had been deployed to Vietnam in 1965.

With the alert, the cadre of the Recondo School (of which I was a member) were designated the nucleus of the Division Long Range Patrol Company which in Vietnam would come directly under Beckwith as the G-2. This was the original Recondo School, begun by former division commander GEN William C. Westmoreland in the late '50s to train selected division troops in recon-commando operations (see "MACV Recondo School," SOF, September '84). Under the initial command of Medal of Honor winner COL Lew Millet, the school established a reputation for toughness and realism.

One morning, the school sergeant major passed the word: Beckwith would come down to the school to lecture the NCO cadre on LRP operations. We were gathered in the classroom wondering what this Beckwith was all about, for the legend of Chargin' Charlie had filtered up from the Florida Ranger camp. Suddenly, a bull of a man, slightly ragged and unkempt at the edges, barged into the room. We all snapped to attention as LTC Charlie Beckwith strode to the front and stepped up on the platform.

With his hands clasped behind his back, he paced back and forth, his eyes boring into us with an incredible intensity and his craggy face fixed in what we soon learned to recognize as the familiar Beckwith scowl.

Then he sat down, crossing and uncrossing his legs, rolling his cigarette back and forth in his mouth. Everybody turned around and looked at each other, thinking, "Who is this crazy bastard?"

Unexpectedly, he jumped up and whipped around, saying, "Fuck it! Fuck it! You sons of bitches want to go back to Vietnam



Special Forces troopers from Project Delta lead Vietnamese Rangers (background) through perimeter wire at Plei Me. Photo: UPI.

and be Long Range Patrols, huh? Well, I'll tell you about it."

That he did in a gruff voice that sounded like gravel rolling along a stream bed at high water. And when he finished, we all had a damn good idea of what our next tour of Vietnam would be like as LRPs.

In the weeks that followed, we quickly learned that Beckwith didn't tolerate fools. You were either a "dipshit" or a "pisscutter." If you were a professional, you had a friend for life. If you weren't, he wouldn't talk to you.

With the Vietnam alert, the Recondo School mission was changed to training squad leaders and later LRP teams. Much of the training had the Beckwith touch — like the two giant telegrams from the Department of Defense to Mom (the ones your mother ought to get) tacked on the classroom blackboard. One read, "Dear Mom, Your son was killed because he was stupid." And the other: "Dear Mom, Your son was killed because his leaders were stupid." As training aids, they cut right through the bull, and as any combat veteran knows, those telegrams were often only too accurate.

Another Beckwith innovation was a live-fire "quick-kill" range which the Recondo School set up. It was designed to train troops to engage unexpected targets in a tightly controlled environment like the jungle and make maximum use of the versatility of the M16. This was a concept Beckwith was to refine even further as commander of Delta Force. With practice, one could become uncannily fast and deadly at this type of instinctive snap shooting.

Many of us were still trying to take the measure of Charlie Beckwith. How much was wind and how much was real? One day, for example, shortly after setting up the quick-kill course, SSGT Roger Brown (now captain), another NCO and I were sitting in Beckwith's G-2 office at division headquarters.

A major with a Military Assistance Com-



Special Forces sergeant laying in 81mm mortar in defensive perimeter at Plei Me. Photo: AP.

mand Vietnam (MACV) combat patch walked by the open door. Beckwith's eyes flashed a look that by now meant laughter to us but obviously didn't to the major, as Charlie bellowed across the room, "Hey, soldier, come here! What are you doing with that patch on? What patch is that?"

Of course he knew damn well what a MACV patch was, and the major knew he knew as he stood in front of Charlie's desk, probably wondering how an officer one rank his senior could pull him up in front of three lounging staff sergeants. But he didn't wonder long, for after a meek attempt to answer, he found that Beckwith's scorn took in all non-combat types: "Well, you're going over there to do some real fighting this time. You're not going over there to play around." When the major left, we all roared with laughter.

All of the Recondo cadre had been to Vietnam at least once, and time was now getting short to sign the waiver to go back. We'd often come into the orderly room in the morning to find Beckwith sitting behind the first sergeant's desk with his feet up and a sheaf of papers in one hand.

"When are you signing this paper?" he'd ask. Most of us, including myself, eventually did sign. But, except for two men on the





Soldiers inspect one NVA killed by Rangers and Project Delta Special Forces troops as they infiltrated into Plei Me camp. Identification of bodies as North Vietnamese gave SF the first indication of what they were up against. Photo: UPI



An undamaged Sea Stallion sits behind the charred remains of a helicopter at Desert One, in the Iranian desert of Dasht-E-Kavir. The crash occurred as the Sea Stallion and a C-130 were attempting to take off after the mission had been aborted. Photo: Wide World

SFC list, we didn't sign for our careers or even our country. We signed because Charlie Beckwith wanted us to.

Beckwith has always inspired loyalty. Born in Atlanta, Ga., 22 January 1929, he was brought up by his mother and a brother after his father died. Beckwith went to Atlanta's Brown High and later the University of Georgia where he was enrolled in ROTC and became a company commander. He didn't have much money and sometimes chopped wood to make a few bucks. He also developed his well-known driving skills by running an occasional load of tax-free liquor around the back hills of northern Georgia. Clandestine operations came early for Charlie.

Football was one of his real loves at the University of Georgia, where he was offensive tackle under the late Wally Butts. And he was good — good enough, in fact, to be drafted by the Green Bay Packers in 1952, the year he left school. But instead, Beckwith chose his other loves. He took his commission, went Airborne and married Katherine, his tall, dark-haired college sweetheart.

Charlie Beckwith was soon a member of the crack 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, N.C. He is remembered by some as a damn good regimental football coach. But in 1958, he gravitated to Special Forces where his guts, resourcefulness and individualism found a home. Charlie's years with the 77th SF Group — redesignated the 7th in 1960 — were formative ones.

In the late 1950s, North Vietnam dramatically increased its military aid to the Laotian communists — the Pathet Lao. Truck convoys of up to 300 vehicles were sighted entering Laos loaded with munitions, food and NVA troops. By early summer, 1959, the NVA 335th Division, made up of Laotian "volunteers," began operating in Laos with its HQ just across the border in North Vietnam. Ethnic Vietnamese units were not long behind. And, beginning in December 1960 and continuing until early 1962, Soviet aircraft flew hundreds of sorties, delivering more than 3,000 tons of supplies, including artillery and radar, to the Pathet Lao.

The main U.S. response for bolstering anti-communist forces was Operation White Star, begun in 1959 (see "Bull in Indochina Shop," "White Star Warriors," "Fire in the Hole," SOF, January, April, May '84). Mobile SF teams trained Laotian NCOs and officers at the academies, and in remote mountain areas recruited and organized Hmong (Meo) tribesmen.

COL Arthur D. "Bull" Simons (see "Requiem for a Warrior," SOF, November '79) took the first group of about 107 people to Laos in 1959. Simons also commanded half of the second six-month cycle for which Beckwith, then a captain, arrived in January 1960. Beckwith led Team A-51, one of 14 A-teams in the country at the time.

Simons, who was later to lead the Son Tay raid into North Vietnam, always had a high regard for Beckwith, but according to BG Donald G. Blackburn, "Putting the two of them together was like putting two wildcats out."

One SF officer remembers the Bull telling him at Ft. Bragg, "Goddamn that Beckwith! He just thinks the best way to get a guy to do something is put him under his heel and grind him down. I'm going to have to straighten that one out."

Certainly, a little heel-grinding was well entrenched in Beckwith's repertoire, and tact was never one of his strong points. But none would deny that Charlie Beckwith looked after the men in his command, and that his response was both direct and immediate when someone tried messing with them. One of Beckwith's team sergeants from White Star remembers how Charlie handled one situation in Laos:

*Continued on page 80*





Johann Strubreither, Glock factory engineer, fires the Glock 17 pistol.

**SOF T&E**

# PLASTIC PERFECTION

**SOF Expert Gives Glock-17 Great Grades**

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

Left side view of Glock 17 pistol shows slide stop and disassembly lever.







**T**HE best pistol will not win the current XM9 (Personal Defense Weapon — PDW) trials. The finest military pistol in the world today, in my opinion, is not entered in the XM9 tests.

Currently in service only with the Austrian Army, the revolutionary Glock 17 pistol was withheld from the U.S. XM9 trials at the behest of its inventor, Gaston Glock, who would not accept U.S. government requirements to release the winning contender's production and patent rights to open bidding. The Glock pistol represents an entirely new era in small arms technology. Glock would have submitted his pistol only if guaranteed production rights. However, this stipulation does not conform to procedures practiced by the DOD.

In May 1980, when the Austrian Army opened bidding for a new service pistol, Glock didn't know the difference between a revolver and a semiautomatic pistol. His small company, employing only 38 people and located in the village of Deutsch-Wagram just outside Vienna, had been in existence only since 1963. Glock, whose personal background is that of a mechanical engineer specializing in machine tool construction, had developed and provided the Austrian Army with a heterogeneous mix of products, all of which combined his unique talents in the fields of both

metallurgy and plastics. Glock produces nondisintegrating (but detachable) links for the MG74-3 machine gun (Austrian nomenclature for the MG42 in 7.62mm NATO), military fighting knives, entrenching tools and training grenades.

Gathering several weapons experts together, Glock asked them what features the ideal combat pistol would possess. In several areas their consensus was unanimous. The pistol should be capable of instant and instinctive performance. Any consideration of whether the pistol is in a safe or fire mode should be eliminated, if possible. Absolute reliability and simplicity of design were also stressed. Glock then tested and evaluated the most highly regarded pistols available and reviewed all existing patents. Within six months he had a working prototype. Glock's startling response will stand as a hallmark in innovation and the application of advanced technology for generations to come.

Glock's pistol has a unique plastic frame which still manages to retain a more-or-less classical appearance. Fabricated in a manner and of materials Glock will not divulge (understandably), four steel guide rails are integrated into the molding to accommodate the slide. This has, of course, resulted in a considerable reduction in overall weight. At 21.175 oz., empty, the Glock 17 (refer-

ring to its magazine capacity) compares favorably with its competition. The HK P7 weighs 27.5 oz., the SIG-Sauer P226 is 26.25 oz., the Steyr GB is 29.6 oz., the Beretta 92SB is 34.5 oz. and the venerable Colt M1911A1 is almost twice as heavy at 39.5 oz. Loaded with a full magazine (also made of plastic) of 17 rounds, the Glock pistol weighs only 30.1 oz. — just .5 ounce more than an empty Steyr GB!

The overall envelope is as compact as it is light. With a length of only 7.4 inches and a height of 5.2 inches, the Glock 17 is only 1.2 inches thick. In addition, the plastic frame's elastic qualities absorb a significant portion of the counter-recoiling forces during firing. The Glock frame is also more durable under the distortion of hard shock and dropping than steel or aluminum, having successfully passed a two-meter drop test from all angles of contact. The frame's final advantage lies in the area of cost-effectiveness.

Glock's only condescension to conventionality is the pistol's method of operation, which is those of the Browning pattern. Recoil operated, the barrel is locked up in the slide by a single lug which recesses into the ejection port, somewhat in the manner of the SIG-Sauer P220/P225/P226 series. The barrel thus moves rearward with the slide about 3mm until the bullet leaves the barrel and pressures drop to the safe level. At this time the barrel drops downward, separating from the slide and terminating any further motion. The slide's continued rearward movement and return cycle are those of the Browning types.

The Glock pistol's most distinctive feature is its so-called Safe Action trigger system. A wide outer trigger encompasses a small inner trigger, both fabricated from plastic. The outer trigger cannot be actuated, such as by contact with the holster, unless the middle trigger is first depressed. This two-component mechanism which can be pulled only from the center, not the edges, constitutes the pistol's first fail-safe. There is no manual thumb safety and no hammer. The trigger mechanism consists of two stages. Stage one has a pull of approximately 2.2 lbs. and travel of 0.25 inch. During this stage three things occur: (1) The firing pin is fully cocked [it's always half cocked]; (2) the firing pin safety is released [the second safety in the sequence]; and (3) the previously blocked trigger rod is released [the final safety]. At the second stage all slack has been taken up and we are at the point of release. Five pounds of pressure will draw the sear down along the oblique surface of the control spring, release the firing pin and fire the round. (The absence of a hammer increases lock time considerably.) If the trigger is pulled without a cartridge in the chamber, it remains rearward. It can be reset by pulling the slide back about 10mm.





**Glock 17 pistol was buried in sand pile during Kokalis' test and evaluation.**

**Glock 17 pistol field stripped.**

**Glock 17 pistol in plastic holster with hooks for wear on U.S.-type web gear.**

**Closeup of Safe Action trigger system described in text.**



The entire Glock 17 pistol consists of only 33 parts. Investment casting processes are not used on any of the steel components. The square-cut slide is milled from a single block of steel. Everything is manufactured at the Glock plant except springs and the cold-forged barrel stock which is obtained from Ferlach. The barrel, machine finished by Glock, has an unusual bore profile intermediate between conventional lands and grooves and a polygonal configuration that offers superior barrel life. The original barrels were of the land and groove type. Even though there was no significant degradation of accuracy potential until 15,000 rounds had been fired, Glock opted for the improved barrel. The barrel is 4.5 inches long with six grooves and a right-hand twist.

The sight radius is 6.5 inches. The ramped front sight is 0.12 inch wide. The rear sight notch is 0.13 inch wide. The rear sight is adjustable for windage zero by tapping right or left in its dovetail on the slide. Different heights are available corresponding to various types of 9mm Parabellum ammunition.

The slide stop release is mounted on the left side of the frame directly below the slide, where it can be manipulated with ease by the thumb of the shooting hand. The magazine catch-release button is also where it belongs — on the left side of the frame, directly to the rear of the trigger guard. The plastic magazines are light, yet they fall freely from the magazine well. Holes in the rear of the magazine housing indicate the number of remaining rounds. The trigger guard is moderately hooked for those who wish to employ its use with the support hand.

The grip-to-frame angle is somewhat steeper than competing designs, but the pistol points instinctively and — despite its large magazine capacity — the grip sits well in normal-sized hands. As the



**Glock 17 pistol with issue plastic holster, also manufactured by Glock. View looking down into the frame assembly.**





## GLOCK 17 SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Caliber:</b>	9x19mm (Parabellum)
<b>Operation:</b>	Short recoil, barrel locks with single lug into the ejection port, semiautomatic, hammerless, Safe Action double-trigger system
<b>Weight,</b>	
without magazine:	21.175 oz.
with full magazine:	30.1 oz.
<b>Overall length:</b>	7.4 inches
<b>Height:</b>	5.2 inches
<b>Width:</b>	1.2 inches
<b>Barrel:</b>	6 grooves, right-hand twist
<b>Barrel length:</b>	4.5 inches
<b>Magazine:</b>	Staggered box type, plastic construction, 1.575 oz., 17-round capacity
<b>Number of parts,</b>	
including magazine:	33
<b>Sights:</b>	Front: ramped (0.12" thick); Rear: square notch (0.13" wide) adjustable for windage zero; 6.5-inch sight radius
<b>Manufacturer:</b>	Glock Ges. m.b.H., Produkte aus Kunststoffe, Metallwaren, und Holz. 2232 Deutsch-Wagram, Hausfeldstrasse 17, Austria
<b>Status:</b>	In service with the Austrian Army. Not currently imported into the U.S.

frame is plastic, the pistol is decidedly muzzle heavy — also a desirable characteristic.

Disassembly procedures are quite straightforward. Remove the magazine and clear the chamber. Pull the trigger (with the pistol pointed in a safe direction!). Jack the slide back 2 to 3mm and simultaneously depress the two spring-loaded disassembly levers (located on each side of the frame above the trigger guard) downward. The slide can now be pulled forward off the frame. Separate the barrel, recoil spring and guide rod from the slide. Reassemble in the reverse order. Make certain the frame's four steel guide rails are mated to the slide's guide slots. Remember, the slide cannot be replaced unless the trigger mechanism is in the pulled position. Pull the slide rearward until the two disassembly levers engage.

By May 1982 Glock submitted samples and a price proposal to the Austrian Army. His offer was 25-percent lower than the next lowest bidder. As the Glock pistol was somewhat of an enigma, the Austrian Army test facility decided that it must first pass a preliminary firing test — 10,000 rounds with no more than 20 stoppages. The 10,000 rounds were fired with only one malfunction! This test was waived for the other contenders as it was assumed they would be able to complete this portion of the trials.

Tests of function and parts durability included firing under conditions of extreme heat, ice, sand and mud; a drop test (2 meters onto a steel plate — muzzle and rear); oiled and unlubricated

functioning; and the firing of normal, low- and high-pressure ammunition (the high-pressure requirement was double NATO specifications — 5,000 BAR [56,000 psi]).

The test parameters also included accuracy potential on the first shot (a hit within 2 seconds was required from a holstered gun); second-shot hit potential; precision shooting at 25 meters; magazine capacity (if the magazine capacity was 16 rounds or more only one issue magazine with each pistol was required; if less than 16 rounds, then two issue magazines were required); energy levels; handling characteristics; steps required to make ready; weight; dimensions; direction of case ejection; steps required to change magazines with the shooting hand; maintenance (no tools are required to completely disassemble the Glock pistol); parts strength; storage capacity; and necessary cleaning equipment. Training parameters such as the time required to train shooters, the number of parts manipulated to place the weapon into operation, and the possibility of dry-fire exercises were also evaluated.

The Glock 17 won hands down. No other competing pistol was even close. Glock was awarded the entire Austrian Army contract of 25,000 units plus spare parts. Delivery will be completed by 1985. After the manufacture of every 3,000 pistols, a gun picked at random must pass a 10,000-round firing test with parts assembled from five different units.

Five thousand miles is a long way to travel just to shoot another 9mm pistol.

But the Glock 17 is not just another pistol. I must admit, however, that my initial reaction was genuine skepticism. Is nothing sacred anymore? Now they're even making pistol frames out of plastic? In our pop culture "plastic" has come to mean vacuous or devoid of substance. Yet, plastic is a salient feature of the Glock design. Not only the frame, but the triggers and magazine as well are made of this material.

The proof of the pudding, in this instance, is in the firing. And the Glock 17 does that quite well, thank you. The specimen I was handed to test had already fired 8,000 rounds without a single malfunction. During the hundreds of rounds we fired, I experienced one stoppage — a failure to eject — much to the embarrassment of Herr Glock. The pistol digested an unbelievable assortment of ammunition: Austrian Hirtenberg, German Geco, Federal hollow points, Winchester-Western Silvertip hollow points, Finnish Lapua, Israeli Eagle, Norma, Remington, Czech, Spanish, and W-W ball. It will successfully feed all currently popular 9mm projectile types. We also buried the pistol in a sand pile, retrieved it, shook it off briefly, and then continued the firing sequences without any further stoppages.

What a pleasure to fire so many rounds from the modified Weaver stance without the slightest trace of hammer bite! The grip almost seems to mold its configuration to the individual hand. The frame's amazing elasticity reduces felt recoil considerably. The accuracy potential is significantly enhanced by the barrel's positive lockup in the ejection port. With a clean, constant trigger system, hit probability is quite high. The Safe Action trigger mechanism should pose no problem to even the rankest amateur.

Safe, reliable, accurate, instantly ready, easy to maintain, a minimal number of parts, light, compact, durable (almost indestructible), low felt recoil, a large capacity magazine, simplified training, and natural, instinctive pointing qualities — the Glock 17 possesses every single characteristic anyone has ever dreamed of having in a combat pistol. I have only one major criticism: It is not yet available in the U.S.

An importer has not been selected to date. Furthermore, the pistol will have difficulty passing the BATF factoring system for imported handguns. The plastic frame will lose points, as maximum credit is granted to all-steel frames. At the very least, the BATF has informed me that a metal plate containing the serial number (which is now marked on the slide) will have to be molded into the frame. If the import situation is resolved, other pistol manufacturers have much to fear from the tiny village of Deutsch-Wagram. The price is expected to be extremely competitive.





# SALV



## PROFESSIONAL TUTOR

One of the recurring criticisms concerning SOF's efforts to help refine the emerging strength of the Salvadoran Army is that they are "unprofessional, disorganized and haphazard." That's about as far from the truth as much of the other reporting that comes from troubled Central America, but it particularly galls members of an SOF training team such as the one which visited El Salvador in May. A profile of these men includes a total of nearly 140 years of military service, including 40 years of total overseas time and 15 years of combat service among them.

An example of a typical training schedule for 46 Salvadoran troops who had previously only jam-fired five rounds from their M16 rifles should point out the professional level of instruction provided by SOF crews:

**DAY ONE:** Intro to M16 and weapons safety

Assembly and disassembly  
Care and cleaning  
Sight picture  
Preliminary marksmanship, prone position  
Breathing, trigger control  
Review

**DAY TWO:** Review of first day's instruction

Basic firing positions: prone, off-hand, sitting, kneeling  
25-meter zero (battle sights)  
Review

**DAY THREE:** Review of first two days' instruction

Initial qualification (25 rounds): 10 prone, 5 off-hand, 5 sitting, 5 kneeling from 110 meters  
Combat firing techniques, semi and full-auto  
Malfunctions and immediate action  
Automatic fire control, quick reaction, 25 meters  
Review, critique, marksmanship awards ceremony

— *SOF Staff*



# OS SALUTE CinC

## SOF Takes to the Field with the "Reagan Battalion"

by Alexander M.S. McColl



ABOVE: Previous SOF training missions ensured repair and deployment of .50s. RIGHT: Liam O'Hart (right) and Ben Jones (center) ran mortar platoon through dry-run crew drills before live-fire practice.



THEY can't vote for their man in the U.S. elections, but you can bet all the Salvos' ballots would read "re-elect Ronnie" if the soldiers the latest SOF training team met in El Salvador could claim U.S. citizenship. It would be disloyal — perhaps professional suicide — for a trooper from El Salvador's *Batallón de Infantería Anti-Terrorista Reagan* to back any other candidate.

The Salvadorans are aware of and grateful for Reagan's support of their cause and of the opposition he has had to overcome. So, Lt. Col. Jorge Adalberto Cruz got permission of the *Estado Mayor* to name the new unit after U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

Sunday, 20 May 1984, an 11-man SOF team arrived aboard a Salvadoran Air Force (*Fuerza Aerea Salvadoreña* — FAS) C47 to begin three days of training in San Francisco Gotera — what used to be called "guerrilla-dominated" Morazán Province.

A year ago that might have been true, and the Gs still control everything north of the Torola River. But during the last year the commander in Morazán has been Cruz, dark, soft-spoken, boyish-looking, and universally rated as the best field commander on the government side in El Salvador. And he dominates everything south of the Torola River.

Since counterinsurgency is the MOS of the Reagan Battalion, the SOF team determined to organize training around the requirements of troops who chase guerrillas. After good light infantry tactics, the most important discipline in COIN ops is the use of mortars. Ben Jones and Liam O'Hart were our mortar training team.

Jones rooted through San Francisco's stores and found two Yugoslav 120mm mortars. One didn't have a bipod assembly, and the few rounds had Slavic markings. No one seemed eager to fire them. There were U.S. M1 81mm mortar parts, too, but they were in good shape, despite their World War II manufacture: five tubes, four base-plates, and one serviceable bipod assembly. One more bipod was available, but its cross-level worm-gear was worn and binding.

This meant we had exactly one complete, serviceable, 40-year-old 81mm mortar to support four infantry battalions.

(One of Cruz' objectives is to get one truly operational 81mm mortar for each of his battalions. The standard U.S. Army issue is three 81s per rifle company, plus four 4.2-inch mortars at the battalion level. Rattling C47s, these ancient mortars, tired Mauser rifles and M1 carbines carried by some of the Guardia Nacional troops are often older than the fathers of most of the troops.)

So Ben Jones collected components amounting to one complete mortar, some ammunition, a truck and most of the mortar platoon and went out to the airstrip. There he had them set up and fire a couple of rounds just to see how they did it. As the book says, diagnostic testing



refines the estimate of the training situation. Then you don't waste time teaching the troops what they already know. Jones and O'Hart — assisted by SOF's Steven Salisbury working as translator — decided to spend the next three days on the basics of mechanical instruction and crew drill.

Two bipods were borrowed from San Miguel, making three complete mortars. With these additions to the arsenal, some 30 men were taught the basics of 81mm crew drill, firing procedures and mechanical training.

Cruz had 140 troops — four platoons each of 35 to 40 men — to be trained with M16 rifles. One platoon of 40 trained with Phil Medley and Frank Keefer, with a Teniente Cross as assistant instructor and interpreter. Another platoon of 36 men was given to Jim Freeland, Larry Henry and Jim Whitlock, with a Cadet Diaz as assistant instructor and interpreter. The idea was that these officers and the NCOs with the troops would learn by watching the Gringos and thus be better able to teach the rest of the troops.

The Keefer and Freeland teams went out to look at and set up their respective ranges. These were not formally constructed ranges as might be found on an American Army or Marine Corps installation. A *poligono* is merely a place, an open area facing a hill that serves as a backstop. You bring your own targets, pace off and locate your firing lines, and try to keep the cows and goats out of the area. Keefer's team had an area up the hill south of town, and Freeland drew the *poligono* out by the airstrip. Each at least had a large shade tree for conducting sit-down classes and taking breaks; not a small advantage under the tropical sun and sweltering humidity under which we were working.

By the end of Sunday, Keefer and Freeland reported that their ranges were in order, and that they were prepared to start with M16 basics in the morning.

Rifle training began Monday morning, 21 May. SOF's weapons training not only taught marksmanship and maintenance; it helped Salvadoran soldiers find and fix — or discard — defective weapons. That has an immediate effect on combat efficiency. The class on basic assembly, disassembly, care and cleaning of the rifle is a vehicle for having a thorough look at the weapons and correcting bad maintenance habits such as not cleaning the weapon at all or applying too much oil. The 25-meter zero exercise turns up broken and frozen sights so they can be corrected.

In each of the platoons being trained on the M16, one or two soldiers simply couldn't shoot at all, three or four could have been trained as snipers, and a lot in the middle got decent zeros on their weapons, showed real improvement in shooting, and learned confidence in their basic weapon. All the troops under in-



Departing warrior: Former Morazan Province commander Lt. Col. Cruz poses with SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown before leaving El Salvador for the U.S. Army War College.

## CRUZ 'N MORAZAN

Of all the frayed and time-worn epithets from the Vietnam War, perhaps none is as ragged as "winning hearts and minds." Gaining the support of the civilian population was and is the crux of a successful counterinsurgency.

Responsible leadership within the Salvadoran military must inspire new vigor and seriousness in winning hearts and minds. Morazan Province, the nest of guerrilla activity in El Salvador, is perhaps the ultimate test of that leadership. For the past year, Lt. Col. Jorge Adalberto Cruz, commander of Morazan Province, has given a fine demonstration of political savvy and military tenacity. During his 12-month tour of duty, Cruz has seen to it that Morazan gets top priority when it comes to troops and available equipment.

A balance of tight security and relaxed rapport with the people of Morazan would seem to be a contradiction, but Cruz has managed it. A zealous anti-communist, Cruz is sensitive to political, cultural and military considerations. Rejecting brute force, he has emphasized increased intelligence to head off the depredations of communist guerrillas. Instead of reacting to communist offensives, Cruz averts enemy action before it becomes a threat to population centers. His security system has been so successful that travel after dark in Morazan is no longer a dangerous undertaking.

Lt. Col. Cruz wins hearts and minds. With his stint as commander of Morazan at an end, Cruz will round out his military training at the Inter American Defense College in Washington.

— SOF Staff

struction were disciplined, eager, quick and attentive. After all, a glance over their shoulders showed them *Cacahuatique Cordillera* — the local Marlboro Country. Moving targets and non-simulated casualties would soon replace training aids. Salvadoran officers and NCOs with these platoons also benefited: They are now better-qualified mortar and M16 instructors.

Chester Golden, a Vietnam LRRP team leader and registered nurse, worked with Dr. Alcides Caballero to train enlisted medics in basic life-saving procedures. The two also conducted first-aid and field sanitation classes, especially to some troops of the Cacahuatique Battalion at Osicala, and distributed 1,500 pounds of donated medical supplies.

The three days of training were a lot of hot, hard work, but results justified the sweat.

And there were compensations. Cruz took the team to Jocoro, Morazán's second largest town, in the southern end of Morazán. The Lenca Battalion calls Jocoro home, holding the town and securing a critical east-west road that runs from the border with Honduras to the east to San Miguel. We got to see some of their night ambush patrols moving off at a crossroads east of the town. The experienced eye can tell, just by noting the way troops move out, if they know what they're doing: These did.

Later in the evening we were briefed by the battalion commander, entertained by Salvadoran guitar music and singing by the troops, and escorted on a *paseo* through the town, which was holding its local *fiesta*. Driving home by moonlight was tense, but there was no contact or incident . . . other than nearly running over a drunk sleeping in the road.

Later we also got a brief look at two Yugoslav M56 105mm howitzers. These were weapons apparently purchased some time after the 1968 Soccer War with Honduras. Cruz told me that they were old and heavy, but that was all the artillery support he had. We also collected the serial numbers off three captured 9mm Sterling SMGs, and samples of 7.62mm NATO cartridges, which Cruz' people thought were Soviet made. Peter Kokalis tells us these are Bulgarian. The Bulgarians tried to murder the Pope, and now they supply ammunition to the rebels.

Wednesday afternoon, 23 May, since Cruz was in San Salvador, his second-in-command, Lt. Col. Leopoldo Segovia, held a ceremony for the graduates of the mortar course. SOF patches were presented to the graduates, and each member of the SOF team was given a Reagan Battalion T-shirt.

Everybody had to head back Friday — they were, after all unpaid volunteers with families, jobs and responsibilities (five paid their own way) — so late Wednesday afternoon we loaded up on the cuartel's minibus, and on a pickup



with an escort of four soldiers, and drove to San Miguel. The road would not have been safe a year ago.

The plan was to get the air taxi from San Miguel to Ilopango, since just this once, the FAS couldn't get a bird up to San Francisco to pick us up. The problem is that there are no navigation aids, not even runway lights at San Francisco airstrip, and altogether too often in the rainy season the place gets weathered in. At San Miguel we were met by a real gully-washer of a tropical rainstorm, and all flying was cancelled until morning. So we imposed on the hospitality of the 3rd Brigade and Colonel Guzman, Colonel Monterrosa's second in command, and bunked down at the cuartel there.

What did it all accomplish? Seventy-six troops learned basics on their M16s, the 30-man mortar platoon got a thorough review of crew drill, and several junior officers and NCOs got some exposure to U.S. techniques of instruction in these subjects.

But there's more to it than that.

These men — men with substantial military and weapons qualifications and experience — come, on their own time as unpaid volunteers, supported by their own or SOF's money, to help the Salvadorans in their war to keep their country. We, then, are visible proof that there are also Americans who are willing to help, and not just because that's the job they're hired to do.

We do not criticize the Mil Group or the other Americans on the official payroll in El Salvador. All of them whom we've met are competent and dedicated. Within the unreasonable limits on numbers, resources and where they can go — imposed on them by higher authority — they do well and accomplish more than anyone could reasonably expect.

But the official, governmental effort emerges as an act of policy from Washington. SOF teams, however small, can go places and do things forbidden to the Mil Group — to their deep regret — like writing this article. We are proof that there is more to American support of Salvadoran independence and democracy than vacillating official policy that may entirely reverse itself every four years.

While U.S. foreign policy turns on the fortunes of elections, the Salvadorans show they know who their friends are: One wonders whether the communist-led anti-American terrorists on the other side will follow suit and name battalions after Chris Dodd, Teddy Kennedy, Steve Solarz or Jane Fonda. ✕

**Newly formed Reagan Antiterrorist Bn. marches through streets of San Francisco Gotera.**

**Team members receive Reagan Bn. T-shirts. Left to right before table: Jim Freeland, Ben Jones and Alex McColl.**

**SOFer Liam O'Hart coaches Reagan Bn. troops through intricacies of mortar aiming.**





**SOF AFGHANISTAN**

# **SOF COUNTS COUPS IN AFGHANISTAN**

## **New Hammers Can't Nail Resistance**

Text & Photos by David C. Isby

A present for the Russians: Kabul Cocktail  
in the making.





**S***SOLDIER of Fortune* has scored a number of technical intelligence coups in Afghanistan: bringing back the first 5.45mm rounds for evaluation, the first Soviet body armor, the first chemical filters from a BMP infantry fighting vehicle, among others; and conducting the first open-source tests of the AKS-74 rifle, the AKR cut-down assault rifle, and the AGS-17 grenade launcher (see box, p. 00, for a bibliography of these articles).

The latest *Soldier of Fortune* mission sent into the area — Karen McKay of the Committee for a Free Afghanistan and myself — certainly covered a few interesting collections of ordnance. We were looking for Moscow's latest and most exotic contributions to the creation of human misery, preferably items that have until now been unknown in the West. Karen's contacts among the Afghans literally opened doors to us, and I was able to determine what was common, garden-variety stuff and what was really interesting — one of the times being an expert in Soviet weaponry is useful.

We had a good look at some new and exciting hardware: a Soviet copy of the Claymore mine, an antipersonnel bomblet, a new antitank weapon. We also found out some new information about some of the hardware that has eluded our grasp: the *Hind* helicopter, the T-72 tank and others. An old Russian proverb says, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, treat everything like a nail." The Soviets have fashioned themselves some powerful hammers, but the Afghans still prove a very stubborn nail.

The Afghans themselves use relatively few unusual weapons. Most of the guerrillas we saw were using different versions of the 7.62mm Kalashnikov — AK-47s, both fixed-stock AKMs, and folding-stock AKMSs. They also have a lot of Lee-Enfields. It seemed the older guerrillas preferred the Lee-Enfield, the younger guys the Kalashnikovs. Light machine guns are also mainly Soviet 7.62mm types: PKMs, RPKs and RPDs, while a variety of mines and the RPG-7 — now, thankfully, available in larger numbers than in the past — take on the world's largest armored army. The only place where the Afghans' love of individuality comes out is in their pistols, which consist of just about everything under the sun, communist and Western, cowboy and Indian. I swear one guy had what looked like a sawed-off .50-caliber.

The journalist in Afghanistan can often be detected by his downcast eyes — looking for PFM-1 plastic "butterfly" mines — and cocked ears — listening for helicopters. But the claim that the Soviets control only what is within range of their guns seems true. You can go for miles and not see a trace of enemy action. They bomb and then go away, but looking for weapons can be hazardous in itself. The Afghans tend to be rather lax about weapons-safety procedures: They have been known to recover mines simply by picking them up and taking them home. No sissy defusing! Reports of explosions in Afghan headquarters in Peshawar

or elsewhere are not evidence of intergroup fighting, but rather someone being careless with the souvenirs during a party. This limited the photographs we could take of some of the hardware. I was also not going

to point a flash near the RPG-16 round. Piezo-electric fuses can do funny things with strange electrical impulses if they have been damaged, and I am not betting on Soviet quality control.



#### **MON-50 SOVIET CLAYMORE**

**MINE.** The Soviets have always been ready to acquire, by purchase or by simply stealing, military technology which they require but have not been able to create themselves. We discovered the latest example of this in Afghanistan — a direct copy of the U.S. M18A1 Claymore mine. Designated by the Soviets as the MON-50 (*Miny ye Oskolochonym Napravlениem*, antipersonnel mine with directional fragments), a partially detonated example of the Soviet Claymore copy was recovered in Kunar Province in July 1983.

The MON-50 design appears to follow that of the M18A1 very closely indeed. It uses a form of plastic explosive, similar to the C-4 used in the U.S. mine. The fragmentation matrix, however, appears to be a metal grid, etched to detonate into rectangular fragments, rather than the steel spheres of the U.S. mine. A section of this grid can be seen with the mine in the photographs. The MON-50 can be detonated either with a pull or trip wire or electrically. The effective area swept by fragments can be determined by the shape of the charge and is probably the same as the M18A1: 50 meters in a 60-degree arc.

The MON-50 is probably a relatively recent addition to the Soviet arsenal. This one bears a 1979 date of manufacture. The Soviets have revealed very little about their directional fragmentation mines, other than mentioning the existence of two others, the MON-100 and MON-200. No information on the MON-50 has previously appeared in open Western sources.

**Communist copy of a claymore: MON-50 directional fragmentation mine makes an appearance in Afghanistan.**

The use of the MON-50 in Afghanistan appears to be relatively limited. Few mujahideen were familiar with it. Hassan Gailani, military chairman of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, had seen them used in action as part of the perimeter defenses of Soviet and Kabul Regime outposts. There have been no reports yet of them being used in ambushes by Soviet forces.

**SOVIET BOMBLET.** The "prestige media" discovered the cluster bomb during the 1982 Lebanon War. Israeli use of these weapons was vigorously attacked for its inhumane killing. The Afghan guerrillas, who avidly listen to radio broadcasts, wondered why these same media ignored the Soviet use of cluster bombs throughout their involvement in Afghanistan.

This bomblet was found in Kunar Province in 1983. Unexploded bombs and bomblets are common in Afghanistan. One Afghan guerrilla leader estimated that Soviet air-delivered ordnance had a dud rate of at least 10 percent, possibly as high as 20 percent. NATO planners estimate a five-percent dud rate, so the Soviets are apparently having trouble either with the quality control of their weapons or the way they are armed and delivered on target.

Little has been written about Soviet cluster bombs, even though these have been in the Soviet inventory at least since the late





**Death in miniature:** Bomblets from cluster bomb were called inhumane when used by Israelis in Lebanon but press ignores their use in Afghanistan.

1960s. Earlier cluster bombs were used in WWII, delivering either various-sized high-explosive bomblets or an incendiary munition the Germans called "Molotov's Breadbasket." The weapon we came across is believed to be an AO-2.5-2 bomblet, an improved version of a wartime design. Sixty of these are packed in an RBK-250 cluster, a cylindrical light-metal canister, normally painted light gray. The cluster opens in midair, showering the bomblets over a wide area. Against people not under cover, the effect is devastating. One cluster has an estimated lethal area of 200,000 square feet. The bomblet itself is estimated to be as effective as an 81mm-mortar cast-steel projectile, over an average lethal area of 3,330 square feet. It weighs 2.5-3 kilograms, of which about 10-20 percent is explosive. The markings on the bomblet show that it is filled with A-IX-2 explosive, a Soviet mixture of 73-percent RDX, 23-percent aluminum and four-percent wax, a standard Soviet-shell filling. The "73" on the casing is probably the year of manufacture, and other markings designate place of manufacture and designation. A similar antitank bomblet, the PTAB-2.5-1.5, is packed 30 to an RBK-250 canister, which uses a shaped-charge warhead.

**SOVIET FLECHETTE AMMUNITION.** *Soldier of Fortune* discovered "beehive" rounds for the Soviet 30mm AGS-17 grenade launcher, packed with 40mm-long black-steel flechettes, in a previous trip to the Pakistani-Afghan border. Since then, other journalists have reported flechette-filled 152mm howitzer shells in use. It is possible that the Soviets may have expanded their chemical-warfare efforts to include the use of poison-tipped flechettes. Dr. Khalid, who has treated many wounded mujahideen, has seen those hit by flechettes

sicken and die from wounds that should have been survivable, even considering the primitive medical care of the Afghans. Once dead, their bodies started to decompose rapidly. While there is no confirmation of this, flechettes — poisoned or not — remain a most unpleasant bit of business.

**THE RPG-16.** The RPG-16 is the replacement to the RPG-7 as the Soviet Army's squad-level, man-carried, antitank rocket-launcher. Although it has been in service as a standard squad-level antitank rocket-launcher since the late 1970s, information on the weapon has been relatively scarce.

Because of this lack of information on the RPG-16, when we heard one was being offered for sale in Dharra for the equivalent of \$50,000, we jumped at the chance to see it. As it turned out, there was no RPG-16 in Dharra at all, although we were told of one cached "somewhere else" — which, in the local idiom, means "over the border." We were still able to examine some RPG-16 ammunition, and believe the photographs of the round are the first to be published in an open-source publication.

The RPG-16 round is a rocket-propelled grenade that relies on a shaped-charge High Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) warhead to literally blast its way through enemy armor with a concentrated stream of explosive force. It offers significant advantages over the RPG-7, the most tactically important being that the RPG-16 is likely to be more accurate — news not encouraging to those whose normal place of business is in an APC. The RPG-16 round is faster and less affected by crosswinds. Therefore, aiming it is easier than aiming the RPG-7. This has led to a significant increase in effective range of 500-800 meters over the RPG-7's 300-500 meters.

**T-72 MAIN BATTLE TANK.** We did not get to bring back a T-72, or even parts of one. We did run into people who had been on the receiving end of them. Massoud Khalili, political officer of the Jamiat-i-Islami party, saw T-72s in the Panjshir Valley during the Soviet 1982 offensives. He reported that their guns had no better elevation than other Soviet tanks, and so could not engage many targets in the Panjshir. One of the T-72s in the Panjshir offensive went over a Chinese-made antitank mine that the Afghans had souped up with explosive from unexploded Soviet bombs. This, in turn, set off the T-72's ammunition. The Soviets were unable to recover the remains of this tank, which is in the village of Bazarak, but there did not appear to be anything of value left in the hulk.

Patrice Franchesci, a French journalist, saw T-72s near Ghazni airfield in February 1983. Peter Jouvenal, a British journalist, knew of a T-72 knocked out by a mine in Badakshan Province in 1983. Unfortunately, the Afghans had burned it after removing only the machine guns — not the laser rangefinder, ballistic computer or other interesting parts. Our desire to get our hands on a T-72's rangefinder resulted in the

**Warhead from new RPG-16.** More powerful than RPG-7, it probably packs double punch — shaped charge to make initial hole and second one to follow through.





Afghans presenting us with one from a BTR-60PB armored personnel carrier — nice, but they've already got a bunch at Aberdeen Proving Grounds.

**PMN ANTIPERSONNEL MINE.** This is not a new weapon. It dates from the 1950s and was used during the Vietnam War. What is significant is that the Soviets used increased quantities of these mines in 1983. The Kabul Regime garrison in the fort at Urgan were able to save themselves from being overrun by a concentrated mujahideen offensive in December 1983 by sur-

**ABOVE:** Afghan demolition instructor — former engineer officer in the Kabul Regime Army — shows a standard guerrilla pipe bomb. **MIDDLE:** Tools of the demo train on display at resistance training camp. Mujahideen employ anything at hand to bring a bang to Russian troops. **BELOW:** Mixing a "Kabul Cocktail."

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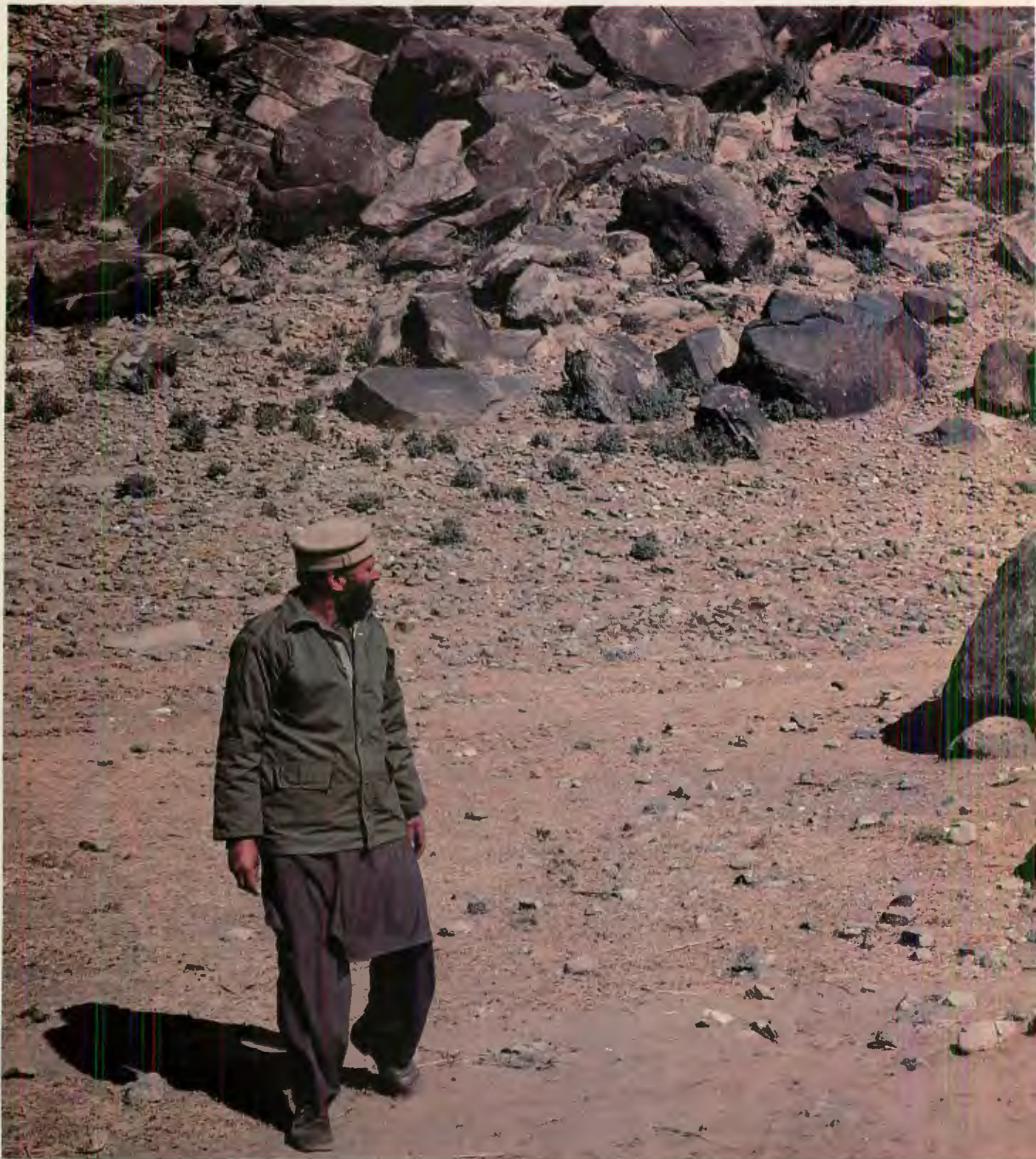
rounding their position with large numbers of PMNs on top of the frozen ground. The Soviets have also found a novel use for the PMN. They put them on the surface around outposts occupied by Kabul Regime troops, taking care that the only gaps in the minefields are where the Soviet advisers can keep an eye on them. These minefields are not to keep the guerrillas out, but to keep their allies in — one way to reduce defection. The Afghans pick up the PMNs at night for their own use, usually without defusing them. Many of the PMNs we were

shown by Afghans were quite live, which is why we did not spend much time photographing them.

**MI-24 HIND.** The Mi-24 *Hind* helicopter remains the most effective single weapon the Soviets have deployed in Afghanistan. In 1983 and 1984, the Soviets improved their *Hind* tactics.

**Incendiary expert tests his creation on a rock. Mujahideen make their own explosives.**

*Hinds* have been reported operating at night without illumination. This included attacks on Afghan convoys on the infiltration routes. *Hinds* are also used at night with the support of flare illumination, especially around Soviet positions and airbases. The Soviets will put up 12-15 flares in a single bundle that the Afghans call "a little moon," as a propeller reconnaissance aircraft — probably a four-engined An-12 *Cub* or a twin-engined An-24 *Coke* — flies a square pattern around the target area. Any targets spotted by the airplane are attacked





by the waiting *Hinds*.

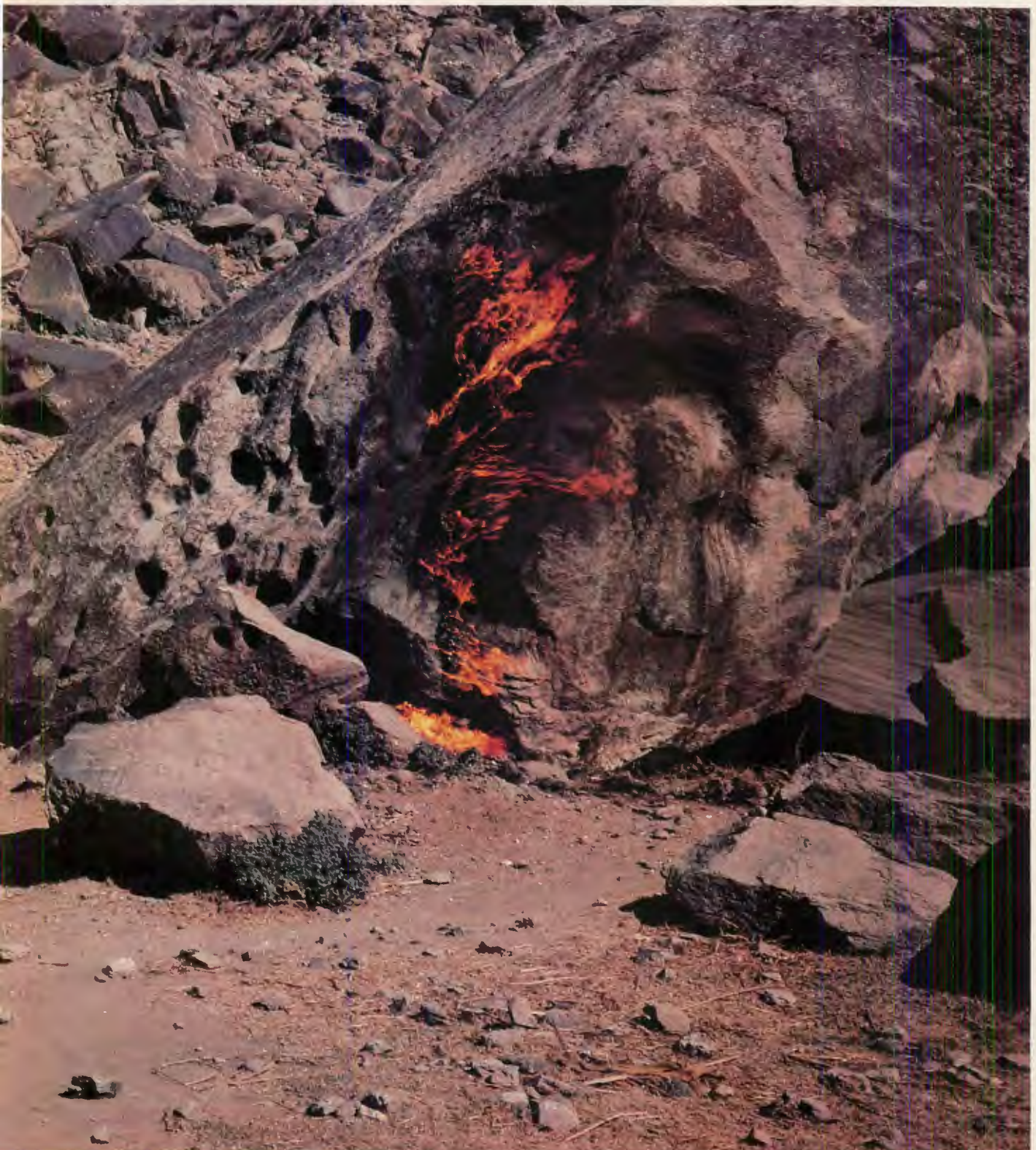
*Hinds* have also been spotted routinely dispensing flares as they fly over ridge lines — a reaction to the increased Afghan use of SA-7s in 1983. At least a pair of *Hinds* accompany most Soviet convoys, and the speed with which additional *Hinds* appear on the scene in case of ambush indicates that others are kept on runway alert, with a direct radio link from the convoy to the airbase. *Hinds* have also been seen spiraling when taking off and landing, especially at Bagram airfield north of Kabul, to reduce their vul-

nerability to Afghan weapons, but this tactic is apparently not used elsewhere.

**VASILESK 82mm MORTAR.** None of the Afghans we met knew of any captured examples of this weapon. The towed version is described as being "like a little D-30 howitzer," and they were reported to have been in action in the Soviet relief of the besieged fort at Urgan in January 1984. The Vasilesk is capable of automatic fire at a rate of 120 rounds per minute, firing either High Explosive or High Explosive Anti-Tank

shells in direct or indirect fire. They are mounted on either a howitzer-like carriage or on a BTR-60 APC.

**THE TOY BOMBS.** The Afghans have reported that the Soviets, in the first year of the war, dropped booby traps camouflaged as toys, watches, pens, lighters or other objects that would be picked up. We were unable to locate fragments of any of these bombs or find photographs of them. However, reports of the use of these weapons are consistent with WWII German





## AFGHAN-IMPROVISED MUNITIONS

Not all the interesting hardware in Afghanistan comes from the Soviets. In an Afghan training camp, *Soldier of Fortune* saw a range of sophisticated home-made munitions that could make Kabul rather unhealthy for the Soviets.

It requires little skill to improvise explosives. It's doing it effectively without blowing yourself up that is difficult. While the Afghans do not like talking about it, they have not always used such weapons effectively.

Part of the reason for this is cultural. The Afghans like rifles. They know rifles. Before the war, no one knew explosives. So the Afghans did not use either issue or improvised munitions with anything like the ingenuity and originality of the Vietnamese communists. From what we saw, the situation is changing. As the Afghans try desperately to become more of a cohesive fighting force and less a collection of heroic militias, they are learning not only to use mines and booby traps effectively, but to prepare their own improvised munitions and use them in a way that is standardized, tactically sound, and more hazardous to the enemy than to themselves.

One of the masterminds of this effort is Brigadier Rahmatullah Safi, former chief of Special Forces, Royal Afghan Army. Brigadier Safi is now a senior military adviser with The National Islamic Front of Afghanistan and was heavily involved in the planning and execution of the 1983-84 campaign in Paktia and Paktika Provinces.

Safi is an impressive figure. A Pathan who can look the part of either Afghan warrior or scientific soldier, he survived over two years in the Kabul Regime's prisons. He speaks excellent English and knows as much as anyone what the Afghans need on the battlefield: more and better training. The training camp he originally set up has already been detailed in *Soldier of Fortune* ("Afghan Elite Forces," December '83). Safi is now working to impart his professionalism, and that of a cadre of Afghans, including both Western and Soviet-trained ex-Afghan Army officers and experienced guerrillas, to the fighting men. Even if trained mujahideen are only a small percentage of the total Afghan numbers, Safi believes they can have an impact much greater than their numbers.

The favorite weapon of the Afghans who have passed through Safi's training is the Kabul Cocktail: a Molotov Cocktail that does not require a match to ignite — always risky under combat conditions — and is safer to the users. It consists of mixing — to a formula that trainees must memorize — old crankcase oil with



other ingredients that include gasoline and sulphur (old oil sticks to its target when the bottle breaks). They normally do not add soap powder and egg white, which would create a napalm-like substance whose effect would be too hard to control.

The mixture goes into the standard Mark I soda bottle and, to arm the cocktail, they drop the corked bottle inside a plastic bag containing potassium carbonate, and throw it where it will do the most good. When the bottle breaks, the mixture of the ingredients with the potassium carbonate creates ignition. These weapons are effective: The Afghans have discovered that a Kabul Cocktail across the engine decking of a Soviet tank will often set off the fire-extinguishing system, which uses toxic ethylene bromide gas, and force the crew to either bail out to face the waiting Lee-Enfields or risk being poisoned in their own tank. This method also has the advantage of leaving an intact tank for the Afghans.

The pipe bomb is also popular among the Afghans. Basic plumbing is packed with TNT, dynamite or plastic explosive, detonated either electrically or by ignited fuse. The pipe can also contain nails, bolts and other nasty objects, the amount of fragments and blast being varied with the tactical requirements. You can stage quite an effective ambush with only a handful of guerrillas if you line the killing zone with a series of electrically detonated pipe bombs. A demonstration of one of these bombs loaded with a reduced charge and oil for an incendiary effect yielded a spectacular result. Brig. Safi had himself almost been killed by such a bomb during training a few days before — he had not gotten down quickly enough and took a

**Homemade claymore mine — plastic explosive inside light metal casing with fragmentation matrix imbedded in the form of nails or shell splinters.**

rock fragment in the forehead.

The Afghans are also being instructed in how to make shaped charges, some of which have recently been put to good use near Kabul, taking out a large segment of the main electrical power line in a New Year's Eve blast on 31 December 1983. Tennis balls injected with gasoline and coated with black oil can be ignited, with a delay before burning through the coating and exploding. The demolitions instructor — a former engineer officer in the Afghan Army — also teaches how unexploded Soviet shells and bombs can be emptied for their explosives or used, intact, as mines or booby traps. These have already accounted for more than a few tanks. We were shown a photograph of a T-54 converted to scrap metal by a command-detonated aircraft bomb rigged as a mine.

The Afghans have always known how to fight with bravery. Now they are learning to fight with brains. The standardization of effective improvised munitions can go a long way toward compensating for the shortage of modern weapons that the Afghans have always suffered. Brig. Safi's instructors are passing along lessons gleaned not only from Western and Soviet training — Safi himself trained with both U.S. Special Forces and the British Special Air Service — but the lessons of over four years of war. The mixture of better weapons and more effective combat tactics may prove a lethal one indeed for the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan.

— David C. Isby



**RBK-250 cluster bomb showers bomblets over a wide area. Estimated lethal zone is 200,000 square feet.**

**A product of traditional Afghanistan who knows the value of good training, Brigadier Safi works to impart professionalism to his troops.**

reports of the Soviets using similar airdropped booby traps. According to *Russische Munition*, a wartime German intelligence publication, these included "mechanical pens, cigarette cases, pocket watches, and animals such as frogs." The Soviets may have been using such WWII-vintage weapons in the early stages of the Afghanistan War. Meanwhile, we have told the Afghans to defuse all suspicious frogs with extreme caution.

**SOVIET VERSION OF THE M203 GRENADE LAUNCHER.** Although we were unable to examine a specimen, both Afghans and Western journalists mentioned the existence of a Soviet version of the U.S. M203 40mm grenade launcher, which is mounted under the barrel of an M16 rifle. The Soviets use an AKS-74 5.45mm assault rifle, according to these reports, but the principle remains the same. Whether or not the Soviets have again lifted an item of hardware they needed remains to be seen. We'll be looking for an example of this on our next trip.

**AGS-17 30mm AUTOMATIC GRENADE LAUNCHER.** These photographs of an AGS-17 mounted in a BTR-60PB APC may represent the first published illustrations of a turret-mounted 30mm grenade launcher. BTR-60PB No. 460 is not armed with the standard 14.5mm KPV heavy machine gun with a coaxial 7.62mm PKT, but with what appears to be a shorter, larger-caliber weapon. It could well be a 30mm grenade launcher without the characteristic cooling fins and with a longer barrel. The muzzle looks like that on an AGS-17. These photographs were taken in early 1984 by Omar Babrakzai, a former high court judge, now a guerrilla commander at a location "somewhere in Afghanistan."

**THE CHOCOLATE MINE.** Not all the hardware *Soldier of Fortune* found from Afghanistan was deadly. Reports had filtered back to Peshawar of a new Soviet antipersonnel mine. Then, weeks later, a party of tattered mujahideen appeared. They had brought one of the mines with them, but had been unable to defuse it, so had brought it very carefully over the mountains. Opening the mine's carrying case behind sandbags, the Afghans discovered the "mine" was actually a tin of Soviet Army-issue chocolate, with *shokolad* stencilled in Russian across the lid, a language none of the Afghans who had captured and transported it could read. Its lethal effect is exerted through calories rather than high explosive. In Afghanistan, things are not always what they seem. ✕





**SOF** FEATURE

# GERMANY'S WINTER WARRIORS

## Alpine Troops Atop the Highest Heaps

by SOF Staff  
Photos by Rick Venable

Snow-holes save lives in alpine environment, where insulation and blending with white background are paramount.





**A** man in winter camouflage soundlessly stretches out on the snow. Nearly invisible against the white background, he ignores the numbing cold as he sights in on his unsuspecting prey. The mountains are silent — there is no shot and no blood will stain the pristine snow today. Because this is not war — at least not yet. It is the training school of the legendary German alpine troops — the *Gebirgsjäger*.

Mountains have always played an active and often deadly role in wartime. The forces of Alexander the Great were decimated by their crossing of the Taurus Mountains in southern Turkey; Hannibal suffered heavy casualties crossing the Alps and Napoleon lost many of his troops crossing the Saint Bernard Pass in 1800. In a more modern case, during World War I Turkish commander Enver Pasha lost 78,000 out of a total of 90,000 men trying to invade Russia through the Caucasus Mountains.

The idea of training Alpine troops didn't occur in modern times until the end of the 19th century, when it was implemented almost simultaneously in France, Italy and Austria. Alpine troops have three main tasks: defense (the invention of the machine gun made it possible for defenders to pick off large numbers of potential invaders as they straggled out of mountain passes before regrouping); offense (spearheading attacks on enemy positions) and guiding (leading their own armies safely through the mountains).

Germany raised her first ski battalion in November 1914, following with a mountaineer company soon after. The early *Gebirgsjäger* were trained to rock-climb, traverse glaciers and survive in sub-zero conditions without food or shelter by civilian mountaineering clubs, since no military men had adequate knowledge of

*Continued on page 70*



**SOF FEATURE**

# WINNING ISRAELI WINGS

## SOF Team Joins Allied Jumpers in Desert Sky-Jam

by Kevin E. Steele



Female Israeli para joins comrades from Italy, the United States and Belgium during ceremony held at the Paratrooper Memorial.

**G**O! Go! Go! Exploding through the door, I was blown away from the rumbling Israeli C-130 by the slipstream, right behind Donovan and Brown. *Onethowsun, twothowsun, threethowsun* — my audio senses returned as the modified T-10 canopy billowed open above me. Turning slightly in my harness, I watched as the remaining jumpers were spawned from the side doors of the retreating aircraft. The sky around me erupted in bursts of green canopies, mirrored in the deep blue Med to our west. The late afternoon sun glistened on the surface of the water, presenting an awe-inspiring seascape as viewed from 1,000 feet.

The desert DZ rose quickly to greet me. Assuming position, I hit the sand and executed a semi-PLF — my roll being interrupted by an intruding sand dune. Collapsing my 'chute, I glanced around and saw Craig Nunn rising from the desert floor 25 meters to my right. Looking like a reincarnation of Otto Skorzeny in his *Fallschirmjäger* jump helmet, Nunn's baritone carried across the dunes:

"Isn't this a great feeling — *AIRBORNE!!*!" Craig was right; it was a great feeling.

"You bet your ass — *Mazel tov!*" I hollered back.



Left to right: Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, the author and John Donovan examine Beaufort Castle from the defender's view — within an Israeli-destroyed PLO concrete pillbox.



SOF staffers Brown, Nunn, Donovan, Edens and I made up part of the 103-man American delegation to the 2nd Annual Congress of Free World Paratroopers, hosted by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli Paratroopers in particular. Israel's Red Berets provided the climax of the trip — the jump — but the rest of the week-long tour was equally exciting. It's hard to imagine a group that can have more fun doing what they love best. And it's hard to imagine that it all started as a sort of military exchange program.

Ten years ago a retired French paratrooper, Lt. Col. Andre Le Maitre, exchanged invitations with Israeli paras for combined jumps. Two years ago organization took hold, and other Free World countries were invited to participate with the French and Israelis. In 1984, more than 200 paratroopers representing nine countries attended the Congress. The avowed intention of the Congress is to strengthen the relationship between international brothers-in-arms, and to increase public knowledge of Israel and its armed forces, an outfit which some professional observers believe is second to none in terms of military capability.

SOF first learned of the Congress from Mike Epstein of

the 82nd Airborne Association. A few discussions with Mike assured us that the Congress was something SOF would be interested in, and our participation was guaranteed when Mike mentioned that our hosts would present Israeli jump wings following the drop. The wings would make a great addition for those of us who still had some room left on our cammies, but the real draw was getting actively involved in the thrill and comradeship of laying it on the line with some of the finest, most experienced jumpers in the world today. Publisher Robert K. Brown was selected to lead the American delegation, and we departed from New York's JFK airport 26 May aboard an El Al 747. Arriving at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, we were met by a contingent of male and female Israeli paras. The women presented each American with a red rose as we boarded the tour buses. "This is my kind of army!" someone shouted as we began the short hop into Israel's capital city.

We were all delighted when the bus pulled up in front of a first-class hotel right on the beach. As the setting sun cast golden shadows on the surface of the Mediterranean we headed to the bar, presumably to acquaint ourselves



**TOP:** South African delegation included Maj. Gen. du Plessis, center, Chief of Operations for the SA Defense Forces.

**ABOVE:** John Donovan and highly decorated French para pose for the cameras in front of the soaring wings of the Paratrooper Memorial.



with the week's schedule. Pre-jump planning is tough and dirty, but *someone* had to do it!

The week's itinerary was presented with military precision. Monday's schedule proved to be SOP for the week: reveille at 0630, chow at 0700, board the bus by 0800.

We had a full day of touring on Monday, taking off from Tel Aviv and seeing the sights to the north, which included the ancient Roman city of Caesarea; Haifa, Israel's San Francisco; lunch at Kibbutz Geshet Haziv; and ending with a tour of the underground Crusader city of Acre and a return to Tel Aviv via Nazareth.

It was interesting, but difficult to concentrate on the ancient and contemporary wonders of the land. Our thoughts turned to Tuesday — JUMP DAY.

Demonstrating dubious judgement, I prepared myself for Tuesday's jump not by practicing PLFs, but by closing the hotel bar Monday night. With what I considered to be abject rudeness on the part of the organizers, I was forced to respond to a 0630 wakeup call.

Four aspirins helped, but not much. I was all right until I bent down to lace my jump boots — at that point I knew I was in deep shit. Of course, cheerful John Donovan didn't help. "I *never* drink the night before a jump," Donovan rumbled as I slid into the seat beside him on the bus.

Our groups assembled at the Paratroopers' Memorial, dedicated to Israeli troopers who died in their country's wars. Located a short distance from the Paratrooper base, the memorial's polished marble walls are an impressive sight. Soaring overhead, atop a tall marble column, is a huge bronze casting of Israeli para wings. It's almost as if the spreading wings embrace the names of the dead listed on the monument's wall.



**ABOVE: SOF stick included from left to right: Bob Brown, the author, Craig Nunn, Jack Richardson and Paul "Bull" Chirlin. TOP: "Sound Off... Equipment Check!" SOF stick is examined by Israeli jumpmaster to make sure nothin's stickin' so you go on tickin'!**



The Paratrooper Congress presented a wreath to honor our fallen brothers. Attired in full jump gear, the participants had been ordered to wear full decorations. Standard bearers represented Israel, the United States, France, Belgium, Italy and South Africa. Robert K. Brown joined Generals Masseau of France and du Plessis of South Africa in presenting the wreath, in the form of jump wings, at the foot of the memorial.

Following the ceremony, we were taken to the Paratrooper base for a reception and an abbreviated ground course prior to the afternoon's jump. We had heard that the Israeli Army was somewhat informal, but were all a bit taken aback by what we saw at the base.

As one 82nd Airborne vet stated, "I don't see one damn painted rock on this base."

He was right. Even an elite unit like the paras is extremely relaxed and mellow when compared to U.S. forces. The Israelis appear to be on a constant wartime footing, and there's little time for garrison Mickey Mouse. That's understandable given their contemporary history. Virtually every time the IDF has been called out to answer a threat it's been a quick-and-dirty, come-as-you-are affair. In a situation like that being comfortable, and ready to face the enemy is more important than spit-and-polish.

Discipline was comparatively relaxed also. It is common IDF practice *not* to salute a superior officer. If a comparison between U.S. and IDF forces could be made at all, it would be to point out the difference between troops stateside and those in a combat zone. If you were in combat, you know the difference; if not, look at photos from 'Nam and compare the troops in those to photos taken stateside or during peacetime exercises.

We queued up in front of the QM building to be issued helmets. The Israelis do not use a special jump helmet, just their standard issue. However, these are "ballistic" helmets, made from Kevlar, which the manufacturer claims will resist full penetration by Russian 7.62 ammo. We didn't get a chance to test that claim and I don't think many IDF troopers would want to be in on the test. The headgear is relatively well-padded and comfortable. It has about the same weight and wearing characteristics of the new American 'coal-scuttle' ballistic helmet which resembles an earlier WW II German style, but the IDF helmet does not feature the protection for base of skull and upper neck of the U.S. version.

Once outfitted, we formed in ranks and double-timed to the training area for some PLF practice, a rundown on loading procedure, and a jump sequence from a C-130 mock-up. Unlike U.S. procedure, the Israelis take a reverse-bite on the static line following hookup, and although they perform a modified equipment check, they do not do a "sound-off" as a final equipment check prior to moving toward the door.

After lunch, the jumpers headed to the para-loft to be issued parachutes. Israeli riggers are called "packers," and they are all women — and jumpers.

Our main canopies were similar to the non-steerable T-10, and were of French design and Israeli manufacture. They utilize an anti-inversion net on the underside of the canopy, and the panels are not modified in any way. Our gear was brand new: backpacks, harnesses and reserves.

The Israelis have one technique that's kind of interesting. As our Israeli jumpmaster was explaining our rigs, he directed that after the main canopy was fully deployed, we

## JUMP WITH SOF IN '85

While a date has yet to be set for next year's Congress of Free World Paratroopers, SOF is assisting in organizing a large American delegation. All military jumpers, both active, reserve and retired, are welcomed. The event is seven days long, and the tour package includes airfare from New York to Tel Aviv, lodging, breakfast and lunch, the jump with the Israeli Airborne, and all tours conducted. We are investigating the possibility of spending more time with the Israeli Defense Forces and reserving the historical tours as an option. SOF will also be organizing an after-convention trip to Eilat and the Red Sea for those of you who are qualified SCUBA divers. If you're interested in receiving an information packet when they become available, drop us a note at: Israel '85, C/O Soldier of Fortune, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. Airborne!



American paratroopers form photo ranks alongside Israeli tour bus that was "home" for seven days. Our Israeli jumpmasters — one male and one female — are in the foreground.



were to unhook the right side of the reserve and allow it to dangle. This statement raised a few American eyebrows, and I don't know of one American jumper, including myself, who unhooked his reserve prior to landing. After all, why go screwing around with your insurance policy if you're satisfied with the coverage?

The Israeli rationale for doing this has to do with the fact that they sling their rifles from the right shoulder on combat jumps. They detach the reserve so it won't get in the way should they have to deploy the weapon while still in the air.

We suited up at the airport, and shortly thereafter the drone of multiple C-130s was heard approaching the loading apron. The Americans were on the second plane, with Donovan as our jumpmaster. Three sticks of 11 men each made up the C-130's complement.

Buffed by propwash, we moved out in jump order

## WENDELL YOUNG

"Hi, I'm Bob Brown," said SOF's editor-publisher as he slid into his seat on the El Al 747 bound for Tel Aviv.

"I'm Wendell Young." An older man sitting next to the window offered a gnarled paw to shake.

"Are you gonna be jumping?" asked Brown, examining the gray-haired man's obvious age and less-than-peak physical condition.

"Sure as shit am," was the reply.

So went the first meeting with Wendell Young, a 65-year-old native of Big Spring, Texas, and the acknowledged favorite of the SOF contingent during the Congress of Free World Paratroopers.

Young decided to join the American delegation after seeing a notice in SOF's "Bulletin Board" welcoming all military jumpers to the Congress. Young told us he made his decision to jump after growing weary of hearing friends tell war stories about incidents that occurred 45 years ago. "Hell, I'm gonna go jump out of a plane again," he told his buddies.



**Proud and tall, Wendell Young is an 11th Airborne vet whose jump in Israel marked his first since 1945!**

and boarded the Hercules through the rear ramp. Once we were seated, the plane taxied and lifted off into the hot, dry air.

The drop zone was about two clicks east of the beach, just north of Tel Aviv. Landings would be soft due to the desert sand, with only a few thorn bushes to contend with.

A bell sounded, and we were on our feet.

"Sound off, equipment check!" Donovan roared above the turboprops.

"Stand in the door!" We jumper-shuffled behind each other, focusing on the square of sunlight which marked the hatches.

Go! Go! Go!

It took five C-130s for full deployment. As each plane approached the DZ, it dropped its complement, and the

The Israeli jump was far from his first, but it marked the first time out the door and under a canopy since 23 April 1945. That's when Young and his buddies in the 11th Airborne Division fell from the sky to combat Japanese forces in Luzon, the Philippines, during World War II.

Young joined the Army as an 18-year-old at the outbreak of WWII. He served with the 11th Airborne Division throughout the conflict and, aside from his jump into Luzon, also helped liberate 2,073 American POWs from the Los Banyos prison camp, and participated in the rescue of General Wainwright from Japanese captivity in Manchuria.

Wendell Young is a crusty, yet charming, cowboy whose ancestors came to west Texas on a wagon train in 1881. His mother was born on that wagon train, and his grandmother died during childbirth as a result of wounds sustained in an Indian attack six weeks earlier.

Brown, the leader of the American delegation to the Congress, selected Young as standard bearer for the Stars and Stripes during the many ceremonies we attended. The grizzled veteran accepted the honor proudly and carried out his duty with a ramrod posture and a determined set to his jaw — the combination of him and our flag was impossible to upstage.

Young was interviewed by an Israeli video crew who were preparing a tape of the jump day. "What makes a paratrooper?" they asked him. "Balls," he growled. "Macho and crotcho."

Wendell Young is an authentic American hero, a vanishing breed in these days of computers and faceless military commanders. Our last encounter with Young was on an elevator in our Tel Aviv hotel. He was talking with a group of young troopers from the 82nd Airborne who had never heard of the 11th Airborne Division.

"Things have changed," he sighed as the elevator door closed behind him. He left me with the image of a ramrod-straight figure, proudly wearing the red beret and buck-sergeant stripes on his sleeve. I thought of the words John Donovan spoke as he presented Young the American flag at the farewell banquet.

"Wendell Young personifies the tradition of the Free World paratrooper," said Donovan. I hoped my 82nd Airborne elevator-mates had the same paratrooper spirit Wendell Young personified.

— David Mills



sky filled with a beautiful sight: parachute canopies floating en masse toward the ground.

The Israeli women packers had done their jobs well. Aside from a few barberpoles there were no malfunctions, and only two jumpers sustained injuries. One tore a ligament in his leg going out the door of the Herc when a cleat on his jungle boot wedged into the door jamb, sending his body earthward long before his leg decided to follow. The other casualty compressed a disc on landing. Overall, it was a very successful jump.

Regrouping at the target area, we were presented with our jump certificates and Israeli wings by Gen. Mordecai, CG, Paratroops. Following the awards ceremony, champagne corks started flying like empty brass in a fire fight as the assembled paras toasted the experience and our common bond.

Following the post-jump party at the DZ, we loaded up and headed out to Tiberias, a beautiful resort town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Rumors had begun to circulate that a "special tour" had been arranged for the next day, and when we arrived at a swank hotel in Tiberias, we were ordered to report for a general meeting at 2200. We

knew we were in for something interesting when we entered the room and saw five Israeli officers waiting for us. We were informed that we would be lifted by chopper to Beaufort Castle, several clicks inside the Lebanese border. The area had been the scene of some desperate fighting during the 1982 IDF incursion into Lebanon in an attempt to drive PLO fighters out of their sanctuary. Our departure point would be Kiryat Shmona which is situated along Israel's northern border with Lebanon.

On arrival at Kiryat Shmona, we were taken to an LZ and assigned to heli-teams. Within moments, the thud of heavy chopper blades filled the air. Israeli-modified Sikorsky CH-53s, called "Goliaths," set down and lowered their rear ramps. Double-timing into the birds, we loaded and lifted off, heading due north out of Galilee and into southern Lebanon.

The cultivated green of Israel faded to the scarred brown earth of Lebanon as we craned our necks to see through the partially open rear ramp. An architectural anachronism built by the Crusaders in the 12th century, Beaufort Castle is located 1,200 feet above the Litani River.

The chopper landed, and we bounded down the ramp

## ZBIGNIEW ZIEMSKI

As Hitler's blitzkrieg thundered across the plains of Poland in September 1939, Zbigniew Ziemski fought his way west across war-torn Europe to freedom. Hitler had made another mortal enemy.

Eventually arriving in England in 1940, the free Pole joined the British Army. Ziemski volunteered for parachute training in May 1941, and was among the first paratroopers to graduate from Great Britain's newly formed airborne course at Ringway.

In those days, military parachuting was in its infancy. At Ringway, the initial trainees jumped from a Whitley bomber through a hole cut in the fuselage floor. Ziemski was among the survivors of this treacherous training.

For those who recall Cornelius Ryan's nonfiction best-

seller, *A Bridge Too Far*, and the motion picture of the same name, the Dutch town of Arnhem and the exploits of General Sosobowski's 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade are quite familiar. They are certainly familiar to Ziemski — he was there. The 1st Polish played a critical role in Operation Market-Garden, the largest combined airborne-armor offensive in the annals of modern warfare.

The vengeful young Pole jumped at Arnhem with Sosobowski. Pinned down on the south bank of the Rhine by unanticipated Waffen-SS troops, the Poles struggled to cross the river into Arnhem to reinforce elements of the British 1st Parachute Regiment. Ziemski's personal attempt to cross the Rhine was foiled when German machine guns sank his rubber raft. Faced with potential disaster, the Polish force finally withdrew behind Allied lines. But Ziemski's career as a paratrooper did not end in Holland.

Following the war, he went to France and enlisted in the Foreign Legion. He was sent to Indochina in 1951 with the 1st BEP. During the fighting in Vietnam against Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh, Ziemski was wounded. As he tells it:

"I only survived because I got shot just after 1200 hours, and I had just put on my steel helmet to comply with standing orders." The round would have been fatal had the Polish legionnaire not feared the wrath of his NCOs more than incoming fire.

In 1953, Ziemski was transferred to North Africa with the 3rd BEP. His unit was moved back to Indochina in 1954, but arrived too late to reverse the debacle at Dien Bien Phu. Returning to Algeria, Ziemski retired from the Legion in 1964. In the Legion, Ziemski was known to his comrades as *Der Alte Kampfer*, the old fighter. He was 34 years old when he enlisted in 1947.

Among Ziemski's decorations are the Legion of Honor, the Cross of Merit and the Cross of War. But the proudest symbol of his indomitable spirit remains the several sets of paratrooper wings he wears.

— David Mills



British Army, 1st Independent Polish Para Brigade and the Foreign Legion were all home to Zbigniew Ziemski, *Der Alte Kampfer* — the old fighter.



and away from the rotorwash. The ancient fortress loomed ahead of us, pockmarked from numerous direct artillery hits, but still standing like a stone sentinel.

Security at Beaufort was tight. While the area is considered "secure," danger from infiltrating PLO snipers still exists, and the Israeli garrison was on its toes.

Strategically, Beaufort Castle and the surrounding area is a critical, commanding terrain feature, viewed from either the Syrian, PLO or Israeli perspective. Located about three miles from the village of Metula, Beaufort dominates the Amoun Heights, a natural barrier of high ground on which PLO and Syrian artillery emplacements had been erected to shell Israeli settlements and farms in northern Galilee.

PLO forward observers at Beaufort directed the Syrian artillery fire. From Beaufort, you can see the Galilee panhandle clearly laid out below. During the most recent fighting in the area, 57mm batteries plagued the Israelis and had to be silenced.

For years the PLO had dug deeply under and into the ancient stone walls of Beaufort. Impervious to conventional air and artillery attack, the Israelis decided to sweep the entrenched PLO out the only way possible: a go-for-broke, all-out infantry assault supported by armor.

In June 1982, the Israelis launched a preemptive offensive against the PLO and Syrian forces in southern Lebanon. Titled "Peace for Galilee," the offensive was laun-

ched following a request from the Lebanese commander of the area, the late Maj. Said Haddad, a renegade Lebanese Army officer who cooperated with the Israeli government in keeping the area of southern Lebanon relatively secure and free from PLO cross-border incursion. Whatever the motivation, the Israelis hit, and hit hard, until they fell under fire from the entrenched guns at Beaufort. The terrain and imposing fortifications kept the IDF from overwhelming the position and their advance along the sector was temporarily stalled.

The Israeli general staff assigned the mission of seizing the castle to the famed Golani Brigade. According to the concept of operations, the Golani infantrymen were to launch a daylight strike on Beaufort, supported by direct fire from APCs and tanks. Unfortunately, when the mechanized Golani column approached the only bridge in the area over the Litani River, they found an entire Israeli division ahead of them making the crossing. Not wanting to wait and fall behind schedule, the Golani CO ordered his men to ford the Litani downstream. Unfortunately, the armor ran into difficulty, and the infantry proceeded to the jump-off point without them.

In the 800 years Beaufort has guarded the Amoun Heights, no assaulting force had ever taken the citadel. Siege worked on numerous occasions, but frontal attacks had always been repulsed by defenders holding the high ground.



**TOP:** Lt. Gen. Moshe Levy, chief of staff *Tshal*, or the Israeli Defense Forces. Levy addressed the Para Congress at Beaufort Castle in Lebanon. **ABOVE:** Built in the 12th century by French crusaders, Beaufort Castle guards the Amoun Heights of southern Lebanon, and was the scene of intensive hand-to-hand fighting between the Golani Brigade and PLO defenders in June of 1982.



**Modified CH-53 "Goliath" prepares to touch down at Beaufort with a complement of Free World Paras.**



Without armor and artillery support, the Golani went forward as the sun began to set. After 12 hours of combat, much of it hand-to-hand, Beaufort finally fell to the Israelis. The Golani Brigade killed 27 PLO defenders, routed 30 to 40 more, and lost only four Israeli KIA.

Only a Brit, with their typical penchant for understatement, would say that the view from the top of Beaufort is awesome. As a defensive position it's almost perfect. Viewed from an attacker's position it's downright scary. We were a bit curious as to why the Israelis had not simply dropped a few cannisters of napalm on the old fort. Their reply was vague, something about not using napalm much anymore. That's all we could get out of them.

We toured the Beaufort fortifications, then gathered under a camo netting that provided some relief from the searing sun. We were awaiting the arrival of Lt. Gen. Moshe Levy, Chief of Staff of the IDF, who would deliver a briefing on Israel's current military situation.

Just prior to Levy's arrival, I was walking around taking photos. I saw a tall, blond Israeli trooper heading toward me, armed with what appeared to be an M21 sniper rifle. He was obviously a "shooter."

I stopped him and asked if I could take a photo. He spoke only Hebrew, but appeared to agree. After he walked off, I glanced around. High above me was a crumbling wall of what remained of that section of Beaufort. I was trying to figure out where the shooter

would choose to locate his hide, and that high wall looked pretty good to me. Within 15 minutes, the shooter had reached the top of that same wall and perched on it.

Shortly thereafter, the Israelis announced that everyone not in Israeli uniform would be required to stay inside the netting area. Having seen the shooter for myself, I didn't need to be told twice.

Levy arrived in a Huey slick that dipped over the reception area, then headed toward the chopper pad. The shooter was keeping his eye out for threats to the boss.

Gen. Levy strolled down the path from the pad, accompanied by a brigadier and a major general who turned out to be Dan Shomron, operational commander of the Entebbe raid, and the officer played by Charles Bronson in the film.

Levy and his party spent about 40 minutes with our group, and outlined an Israeli defense policy that can be summed up in four words: "Don't tread on me." The Israelis don't make any apologies for their position. You mess with the bull and you get the horn.

Following Levy's departure, we again boarded the Goliaths and returned to Kiryat Shmona for a late lunch. We then headed out along the banks of the River Jordan, and south through the disputed territory known as the West Bank. We turned west at the Almog junction and headed for Jerusalem, which was to be our HQ for three days.



Israeli "shooter" took up position at Beaufort prior to the arrival of Gen. Levy. He was armed with a U.S. M21 sniper rifle fitted with a Zeiss scope.



## PAUL "BULL" CHIRLIN

One of the more colorful American jumpers to hang beneath an Israeli T-10 was Paul Chirlin. This grizzled veteran volunteered for Airborne training in 1943 at the tender age of 17. His bulk and brawn soon had his buddies calling him "Bull."

Assigned to Gen. William M. Miley's newly formed 17th Airborne — the "Golden Talon Division" — Chirlin didn't have to wait long before earning combat veteran status.

Ferried to France from England just before Christmas Day, 1944, the 17th was thrown into defensive positions on the Meuse River. On 3 January, the Golden Talon was trucked to the town of Morhet in the southern sector of the German penetration of the Allied lines known as "The Bulge." The paratroopers relieved the 11th Armored Division and tied in with Patton's Third Army. On the following day, the 17th launched an assault against German Gen. Von Rundstedt in the rear of the Belgian town of Bastogne, which ultimately cleared the sector of Germans and relieved the pressure on the beleaguered "Battered Bastards of Bastogne," the 101st Airborne Division.

During the fierce, frigid combat in the snow around Bastogne, Bull Chirlin sustained a wound which knocked him unconscious. "When I came to," he relates, "I was laying in the snow with my dogtags wedged in my teeth. I finally figured out that I had been left for dead by my buddies who had been driven back.

"When I ultimately made it back to my outfit, there were some pretty surprised faces. You'd think they'd seen a ghost!"

Bull's next combat adventure involved a daylight jump over the Rhine River into Germany — Operation Varsity. Though any paratrooper has a right to be a bit squeamish prior to a daylight insertion on a very hot DZ, Bull and his buddies had an added pucker factor when they discovered several parachutes had been sabotaged on a rehearsal jump for the operation.

Also, they would be jumping a new aircraft — the C-46 — which featured two jump doors to accelerate the exit of troopers. The venerable bird soon gained a bad reputation for catching fire quite easily.

When he landed in the neighborhood of Wesel, Germany, Chirlin recalled seeing elements of the British 6th Airborne Division coming down right in the lap of the German First Parachute Army. "The *fallschirmjäger*s were really giving the Brits hell," Bull intoned. "We had quite a few gliders in the operation and I clearly recall seeing a German with a flame thrower run up and torch one right after it landed, killing everyone inside. Another trick the Germans used was to place machine-gun nests in the wrecked gliders," Chirlin added. "It was plenty hot."

Now a resident of Brooklyn, N.Y., Bull Chirlin told SOF that he read about the Israeli operation in his unit's newsletter, *Thunder From Heaven*. "My wife didn't care much for the idea of my jumping out of a perfectly good airplane," quipped the 58-year-old veteran, "but she knows better than to try to keep me from doing something I want to do." Bull concluded by cheerfully relating that his jump in the Holy Land, his first in the 39 years since Operation Varsity, "was perfect — I loved it!"

— Nick Nichols

## COL. DONALD R. STROBAUGH, USAF (RET.)

Of all the highly qualified military parachutists who took part in the second Congress of Free World Paras, Col. Don Strobaugh is very likely the most qualified. After entering the U.S. Air Force as a private in 1948, Strobaugh served a three-year hitch in Germany where he participated in the Berlin airlift.

He then attended OCS in 1953 and began his commissioned career as a communications officer. In October 1955, Strobaugh volunteered for airborne training and after completing the U.S. Army course at Ft. Benning, Ga., was assigned to the 2nd Aerial Port Squadron as a Combat Control Team (CCT) leader.

Though this unique assignment would provide enough excitement and challenge for most men, Strobaugh was looking for something "a little different." In May 1959, he attended the Department of Defense Test Parachutist Course after which he joined the six-man team (five Army and one Air Force) which made the first night, delayed, free-fall, combat-equipment parachute-jump in U.S. military history.

During the early '60s, Strobaugh founded the U.S. Air Force Parachute Demonstration Team (Europe) — the "Blue Masters" — and served as its team leader. He was also the captain of the American parachute team that won the British Parachuting Championships (1961) and was a member of the U.S. Parachute Team which took first place in the International Parachuting Championships at Leutkirch, Germany, in 1961.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Strobaugh accepted an assignment in November 1962 to Tripoli, Libya, where he participated in the development and testing of high-altitude bail-out procedures for C-130 aircraft over the Sahara Desert.

Putting his skills to work in combat, Col. Strobaugh was assigned to operate with the Belgian paratroop battalion which made the airborne assault on Stanleyville, Republic of the Congo, during Operation Dragon Rouge in November 1964. More combat experience would come when he made his first trip to Vietnam in June 1967.

Serving as chief of combat control operations, his first tour included cooperative operations with the 26th Marine Regiment during the siege of Khe Sanh in the spring of 1968 and similar work with the 1st Air Cav during the initial assault on the A Shau Valley during the same period. By the time his tour was completed, Strobaugh had logged 14 jumps in Vietnam.

In the early years of the following decade, Strobaugh took part in the jump testing of the C-5 Galaxy aircraft and then returned to Vietnam in August 1972, where he was involved in the redeployment of Allied troops. He left Vietnam on the last aircraft carrying American troops.

His career also had some ties with the Israelis. During the Yom Kippur War, Strobaugh served as commander of the airlift control element which was responsible for the American resupply airlift to Tel Aviv known as Operation Nickle Grass.

Strobaugh retired from the Air Force in 1976. His last jump prior to the one in Israel was made in 1974. He has logged more than 1,200 military static-line jumps and his log book now features more than 3,200 total jumps from 52 different types of aircraft. In addition to numerous combat awards, Strobaugh has qualified for the French Parachutist Badge, Iranian Master Parachutist Badge, German Master Parachutist Badge, Vietnamese Jumpmaster Badge and now, the Israeli Parachutist Badge. Don Strobaugh is a Master Blaster *par excellence!*

— Nick Nichols



Jerusalem is an experience, even if you're not into organized religion. The city is 5,000 years old, layer upon layer of tangible history staring you in the face and inviting you to experience it. My first night in Jerusalem proved to be a very moving emotional experience, for a number of reasons — one I won't forget or regret.

Our remaining days were filled with tours, nighttime get-togethers with old and newly made friends, numerous toasts, and one morning spent at a monument commemorating one of the most heinous acts in history: Hitler's Holocaust.

Yad Vashem sits on a hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem. It's an interesting monument in that it's both a grisly reminder of the past, and a tribute to those who perished in the ovens. The Paratrooper Congress presented a wreath at the mausoleum while a cantor chanted a Hebrew prayer. The eternal flame cast eerie shadows upon the faces of the assembled paratroopers, and many watched the smoke curling up through the vent in the roof — lost in private thoughts.

We also visited another memorial to the ghosts of Israel's past: Masada.

Rising 1,200 feet above the Dead Sea, Masada is a natural mesa that was chosen by Herod the Great as a site for a retreat, should his despotic rule of the Jews end in open rebellion. Following the burning of Jerusalem by Roman troops, Masada was occupied by Jewish Zealots in 71 A.D. Hounded by the Romans, the Zealots atop Masada were subjected to a two-year siege by the Tenth Roman Legion of Flavius Silva.

The Romans erected a giant earthen ramp, using Jewish slaves. For two years the ramp steadily approached the Jewish defenses atop Masada's walls. Roman intent was to get the ramp high enough so that the Roman siege towers could be positioned at wall height and assault troops could

bridge the gap and attack the Zealots. Masada, a novel by the late Ernest Gann, and later a made-for-television movie, tells the whole story.

The Zealots decided to commit mass suicide rather than provide the Romans with a victory. When the Roman horde finally violated Masada's walls, the corpses of more than 900 men, women and children awaited their raised swords.

According to the Hebrew-turned-Roman historian Josephus, Silva was heard to say, "We have conquered a pile of rocks, surrounded by desert, on the shore of a dead sea." Perhaps the "battle" of Masada gave rise to the term "hollow victory."

Today, each new member of the IDF is taken to the top of Masada. There, with a rifle in one hand and a Bible in the other, they take a solemn oath: "I swear Masada will not fall again."

Saturday night's farewell banquet was held back in Tel Aviv at 2030 hours. Most participants had forgotten our jump day had been recorded on video tape by an IDF crew. A large movie screen had been set up in the hall, and the lights were dimmed and the tape rolled. There we were, our entire day captured on video tape complete with voice and music. To say the tape was an exciting end to an eventful trip does not do it justice. The climax was the footage of the jump itself: thundering C-130s discharging paratroopers to haunting strains of music from *Chariots of Fire*.

Our trip was over, but it certainly would not be forgotten. Since the Congress is an annual event, the general feeling among participants was that most of us would return in '85. For the paratroopers of the Free World Congress, the traditional words uttered at Passover had taken on their own special meaning to us: Next year in Jerusalem! ✂



John Donovan muses atop Masada. The ancient retreat of Herod the Great was the site of one of history's great conflicts — the 10th Roman Legion led by Flavius Silva against 900 Jewish Zealots.



TOP: Kibbutzniks bring their own security detail to Masada — this comely lass carries the omnipresent UZI submachine gun. ABOVE: Memorial service at Yad Vashem, Israel's monument to the Holocaust, brought tears to the eyes of the most hardened paratroopers.



## SOF FEATURE

### Politics Retires the Side for SADF Philistines

# PATHFINDER PARABATS

by Alastair R.F. MacKenzie

WHEN I was posted to HQ 44 Parachute Brigade of the South African Defense Force (SADF) in early 1981 as the SO2 (senior officer, second in command), operations and training, the Pathfinder Company had been in existence for little more than four months. However, it had already established a good reputation for aggressive, successful operations in South West Africa, thanks to the professional leadership of a young South African officer assisted by two experienced warrant officers, one of whom was ex-British and Rhodesian SAS, the other ex-Rhodesian Light Infantry and Selous Scout.

The Pathfinder Company was formed in late November 1980 on the instructions of Col. "Carpenter," the brigade commander, to provide him with an independent force capable of carrying out clandestine and unconventional operations in the border areas of South West Africa (SWA), because the pathfinder company already in the brigade, stationed with the 1st Parachute Battalion in Bloemfontein, performed only the traditional task of marking and controlling para drop zones (DZ) or helicopter landing points (LP).

Carpenter already had experience in forming unconventional units. He had started both the Recce Commandos, the

SADF Special Forces (see SOF, July '79), and 32 Battalion (see SOF, February '84). In addition the colonel, one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the SADF, had combat experience in all its major operations to date, including the attack on Cassinga in 1978. At Cassinga he commanded a brigade airborne assault on a major SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) camp complex where they carried out some *goed* culling.

Before going on, I should briefly explain the organization of the Parachute Brigade, known as Parabats in South Africa. In 1980 there were three of these battalions. The 1st Battalion, based at Tempe, was the permanent-force Parabat. It was responsible for SADF parachute training and selecting the National Servicemen who volunteer for service in the airborne forces. The Brigade and 2nd Battalion HQs were based at Hammanskraal on the outskirts of Pretoria. The 3rd Battalion was based in Johannesburg and, like the 2nd Battalion, had companies spread throughout the Republic. Second and 3rd Parabats were manned entirely by part-time soldiers, Citizen Force personnel who volunteered to serve their annual one-month obligation to these units after having served their initial two-year tour. In 1981 a fourth Parabat was formed, based in Durban

The setting sun silhouettes a South African Puma helicopter returning from its mission.

Alouette dives toward the veldt in support of troopers on the ground.

and commanded by an ex-Recce Commando soldier who is the holder of the Honoris Crux, one of the Republic's highest decorations for gallantry. Fourth Parabat is also composed of Citizen Force soldiers.

The soldiers of the 1st Parabat spend much of their time on operations, so when the National Servicemen complete their compulsory two-year fulltime service with them they become combat veterans. Those who have done their National Service with the 1st Parabat return each year to serve with 2, 3 or 4 Parabat even though they are not obligated to serve their compulsory 30 days in the airborne. This means that although the majority of 44 Parachute Brigade are part-time soldiers, there is no shortage of combat experience. The Parabats are the cream of the SADF — and that is not an honor won lightly in an army that is ultra-efficient on operations.

The 44 Parachute Brigade Pathfinder Company was fortunate in having a potpourri of talent, skill, ability, knowledge and integrity in its 23 men — two South Africans and expatriates from the United





States, Britain, France, New Zealand, Italy and Australia, most of whom had served in the Rhodesian Army but would not stay when Mugabe was handed power. Their service experience included: (United States) infantry, airborne, Rangers, Special Forces and Marines; (Britain) SAS, Paras, Royal Marines and Guardsmen; (Rhodesia) RLI, Selous Scouts, Greys Scouts and the Armored Car Regiment.

The SADF was particularly receptive to recruits who had served in the Rhodesian Army and treated them well on enlistment. An enlistee received a bonus of 500 Rand when he signed up and another bonus of 1,000 Rand on completion of his contract, which was normally one year but renewable. Married enlistees were given furnished accommodations near Pretoria.

Because the brigade HQ had only recent-

ly moved to Hammanskraal, one of the Pathfinder Company's first tasks was to make their own camp next to HQ. A cookhouse was built, a farmhouse provided the accommodation, stables were converted into magazines and, most importantly, ranges, training areas and a combat assault course were built. The 5km-long assault course was a testing little beast that included a water crossing, wire obstacles, a bunker complex and an enemy camp, all to be cleared under live fire.

On enlistment in the SADF, if it was thought that a soldier who wanted to join the Pathfinders had potential, he was sent to the brigade HQ to attend the next selection course. An initial problem with Pathfinder volunteers was the difficulty of substantiating claims of previous rank and combat experience. It seemed that all the volunteers from the Rhodesian Army had been SAS or Selous Scouts officers, volunteers from the British Army were SAS or Para veterans, and every Frenchman had been in the Foreign Legion paras.

Selection soon weeded out the phonies and showed the genuine professionals. The first stage of the intensive course involved covering long distances, with equipment, over the rugged, unforgiving Drakensberg Mountains in the province of Natal. Volunteers had to hike set distances within a given time, often in appallingly wet, cold and sometimes snowy weather, to prove that they had the stamina and determination to be Pathfinders. After completion of this stage, the volunteers underwent tactical training/revision at Mabilique in northern Transvaal on the Zimbabwe border. (The Mugabe government became paranoid about this training, believing it to be the buildup for an invasion by the feared Rhodesian army-in-exile.) Next, the volunteers were deployed to Sector One Zero, South West Africa's operational zone, for assessment in a combat environment. Only if they showed capability could they become Pathfinders and wear the coveted red beret.

The operational Pathfinders were based in the camp on the main sector airbase at Ondangwa with a 1st Parabat company that provided a fire force for the sector. The Pathfinder group was commanded by Dennis Croukamp, a lean, hard veteran of the RLI and Selous Scouts and one of the first recipients of the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia for gallantry.

Because deployment of the Pathfinders in SWA was controlled by HQ Sector One Zero, unfortunately many of the tasks given to the group were neither well planned nor allowed the men's skills and experience to be used to best advantage. Take the case of the "Q" car, for example.

The Q car was a converted buckie (station wagon) with concealed 7.62mm FN MAGs and armor plating. The group was tasked for its crew. They drove it after last light between Grootfontein, the SWA logistic base, and Oshakati, the location of the main HQ complex, a distance of over 200 kms. SWA-PO terrorists, who could not lay mines on this road because it was tar-sealed, would



stop what they thought were soft vehicles to assault and often murder the civilian occupants. The Q car was extremely effective, and many SWAPO had their nights permanently ruined when a supposedly innocent buckie erupted in a blaze of gunfire from MAGs, RIs (SADF 7.62mm FN rifle) and R4s (South African copy of the Israeli Galil).

The value of the Q car was lost after a few weeks, however, when Sector HQ insisted on its being driven almost every night: Even

SWAPO terrorists weren't tired enough of living to attack it when it appeared on a regular basis.

The Pathfinders' "tackie" patrols were a better operation. (Tackie is the South African and Rhodesian troopie name for a gym shoe.) A tackie patrol took along a SWAPO group of "turned" terrors who had been given "an offer they couldn't refuse" in the PW cage at Oshakati. It moved into an area where it was suspected that SWAPO were lying up in *kraals* (native hamlets) after hav-

ing crossed into Sector One Zero from Angola. A patrol base would be established. Then the ex-SWAPOs and their Pathfinder minders would move around likely *kraals*. The ex-SWAPOs, posing as the real thing, either obtained intelligence on SWAPO movements, or captured or killed any terrors found. It was a very successful operation because captured SWAPO could, themselves, be "turned."

In my first few weeks at the brigade I went on operations with the Pathfinder

Chasing SWAPO terrors allows no rest. Transports move supplies to resupply troopers in the bush.





Company and talked with its leaders. I then decided to institute a more progressive training cycle for the unit. At that time, once the Pathfinders were dispatched to Sector One Zero, they stayed there until their contract expired or they were killed or wounded. There was no specialist training or tactical retraining.

The new selection and training program began in March 1981. It was based on my experience with the New Zealand infantry in South Vietnam, that of the British Paras and 22 SAS and of the experienced soldiers within the company. The system was designed to ensure that each soldier, once he had passed selection, would be trained as a specialist in either signals, demolitions, medic or tracking. Each soldier would then be cross-trained in the other skills during breaks from operations. This gave the four-man patrols or "sticks" maximum operational flexibility, and sticks could be combined for larger operations. (The block syllabus appears on p. 00.)

The selection was broken into two phases, the first still being held in the Drakensberg Mountains, the second, the tactical phase, at the eastern end of the Caprivi Strip near Mpacha. It included a "dark phase" similar to those carried out by the Rhodesian SAS, Selous Scouts and the South African Recce Commando. In this phase students live and train exactly like SWAPOs, learning their tactics, customs and habits — even singing SWAPO songs. The logic behind the dark phase can be found in the writings of Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese strategist: "If you know your enemy as well as you know yourself, you will never suffer defeat."

The final part of the second phase covered various methods of interrogation used by the communists and how to counter them. Students were subjected to physical stress, caused by discomfort and lack of food and water, and to mental stress caused by silence, isolation, "white sound" (constant high-pitched sound) and interrogations. This part of the training showed flaws in individuals that had so far been concealed. Students were not considered passed until they successfully completed it. (One soldier who had "cracked" under interrogation — no physical violence was allowed during this training — had been allowed to go on operations before passing this part of the course. He was killed in his first contact when he stood up in his fire position to engage the enemy with a pistol like Roy Rogers.)

As a result of the amended training system and the intervention of Col. Carpenter, the operational tasking and employment of the Pathfinder Company improved during 1981. The company deployed on a number of external operations, sometimes on independent tasks but mainly in support of 32 Battalion or, occasionally, to assist the SADF infantry battalions from such camps as Okalongo, 30km from the Angolan border. The Pathfinders' training enabled them to operate in small, well-armed sticks, establishing observation posts (OP) along

SWAPO infiltration routes into Sector One Zero, outside *kraals* and waterholes, and in ambushes around the numerous reservoirs, built by the Portuguese and scattered throughout southern Angola. If terts were sighted from these OPs they would either be engaged, or their direction and strength passed to the Pathfinder operations room in Ondangwa or a forward base in an SADF camp close to the border.

This information would be used by HQ Sector One Zero to deploy the Parabat fire force, the Alouette helicopter gunships or — the solution we preferred — 32 Battalion, which always had two companies deployed above the "cut-line," as the border was known. These aggressive, Portuguese-speaking, black Angolans, dressed in Pork (Portuguese) camouflage uniforms, would set off and trail the SWAPOs until the inevitable conclusion of the hunt.

## BLOCK SYLLABUS

Subject	Training Periods	
	Day	Night
Physical Training (including selection)	61	
Navigation	32	8
Weapon Training	32	
Medical	8	4
Communications	10	2
Minor Tactics	84	18
Pathfinder Technique (conventional operations)	35	10
Combat Survival (escape and evasion)	28	8
Resistance to Interrogation	22	2
	301	52

In an effort to avoid these relentless pursuits, the terts started using bicycles to move into SWA. In the dry season the *shonas* (dry river beds) were ideal cycle tracks. So, for the SADF forces, any cyclists who acted suspiciously above the cut-line were fair game. The chopper jockeys in the gunships particularly enjoyed the challenge of engaging terts on bikes as they sped across the *shonas* with their legs going like "bee's wings."

The Pathfinders were also able to operate in a mobile role, using their Sabre vehicles (see "Raid into Angola," SOF, December '83). Operating from these "Jackals" — as they nicknamed the Sabres — their task was to ambush roads and tracks and generally interdict SWAPO's logistic routes in Angola. They were also able to act as stop groups for conventional ground assaults by the Parabats or 32 Battalion against tert camp and bunker complexes. The massive firepower provided by the Jackals made withdrawal very hazardous for the terts.

Despite the operational success of the Pathfinders and their ability to work almost unsupported behind enemy lines — or maybe because of it — the senior officers in sector HQ resented them. The Pathfinders came from diverse and mainly non-South African backgrounds and, as a result, were

called *uitlanders* (foreigners in Afrikaans, the language of the SADF). As such they were considered expendable. This animosity was disappointing, since we felt that the greatest thing we could offer in the defense of a country that we admired and respected was our lives.

The *uitlanders* were also called "Philistines" (defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as "an outsider — an uncultured person") by the Afrikaans because of their hard-drinking, hard-living habits when out of the line, a not uncommon characteristic of those who have been on operations. The rather austere Afrikaaner or the National Service man restricted to two cans of beer a week was somewhat wary of these hard-bitten warriors. However, the title Philistine was taken as an epithet of honor by the Pathfinders, despite its original intention. Ex-members of the Rhodesian SAS even had a pullover manufactured with the famous "winged dagger" embroidered discreetly on the left breast with the word Philistine beneath.

Unfortunately, when Col. Carpenter left 44 Brigade in early 1982 to work with the SADF military intelligence, his replacement had little time for the *uitlanders* in his Pathfinder Company. Without Carpenter's support, recruiting ceased and members left the Brigade when their contracts were up. There are now only two of the original HQ 44 Brigade Pathfinders left in Hammanskraal. The majority of the others have left the SADF, since there was no incentive to transfer to another unit. A handful, however, decided to join the recce platoon of 32 Battalion, and one has joined the Recce Commandos.

The 44 Parachute Brigade Pathfinder Company had a short life — a little over a year from its formation in November 1980 to its disbandment in January 1982 — but in this short time it built up an enviable reputation for efficiency on operations inside SWA and into Angola. Because of their extensive combat experience, gained throughout the world fighting against those who would destroy Western democracy, the Pathfinders were hard soldiers who neither expected nor gave quarter on the battlefield. During their SADF service their expertise was put to good effect against SWAPO terrorists and their Angolan sponsors. Unfortunately, their dedication to the cause could not prevent the demise of a unit feared by the enemy.

The Pathfinders became political casualties. The Afrikaaner inherently distrusted foreigners, even those who desired to fight for his country. The SADF did not want to be accused of employing mercenaries, even if these so-called mercenaries received normal rates of pay and were subject to military discipline. Nor did certain members of the SADF believe there was a need to employ *uitlanders*. Consequently, the Pathfinder Company of Col. Carpenter's Parachute Brigade ceased to exist. However, I think I speak for all those who served in the unit when I say, "If South Africa needs us again — we'll be back!"



Continued from page 55

mountaineering. The training stressed personal courage, physical strength, endurance and resourcefulness.

By 1939 the German mountain troops were a highly respected elite unit within the *Wehrmacht*. They served in Norway, Italy, the Balkans, Finland, mainland Greece and Crete, and on the dreaded Russian Front. They were quite effective in Norway, where they secured the west coast after bloody fighting, and in the Balkans and the Caucasus, where members of the 99th *Gebirgsjäger* scaled Mt. Elbrus, the tallest peak, providing a propaganda victory while other regiments occupied themselves more productively by fighting for various passes through the mountains which would give them access to the Black Sea Coast.

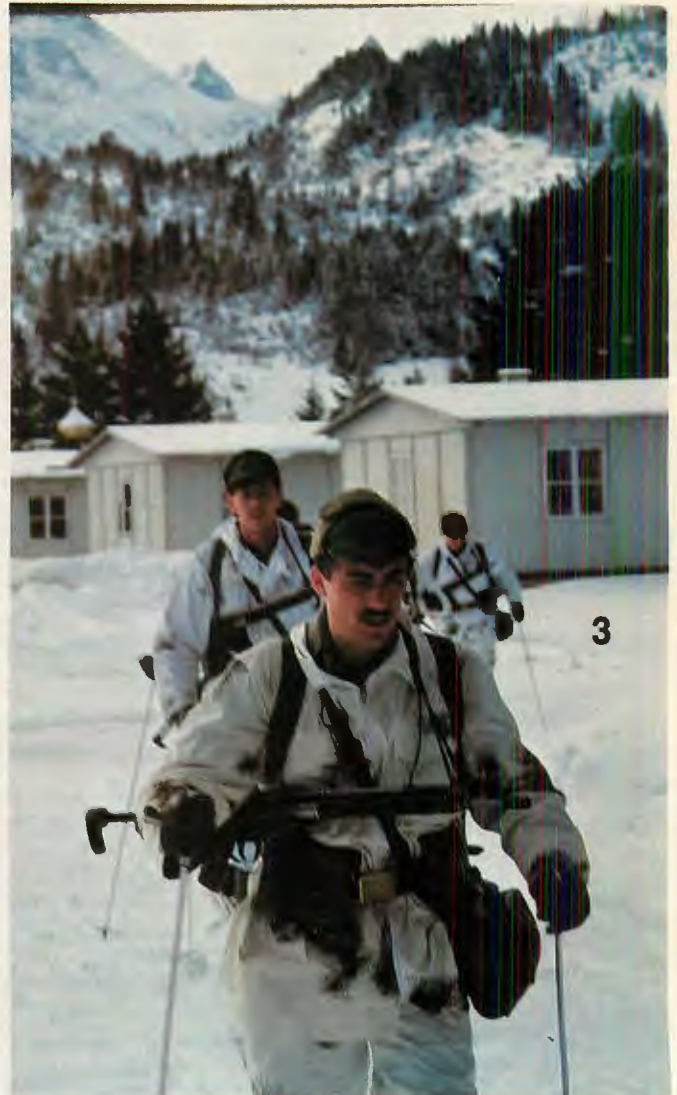
The *Gebirgsjäger* have retained the traditions they developed over the last century. Their training school is located in Mittenwald, West Germany, in the Bavarian Alps. They are all parachute trained, and many are HALO trained. Troops from many other countries attend the intensive year-long course which gives them the title *Gebirgsführer* (Mountain Leader). In fact, one of the British commandoes killed in the Falklands had attended this course and his name is inscribed on

the war memorial in the Bavarian woods.

As in the early days, *Gebirgsjäger* are usually natives of the Bavarian Alps in which they will fight — so most of the mountain techniques: skiing, survival, camping — are natural to them when they enter the military.

The training camp at Mittenwald is busy creating a new generation of tough and confident *Gebirgsjäger*, ready to take on the worst nature and other men have to offer. As James Lucas says in his book, *Alpine Elite*, although tactics may change with the times, when climate and terrain make the mountains into an insurmountable barrier, the *Gebirgsjäger* "like the mountain flower which he wears in his cap, will [still] be found flourishing and resilient on the loneliest and most inaccessible peak." ❄

(1) In spite of older "Fulda Gap" doctrine, German mountain troops know Soviets can and will exploit any weakness. (2) Close coordination and map skills are vital for small units moving through complex terrain. (3) As Finns showed Russians in the Winter War, practiced snow-craft, good equipment and means of keeping warm are required for war in the cold. (4) German mountain troops ski constantly, downhill and cross-country, for training and — often — amusement. (5) Specialized German mountain troops — *Gebirgsjäger* — carry telescoping-butt G3s and wear mountaineering boots instead of military field boots.







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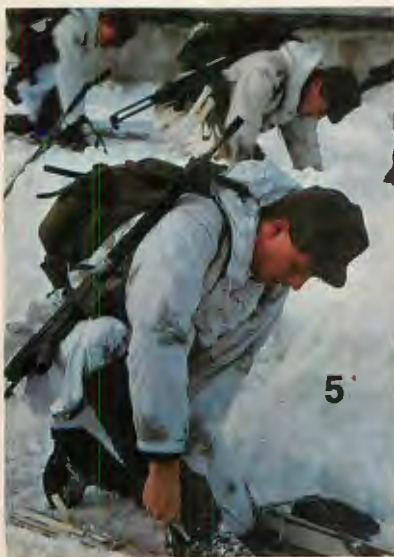
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Continued from page 4

makes SOF special and gives our publication a unique — frequently misunderstood — niche in the field of magazine journalism. Again, no apologies for that.

Despite an increasing dedication to tell the vital stories that more establishment-oriented publications tend to give only cursory ink or ignore entirely, we will likely continue to be referred to as “a magazine for mercenaries.” That’s OK. Call us anything but late for chow.

The plain fact of the matter is you wouldn’t have to take off your combat boots to count the number of actual “mercenaries” who buy and read SOF. The folks who peruse our pages each month are, or generally have been, genuine soldiers, sailors, airmen or Marines, who maintain an avid interest in the significance, as well as the excitement and adventure, of struggles against tyranny around the world. As I know all-too-well, such people were offered damn little to be mercenary about in their experiences.

While we’re unlikely to pick up any decorations for it (with the possible exception of the occasional Purple Heart some Pentagon-types would like to give us), we’ll continue to be interested in and report on the capability and professionalism of America’s armed forces. Those of us who pay the freight have a right to examine the shipment and we think SOF has the format, professional expertise and commitment to keep the X-ray eye on the situation.

That’s the direction of march for SOF. The point elements have already moved out in the attack. Before SOF readers saddle up and step off on the flanks, here’s a word about individual responsibility in the coming action: VOTE.

In the weeks remaining before national elections, gather your intelligence, analyze the situation and terrain, select your target and vote the right individuals into position of leadership. Most of us fought for the right to have a say in our country’s future. All that — and much, much more — is wasted if we don’t exercise the privilege for which so many of our brothers died.

Thanks for your support of SOF. Continue the march. We intend to do so. ✘

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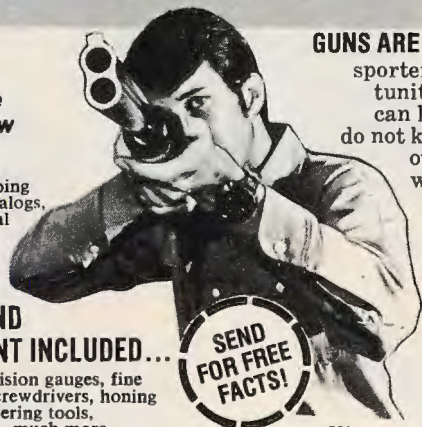
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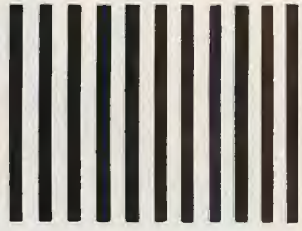
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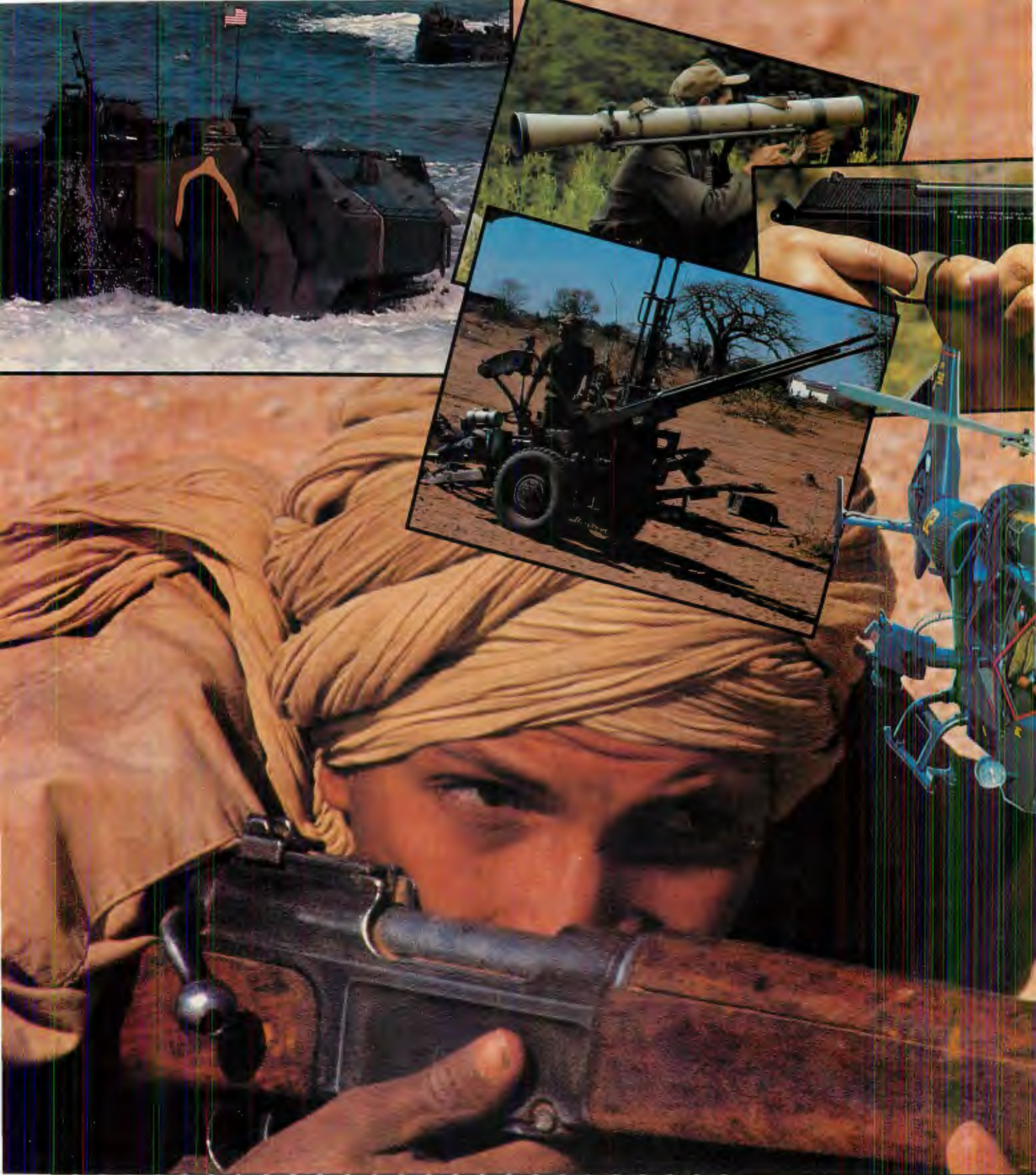
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## DODGE CITY

Continued from page 31

choppers out to our front. I kept picking someone else's blood and guts off my arms and body for the next two or three hours. A knot bound up in my stomach, and all I could do was thank God that it wasn't us.

Later in the day, when we broke into a regular wooded area, we felt as though a weight had been lifted from us. We started hitting a series of bunker complexes. They were all empty with blown tunnels. At the time I was five-feet six-inches, weighing 150 pounds, so they elected me tunnel rat of the day. I got some frags and smoke grenades, and Lt. Brooks handed me his .45.

After clearing six or seven bunkers, my final catch was four cans of sardines, two cans of salmon, some beef jerky, four or five American C-rat meals and some rice wine. Unfortunately, I couldn't keep any of it.

We continued our walk in the sun.

For the next few days we received harassment fire from snipers and mortars. By day you could outrun the mortars, but by night it was hair-raising. One night stands out in my mind: We had come across a pretty clear stretch of land, and it was already getting dark. The platoon sergeant gathered the squad leaders tighter and set up the game plan. We were told where to dig in. But soon we started to hit rock of some sort, so couldn't dig much deeper than about two feet. We weren't too happy: We'd heard that the NVA battalion we had missed was waiting there for us.

About 0145 the mortar started coming in. It took all my willpower to keep from wetting my pants. A couple of the guys got hit, but it wasn't serious. The foxhole to our left front, in the center of the arced position, had started throwing frags. Everytime a shell hit, we looked up: We saw NVA crawling up on the position in front of us, trying to break through. Frags starting bursting; M16s popped and AK-47s cracked. We covered their right flank.

In the morning we found two dead NVA around the position to our front. Blood trails led away, so we knew we'd hit more. We continued through the elephant grass and tall weeds, coming so close to the end of the island that we could smell the water.

A single shot cracked toward us. Ollie, the 2nd squad leader, crumpled in a heap. Off to the right was a bunker. Roche, Lt. Brooks and I went straight for it. Inside we found one scared NVA who surrendered. Off to the left was more firing and a hot pursuit. We continued the search for several minutes, but came up with nothing.

Lt. Brooks called in a cobra. A few minutes later she was hovering above, asking for the fire mission. We marked our position with white smoke, and told them to hit everything to our front as far as the river. After two passes with their mini guns they departed, and we started our sweep of the area. Near the riverbank we found them: a man





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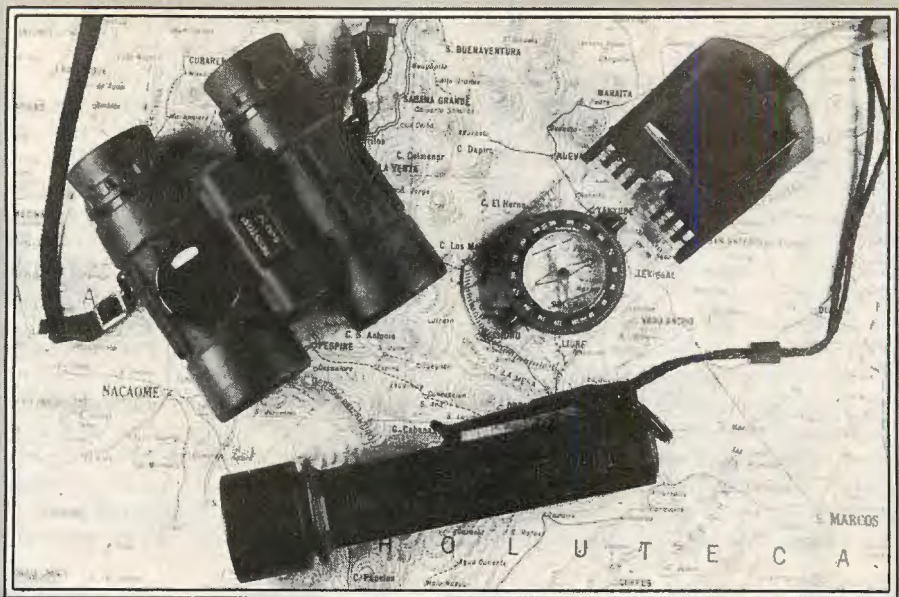
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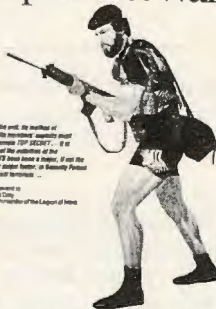
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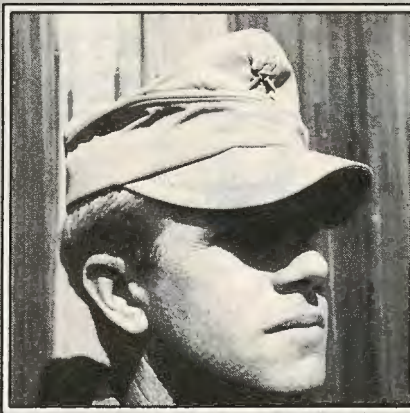
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and a woman, both in black pajamas, both with AK-47s and both very dead. We escorted our prisoner to the CP. Ollie had taken a round in the stomach, but the doc said he would be all right.

Next morning, we hit the end of the line. We thought it was all over, but the order came down to build rafts for the gear and a lifeline for us to cross the river. We sent a reinforced squad of the best swimmers across first to set up the line and provide security. After we were in gear, it took about two hours for the entire crossing.

The new orders were to sweep all adjoining islands for that NVA battalion, as they weren't on Go Noi any longer. It was bad news, but at least we were responsible only for this one island. The chances were 9 to 1 that we would hit the shit. Choppers brought us a new ammo supply, including frags. We

had to hump extra rounds for the mortar, too. In addition we got a fresh supply of little white shit-pills — a lifesaver.

The island was thick vegetation, the tops of the trees cutting out most of the sunlight. We cut into the brush and, farther inland, started hitting tracks. Here and there we heard fire fights and got sporadic sniper rounds and booby traps. It was hot, and the day was almost finished. We were diverted off to the right, and our company was chosen for CP security.

We set up a solid 360 degrees around the CP, making our own field of fire. After we were dug in and all of our ordnance was set in place, the CP ordered their regulars to relieve us for 30 minutes. Off to our rear was a cliff which led to a beach. We went skinny-dipping, then back to our posts.

Skipper Adams came around to see how

all the men were doing. He told us, "Keep smiling and shoot straight." He was one hell of a man; I'd go into battle with him anywhere.

With night the mortars came, but this time they couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. They kept us awake, just the same. Lt. Brooks came to each position to warn us that their not hitting us right on could mean that they were close and were going to attack. "Stay awake and ready," he said.

We were on 100 percent the rest of the night. We loosened the pins on more frags, got more ammo out of our backpacks and prepared for the worst.

**"We who are about to die salute you."**

One guy turned in his foxhole and said, "We who are about to die salute you." We all started to laugh. It took the edge off things.

The night passed with only a few probes which we repelled. In the morning we were gung ho — ready to fight and die, knowing we would take a lot of them with us. The next two days passed without incident.

On the 4th of July we were suddenly awakened by a mortar. We were set in a 360-degree position. We all jumped up with a start, thinking we were being hit. Shrapnel from the explosion flew past my head. It killed two and wounded four or five. We searched the countryside for an attack, waiting for more mortars. None came. We secured our position and our anxiety.

I walked over to the guy who was six people away from me to my right. He was a crispy critter with only legs, arms and a head. The torso was gone. The guy next to him was mutilated.

In a few minutes the chopper came in to take them out. It was a messy job, getting the gooey remains into the body bag. The gunner on the chopper threw up when he touched the mess. After the chopper left, one of the guys told the Skipper that he'd seen the whole thing.

The crispy critter had stood watch, knowing we would saddle up and move out. He'd started to prepare ahead of time. He put a mortar and some blasting caps in his pack, tied it up and put it on his back. Then he plopped down — and everything went off.

It was another hot day. The NVA had switched islands and run into other elements. On 5 July the op ended. We were taken back to the new battalion area where, two days later, we ran into another hell: Operation Durham Peak. ☒

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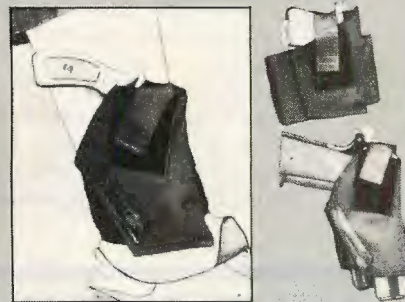
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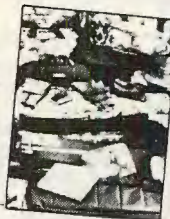
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“Beckwith was away from the team doing something, and another officer was giving us a ration of bull. Well, he didn't see Charlie sneak up on him, though we sure did. Next thing he knew, Charlie had him by the lapels, and shit, he lifted him right off the ground. ‘You mess with my boys again and I'll tear your head off your shoulders,’ he told him.”

White Star, however successful it was on a local level, was not able to halt the gains of the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao. On 23 July 1962, an agreement was reached with the communists in Geneva to neutralize Laos and withdraw all foreign military and paramilitary units. In a preview of what would later happen in Vietnam, Blackburn says, “We did it by the numbers and checked off at the checkpoints, and the North Vietnamese just stayed there.”

In fact, only 40 North Vietnamese were removed under International Control Commission observation. At the time of the agreement, there were 6,000 NVA personnel in 12 battalions plus 3,000 advisers to the Pathet Lao in Laos. Six months later when they all should have been withdrawn, U.S. intelligence estimates put NVA strength at 4,000 troops in eight battalions plus 2,000 advisers. The communists had brought about the withdrawal of the U.S.

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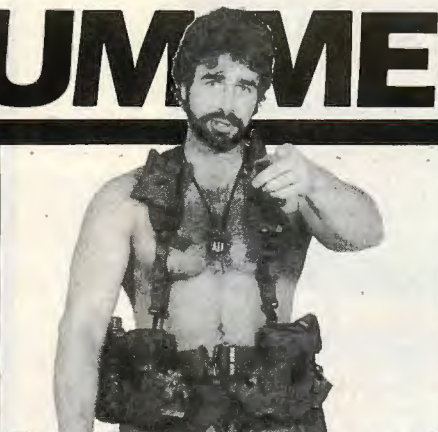
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military from Laos and secured control over the territory adjacent to South Vietnam through which the Ho Chi Minh infiltration route passed.

Charlie Beckwith had his first face-to-face view of communism in Laos, but the real turning point in his career came in 1961 when he was selected to go to the British 22 Special Air Service Regiment on a year-long exchange program.

Charlie was the second officer to go, and both he and his predecessor, Elliot P. "Bud" Sydnor, who served as Bull Simons' deputy on the Son Tay raid, were rigorously screened for the honor.

The SAS is undoubtedly one of the world's foremost commando units. Originating in World War II and used extensively for deep-penetration sabotage and recon missions, the SAS has evolved to include new specialties such as antiterrorist tactics. In May 1980, they successfully rescued 19 hostages held by terrorists in Iran's London Embassy (see "SAS Dares and Wins," SOF, September '80).

As an American, Charlie was determined to acquit himself well and make a favorable impression for his country. Furthermore, SAS training emphasized two qualities that Charlie had in abundance: guts and resourcefulness.

One SAS exercise was an escape-and-evasion problem. The SAS men would be dropped off a covered truck in Corsica, accomplish a mission, contact the escape net and work their way out. They were briefed thoroughly, given maps of the area to study, and told who to contact and where. Then the maps were taken away, and they were searched for hidden compasses.

Once on the ground, it didn't take Beckwith long to figure out this wasn't anywhere near the area where the SAS said they'd be.

As David Cole tells it, "Ol' Beckwith could always figure one step ahead of the game. He figured, 'These sons-of-bitches know where I'm at and are watching me. They're going to make their move when they feel like it.' So Charlie rustled up some clothes and herded sheep for a couple of days. Finally, they moved in, abducted him and got him into the net. The object was to see if he would panic. Beckwith had a grin on his face the whole time!"

Beckwith wasn't grinning during another SAS escapade which almost proved fatal. They outfitted him in a British Army uniform, told him to keep his mouth shut and hauled him off to Malaya in January 1962. Although the Malaya Emergency had officially ended with a British victory against the communist terrorists in 1960, guerrilla leader Chin Peng and 400 survivors were still holding out in remote jungle camps astride the Thai border. Much of the SAS work in Malaya (see "SAS at War in Malaya," SOF, April '81) was with remote tribes of aborigines who lived on slash-and-burn agriculture similar to the Montagnards in Vietnam. At this time, the SAS was trying to ambush infiltrators coming across the border from Thailand.

It was while operating in the jungle with the SAS that Beckwith contracted Leptos-

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piros and almost died. They were coming off an extended patrol, their hands covered with cuts and abrasions from the thick jungle brush and thorns, when they went by a stream. Americans have an obsession with cleanliness, and Beckwith was no exception. He just couldn't resist washing his hands in that creek water, although the SAS troopers told him not to. What they knew and he didn't was that rats and other rodents urinate in the water and that the infection can penetrate through abraded skin.

Several days later, the doctor at the Ipoh hospital told Charlie Beckwith, "You've got one of the three worst cases I've seen, and the other two died."

His illness was reported up through British channels. The word came back: "Who in hell is Charlie Beckwith?" They didn't have that name on any SAS roster. The next cable straightened that out by reporting that Beckwith was an American.

"You can imagine the cable traffic to Washington and the excitement," says Cole, "when the word got out to some foreign-service officer at the American Embassy that there is an American officer out fighting with a British Army unit and he's damn near dead."

But Charlie Beckwith was again one step ahead. He looked out through the window slats of his hospital room and saw a fat civilian waddling along on the other side of the street. Beckwith figured he was an American from the Embassy. He waited.

Sure enough, the civilian walked up to his bed. That's when Beckwith threw his fit, thrashing about and yelling at the top of his lungs in his best Limey accent, "Get that bloody bloke out of here!" The civilian was escorted to the door.

When Beckwith came back to the 7th Special Forces at Ft. Bragg from his SAS stint, the word was that he had gone native — not, however, in the usual SF sense of wearing a loincloth and drinking rice wine with the Montagnards. He was hooked on the British, recalls Cole. He would eat British-style, mashing up his peas with his fork. A beret became a "berry," a rucksack a "Bergen." But most of all, Charlie Beckwith was like a man who has seen the light and believed. And when Beckwith believes, his mind becomes set with that incredible intensity. Nothing distracts him from the heart of the matter.

From then on, his ambition was to command an SAS-type unit in the U.S. Army. Dozens of times, he would say with an absolute fervor, according to Cole, "We're going to have a unit like that in this Army, and I'm going to be the guy to organize it, and I'm going to command it."

When COL E.E. "Ed" Mayer (another planner of the Son Tay raid) later took over the group, he put Beckwith in charge of S-3 (Operations and Training).

When Beckwith started evaluating people, the first thing he'd say was, "He's fit," or "He's not fit." If you weren't fit, you weren't ready to go off to war, and that was a sacrilege — a dereliction of duty. Charlie Beckwith would write you off and have nothing further to do with you.

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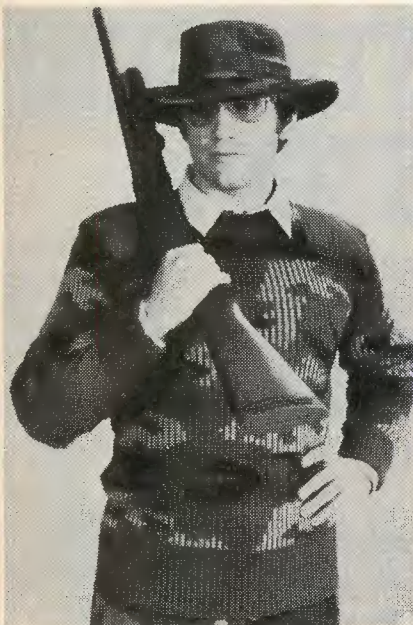
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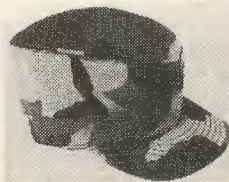
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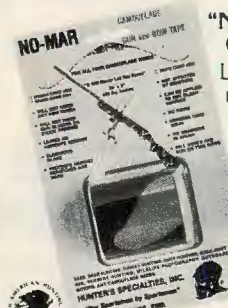
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In conditioning, Beckwith stressed doing things the hard way. He believed in climbing, not rappelling. "I don't want any of that shit, bouncing down the smooth side of a cliff," he told Cole. "The side-straddle hop and all that shit; they don't do anything. The only way to get in shape to carry an 80-pound bag up and down hills is to carry an 80-pound bag up and down hills."

The early '60s were, in many ways, years of preparation. The big buildup in Vietnam had not yet begun, though Special Forces was already solidly committed. In July 1965 Charlie Beckwith was made commander (with a Vietnamese counterpart) of Project Delta in Vietnam.

Project Delta, designated Detachment B-52, became operational in December 1965. It was the first of the special-operations B detachments and derived from a secret CIA operation known as Leaping Lena which was later run by Studies and Observations Group (SOG).

Leaping Lena was initiated in the spring of 1964 when Special Forces, working under the U.S. Mission, trained South Vietnamese and Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) personnel in Long Range Patrol techniques. Several eight-man Vietnamese teams were then parachuted into Laos to recon and harass traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Except for the lessons learned, the missions accomplished little. All of the initial teams were located, and only four survivors returned to Vietnam. It was concluded that it would be at least 1 January 1965 before effective cross-border ground operations could be carried out.

While SOG ran cross-border ground ops, Project Delta was designed to operate within the four military corps of Vietnam under joint U.S. and RVN Special Forces command. Its main mission was intelligence gathering through long-range patrols of small teams of Vietnamese and Americans. These missions could be as varied as trail watching, tracking, ambushing, prisoner snatching, and calling in artillery and air strikes on targets of opportunity such as base camps.

To provide quick reaction to its intelligence where feasible, Project Delta had its own organic reaction force: the 91st ARVN Airborne Ranger Battalion comprised primarily of Nungs, a tribe of ethnic Chinese, many of whom worked as mercenaries. It was this battalion and Beckwith's use of it at the battle of Plei Me that first threw his name into the national spotlight. (See "Bloody Ia Drang," "If You Want a Good Fight . . .," SOF, March, September '83.)

Plei Me was an isolated, triangular SF camp bulldozed from the surrounding scrub brush, stunted trees and tough elephant grass. It was only 20 miles from the Cambodian border and 25 miles southwest of Pleiku in the II Corps military region. Nearby stretched areas of secondary jungle with thick, tangled, almost impenetrable growth.

In early October 1965, three NVA regiments — the 32nd, 33rd and 66th — totaling some 6,000 men moved out of their Cambodian sanctuaries and into the region around

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Plei Me. The 33rd NVA Regiment surrounded the camp itself, which was defended by only an SF A-team and about 300 Jarai CIDG tribesmen. It was Tuesday evening, the 19th, when the regiment struck, decimating a patrol from the camp and wiping out a 20-man outpost.

Then, under a concentrated mortar and recoilless-rifle barrage and supported by 12.7mm heavy machine guns, they swarmed toward the camp itself, now lit by parachute flares casting eerie, moving shadows during their slow, swinging descent. An attempt to blow the main gate with satchel charges was quickly halted by small-arms fire. All night, A1-E Skyraider prop fighter-bombers roared in, dropping napalm-filled canisters which tumbled onto wave after wave of assaulting NVA infantry. The attacks were beaten back, but by morning, the beleaguered garrison was badly battered.

On the first chopper in at dawn was CPT Russell L. Hunter, an SF doctor bringing in medical supplies. Hunter's chopper was also one of the last in, because the 12.7s, some of them mounted so they could fire skyward, made the risks too great. The camp was under continual sniper, machine-gun and mortar harassing fire during the day. Already, several Hueys had crashed outside the compound, and several of the attacking Skyraiders had been sent smoking to the ground. It was better to try to keep the wounded alive on the ground than to take more casualties attempting medevacs.

That night, the camp was hit again with

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multiple assaults. Again, massive air support broke up the attacks and the camp survived, but just barely. With mounting casualties, including most of the A-team, and with camp commander CPT Harold M. Moore wounded, the general sense, says Hunter, was that they'd never make it through another night. "We'd lost a lot of people, and there was talk of going into an escape-and-evasion net we had set up — if, that is, we could get out."

What Hunter didn't know was that the decision to reinforce the Plei Me camp had already been made.

When the alert came, Project Delta was staging out of Phu Cat in II Corps on a normal recon mission. Beckwith was to take two companies of the Ranger reaction force in on Thursday, 21 October, and his recon officer, CPT James "Bo" Gritz (LTC-ret. — see SOF's Special POW/MIA issue, 1983) would bring in the recon teams when choppers could land in the camp.

That morning, Beckwith made an aerial recon, looking for a landing zone for his force and infiltration routes into the camp. Suddenly, a supporting gunship lost a rotor and went streaming to the ground, exploding on impact. "Hell of a way to start an operation," Beckwith remembers thinking.

SGM William DeSoto, a veteran of WWII and Korea, who had served on Beckwith's team in Laos as well, was on the first lift into the landing zone: a field of thick elephant grass about six clicks from the beleaguered camp. When they hit the ground, Beckwith took one column and DeSoto the other, and they moved out, pressing hard to link up with the camp before dark.

Enemy patrols were scattered through the jungle. As DeSoto puts it, the small force was in "a hell of a situation" trying to infiltrate covertly. At one point, two enemies came between the columns. Beckwith's group in the front fired on them first, and DeSoto says, "We went in there and made damn sure no information about us got out." The bodies were identified as North Vietnamese, the first time the Delta people realized what they were up against. One was carrying 57mm recoilless-rifle rockets.

When the jungle thickened, the force got down on their hands and knees and slowly crawled through the thick tangle of brush and "wait-a-minute" vines. Beckwith kept pushing. He wanted his force to get through before dark when the camp would be hit and the column isolated. It was hot, exhausting work, agonizingly slow. Overhead a Forward Air Controller (FAC) followed their progress.

"Pop smoke," he'd say, and they'd throw a smoke grenade only to be told by the FAC, "Hell, you've moved only 200 meters." When darkness came, they were still crawling on their hands, knees and bellies some distance from the camp. At midnight, they stopped and holed up, waiting for dawn.

At first light, they saddled up and moved on, finally breaking out at the edge of the road near the camp's outpost. Everybody

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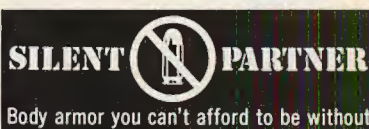
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there was dead. Between the outpost and the camp lay 500 meters of underbrush, all of it covered by NVA heavy machine guns and automatic weapons.

"Bill," Beckwith said grimly as he turned to DeSoto, who lay prone next to him, "one way or another, we're going to get them all in. We got to move and move fast."

Chargin' Charlie was about to live up to his name.

Leaping up, Beckwith broke into the field, urging his men to press on. As the surprised NVA began to pick up their fire, the Rangers ran full tilt for the camp gate. A blond French photographer with no head cover or camouflage (DeSoto had warned him) was the first down with a round through the jaw. Others were hit in quick succession, but they made it into the compound, bringing their wounded with them.

Beckwith quickly took charge and spread his men around the perimeter bunkers, keeping several squads in reserve to act as a quick reaction force. They found friendly wounded still lying in the open and the Vietnamese camp commander so deep in a bunker he didn't know what the situation was. Beckwith was furious.

The first real reinforcements had arrived, and though the siege was far from over, CPT Hunter remembers being tremendously elated with more Americans on the ground.

"Beckwith was kind of full of shit in a

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good way," recalls Hunter. "He was very impressive. He kept going around the perimeter, saying, 'Press on! Press on!' Charlie was cool, very cool, and a believer, and we couldn't help believing also."

That night, the NVA pounded the camp with heavy mortar concentrations and hit the wire with strong infantry probes. The A1-Es kept the heat on, and Beckwith moved his reserve squads to the hot spots on the perimeter.

"They could have had us that night with an all-out attack," says DeSoto. But there were more nights to come, and the men inside Plei Me didn't know how long they would have to hold out. From radio messages, they knew that a South Vietnamese armored relief column had been ambushed six miles away by another of the NVA regiments and was fighting for its own life, blasting the roadsides with cannister rounds. It was a classic case of pinning down a target in order to draw in a relief force to ambush. There could be no expectation of quick help.

In front of the wire, the field was pitted with foxholes. The air had wrought terrific destruction on the NVA. "It just fried them in their foxholes," says Bo Gritz, who came in with the Delta recon team later. "It was the damndest thing I've ever seen. Under the cover of darkness and due to poor patrolling, the NVA were able to dig camouflaged L-shaped fighting trenches right up in the protective wire. And when the A1-Es came in, they napalmed them and just burnt them right there in the holes. They were laying all over the wire — just crispy critters."

By morning, Beckwith had received an order from 5th SF Group commander COL William A. McKean to push out from the camp and "clean up" the area. Beckwith resisted. Though he knew the attacks might throw the enemy off balance, he felt it would be better to conserve manpower and hold the camp until a relief force could get in.

But his arguments were to no avail, and the attacks went out. Sometimes a company or company-and-a-half pushed out to try to clear the slight ridges that surrounded the camp. They didn't always get far before they ran into 12.7s, and it was the heavy machine guns that did most of the damage. For there was no backing off for the NVA. Many of them died chained to those guns, and the Rangers paid a heavy price.

Each night the enemy would move in close to reoccupy the holes. The next day, the Rangers would have to rout them out.

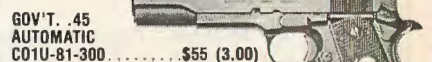
One morning, two NVA were firing from a hole just 10 meters from the wire, and Beckwith and DeSoto led a platoon out after them. One squad of the platoon made an attack while two squads lay down a base of fire. All of a sudden, says DeSoto, "One gook came out of his hole, throwing grenades and screaming and hollering, and one of our squads just run like hell. Charlie shot that son of a bitch and then said, 'If I had 200 of those guys, I could whip the whole North Vietnamese Army.'" Comments

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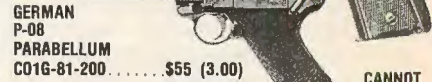
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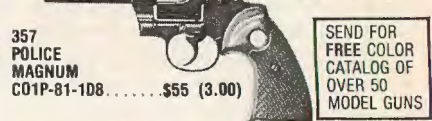
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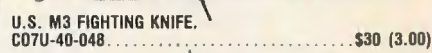
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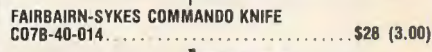
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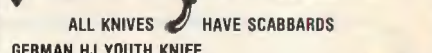
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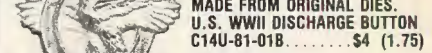


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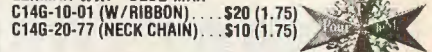
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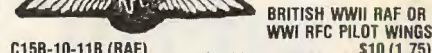
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like these on the fighting performance of the South Vietnamese were picked up by the press and printed.

"It was a time," recalls Gritz, "that Westmoreland was trying to praise the Vietnamese. But Charlie just told it the way it was, and Westy was not pleased."

When Beckwith's command takes a lot of casualties, he often becomes quiet and goes off by himself. And there were a lot of casualties at Plei Me. There were treatment bunkers, holding bunkers and perimeter bunkers full of wounded. But there were no medevacs.

There were plenty of dead, stacked like cordwood and rotting quickly in the burning tropical sun. The camp swarmed with lice, and rats worked over the bodies both inside and outside the perimeter. Some of the corpses were zipped into body bags dropped by C-123s that roared in over the camp, kicking out parachute pallets of ammo, food and medical supplies, one of which landed atop and killed two friendlies. Other bodies were wrapped in parachute silk from the cargo chutes. An overwhelming stench pervaded the compound.

After several days, some lime was dropped, which helped. But it wasn't until toward the end that the H-34s of Project Delta, piloted by Vietnamese, braved the fire and got into the camp for medevac.

Those H-34s with their closed compartments aren't made for ventilation. Bo Gritz says he'll never forget picking up those bodies and gagging as they carried them

over to the H-34s and threw them in the back. Neither will SF 5th Group SGM John Pioletti, who helped with the loading. The skin of the dead was so rotten that it would slough off when touched. But they developed a routine, says one SF officer who watched them: "They would throw up and load a body, throw up and load a body."

The battle of Plei Me was almost over. On Wednesday, 27 October, the 1st Brigade (Airborne) of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) kicked off Operation All The Way with an air assault relieving the compound. The North Vietnamese faded into the jungle, leaving over 850 dead. The Air Cav. kept after them and eventually, all three brigades of the division tangled with the NVA in the Battle of Ia Drang Valley. (See "Winning One for Gary Owen," SOF, April '83.) It was the first time that a major NVA unit had fought a major American unit. The battle was, at the time, the biggest engagement of the war. Another 1,300 communists were left dead. ✕

*Next month continues coverage of Charlie's command of Project Delta and his military career up to the formation of Delta Force.*

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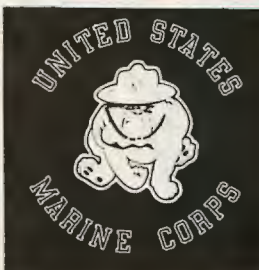
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Continued from page 25



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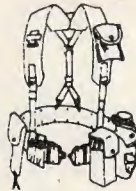
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hasit stood nearby, his mood black.

"You did not have to ask the prince," he pouted. "I would have gratefully given you the bridge had you asked." I put a friendly arm around his shoulder, an effort to soothe his injured pride.

"You and I are soldiers," I said, anxious to keep him as a friend. "Pouff!" I gestured dramatically. "What is a bridge among soldiers? Nothing!"

"To you, no," he continued to pout, "but to me, everything." He pointed to his little blue and white American jeep, impeccably clean, lovingly maintained. "Ma voiture," he dabbled at a liquid eye, "now there is no way for it to cross the river."

"You could come in the back side," I suggested. "A few kilometers more or less, but . . ." I shouldn't have ended it with such an uncertainty. Prahasis brightened.

"Gasoline," he said flatly. "That's an honorable exchange."

A Lao doesn't always have to give something to get something, but the bridge was another matter. It was a military trade. Since "going the other way" would involve more mileage, maybe we could increase his monthly ration by 50 liters, that to come out of the one 55-gallon drum I got each month for my vehicle.

"You're a thief, Prahasis," I hissed through clenched teeth, though I smiled while doing it. He shrugged his shoulders and raised a hand as if to stop his men from dismantling the bridge, all of that over a little matter like 12 gallons of gas.

"Of course, if the bridge isn't that important . . ."

They brought the Bailey down in pieces that made it look like an oversized Tinker Toy set, spreading them out on both sides of the river. I began testing the soil for anchoring points. Prahasis gave me his engineering advice. His first suggestion floored me.

"That teak tree," he gestured. "It must come down before you can put the butt plate into place."

"That fucking tree is 10 feet thick!" I screeched. He smiled benignly, another little shrug of his shoulders.

"Bo pin yawn," he replied, using a Lao expression that meant everything from "Holy Cow!" to "Screw it!"

"But, of course," he added, "the Royal Lao Engineers will be happy to help."

That did it! No Lao army outfit was going to show Green Berets how to put up an American Bailey Bridge!

"Come back in three days," was all I could manage. I was devastated. Prahasis was right, of course. The lone teak tree stood directly in line with the abutments we'd built, and the steel decking that formed the butt plate would have to go right where the giant stood.

It was better than 10 feet thick, closer to 15. It stood a ponderous 200 feet in the air. But it was worth money, too. If I could get it

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to the sawmill at Paksong, I could get \$200 for it. We could use the money for some of the niceties we'd planned for the long range.

"Bring it down with demo," one Team member suggested.

"Who's going to cut the felling notch?" another asked.

"A notch. What's a notch?" I asked. "Just cut one in it," I ordered, as if we cut felling notches in water-laden teak trees every day.

I was very proud of the Lao infantry company helping me build the range. They could rise to any occasion, and often did, but cutting that four-foot-deep felling notch into the teak tree was really more than one man should ask of another. While I went off to scout for the 30 pounds of plastic demo my demo man said I needed, the Lao built a small platform at the base of the teak trunk and, standing there by the hour, began to swing their puny little rice knives against the giant's knees. Chip by chip the notch began to take shape. When Prahait showed up three days later, it was done. No one on the Team dared tell him we had literally finished it under floodlights. He walked around the tree, appraising our work.

"Bon," he said finally. "Now you can begin sawing."

"No sawing," I grinned expertly. I showed him the mass of C-3 plastic demo.

"We're gonna blow it down."

I have a feeling it was the team sergeant who planned the notch. It was he who had said he'd sawed down "hundreds of big 'uns in the Northwest."

"You notch it like this," he had said, sighting along the path where he wanted the tree to fall. "Then," he explained, slapping his hand up against the opposite side, "you plaster the demo right along this line and — boom! The tree goes down right there."

He pointed to where he thought the tree should fall. I agreed. He grinned and waved to the light-weapons man, who drove a stake into the ground, a little red flag tied to it.

"What's that for?" I asked. I'd never felled a big tree before.

"Like I said, Cap'n, it's the way we do it up in the Northwest. Just to show old Prahait how good we are, I'm gonna drop this here sucker on that there stake and drive it in the ground!" he struck an engineer's stance, proud.

I was proud, too. Bygod, we'd do it! We shook hands all around, including Prahait's, and made ready to tumble the teak.

Each living thing in Laos has a soul, according to Rama, even a teak. There was a brief ceremony by the local *Bonze*, the monk who came to sanctify the death of the magnificent giant. He burned a few sticks of punk and sprinkled some fermented rice at its base. Soldiers pinned bright ribbons to its trunk; orange for long life, blue and red for courage and truth. The demo man rolled the C-3 between his hands, working it into a long, wrist-thick band that would fit into the cutting groove. Prahait picked a place and parked his jeep. I corrected him.

"You're in line with the tree's fall," I



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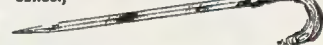
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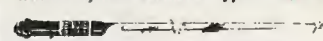
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stead.

Prahasit was beside himself. Even the immediate promise of a replacement vehicle didn't help. He fell into a rattling of coarse, rapid French, only a few words of which I was able to catch. All of it called down the gods on our collective heads.

Oh, the Bailey went up all right. It was a little short on the other side, but we made it reach when Boun Gum's elephants brought us down enough timber to make it stretch. The \$200 we got from the sawmill went to pay the bill "for his elephants' knees," and Prahasit finally got a new vehicle on the Air America flight from Vientiane. He was never happy with it, though. It was OD, and the instructions said to let it stay that way.

Somebody got in under the dash and found a little manufacturer's tag that said it was made in Tachigawa.

"Tachigawa?" Prahasit asked, raising an eyebrow. "Not Detroit, Michigan?"

I never found the courage to tell him that Tachigawa was some place closer by. Instead, I gave him the singular honor of letting him be the first to drive his brand new Japanese jeep across our little bridge on the River Kwai. ☞

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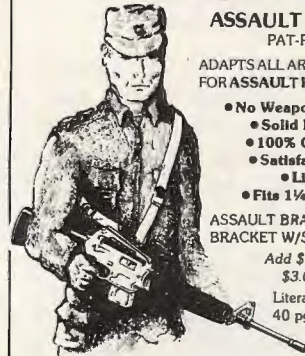
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# LEAN, MEAN CUISINE

Continued from page 33

'Nam was like paying for sex at the University of Houston — stupid and unnecessary.

But I could do nothing about it until I got to Regimental HQ. I took a three-quarter-ton truck, a sergeant and a lot of ammo, and we took an unsecured trail to an 11th ACR unit. Nobody from HQ had the *cojones* to make the trip because it was "unsecured," as if anything were secured in 'Nam. I wasn't too worried. For several weeks we'd been in areas marked on the map. "Here be dragons." This was civilization to me. People bathed.

There we discovered that they received C-rats for every troop for three meals a day, but had a field kitchen making two hot meals a day. They had, in other words, C-rats coming out their ears. So they filled up our three-quarter-ton, including boxes of apples and oranges, nectar of the gods, and some unobtainable LRRPS, the ultimate rations in 'Nam. They also had their next resupply chopper drop a pallet load of Cs at our regimental HQ. For a few minutes I was a legend in my own regiment. At least I was until I screwed up again. (Remember, one "ah, shit" cancels a thousand "attaboys.")

I went back into the boonies, and six days later I called back, asking why there were no rations on the resupply chopper, and the REMF "Staff Adviser" (Dog Robber) said, "What happened to the rations I sent three days ago?"

I looked insanely at the receiver, my grip on it as tight as it would be on his neck if I could get to him before I calmed down.

"We ate them," I said, as calmly and sarcastically as I could.

So we went hungry again.

Such was the culinary life of an adviser. When I sit down to a nice dinner at a French restaurant — *escargots*, *boeuf bourguignon*, all the trimmings, with a nice Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape — I think of the meals I had in 'Nam . . . but only until the first forkful hits my face. ☞

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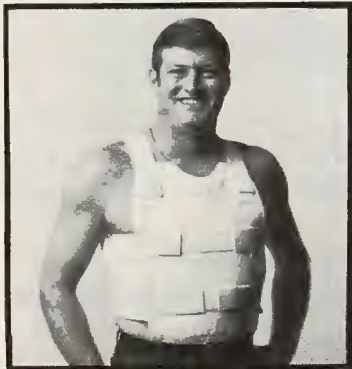
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## FLAK

Continued from page 6

### CAREER MEDIC...

Sirs:

I am a paramedic student, and am joining the military upon graduation. My interest is with Medevac or Special Forces. So, to all EMTs and paramedics out there, just put these thoughts on the front burner for a moment.

1) To serve some of your peers, American soldiers who are people with worried families back home.

2) To treat civilians oppressed by war, famine and illness.

3) To contribute to your country and gain experience.

The glory seekers out there need not give a second thought to my letter, but to the serious emergency medical personnel who are able to join our military, consider the Medic-al Corps.

Bill Howard  
Louisville, Kentucky

*Those of us who have felt the sting of enemy steel couldn't agree more. Most combat medics/hospital corpsman we've known already share your sentiments. We hope the guys who hump the Unit Ones and bandoliers full of battle dressings will continue to do so. Dedicated, professional medics are a big part of combat readiness and morale. — The Eds.*

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## CIVILIAN LENDS HELPING HAND...

Sirs:

As a civilian I can't really identify with some of your articles, but as an active shooter and hunter, as well as military history buff, most everything between the covers is read and re-read.

Having been in many not-so-free countries, I was bothered for some time by the pleas in your magazine for items for El Salvador, Afghanistan and Nicaragua, wondering what I could do to help, since I have little money.

So I've gone through the closets and the cellar. I have no combat gear, but I do have some useful clothes in very good condition. I'd like to do more than give lip service to the causes, so since I can't send money, how about some clothes? I'm working on some medical supplies, too.

Keep up the good work.

Glenn Gerber  
Germany

*Trans-shipment of goods to Afghanistan is difficult and expensive, so we just send money. But SOF's Salvadoran/Nicaraguan Defense Fund needs goods, along with money to pay for handling and shipping. All kinds of small- and medium-sized clothing can be used by the Contras. Medical supplies are especially valuable and welcome, but send them to the tax-deductible Refugee Relief International, Inc. (RRII). Clothing and medical supplies should be sent to either the Defense Fund or RRII in care of Soldier of Fortune Magazine, 5721 Arapahoe Avenue, Boulder, CO 80303. We can no longer accept freight-collect shipments. — The Eds.*

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Sirs:

Grenada was my first real taste of war, and I hope my last, but I doubt it. I'm writing to you to tell you how proud of my country your stories on the military make me feel. To be honest, I was almost done serving my first four-year enlistment when my ship was sent to Grenada, and I hated the Navy with a passion. But because of you, the students on Grenada, the Marines in Lebanon and Grenada who died, the Army Rangers and everyone else fighting and dying for freedom, I no longer hate the Navy. I realize now it was the way we were treated by America

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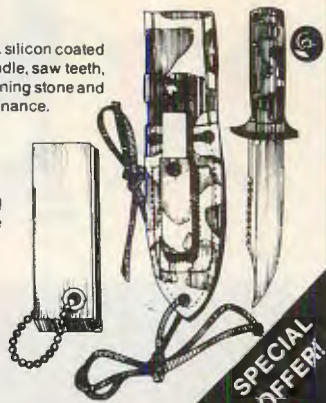
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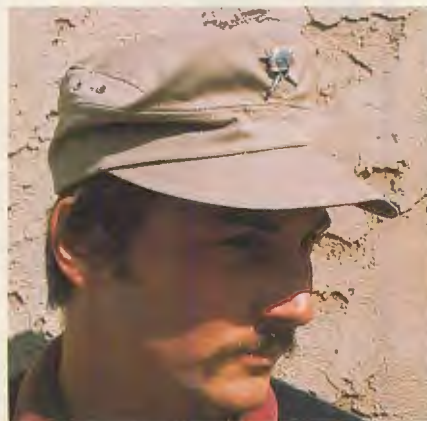


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which had turned me off in the first place.

Thanks to all those I mentioned, though, people are starting to feel pride in their country again and show support for their military.

The point is, I reenlisted for another four-year cruise because of you all.

Jeffrey Ivester  
Virginia Beach, Virginia

*Score a big one for the U.S. Navy. We've always maintained that one graphic example of the importance of our American military is worth all the shipping-over lectures in the world. Apparently the success in Grenada gave us all a bit more than just a much-needed battlefield victory. Congratulations on your new career. May you have fair winds and following seas. — The Eds.*


## ARMOR AFICIONADO...

Sirs:


I lived in Central America for about six years, and I tend to agree with most of what you say regarding that area. I'd like to see you do articles on specific Salvadoran units, much like you do with South African ones.

I'm interested in armor, and am wondering if you could do some kind of article on Salvadoran armor and how it's being used in the current war. I'm aware that El Salvador converts a lot of vehicles into armored vehicles. In other words, they have a homemade-armor industry. I'm aware that homemade APCs were one of the reasons that the Salvadoran Army was able to advance so far in the 1969 war. One vehicle I'm particularly interested in is a vehicle that was seen much in newsreels at the beginning of the current conflict. It looks a lot like the


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M113 APC, but it's not, and if you take a good look, it is obviously homemade. Do you know what this is? I'm also aware that the Salvadorans have mounted 20mm triple-barreled AA guns on some kind of APC. What are they, and what role are they used in. Any information on this kind of thing that you have would be useful to me. If you can't provide me with anything, could you at least provide me with a source?

Thank you for the help, and the letters you've already sent me. You've been very helpful, and I was astonished that you'd reply in such detail. This reflects on your professionalism, and your concern for the people that you serve.

David Spencer  
Cali, Valle, Colombia

*SOF has already assigned Marine veteran Ralph Bicknell to ride with and report on the Salvadoran Army cavalry units.*

*We have printed so little on armor in El Salvador because — to our knowledge — it is little used. Salvadoran armor units are usually deployed as mounted infantry much like ancestral dragoons. Armored vehicles are little more than a replacement for trucks in that scheme. — The Eds.*

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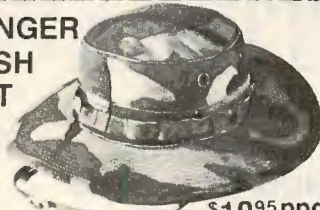
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## NAVAL MAN HUNT...

Sirs:

I wonder if your FLAK column could give me some assistance in tracking down the following persons who served with the Marine Advisory Group Team 43 in the Rung Sat Special Zone, Nha Be, Vietnam, from July 1970 to December 1971. They are: Maj. W. Stensland, Maj. Tully, Capt. W. Cohen, Lts. Brown, Johnson and Buckhieser, GySgt. Hicks, SSgts. Murray, Fish, Larry Collins or Cummins, or any others who served at the Rung Sat at those dates, or anyone knowing their whereabouts. Also Lt. Cmdr. W. Needham, USN, Lt. Cmdr. Zeke — (Polish surname).

I served in 'Nam in the British Merchant Marine from '76 to very early '72. The last ship was the Shell Oil Company's ship *Hemisinus*, better known as the Saigon Flyer.

Mick Dunk  
London, England

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**IN REVIEW**

Continued from page 12

this meeting, see "Election '84: The Fate of the Military," SOF, July '84.)

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