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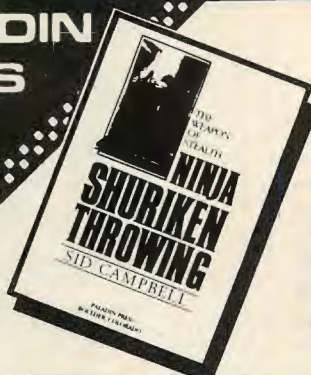
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# DE-BRIEF

by Dale A. Dye, Executive Editor

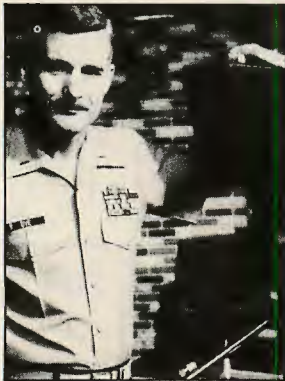
**C**OWBOY comedian and philosopher Will Rogers used to entertain audiences in the 1930s by thumbing his sweat-stained Stetson onto the back of his head, scratching an errant cowlick and proclaiming, "All I know is what I read in the papers, but..." What followed was usually his eloquent, earthy commentary on the state of national affairs or the bias of the men and women who reported on them. I'd love to see the Oklahoma cowboy do his number on national TV today.

He'd probably squint into the camera and drawl, "All I know is what I read in the papers but, by gum, I do believe there's a downright war goin' on in El Salvador." Rogers could have gotten a hint of his material from what he read in America's daily newspapers or newsmagazines. If he'd lived long enough to become an avid TV fan, he'd likely have been given the impression from the six o'clock news that something was amiss in "one of them Banana Republics down south," but he'd have to draw his own conclusions about the real situation in El Salvador and in most of the other Central American countries.

That's because a great deal of the reporting on the war in that turbulent country is either inaccurate, biased or simply shallow. Before my many friends in the foreign-correspondent corps lock and load for counter-battery fire, let me point out that there is also a great deal of accurate, insightful and poignant reporting coming out of El Salvador. The journalism pros know who they are and don't need any plaudits from SOF. Unfortunately, the amateurs who learned everything they ever wanted to know about war and the military right there in El Salvador, and the Stateside editors who don't know a rifle from a rocket launcher (and don't care which is which) screw a lot of the good reporting right into

wasted effort.

"A lot of not-so-highly qualified reporters come down here looking to earn their foreign-correspondent credentials," said an American official who has been dealing with the press regularly in El Salvador. "They tend to bring a sort of ethnocentricity and a generally disdainful, paternalistic attitude with them." The Ugly American syndrome is alive and well among some of the reporters who show up to cover the war in El Salvador. The same source backed his claim by telling me the story of the "Minnesotans for Peace in Central America," who showed up in the country wanting to see the President and take a report on the situation home to their weekly newspapers



and sewing circles. "They fully expected the president to see them right away," my source chuckled. "Their attitude was, 'Hell, this is just another Banana Republic and the guy's got nothing better to do anyway.'"

Granted that case has little to do with professional reportage from El Salvador. The heavyweights who carry major-league credentials and do their best to cover the war are rarely Ugly Americans. They are also rarely military experts qualified to comment incisively on the tactical situation. A major-network reporter who is one of a few correspondents in El Salvador with enough combat time to accurately report on the war and the army refers to "the shadow press; those characters who show up with a letter from someplace and become instant experts." Those are the reporters who provide superficial stories that frequently lead to false conclusions.

Some journalists would call it the nature of the beast. You can't paint a Pollyanna picture and expect to make the front page or snatch a mi-

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**WITH THE  
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**COVER:** During their July visit to El Salvador, SOF training team members were surprised and delighted to discover one of the country's few military helicopters had been emblazoned with the familiar *Soldier of Fortune* logo. A little investigation revealed the paint scheme was the brainchild of 2nd Lt. Mauricio A. Bonilla, aircraft commander of Salvadoran Huey number 269, who had seen a number of soldiers wearing the SOF shoulder patch. The chopper was one of the first birds to put paratroopers on the ground during the Airborne Battalion's combat assault on Cerron Grande. Photo: Steve Salisbury

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## TOSS YOUR HATS IN THE RING...

Major Luis M. Turcio's Airborne Battalion troopers like to save their jaunty red berets (most of which were supplied by SOF) for special occasions such as parades and Presidential visits to their base at Ilopango airfield just outside San Salvador. When the troopers take to the bush in search of G's, they prefer a more subdued form of headgear. Unfortunately, not many of the soldiers have any sort of fatigue cap and the Salvadoran military supply system is concerned with more pressing shortages — like weapons that work and ammo to fire through them.

When SOF Executive Editor Dale Dye visited the Airborne Battalion in July (See story on p. 60) to conduct much-needed mortar training, the *Paracaidista* CO cornered him and asked if SOF readers might be able to do something to solve the fatigue cap shortage among his people. When former Marine Dye had determined that Major Turcio was really talking about "covers," he promised to do what he could by appealing to readers.

The airborne troopers need around 800 covers (either camouflage or OD), preferably in smaller sizes. If you've got some old hats attracting moths in your closet or seabag, send them to SOF Warehouse, 3750 Arapahoe Ave., Boulder, CO 80306. We'll see that they are delivered down south.

# BULLETIN BOARD



**TOP:** SOF Executive Editor Dale Dye (left) and Publisher Robert K. Brown (right) present San Miguel garrison commander Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa with one of the first prototypes of a new SOF commemorative plaque in recognition of the Salvadoran CO's aggressive fight against communist guerilla tyranny. Monterrosa regularly plays gracious host to SOF training teams in El Salvador. **ABOVE:** A welcome offering: SOF delivers a load of medical supplies to the hospital in San Miguel. The sorely-needed medicines and equipment were contributed by readers who actively support the Salvadoran fight for freedom. Much more is needed, but contributors will be heartened to hear the nurses and medical orderlies were so thrilled with this load that the scene at the delivery area in front of the run-down military hospital resembled an American home full of kids on Christmas morning.

## ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY...

You also have the right to vote. Find out where the House and Senate candidates in your home-of-record district and state stand on the defense issues: nuclear freeze, the B-1 Bomber, military aid to El Salvador and the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters. Then get an absentee ballot — and VOTE!

## GUNS... WHAT GUNS?...

A captured guerilla *comandante* has testified — contrary to most U.S. newsmen's belief — that Salvadoran insurgents get most of their arms through Nicaragua.

Arquimedes Canadas — the one-time "Comandante Alejandro Montenegro" — on July 11, 1984, told Hedrick Smith of *The New York Times* that "99.9 percent of our arms" come from Nicaragua. He also corroborated what had been previously printed in *Soldier of Fortune*: M16s abandoned in Vietnam are being smuggled to Salvadoran terrorists across southern Honduras.

Arms aren't the only aid provided by the communists. Canadas recounted meetings he had with Cuban and Nicaraguan officials, including a two-hour discussion on revolutionary warfare with Sandinista Army Chief of Staff Joaquin Cuadra at a Sandinista command post for out-of-country guerilla ops a few miles south of Managua. Before his August 1982 capture by Honduran authorities, Canadas had acted in a staged press event when he and other guerilla leaders claimed they either captured all their weapons, or bought them from Salvadoran officers who stole them from the government. Obviously, that was a lie.



Unfortunately, Canadas' retraction was not circulated as widely as his original slander of the Salvadoran Army.

## RADIO FREE SURINAM...

Air times are rarely exact, but somewhere around 0100 Greenwich Meridian Time the Council for the Liberation of Surinam occasionally broadcasts their version of the news in Surinam. With between 15 and 20 kilowatts of power, transmissions are at 6.850 megahertz, from "somewhere in the Caribbean."

Thanks to J.P. Sullivan of Brooklyn, N.Y., for the tip.

## WHAT SOF CAN'T DO...

We get a lot of letters from readers asking about enlistment in the U.S. Armed Forces or seeking help in getting jobs as contract military technicians, less politely known as mercs.

SOF isn't your best source of information on current enlistment options and regulations — local recruiters for the four Armed Forces have everything you need.

The Armed Forces do not enlist people with felony convictions and they will not take foreign nationals unless they have a resident visa (Green Card). There are also physical and educational requirements which recruiters must comply with. SOF has connections with certain officials in the Defense Department, but our influence does not extend to getting recruiting officers to violate the laws and regulations they are required to enforce.

Concerning the matter of mercenary contacts and contracts: (1) Recruiting within the United States for the armed forces of any foreign movement or government is a felony; we don't do it. (2) With the exception of the French Foreign Legion, there are very few job openings for mercs just now, and most of these are for men with "high-tech" qualifications: jet pilots, helicopter mechanics, people who have reputations in the executive security business, and so on.

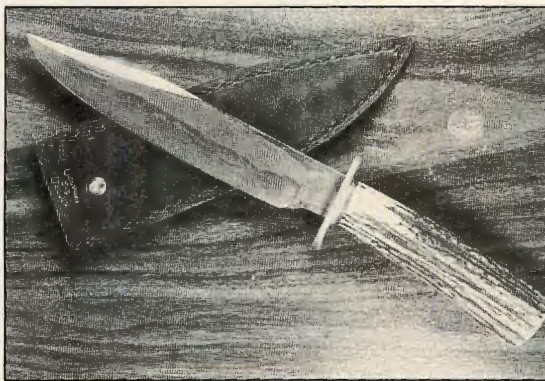
(3) SOF has neither the power nor the inclination to get people out of prison and into jobs as mercs.

## NEW COLUMN PREVIEW...

Bill Bagwell is the only American knifemaker who specializes in combat knives, a subject many other smiths would sooner not discuss. No one is saying the knife can replace firearms as the primary weapon of self defense, but a knife can do many things that a pistol can't, Bagwell argues. "There are times and places you can stab a man faster than you can shoot him . . . and in a non-fatal area the effect is greater than a pistol bullet. A cut to the bone anywhere between the knuckles and the elbow will render a man unconscious inside of thirty seconds from blood loss." That's valuable information for professionals and there's more to come from Bill Bagwell's huge collection of knowledge and information on Battle Blades.



## BATTLE BLADES



**Eight-inch Damascus Bowie, made by Bagwell, was presented to Publisher Robert K. Brown at SOF's Convention '83.**

Fortunately, Bill has agreed to begin a column on the topic for us and in months to come, SOF readers will have the advantage of learning from a master in the art of knife design, use and manufacture. If you want the straight scoop on fighting knives from a renowned expert who makes them for professionals the world over, don't miss Battle Blades, beginning in next month's *Soldier of Fortune*.

## BALLOT BOX GUARANTEES GUN RIGHTS...

Tuesday, 6 November, is coming up real fast. Your vote on that critical day can either preserve and strengthen your right to keep and bear arms — or destroy it! Find out where your local, state and federal elected officials stand on the issue that's important to you — the preservation of our 2nd Amendment — then register and VOTE for those candidates that realize America's freedom hinges upon our constitutional rights.

## FUZZY YELLOW JOURNALISM...

The 4 June 1984 issue of *Newsweek* magazine used a report of the interment of the Vietnam War Unknown Soldier to defend the media-darling Vietnam Veterans of America against such well-known enemies of American veterans' interests as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine.

This misplaced piece of propaganda cited "an innuendo-filled article from *Soldier of Fortune*, a magazine for mercenaries. The article made vague and unsubstantiated charges that the VVA was financed by 'strange bedfellows' who might have communist connections."

Perusing past issues of SOF, we failed to find the article they described. What we *did* find was Tony Bliss' expose entitled "Bobby Muller's Vietnam Veterans of America," p. 30, SOF, May '84, containing specific charges that:

- The VVA took in \$2 million in donations and grants between 1978 and 1981, and did not file tax returns on that \$2 million until 1982.
- Bobby Muller had confessed the VVA kept no books.
- Bobby Muller had said he would "take the money from any source because the use of the money justifies whoever the sponsor for the monies [is]."
- The Vietnam War-period visitor to Hanoi and head of the leftist Samuel Rubin Foundation had given VVA \$1,000 in 1982.
- The VVA received about \$80,000 from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation which had also given money to such groups as the Foundation for Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam.
- Jane Fonda contributed \$500 to the VVA.

If these charges are vague, we would like to hear how Jonathan Alter and Kim Willenson would characterize their own insubstantial description of SOF's tally of VVA contributors.

## FREEDOM FIGHTERS...

El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund Contributors:

Jay P. Gladieux, Jr.; Nicole and Lee Ann Goodrich; Dan Graff;

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The Locale Is Vietnam.**

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game only one team  
can win...**

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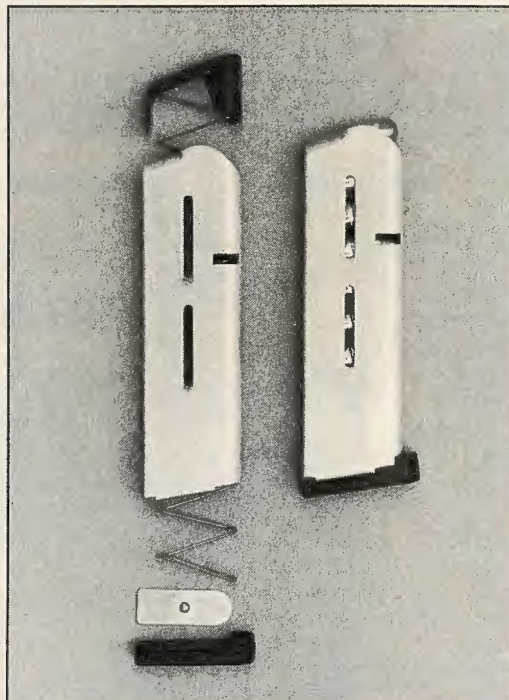
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## COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

by Ken Hackathorn

Wilson/Rogers Mag: Good to the Last Shot



**Solid stainless-steel construction, low-friction rounded follower and built-in base pad make the Rogers/Wilson magazine Hackathorn's choice.**

**O**NE of the most often-asked questions concerning accessories for the .45 auto pistol is what kind of magazines are best to buy.

Currently the trade is full of after-market manufacture magazines. I have used nearly every type and favor some more than others. The current-manufacture Colt .45 magazines are still good, but not nearly as fine as those made five years ago.

For the past year I have used and tested the .45 magazine designed and manufactured by Bill Rogers and Bill Wilson. Both these men are very successful shooters, and they combined their skills to produce what they felt would be the best .45 magazine on the market.

The Wilson/Rogers magazine uses a stainless-steel body made from precision 304 stainless steel. They have developed methods of manufacture to eliminate cracking problems found in other magazines. The follower is a moulded, synthetic rounded design

that provides positive and uniform feeding, from first to last shot. The follower lip is made to lock the slide stop in engagement on the last shot. A Wolff magazine spring is used to give the follower smooth positive travel from full compression to empty position. A moulded base plate is used to hold the magazine together and serves as a bumper pad to make seating of the magazine easy under stress.

My test magazines have been used and abused. They have proven to be the most reliable that I have ever used. Even when dirty, the Wilson/Rogers magazine continues to feed rounds perfectly. Short-nose hollowpoints, wadcutter, and my favorite No. 68 H&G bullets all work ideally in the Wilson/Rogers.

I favor these magazines over all others currently available. Most top IPSC shooters also use them — as good a sign as you can ask for. These excellent magazines are available from Rogers, Dept. SOF, 1736 St. Johns Bluff Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32216 or Wilson Gun Shop, Dept. SOF, Route 3, Box 211-D, Berryville, AR 72616.

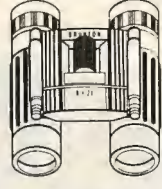
Suggested retail price is \$21.95. As with most things in life, you get what you pay for . . . and the Wilson/Rogers .45 magazine is top of the line. ✕

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NEW ADDRESS!

# "We're America's Army & Navy Store"

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

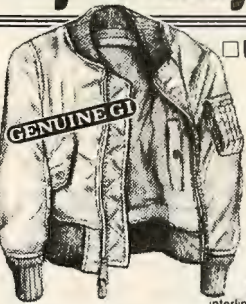


It looks like a toy - but ours is a state of the art, micro binocular with sterling optical quality. Manufactured by Brunton (the firm that has supplied the precision M2 compass to the US military since the 1940's) our binocular weighs less than 9 ounces and measures a mere 2 3/4" x 4". Yet its 8 power 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 warranted 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  
 Kaufman's price \$99.95/each.



**USAF Flight Jacket**

These flight jackets are issued to military fliers and are designated Type MA1 for Intermediate Cold. (This means that it is the medium weight jacket, designed for comfort in a temperature zone of about 20° to 55°F). Look for the military designation, sizes and stock numbers inside the left pocket. The outer shell and lining are 100% nylon making the jacket completely wind and waterproof. The interlining is 100% polyester fiberfill for the highest degree of warmth per ounce. This jacket is reversible, outside in your choice of either sage green or blue and the inside is survival orange. It features: two hip pockets outside as well as inside, sewn pen and pencil holders plus zippered easy access storage pocket in the left sleeve. This a snappy, convenient, warm, fully functional jacket and it happens to be the latest fashion trend.

Specify: Sage Green or Blue Shell - Regular Length Only.  
 Sizes XS,S,M,L ..... \$46.75/each; XL ..... \$51.50/each



**Commando Sweater** - This is the famous British Commando Sweater (Woolly Pully) adopted by the US Military. The natural 100% wool fiber content makes the sweater super warm, the long cut and tight knit ribbed design makes it wind proof. Sleeve and shoulder patches provide protection at abrasion points. Specify size: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48 ..... \$39.75/each

Choose from:  
 **Olive Drab (OD) Green Crewneck** (USMC Approved)  
 **Black V Neck** with epaulets and name plate area on breast (US Army Approved)  
 **Black Crewneck** (no epaulets or name plate area)  
 **Camouflage**

**Commando Sweater - Commercially made** - patterned after the GI ones, these are commercially made in easy care 100% acrylic. Although they are copies, they are constructed surprisingly true to the all wool ones, complete with sleeve and shoulder patches. Choose between: Olive Drab (OD) Green or Black. Specify Size: S, M, L, XL ..... \$21.75/each.

**SATISFACTION GUARANTEED**

**Special Forces Green Beret** - Jaunty and daring and classy - like the professional's who wear them. These are official regulation berets of 100% vat dyed wool and meeting all military specs. Made expressly for us by the prime government contractor. Also available: Official headgear for:  
 **Airborne Qualified (Maroon)**  
 **Ranger Commandos (Black)**  
 **Artillery & Guardian Angels (Red)**  
 **Commando Dress (Camouflage)**  
 Sizes - 6 7/8 to 7 7/8

(Not sure of head size? Tell us how many inches around your head where you wear your hat. We'll send the right one.) \$13.75/each



**Military Goods Catalog** - Genuine military clothing, gear and equipment with an emphasis on camouflage. See details on these and many more related items \$1.00/each. Free with order.

**Angle Head Flashlite** - This is the heavy duty olive drab plastic flashlight 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.

**We're America's Army & Navy Store!!**

**Drill Instructor/Smokey the Bear Hat** - Formally called the Campaign Hat, this is a really fine quality pressed felt headpiece. A hat with character. No one who wears it escapes a personality change. An uncontrollable urge to shout orders or hear abuses, pursue flammies or write traffic tickets. Let your true or wifely self be heard. Sizes: 6-7/8 to 7-3/4 ..... \$19.75/each.  
 **Genuine Leather Chin Strap** ..... \$2.00/each.  
 **Acorn Hat Cord** (as shown) ..... \$6.00/each. (Specify color: silver, gold metallic, black/gold, metallic, yellow, red or light blue).

**Distress Marker Rescue Strobe Light** - This is a high intensity strobe beacon which penetrates rain and fog and is visible for distances up to 15 miles. Standard pilot survival gear, this light is about the size of a pack of cigarettes (1" x 2" x 4 1/2") yet it puts out a dazzling white flash (250,000 lumens) 50 times per minute for up to 9 hours. The unit is waterproof and shockproof. Sold complete with case and 1 battery ..... \$39.50/each.  
 **Replacement Batteries for Strobe Light** \$5.00/each; 3 for \$12.00

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The Basic Wardrobe Accessory for Every Well Dressed Merc. Donchathink? Two great things about our ties: First, they're made especially for us in the USA from genuine GI woodland camo material of 50% cotton/50% nylon so they can be washed or dry cleaned. Second, they go equally well with anything in your wardrobe: from your most formal blue pin stripe suit to your Hawaiian shirt with the funny looking fishes on it. Choose from: **Pointed end** (traditional and conservative) or **Straight End** (punk and iconoclastic) ..... \$9.95/each; 2 for \$18.95.

**Ranger Combat Cap - Woodland Camouflage** - latest Army issue. This winterweight cap features lined flaps which can fold out to keep your ears warm and tuck into the hat when the weather's balmy. Sizes run small. Also available in Olive Drab (OD) Green. Sizes: 7, 7-1/4, 7-1/2, 7-3/4 ..... \$9.00/each.

**Watch Cap, 100% Wool** - This is the genuine GI, tightly knit, and all-wool watch cap. Used by commandos and troops alike, this tightly knit cap fits snug on any size head for maximum warmth on extended cold weather operations. Sides can roll down to protect ears. Choose between dark blue/black (Navy Seal or Marine Recon teams) or OD (olive drab; army) ..... \$6.00/each.

**Black Commando Dog Tag Set** - (A Kaufman's Exclusive): 2 GI stainless steel tags specially treated to be non-glare flat black plus 2 black (4" and 24") ball chains ..... \$5.00/set

**Regulation GI Dog Tags** - set of 2 stainless steel tags and 2 stainless chains (4" and 24") ..... \$3.00/each. Want us to print them? WE'LL PRINT ANYTHING up to 6 lines and 15 spaces per line.  
 **Printing** ..... only \$1.00 per tag (\$2.00 per set)

PLEASE, NO DOG TAG IMPRINTING ORDERS BY TELEPHONE.

**Dog Tag Silencers** - black, non-glare rubber bumpers for tags ..... \$1.00/pair

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 • All in stock items are shipped no later than the next business day regardless of whether you pay by check, money order, credit card or C.O.D. (There is a C.O.D. fee of \$4.00 in addition to the regular shipping)  
 • Toll free telephone lines direct to our Customer Service Department. We'll not only be 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.  
 No, we're not the cheapest. But you get what you pay for. If you order the cheapest you may wait a long time for delivery of something you may ultimately be unhappy with. If you order from Kaufman's you'll see why top quality merchandise and first rate service (with a Customer Service Department always available) will squeeze the most value out of every dollar you spend.

**Brand New!! Flight Jackets in Black and Woodland Camouflage** - Exact in every detail to the genuine GI MA1 jackets above, manufactured by the same government contractor, to military specs, with reversible orange linings. The Black nylon shelled jackets feature a gold zipper and the Woodland Camo jackets are made from genuine GI cloth of 50% cotton/50% nylon. Sizes: XS, S, M, L ..... \$48.75/each; XL ..... \$53.50/each.

**US Navy Cold Weather Deck Jackets**

**Type A2** - These jackets feature windproof cuff and hip closures plus a full zipper front with button overclosure. The Olive Drab (OD) green shell is 50% cotton/50% nylon. This blend allows the jacket to be water-repellent (not waterproof) while at the same time it has the softness of the natural fibre. It is lined with double face pile in both the body and sleeves. It sports two hip pockets and a breast pocket with snap closure. The Deck Jacket is cut slightly below the waist so large or tall persons will find it quite comfortable.  
 XS, S, M, L ..... \$47.75/each; XL ..... \$50.75/each; XXL ..... \$62.75/each.  
 Specify Olive Drab (OD) Green or Woodland Camo Shell.

**M-65 Field Jackets**

This is the basic issue combat jacket. Designed for complete utility, these water-repellent and windproof jackets feature: 4 super large utility pockets; gusseted back for complete mobility and freedom of movement; epaulets; adjustable cuffs and collar; drawstring waistband; hidden hood in collar. Brand new, of course. Sizes are XS, S, M, L, XL. Long lengths are available in Olive Drab (OD) Green and Camouflage, Woodland pattern only. If you're unsure of your size, tell us your chest measurement when ordering. XS-L ..... \$55.00/each; XL & all long lengths ..... \$60.50/each; XL/long ..... \$85.00/each.  
 Choose from:  Olive Drab (OD) Green  
 Camouflage, Woodland Pattern (latest GI issue to Army)  
 Desert Tan - (NATO issue).  Camouflage, Tiger Stripe - (Commercially made in a US mill to military specs).

**M-65 liner - Genuine GI** - designed to quickly and easily button into M 65 jacket to provide complete warmth by sealing in the body heat. Brand New XS, S, M, L ..... \$19.00/each; XL ..... \$20.50/each

**USAF Heavyweight Flight Jacket - Type M2B**

This is the warmest light jacket that the military issues. It features full pile hood which drapes over the shoulders when not needed. This is the cold weather version of the Intermediate Weight Flight Jacket - Type MA1 featured elsewhere in this ad. This jacket is designed for subfreezing temperatures. Waterproof and Windproof. S,M,L ..... \$87.75/each; XL ..... \$95.75

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ORDER TOLL FREE 1-800-545-0933 - CALL MON-SAT; 9:00 - 7:00 (Mountain Time)

**DEAD CLIENTS DON'T PAY (The Bodyguard's Manual).** By Leroy Thompson. 120 pp. Illustrated. Softcover. \$10 from Paladin Press, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1307, Boulder, CO 80306. Review by Bradley J. Steiner.

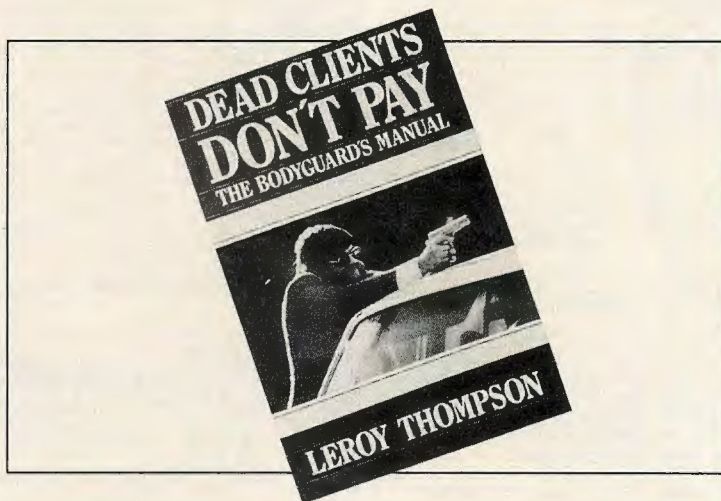
**F**OR reasons of propriety, few books about bodyguard work have surfaced. Even fewer go beyond the basics or teach actual protective skills. **Dead Clients Don't Pay** outlines some specific aspects of the bodyguard business but, frankly, it leaves me wanting more. Although interesting, it is hardly comprehensive.

The author examines the obvious: the need for physical fitness, hand-to-hand combat ability, weapons expertise and security training, etc. Thompson states that prior law-enforcement training is desirable for bodyguards—I disagree. The notion that police or elite military service alone prepares one for bodyguard work must be clearly *qualified*, since law-enforcement training emphasizes qualities that are opposite to those needed by protection agents. The U.S. Secret Service often hires agents from other branches of the law enforcement community but they meticulously *retrain* them for specific protective responsibilities. When SAS men serve as bodyguards (which they often do), they undergo specific training in protective tactics. On the other hand, as Thompson points out, police firearms training may be helpful, but bodyguards must be trained differently to be effective.

Justifiably, Thompson praises the Secret Service, but I differ with his statement that its agents rely too much on extensive technological and manpower support. Extensive technological, manpower and intelligence resources are the heart and soul of the modern protective service. To call a bodyguard's reliance on them a shortcoming is similar to criticizing a surgeon's ability to handle medical trauma because he uses sterile instruments and modern anesthesia in a scrupulously clean hospital environment to perform surgery.

In my opinion, the "professional assignments" chapter is flawed. Thompson does not stress the need for effective, coordinated *team effort* in providing protection. The illustration on p. 18 shows a bodyguard standing in front of his client and returning an attacker's fire. This is, frankly, second-rate protection. To react like this might protect the client from a lone assailant armed with a knife, club or broken bottle but would surely fail against an onslaught by multiple armed or unarmed attackers or one semiskilled attacker with a gun.

## IN REVIEW



A bodyguard *team* is needed as well as a different tactical approach. A lone bodyguard (or even two) can only rarely provide serious, efficient protective service. The protective guideline reads, "Cover and evacuate!" *not* "Shield and return fire!" A protective team trained according to this principle might have prevented Anwar Sadat's tragic assassination.

Thompson's chapter on weapons is interesting and I agree with his high regard for the Browning Hi-Power as "first choice" in a 9mm pistol. Were I limited to a 9mm handgun in any situation or assignment that would certainly be *my* choice, too.

I get the feeling that Thompson has done more estate security work than close protection work. The array of weaponry discussed (i.e., SMGs, shotguns, assault rifles, knives) and the implication that they are normally carried on protective details makes sense only when speaking of commando-type guards and high-level security people. In the total protective effort of a professionally trained security-bodyguard force, the back-up "artillery" is discreetly available, but not generally carried by each person in a close-protection team.

Vehicle security is a most critical subject and the attention Thompson gives it is indeed praiseworthy. Every bodyguard must be acquainted with the critical need for iron-clad vehicular security and checks. The best bet, in fact, is 24-hour-a-day guard over the client's vehicle, as is done with Air Force One and the Presidential limousines.

Thompson is again right on target when he points out the distinction between high- and low-profile protection. However, he should have stressed

that the the low-profile jobs for clients who can afford to pay well are the most desirable ones to seek. Well-tailored suits are a substantial tax deduction, when purchased for business reasons. In addition, the reader who aspires to work in the bodyguard field should make it clear to clients that *they* will need to foot the bill for any on-the-job special clothing or attire.

When on the job, socializing is taboo. Social sophistication has been overrated: The bodyguard who flirts with beautiful women, gets caught up in political or social discussions and enjoys demonstrating his knowledge of wines and social graces is as useful as a seeing eye dog who chases blue cars.

Thompson stresses the fact that more than muscle is required to be a bodyguard. Attack dogs are indeed a valuable link in the protective chain. In my opinion the use of dogs is highly underrated. It's only because of public relations that the White House grounds are not patrolled by professional dog handlers and well-trained Dobermans.

In the final chapter, "Minimizing Risk," Thompson stresses the importance of knowledge. The bodyguard needs to know about the various terror groups around the world. He should know something of his countries of assignment and be familiar with law enforcement liaison.

While I strongly disagree with Thompson's "lone bodyguard" approach to protection, I nevertheless recommend **Dead Clients Don't Pay** to anyone professionally interested in the bodyguard field. There's too little available on the subject to pass his information up. ❧

# "Jet support? Hell, in 'Nam our best friend was Puff the magic dragon!"



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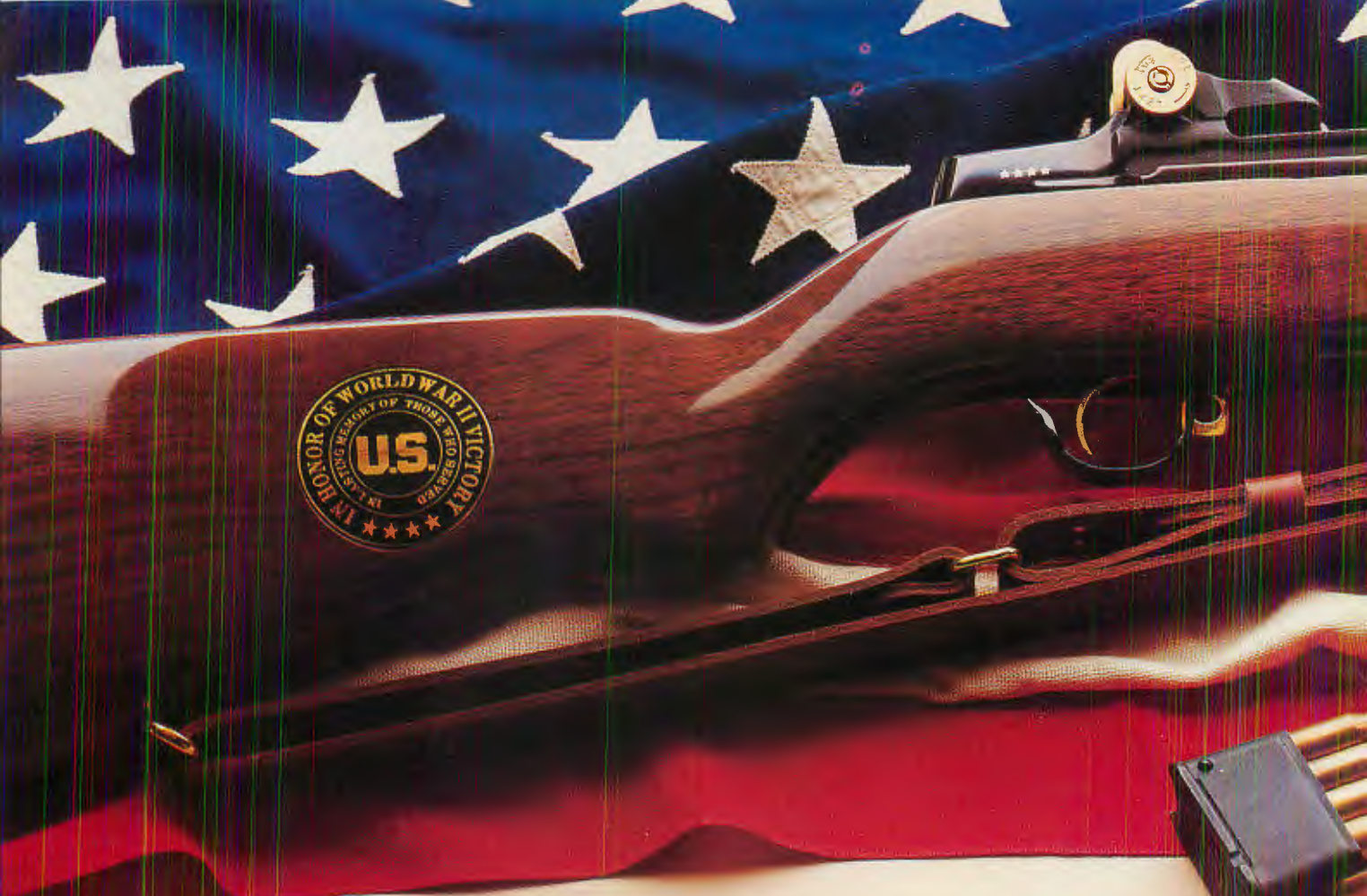


Warning his buddies, a Marine fires his M79 grenade launcher near Khe Sanh.

## The Vietnam Experience

Each volume: Approximately 220 pages, 160 gripping full color and monochrome photographs; maps, diagrams. Detailed text. 9" x 12".

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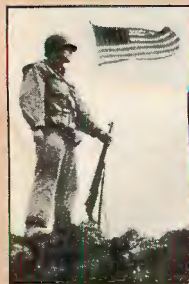
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*The solid walnut display cabinet is easily wall mounted—or it may be displayed flat or upright on a mantel, table or shelf. The acrylic glass lid, with*





*Free Personalized Solid Brass Plaque – When you place your reservation, you will receive a form to specify the information you want us to engrave on this free brass plaque at no additional charge. This will further personalize the rifle to you or a family member and make it particularly meaningful for future generations.*

proud to own and display. M1 Garands served all branches of our armed forces— Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Army Air Corps. More battle honors and military awards of valor were won with the M1 Garand than any other rifle in American history. You will own the weapon, designed by John C. Garand, that the U.S. Army Ordnance Board called "... the finest shoulder rifle in the world" and General Patton called "... the greatest battle instrument ever devised."

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are accepted. You may call (a 24-hour toll free number is available), use the reservation form below or personally visit our headquarters. Satisfaction is fully guaranteed, or you may return for full refund anytime within one month. This is available exclusively through The American Historical Foundation.

If you do not have a Federal 01 firearms license, we will coordinate delivery with you through your local firearms dealer, after your reservation is received here. If you have a license, send a signed copy, and the World War II Commemorative M1 Garand will be delivered directly to you.

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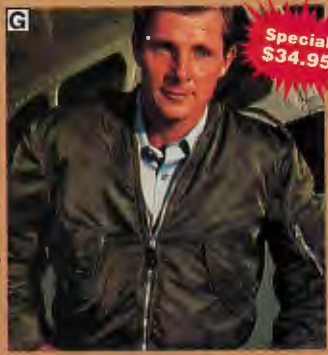
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# I WAS THERE

by Richard Krizan as told to M.L. Jones

## Blasting Boredom Blues

SGT Richard Krizan served with the 1st Infantry Division in 1964-65 at Ft. Riley, Kan. Upon separation from active duty, he joined the 3rd Brigade (AIT) 84th Division (TNG) USAR in Milwaukee, Wisc., as an artillery and general subjects instructor. Presently a sergeant with the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Dept., he was on temporary duty with a training battery at the United States Artillery Training Center (USATC) at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma back in 1967:

**T**HE mid-July Oklahoma sun beat down so ferociously that the cannons became too hot to touch and training was suspended — except for my unit, firing support for a "school shoot" for second lieutenants learning to be forward observers. Because 'Nam was in full swing, we had to train and ship replacements as quickly as possible. Forward observers' skills were critically needed, and they had a high casualty rate.

I was a sergeant attached to a training battery at the USATC. Trainees were cannoners on our gun crews for this shoot. We were firing simulated combat missions, so speed and accuracy were paramount.

We settled into the workhorse routine of firing and waiting, and between fire missions some of our trainees bitched about the heat and boredom. We urged them to enjoy it, reminding them, "You could be in 'Nam where it's hot but definitely not boring."

Our next fire mission was cancelled almost as soon as it came down, when we got word from FDC that there'd be an unspecified delay. The XO (executive officer) told us to unload the overheated 105s to preclude a cookoff.

I was the assistant gunner. After the No. 1 man removed the canister and powder from the breech, I dropped the tube, and the SSG gunner and I showed our trainees the quick way to tap a round out of the forcing cone with a bell-rammer staff. It was stuck fast, and we were laying our backs into it when a passing safety officer, assigned to us for the day only, got on our case for using too much gusto in ramming the projectile out of the tube.

He told us he'd seen two men killed when they struck a faulty fuse with a

bell rammer and it detonated in the tube.

Patiently, we explained to the lieutenant that we'd done this many times before and that there was a mechanism in the fuse that kept the round safe until it left the tube and rotated several times so that it armed itself only after about 15 meters of travel.

"This is WWII-vintage ammo," he snapped back. "After 25 years of shipping and mishandling, it could be unstable."

"Yessir," we agreed, to get him out of our hair. When he left, we gave him the horse laugh.

The next fire mission came down about 20 minutes later, a time-on-target request, requiring us to cut a time fuse. We used the same round, and when I pulled the lanyard, the 105 belched smoke and flame as it recoiled out of battery. Simultaneously, a rending explosion split the air in front of my face. Muzzle burst!

The round had detonated as it left the tube. Icy fear gripped my insides. I froze, afraid if I moved I'd find something missing. We all held our breaths as we gingerly checked ourselves out.

The safety officer ran up, prepared to raise bloody hell. One look at our waxen complexions told him that words would be superfluous. His point had been made eloquently, complete with exclamation point.

The gunner was the first to find his voice.

"Well — gawDAMN!" he breathed, almost reverently. I never found out if the awe in his voice was for the unlikely coincidence or the fact that we had lived through it.

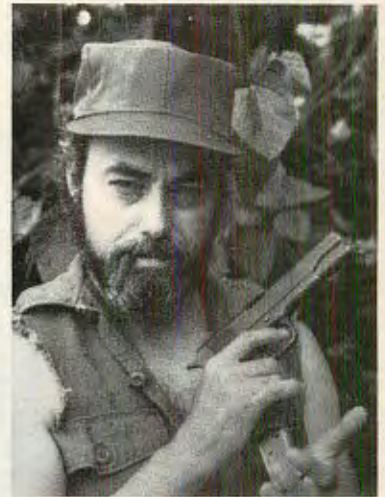
Behind us, a shaken trainee replied, "You got *that* fuckin' right, Sarge." He was looking at our prime mover, a deuce-and-a-half.

We turned and looked at the truck parked in a shallow depression several meters to our rear. Its canvas was holed by shrapnel that had passed between the three of us. We'd been standing with no more than an arm's length between us, but not a single shard had touched us or the men on the weapons next to us.

When my balls descended from my throat, I turned to the trainees crouched by the ammo tarp and asked, "Still bored?"

I expected no answer, and none was given. ☒

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## OPEN SIGHTS ON CRITICISM...

Sirs:

In reference to Ken Hackathorn's column on the M16A2 (September '84). Mr. Hackathorn's criticism of the easily adjustable rear sight is without justification. To assume that because a sight is more easily and precisely adjustable, it will be tinkered with and constantly changed is ludicrous. If we accept this argument then we must also believe that every time a GI in WWII or Korea got a five minute break he started screwing with his rear sight. Of course, we know this is not true. One reason the M1 rifle was considered such a fine weapon was because a soldier could easily zero his rifle for his own style and change the zero if circumstances required. This ability to get a zero and return to it quickly and precisely inspires tremendous confidence in the user.

John K. McAdams  
Houston, Texas

*Contributing Editor Hackathorn — like almost every other weapons analyst — bears strong personal opinions about what's wrong and right with all the world's current military weapons. We like to publish both sides of any argument, including this one. For our money, the more-easily adjustable rear sights on the M16A2 are a boon to the combat marksman. It's time the U. S. military forgot about the Vietnam-era garden hose school of combat firing and got back to an emphasis on placing well-aimed fire on the enemy — including quick adjustment of sights for windage and elevation by the shooter. — The Eds.*



## FLAK



## FLAGRANT FONDA...

Sirs:

I think that you and your readers will be surprised to learn that Jane Fonda's workout tapes are available through the Armed Forces Exchange catalog and I also saw them on counters at the Navy Exchange in Rota, Spain.

*Ironic, isn't it?*

Paul Nissen  
Address Withheld

*It certainly is. How quickly they forget. We believe a call to AAFES or the base exchange officer might have some impact on this situation. How about: "Get those pinko platters the hell out of OUR exchange. Strongly-worded letter follows."? — The Eds.*

## KEEP SHARP...

Sirs:

That's no zero on the Soviet silencer (SOF Silencer Scoop, August '84). That's an *F!* It reads "FE513." Also, I think you'll find that the abbreviation is "Spetsnaz" — SPETSial'noye NAZvanie, meaning "special mission."

Keep sharp, guys. You're miles ahead of most (not all) of the rest of the pack of gonzos who publish cammie magazines.

W. Reid Ripley  
Ft. Mead, Maryland

*You're right. We goofed on the spelling of "Spetsnaz." The Soviet silencer number should read "FE513" — that was a typo. Thanks for the compliment. SOF fully intends to stay out on point in this growing genre of magazine publishing. Readers with sharp eyes and strong technical backgrounds keep us honest. — The Eds.*

## LEST WE FORGET...

Sirs:

I applaud John Lofton's editorial "Fragging Fonda" printed in your August issue. As a young American, I feel it is my duty to objectively consider the facts concerning the war in Vietnam. Although I do question the motives of our government during the conflict, and I curse the indecision that forced us to fight a war of half-measures, I cannot find it in myself to question the sacrifice of the American men who fought and died in Vietnam.

Fonda and her ilk that denounced American soldiers as "war criminals" are vermin of the lowest order. Such comments aimed at government policy makers I can understand; democracy bids that all views be heard and considered. But to voice such statements about men who are logging through jungles that make hell look like a Swiss health spa while she basks in the adoration of every communist propaganda mill in the world constitutes a crime in itself. And one that has not, and probably never will be redressed. But it will not be forgotten.

Charles J. Wilkins Jr.  
Cadanadian, Texas

*Even if Fonda's actions during the Vietnam War are not redressed, we hope that no one lets her forget. — The Eds.*

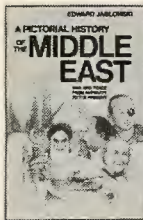
## FORMER SANDINISTA SPEAKS OUT...

Sirs:

As a former member of the Sandinista Security Police (DIGESE), and now a member of ARDE, I want to congratulate you for the magnificent articles on Central America and for pressing on the need to stop the spread of Marxism in the free world. I can assure you that your work is not in vain; they get the message and hate you with a passion. I remember finding your magazine in several military offices, and in the Cuban embassy too.

Luciano A. Cuadra  
Ministry of the Interior

*It doesn't suprise us that the communists take a dim view of our activities and the publication that supports them. That's OK. We don't make any secret of what we think of communists in any form either. — The Eds. ✕*



†0646 Spec. ed.



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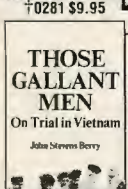
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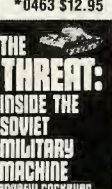
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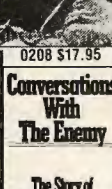
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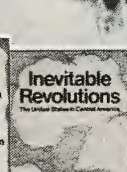
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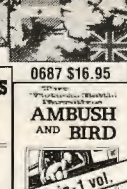
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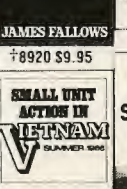
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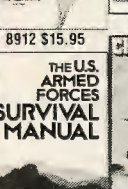
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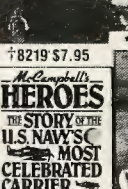
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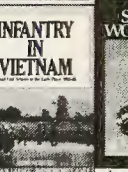
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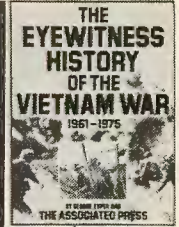
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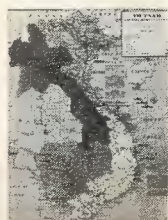
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**T**HE venerable Colt M1911A1 .45 ACP pistol now faces almost certain extinction from U.S. military inventories as a consequence of the current XM9 pistol trials. Premature burial services were scheduled once before, more than 40 years ago.

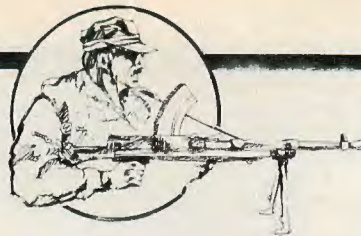
The pistol, as such, is an item of small moment in military scenarios, outside of the parade ground. U.S. Army experience in World War I indicated a need for more effective firepower than the M1911A1 could provide for command personnel, ammunition bearers, weapon crews and rear-echelon troops.

The onslaught of World War II initiated a crash program to this end which resulted in the .30-cal. carbine developed by Winchester in 1941 from specifications of the U.S. Ordnance Dept. The design is a scaled-down variation of the Garand action, coupled with a short-stroke gas system invented by David Marshall "Carbine" Williams.

The rifle utilized an intermediate cartridge of questionable effectiveness. Based on the .32 Winchester self-loading round of 1906, the rimless case is straight-walled and slightly tapered. The 110-grain-ball projectile delivers a muzzle velocity of 1,975 fps. Unfortunately, this much-maligned cartridge offers a stopping-power potential only slightly better than the 9mm Parabellum and well below that of the .45 ACP on the Hatcher Momentum Relative Stopping Power Rating System (itself a hotly disputed concept). However, it was never intended that this lightweight 5.5-lb. carbine replace the infantry battle rifle. Faced only with a choice between the .30-cal. carbine and any pistol — in a battlefield environment — I'll take the carbine *without hesitation* any time.

Development of a carbine tracer cartridge commenced in August 1943. It was based on requests from British Army forces in Burma. However, its standardization as the M27 cartridge did not occur until May 1946. It was used extensively in Korea. Identified by an orange tip, the length of dim trace was 75 yards. The overall burn-out distance was about 600 yards. It is still encountered at gun shows packed in the original 600-rd., sealed Spam cans. I have sometimes wondered what profit could be turned by filling unused tins of this type with an equivalent weight of sand or bricks and then sealing and painting them, as they are almost always found in the sweating hands of collectors who have no intention of ever opening and expending their precious bullion.

In operation, the carbine is quite conventional. After the bullet passes over the barrel's gas vent, located only 4.5 inches in front of the chamber,



# FULL AUTO

by Peter G. Kokalis

## The Carbine Controversy



some of the escaping gases move into the small gas cylinder, where they strike the short piston. The piston, driven rearward only  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch, hits the operating slide sharply and sends it to the rear. The slide's initial movement is independent of the bolt mechanism for  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch, delaying the opening of the bolt until pressures have dropped to a safe level. The retracting handle's cam surface then pivots the bolt's operating lug upward, rotating the bolt to the left and disengaging the two locking lugs on the bolt's head from their recesses in the receiver. The operating slide

**Still fighting:** Contributed to the Salvadoran army, this M1 carbine may see action.

continues its rearward movement, retracting the bolt, which in turn extracts and ejects the empty case. The fully compressed recoil-spring forces the slide and bolt to return forward. The front of the bolt strips a fresh round from the magazine and chambers it as the slide cam rotates the bolt to the locked position.

The original specifications called for a selective-fire option. Because of its light weight, the test guns exhibited considerable climb when fired in the full-auto mode, making acceptable accuracy at 100 yards and beyond seemingly impossible. As there were also problems with the fire-control mechanism, this requirement was dropped, along with a 50-rd. magazine, then under development. The rifle was issued as the M1 carbine and was capable of semiautomatic fire only.

In 1942 a para model, called the M1A1, was adopted. It differs from the M1 only by virtue of its flimsy folding stock. About 140,000 were produced, all by the Inland Division of General Motors. Because of its poorly designed stock (which has not deterred collector interest one whit), it is totally unsuited for conversion to full-auto fire.

Once the M1 carbine was fielded, grunts, as they are wont to do, commenced to improvise methods of converting the weapon to full-auto fire. Combat experiences demonstrated that the group dispersion in this mode



**The M2 carbine — light and compact, it has greater hit potential than any pistol. It's still in use throughout the world. The selector lever is located to left of chamber (author's collection). Photo: Peter G. Kokalis**



*Continued on page 104*

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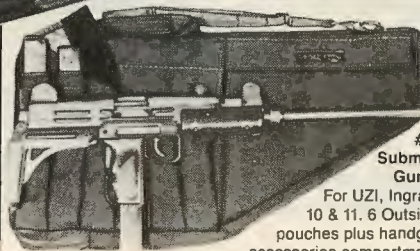
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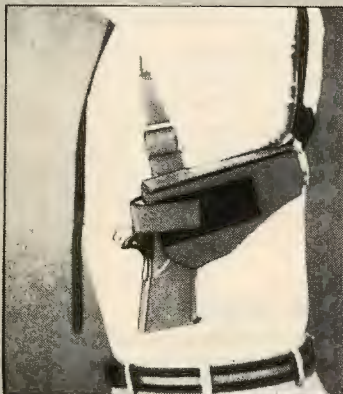
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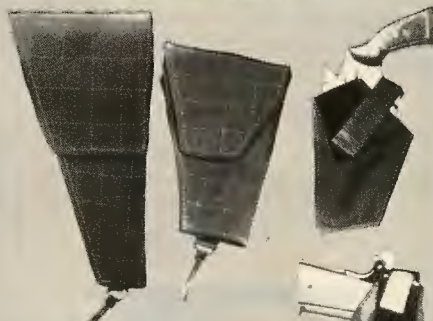
**Military Shoulder Holster (Bottom).** Constructed of 5 layers ballistic nylon. Sewn in sight channel. Fully adjustable 1¼" nylon web harness. **HN45B** for auto's \$38; **HN45BR** for revolvers \$35; **HN45BL** for 6" BBL \$43.

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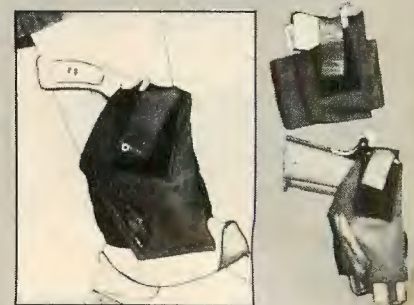
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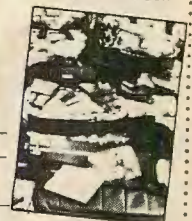
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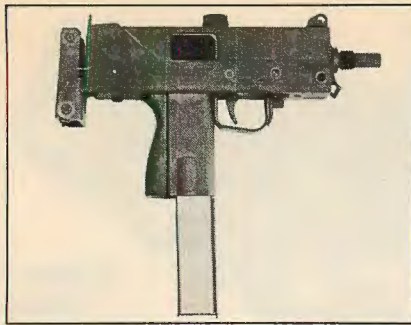
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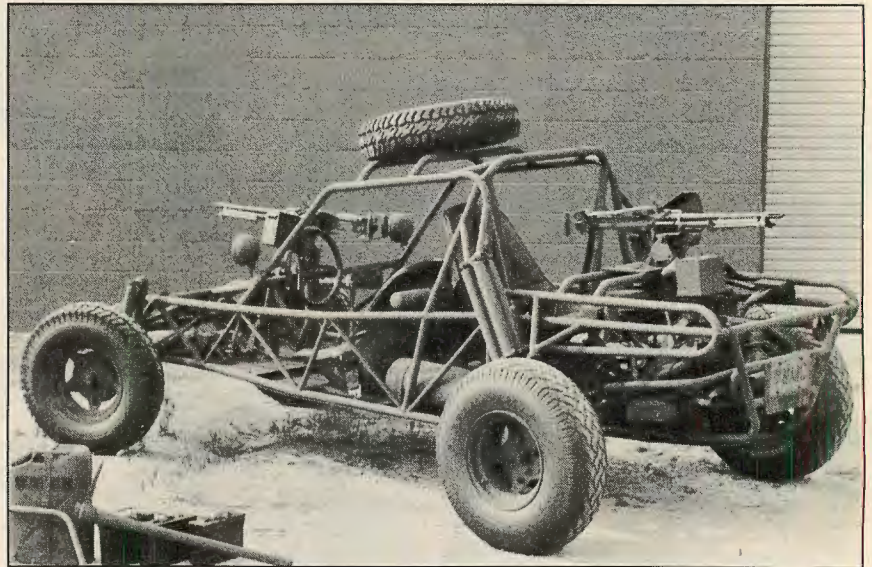
*Military Armament Corporation* has announced that they have an exclusive manufacturing license agreement with Gordon Ingram to produce the MAC 10 submachine gun at their plant in Stephenville, Texas. The new model MAC is called the Ingram M10A1. Design changes will make the M10A1 safer and lighter. The M10A1 comes in select-fire and a semiauto pistol version. Available in 9mm and .45 ACP, the M10A1 can be converted to fire either cartridge. The semiauto MAC can be had for \$399 but you'll have to pay \$550 for the select-fire version. *Military Armaments Corp.*, Dept. SOF, 1481 South Loop-Suite 4, Stephenville, TX 76401.



## LIFEKNIFE TRAILMASTER

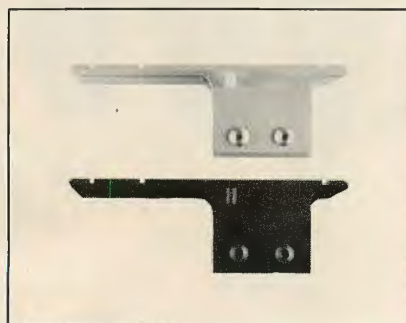
To people familiar with the Lifeknife Commando, this scaled-down survival tool will be a welcome addition to the line. Lighter and less expensive than the Commando, the Trailmaster features other additions. The resin hollow handle contains matches, fishhooks, line, sinkers, needles — most of the same gear contained in the Commando. New items include a first-aid kit in the nylon sheath and a handle imprinted with the International Ground to Air Emergency Rescue Signals. The stainless-steel modified Bowie blade is non-reflective and serrated on the back edge. This nine-inch, seven-ounce survival knife retails for \$35.00. *Lifeknife Industries*, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 771, Santa Monica, CA 90406.

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**N**OTHING is more important to the future of America than the conduct of U.S. foreign policy during the remainder of this decade. Over the last 10 years, Soviet military might has been increasing globally, and the Bolshevik brand of imperialism is on the march everywhere. Thus, the coming election may be even more important for our future than was the Carter-Reagan contest in 1980.

The unusually intense Soviet interest in our current presidential election is itself extremely significant. They know that the outcome and the resulting American foreign policy decisions will seriously affect their global interests. They are doing their best to manipulate U.S. political affairs, centering much of their effort on disrupting relations with our NATO allies (NATO's future will be discussed next month in the final *Election '84* editorial) but of equal importance is their desire to exercise control over events around the globe.

A comparative look at the foreign policy records of the Carter and Reagan administrations will shed some light on this Soviet concern. It will also highlight the historical record of each administration, telling us what we can likely expect over the next four years. The general thrust of the Reagan administration won't change, but Mondale's policy proposals clearly involve a return to the Carter agenda.

While the world's attention has been forced toward NATO and the nuclear arms issue, the Soviets have advanced their interests in the Third World. South Africa, bordered by Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, is a good place to compare Carter and Reagan policies and their results. Our involvement in the region is a contrast between two alternative directions, each typical of the broader foreign policies of the administration in power, and each with very different results.

Ten years ago our attention was focused on Watergate, lurid tales of a "rogue" CIA, and the disaster unfolding in Southeast Asia. While these matters dominated headlines, the Soviets quietly wrapped up another foreign policy coup almost without comment. It began in Portugal, where for 30 years the Soviets supported a small but cohesive communist organization, including infiltration of the military, in what amounted to a long-term gamble with history.

The investment in this enterprise was a good one, and the gamble paid off handsomely. In 1975, Portugal's African colonies, Mozambique and Angola, were given hasty independence. Small but well-armed Marxist movements quickly filled the power vacuum — another major advance for Moscow's strategy to isolate South Africa and one more example (if any were needed) of the effectiveness of Soviet long-range planning for their strategic interests.

The Carter-Mondale African agenda would normally have been implemented by then Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, but Andrew Young at the U. N. played his wild card for added excitement. While the Carter-Mondale policy included a strong emphasis on "human rights," Young's sporadic bombast to the press gave an emphasis to the issue which would not die in the face of pragmatism. This meant continuing heavy economic and diplomatic pressure on South Africa. All of this activity, of course, happened to support Soviet regional strategy, and the Kremlin couldn't have been happier. For Carter and Mondale, however, an abstract ideal clearly outweighed mere national security considerations. The results of this policy were clear throughout its course: constant warfare between South Africa and her Marxist neighbors, and a steady overall decline in societal cohesion and economic well-being for the entire region.

When we look at the course of events under the Reagan administration, Soviet eagerness for a return to the good old days becomes even more understandable. Reagan began with a simple but useful step: stop shouting, and begin a long series of quiet, private regional meetings.



## EDITORIAL

# ELECTION '84: Emphasis on Foreign Policy

by Karl Phaler

Escalating regional warfare benefitted no one. An approach that focused attention on regional cooperation while providing the necessary atmosphere for working out new approaches to regional tensions was needed and Reagan provided it.

The outcome, accomplished with almost no comment in the U.S. media, has been a series of bilateral agreements between South Africa and her neighbors, with each pledging non-interference in the internal affairs of the other. On this basis needed regional cooperation in economic growth can begin, and scarce resources diverted to security needs can be returned to more productive uses. In short, it appears that peace has broken out. Although this does not fit media preconceptions of newsworthiness, it is a dramatic development for the region's inhabitants and a major advance in U.S. strategic position. The only loser in the Reagan game has been Moscow, a fact emphasized by the shrill crescendo of Soviet propaganda.

Southern Africa is only one region where the course of events masks a new reality. The high visibility of conflict in Central America and the Caribbean has obscured several other significant trends. Since Somoza's ouster by the Sandinistas in 1979, there has been a broad-based movement away from military rule to democratic governments. Like an outbreak of peace, however, an epidemic of democracy attracts very little press attention.

After this goes to press, Mondale will tell us about his foreign policy program, and who he will choose to direct it. The inevitable media blitz against Reagan's foreign policy orchestrated by the Democratic party will undoubtedly be accompanied by Soviet provocations and disinformation campaigns. In the confusion, each of us will have to remember that — although this is only one factor among many — a careful evaluation of the Mondale/Reagan choice with respect to direction of foreign policy is important for all of us.

Because it is no longer fashionable, the difficult questions of how our foreign policy affects American strategic interests will be largely ignored in the campaign coverage. Even so, the voters (a far more sophisticated lot than is generally believed) will again respond to the traditional and valid concern of foreign policy when selecting the next President. Which alternative offers greater protection for our nation's future? Will America's long-term interests be protected by Mondale's rehash of Carter's failures? The answer to these questions should determine our choice. So long as enough of us choose correctly and demonstrate our concern where it counts — at the ballot box — we will at least have a future to protect. ✕

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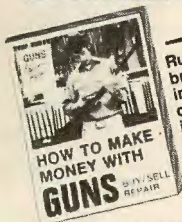
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by Alexander M.S. McColl

### Your Duty Calls: VOTE!

The outcome of any election is not determined by the desires of the majority of the people. I hope this statement shocks you into going on reading. The outcome of any election is determined by the desires of the majority of registered voters who actually go and vote.

And it is not enough just to vote. Inform yourself on the issues and the candidates. Where do the candidates stand on your issues: the right to keep and bear arms (being very wary of double-talk about handgun control as a crime-prevention scheme); support for the democratically elected government in El Salvador and the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters; national defense generally (the man's vote on the nuclear freeze is a very good indicator). Don't be taken in by the double-talk; find out how the candidate actually voted. Then you decide how you are actually going to vote; then vote.

Keep in mind that Mondale was Jimmy Carter's Vice-President and that a Mondale administration would be a repetition of the Jimmy Carter disasters: 20 percent interest rates, double-digit inflation and unemployment, and closer-to-home equivalents of the sell-outs in Iran, Nicaragua and the Panama Canal. When we run out of foreign allies to sell out, do we start giving away counties in south Texas?

The Vietnam War was lost in Washington. Most of us who believed in winning it were out in Southeast Asia somewhere doing our duty while the rats stayed home and gnawed away the foundations. Let's not make that mistake again. The campaign organizations of your candidate or your local Republican Party can always use more volunteers for such necessary details as ringing doorbells to hand out literature, answering telephones, stuffing envelopes, and so on. It's a lot of work, but it can be a lot of fun, and it's necessary.

There is no such thing as enough money for a political campaign: if there's an extra fin in your billfold, or, say, your guess as to the amount of money you save in a year's driving with gas at its present price compared to the Jimmy Carter price in 1980 (about 20 cents a gallon more), your candidate or local party can definitely find a use for it. They don't give radio and TV time away, printers like to get paid, the rent on campaign headquarters comes due, and so on.

Under the Hatch Act, of course, active-duty military members are not permitted to get too visibly active in the campaign, but you can and should (1) make a financial contribution, and (2) (MOST IMPORTANT) find out where the House and Senate candidates in your home-of-record district stand on the defense issues; Then get an absentee ballot and VOTE.

As we have seen with all the hassles and obstruction over funding for El Salvador and the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters, it's not enough to re-elect the President, we also have to get him a Congress he can work with. Election Day, Tuesday November 6, 1984, is the one day you're boss. If you don't vote, if you haven't got your friends to vote, if you haven't done all you can for the campaign, you have only yourself to blame if the wrong side wins and our country goes down the pipe.

Am I telling you to vote the straight Republican ticket? Basically yes, but with exceptions. The box above lists Democrats running for House and Senate seats who are basically sound on gun rights, defense and Central America. Vote for them. Otherwise the straight ticket.

Your vote work and financial contribution can and will make a difference.

### Misinformation: The Democrat Platform

Since this is the official program on which the Democrats seek to obtain control of the future of America, it merits inspection. A few quotes, relating to issues of concern to SOF readers:

"We support tough restraints on the manufacture, transportation and sale of snub-nosed handguns, which have no legitimate sporting use and are used in a high proportion of violent crimes."

How do you write a law defining "snub-nosed handguns?" Is it really an unarguable, self-evident truth that such weapons, however defined, "have no legitimate sporting use?" Does the Constitution make any such exception to the right of the citizens to keep and bear arms? Have they learned nothing from the total failure of the 1968 Gun Control Act?

"Today in El Salvador, after more than a billion dollars in American aid, the guerrillas are stronger than they were three years ago, and the people are much poorer."

This is a direct misrepresentation of fact. Notwithstanding totally inadequate U.S. military aid (the "billion dollars" included a lot of purely economic aid) the Salvadoran government is winning the war.

"In Nicaragua our support for the *contras* and for the covert war has strengthened the totalitarians at the expense of the moderates."

More misinformation. The moderates — the Caleros, Chamorros, Robelos and the other *contra* leaders — were maneuvered out of the post-revolution *junta* by the Ortega brothers, Tomas Borge and the other communists in 1979 and 1980, that is, under Jimmy Carter's non-policy in that area.

"We must terminate our support for the *contras* and other paramilitary groups fighting in Nicaragua."

"... a Democratic President will support the newly elected President of El Salvador ... by channeling U.S. aid through him and by conditioning it on the elimination of government supported death squads and on ... serious negotiations with contending forces in El Salvador, in order to achieve a peaceful democratic settlement to the Salvadoran conflict."

In other words, cut off support to the best means we have to eliminate the deadly threat posed by the Soviet and Cuban controlled terrorist tyranny in Nicaragua without committing our own troops; then force Duarte to negotiate a sell-out of his country to these same Communist terrorists, who have done all they can to destroy the emerging democratic process in El Salvador.

"Our ultimate aim must be to abolish all nuclear weapons in a world safe for peace and freedom."

"Terminate production of the MX missiles and the B-1."

"Prohibit the production of nerve gas and work for a verifiable treaty banning chemical weapons."

In other words disarm unilaterally and then try to persuade the Soviets, for no *quid pro quo* to do likewise. Have they never heard of Yellow Rain? Are they aware of the gigantic cost of *trying* to match the Soviets' non-nuclear, conventional armed forces, even if the utopian dream of a nuclear-free world could be achieved?

The entire Democratic platform — and the above are merely some of the misinformation and idiocies in it — is a continuation of the willful blindness to the grim facts of the real world that led Jimmy Carter into the disasters and failures of Iran, the Panama Canal and Nicaragua. Wasn't four years of Jimmy Carter more than enough? Do we need another such four years under Carter's vice-president? Tuesday, November 6, 1984, you get to decide.

### CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS

#### House of Representatives:

Stan Holm, Texas  
Sam Hall, Texas  
Ralph Hall, Texas  
Carroll Hubbard, Jr., Kentucky  
G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery, Mississippi  
Bill Nelson, Florida  
Sam Stratton, New York  
Dan Alexander, Alabama (challenger)

#### Senate:

David Boren, Oklahoma  
Sam Nunn, Georgia



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Air Cav soldiers brace against the rotorwash of departing UH-1s before moving against VC supply caches in the Ia Drang Valley. Photos: AP/Wide World

# A POW IN VC VALLEY

## The Geneva Convention Does Not Apply in the Bloody Ia Drang

by Don A. MacPhail



**H**ESS whispered, "I hear something. It's out there about 75 to 100 meters to the front."

We were all awake now, straining ears and eyes, trying to see or hear something definite. They were out there, no mistake about that.

**TOP:** In search of enemies: "The Cavalry" dashes toward cover as they battle Viet Cong in entrenched positions. **ABOVE:** After the battle: A G.I. helps a wounded buddy following a brisk fire fight at Ia Drang.

## PRISONER OF WAR

Don MacPhail's story recounts his last few hours of freedom in Vietnam. After his capture on 9 February 1969 he was held prisoner in Cambodia, Laos and Son Tay (he was removed the day before the raid), and a place the prisoners called Plantation Gardens. Despite his captor's protestations about Uncle Ho's humanity, his permanent injuries sustained as a prisoner include: a plastic nose and part of his face, club fingers

and toes (his captors pulled out his fingernails and broke his toes). MacPhail was released on 17 March 1973 at Gia Lam Airport in North Vietnam, after four long years as an unwilling guest of the North Vietnamese.

He was awarded a Purple Heart with two clusters, and is on 100-percent disability from Uncle Sam. Don is now a railroad engineer on the Boston and Maine Railroad. This is his first story for SOF.

We could hear muffled whispers in the trees and I heard metal clanking. Suddenly it got quiet. I knew what was going to happen. I yelled, "Blow off the claymores!" and grabbed for the radio handset.

Our night location erupted in clouds of dirt and shrapnel. Machine guns and small arms hammered our position, green tracer rounds weaving patterns in the air.

I reached for Dobie. My hand touched his skull and his head felt like a melon that had been stepped on. Hess was wounded and unconscious; I couldn't tell how bad. The radio was scraps of metal destroyed by the first barrage.

We were going to die, all four of us, in a country thousands of miles from home; in a place called Vietnam.

This had been Team No. 64's second insertion into VC Valley, the Ia Drang, this month. When the Echo Co. commander briefed Ken Hess, my assistant team leader, and me on our mission three days ago at Fire Base Oasis where we were attached to the 58th Rangers of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, both of us broke out in a cold sweat. Although he stressed our ability and experience, we both remembered getting our asses shot off in the last mission in the valley. But whether we liked it or not, a mission is a mission and we were to go in at dawn on 8 February 1969.

There were four of us on our team: I was team leader; Hess was my assistant; Dobie was a new team member who'd only been in 'Nam for a month, and Club, our Montagnard, had been a guide with the Rangers for three months — before that he'd been with the 5th Special Forces at Ban Me Thuot.

Our mission was to assess bomb damage from recent B-52 raids and to look for infiltrators. After we were inserted, Club was nervous. He said the jungle was just too quiet. But the day passed uneventfully. Before it got dark, we set up our November Lima (night location) in the best defensible position we could find and put out the claymore mines that we each carried. Then we waited. I took the first watch, Hess the second, Dobie the third and Club was to wake us up at first light.

When Hess shook me, I looked at my watch: 0200 hours. We heard them whispering in the trees before I yelled to blow the claymores. Their machine guns and small arms still hammered us. Dobie was dead and Hess was unconscious, and I knew that we were all going to die.

You can face death by panicking but I was so goddamn mad that a bunch of communist bastards were going to end my life before it had even started that I wanted to make sure I took a whole bunch of them with me. I didn't have to tell Club what to do; he knew the only thing left:

A shadow, fire him up, three- to five-round bursts. Don't waste your ammunition. Club and I were doing it as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

The NVA machine gun continued to strafe us with low grazing fire. It was hard to keep fighting.



Hess had stopped moaning. I wished I could have done more for him than just put on a pressure bandage. I thought, "He's dead." My eyes started to fill with tears but my hatred of the enemy made me blink them back. I kept on firing.

Christ! What happened? I felt like I'd been thrown six feet in the air and I wasn't firing anymore. I'd been hit! My leg felt like a red-hot poker was being twisted around in it. I heard Club shouting but I couldn't move. I watched him moving away, running in slow motion. Then I felt a rush of warm air. I was floating in the air, weightless, and it was beautiful all around me; red and yellow. Death wasn't horrible but like the most breathtaking sunset I'd ever seen.

Then I woke up. Cold, terribly cold. I smelled smoke, wood smoke. Where the

**This 1st Cav soldier becomes one with the earth after being caught in withering fire from a VC ambush.**

hell was I?

As my eyes started to focus, I saw men around a fire. My blood went cold. They were NVA soldiers. I couldn't believe it! I was dead. What kind of macabre game was this?

I'd seen NVA atrocities: genitals cut off and placed in the mouths of their victims, decapitations, disembowelments. God, if you're there, let me die now. I had to escape, run as far and as fast as I could before they killed me. I wouldn't think about the bullet that might hit me — but I couldn't move! I realized that I was tied between two trees.

As the sun came up, I could see why I was so terribly cold, and why I couldn't focus properly. I was stark naked and blood from a head wound had dried and crusted over my eyes. I could see the wound in my left thigh. It had stopped bleeding, so it couldn't be too bad.

As soon as the soldiers saw I was conscious and moving, two of them started walking toward me. One stopped directly in front of me, grinning like a damn fool.

My mind whirled. I didn't know whether the grinning was a good or a bad sign. I soon learned — at my first interrogation — that it was bad and that this grinning idiot, whom I named "Pizza Face," was one of the most sadistic bastards I had ever met or heard about.

Pizza Face motioned to some of the sol-



diers to untie and drag me to a hootch about 15 meters away. As we went in, I was thrown on my face and belly. The two guards tied my wrists together and then tied them to the back of my legs, so my body was arched in an excruciatingly painful bow. My tears streamed uncontrollably, while the guards laughed at their little joke.

In front of me, about four feet off the ground, was what I'm going to call a desk. I had to strain my head and neck upward to look at anyone sitting behind it. It made me feel very insignificant. They made me kneel and, because of the way I was tied, my leg wound started to bleed heavily again.

Inside I was yelling, "Bleed! Bleed!" I had heard somewhere that bleeding to death was an easy way to die, just like going to sleep. I would beat them at their own game.

Kneeling was very awkward. It was almost impossible to keep my balance. I fell over on my side. This signalled the guards to begin. One bastard (I learned to call him "Brutus") yanked me up by the hair, and the other gave me a love tap with the butt of his rifle right on the leg wound.

Jesus, what's that awful smell? I looked down. I had vomited all over myself.

Brutus grabbed me by the hair and dragged me out of the hootch toward a group of soldiers. They helped him drag me near the fire. Brutus picked up a pot of steaming water. He told me in sign language that if I vomited again he'd pour the steaming water over me to wash the vomit off. To emphasize his point, he poured some water on my leg.

The pain was unbelievable. What kind of

people were they? To die in battle is one thing, but to be treated as an animal?

They dragged me back to the hootch and made me kneel in the same position as before, but now Pizza Face was sitting at the desk, wearing his idiotic grin.

"What is your name?"

He had spoken in English! I was stunned. I'd heard Vietnamese speaking English before, but it seemed so strange here.

"Do you think all Vietnamese are so stupid they cannot learn a different language?" This must have been a sore spot with him. He motioned to the guards. Brutus gave me another love tap.

I could see I wouldn't receive any sympathy from Pizza Face. He told me that 14 of his men had been killed by our team and that my chances of survival were slim. I was to answer all his questions quickly and truthfully if I wanted to live. To prove he was not joking, he spoke to the guards. They left the hootch and in a few moments returned, dragging a pathetic-looking human being.

I went cold with fear. It was Club. I had taken it for granted he'd been killed in the battle. They threw him on the ground beside me. He was alive. I don't know how but he was. He had one eye. The other was a gaping socket. Three fingers were missing on one hand and all of his fingers on the other were gone.

Pizza Face then told me that the Vietnamese people had not signed the Geneva Accords of 1954 and therefore I wasn't protected under the status of a prisoner of war. I was, in fact, a war criminal, a murderer of Vietnamese women and children, and as such had no right to live.

I didn't feel the pain anymore. I knew I had only moments to live and this creature out of the stone age was toying with me. I watched him take his pistol out of his holster. I wasn't afraid. To let them do to me what they had done to poor Club would have been more horrible. One round in the head would be clean and quick. This time it would be over.

He rose and walked from behind the desk. I was fascinated by his every movement and by that idiotic grin on his face.

He walked over and stood beside me. Instead of firing the pistol, he told me that because of their beloved "Uncle Ho," the National Front for Liberation had a humane and lenient policy toward captured Americans, but since Club was a Vietnamese fighting his own people he would not be spared.

I'll never forget the noise the pistol made, or watching Pizza Face put the pistol next to Club's head and pulling the trigger. Club's body jumped off the ground before it finally was still. As Pizza Face left the hootch all I could think was that the son of a bitch never asked me one question.

Of the four of us who had started out together, three were dead within 48 hours, one more horribly than I could have ever imagined. And for me, it was only the beginning of 54 months I would spend in captivity. ✖

# CHARGIN' CHARLIE CHALLENGES NVA

## Beckwith as Battalion Commander

by Tony Bliss, Jr.

*Last month, our story of the life and times of COL "Chargin' Charlie" Beckwith recapped the scene at Desert One during the aborted mission to rescue American hostages in Teheran, the early years of Beckwith's career and his leadership with Project Delta in Vietnam, including his part in lifting the siege at Plei Me.*

**P**ROJECT Delta troopers' luck ran out at the end of January 1966. While staging out of Bong Son, several recon teams were inserted north into the fishhook-shaped An Lao Valley, a perennial Viet Cong stronghold. They were strictly American teams, and the mission marked only the second time Project Delta units had been fielded with other than mixed U.S. and Vietnamese forces.

The mission was relatively simple for trained and blooded troops. Once the recon teams pinpointed the communists, helo waves would lift in assault elements of Operation Masher/White Wing. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was slated to sweep through the valley to attack the base camps while units of the 3rd Marine Division, maneuvering under their own code name on Operation Double Eagle, would swing down and seal the valley from the north. If the tactical plan worked as advertised, the communists would be crushed between the two American divisions.

The commander of the 3rd Brigade of the Cav, COL Hal G. Moore, told Charlie Beckwith, "You find them and we'll come in and kill them." Unfortunately for nearly everyone concerned, it didn't happen that way.

After the Delta teams were inserted, the weather closed in to nearly zero-zero, effectively grounding allied air operations. Beckwith's teams, committed to the mission before the ceiling fell, were on their own. They didn't have to look long to find

the enemy. In fact, it's much more likely that Beckwith's boys got found.

SSGT Charles T. "Chuck" Hiner (MSG USA Ret) was on one of the three six-man teams inserted into the An Lao at dusk on 27 January. "The first team," he recalls, "was extracted the next morning. The second team was hit at noon. We could hear the firing. Their whole team was split up and they lost three killed. We lasted that day, that night and then they hit us about 0800 the following morning."

The Viet Cong had been tracking Hiner's team and just as they broke through a clearing, rifle and machine gun fire lashed into the patrol. Hiner was on point and went down immediately with a round grazing his head. The team leader was wounded. The remainder of the team were KIA.

A C-47 flying overhead picked up the team's distress signal and relayed it to a Forward Air Controller (FAC) who alerted Beckwith of the situation.

Beckwith's chopper was in the area and he immediately headed for Hiner's devastated patrol, racing at tree-top level just under the low ceiling. At the same time, the Cav got wrapped around the axle closer to Bong Son. Heavy rain and winds severely hampered their helo support. There would be no Cav relief force. The Delta patrols were left with their asses hanging in the wind.

As Beckwith's chopper approached the shot-up patrol, a .50 caliber round tore through Chargin' Charlie's right side, leaving a huge, jagged wound. The heavy projectile also smacked Beckwith's RTO in the hand. When the choppers were finally able to rescue Hiner's team, Beckwith was aboard as an emergency medevac headed for treatment at the Qui Nhon field hospital. En route, Beckwith realized he was losing a lot of blood and slipping into shock. He quickly ordered a medic to treat him for trauma.

When Beckwith arrived at the hospital, it was jammed with newly-wounded from the 101st Airborne. As a big redheaded nurse — a major — tried to stick a large needle into his right shoulder, Beckwith heard the doctors discussing his fate. He was to be triaged to the hospital's death row while the doctors attended to the wounded they thought had a better chance of making it.

"Hey, you!" roared Beckwith at the first doctor in sight. He reached up and grabbed the doc's surgical gown, pulling him down to where he'd get the full effect of Beckwith's foghorn bellow. "Goddammit, I'm not an ordinary guy. Let's get on with it!" The unnerved physician promptly got on with it.

After four operations and 30 days in the recovery room, Charlie Beckwith was finally evacuated through the Philippines back to the States.

When he finally got out of the hospital, Beckwith was left with a big, flap-shaped scar (he calls it his zipper) running from his right ribcage down around his side at belt-level and up the back.

Chuck Hiner only realized that Beckwith was hit when he saw him in the Qui Nhon hospital. Since then, even though the two of them have been in the same room, they have never spoken. Hiner blames Beckwith for his team's fate. He feels the Delta teams should never have gone into the An Lao Valley.

"We didn't have the support, we didn't have enough maps, we didn't have the intel. But the idea was to press in there, do the job and take what comes.

"We'd run quite a few missions, but it was always the deal with Chargin' Charlie that, Hey, the mission comes first regardless of the consequences. He don't give a shit how many people get hurt as long as the mission is accomplished."

Beckwith bristles at the charge: "It really burns me up because I'm not that kind of



man," he says. There are some practical experience factors concerning Long Range Patrol operations in Vietnam that make Hiner's charges sound like sour grapes.

Patrol members operating in enemy territory depend on stealth and concealment for survival. Lives are at serious risk anytime a patrol's position or immediate support is compromised as it clearly was during Operation Masher/White Wing. A lack of maps was certainly more the rule than the exception in the early years of the Vietnam War. In most instances, LRP patrol members indicated they would have considered themselves lucky to have two maps in the same unit.

The gross lack of logistical support Hiner alleges should have precluded commitment of the Delta teams was also not unusual for the period. There were consistently more LRPs inserted than could be immediately extracted by available helicopter assets. Veteran pilots indicate an extraction mission generally involved a light gun section of two helos, a command and control bird, an aircraft to actually do the extraction, a back-up ship and frequently a FAC to control any required air support from fixed-wing flights. Given the large number of aircraft required for support, commands who fielded LRP teams had to gamble and presume not all of them would require emergency extraction at the same time.

It seems quite safe to assume that Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols would be fielded with a lack of prior intelligence. Gathering intelligence was their mission. In the case of the An Lao Valley operation, Project Delta teams were inserted specifically to gather information for the 1st Cavalry and the Marines — intelligence on which hundreds of lives would depend. Had good intelligence on enemy activities been available, there would have been no need for the Delta teams.

But the facts remain generally as related

**Beckwith watches ceremonies at White House honoring 52 freed American hostages. Photo: UPI**

by Beckwith. In a left-handed sort of way, Project Delta teams accomplished their basic mission. They found the enemy forces, intentionally or unintentionally. They also got stranded by bad weather which precluded support when the shit hit the fan and took heavy casualties. Despite those realities, Beckwith still retains bad feelings about the Cav. He made sure following the An Lao debacle that Project Delta teams never went into a situation without a committed back-up for emergency extraction.

Several months after Charlie Beckwith had recovered sufficiently from his wound to return to active service, he was offered command of the Florida Ranger Camp. It was a logical choice for the former commander of a Long Range Patrol outfit to train Rangers. Beckwith tackled it with typical intensity. He arrived in Florida on 1 June 1966. The Ranger camp was not much more than a small cluster of buildings adjacent to an abandoned airstrip at Eglin Air Force Base. It was some 20 miles to the nearest civilization, a situation Beckwith considered perfect for his purposes. In the swamps, bays and rivers surrounding the area, the third and final phase of Ranger training is conducted, including extensive exercises in patrolling, ambush techniques, small-boat operations and river crossings. These gruelling operations frequently begin with a helicopter assault or a parachute drop. Much of that thanks to Beckwith's early influence on Ranger training.

A week after he took command, Charlie Beckwith gathered the cadre in Darby Hall, a large metal building next to the airstrips that served as the camp's only formal classroom. The other classes were held in the swamps where heavy rains usually soaked

would-be-Rangers while they attempted to soak up the instruction. As the new camp commander mounted the stage he began ranting and raving about how things at the Ranger school were screwed up beyond all recognition. He continued his tirade until a cadre NCO finally interrupted.

"Sir, how in the hell can you evaluate the training that we're presenting right now in the short time you've been here?"

Silence fell over the hall. Given Beckwith's initial outburst, most of the cadre were afraid to fart for fear of drawing his wrath. The camp's acting sergeant major, 1st SGT Thomas J. Stearns (USA Ret), indicates everyone "figured Beckwith was going to tear this guy up."

"What's your name, sergeant?" Beckwith bellowed. When he digested the reply, Beckwith drew a breath and bellowed again. "Goddamn it, you're right! I don't know what the hell I'm doing up here. *I'll be back in about a month.*" Beckwith promptly strode off the stage and did not climb back on it until he had done a thorough evaluation of the Ranger training curriculum.

Beckwith hated "yes-men," according to those who served with him. He later became fast friends with the NCO who interrupted his bombast. Platoon SGT Johnny Jordan (USA Ret) comments, "You could walk up to him and call him a sonofabitch as long as you were right. Don't even say 'yessir' if you were wrong. He'd tell you in a pair of seconds, 'I don't want a goddamn handful of yes-sir, yes-sir, three bags-full. I want to know what is going on!'"

Periodically, during cycle breaks, Beckwith would get his NCOs together in the mess hall, order up some coffee and cake, and have a "counseling session" with Ranger instructors. One by one they'd be called into Beckwith's office. Both Stearns and Jordan recall their times in the barrel and agree that Beckwith's typical comments





**Ranger School graduation ceremony at Florida Ranger Camp during Beckwith's command. Beckwith is second from left.**

ran along standard lines: "Well now, Ranger Jones, you ain't worth a shit. I don't see how you could ever make a Ranger instructor. Why don't you go find a home? Tell you what, I'll give you a 10-day leave — off the books. Just go and find you a new home."

And then there was Standard Line 2: "Goddamn it, you're good! But you need to get a little of that weight off."

Line 3 was also common: "You're a good boy, but you're sorry, sorry as hell! All you want to do is go home and play with Mama."

Line 4 worked wonders on lazy senior NCOs: "You've been in the Army too goddamn long. All you're interested in is pigs and peas. The best thing you can do is go ahead and retire."

Personnel changes weren't the only ones Beckwith made. A tough training course was made even more demanding. It was common for cadre to find Charlie leading the ambushes against the student patrols, charging out of a river bank or popping out of a spider hole hidden in the sandy flats of Santa Rosa Island to test student reactions.

He was obviously having as good a time as possible, but a school command could only hold Beckwith's attention for a short period. There was a war on, and for Beckwith, the combat zone was the only place to be. In the summer of 1967, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel with orders to the 101st Airborne Division as G-2, the assistant chief of staff for intelligence. Division headquarters and the remaining two brigades were slated to deploy to Vietnam that Fall.

The advance party arrived in Vietnam in November 1967 and moved into the vacated base camp of the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. In the next 41 days, 10,356 para-

troopers — more than 1,000 of them volunteers returning for a second combat tour — were deployed to Vietnam. On 13 December 1967, Division Commander MG Olinto M. Barsanti arrived in-country, completing the largest air movement of a combat force directly to Vietnam in the history of the conflict.

By anyone's reckoning Barsanti had his quirks. He scared hell out of more than one officer with his quick, sometimes illogical, temper flashes triggered by seemingly unimportant details.

More than once Barsanti took Beckwith aside on some remote fire base and started chewing. But Beckwith always said his piece and, as a result, Barsanti treated him differently than he did most of his other officers. The general never hesitated to give Beckwith the toughest assignments.

In late January, SFC Darol Walker of the Division Long Range Patrol Company was visiting headquarters when he ran into Beckwith. "Walker," said the Division Intelligence Officer, "you better get back to your area. We're going to get hit at 3 a.m."

That night, Walker lay down with his clothes on and when the first 122mm rocket came over, he automatically looked at his watch. It was 0300 exactly. The 1968 Tet Offensive had begun.

Chargin' Charlie had been wheedling for a combat command since the Screaming Eagles arrived in Vietnam. With Tet underway, he renewed his request for command of an infantry battalion. When Barsanti finally asked, "Which one do you want?" Beckwith was ready.

"I want the worst one you got."

Beckwith got his battalion on 10 February. It was the 2/327 Airborne Infantry. It was clearly not the worst lash-up in the division, but the unit had taken a lot of casualties and was at Bien Hoa refitting when Beckwith arrived to take command.

On 19 February the battalion loaded onto C-130s and flew north to Phu Bai in I Corps where the battle of Hue was still raging.

In cool, overcast, drizzly weather, the 2/327, under operational control of the Marine general commanding Task Force X-Ray (the combat command handling the offensive along the DMZ) fought along the Song Huong (Perfume River) and then marched south with the mission of denying communist reinforcements access to Hue.

The 2/327 was beginning to take on some of the personality that Beckwith wanted. More and more hand-picked men were responding to Beckwith's call for volunteers. CPTs Jim Daily and David Bramlett, both from the Florida Ranger Camp, SSG Roger Brown from the Division Long Range Patrol Company and many others showed up to serve in the ranks. No one ever figured out that Beckwith funneled captured weapons back to the rear area AG in return for first choice of replacements.

There were other elements of the 101st fighting around Hue and when Division HQ arrived at Camp Eagle, their new base outside of Phu Bai, the 2/327 returned to the division — and to Barsanti. Beckwith was about to encounter one of the toughest nuts he'd ever tried to crack.

Patrols from Project Delta, Beckwith's old Special Forces reconnaissance command, were inserted into the A Shau Valley region in early March. What they found, at the cost of many lives, was startling and became the impetus for one of Charlie Beckwith's most significant exploits

## CHARGIN' CHARLIE FINALLY FORMS S.A.S.

Chargin' Charlie Beckwith, the hard-driving Special Forces colonel who formed and led the crack counter-terrorist Delta Force, has retired from the Army and is now teaching private corporations how to protect themselves against terrorism and violent extortion.

That's appropriate. Beckwith is one of the world's foremost experts in that increasingly-significant study. With two other officers who had been working in the same field, Beckwith went to Austin and formed the Security Assistance Service (S.A.S.) of Texas, Ltd. in September 1981, the same month he officially retired from the Army.

S.A.S. of Texas provides crisis-management and risk-analysis surveys for corporations. They'll examine American companies and their overseas subsidiaries and identify areas of vulnerability to extortion and violent terrorist acts.

"Then," says Beckwith, "based on what we find from our survey, if they are interested in correcting problems, we'll be interested in training their people, giving them education and 'what if' type planning. A big company that has a problem had damn well better know who's in charge and what to do in a crisis." S.A.S. of Texas will also develop a viable response plan and rehearse that plan with company employees.

"It's an area where we have a lot of expertise and we can do it well," Beckwith says.

S.A.S. of Texas plans to cover areas of crisis-response planning, VIP protection (without changing the VIP's lifestyle), education and training. They are even prepared to handle hostage negotiations.

"We're certainly qualified," Beckwith says. "We're all school-trained and have done it."

Beckwith isn't interested in simply protecting convenience stores from rip-offs. He's thinking on a larger scale. "I'd be interested in the whole concept," he says, "but not just a store here and a store there."

Eventually, he would like to "lash it up under one roof" in an academy. But the first step, he realizes, is to "earn my spurs" and the key to that, he believes, is credibility.

"I've done some looking in this business and my Mama didn't raise no fool. If you do what you say you can do, then you're credible."

"If somebody asks us to do something and it's within our capability, I'll do it. But, I'm not going to reach outside the window of my expertise and grab something just to put beans on the table. That's how you fail.

"If you run out there and get excited and do things that some people are doing in this business, such as training foreigners in a mercenary role and attempting to teach orienteering, well, it's not credible. Goddamn, it's ridiculous!"

Just how receptive have corporations been to Beckwith's approach?

When he did his initial market research, "a lot of people talked like they were interested but you never know. There's a lot of apathy out there too. A lot of people say: 'I don't have a problem and never will.' Then — after it's gone down — it's too late to call."

One of the most dynamic assignments Beckwith's company carried out was examination of the preparations and security plans for the 1984 Olympics.

Two failings that Beckwith sees — not too sensitive to discuss — are poor command and control because of jurisdiction conflicts and the poor availability of intelligence information to the officer on the street. (See also SOF's evaluation of Olympic security: "Killing for the Gold," July '84.)

Besides apathy and the fact that security budgets are low-priority items for many corporations, another problem has surfaced. Security directors of large corporations often feel their jobs threatened by bringing in an outside consulting service.

"Some we have worked with are first-class. Others are so close to their little domains that they can't see anything beyond. But we represent the state of the art. We can help them," Beckwith says.

Whether Beckwith's outfit can convince the corporations to change old attitudes remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the record certainly indicates the need for his service exists. In 1983 alone, the State Department Office for Combating Terrorism reported more than 200 terrorist attacks against U.S. interests.

Geoffrey Williams, a former NATO defense adviser who is now head of a strategic and defense studies unit in Australia, says that terrorists regard multinational corporations as "soft targets" where they can quietly obtain extortion money without publicity. His studies show that between 1972 and 1978 more than \$500 million was paid to terrorist groups worldwide in both ransom and extortion payments not reported in the media.

— Tony Bliss, Jr.

in the nothernmost area.

Twenty-four miles southwest of Hue, three rivers — the Rao Nho, Rao Nai and the Khe A — join to become the Song Bo. In the vicinity of this river junction, in mountainous, heavily-jungled terrain, the NVA had organized a major staging area for attacks throughout the northern area.

Officially designated Base Area 114, it was called Delta Junction for the unit that found it. The area was intersected by a new road, built by the NVA who referred to it as Route 547A. The road ran from the A Shau Valley past the junction and joined with Route 547 terminating at Hue. It was along this road the main enemy resupply convoys moved.

Delta Junction became the objective of the 1st Brigade and Beckwith's battalion was designated to spearhead the attack.

The first phase included establishing a heavy Fire Support Base, to be called Bastogne, along route 547 from which fire from 175mm guns could be brought to bear on the

A Shau Valley. Fire from 105mm, 155mm and eight-inch howitzers at FSB Bastogne could reach Delta Junction. To get the heavy, self-propelled 175mm guns and eight-inchers to Bastogne, 547 had to be opened, cleared and secured. Beckwith's battalion got the nod.

The push got underway on 19 March. Rainy weather improved but the terrain got continually worse as the troopers toiled to reach their daily objectives. Hills went from 10-percent to 60-percent slopes covered with double and triple-canopy jungle. The order from the provisional Corps commander, LTG William B. Rosson, was to "develop the situation." Beckwith's troops did just that — almost immediately.

Contact with NVA defenders was continuous and progress was costly. It soon became apparent to Beckwith that he was facing a well-trained, well-equipped enemy of battalion or regimental strength.

Because Beckwith's mission was to open the road to Bastogne, he was forced to orient

his scheme of maneuver on terrain rather than enemy disposition. That proved to be an important advantage for the NVA which initiated contact at will when Beckwith's troops were forced by key terrain features to pass their bunkers and fortified positions. It became a classic light infantry fight.

Several large-scale engagements were fought by rifle companies sweeping the jungle on both sides of the enemy MSR. Bunker complex after bunker complex had to be overrun by the assaulting paratroopers, sometimes aided by fire from a platoon of armored cavalry pushing along the road. Mortar fire continued to fall on the battalion during the push. Casualties mounted but Beckwith kept the pressure on the NVA defenders.

MG Barsanti and LTG Rosson flew into Beckwith's CP as the battalion commander was anxiously monitoring a fire fight between an entrenched enemy and one of his maneuver elements.

"What are you doing?" they demanded.



"Killing the enemy," Beckwith replied as though he'd just been asked the stupidest question in the world.

Rosson was also under some pressure from his superiors. He wanted more with quicker results and told Beckwith as much. "Get on that road and go," he ordered Beckwith. "Take Bastogne in seven days."

It was not an order Beckwith liked. "It's going to be expensive," he told Rosson. "It's got to be done," the senior officer replied.

Despite Beckwith's urgings, progress was agonizingly slow and by late afternoon on 26 March, the battalion was still two kilometers from Bastogne.

Beckwith, conscious of his seven-day mandate, decided to take a calculated risk. He ordered Alpha Company of the 2/502 Airborne Infantry, attached to his command for the operation, to load onto the Cavalry APCs and go all out for Bastogne.

It was a hell of a gamble but the move apparently surprised the NVA. The column made it through. By nightfall, FSB Bastogne had the 2/327 as new landlords. The mission was accomplished within four days of the time Rosson issued the order. Only after he'd secured their precious fire base did HQ tell Beckwith the reason for the urgency. The plan to relocate the big guns and bring fire on the NVA's staging areas had never been explained to Beckwith. He did not have the Big Picture. What he did have was a badly-mauled battalion which had sustained more than 100 casualties over a very short period.

Beckwith didn't let that bother him on the surface. He continued to ride his men hard — especially officers. When officer replacements joined the battalion, they made their first stop by Beckwith's area. More than one went out on the same chopper that brought him.

"During one operation," recalls 2/327 veteran Jim Perschka, "a platoon leader had lost his glasses and wasn't worth a shit. Charlie made up his mind right then that he wouldn't accept any officers or senior

**Beckwith with MG Barsanti, Commanding General of 101st Airborne Division, at a firebase southwest of Hue on 16 July 1968. Photo: UPI**

NCOs if they wore glasses. On Bastogne, we had a new lieutenant who came flying in on the resupply chopper. Charlie talked to him for a few minutes, and before that helicopter left, the lieutenant was back on it going out."

"Hell, the SOB wears glasses," snorted Beckwith. "I can't have him leading a company." Beckwith's disdain for some officers was readily returned by those who thought of him as an unfeeling martinet.

"I know quite a few officers that didn't care for Beckwith," says veteran Bull Gergen who also served with Beckwith in Vietnam. "If they didn't measure up to his standards, he could be brutal. He would warn his new officers right off: 'Let me tell you something. Either you be a lieutenant and be a man or I'll put you out of this Army with a gray suit and a briefcase.'"

The brigade's next mission was to establish a fire base in the heart of the Delta Junction. While the 1/327 got the air-assault assignment to secure what became FSB Veghel, Beckwith's battalion was again given the gruelling mission to "develop the situation" along 547. This time from Bastogne to the Delta Junction.

The operation, called Delaware, kicked off on 16 April. The terrain was the same and enemy situation proved similar with the communists utilizing a series of heavily-fortified blocking positions with overhead cover up to three feet thick. Beckwith decided a frontal assault would be too costly in terms of manpower and time. The battalion still had to orient on the road but now the companies would move in hooking motions, flanking the enemy blocking positions by 100 to 300 meters, and coming to the road only to check specific areas of interest.

Immediately, the new approach paid dividends. By coming in from the flanks, the

elements of terrain and surprise now favored the attacking paratroopers. Several company-size engagements were fought and the battalion swept through an increasing number of bunker and hut complexes as they pushed deeper into the NVA base areas.

By the middle of May, Charlie Company crested the hill and entered FSB Veghel, marking the end of Operation Delaware for the 2/327. It had been a hard push that cost the battalion more than 200 casualties, including 22 KIA. After-action reports indicate Beckwith's boys gave as good as they got, killing some 200 NVA.

"Barsanti looked at the 2/327," recalls an officer who was in the brigade headquarters at the time, "as the unit to be sent to the trouble spots where Charlie would drive home a solution."

As a result, some pilots weren't always thrilled when they pulled a mission to the 2/327. "Charlie's firebase," recalls chopper pilot WO2 Bill Whittaker, "was always the furthest one forward and in the worst place."

One time, a pilot picked up some M16s on a rope from infantry in dense jungle in order to fly the weapons back to the fire base. "He just dropped them," says Bull Gergen. "Just broke them all to hell."

The next time that pilot flew in, he was the recipient of Beckwith's special brand of corrective action.

"Ole Charlie," says Gergen, "jumped up in the cockpit and just beat the shit out of that pilot."

With FSB Veghel established, the 2/327's mission changed to search-and-destroy operations in the same area. During the next several months Chargin' Charlie's battalion engaged in a number of sweeps and quick jabs at the enemy such as the 4 August spoiling raid into the southern half of the A Shau Valley at the abandoned Ta Bat airstrip. The unit continued to be responsible for search-and-destroy operations in the rugged terrain west of Hue. Things were relatively quiet in the sector and on 10 November 1968, Charlie Beckwith turned over command of his veteran battalion to LTC Charles W. Dyke.

In December of the same year, Charlie Beckwith was assigned to the special operations staff of the commander-in-chief, Pacific, in Hawaii. His duties kept him ricocheting back and forth from Hawaii to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. He even worked out of Thailand as part of a search-and-rescue force investigating Missing-In-Action reports and attempting to locate remains of U.S. fliers who may have been downed in the area. He had been there 11 months when the program was abandoned.

In 1974, Beckwith returned to Ft. Bragg and attended the Institute for Military Assistance School for Foreign Area Specialists where he studied Southeast Asia. Finally Charlie was made commandant of

*Continued on page 105*



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## SOF WEAPONS

# GROIN GUNS

## SOF Tests Hideable Heaters in El Salvador

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis



Line-up of diminutive .25s. Left to right: Walther TPH, Seecamp LWS-.25 and Beretta Model 20.

**I**N 1908 the .25 ACP (6.35mm) cartridge was introduced into the United States with the Browning-designed, Colt-manufactured, .25-caliber Vest Pocket Automatic Pistol.

An anathema since its inception among professional pistoleros, the .25 ACP round remains a perennial favorite of the unwashed masses. With a muzzle velocity of about 810 fps from a two-inch barrel, the .25 ACP steps out smartly for such a small cartridge. However, its energy deposit at any range is *abysmally* low, and this, combined with the full-metal-jacketed (FMJ) bullet, usually provided to assure functional reliability, results in dismal stopping power on anything more menacing than the neighborhood alley cat.

Its popularity resides in the extremely small size of the pistols chambered for it. Not to shrug: The smaller and more compact a firearm, the more likely it is to be carried than left at home *on the nightstand*. In addition,

Easy handling and low recoil make Walther TPH good back-up pistol.



tion, its rimless case is marginally more reliable than rimmed .22-caliber cases.

In 1980, Winchester-Western, realizing the .25 ACP would remain popular regardless of continued, well-founded criticism of its effectiveness as a defense round, sought to address this valetudinary performance by means of an innovative loading. The usual round-nose FMJ bullet has been replaced by a lead bullet with a hollow-point cavity. The

projectile has been Lubaloy-plated to increase hardness, ensure dependable feeding and inhibit barrel leading. A small steel ball is inserted into the cavity. The total weight has been decreased by 10 percent — from 50 to 45 grains — permitting a modest velocity increase of 25 fps. However, a significant improvement in expansion has been achieved through redesign of the projectile. A soft-point bullet which expands





and deposits all of its energy within the target is always more effective than a nonexpanding, FMJ projectile of the same caliber, weight and velocity.

Loaded with Winchester-Western expanding-point ammunition, a more reasonable case may be presented for the .25 ACP pistol in the back-up or second-gun role.

I would never walk the streets of San Salvador armed only with a .25-caliber

pocket pistol. Yet submachine guns are inappropriate appendages at social functions, even in El Salvador. Thus, when dressed in civilian clothes, I invariably carry a .45 ACP Colt Commander in a Davis inside-the-pants crossdraw rig (Davis Leather Company, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 446, Arcadia, CA 91006). And, although after more than a decade of use the Commander, customized by Burke C. Hill, Jr., has never

failed me, the .25 ACP pocket pistol I carry as a back-up further assuages the central nervous system when operating in the violent atmosphere of Central America.

Although they can be carried loose in any pocket, these Lilliputian devices are best conveyed in one of Gene De Santis' slick rigs (De Santis Holster & Leather Goods Co., Dept. SOF, 155 Jericho Tpke., Mineola, NY 11501). Most popular is the De Santis Maverick, a wallet holster of the shoot-through design. The soft-suede waistband-clip-style No. 7 permits an inside-the-pants carry for those who prefer this position. My favorite, however, is Gene's back-pocket holster for tight-fitting jeans, appropriately enough called the Trickster.

Assuming your predilections lead you to acquisition of a .25 ACP pocket pistol for back-up use, which is best? SOF chose three examples which represent the state of the art in this diminutive genre for test and evaluation in El Salvador — a definitive test-bed for weapons ranging from the crossbow to the 105mm howitzer.

Five hundred rounds of assorted ammunition were purchased for the test: 250 rounds of FMJ ammo (Hornady, Frontier, Remington, Winchester-Western and Geco) and 250 rounds of Winchester-Western 45-gr. Expanding Point.

**Walther TPH:** The Walther TPH is essentially a scaled-down version of their highly regarded PP and PPK models. The TPH has a fixed barrel and operates by the unlocked blowback principle. The pistol has an external hammer, and the first round may be fired double-action. Subsequent rounds are fired single-action. Aesthetically pleasing and beautifully finished, the TPH is a joy to behold. With its all-steel slide and alloy dural frame, the TPH weighs in at only 11.5 ounces, empty. Overall length is 5.31 inches, and the barrel length is 2.8 inches. Just 0.9 inch in width, the TPH is 3.66 inches high. The magazine capacity is six rounds. The grip panels are black plastic. A slide-mounted firing-pin-blocking safety is incorporated, i.e., when the safety lever is applied the hammer drops on a firing-pin shroud. In addition, an arrester blocks the hammer if the trigger has not been pulled. A magazine safety is also employed. The TPH has no hold-open mechanism for the slide.

The TPH rear sight has a white line, and the front sight a white dot. While efficient, this arrangement is inconsequential on this type of pistol, since contact ranges should be kept under 10 feet.

**Tiny Seecamp LWS-.25** demands careful two-handed hold.



Disassembly procedures are simple and identical to the PP and PPK. Pull down on the front of the trigger guard, and ease it to one side to rest against the frame. Then jack the slide to the rear as far as it will go, and lift the tail end upward and forward off the frame. Further disassembly for maintenance is not required.

During the test sequence the TPH exhibited high accuracy potential for a pistol of this type, due, no doubt, to the grooved trigger's extremely light and crisp single-action pull and the fixed barrel. Those with large hands will benefit from the plastic extension on the magazine's floor plate. No stoppages were encountered. However, when fired from a Weaver hold, hammer bite is severe and irritating.

Unfortunately, the Walther TPH was introduced in 1971 after the onerous provisions of the Gun Control Act of 1968 were enacted. Due to its size and caliber chamberings it does not qualify under the BATF's factoring system for importation into the U.S. It is, therefore, imported by Interarms (Dept. SOF, 10 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22313) for sale to law enforcement agencies only, in caliber .22 LR. At this level, the TPH has proven popular with certain government operatives. On occasion, specimens appear on the open market, but always at prices close to \$600.

**Seecamp LWS-.25:** Long noted for their fine double-action conversions of the Colt M1911A1 pistol, the first complete gun produced by the L.W. Seecamp Co. was initially a shock and somewhat of an enigma to almost everyone (apparently even to Seecamp, as the first two pages of the instruction manual attempt to justify their decision). Nevertheless, the LWS .25-caliber pocket pistol is unique in several design areas.

The LWS-.25 is constructed predominantly of aircraft-quality 17-4PH stainless steel with a matte finish. The frame is fabricated from 416 stainless steel, and selected parts, such as springs, are of appropriate non-stainless steels. The grip panels are made of sturdy glass-impregnated nylon. The quality of this pistol is outstanding.

The eight-grooved barrel is two inches long. Overall length is 4.25 inches, overall height is 3.25 inches, and the width is only 0.9 inches. The weight, fully loaded with eight rounds (one in the chamber and seven in the magazine), is a mere 12 ounces! The LWS-.25 is thus considerably lighter and more compact than the Walther TPH.

This semiautomatic blowback pistol features an unusual double-action-only trigger system. The hammer is not cocked by the slide's rearward movement. Thus, the trigger mechanism cocks the hammer for each shot, and each pull of the trigger must be a full double-action stroke. While ingenious and brilliantly engineered, the trigger pull is a horrendous 14+ pounds: on first thought a defect, yet there is small chance of an accidental discharge. You really have to want to give someone a very bad headache with every fiber in your being to fire the Seecamp LWS-.25. There is, therefore, no

manual safety.

There is one additional safety feature. When the magazine is withdrawn more than a quarter-inch, the trigger cannot be pulled and the slide cannot be retracted far enough for a feed cycle.

*Continued on page 101*

**Beretta Model 20** has large trigger guard making fast access easy. Rear sight is almost non-existent: This is a weapon meant to be used at point blank ranges only.



## SPECIFICATIONS

	Walther TPH	Seecamp LWS-.25	Beretta M 20
<b>Caliber:</b>	.25 ACP or .22LR	.25 ACP	.25 ACP
<b>Magazine capacity:</b>	6 rounds	7 rounds	8 rounds
<b>Overall length:</b>	5.31 inches	4.25 inches	4.9 inches
<b>Barrel length:</b>	2.8 inches	2.0 inches	2.5 inches
<b>Overall height:</b>	3.66 inches	3.25 inches	3.4 inches
<b>Width:</b>	0.9 inch	0.9 inch	1.1 inches
<b>Weight:</b>	11.5 oz., empty	12 oz., with 8 rounds	10.9 oz., empty
<b>Construction:</b>	blued steel w/dural frame	stainless steel	blued steel w/alloy frame
<b>Sights:</b>	square notch rear w/white line; fixed front w/white dot	none	square notch rear; inverted-V front
<b>Safeties:</b>	manual hammer drop & magazine	magazine	manual
<b>Method of Operation:</b>	— unlocked blowback —		
<b>Trigger system:</b>	first shot double-action	double-action only	first shot double-action
<b>Price:</b>	available to law enforcement agencies only	\$189.95	\$214.00
<b>Manufacturer and/or distributor:</b>	Interarms 10 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22313	Sile Distributors, Inc., 7 Centre Market Place, New York, NY 10013	Beretta U.S.A. Corp., 17601 Indian Head Hwy., Accokeek, MD 20607



Three U.S. Army OH-6 "Loaches" (Light Observation Helicopters) head into the hazy morning sky. Flying point for a rescue mission, these fast moving helicopters spot enemy antiaircraft fire and direct gunships in for the kill. Photos: AP/Wide World

## **SOF VIETNAM**

# **HOT TIME IN UNCLE HO'S CABBAGE PATCH**

## **Pink Teams Are Combat Crash Crew**

by Robert DiDomenico

**I**T was a hell of a way to finagle five days out of combat, but no one in our shot-up Pink Team was complaining. We'd been inserted into the Cabbage Patch near the Ho Chi Minh trail that April morning in 1971 to rescue the crew of a downed Kiowa scout ship. When we returned to Quang Tri and walked across the chopper pad to talk to the pilots, we discovered that all eight of our birds were so shot up they wouldn't fly.

Our five-man Pink Team (Aircraft Recovery Team D, Troop 3 of the 3rd Squadron, 5th Cav., 5th Division) had ridden the Huey UH-1 chopper in a four-ship air team,

### **IN THE PINK**

Robert DiDomenico spent 11½ months flying with the Rescue and Recovery Teams in Quang Tri Province during 1971. He was drafted into the Army at age 20 and spent five months in basic training and advanced infantry training before leaving for Southeast Asia.

All of DiDomenico's writing has been about his tour in Vietnam. SOF welcomes him aboard.

consisting of the Huey, a Kiowa scout ship and two Cobra gunships. Pink Teams searched for and destroyed North Vietnamese Army supplies, equipment and men. As ship-recovery crews we secured shot-down helicopters until another chopper could come in to retrieve the downed bird and recover its crew. In general, we had to be prepared for any emergency on the ground.

And we had to be prepared that hot April day in Uncle Ho's Cabbage Patch. It was still dark when our platoon sergeant marched into our quonset hut and told us to



hurry up and get dressed — we had an early mission. It was during the Laos push, when the U.S. Army, Air Force and Marines were helping the South Vietnamese troops up to the border. We scrambled into our clothes and hurried to the chopper pad.

Our team consisted of a squad sergeant, an M60 machine gunner, a radio man with PRC-25, a grenadier who carried an over-and-under — M16 on top and grenade launcher on bottom — and a point man. I'd been the point man for the 3½ months I'd been in-country. We also had an NVA who'd turned himself in as our guide. He'd started working for us after our Kit Carson scout was killed on the DMZ.

As we walked to the chopper pad we could see the choppers' anticrash lights and the engines beginning to turn over. We loaded our gear and took off for the Cabbage Patch, a half-hour flight from Khe Sanh. Cabbage Patch was a good name for where we were going. From the air, the jungle trees looked just like big heads of cabbage.

Our four-ship chopper team consisted of our Huey, a Kiowa scout ship and two Cobras. The Kiowa carried two pilots and an observer. It flew tree-top level, looking for the enemy below. The Cobra gunships carried 16-pound explosive rockets, flechette rockets loaded with thousands of darts, a 20mm Vulcan cannon, a 7.62mm Gatling gun and a grenade launcher. The Gatling gun and the grenade launcher were mounted at the bottom of the nose on a turret that rotated 180 degrees while moving up and down.

The Cobra was a hard target to hit on a gunrun because of its sleek, narrow body design. In fact, it wasn't much wider than the front gunner's bullet-proof seat. Because the ship was easier to hit when pulling out of a dive, as the first Cobra pulled out of a gunrun the second ship dived in behind to cover it.

It was still dark when we left Quang Tri. We flew over the foothills and reached the mountains near the Rock Pile. It began to get light as we flew over Khe Sanh. At last we reached the Cabbage Patch and started our search for NVA. Our ship flew a few counter-clockwise circles, following the Cobras and watching the scout skim the tree tops.

I was stretched out on the chopper floor, relaxing. I knew it was too soon for anything to happen.

Then the floor dropped out under me as our chopper started to free-fall out of the sky from 2,000 feet. I looked over at Frank, our radio man. He was hurriedly buckling his gear on. "What the hell's going on," I asked him.

"The scout's down," he said.

I looked out the right side of the ship. Down in the jungle the Kiowa was burning. Near it a plume of red smoke drifted up. The co-pilot observer had thrown it when they first took enemy fire; it directed the Cobras to their coordinates to begin their gunruns.

As our ship dived closer, we heard heavy AK-47 fire and saw their bright muzzle flashes, coming toward us. Our ship took



Heliborne infantry scramble through the tall grass after insertion into an LZ.

about 10 rounds as we closed in. We returned it, but the intense gunfire made our pilot pull up.

He pulled up to about 3,000 feet. Our door-gunners kept firing their M60 machine guns into the jungle, and the Cobras circled around the burning scout ship to keep the enemy from reaching the Kiowa before we did. The Cobras were taking heavy enemy small-arms and 51mm anti-aircraft fire. Because they were getting shot up so bad, they started flying tree-top level at nearly 200 mph, making it harder for the enemy to hit them.

We flew around the downed Kiowa for another 10 minutes before our pilot told us he was going to try another insertion. He pointed out a patch of elephant grass and told us to jump as soon as the ship got close to the LZ. Our chopper dropped toward the jungle, again taking heavy fire. It hovered near the clump of elephant grass, and Frank, our radio man, and I jumped, while firing our weapons into the jungle. We rolled through the grass.

I looked at Frank: "What the hell! Those other guys stayed on the chopper." We crawled toward the jungle.

As we got to the tree-line, the other three leaped off the hovering chopper. Because of our fast insertion there was a 50-foot difference in drop-offs, but they soon reached us. Our team sat at the jungle's edge, trying to figure out how to approach the downed scout. We could hear the grenades and Willy Petes (white phosphorous) exploding in the burning ship. We decided they were probably keeping the NVA from getting too close to it.

Beside us we saw a heavily traveled NVA trail that looked like it headed right toward the downed ship. We moved out, staying away from the trail, and crawled about 100

meters through the jungle. As we topped a small hill about 15 meters from the ship, we spotted one of the pilots at the bottom. Ronnie, our machine-gunner, ran down the hill to help him. The pilot had broken his leg and smashed his hand and the left side of his head and face. Ronnie put the pilot's arm around his neck and started back up the hill, carrying the machine gun in his other hand. The pilot staggered because of his broken leg, but as bad as he was, he still had his .45 pistol in his good hand, ready to use against the enemy.

Just as they reached us, our radio man yelled: "Grenade!" Ronnie and the pilot hit the ground as the rest of us returned fire with our M16s and tossed some grenades in the direction of the attack.

As we crouched near the hilltop, the pilot told us the other two men were dead. They had burned up in the ship. We decided not to approach the downed chopper since we'd already made contact and the fire would keep the enemy from it. Frank radioed up to our pilot to tell him our decision.

"Don't be afraid, boys," the pilot replied. "The NVA are more scared than you."

Easy to say from 7,000 feet, but as I dived behind a sapling to change magazines, AK-47 fire shredded branches as close as two inches from me. We couldn't see the enemy but he sure as hell could see us.

We must have crouched on that hilltop for five minutes, before I spotted brush moving at the bottom of the embankment to our left. Then I saw the NVA soldier. He was trying to get a better shot with his AK-47.

"I see him!" I screamed, and I emptied my M16 into him. It was my first confirmed kill.

Our major was on the radio again from his UH-1 Huey. He ordered us to move to a different location and wait until some Phantoms from Da Nang Air Base arrived to make an airstrike around us with 500-pound bombs. I walked point, cutting through the jungle, trying not to use the same trail we'd come in on.



Minutes later, we came across another heavily traveled NVA trail. It was far enough from the downed ship to wait for the Phantoms. We lay down beside it for nearly an hour before the jets finally arrived.

They made a few passes overhead. After the Cobra pilots and our major told them their objective, the major radioed Frank and told him to pop a smoke to mark our position so they could drop the bombs around us.

They dropped the bombs where the Cobras had been taking heavy antiaircraft, 51-cal. and AK-47 fire. As the bombs dropped, shrapnel ripped through the tree tops around us. Then the jungle caught fire. A wind blew up and the fire moved toward us.

We hugged the ground and watched the fire. Suddenly, I heard something crawling toward me from my left. It was keeping ahead of the fire. I opened my mouth and shut it. If I warned the team I'd give our position away. I turned toward the sound with my M16 on full-auto.

My heart pounded and I wanted to swallow but was afraid to — whoever it was might hear me. Slowly, I turned my head to the left: I was staring into the face of a large lizard.

We'd been on the ground for about five hours. It was clear enough to send in a relief unit to replace us. We were told to return to the clearing where we'd been dropped off and pop a smoke. We moved out fast.

Within seconds, a Huey descended from the sky. Five grunts jumped off as we six jumped on.

As the chopper lifted off, Ronnie and I grinned at each other. Then we shook hands, saying, "Boy, I'm glad we got out of there alive!"

The chopper took us to the B-Med hospital first where we dropped off the wounded officer. Then we headed back to Quang Tri.

On the chopper pad, we talked to the officers who were checking out the bullet holes in their Cobras, Kiowas and Loaches. A Cobra pilot showed us the instrument panel of his ship. It was all shot up. He told us he'd been flying tree-top level between the same two-foot hills where the scout ship was shot down. As he came toward the 51 pit, the two NVA operating the gun swung it toward him. The burst missed him by inches. The Cobra's front gunner turned the mini-gun toward the NVA, cutting them down and disabling their weapon.

The ship that brought us into the insertion had crash-landed about 250 meters from where it landed us on the ground. It took so many rounds it couldn't fly; the pilots, crewchief and doorgunner weren't hit. After the two bodies were recovered from the downed Kiowa, the area was heavily napalmed and bombed with 500-pound bombs.

So our time in the Cabbage Patch got us a five-day rest. After that we got back to the war. ✕

American soldiers are plucked out of a dangerous spot by a CH-47 Chinook. Unable to land in the tall mountain grass, the helicopter lowered a rope ladder.

# BIANCHI CUP VI

## Enos Earns Top Shot

Text & Photos by Jake Jatras

**B**RIAN Enos doesn't mind a little friendly ribbing from his fellow handgunners regarding his now-traditional somber approach to competition, but he had a lot to smile about after his outstanding performance on the Falling Plates to capture the first NRA Action Shooting Championships-Bianchi Cup VI.

The "Cup" from its inception has been an intense, challenging test of skill for the top pistol shooters from all the major disciplines, and 1984's contest exemplified the professionalism required to win such a demanding match.

While the courses of fire have remained the same, the improvements in equipment and shooting techniques have raised scores drastically. The four-stage event has a possible total of 1,920 points. A couple of years ago, breaking 1,900 was the four-minute mile of shooting, but this year nine shooters accomplished the feat.

This evolutionary process began with the introduction of the optical sights, and after Enos' 1983 victory with a revolver, many of the top shots switched to wheelguns. Many shooting pros feel trigger control with the revolver is better, and even when rushed for time they'll be less likely to "slap" at the trigger and throw a shot out of the 10 ring. Bianchi is a high-pressure accuracy test, and a missed 10 or "X" can cost many places in the overall standings.

Despite such a pressure-cooker atmosphere, Bianchi Cup VI competition was deadlocked at a six-way tie for first place after two days of shooting.

Of the 200 entrants, 125 chose to fire wheelguns (116 of those Smith & Wesson), while 75 stayed with their trusted autos. Eight shooters used 9mms, but the .45 ACP dominated the auto ranks.

Courses of fire for the Cup are published and have remained unchanged, giving competitors the opportunity to hone their skills and styles for each stage. To be the best requires practice, and those in serious contention for shooting's biggest payday do their homework. Firing 30,000 to 50,000 rounds prior to the match is common.

**The Practical:** Match One is a basic exercise. Times vary, depending on the distance involved, and it is the only stage that requires weak-hand shooting, as well as distance shooting (50 yards).

All of the stages are critical, but with the skill needed to score 10s at 25 and 50 yards, the "Practical" could be retitled the "Critical."

With the sanctioning of the NRA, "free-

style" shooting came back to the Cup competition. Last year no prone shooting was allowed, but the rule was lifted this year. Although many sports live with bad rules, dragging their feet rather than updating activity, the NRA has taken another path in its action-shooting program.

The race for the Cup was close, and after the first two days no one was willing to predict the outcome. Bill Rogers had cleaned two matches and was looking good.

On the weak-hand stage when Rogers drew and transferred the weapon to his weak hand, he had difficulties getting a solid purchase on the gun. His first three shots were a bit slow, so he rushed the next three. This catch-up tactic failed when his sixth shot went off late. The resulting 10-point penalty knocked him out of the winners' circle.

Bill Wilson, also in contention for the top spot, shot an NRA record 1,914 points in a warm-up match in St. Louis, but the Practical dashed his hopes when he shot a five.

Jim Swain smoked the stage with a perfect 480 points, 35Xs, followed by Brian Enos at 478-35X and Paul Liebenberg with 478-31X.

**The Barricade:** This event is based on the test of the same name used in Practical Police Combat (PPC), and this year the course was unchanged. However, the barricades were constructed of steel rather than wooden frames. This minor improvement for durability did affect the competitors shooting autoloaders, since shooters use the barricade's steel framework for support. When firing the auto, more than one could feel the framework's steel — unlike wood — rebounding slightly from the recoil of the shot. This tremor did not seem to bother the revolver entrants.

Last year, four-time Cup champion Mickey Fowler felt the sting of an overtime shot penalty on his first event. This year, he proved up to the task and fired a clean 480-43X.

Bill Rogers, although impressed, overtook Fowler's X count by three to take first place with a 480-46X. Newcomer Frank

### BRIAN ENOS: CHAMPION

Arizona's Brian Enos at 28 has established himself as a master of modern handgunning.

Enos earned his reputation shooting his .45 auto in IPSC competition, placing second in the U.S. Nationals and ninth in the World Championships as a team member of the Gold American Team in 1983. He also took a third in the Steel Challenge and holds the all-time record for consecutive number of plates dropped in that Bianchi event (550).

After shooting his way to second place in 1982 — Enos lost the match by only one point to Mickey Fowler — he was not to be denied in the 1983 contest. But the question was, could he do it again?

This year the big question was answered. Everyone knew the pressure would be high since Enos would have to fight off quite a few hungry shooters, including his best friend, Rob Leatham.

Just what does winning the Cup mean to Enos? Well, last year his winnings went to purchase his first home for his wife Michelle and his 7-year-old daughter, Joni. This year the earnings will help him fund a business.

Being a champion is an important part of his life, and when he faces the 200-plus challengers next year, you can bet Brian Enos will be as tough as ever.

— Jake Jatras



Californian Jim Zubiena displays his shooting technique on the Barricade Event. Each competitor has his own method of positioning himself, but all use the barricade for support.

This year's Bianchi Women's Champ Lee Cole of Arkansas fires on Ruger/Winchester .22 LR Rapid Fire Event. Cole used a KART .22 conversion on a Colt Gold Cup frame.



Glenn of Arizona took third with a 480-43X.

**The Mover:** Match Three, the Moving Target, was adapted from the course shot by the home of practical shooting, California's Southwest Pistol League. This demanding course requires perfect concentration and timing. A contest is often decided by simply not blowing out of any one stage. Consistency is the path to victory, but the Mover can be a destroyer.

Nick Pruitt, fresh from his impressive win at the "Steel Challenge," fired an extra shot at one stage, and this mental lapse affected the remainder of his runs. Others, aware of a poor shot, still could not regain the edge needed to do well.

Mickey Fowler at one point had a malfunction (the weapon did not return to battery) and had to rush a shot. Bill Rogers shot like the master he is and scored a clean 480-29X. Bill Wilson shot two down at 478-32X, and Rick Castelov fired a 478-29X.

**Killer Plates:** Although any individual stage can spell doom for a contestant who has a disaster, the "disaster factor" in the plates is the highest. This stage draws large crowds of spectators, who cheer and applaud the shooters' performances. Pressure is always high, and this year it was the make-it-or-break-it stage for the three men vying for the Bianchi Cup VI Championship.

John Shaw had already shot the plates and was leading the match. With Rogers and Wilson seemingly out of the race for top seat, everyone was on hand to watch Brian Enos and Rob Leatham face the plates.

As Enos and Leatham were waiting to shoot, I sat and talked with them. When I asked Leatham about the tie situation, he told me it was down to a three-way tie at 1,910 points. I said that it couldn't be a three-way tie — he and Enos hadn't shot the plates yet. He grinned and said, "You don't expect us to miss any, do you?"

Point well taken: Last year Enos shot plates until the ROs put in 25 miles running up to reset them.

To save time and ammo, the match organizers changed the tie-breaking method. After the first 48 plates, shooters would run the stage again with one second taken off the times. If clean once more, they'd shoot again with another second shaved off.

Enos was in perfect form. His 149-plate count put him over the top as he edged out John Shaw to take first place overall. Shaw was second at 480-119X and Bill Rogers third with 480-109X. (The plates counted for the overall X count; thus, Enos won.)

**Overall:** Brian Enos shot a 1910-257X, followed by John Shaw at 1910-214X; Rob Leatham, 1910-207X; Mickey Fowler, 1907-165X and Paul Liebenberg, 1906-177X.

It was a tough, close match. Other titles and honors in addition to the main event were at stake, including High Lady, Top Cop, Top International and High Team.

Continued on page 99

## BIANCHI CUP VI TOP 50 OVERALL

1. B. Enos	1910-257X	24. J. Pride	1873-167
2. J. Shaw	1910-214	25. R. Carter	1872-123
3. R. Leatham	1910-207	26. J. Rock	1872-122
4. M. Fowler	1907-165	27. J. Zubiena	1871-119
5. P. Liebenberg	1906-177	28. M. Murray	1870-154
6. F. Glenn	1905-198	29. S. Nastoff	1870-117
7. B. Wilson	1905-193	30. J. Brown	1869-119
8. W. Rogers	1902-208	31. H. Stern	1867-129
9. J. Nelson	1902-180	32. D. Miller	1866-111
10. T. Campbell	1886-135	33. N. Pruitt	1864-157
11. M. Dalton	1885-127	34. J. White	1864-122
12. V. Schmid	1884-147	35. D. Watson	1864-117
13. M. Kanazawa	1883-132	36. J. Sayle	1863-142
14. J. Swain	1882-131	37. R. Weddle	1862-127
15. E. Deacon	1881-137	38. M. Fichman	1862-126
16. W. Bowker	1880-176	39. M. McNeese	1861-126
17. E. Brown	1880-119	40. L. Raymond	1859-125
18. L. Haynie	1880-117	41. P. Andrews	1853-116
19. W. Gilmore	1879-179	42. F. Romero	1852-155
20. M. Plaxco	1879-122	43. A. Fulford	1852-120
21. M. Duncan	1878-124	44. J. Usher	1851-127
22. J. Cole	1878-120	45. J. Clark	1850-108
23. I. Nagata	1874-150	46. H. Conley	1848-122
		47. C. Wood	1846-107
		48. R. Watson	1845-125
		49. C. Shipley	1844-117
		50. L. Harper	1841-116



**SOF** CENTRAL AMERICA

# IS CENTRAL AMERICA REALLY IMPORTANT?

We're Glad You Asked

by COL Lawrence L. Tracy



**R**ECENT opinion polls reflect confusion in the land over events in Central America. The public seems to have little appreciation of the economic and strategic implications for the United States of a permanent and viable Soviet military presence so close to our shores. The events now taking place are complex and compounded both by past U.S. involvement in the area and by the sense of *déjà vu* relating to Vietnam. The prevailing question seems to be, "Is Central America really important?"

As one deeply involved at the working level of Washington's political-military



**On the lookout for Gs: M60 gunner scans the bush while his M16-toting *companero* looks on.**

**Contras come in all sizes: This youngster shows off his Galil assault rifle while resting in a hammock.**

bureaucracy in the development of our Central American policy, I find the question almost rhetorical, and I am puzzled as to why we in government have not done a better job explaining the importance to our vital interests in this area. Over the last three years I have seen the relentless Soviet military buildup in Cuba and Nicaragua. I have seen the guerrillas in El Salvador — with little backing from the Salvadoran people — turn to their variant of a scorched-earth policy, trying to gain by intimidation what they know they cannot gain by popular support.

I have seen the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, who appeared in 1979 to be young idealists intent on liberating their country from harsh authoritarianism, develop a militaristic regime perhaps even more autocratic than the Somoza government. And I have also seen — from within — the Reagan Administration's frustrating inability to communicate to the public and to Congress the consequences of our inability or unwillingness to take steps to prevent the creation of additional Marxist-Leninist states in our hemisphere.

That particular failure is not for lack of trying. For more than two years a steady stream of administration witnesses have trooped to Capitol Hill and presented testimony, both classified and public, to

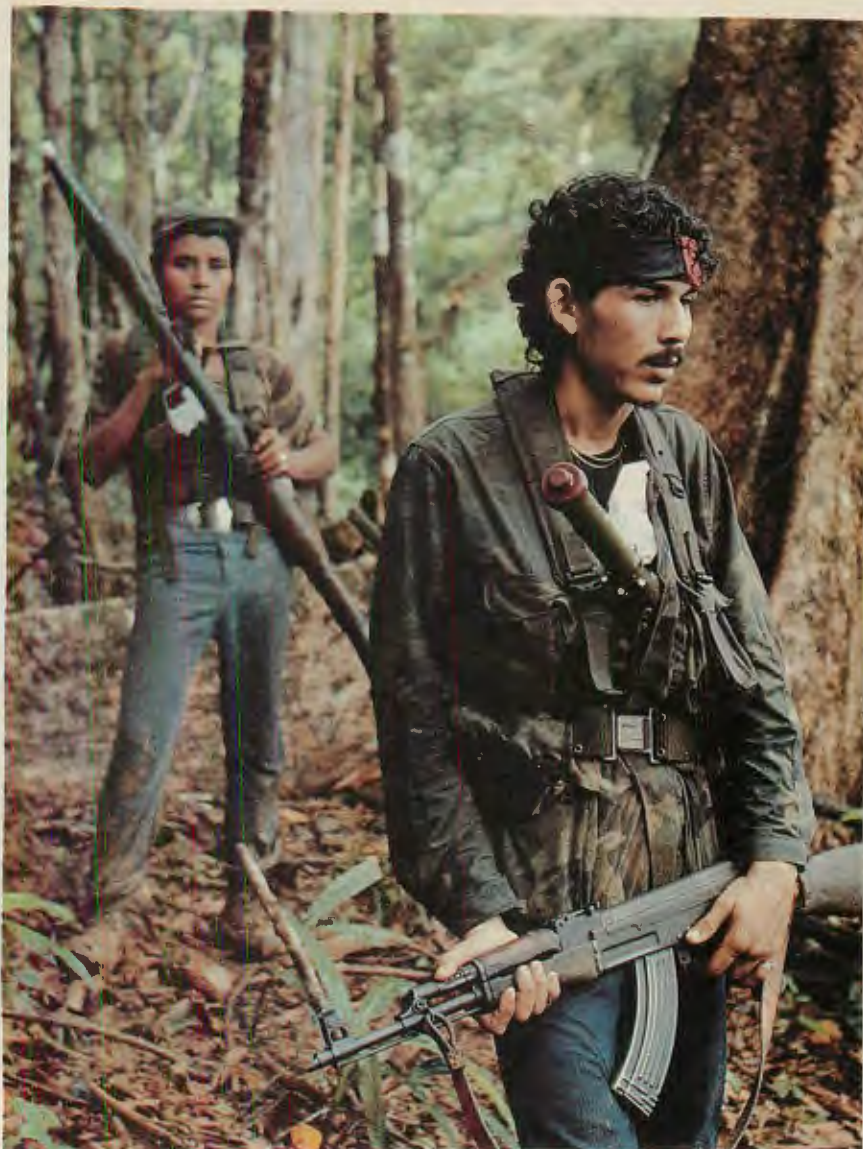


Congressional committees of both houses. Administration members have likewise carried the story directly to the public through articles and speeches. The President himself has made three major policy speeches on the subject in the past year.

Despite these efforts, the majority of the American people do not appear to understand the extent to which U.S. security interests are at stake in Central America. Unless this communications gap is bridged, we may some day find a surprised public demanding of the government, "Why were we not told? Why has the government permitted the Soviet Union to establish a mini-Warsaw Pact in the Caribbean? Why has a flood of refugees descended on us without any warning?"

The failure to communicate effectively may stem from differing perspectives. Perhaps we have focused too much on events in El Salvador and Nicaragua as symptoms and ignored the disease — the Soviet Union. To gain a clear understanding of the dynamics of Central America, we should look at the area through Russian eyes. In contrast to American opportunities, there are few areas in which the Soviets can maneuver freely in the global chess game of expanding influence.

They look at Japan and see a country



that, despite serious trade and economic problems with the United States, has absolutely no intention of throwing in its lot with the USSR. The Soviets look next door and become so concerned with security that they deploy a full 25 percent of their military force on their border with the Chinese. In the Middle East, the Soviet leaders see an area that has been a political and military disaster for them. Egypt threw the Russians out several years ago, and the Russians' main ally, Syria, had its armed forces decimated by the Israelis. In Afghanistan, the Soviets are tied down in a war that is costing them dearly in money, blood and, most importantly, credibility with Third World countries.

As these nations observe the ruthless Russian campaign against the Afghan rebels, they have cause to doubt the sincerity of Soviet promises to support "national liberation" struggles. When they look at Europe, the Soviet leaders have grave worries over the threat to the internal integrity of their Eastern European empire posed by the courageous Poles. No fundamental change to the balance of power is likely in Europe, where NATO and the Warsaw Pact are poised against each other. A miscalculation by the Soviets could trigger World War III. The Soviets would want such a war on their terms, not as the result of an accident.

Since opportunities for decisive Soviet strategic gains are limited in all these areas, the Russians focus attention on the Caribbean and Central America. The United States has long ignored this area militarily, considering our southern flank an "economy of force" area — jargon meaning only minimum military presence is required because there is no significant threat to U.S. security. What a paradox!

**At a Contra camp in Nicaragua, anti-Sandinista guerrillas check their weapons. Contras take what they can get — Soviet AKs, RPG-7s.**



## LATIN AMERICAN SPECIALIST

Col. Lawrence L. Tracy, United States Army, is assigned to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs. He has served in Argentina as an Army Foreign Area Specialist, and in Bolivia as Army Attaché. He is a graduate of St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia, holds a Master's degree in Latin American Studies from Georgetown University, and has done post-graduate studies in Political Science at that university. In 1980, he graduated as the U.S. Army representative at the Inter-American Defense College, the senior educational institution for Latin American military personnel.

Europe, the Middle East and Asia have preoccupied American strategic thinking, while we have failed to glance at our own doorstep.

Twenty-five years ago, the Soviets were presented a gift they did not expect. Cuba became a communist beachhead in the Western Hemisphere. The relationship between Cuba and the USSR has been tempestuous at times, Fidel Castro being more headstrong and individualistic than the Soviets prefer in their employees, but the Soviets still proudly maintain an unsinkable "aircraft carrier" in the Caribbean. From Cuba they can carry out their political and military objectives worldwide, especially on our lightly defended southern flank. Although the USSR bankrolls the Cuban economy to the tune of over \$4 billion annually (an amount equal to 25 percent of Cuba's GNP), Kremlin leaders obviously consider Cuba a strategic bargain.

Kremlin political strategists had considered Latin America clearly under U.S. hegemony, full of stoic peasants who were not ready for revolution. In fact, the Moscow-oriented communist parties in Latin America downplayed violence and preached taking power at the polls. Then came Castro leading a rural-based insurgency.

He instigated and supported similar movements throughout Latin America, most significantly in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Bolivia. But the Soviets did not agree entirely with his tactics, believing he should consolidate his own revolution before attempting to export it to other countries. Eventually, they bowed to pressure from Castro and a growing interest in the area displayed by their arch-rival People's Republic of China, and provided limited assistance to revolutionary groups in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Despite Castro's popularity and Soviet assistance, his experiment in exporting violent revolt failed when his former second-in-command, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, met his death in an ill-conceived and poorly executed attempt to implant a communist government in Bolivia in 1967. With that defeat, Castro adopted a variant of Soviet foreign policy, ostensibly maintaining "peaceful coexistence" with the governments of the area. Close ties were still maintained with the more radical, leftist elements in these countries, and Castro remained a hero to discontented Latin American youth. During the next several years, while concentrating on a hapless domestic economy, he continued to assist Latin leftists who had shifted to urban terrorism as a pathway to power.

By the mid-1970s, Castro's pent-up revolutionary zeal was transferred to Africa. Cuba provided almost 20,000 troops, and Russia provided the equipment, to impose a Marxist government in Angola. In Ethiopia, the Soviet and Cuban axis worked even more effectively. Approximately

15,000 Cuban troops fought under Soviet command against the Somalis. To this day, Cuba maintains almost 40,000 troops in Africa alone. This African expeditionary force is only a fraction of Cuba's military machine, which numbers about a quarter of a million troops.

The Soviets and their Cuban puppets are currently working in concert in Central America. The key to Soviet motivation lies in the 1962 missile crisis during which the USSR was humiliated when Nikita Khrushchev "blinked first" in a celebrated eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with President John Kennedy. We scored only a Pyrrhic victory. The continued use of communist Cuba as a Soviet beachhead in the hemisphere was assured by the so-called Kennedy-Khrushchev Accords. And it was the missile crisis that spurred the intensive military buildup designed to ensure the Russians would never again blink in a global confrontation.

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## Twenty-five years ago the Soviets were presented a gift they did not expect — Cuba.

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The importance of the Caribbean area to the Soviets derives from military doctrine which holds that a decisive victory is gained by attacking the enemy's "strategic rear" — in this case, our southern flank. In Cuba, the Soviets have a permanent military presence less than 100 miles from our shores.

Soviet warships regularly ply the Caribbean, and long-range-reconnaissance aircraft routinely land in Cuba. A Soviet brigade of 2,600 men is stationed there, along with 2,500 military and 8,000 civilian advisers. Soviet military equipment is pouring into Cuba at the highest rate since the missile crisis. A sophisticated electronic-intelligence facility near Havana is aimed at the U.S. The Cuban military has more than 650 Soviet tanks and almost 100 helicopters, including the Mi-24 Hind, one of the world's foremost assault helicopters. Additionally, Castro has more than 200 jet fighters, including MiG-23s with ranges capable of hitting targets as far away as Savannah. The Cuban Navy has about 50 torpedo and missile attack boats, including a sophisticated hydrofoil craft which no other Warsaw Pact countries have yet received. Even more ominous are the two Foxtrot-class attack submarines sailing under the Cuban Navy.

Despite such startling revelations, many Americans continue to ask: So what? Is Cuba a threat to the United States in a military confrontation? Obviously not, so why place such emphasis on Cuba's military strength? Once again, the answer lies

in Soviet doctrine of attacking the strategic rear, viewed in conjunction with the particular vulnerability of our southern flank.

Almost half of all U.S. foreign trade passes through the critical Caribbean sea lanes. About the same percentage of our imported crude oil transits this route. Additionally, the Caribbean contains several important refineries, and composes our outbound approach to the Panama Canal. In a period of crisis, the Soviets and their well-armed Cuban allies could put a stranglehold on American commerce.

From a military standpoint, creation of a mini-Warsaw Pact on our shores could be a decisive factor if the Soviets and their allies launch their huge conventional force against NATO. Should the Soviets decide to attack, their strategy would probably be to capture an intact Western Europe with its technologically advanced industrial base. To do this, Pact forces would strike with little warning in an effort to present NATO with a *fait accompli*. The West's strategy for countering such aggression is to hold the line against overwhelming Warsaw Pact armor and manpower until reinforcements arrive from the United States. But rapid reinforcement is critical — without it, Western Europe could be lost.

More than half of these reinforcements are slated to leave from such Gulf ports as Galveston and Mobile. The cargo- and troop-ship route to Europe runs through the narrow Straits of Florida and includes the windward passage between Haiti and Cuba. These ships will be easy prey for Cuban submarines and patrol boats or Soviet combatants visiting Cuba on one of those now "routine deployments." The U.S. Navy could defeat this threat, but it would take precious time that our troops in NATO simply would not have. A battle for sea control would also divert our over-committed Navy from the North Atlantic, where the principal Soviet submarine force threatens our fleet, and where the Soviets regularly deploy Yankee-class submarines with nuclear missiles capable of destroying cities and military targets as far inland as Offut Air Force Base, nerve center of the Strategic Air Command, near Omaha.

The Russians place great emphasis on the lessons of Cuba, and tout Castro's success as the beginning of the end of U.S. influence in Latin America. They are quick to point out — accurately — that Cuba chose the Marxist-Leninist path without Soviet assistance. Once Fidel was in power, however, the Soviets were quick to exert pervasive influence.

If the Soviets can develop both a permanent military presence and additional Marxist-Leninist states in the region, they probably believe they can inhibit U.S. flexibility and reactions in any future political confrontations throughout Latin America. The means chosen is the same as that tried unsuccessfully by Castro in



the 1960s: rural-based insurgencies to implant communist regimes sympathetic to and dependent on the Soviet Union and Cuba.

It is important to understand that the conditions that give rise to such insurgencies are *not* created by Cuba or her Soviet masters. The grinding poverty, the lack of opportunity, the poor quality of life, the often oppressive, insensitive, authoritarian governments that maintain the status quo, and the stratified societies throughout much of Latin America have all contributed to frustrations that can easily explode. People living under such conditions want their lives improved. If the government does not take steps to address these deprivations, it runs the risk of a popular uprising.

Since the 1930s, Marxism has held itself as the solution to the societal ills of Latin America. Castro is now once again in the vanguard of such a call, selfishly exploiting widespread misery for his own gain and that of his Soviet employers. El Salvador is the immediate target. Judging by the tactics of the guerrillas in El Salvador, the goal is not to solve the endemic problems that feed insurgent movements. The Salvadoran rebels intend to increase such problems in hopes the people will withdraw their support of the duly-elected government because it cannot resolve the hardships. It is a nihilistic, ruthless strategy based on the Leninist premise that the country must be destroyed before it can be saved.

Before attempting to analyze the current situation in El Salvador, it's helpful to look first at neighboring Nicaragua, the principal laboratory for applying the lessons learned by the Soviets in Cuba and Chile. World headlines in spring and summer 1979 celebrated the Sandinistas' fight to end the dictatorship of Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza. His highly authoritarian regime had provoked widespread opposition, and the Sandinistas received extensive support from other Latin American countries, most notably Panama and Venezuela. Additionally, Costa Rica allowed its territory to be used as a sanctuary and operations base for anti-Somoza guerrillas.

The United States put pressure on long-time ally Somoza to step down, and finally suspended military support for his government. When Somoza fell, there was widespread feeling in Nicaragua that a representative government would replace the 45-year dynasty. The Sandinistas made a written promise to the Organization of American States that they would hold free elections and develop a pluralistic political system. It was popularly known that Castro and members of the Sandinista leadership had close ties, but the Cuban leader effectively disguised the extent of his support to avoid disrupting the alliance between the Marxists and other opponents of Somoza. The anti-Somoza coalition was thus a classic front organization, the great bulk being non-communists, sur-

rounding a central core of the Sandinista Directorate with direct links to the worldwide communist support-system.

Many of the non-communist Somoza opponents who joined with the Sandinistas have now defected after belatedly and sadly concluding that they had been used, their revolution betrayed. Genuine Nicaraguan patriots such as Alfonso Robelo and Adolfo Calero are now trying to recapture the revolution stolen by the Sandinistas, Cubans and Soviets.

The argument is frequently made that the Sandinistas have embraced the Cubans and Russians because the United States turned a deaf ear to their pleas for help. That's enticing but inaccurate. The U.S. cut off all military assistance to Somoza in his final months, just when he needed it most. After the Sandinistas came to power in July 1979, the U.S. provided almost \$25 million in emergency food and medical supplies. From July 1979 to January 1981, we gave the Sandinista government \$118 million in direct economic assistance: more than any other government. The U.S. also used its considerable influence with international lending agencies to generate approximately \$250 million in financial assistance to the Sandinistas, almost double the total in aid that Somoza had received in the previous 20 years.

While the United States and other democracies were providing economic aid to the destitute and restoring basic government services disrupted by the war, the Cubans and Soviets were pouring military equipment into Nicaragua. The Kremlin had concluded that Allende was eventually toppled in Chile because he did not consolidate himself in power by force of arms, and was determined that the same fate should not befall the Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas have prospered militarily under Cuban and Soviet tutelage. They have the largest army in the history of Central America. Where Somoza had 13 military garrisons, the Sandinistas have 49. Where Somoza had an army of about 12,000, the Sandinistas have 25,000 in their active force and another 50,000 in the militia. They have announced plans for a total force of 250,000, which would mean almost 10 percent of the population would be under arms.

Somoza's army, called the National Guard, was basically a domestic police force. By contrast, the Sandinista Army is a modern military establishment with about 50 Soviet T54/T55 tanks, transports to carry them, and 152mm artillery pieces with a range of 27 kilometers. The Sandinistas also have more than 1,000 east



German military trucks and some 100 anti-aircraft guns. Somoza had an antiquated air force, but the Sandinistas will soon have MiG jets. About 70 Nicaraguans were sent to Bulgaria for pilot and mechanic training in 1980. The first group of 30 pilots was scheduled to complete training in December 1982. Runways have been extended at airfields throughout the country, probably in preparation for MiG aircraft. There are about 2,000 Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua, and Cubans are believed to be in key positions throughout the Sandinista government.

Press censorship is prevalent, and the Sandinistas are exhibiting the same paranoia toward traditional religions that is frequently encountered in communist societies. The Catholic Church is being persecuted, and one of Somoza's most outspoken critics, Archbishop Obando y Bravo, is now the leading anti-Sandinista spokesman. Priests have been harassed and humiliated in public, and the rude treatment received by the Pope during his recent visit is well documented. Anti-Semitism is also evident. According to B'nai B'rith, a tiny, 50-person Jewish community in Nicaragua was forced into exile, properties confiscated and the synagogue in Managua desecrated.

The relationship of the Soviets to their Cuban and Nicaraguan handmaidens is a sad tale of how the legitimate desires of the Cubans and Nicaraguans have been betrayed because the leaders of their revolutions sold out to the Soviet Union and the myth of a classless society. And the same story is unfolding in El Salvador.

A country the size of Massachusetts, with a population density similar to that of India, El Salvador is steeped in a violent tradition aggravated by a feudal land-tenure system. The pressures for change

have been building for years, the radical left has become increasingly violent and, in the late 1970s, the military government of President Carlos Romero reacted in kind. In October 1979, a group of military officers overthrew Romero, and announced their intention to hold free elections, establish a pluralistic government and institute basic socio-economic reforms. It was an echo of empty Sandinista pledges made four months earlier. The difference is that the Salvadorans have carried out their promises. An extensive agrarian reform program has been implemented, a Constituent Assembly elected and presidential elections have been held.

Shortly after coming to power in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas started training Salvadoran insurgents. After Romero's overthrow, Castro summoned guerrilla leaders to Havana. The result was a unified, radical-left coalition for Central America. Cuban strategy called for El Salvador and Guatemala to be the next target countries, with Honduras serving as conduit for arms and supplies. The classic front-type organization soon materialized in El Salvador, with non-communist and communist resistance groups aligned. In November 1980, a military alliance of five guerrilla groups was formed. In January 1981, in an effort to present President-elect Reagan with a *fait accompli*, they launched their so-called "final offensive," calling for a general uprising by the people.

The lack of popular support for the guerrillas was exposed. No uprising took place, and their offensive was stalled. Meanwhile, the Carter Administration had restricted military aid to the Salvadoran military due to concerns over human-rights violations. The irony of the situation in which communist guerrillas used U.S.-made M16s shipped to them from Vietnam, while American allies resisted with antiquated European-manufactured rifles, was not lost on the administration. President Carter finally authorized additional military assistance after the guerrilla offensive in El Salvador began.

The U.S. dispatched advisers and helped organize a quick-reaction battalion. Advisers trained helicopter pilots, maintenance men and logistic technicians. Plans were developed for a Constituent Assembly election, and the agrarian and other reforms continued in the face of increasing Cuban/Nicaraguan support for the guerrillas. In March 1982, the election

was held despite a call for a boycott by the guerrillas. Since a majority of the populace ignored this boycott, the guerrillas turned to intimidation, attacking polling places, blowing up bridges, and attacking buses carrying voters to the polls. It was obvious why they had refused to take their chances at the polls. Despite their destructive efforts, more than 80 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots in an overwhelming repudiation of the extreme left. Had they wished to, the voters could have cast blank ballots as a form of protest against the government, a time-honored practice in Latin America. Only about two percent of the votes cast were blank.

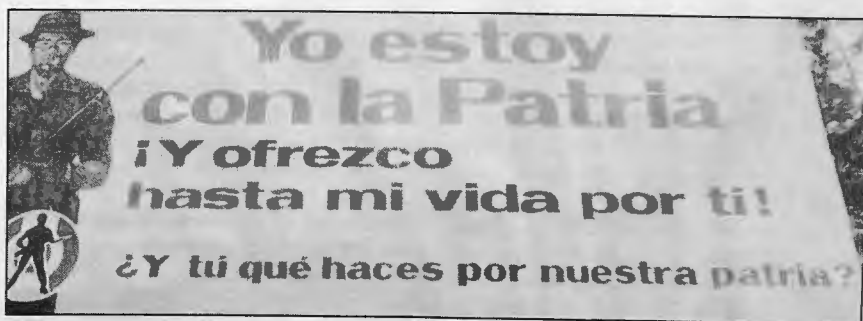
Despite this setback, the guerrillas remain a potent military force, thanks to a flowing pipeline of supplies from Cuba and Nicaragua. Facing a lack of popular support, the guerrillas have concentrated on gaining power by destroying El Salvador's economy. To date, more than \$100 million in direct damage has been inflicted through guerrilla sabotage and terrorism. Indirect costs, stemming from lost production, high defense costs and the displacement of people, have been estimated at nearly a billion dollars. The guerrillas have focused on destroying coffee, sugar and cotton crops — staples of El Salvador's agricultural economy.

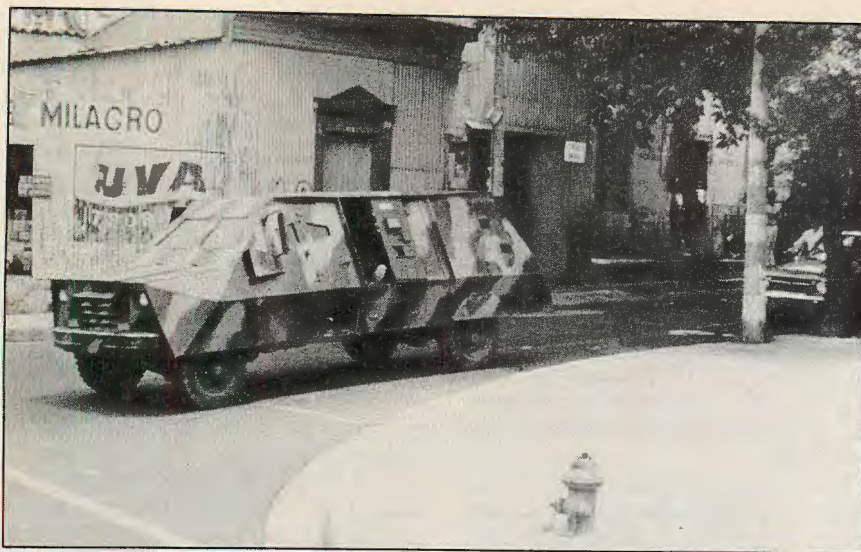
The Salvadoran military has the twin tasks of protecting the economic infrastructure and carrying the offensive to the guerrillas — but it is stretched too thin to accomplish both tasks. The war has been a stalemate, although the military is now moving decisively against the guerrillas, demonstrating a *credible field performance* with increased resources and U.S. funding. In February 1983, the Reagan Administration requested that Congress provide \$110 million in additional security assistance. Congress had reduced by half the funds programmed for fiscal year 1983.

During fiscal year 1984, Reagan asked for \$86.3 million, \$64.8 million of which was approved by Congress. After reading the Kissinger Report, the administration requested an additional \$178.7 million in security assistance. Again, Congress substantially cut that amount to \$61.7 million but Reagan hasn't accepted the new package. He insists that the entire amount is necessary to forge the Salvadoran Army into a formidable fighting force. As of press time, Congress had not addressed the issue.



**LEFT:** Contras sort through ammo for cartridges which fit their various weapons. **ABOVE:** Miskito TEA guerrilla loads up his web gear and M16 in preparation for ops against the Sandinistas. **RIGHT:** Billboard in San Salvador asks, "What are you doing for your country?"





**Government armored cars cruise urban streets in turbulent El Salvador searching for terrorists.**

While U.S. support has been spotty, the Soviets have continued providing security assistance to their puppets at record levels. Military equipment shipped to Cuba in both 1981 and 1982 amounted to the highest total tonnages since the 1962 missile crisis. Much of this had been passed to Salvadoran guerrillas after being shipped to Nicaragua. Military deliveries to Nicaragua in 1983 greatly surpassed those of 1982.

A land corridor has been established from Nicaragua through Honduras to the Salvadoran guerrillas. The Honduran Army has captured guerrillas coming through this corridor, and they tell of an elaborate training and resupply system. It's another bitter irony that people fighting to establish a Marxist-Leninist state in El Salvador receive all the support they need, while those attempting to protect the democratic process and the reforms needed to alleviate deprivations that breed insurgency cannot depend on the United States to provide similar support. So restricted has been our assistance to date, and so doubtful the willingness of the Congress to provide needed aid in the future, that the Central American democracies can be forgiven a certain skepticism concerning the reliability of the U.S. as an ally.

The U.S. has trained three quick-reaction battalions since 1981 — a total of 10 percent of the Salvadoran military on active duty. They are the best in the army and have the support of the people. The full \$110 million in extra security assistance would have enabled the United States to train more than half of the military, enabling the Salvadoran government to regain the initiative permanently. The funds approved so far will permit only limited-force modernization and the training of additional units at the recently established Honduran Regional Military Training Center. Honduras will also train troops there.

What are the consequences of a failure by the United States to provide the needed materiel, training and moral support required by the Central American

countries? First would be a powerful and permanent Soviet military presence on our doorstep. This could result in greater defense expenditures so the U.S. can develop a military capability on our southern flank. This could cost much more than the security assistance we are now requesting for the region. Second, world doubt over the resolve and dependability of the United States as a leader in the cause of freedom will certainly be reinforced.

Finally, refugees are sure to flee the prospect of living in communist police states, and, as has happened before, the mecca for many will be the United States. In the first years of Cuban communism about 10 percent of the population fled, most to this country. The Central American nations and Mexico have a total population of over 100 million. If a percentage of refugees similar to those who fled Cuba reaches the United States, we would be faced with handling six to perhaps 10 million homeless people. This would dwarf the influx of boat people from Southeast Asia after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and the Cubans who fled Castro's rule in 1980. Where would they go? How would we care for them?

A few points should be emphasized in examining the importance of Central America to our nation's future. The U.S. is *not* seeking a military solution in El Salvador. Castro and his employers in Moscow cynically exploit the poverty that contributes to insurgency. We are primarily addressing those causes. Of our aid, about 75 cents of every dollar goes for economic assistance and only 25 cents for security assistance. But the economic aid can have little benefit without the security assistance to help the Salvadoran armed forces defend the economy that has become the guerrillas' primary target.

We need, as Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and others have recommended, a massive economic development program along the lines of the post-WWII Marshall

Plan. The task will be greater, as Latin America lacks the industrial base and skilled manpower that even a devastated Europe possessed in 1945. But with resources and commitment, it can be done. It must be done.

Latin American population is exploding. Jobs and opportunity must be created lest this area become a cauldron of instability and violence. The U.S. would pay a far greater price in the future for its neglect than we would pay now for preventive measures. We need to treat this hemisphere with *at least* the same attention as we do other important areas of the world.

Of our worldwide military-assistance budget, only about two percent goes to Latin America, much of that as loans which the impoverished countries are required to pay back at interest rates that currently run about 13 percent. This has caused one Central American military leader to lament, "It costs a lot to have you as a friend." Soviet assistance to Marxist-Leninist guerrillas is not, of course, tied to Moscow's version of the prime lending rate.

In the pluralistic society the Salvadoran government envisions, there is room for dissent. The government, with full U.S. support, stands ready to discuss all possible means for insurgents to participate in elections and put their alleged popularity to the test at the ballot box. But the government, chosen freely by its citizens in elections the guerrillas tried to destroy, will not allow them to share power they have not earned.

The critical juncture at which the U.S. now finds itself will show whether it can make the commitment to defend its allies and fight Soviet aggression, or accept another setback. As the Soviet leadership observes the increasingly acrimonious debate in the United States on Central America, and hears the Congress discuss cutting off aid to the enemies of the Soviets' hired guns, they must be amused by the contradictions of democracy and more convinced than ever of the inevitability of a communist-dominated world.

The Soviets are opportunists of the first order. They push at every open door, and the Caribbean portal has been ajar for years. They are also hard-headed realists. They will not place the gains they have made since 1917 in jeopardy for what they consider merely an opportunity they can exploit, not a vital interest they must defend. In short, a definite show of unified resolve on the part of the United States — the administration, the Congress and the American people — will be viewed by the Soviets as a signal to back off.

For the present, however, the Soviet leaders see little reason to slacken the pace. When they look at all the problems they have in the rest of the world, they probably find it hard to believe that they can enjoy so much success with so little risk, virtually in the shadow of their principal adversary. ✕



**SOF CENTRAL AMERICA**

# SHOWDOWN AT CERRON GRANDE

## Blooding the Airborne Battalion

by Dale Dye

Photos by J.L. Pate

During the combat assault to retake Cerron Grande, 60mm mortar crews from the Airborne Battalion provided effective, close-in support fire for paratroopers engaging guerrillas along the spiny ridges that surround the dam and power generating plant.

**T**HERE was a hell of a fight on 28 June at Cerron Grande, the hydroelectric dam and power-generating station that supplies some 50 percent of El Salvador's electricity. If you get your daily dose of international news from American TV or newspapers, you probably didn't know that. If you did happen to notice the brief mention of an airmobile assault to free Cerron Grande from siege by communist guerrillas, you probably came away from your watching or reading thinking the Salvadoran Army got pummeled in that particular punch-up, or at best merely drove the enemy off this strategic target without scoring a significant victory.

That figures, I suppose. As in the case of the U. S. press versus the U. S. military

during the Grenada operation, the Salvadoran Army simply got on with the business of driving the guerrillas away from the dam and didn't bother with inviting the international press in San Salvador along for the show. When the Salvadoran Army Public Affairs Office finally did lay on two desperately needed helicopters to fly the press up to the battle site, there were no "bang-bang" scenes for the video cameras, most of the wounded were evacuated and unavailable for poig-

nant human interest photos, and there certainly were no live guerrillas hanging around to verify the Army claims of a major defeat for the insurgents who had massed to strike what could have been a death blow for the credibility of the Duarte government and the nation's emerging military power.

In defense of the editors back in the States who had to decide how much space "just another battle in that Banana Republic down there" merited, I suppose

it's only fair to mention that the news of the Cerron Grande fight broke at about the same time they were trying to sort out reality from rumor in titillating reports that Salvadoran presidential hopeful Roberto D'Aubuisson was linked with a purported plot to assassinate American Ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering. A story with that sort of Machiavellian overtones is bound to get the most air and ink in a nation that still hasn't decided whether or not El Salvador means anything more to it

**Armed Hueys of the helicopter-poor Salvadoran Air Force remained on station over Cerron Grande to provide air cover after ferrying the Airborne Battalion from its base at Ilopango. Photo Steve Salisbury**



than just another country cousin that needs some help in controlling the rowdies raising hell in the hinterlands.





Meanwhile, that may be a real injustice to the Salvadoran Army, particularly the recently formed Airborne Battalion which has been designated one of the nation's immediate-reaction forces and the strategic reserve for emergencies throughout the country. It may also be an indication that the Salvadoran military establishment has yet to learn the power of public relations and the necessity of capitalizing on the propaganda value of each victory. It may mean the American press has assumed an "if we weren't there, it didn't happen" attitude with regard to events in El Salvador. It may even mean that the communist guerrillas in El Salvador have learned to cover their losses by recognizing the power of the press and ensuring that such confrontations seem intentional political statements which proclaim, if not a free hand in the countryside, at least an ability to hit and run at will.

Given the turbulent situation in El Salvador and the national paranoia that equates U.S. efforts there with "another Vietnam," we may never be able to truthfully say why the battle at Cerron Grande got such short shrift in the national media. In fact, those who are interested may never know what really happened at Cerron Grande.

But we can draw some valid conclusions about the battle, the soldiers who fought it for the government and the guerrillas.

On a humid afternoon, 13 July, some two weeks after the early morning attack on the dam and power station by a force of some 700-800 guerrillas (the figures come from the Salvadoran military; the American press commonly reported an assault force of 1,000), I walked the ground at Cerron Grande with the man who led one of the assault elements in the army effort to retake the position. Captain Alvaro Rivera Allemande, Executive Officer of the Airborne Battalion, strode to the crest of a jagged, brush-covered finger of high ground that commanded the northern approach to Cerron Grande. He pointed off in the distance below indicating the LZs into which he led the first assault force of some 90 paratroopers at around 0645 on 28 June. Facing about he

**TOP LEFT: Aerial view of the heavily damaged troop barracks on the south side of Cerron Grande dam. Most of the soldiers killed or wounded in the guerrilla attack on the site were off-duty and asleep inside the structure. Wounded who could not escape were executed. The building was initially attacked with satchel charges which accounts for most of the damage to the roof. LEFT: Commander of the Airborne's Support Squadron employed his 60mm mortars in the retaking of Cerron Grande but was disappointed in the ammunition he had been issued. Crews reported four duds in the 12 rounds they fired at guerrilla attackers.**



## CARGO OF TEARS

It wasn't hard to shut my eyes for a moment against the glare of Salvadoran sunlight and imagine the fertile terrain slipping by below was Iowa. Dusters trying to save a corn crop from insects would fly like this; at low level, meandering over the verdant fields in search of a place to reunite peacefully with the earth.

But this was not the peaceful American midwest as viewed from the cockpit of of some stump-jumper hauling chemicals. This was the humid, cloying sky over El Salvador and my perspective was the right seat of a creaking, worn-out C-47 that should have been retired with Terry and the Pirates. Still, it was nice to imagine the land below at peace.

The man in the left seat had no time to share my musings. He was busy looking for a long finger of clear grassland that would mark our landing site. I had made most of my touch-downs on asphalt, straddling the roaring turbines of an F-4 carrying a cargo of death and destruction. He would make the landing. I would have some time to think and feel.

The Iowa image flashed back as I stared out the cockpit window during the bumpy taxi run toward a knot of quiet, placid men and women waiting for our arrival next to a beat-up yellow Chevy. They could be corn farmers waiting for a load of seed, I thought. That's when the analogy hit me and I felt like a genuine dirt-bag. These people were indeed waiting for something to plant, but what they put in the fertile soil of El Salvador this day would never grow to ripen.

In the back of our aircraft was a cargo of coffins. Inside each of the two we carried was a young Salvadoran citizen killed by the communist guerrillas that plague this country. We applied the brakes and unstrapped to begin unloading what was left of these peoples' hopes and dreams for the future. They were surprisingly light, these two young Salvadorans who had the misfortune to be aboard a train that was blown up by the guerrillas in their increasingly violent war on the nation's economy.

I wondered what cause would be listed on their death certificates if there were such things in El Salvador. I'd have called it murder. The guerrillas call it a war of national revolution. Ya pays yer nickel and ya takes yer choice of terms. For my money, detonating mines under civilian vehicles, blowing bridges full of homeless refugees, executing those who simply refuse to support your cause — and mining trains such as the one these two young



**TOP: SOF team member Dana Drenkowski wanted his first mission with the Salvadoran Air Force recorded for posterity. Identity of the pilot and plane captain is protected as Air Force crews are prime targets for guerrilla attacks. ABOVE: U.S.-manufactured A-37 aircraft on a mission over El Salvador. Senior commanders in the Salvadoran Army say the aircraft are much feared by guerrilla forces.**

men had been riding — amounts to murder.

But here in Usulután, the good *campesino* families of the two victims were not concerned with such morbid realities. They merely wanted us to unload the remains so they could say their prayers, cry their tears, bury the dead and get on with what's left of their lives. I couldn't think of anything to say to anyone. The Salvadoran pilot must have noticed my discomfort. On the return trip he told me the story of a similar mission he had flown to another farming community just down the coast. If it was designed to distract me

or cheer me up, it failed — miserably.

The family of the dead man was dirt poor. The mother and father were long past child-bearing age. When he glided his aircraft into a dirt strip near their house, the entire village turned out, fully expecting a favorite son home for leave. No one had been notified of the soldier's death. The pilot had to stand by and watch joy turn to gut-wrenching sorrow. The parents and village friends watched uncomprehendingly as the flight crew unloaded the long, narrow coffin. There would be no son to inherit the fruits of a lifetime of labor on the land. There would be no son to sire grandchildren and keep the family name alive. There would be no familial comfort for them in their final years. There would be no future.

The young pilot was not ashamed to admit he flew through a sheen of bitter tears on the way back to his base at Ilopango.

And they used to tell me flying made for an impersonal war.

— Dana Drenkowski



pointed at the domineering peak of Cerron Grande (the hill mass for which the dam is named) and said his commanding officer, Major Luis M. Turcio, landed below the reverse slope with the second lift of some 90 soldiers.

"From these two positions we began a two-pronged assault on the *muchachos* who were threatening the dam," I noted that Allemande had said "threatening the dam," not holding the dam or destroying the dam, the two most common descriptions I picked up from press reports of the fight.

"They never actually held the dam," he commented pointing at a heavily damaged barracks to the south of the river which had housed the majority of the 250 defenders of Detachment 1, Choletana-go, tasked with guarding the Cerron Grande site. "They made their strongest push from the south in the area of the barracks using satchel charges and other explosives as well as mortars. Many of the soldiers were wounded in that initial attack because they were off-duty and asleep. The remainder tried to hold the *muchachos* off but were eventually

beaten back."

There were 48 soldiers from the security detachment at Cerron Grande listed as Killed-In-Action. That jibes fairly well with press reports of the battle which indicated some 50 killed on either side. Those reports generally did not specify that all the casualties were from the unit guarding the dam. Editing or faulty reporting may be to blame for the impression that some of the KIAs were from the Airborne Battalion relief force. In fact, official records indicate there were no casualties among the paratroopers, either KIA or WIA.



Salvadoran records also indicate 88 guerrilla bodies were policed up in the aftermath of the fighting at Cerron Grande. By evening on 28 June, according to Allemande, most of the corpses had been searched and buried in a mass grave between Cerron Grande and the village which lies within sight of the dam to the northwest. There is no indication from the Salvadorans who were on the dam site when the press arrived as to why the lower number of guerrilla casualties was reported.

Twenty-five dam defenders were

wounded in the fighting, along with five or six civilian powerplant employees, but the 140 or so who survived the initial attack managed to put up enough resistance to keep the guerrillas from doing anything more than minimal damage to power poles and transformers located on the south side of the dam. Several high explosive rounds were fired at the concrete building which houses the hydroelectric and water-flow machinery, but no guerrillas ever got inside these areas. The press reports on the battle dwelled on the dam employees who took refuge inside the

reinforced building, indicating they were under desperate siege with guerrillas practically banging on the doors. Allemande and several other survivors say the Gs never got that close to the machinery room and seemed perfectly content to stand off behind cover of a pair of rusted chemical tanks and lob rounds into the area.

With no apparent desire to impress me with a "gallant last stand" story, Allemande was quick to admit that the 140 security soldiers who survived the guerrilla attack did get pushed off the dam. "They

**Since the attack on Cerron Grande in late June, Salvadoran army units have beefed up security at the hydroelectric dam and other strategically important potential targets throughout the country. Photo J.L. Pate**





straggled back in over a period of three days," he said through an interpreter, "but our unit (*Las Paracaidistas*) had long since routed the attacking force." He didn't answer a direct question, but Allemande made no apologies for the fact that a *guerrilla force* of some 800 men could manage to get near enough to launch an 0230 attack on Cerron Grande. He and several other soldiers who were directly involved shrugged off — perhaps out of professional courtesy to fellow soldiers — the question of lax security at the dam. "You must understand," he stated, pointing to a serpentine road that led to the area through the village, "the *muchachos* used an estimated four to six buses — regular civilian buses — to bring their assault force in." His meaning is clear to anyone who has traveled El Salvador's roads and

**TOP: Capt. Alvaro Rivera Allmande, XO of the Airborne Battalion, led the assault to push guerrilla attackers off the high ground on the north side of Cerron Grande. ABOVE: Structures in the village near Cerron Grande also suffered damage in the intense fighting between paratroopers of El Salvador's Airborne Battalion and guerrilla forces.**

struggled to deal with *kamikaze* bus drivers careening along with a potentially disastrous overload of passengers clinging like garden slugs to every exterior and interior handhold. It's not a sight that prompts the average *campesino* to ring the alarm bell.

In most press reports I could find concerning the Cerron Grande fighting, the

guerrillas came off fairly clean. They were simply an assault force dedicated to taking the dam — either as a demonstration of their ability to mass and attack or in a serious attempt to disrupt one of the country's primary power sources. Allemande, a typical professional soldier who bears grudging respect for the soldier on the other side of his rifle sights, thought differently about the group who assaulted the sleeping soldiers in barracks at Cerron Grande. "Many of the off-duty troops were wounded by the initial explosions," he stated. "Those who could not escape were killed by the guerrillas. There was obviously no attempt to take prisoners. We found many that had been wounded and then shot in the head from close range." Allemande said his command would have liked to have taken guerrilla prisoners but the attackers were carried off the site in the same buses that brought the assault force. His testimony was corroborated by villagers who stated they saw many guerrilla wounded being carried into the hills in the aftermath of the attack.

Staring into the thick, green foliage that blankets the hills surrounding Cerron Grande, I imagined the difficulty an assault force must have had struggling upward to take the high ground in the face of enemy automatic weapons. I'd been involved in that sort of thing before. The only adjective that came to mind was "nasty." Allemande agreed with that description calling the fight *mano a mano* most of the way up the hills on the north and south sides of Cerron Grande dam. "The guerrillas did not seem to want to back off," he commented. "They mostly stood and fought until we were right on top of them. Still, we managed to kick them off by killing them in their holes. We captured about 17 rifles, a .50-caliber machine gun, a .30-caliber machine gun, some submachine guns, a 90mm recoilless rifle and plenty of ammo."

Allemande's account matches the official Salvadoran record of the battle but there are those in the country who would dispute his contention that the guerrilla force ever intended to do anything with their attack on Cerron Grande but demonstrate that they can threaten major national resources at will. One military source who insisted on anonymity for his own safety claimed to have visited the site the day after it was secured by the Airborne Battalion only to discover a large cache of Salvadoran weapons, presumably taken from dead defenders, lined up near a hole in the security fence and waiting to be carried off by the guerrillas. He maintained that this indicated the assault force was fully in control at Cerron Grande and able to stage captured weapons under no real pressure from the relieving paratroopers. The same source also indicated that the very fact that a guerrilla force could get inside the wire at Cerron Grande proved that the troops could not execute their immediate-reaction plans in the field. "They can plan



**TOP:** Maj. Luis M. Turcio, commander of the immediate reaction Airborne Battalion, landed with the first wave of troops on the south side of Cerron Grande and led his men in a successful attack which put the critical national asset back in government hands in under three hours.

and prepare," he stated, "but when it comes to executing, everything goes in the shitter."

His comments merely pose more questions about what really happened at Cerron Grande. Why would an arms-and-munitions-poor guerrilla force stage cap-

**ABOVE:** White water surges through the turbines at Cerron Grande, site of a large guerrilla attack in late June. Hydroelectric generators at the dam provide nearly 50 percent of El Salvador's electrical power. Communist insurgents would love to damage or blow the dam in order to decrease civilian confidence in the ability of the army to defend it. **Disruption of power from Cerron Grande would be devastating to the country.**

tured weapons and then fail to carry them off into the hills if they were under no pressure? And why in the world would a

committed anti-government force that was truly in complete control of a national asset like Cerron Grande fail to damage it significantly in order to demonstrate their capabilities and cash in on a major propaganda coup? Certainly Allemande and the other soldiers with whom I spoke had no answers. They all thought the guerrillas might well try for Cerron Grande again. "It would be typical of their recent activities in other areas of the countryside," said Allemande. "If they could blow the dam they could flood the entire basin below Cerron Grande." Staring downriver from the high ground, I could easily see his point. If the Gs managed to flood the fertile basin below the dam, the government and the military would be tied up for months if not years trying to save the *campesino* families and repair the damage.

Regardless of the nuts and bolts of the story, one conclusion about the fight at Cerron Grande seems unavoidable. In their first genuine "immediate reaction" situation, the Airborne Battalion of the Salvadoran Army was able to muster quickly, load into a paltry 10 helicopters which had to shuttle relief forces from the air base at Ilopango and effectively hampered their ability to mass force against the guerrillas in a short span, and still save a major national asset from disaster at the hands of a determined force. The official record of the battle shows the battalion commander was alerted of serious trouble at the dam around 0400. The first combat assault of 10 helos ferrying 90 paratroopers was in a secure LZ at approximately 0645 and the final elements of the battalion were landed an hour later. Commanders of both relief elements converging on the guerrilla force from the north and south were in constant, reliable radio contact with each other and coordinating their assaults. By 0930, only seven hours after the guerrilla assault began and only an hour and 45 minutes after the relief force was on the ground, Cerron Grande was back in government hands. Relief forces trying to reach the besieged area by road from three separate commands were ambushed and prevented from bringing help, *but* in the final analysis, the Salvadoran Army managed to use the airmobile concept to prevent what might have been a major disaster for the government and the innocent people of the country.

What really happened at Cerron Grande during the desperate morning hours of 28 June? We'll probably never know. Perhaps it doesn't even matter much.

Turgid torrents of life-giving water still flow through the dam, emerging in a roaring white cloud of spume and generating the power to keep the countryside alive and fertile. The guerrillas hide and plot in jungle clearings but government forces still control Cerron Grande. As is the case in any battle, victory can be claimed by the guys who remain upright and occupy the terrain. ✘



**SOF CENTRAL AMERICA**

# **LOS MORTEROS**



## **SOF Schools Salvo Tube Crews**

by Dale Dye

Photos by James L. Pate

**“P**OR favor, Señor, puede decirme usted para que sirven estas cosas?”

A sheepish Airborne Battalion NCO furrowed his sunburned brow, shook his head in bewilderment and held open a tattered rucksack for my inspection. Inside were several items taped and guarded in factory bubble-wrap. Squatting beside the NCO in the fertile Salvadoran dirt, I unsheathed a K-Bar and began to cut away the protection from three major items and an assortment of odds and ends that I hoped had something to do with the gag-



**ABOVE:** Despite a relatively low level of formal education, Salvadoran mortar crews had little trouble learning to make algebraic deflection corrections on their 60mm mortar sights. For safety considerations on the crowded firing line, Dye checks each setting before a round is dropped. **RIGHT:** With Salvadoran gun crews gathered around one of their M19 tubes, Dye explains the relationship among sight, tube and aiming stake. Before his instruction, Dye was told virtually all mortar gunnery in the field was done using open sights or simple Kentucky Windage.

gle of beat-up 60mm mortars arrayed on a muddy practice field at Ilopango Air Base on the outskirts of San Salvador.

During the initial morning meeting with the 60mm mortar crews of the support squadrons of the Airborne Battalion and the Air Base Defense Battalion, I had carefully inspected their weapons and found them in what the U. S. Marine Corps used to call "substandard to shitty" shape. Most of the guns had rickety bipods, buried firing pins, stained and difficult-to-read leveling bubbles and a host of other problems. Most glaring to my U. S.-trained eye was the absence of night-sighting equipment, sight extensions and





other goodies that make using the hot little M19 tube as the company commander's hip-pocket artillery so simple and effective.

Through my interpreter, I queried each of the crews about the missing gear and received no definitive answers. The Salvadoran mortarmen seemed convinced that their weapons were complete and ready for combat with only the rudimentary components of baseplate, tube and bipod. Taking a break for a belt of brackish canteen water I contemplated the situation. What the hell, I concluded, they've made it work this way for the past year and still managed to bring fire on the enemy. Why try to fix something that's not broken? About that time the NCO with the ruck full of magical mystery gadgets showed up at my side.

Shaking out a poncho, I cut away the covering on the equipment he brought for my inspection and got the first of many surprises that kept me constantly amazed during my 12-day training mission in El Salvador. Laid out carefully on my poncho were standard 60mm mortar accessories including an M37 instrument light, an M41 aiming-post light with red and green filters and hood, a sight extension which would allow gunners to lay their mortar from the prone position while under direct enemy fire and cardboard boxes containing M10 aiming stakes. I began to get the sneaking suspicion that more of this factory-fresh equipment was available in the battalion armory. It remained in wrappers and unused by these field-seasoned combat crews simply because they had no idea how or when to use it in mortar gunnery. During some incisive questioning by my interpreter, I rapidly concluded I was correct. I also concluded several other things about the use of mortars as close-in infantry-support weapons by the two battalions I had been sent to help train.

After an hour of friendly interrogation, I checked my notebook:

(1) Salvadoran Army 60mm mortar crews generally engage targets using open sights. They rarely employ one of the major assets of the weapon and fire it from defilade. They seem to think that if you can't see a target, you can't possibly hit it with a mortar.

(2) The gun crews know little or nothing about the direct-alignment method of laying a mortar using the M10 aiming stake with an FO in position to observe both the target and the gun.

(3) Most Salvadoran mortarmen are

**On the day his students fire their 60mm mortars using his techniques, Dye keeps in constant radio contact with other units also firing in the area to preclude possibility of dropping a round on friendlies. The Support Squadron Commander and his radioman kept Dye in sight all day long to handle any necessary transmissions in Spanish.**

## BOULDER BOMB

During a flying trip upcountry from San Salvador, SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown and Executive Editor Dale Dye stopped at the National Military Training Center near La Union. During a brief conversation with officials there they discovered that guerrillas in the area had employed a new type of mine that cost the life of one Salvadoran Army trainee and wounded two others who were headed to the field for a firing exercise.

Dye, who has extensive experience with NVA and VC booby traps from his service in Vietnam, listened more intently to the report when he discovered three of the six mines in the cluster did not detonate.

"Did you happen to disarm and save the other three?" he asked the school official.

"Si." Dye anxiously pulled a notebook and a pair of fuse crimpers from his kit.

"Can we examine one of them?"

"Si, porque no?"

Here is Dye's report on what he calls the "Boulder Bomb."

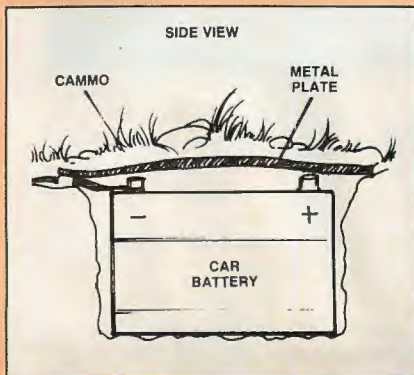
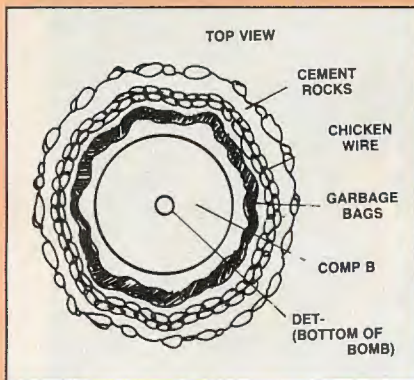
"This mine or booby trap is a real fooler. In fact, it's ingenious. You've got to look hard and know what you're looking for to spot it. It resembles a common boulder of the type found in any uncultivated field practically anywhere in the world. It's about 18 inches long by eight inches deep and eight inches to a foot tall. The shape is irregular as you'd expect in any naturally occurring rock formation. Let's look first at the guts of the mine.

"They start with a round metal container into which they've packed about a kilo (2.2 pounds) of Composition B (or an equivalent explosive). They then construct a wooden box around the metal container leaving a square hole through which a detonating device and fuse can be inserted. Next they cover the whole mess with what appears to be several layers of common plastic garbage bags to make it waterproof. Over that they shape a framework of chicken wire, pressing it down here and there to give it an irregular shape.

"Next comes a layer of wet cement which is poured on the frame until there's enough to completely cover the chicken wire. Before the cement dries, they insert any number of good size stones to further decrease the identifiable shape and increase the shrapnel effect when the damned thing detonates. When the cement is dry, the Gs smear the whole formation with common rubber cement, the sort with the applicator cap that you can buy at any store. Onto the rubber cement they pour handfuls of dirt, grass or any



**SOF Executive Editor Dale Dye cautiously examines a new type of locally manufactured land mine being employed by guerrillas against Salvadoran Army formations. This is one of six that were arranged on an army firing range. Three in the cluster detonated, killing one Salvadoran soldier and wounding two others.**

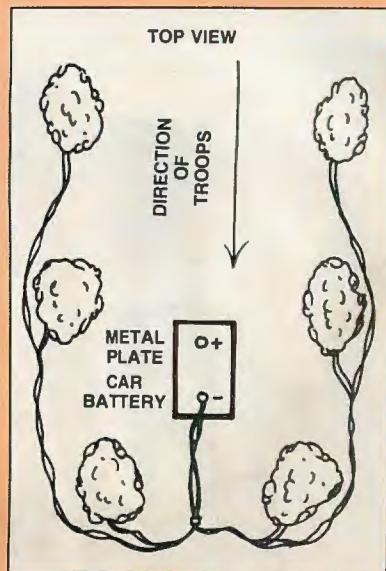


other natural foliage that matches the area where they intend to plant the device.

"Any number of mines can be hooked up to a common power source. In the La Union situation, the Gs rigged each of six mines arranged in a semicircular pattern (see diagram for details and approximate distances) with electrical blasting caps crimped to wire and buried for camouflage. In the center of the mine cluster they dug a hole deep enough to hold a common 12-volt automobile battery. Over the battery they rigged a metal-conductor sole plate and attached each of the wires to it.

"The sole plate rested an inch or so off the exposed terminals of the battery. When an unsuspecting soldier passes by and steps on the sole plate, it sinks to make contact with the positive and negative poles of the battery. WHAM! Current flows to each of the caps, they detonate and set off the main charge in each of the mines.

"In the La Union instance, the mine cluster was placed right on a firing range by guerrillas who knew soldiers would be showing up there for training. I'd guess everyone up there is well aware of the danger by now. The key — as usual with mines or booby traps — is awareness of your area. Be alert for rocks, boulders or anything else that shows up where nothing existed before no matter how natural it looks. I'd also be alert to regular patterns among rocks in an area. Mother Nature has a wonderful randomness about where she decides to put things. If you spot a regular, circular or semicircular rock formation, be suspicious. I'd also be damned careful approaching anything you suspect might be this type of mine. There's no reason to suspect they wouldn't rig it for command detonation."





## DEFUSING A DANGEROUS DILEMMA

Most of the topics the battalion commander at La Union considered germane to his briefing for SOF's Publisher Robert K. Brown and Executive Editor Dale Dye had been covered. He had an orderly bring coffee and then sat back for a more informal chat. Brown sipped the strong brew and then asked a question that led to saving a life.

"Have you found any Russian grenades? We know the Gs are carrying them."

"*Si, amigo.*" Lieutenant Colonel Miguel Alfredo Vasconelos, CO of Detachment 3 at La Union, seemed quite proud of two such grenades he indicated had been taken off guerrillas killed by his men. While an orderly ran to his office to get the weapons, he stated that he had been carrying them around in the field waiting for a good target so he could give the Gs a taste of their own high-explosive medicine. Brown glanced significantly at Dye and asked whether Vasconelos knew that some Soviet grenades had a zero-delay fuse. The Salvadoran officer's dark eyebrows arched.

"What does this mean?" he asked. Dye volunteered the answer.

"It means, Colonel, that if you're carrying one of them that happens to be rigged with a zero-delay fuse, you won't get it six inches out of your hand before it detonates. The Russians design it that way for use as a booby trap or to kill someone who tries to use their own grenades against them without checking the fuse first."

The orderly stormed into the officer's mess bearing two dark-green-painted Soviet F1 fragmentation grenades with typical pineapple serrations and the pointy, two-inch fuse housing. He handed them to Brown who passed them to Dye for examination. The fuse of the first grenade was marked with a tiny, etched '7' on the metal housing which secured the blasting cap. "No problem with this one," Dye commented. "It's rigged for a seven-second delay."

And then he unscrewed the fuse from the second frag. "Uh-oh. You've got one of the bastards here." Dye pointed to the '0' etched onto the fuse housing as a look of shock crossed Vasconelos' dark features. "If you'd tried to pitch that one," Brown commented, "your battalion would have needed a new commander."

Dye carefully marked the zero-delay grenade and handed it back to the Salvadoran officer. "You'd be well-served to keep this as a training aid, Colonel. Show it around to your



SOF Executive Editor Dale Dye scrapes explosive out of a Soviet F1 hand grenade. The battalion commander at La Union had captured two of them but was unaware of the zero-delay fuse screwed into one until alerted by SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown. The CO made Dye a present of one of the grenades.



troops and make sure they check the fuses of any Soviet grenades they pick up before they try to use them."

"*Muchas gracias.*" Vasconelos breathed and shook hands warmly with both of his visitors. "I believe you have saved my life."

Before the SOF team left his headquarters, Vasconelos insisted that Dye accept the seven-second delay F1 grenade as a present.

not aware that the 60mm mortar can be effectively employed at night. The general assumption seems to be that when the sun goes down, the crew packs away the tube and everyone reverts to riflemen.

(4) The vast majority of mortar gunnery done in combat in the Salvadoran bush is strictly Kentucky Windage. Very few crews have the necessary firing tables to give them charge and elevation settings for the M4 sight.

(5) Entirely too damn many communists are escaping their just desserts in the form of a 60mm HE round delivered precisely on top of their guerrilla gourds.

"*Amigo,*" I sighed to my interpreter as I wadded up my carefully prepared, U. S.-style lesson plan, "we have some serious teaching to do. Let's get back to square one." Given the two battalions' hectic schedule of training and actual combat operations, I had precisely three days — two in the school circle at Ilopango and one on a nearby lava-pit firing range — to convince these blooded *campesino*/soldiers that mortars could be more effectively fired using sights and methodical gunnery techniques, and then prove my contention by making them bring accurate fire on a point target.

With the assistance of SOF training-team members Jim Pate and Jerry Lynn, I got right to work. Mounting a table so I could be seen easily by the 30-40 mortar-men and three officers attending my class, I picked up an M10 aiming stake and directed my assistants to ensure that each mortar crew had one of their own so they could follow along.

"This is your primary weapon," I roared. The sea of doubtful frowns from my students was somewhat disconcerting. Several of them picked up the aiming stake and examined it curiously as though considering whether or not I was asking them to bash the Gs over the head with it. Twisting on the wing-nut that holds the stake's crossbar in a vertical position for storage and carrying, I made the stake into a cross, tightened the nut and began to explain the technique of sighting on a target, then reversing position to resight and direct the position for the baseplate of the mortar. "It's not necessary that you see the target from the gun position," I explained. "You only need to see the aiming stake and set your sights on it. The Forward Observer will be looking at the target for you and adjusting your fire. You make the necessary adjustments simply by setting the sights and relaying on the left edge of the aiming stake."

Still more blank stares and a few frowns of serious doubt from the officers and NCOs in the class. "If you employ this method," I intoned in an attempt to capture credibility, "the enemy will not be able to spot your mortar position and bring you under fire. Use the aiming stake and you can stay out of the line of fire." Now they began to show some interest in my mad American methods.

Yet another lesson from El Salvador:

## IS THIS MAN A MERC?

The reaction, particularly for a "peace-at-any-price" puke in a Green Party tee-shirt, was typical. Waiting in El Salvador's international airport for their turn at the TACA ticket counter, the European nudged his halter-topped girlfriend in hotpants and rhinestone cat glasses. Like visitors at a zoo, they both gawked at the American in jeans and jumpboots, shouldering a GI duffel bag and gripping an expensive-looking shotgun case. Their whispered comments were in another language, but their snobbish, derisive tones didn't need translation for understanding. Two words came through loud and clear: "*le mercenaire*."

"I've been called that before," said Harry Clafin, only slightly annoyed and long-accustomed to being regarded as something of a specimen by a curious public. "But when you've been present to see four countries fall to communism, it stimulates and sharpens your focus. I'm really just a patriotic American concerned about a possible communist takeover of Central America. I've seen it happen before and I'd just as soon not see it happen here."

Clafin returned from El Salvador in July as a member of SOF's latest training team. While he was in country, he offered the Salvadoran military — at no charge and with no strings attached — a weapon more powerful and probably more feared by tyrants than any other: knowledge. And the 40-year-old Oklahoma native's knowledge of small-unit combat tactics and techniques is extensive.

During his six years as a U.S. Marine in the early- and mid-60s, Clafin served three tours in Southeast Asia as a member of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. He has since worked as a bodyguard and security consultant. He notes with wry irony that he now lives just outside a town called Liberal in southwest Missouri where he owns and operates Starlight Training Center, a commando training school he founded in 1976. He is quick to add that his business has been examined closely by the FBI and the Treasury Department's BATF. "We don't accept people with snakes loose in their head," he said. His expertise has made him the subject of interviews with such luminaries as Tom Snyder, and a report on his activities was even aired on TV's *PM Magazine*.

Clafin's mission in El Salvador with the most recent SOF training team was not to fight, but to teach others how to become better combat soldiers. His instruction, primarily aimed at the Airborne Battalion, included small-arms training, communications mainte-



**SOF training-team member Clafin displays the business end of one of his favorite bush weapons.**

nance and procedures, rappelling and other small-unit insertion techniques, and basic patrol-operation methods.

Despite his non-combatant role in El Salvador, Clafin remained ready at all times to return the favor should someone have decided to bust a cap on him. "There's no use fooling yourself, you're definitely putting yourself in harm's way when you come down here. Some of these people will definitely kill you — particularly if they think you're in a position to help the government achieve their goal."

Most of Clafin's time was spent at Ilopango Air Base, where he worked one-on-one with paratroopers, with emphasis given to the reconnaissance platoon. His general assessment of Salvo troops is that "they are highly motivated, eager to learn and able to catch-on quick. Much of their problem is that they merely have not been exposed to the information they need; simple things, like basic maintenance procedures for the PRC-77 radio, which antennas to use in certain terrains, things like that. But there's no doubt in my mind that these people, given the proper training and equipment, can fight and win their own war."

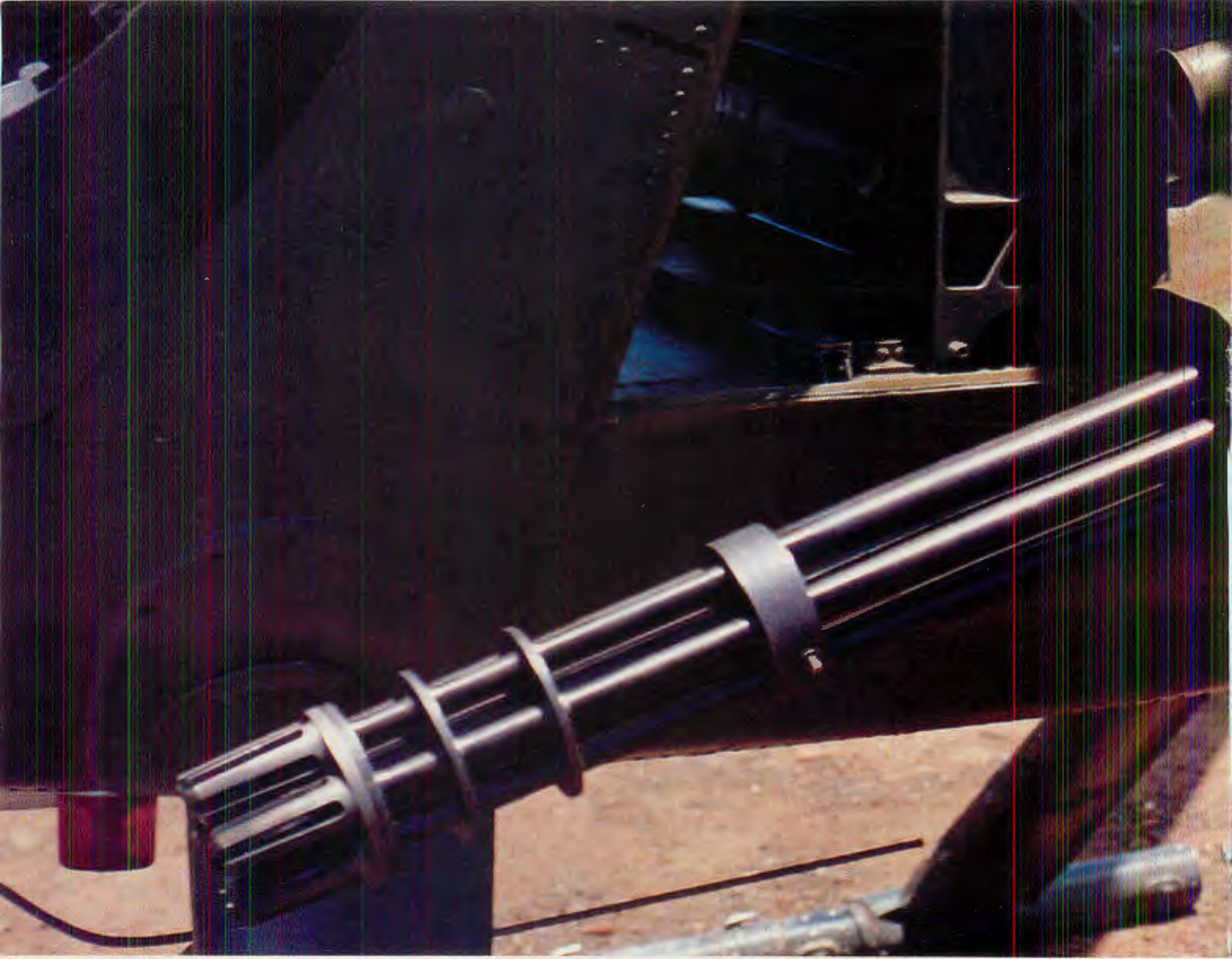
Asked the inevitable question about parallels between El Salvador and Vietnam, the southeast Asia veteran said, "There's no comparison at all. For one thing, Vietnam is halfway around the world from the United States, but El Salvador and its communist guerrillas are a lot closer to Houston than Houston is to Washing-

ton. And if communist expansionism is not stopped here, there's very little to keep it from expanding northward right up to our own borders, in our own backyard. It's a much more real and immediate threat to the United States than it was in southeast Asia."

As for being labeled a mercenary, Clafin just smiles and thoughtfully strokes his pointed beard. "Let me offer an idea. The U.S. Army is an all-volunteer force, and basically everybody in our military thinks of what they do as a job, many as a career. They are working for a country for pay as a soldier. Now, I'm not down here to fight anybody's war for them. I'm here to train because I believe in what they're fighting against, and they need the knowledge in order to fight successfully.

"But there were a lot of Canadians who opposed communism and enlisted in the U.S. military so they could fight in Vietnam. Were *they* mercenaries, or just patriotic people who believed in fighting for the cause of liberty? You tell me. But before you answer, go and look at your history book, and tell me what it says about where the United States would have been in its war for independence from Great Britain had it not been for volunteers from France, Poland and other parts of Europe. Did George Washington look on General Lafayette as a paid mercenary who was in the colonies because the Frenchman needed a fast buck? No. He was doing what he could in the context of his own times to help in the struggle for freedom. It's no fun, but it's something you have to fight to get, and you've often got to fight to keep, because there's always some devious soul out there who'd like to take it away from you."

— J.L. Pate



GIs are the same the world over. Show them a method of staying out of the line of fire and you've got some motivated students. Still, there remained the question of what sort of pea-brain would crawl out under fire and jam an aiming stake in the ground just to bring a mortar onto target. It didn't take me long to jump down off the table and demonstrate that I had the necessary pea-brain to perform the maneuver. Grabbing a Salvo assistant gunner by his suspender harness, I flopped down in the mud and did a low crawl to a slight elevation about 50 meters from the gun line. The Salvo private squirmed right alongside me through the muck while his buddies cheered him and the mad gringo.

We chose a cement post as a target, sighted along the aiming stake crossbar, squirmed around the other side of the stake and motioned for the crew to mark an on-line position for the left-rear corner of the baseplate. In an hour or so we had three, four-tube mortar sections laid in direct alignment to an imaginary target. The Salvo crews were having a great time playing FO and crawling through the mud to get their aiming stakes and baseplates in position.

Next came sight drill and another lesson

from El Salvador. You don't need a high level of formal education to understand numbers. Even a *campesino* with no formal education learns enough about numbers to keep from getting short-changed at the local *mercado*. That's about all that's required to operate and understand the numbers on the M4 sight that comes with the 60mm mortar. And yet another lesson: The 'R' (right) and 'L' (left), designed to guide U. S. crews in moving the deflection knob in the proper direction don't mean doodly squat to Spanish-speaking troops. It didn't take us long to change that to 'D' for *derecho* and 'I' for *izquierda*. By the end of the day we were able to compose simulated fire missions and get the crews to dial on adjustments without too many making 180-mil errors. Of course, the mil scale was another entirely alien concept, but I decided that was best left for *manana*. Our Salvo airborne gunners had about had their fill of shocks and surprises for one day.

That night in a sweltering hotel room, SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown asked each member of the team for an after-action report on their progress in training at each of several units. Armorer Sam Allen reported that he was making prog-

**During a quick trip to the military headquarters and the National Military Training Center at La Union, Dye and other SOF team members get a close look at the externally mounted mini-gun on a Salvadoran Air Force Hughes 500 Defender helo. The gun bird was sent to La Union to stand-by for missions to counter reported guerrilla activity in the area.**

ress rejuvenating the M60D machine guns used by the El Salvadoran Air Force on their paltry fleet of choppers. Former Air Force F-4 pilot Dana Drenkowski reported that he would likely be making a flight or two with the Salvo combat crews in C-47s (See "Cargo of Tears" on page 55) or A-37s. Former U. S. Marine Force Recon hand Harry Clafin reported that he was locked in to teach rappelling and deep-reconnaissance techniques to the Airborne Battalion's Recon Platoon. Brown made notes and suggestions and then returned his attention to me.

"Alright, Dye, don't sit there looking like somebody just smoked your best buddy. What else is on your mind?"

"Hell, boss, I just can't figure it out."

"Can't figure what out?"

"Well, shit. Before I came down here all



I heard was people bitching in public and private about how difficult it is to teach uneducated *campesinos* the relatively sophisticated techniques to employ modern support weapons. My experience today just won't support that. Goddammit, they can learn and they sure want to. Seems to me the problem is that we're badly underestimating these guys and they're suffering for it."

Brown grunted and spit a cheekful of Skoal into a beer bottle. "Explain."

"Well, it's like those night sights and sight extensions they broke out for the first time today. Now, there's no reason for that. Someone — someone other than me, a guy from the private sector — should have been down here a long time ago convincing those guys that mortars can be fired at night and showing them how to use the weapon from defilade. That's basic employment of a weapon that could have been doing them a lot of good against the Gs."

Brown grinned a silent response. I had reached a conclusion about the U. S. training mission in El Salvador that had dawned on him a long time before.

"You've got it. There's just not enough



**LEFT: Clafin takes to the face of one of the hills near Ilopango Air Base to demonstrate rappelling techniques for Airborne Recon soldiers. Most were completely unfamiliar with the technique despite much time in El Salvador's mountainous terrain. RIGHT: SOF team member and former Force Recon Marine Harry Clafin inspects Salvadoran M16s prior to a trip to a nearby range where he will help the Airborne Battalion Recon Platoon set battle sights on their rifles.**

expertise to go around when you're trying to train units that are fighting a war while trying to learn how," he said. "And as far as I'm concerned, the priorities are being badly misplaced. You saw an excellent example of that out at Ilopango today. If they can't move, shoot and communicate, goddammit, they can't fight. Take the people you were training. That's the Support Squadron of the Airborne Battalion among others. Those guys are the country's immediate-reaction battalion. They should have all the basic 'run and gun' stuff before anyone else gets it. Those guys are the ones who got called out when the Gs hit Cerron Grande last month (See "Showdown at Cerron Grande," page 51).

Sipping on a much needed *cerveza* to cut the dust of the day's instruction, I considered his conclusions. From what I could gather, Brown had hit the nail on the head. The Airborne Battalion 60mm mortar gunners had a number of problems — one hot-shot mortarman named Staff Sergeant Martinez Clemente had told me that of the 12 rounds of HE his crews had fired during the assault to retake the hydroelectric dam at Cerron Grande, four had been duds — but a more basic conclusion was inescapable. No one had yet bothered to teach them to mass their fire and shoot from defilade to cover the advancing infantry. What they were using in the flexible, capable 60mm mortar was a heavier-weight grenade launcher. I hit the rack that night determined to change that if I could. I didn't have the facilities available at Parris Island or Camp Lejeune but, by God, I'd take a well-aimed shot at making those mortar crews mobile, agile and hostile.

Following reveille and morning PT, the paratrooper gunners wolfed down their tortillas and beans, then mustered in the school circle for day two of mortar instruction. With little help from us they laid their guns for direct alignment with the M10 aiming stakes and we got right to work on sight adjustment for correction of initial firing data. Overnight I had asked the XO of the Airborne Battalion to make 15 copies of my firing tables for 60mm HE ammo. There was no need to worry about Illum or Willy Pete firing tables. The soldiers we were training had informed us they did not have any other type of round for their mortars. I thanked Captain Alvaro Rivera Allemande for the copies



and reminded him that he needed to press the U. S. sources at his disposal for illumination rounds. With each gunner clutching and regularly consulting his personal copy of the firing tables, the crews began to sort themselves out. The man with the firing tables was clearly in charge and he assigned another member of his crew to serve as assistant gunner and first ammo handler. We were finally beginning to get somewhere.

We sweated through the day working on setting the M4 sight. I kept everyone longer than usual because *manana* we would be going to the range. If they could master sight adjustment here, they'd be able to see the proof of the pudding when we rained steel on target out there. Before the day ended, just as a lovely purple dusk was descending over Ilopango Air Base, I began to explain about night firing of the 60mm mortar.

I selected another highly motivated tube humper — Staff Sergeant Abraham Rodriguez Turcio, an NCO we nicknamed 'Spring-butt' for his willingness to jump up in the middle of class and ask extremely difficult questions — and we began to assemble the instrument light and aiming-post lights. Unclipping the GI-issue flashlight from his suspender straps, I unscrewed the bottom cap and took out two



BA-30 batteries. "This is all you need to light up your sights and fire the mortar at night." Doubt and skepticism again. These guys knew enough about light discipline and the ability of the Gs to hit a pinpoint target to realize you don't go around flashing light at night no matter how badly your buddies need mortar fire.

In the gathering gloom, I inserted a battery in the aiming-stake light, screwed in a red filter to show a thin, vertical sliver of light, put together the instrument light, slipped it over the collimator assembly on the M4 sight and flipped the switch. Let there be light, I prayed.

There was. Each of the crewmen got a chance to see how the night lights worked, reassure themselves that they did not show sufficient light to make their position visible to an enemy, and bring the mortar onto the red glow of the aiming stake. I couldn't get even half of the excited babble of Spanish, but I could see clearly the light of newly gained professional knowledge burning through the rapidly closing night in El Salvador.

Major Luis M. Turcio, the fiery, U. S.-trained paratroop commander was at the head of the convoy that rolled out of Ilopango on shoot day. In the back of a jammed five-ton truck, squatting on the prickly side of a .50-caliber machine gun, I

was sweating as if someone had an Uzi stuck in my ear. The major had heard good tales about the first two days of mortar instruction for his crews and had warmly informed me that morning that I was in charge of the 60mm range detail. He had other things to do. His 90mm recoilless rifles, *las cincuentas* (.50 cal.) and 81mm mortars would also be pumping rounds into an old lava-flow field some 50 miles from San Salvador.

Allowing the gunners a free rein to demonstrate what they had learned in the classroom, I had the crews lay their mortars on the aiming stakes set out on a rolling knoll and prepare to fire a marking round on initial firing data. Through an excellent set of Steiner binoculars I was able to spot a clump of bushes at a range of around 1,200 meters. The verdant color made locating the target easy among the undulating ebony of the lava flow. The scenario my interpreter gave to the crews included a G heavy machine gun in the bushes and friendly infantry pinned down between us and the bad guys. I wanted everyone on target within three rounds. My SOF team assistants shook their heads. No way. Not after only two days of instruction.

We began to pump rounds. Some of the mortars were in bad shape and would

only fire using the lever-fire function due to burred firing pins. But there was no mistaking the confidence and expertise of the crews. They knew. They understood. Somewhere in the babble of English and Spanish instruction, they had grasped the relationship among tube, sight and aiming stake. I spotted the first few rounds from one or two guns and then let them have at it on their own. Some of the farmboys who had spent their childhood estimating range so they'd know how much sugarcane the Old Man wanted them to cut in a day turned out to be fine FOs. The unsophisticated *campesinos* were making sight corrections algebraically and none had to remove their well-worn combat boots to count on their toes.

I stepped back from the firing line with a satisfied smile on my face. Of the six 60mm mortar crews firing, four were burst-on-target by the third round. I could have kissed them all if the nation's *machismo* would have permitted it. Instead I ran up and down the line like a crazy man, shouting "*felicidades, felicidades!*"

Of course, the shoot was not without the odd dicey moment. I went to plus-four pucker factor when the fourth round out of gun three left the tube sounding like a bad *frijoles* fart. I immediately recognized that scary fizzle. "Short," I screamed diving for cover. "Short round. Get down!" Another lesson from El Salvador: Scared shitless sounds the same in English as it does in Spanish.

I determined that the short was caused by wet increments on the round in question, but I pulled the FOs back behind the firing line for safety. The soldiers who had been directing fire seemed disappointed in my temerity. What the hell, they seemed to say as they trudged back from behind their aiming stakes, the damned thing didn't go off.

They may have been disappointed, but it didn't last long. When the last rounds were fired, my interpreter and I spent another hour answering specific questions. It wasn't students talking to teacher this time. It was one mortarman talking to a bunch of other mortarman.

I accepted the congratulatory beers from my assistants that night with pride, but it was nothing like the pride I felt the following day when I was waiting by the paratroopers' soda stand to debrief the battalion commander on the results of my training efforts.

Two airborne corporals shuffled up to my interpreter and asked his permission to speak to *El Capitan*.

"We just want him to know," they said, "that this is the first time we have really felt like someone cared about *los morteros*. We are very proud that he would come here and show us a better way to shoot. We just wanted to say...well, we just wanted to tell him *muchas gracias*." "*De nada*," I responded. "*De nada, amigos*." You've given me an experience that I'll never forget. ✕



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**SOF** CENTRAL AMERICA

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# AMERICAN IN ARDE

*El Comandante*  
**Rates a Zero**

by Dr. John  
Photos by AP/Wide World

On 30 May 1984, Eden Pastora's control of the Contra group ARDE went up in smoke. A bomb exploded in ARDE headquarters, killing several and wounding the famous Commander Zero. Ironically, the blast punctuated Pastora's weakening grasp on the guerrilla movement to oust the Sandinistas. Prior to the bombing, Contra leaders had grown tired of Commander Zero's refusal to join forces with the conservative FDN in northern Nicaragua even though such a move would produce a united front.

The media lauded Pastora as the ideal leader in the quest to overthrow the Sandinista junta, but the reality is much different. With Pastora's leftist "purity" out of the way, the 24 July ARDE council vote to establish a pact with the FDN was a logical choice in the face of a U.S. aid cutoff.

Prior to all that and under the spell of Pastora's rhetoric, Dr. John went to Nicaragua to fight with ARDE. The experience led to some significant disillusionment, particularly concerning Pastora. This is his story.

**I** was Commander Zero's only gringo: oath, dog tags, arm-band, the works. I was his staff officer for intelligence and reconnaissance, in fact, a job that had little

**The Castro image: Beard and fatigues aid Pastora's media image.**

to do with my situation on this agonizingly hot day in the bush.

Alone, except for *mi amor* (a '50s vintage FAL), I sat in the Nicaraguan jungle. A deserted, rough-plank farmhouse was the only symbol of human occupation. That's when I first had time to think about how I came to be sitting on the bank of a jungle river in a communist country, carrying a rifle and wearing a uniform.

I am a practicing psychologist but having spent nine years in the military, I had a different world outlook than the majority of my colleagues. My professional life, although lucrative, gave me little personal satisfaction and I found no camaraderie with psychologists. After two years of practice I found myself another career. I decided to go to Central America and check out Nicaragua.

Managua was my first stop and I photographed anti-American slogans, the ruins of the national cathedral, the troops marching through the streets, lines in front of shops and other sights a communist country has to offer. I stopped to take a picture of a bungalow — classic Latin style — with a sign out front, a very colorful neon sign, which proclaimed that this was the Ricardo Morales Aviles house. In the center of this sign was a Tom Mix hat (symbol of Augusto C. Sandino) and the letters FSLN (*Frente Sandino Liberacion Nacional*).

I didn't know it, but I was taking a picture of one of the headquarters of the Sandinista party. A young guy stepped out of the house, showed me his .45 and beckoned me inside. I followed him in; my camera and passport were taken from me and a professorial-looking little dude came in and asked me who I was, what I was doing. I answered haltingly in Spanish.

After about an hour and a half of watching two punks with .45s stuck in their belts posture about the room, I was finally released and admonished not to take any more pictures in Managua.

Combat veteran that I am, I felt real fear: I knew I could disappear. It was time to make arrangements to get the hell out of Managua.

On 24 July 1983 I flew to San Jose, Costa Rica. Driving from the airport into the city I noticed the thriving economy, the factories, the trucks loaded with goods and people walking around healthy and smiling, as opposed to Nicaragua where nothing was going on, where people moped sadly about and stood in the market place with plenty of things to sell but no buyers because nobody had any money.

In San Jose I contacted a retired *Los Angeles Times* reporter, who suggested that I talk to Orion Pastora, a cousin of Eden Pastora (Commander Zero), about what they were doing to oust the Sandinistas.



**Determined to fight, ARDE guerrillas wait for action. Contra weapons lack consistency; Chinese Type 56 LMG (center) is flanked by two Soviet AKs.**

Orion Pastora was the press liaison and public information officer of ARDE. He told me that although I could visit *Comandante Cero* at a camp inside Nicaragua, I could not stay and I could not fight. I told him my interests did not lie in visiting or reporting this war, but in becoming a part of it.

After making various connections in ARDE and presenting them with my credentials, I sat back to wait. In the middle of August I got my answer. ARDE seemed happy with my background and my motivation — I was accepted as a member of the armed forces.

On 20 August 1983 I signed papers, took an enlistment oath, was issued a set of dog tags (No. 1486) and was told I would be contacted when the next convoy was headed to the front.

I found myself in the back of a Toyota jeep with five other men, all Nicaraguans. Santiago, a former sergeant in the *Guardia Nacional*, who had been shot in the right elbow by an FAL during the last war, sat beside me. He was recruited by ARDE's agents in Miami to join the fight against his former enemy, the Sandinistas. Santiago was one of the best NCOs I've known.

Also in the back of the truck was *El Aguila* (the Eagle), the best cook I know in Central America. Aguila could make rice and beans taste like chateaubriand. He said he would fight to the death for democracy. Aguila later died, shortly after the battle of El Castillo (see "Assault on Nicaragua's El Castillo, SOF, April '84), in his personal quest for what American citizens take for granted.

We drove through the night along the mountain roads of Costa Rica until we reached the town of Boca Carlos. There the road turned to a trail. We fol-

lowed this trail 20 clicks into the jungle until it dissolved into a sea of mud. The Toyota went in up to the axles. We unloaded our gear and hiked through the darkness. Two women stayed with the jeep. One, a nurse, was going back to Nicaragua as a double agent for ARDE.

At dawn we hiked back to the jeep, about an hour's muddy march down the road, and returned with the two women. Israel, a young freedom fighter described by Steve Salisbury (see "Assault on El Castillo"), and another ARDE guerrilla met us when we returned to the outpost. They led us to Shorty's farm. Shorty is a wealthy Costa Rican with extensive holdings along the border and a fine large house in San Jose. He's also a platoon leader and an active fighter.

Shorty's was a working farm, complete with livestock, outbuildings and cultivated fields, but when it was time to be issued equipment the floors opened up and Alice packs and web gear were distributed. In a side room the wall upon which were hanging saddles and other tack swung open to reveal stacks of *cammys* and *jungle* boots. We then went out to the barn, climbed up to the loft which housed the corn crib, the corn was shoveled aside and the floor raised to reveal at least 1,000 AK-47s, a few FALs and even a rusty old Garand.

We went from Shorty's farm up the Rio San Juan to a camp known as *Zeta Tres* (Z-3). We settled into a training regimen which included patrolling, marksmanship, survival tactics and an introduction to camp life a la Nicaragua. This included fishing in the Rio San Juan, and until I learned that the fresh-water sharks were man-eaters, bathing and swimming. The fare was abundant and tasty considering the circumstances: fresh fish from the nearby river and streams, an occasional armadillo, all the rice and beans you could stand, quantities of canned meat, fish and fresh fruits. However, the days stretched into weeks with little contact with the main forces of ARDE, and I grew restless and



impatient for some action.

Finally, the great day arrived. Toward the end of the first day of September 1983, Pastora himself came to our camp with a picked bodyguard of some dozen men. He strode into camp like a bantam rooster, sporting a Castro-type beard and wearing a fatigue cap emblazoned with a red star. Pastora is a rather small man, stocky, but otherwise physically unimpressive. He does carry himself with that almost indefinable air of one used to command. Pastora has boasted that his is a true "People's Army." There's no rank, no insignia, no ceremony. He inquired as to my military background and specialties and grunted an approval when I mentioned reconnaissance and intelligence. He then announced that I would not join the raid on Castillo, that I would join his staff instead and help him prepare various tactical plans.

Pastora constantly changed his mind. In fact, it was sort of a joke among the soldiers. We prepared many tactical plans regarding patrol action before, and after, the upcoming attack on the Sandinista stronghold at El Castillo, all of which were enthusiastically approved by Pastora, but never implemented. The next day, he'd ask for new plans or come up with a totally different idea.

Pastora could expect little help from the Costa Rican authorities, especially the security forces headed by a cabinet-level minister named Angel Solano, who may well receive his paycheck in rubles. If he doesn't, the KGB is getting a lot of work out of him for free. Solano's people harassed our shipments of supplies, arrested our people on various pretexts and raided our training camps inside Costa Rica. Pastora headed for San Jose to put an end to the harassment.

A very important shipment, including mortars and machine guns, had been confiscated and Pastora went to investigate the possibility of liberating ARDE's property from the clutches of the so-called neutral, "democratic" Costa Rican government. Pastora decided on direct action; he would steal the stuff back. I was told to wait on the river near my former camp Zeta Tres. After a few days of no contact from anyone I began to feel, correctly, it turned out, somewhat abandoned. I left my FAL and other ARDE gear with a family of Indian collaborators, walked the 40 kilometers to Boca San Carlos where I then hired a car and driver to take me to San Jose.

When I reported to the headquarters at San Pedro, Pastora said with a groan that he had forgotten that he left me on the river. All 12 of his bodyguard were already incarcerated in a Costa Rican jail, due to the failure of Pastora's plan to burglarize the warehouse holding our confiscated arms. After my experiences with the planning and re-planning of missions that never occurred, my observation that on two occasions he had postponed the attack on El Castillo because some journalists were



coming in to interview him (he considered press contact more important than contact with the Sandinistas) and my general disillusionment with this "hero," I requested a transfer to a more active unit. This was granted.

I was sent to a camp called *Luna Roja* (Red Moon), 400 meters inside Costa Rica, and about 50 kilometers west of El Castillo. *Luna Roja* was not like the Zeta camps where Pastora headquartered. I learned many things about Pastora's army while at *Luna Roja*, not the least of which was that the further an officer is removed politically from Pastora, the less supplies he receives for his men. At *Luna Roja* we had approximately 60 men — and seven canteens. We had Alice packs but no straps. We had belts but no harnesses, or suspenders. Weapons, but few cleaning kits, and an extremely limited number of

mortar rounds, hand grenades and RPG-7 rockets. Nor was the food as good as what I had enjoyed at the Zeta camps.

Morale was poor at *Luna Roja*; there had been several recent changes in command and the camp seemed to be basically divided into two groups, Pastora loyalists of the FRS (*Frente Revolucionario Sandino*) and forces loyal to Alfonso Robelo. The camp was commanded by a Robelo supporter, who was a chemist and readily admitted that he had no military expertise. As he was not a favorite of Pastora nor of the supply officer of San Pedro, he was often in San Pedro begging and scrounging to keep the camp operating. We averaged two desertions a week during the Fall of '83 and there were even thefts — almost unheard of in the ARDE forces.

The second in command, a stocky



**In Miami, after a four-city tour, Pastora said he would take the side of his people if the U.S. invaded Nicaragua.**

Nicaraguan with an Abe Lincoln beard named Surdo, was a loyal FRS man. Surdo was often in charge due to the continued absences of the camp commander.

At *Luna Roja* my primary duties included training recruits and reservists. Unfortunately, our training did not include marksmanship because of our proximity to a large Sandinista camp which very actively patrolled its area of responsibility. Training did include basic individual skills and small unit tactics. Latins are not used to American training procedures, especially as applied at Parris Island or Ft. Bragg. The sight of one of their *companeros* getting a boot in his ass because he was crawling with it too high off the ground,

sent them into paroxysms of laughter. Nonetheless, these Nicaraguan patriots trained hard, were enthusiastic and at no time manifested any resentment at being ordered around by a gringo.

Due to the dietary deficiencies, the rain, mud and general lack of hygiene manifested by many third-world soldiers, we kept a pretty constant 25-percent sick list. One of the friendly farmers in the area told us of a grove of banana trees and a yucca patch near the Sandinista camp. For these reasons and also to get the men out in a tactical situation to conclude a training cycle, the camp commander ordered a patrol into Sandinista territory for the purpose of bringing back bananas and yucca.

Twenty-four of us set out through the jungle carrying weapons and empty sacks. I was in charge of security for the patrol and after reaching our objective set up a

perimeter defense with two ambushes on the trails leading into this clearing while the other men cut stalks of bananas and dug up the delicious roots. We loaded our bags to the max, withdrew as quietly as we came and brought our booty back to *Luna Roja* for the feast. With some real nourishment finally under our belts, a training cycle completed and the weekend warriors arriving, the men were now hot for some action, and we got it.

We received orders to attack the Sandinista camp immediately to our north and set out two days later, commanded by Surdo. I was second in command. With our weekend warriors we numbered over 60 men fit for combat duty. We loaded up our two 60mm mortars, five cases of mortar rounds, one RPG-7 with seven rocket grenades. We had two M60s, a good old Browning .30 (*La Treintra*) and two RPDs. All the platoon and squad leaders carried FALs and the grunts packed the ubiquitous AK-47.

We set off at 0500 hours, moving quickly and silently through the rain forest. Heavily armed and carrying 500 rounds of extra ammo, we found the going was not easy. We moved on game trails and crossed streams that were bridged by logs sometimes no more than 12 inches in diameter.

Eight hours later, we neared the outposts protecting the Sandinista camp. The column halted and then turned around. We probed another spot in the jungle; once again the column halted and turned around. I crept to Surdo's side and asked him what was happening that we couldn't get past these outposts. He said that because they were manned, we would have to scrub this part of the mission and go to our secondary target.

I suggested killing the men in the outposts. I mean, after all, we're at war with these people. They're the enemies. Why don't we just kill them and proceed on to our primary target? He replied that it would make too much noise. Evidently, in Surdo's training, he had never learned any other way of killing human beings than with a gun. I considered it an inappropriate time and place to give lessons in silent killing and acquiesced to his decision to attack the secondary target.

More than 60 men walked eight hours, carrying heavy, valuable equipment through a very inhospitable jungle and then were turned back by outposts manned by a handful of Sandinistas. In the debriefing session after the mission, I suggested that in the future recon patrols be sent out to establish the presence and exact location of such outposts and that lessons be given in silent killing. It was at this point I began to think of Pastora's military tactics as more appropriate to "The Amateur Hour."

We returned to a hootch we had passed on our way to the primary objective, set up a perimeter and settled down for a night's rest. A floor never felt so good.

The next morning dawned clear and

sunny — a bad sign — I like the rain. It masks your footfalls so the sound won't travel more than a few feet. It restricts visibility and reduces the enemy's ability to see you coming. Fortunately, as we neared our secondary objective, it began to pour. Our target was now a Sandinista command post directly on the Rio San Juan. (At this point the Rio San Juan is well into Nicaragua. Down at the Zeta camps, it forms the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.) Surdo and I had worked out a double ambush plan of action: I was to take nine men, and, using maximum concealment, proceed to a point directly across the river from the command post. We would then wait for the arrival of the supply boat, ambush it and lay heavy fire into the command post. The sound of this action would then, hopefully, elicit a response from the nearby camp commander who we expected to then send assistance to his men under fire. When reinforcements arrived, we would ambush them too.

Our main force was on a hill overlooking the command post and had a view of about two kilometers down the river in the direction from which the relief would have to come. Mortars, machine guns and two dozen riflemen with FALs and AK-47s awaited them. The rest of our patrol was guarding the egress route.

We had to proceed down a hill, fortunately thick with grass, but in a direct line of sight with the target. We crawled, we slid, we tried to get our bodies under the grass as we inched our way down the wet slope, directly under the guns of the Sandinistas across the river. I had raised my head a few inches, looked across the river and saw a Sandinista soldier looking out the window of the command post, a Kalashnikov in his hands. I thought we were all dead, that we had been seen and the mortars and AKs would open up any minute. But he didn't see us. There's a lot to be said for jungle cammies.

We arrived at the river and took up our positions. Have you ever lain in the jungle and endured a heavy downpour for two hours? It cleanses the soul, to say nothing of the cammies. While I lay there waiting, I reflected on my surprise at seeing the incredible beauty of Nicaragua. I thought of the brutality of the Sandinista regime and the sadness of the people I saw on the streets of Managua. I remembered the vacant-eyed women with pale, translucent skin, who worked for Representative So-and-so, or this or that left-wing "human rights" organization, who chatted knowingly of Comandante Ortega's (leader of the FSLN junta) commitment to raising the standard of living of the people as they sipped cocktails in the lounge of the Hotel Intercontinental, two blocks from the slums of Managua. I thought of the flight into Costa Rica and being able to breathe relatively free air and how good that felt. But a cloud then crept into my thinking as I recalled my disappointment with Commander Zero and my realization



## ANOTHER CONTRA COMMENT ON COMMANDANTE ZERO

The bubble of Pastora's charisma has been irreversibly burst, but it is not only the ideologically-minded politicians who have rejected his hollow posturing. Nicaraguan contras who have fought with him also tell disturbing tales of his bombast and reluctance to fight.

In June 1984, SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown was in Central America looking for answers to the Pastora enigma among other subjects he was investigating. At Misura headquarters in Tegucigalpa, Honduras he found yet another chink in the armor Pastora has tried to wrap around his myth. An advisor to the Misura Indians was ready to tell his impressions of Pastora and the struggle to oust the Sandinista junta from Nicaragua. A former member of Somoza's National Guard, he has fought the communist government since its inception in 1979.

Humping a ruck through the swamps and jungles of northern Nicaragua is never a pleasant task. It becomes even more galling with the realization that one of your fellow guerrilla groups (Pastora's ARDE) is getting regular resupply while you are barefoot and living off the land.

Brown's conversation with the Misura advisor revealed more of the same story. Pastora gets all the aid and does little of the fighting, due primarily to his accessibility to the U. S. press and a "media darling" image. For the Misura, resupply is the biggest problem. They would be perfectly happy fighting a non-stop war against the Sandinistas but they can't do it without arms, ammunition and equipment. Resupply by air would be a perfect solution but that requires either big bucks for renting aircraft or an amenable Uncle Sam

**Commander Zero, the Sandinista: Pastora speaks to reporters on 17 July 1979 after learning of President Somoza's flight from Nicaragua.**

who can order CIA funds into the effort. The Misura have neither. What many of them do have is an extremely low opinion of the self-centered fellow contra, Pastora.

Brown's source in Tegucigalpa claimed that ARDE had never re-supplied Misura formation despite the fact that Pastora had U. S.-supplied helicopters at his disposal. "Maybe the pilots are scared of MiGs out of Puerto Cabezas," he commented."

And the Misura opinion of Pastora? "It's clear that he is anti-Sandinista," said the Latin instructor to the minority forces who had been on the CIA payroll for a paltry sum, "but Pastora is very ambitious and I believe that he has entered this adventure because he was not given the importance he thought he deserved (by the Sandinistas) after the revolution." That squares with consistent rumors in all contra camps that Pastora defected in a fit of pique when he was offered only the relatively-unimportant post of Assistant Defense Minister in the Sandinista government. Apparently he thought his glamorous role in seizing the palace in Managua merited a more substantial reward.

Pastora's reputation as an aggressive, dedicated military commander has always been largely unmerited. "I have had the opportunity to fight against him (Pastora) in the previous war and he has never really done anything on his own," Brown's Misura source claimed. "Someone always formulates things for him. The Cubans from the International Brigade planned the palace takeover for him (in 1979) which anyone could have done; he just shot a few guards and entered the palace. That is how he got his fame."

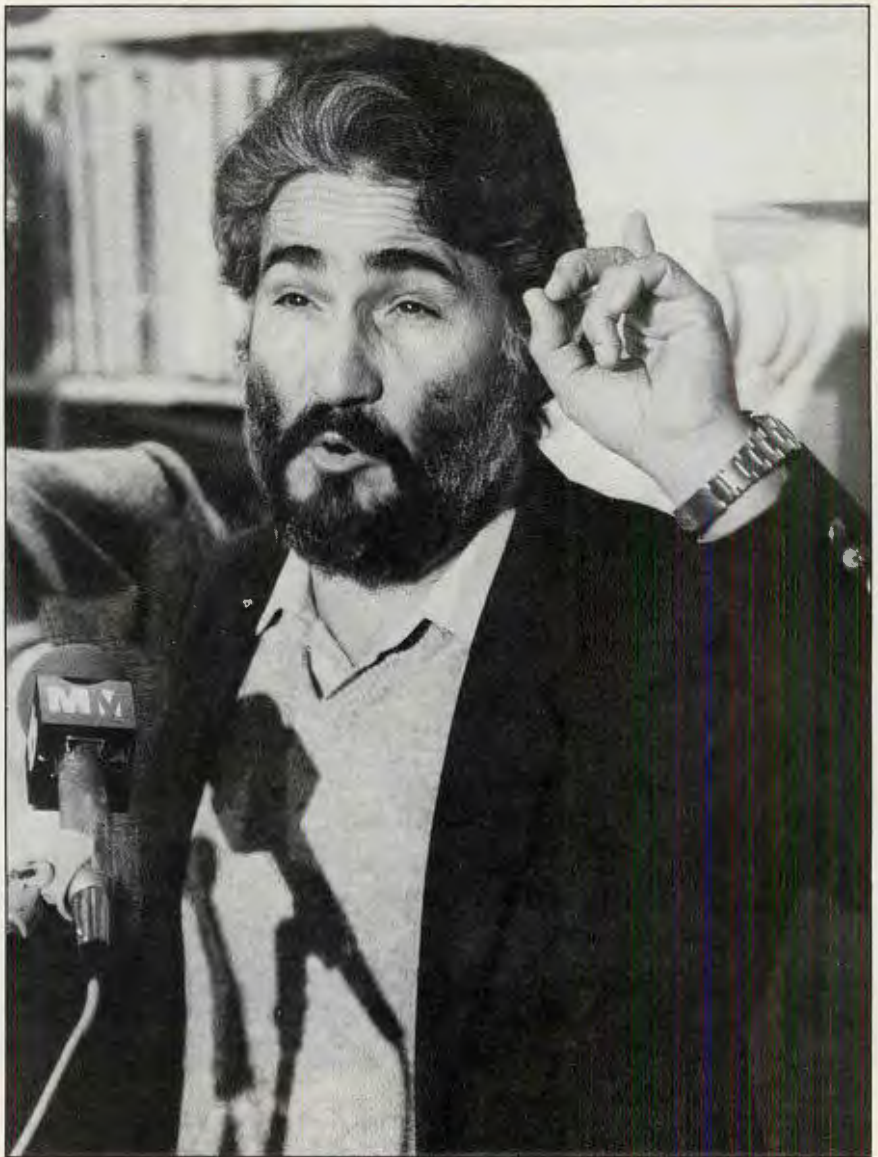
that once again a hero was found to have feet of clay.

You may remember the bally-hoo about the "charismatic leader" who seized the *Palacio Nacional* and was a member of the Sandinista junta after the overthrow of Somoza. In fact, he was the vice-minister of defense. It is generally thought in Nicaraguan and Costa Rican anti-communist circles that had Eden Pastora Gomez been appointed minister of defense (instead of vice-minister), he would still be living in Managua and not in the jungles. "Closet Castro" is a term used to describe him by his enemies, but these are enemies who are also fighting and dying in the jungles of Nicaragua as they struggle to free their country from the Castro-supported Marxist regime. When I was a member of his staff I remember being appalled at his almost total ignorance of basic military tactics. But when I talked to people who had known him prior to his involvement in any sort of armed conflict, it became apparent that the man had no military training nor could he have been expected to have any. He worked as a lumberjack, a shark fisherman and a fishing guide. These are not the sort of occupations that would make one a Latin American Clausewitz.

Pastora is charismatic, especially if you're a Nicaraguan peasant or journalist. Those are the two groups who seem to be most infatuated with his oratory and personal style. Oratory is Pastora's strong suit. Daily he harangues the troops from his safe encampment many miles from any action. His speeches, like those of his hero, Fidel Castro, usually last from two to four hours and say little that is substantive. He uses words beautifully — so does Jesse Jackson. Both have more to say than I want to hear.

In the Zeta camps when Pastora came on the radio, all activity ceased and the faithful gathered around the radio, like disciples at the feet of the master, while he spoke of this "revolution of love" that we were fighting. I, frankly, was not there carrying on a revolution of love, I was there to kill communists. At *Luna Roja* and the other camps much further removed physically from Pastora's headquarters, only the officers of the *Frente Revolucionaria Sandina* listened to the daily broadcasts. The troops preferred to listen to the FDN broadcasts; there they learned of action as their brothers on the northern front slugged it out with the communists on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, back in Nicaragua . . . the hum of an outboard brought me back to the here-and-now as the supply boat approached the Sandinista command post. The tempo of my pulse increased as I opened the LAW and peered through the pop-up sights. The supply boat drew closer and closer. When the prow of the Sandinista boat entered our killing zone, I pressed down the trigger button of the LAW — nothing happened. I shoved the safety forward once again, still nothing.



**Pastora tells newsmen he "seeks help from the American public" in his fight against the Sandinista government.**

Fortunately, the Chinese-made RPG did not malfunction and simultaneously with my oath of disgust the rocket grenade struck the bow of the supply boat, hurling two of its occupants into the water. Our small arms opened up, raking the boat and the command post. The Sandinistas never got one round off. By this time I had thrown the LAW into the Rio San Juan, picked up my FAL and started firing three-round bursts into the command post.

We withdrew, singly, up the hill, covered by our comrades until my force was back at the top of the hill with the main body. Now, we settled down to await the arrival of the Sandinista "cavalry." Our plan worked. Two boatloads, 40 Sandinistas in each, soon came around the bend. We hit them with mortars, machine guns and small arms fire before they had a chance to disembark on the banks of the river. A handful made it to cover of the jungle and returned fire.

You could hear the bullets hitting the trees over our head with a kind of knock-knock-knock sound, but after a few mi-

minutes only one AK answered our bursts. We must have sent 5,000 rounds after this one poor sonofabitch. Sounds like the U.S. Army, right? After five minutes of trying to kill the sole survivor, we called it a day and headed back by our prearranged escape route, picking up our *road guards* as we hustled through the jungle. As we left you could still hear the lone AK banging away at our former positions. *Salud, mi enemigo bravo.*

After our return to *Luna Roja*, the veterans set about cleaning weapons and checking equipment while the new men congratulated themselves. At the debriefing I mentioned the efficacy of reconnaissance patrols and silent killing and it was agreed that these novel concepts really should be a part of our training. Surdo, however, was very busy congratulating himself on a successful mission and downplayed the wasted day attempting to hit the primary target. The weekend warriors put away their weapons, changed into civies and went home to the wife and kids. The rest of us went down to eat some more rice and beans.

*Continued on page 109*



**SOF CENTRAL AMERICA**

# THE TAKING OF EL TABLON

**A Victory  
for Morazan Voters**

**Text & Photos by Steve Salisbury**

**G**UERRILLA forces in El Salvador's turbulent Morazan area were determined to keep people away from the polls on 6 May when the nation's controversial elections were held. An order from fire-brand FMLN leader Joachim Villalobos was carried by messenger through the mountainous jungle of the area to leaders of all fighting formations: close the roads, harass the people, steal the identity cards each citizen must display in order to vote — if necessary, kill those who insist on going to the polling places. Villalobos (since demoted and expelled as a resistance leader) was counting on the disruption to convince the people of Morazan that the democratic process was simply a crock of idealistic crap.

He did not count on the zeal, dedication and tenacity of his opposite number in Morazan, provincial army commander Lieutenant Colonel Jorge Adalberto Cruz. Anticipating guerrilla strategy prior to the elections, Cruz led his units into the field and dogged leftist guerrillas in a sweep of the area's hills, fields and scrub brush to keep insurgent bands from making a mockery of the elections.

On 25 March, the eve of the first hotly disputed electoral round, Cruz' American-trained Lenca Battalion kicked off a search-and-destroy mission deep inside



guerrilla territory. His primary objective was the small town of Corinto, just eight kilometers from the Honduran border. There were at least 150 eligible voters there and Cruz wanted to ensure that the army was going to make it safe for them to reach the polls. The insurgents had little interest in tangling with the fired-up soldiers of the Lenca Battalion and took to the hills with the main body of rebel troops. Only a few snipers were left behind to ping away at the advancing soldiers. Cruz, at the head of his units as usual, was torn between elation at the obvious success of his sweep and disappointment that he couldn't stack up a few guerrilla bodies to demonstrate the skill of his veteran infantrymen. He hoped it was an omen and made plans to resweep the hills just prior to the 6 May runoff elections.

The aggressive veteran of so many similar campaigns later told me he should have known it was not to be. Cruz couldn't have predicted it, but when he led his troops into the jungle in early May, he was headed for a short, bloody punch-up with one of the most dangerous rebel formations in Morazan: the zealots of the elite Rafael Arce Zablah Brigade. The encounter would cost him three badly wounded soldiers and a lot of sweat and

**ABOVE: Salvadoran soldiers joyfully anticipate action while riding a commandeered bus from Gotera to the jump-off point at Cacaopera. BELOW: Don't mess with us: The bodies of dead guerrillas tell the story of the Salvadoran armies' determination to keep the elections safe.**



strain for a fight of such short duration, but he had to force the Gs away from the main rural population centers outside the provincial capital of San Francisco Gotera.

The veteran Lenca Battalion bore the brunt of guerrilla resistance near a little village called El Tablon.

For several weeks since he returned to his headquarters *cuartel* at San Miguel, Cruz' recon patrols had been reporting guerrilla forces massing in the hills near the capital. They posed a serious threat to security and plans for voting among citizens there so Cruz ordered Lenca to launch a preemptive strike.

Led by aggressive battalion commander Captain Montalvo, the unit threw together a convoy and headed for San Francisco Gotera to pick up supplies, munitions and final instructions before reboarding the trucks and roaring off in the direction of Cacaopera, the foothills staging area for their operation. With Cruz' blessing, I went along with Lenca's 1st Company.

Our jam-packed vehicles, including a civilian bus commandeered for the trip, rattled through Gotera's cobblestone streets. None of the troops had any doubt that they were headed for contact and, between the time they spent checking and rechecking their weapons, they psyched



themselves by whooping and shouting at civilians strolling the streets of the capital. Outside the city limits, the trucks stirred up a dust storm which bathed us all in an itchy layer of grime. Most of the adrenalin had disappeared by the time our convoy reached Cacaopera.

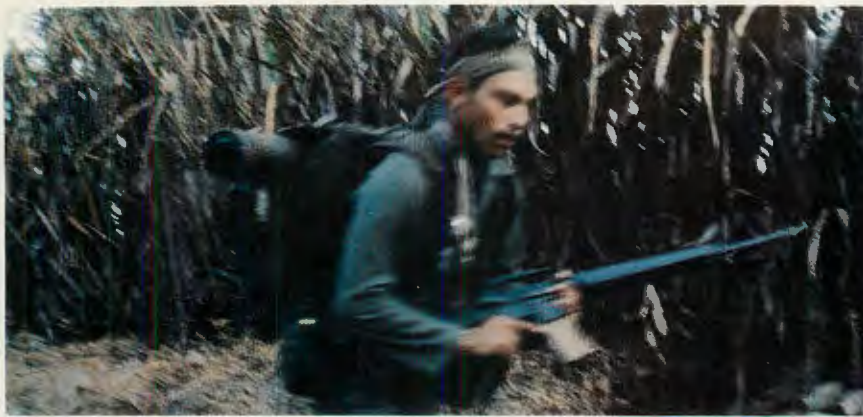
We clambered off the trucks about a kilometer south of the Torola River and spent some time wiping down rifles and trying to cough the cloying dust out of our lungs. This was guerrilla territory and every moment wasted standing on the road in plain sight reduced the possibility of surprising the enemy. On command, the NCOs formed their squads and we pushed off the road into the heavy jungle, climbing steadily uphill in the oppressive, late-afternoon heat.

In the final hour-and-a-half of daylight we struggled through three kilometers of dense jungle and then spread out to make camp on a vast hill just a click from the last reported rebel location. Given our proximity to the enemy an order was quickly passed to the troops on the line around our perimeter: no smoking and keep the noise down to a whisper. There would be no cooking fires, and the cold tortilla topped with a miserly scoop of black beans didn't do much to relieve the hunger we all felt after the rugged approach march. We spread our sweat-soaked shirts on tree limbs to dry and tried not to think about anything other than sleep. The night wind whistling through the bush turned from a chilling breeze to a numbing cold as Lenca Battalion troops wordlessly relieved each other on sentry duty. With my plastic poncho pulled tightly around my shivering body I curled into a ball in the mushy underbrush and began to fall into something resembling sleep.

Naturally, it was about this time that the artillery battery outside San Francisco Gotera chose to begin H&I fire into the area to keep the Gs from getting a good night's sleep before we tangled with them *manana*. High explosive rounds from the Salvadoran 105mm howitzers sailed over our position with an echoing whistle. It was quite a fireworks display and interesting enough to keep me from going back to sleep. El Salvador still has a relatively unsophisticated army, and artillery gunnery at night can be a precise pursuit. I wanted to be alert enough to move quickly if someone in the Fire Direction Center miscalculated and dropped one short of the target on the hill opposite our position.

The rounds burst just beyond a ridge-line that formed a horizon bisecting the moonlit sky. Using the flash-bang method, I calculated we'd have to hump three to four clicks the next day to reach the impact area.

**ABOVE LEFT: Rounds from a U.S.-manufactured 105mm howitzer pound rebel positions near the tiny village of El Tablon. LEFT: Encountering sniper fire, Salvadoran soldiers take cover and await their officer's orders.**



**Sprinting towards cover, a Salvo trooper holds his M16 at the ready.**

## VILLALOBOS: DESERTERS MUST DIE

Guerrilla activity in El Salvador has been following distinct trends lately. Most of the senior officers interviewed by SOF team members reported an increase in mining incidents along the main roadways in their areas. They also reported an increase in desertions from the guerrilla ranks. In the final analysis, that probably represents bad news and good news for the Duarte administration and the Salvadoran Army.

First the bad news. Most senior Salvadoran soldiers believe the increase in the use of Claymores and other command-detonated explosive devices along their main supply-and-transportation routes is entirely intentional. The Gs want to force army units down out of the hills by making it necessary for them to patrol the roads. This accomplishes two things: a decrease in the relentless pressure some army units are putting on the guerrilla forces and an opportunity for the Gs to keep their resupply and communication lines open. The latter benefit would allow them to stage people and munitions for a major push on government installations and assets just prior to the U.S. national elections.

No one is fooling the insurgent leaders about the effect successful attacks on the newly elected Salvadoran administration would have on President Reagan and his foreign policy.

Now the good news. SOF team members had heard rumors of large-scale desertions from guerrilla ranks before they went to El Salvador in July. One story indicated former guerrilla leader Joachim Villalobos had issued a blanket immediate-execution order for any G that deserted. When the team arrived in San Salvador and posed the question to army authorities, the story was partially confirmed. There was no proof of a blanket order, but staffers Dale Dye, Jim Pate and Steve Salisbury were able to actually see Villalobos' notebook — taken from the body

of a dead guerrilla — and confirm that prior to his ouster in July, Villalobos had indeed ordered the execution of at least three former insurgents who apparently stole money, as well as their issue weapons, and either returned to their families or turned themselves in to government forces.

Villalobos' order called for them to be shot on sight by any guerrilla who happened to see the deserters. One former guerrilla fell under the death sentence for having the temerity to laugh at Villalobos. A number of other Salvadoran Army sources also told of hearing similar death-for-deserters stories from former guerrillas.

This information fits well with reports of increasing forced impressment of Salvadoran citizens by the guerrillas who use the unwilling replacements to flesh out their ranks. Apparently things are not all roses and revolutionary zeal among the communists in El Salvador.

— Dale Dye

**Desertion rates are increasing within leftist guerrilla ranks. If caught, the guilty ones are shot on the spot.**



That walk in the woods began around 0430 in pre-dawn darkness the next morning.

A chilling mist had come in with the nighttime fog and we found all our gear wet. Weapons were rapidly dried while the four Lenca Battalion company commanders held a hasty conference to plan the day's advance. Guerrillas had plenty of concealment in the rugged mountains undulating along our scheduled axis of advance. Every foothill would have to be covered and every clump of bush probed. It was bound to be slow, dirty work.

Lieutenant Villaslobos, the tough, muscular commander of 1st Company, didn't care much for the fact that the guerrilla leader he had spent so much time chasing around Morazan bore a name so close to his own and he was anxious to mix it up as soon as possible. Nothing would please him more than to drill Joachim Villalobos right between the running lights. He made no secret about that and told his men to leave the guerrilla leader for him in the unlikely event that someone spotted him during the sweep. He'd been away from the campsite having an early look around the area. When he swaggered back into the camp he reached for the binoculars hanging from the neck of one of his men. Something on a nearby hillside had caught his attention.

He swiftly panned the area and grunted when he spotted movement. Three guerrillas carrying rifles and rucksacks were busting their asses to clear the area. Apparently last night's artillery barrage had convinced them it would be unhealthy to remain in this grid square. Villaslobos flashed an evil grin. "We're going to trap those *hijos de putas*," he snapped. Quickly mustering a detail of his best troopers, he dispatched Sergeant Martinez, a bush-wise veteran NCO with *la cincuenta* and two squads for security. They'd emplace the heavy .50-caliber machine gun on an adjacent *finger* of high ground and do some long-range sniping. Martinez had been known to bring down Gs at astounding ranges with the big, heavy-barreled weapon.

It seemed like a hell of an opportunity to observe an expert at work, so I tagged along with the gun team. The bush along our route was heavy and we were forced to pick our way carefully, one man behind the other. It was a rough hump and I was glad I hadn't volunteered to help carry the gun. The three troopers under the burden of barrel, receiver and tripod were straining and sweating like coolies. I asked Martinez if he was worried about the rebels getting out of the area before we could get set up to shoot. He just grinned and pointed to the jungle around us. They were having to hump through the same stuff.

*Continued on page 106*





**SOF CENTRAL AMERICA**

# MISSION MISURA

## A Cross-Border Convoy into Sandinista Swamps

Text & Photos by Steve Salisbury



On 26 June, SOF staffer Steve Salisbury was the first Western journalist to infiltrate deep inside Nicaragua with the Special Forces of "Misura," a Honduras-based Contra movement of some 2,500 Moskito, Sumo and Rama Indians as well as Creole blacks fighting in northeastern Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinista regime. The distinction almost cost him his life.

Misura's Special Forces, known by their Spanish acronym TEA (Tropa Especial Atlantica — pronounced TEYah — Atlantic Special Troops), were formed in October 1983. These 72 specially-selected



volunteers were trained by Latin Contras in a six-month course that covered clandestine warfare in all of its nastiest forms. Half of the TEA troops have made as many as 12 parachute jumps at training centers in Honduras. "While we don't have the capability to mount paratrooper missions," said Latin Contra instructor "Fifi," "just the experience of jumping makes you a better soldier; you overcome fear and danger."

TEA operates in groups of no more than 20 men and usually conducts sabotage operations against Sandinista troops in their area. Here is Salisbury's first-hand report of his experiences.

**T**HE rain finally stopped drumming onto the sleepy Honduran port at 0300 on 26 June. Dim moonlight revealed the shadowy figures of 10 TEA commandos emerging from a dirty shack. They slipped down a muddy bank to the sandy Caribbean shore, sloshing in knee-high surf to load a 20-foot fiberglass boat with supplies and drums of gasoline. Getting in, they sat wherever space permitted, nervously fondling the AKs and M16s resting on their laps. As I sat down in front of the two pilots, they started two 35-horsepower Johnson outboards and

roared off on a treacherous, 20-hour ordeal that would end 100 miles inside hostile Nicaraguan territory.

The boat gathered speed and bounced over waves, drenching all of us in stinging salt spray. Our ponchos were worthless in the steady shower. A storm rumbled into our path from out of the inky blackness and the sea became a liquid rollercoaster. We were cold, cramped and sick. It occurred to me that I had never seen the faces of these men who were leading me on a mission that could easily end in disaster at the hands of roving Sandinista patrols.

There was nothing any of us could do except lick the brine from our lips, grin and bear it. At dawn the overcast sky turned an ominous violet. It cleared briefly and a warm sun burned some strength back into my raw body. I saw the faces of my comrades for the first time. Most looked more Latin or Jamaican than Indian. Racial identity is hard to make among these people. The only common denominator seems to be an oppressed minority's hatred of the Sandinistas.

Near noon we arrived at the mouth of the Coco River which forms the frontier with Nicaragua. We cruised into inland waters and stopped at an Indian village. It was raw, remote and entirely typical of Indian settlements in this turbulent area.

**ABOVE: Miskito refugees gather to cheer Misura forces visiting their camp. All refugees are violently anti-Sandinista and generally consider Misura combat patrols as their personal form of revenge. BELOW: Miskito refugee woman in Honduran camp showed what she claimed were the remains of two Indian boys tortured and cremated by Sandinista troops.**





Some 250,000 Indians live on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast: 200,000 Miskitos, 30,000 Sumos and 20,000 Ramas, according to Latin American estimates. They speak different dialects. Many speak English and Spanish as second languages. The fourth minority is an estimated 100,000 English-speaking blacks, or Creoles, who are descended from the Jamaican farm laborers imported during the last century. When the much-touted fruit industry in Nicaragua, for which the Creoles had been imported as slave laborers, failed, the blacks became fishermen, as were their Indian neighbors.

The Indians and Creoles have been traditionally isolated from their Latin countrymen and were pretty much ignored during the war against Somoza. All that's changed. The Sandinista takeover has brought burned villages, forced relocation, torture and murder to the Caribbean coast. As many as 40,000 Miskito refugees have now fled to Honduras.

The villagers in the steamy camp on the Honduran side of the Coco were happy to see us. Most were refugees from Nicaragua; skinny men and women cradling children with distended bellies, protruding ribs and gaunt eyes. The United Nations Commission for Refugees refuses to help these and thousands of other destitute people along the banks of the Coco in Honduras. Dwight Harriman of the Commission office in Moscow indicated aid was being withheld because UN planners think the Indian refugees would share food and clothing with Contra bands such as our 10-man SF group. They are probably right. But the UN supports several similar refugee camps along the disputed Honduras-El Salvador border. Despite their poverty, the Indian refugees made room in the squalor for our tired, drenched team.

The commandos hung their camouflage uniforms to dry. Nearly naked, we entered a hut built on stilts where we wolfed canned sardines and quickly fell into exhausted sleep.

We continued our voyage at dusk. Under the dim glow of sunset we left the Coco and rounded Cape Gracias a Dios into Nicaraguan waters. These were just as rough as the Honduran waves which had buffeted us the previous night. We were soaked in minutes. I started to doze in the inky darkness. Suddenly, shouting in the Miskito dialect brought me fully alert. I caught only one word: "*Piri-coacos!*" Sandinistas.

A commando was pointing to the lights of two boats coming at us. Our pilot put the rudder hard over, goosed the engine and we hauled ass out to sea.

"They're fishing boats the *piris* arm with .50 caliber machine guns," shouted a lean commando over the snarl of the straining

engine. Three more sets of bobbing lights appeared on the dark horizon. The commandos were silent, their attention and rifle sights riveted firmly on the threat. Searchlight beams speared the darkness but the low silhouette of our unlighted boat got us safely through the danger zone.

The outboard motors suddenly sputtered, beginning a series of breakdowns, the worst directly opposite the Sandinista Coast Guard station at Puerto Cabezas. The men cursed in the darkness and fumbled with the engine controls. We sweated out what seemed to be an eternity of powerless drifting, praying that the Coast Guard patrols were asleep.

The relief was audible when the engines finally revved back into life. We were behind schedule and that meant full-bore all the way. Unfortunately for all aboard our craft, we ran full-bore into a sudden, violent squall that seemed to swoop down on us from nowhere.

The wind and blowing spume stirred thousands of tiny, glowing sea creatures from the deep and they washed over us like sheets of liquid fire. Our gutty pilot held the bow into the wind and waves, navigating by some inner instinct.

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## The Sandinista takeover has brought burned villages, forced relocation, torture and murder to the Caribbean coast.

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Suddenly, a towering, 10-foot wave crashed over the bow and our boat rapidly swamped. We were sinking fast, miles from any shore. Even the placid commandos shouted anxiously. We jumped into the sea, holding onto the gunwales of our boat. My God, I thought. This is the end of it. There's no way a soaked man, tired and scared, can stay afloat, much less swim in this soup. We seem doomed to join the 12 Misura fighters the Caribbean had already claimed during previous cross-border sea passages.

The TEA commandos clung tenaciously to the boat and began bailing furiously. I helped them push our cargo toward the stern in order to give the bow more buoyancy in riding the rolling waves. The wind and weather continued to pound us. Finally, we bailed enough water to get back in the boat. I sat shivering and cursing the weather. We rocked precariously toward our destination.

With dawn the storm finally passed, letting us rock gently in a glassy sea. Motoring up and down the coastline with the sun rising over the horizon, we searched for the prearranged signal that would mark

our landing site. When a commando finally spotted the light, the signal flashed was incorrect. Fearing a Sandinista ambush, our commander ordered the pilots to make for the far end of a nearby inlet. We waded ashore under the first rays of a pale yellow sunrise, keeping rifles leveled and on the alert for movement in the brush that marked the beginning of the jungle.

Simply standing after our ordeal at sea was excruciating. I flopped down while two commando scouts penetrated the jungle line. They returned in about 20 minutes, saying they could find no evidence of activity in the area. Apparently the reception party arranged for us had left, presuming we were lost at sea, given the violence of the previous night's storm.

We plodded on shaky legs to a nearby village where Miskito villagers welcomed us enthusiastically. Women hugged and kissed me; old men vigorously shook my water-pruned hand. They seemed to think I was some sort of point element for an American rescue mission. I flashed on an image of American troops liberating occupied Paris from the Nazis during World War II. If they'd felt as good 40 years ago as I did now, they had a real memory to dwell on for the rest of their lives.

The spindly villagers helped us push our boat up into a shallow tributary of the inlet and we scooted across a lagoon into a swampy thicket where we finally made camp. TEA teams do not like to stay in villages during the day, no matter how welcome or needed the hospitality of the residents. Security from marauding Sandinista patrols precludes it and they do not want the village to become a subject for reprisals. In our makeshift camp we gobbled sardines and crackers, hung our clothes to dry and dropped off to sleep.

Around noon we woke to cautiously greet an old man who arrived with rice, fish and cornmeal. We sat around after eating and carefully cleaned weapons which had suffered badly from salt-water corrosion. At dusk, we returned to the village. Its small wooden houses were unusually clean and orderly. It soon became obvious why. The village hosted a Morava Church. Oddly, for residents of a Catholic country, most of the Indians and Creoles are Protestants.

The villagers invited us into their homes for rice and beans. We lay on the grass outside after the meal and sucked greedily on horrible-tasting cigarettes. "You know things are bad when we have to smoke this shit," coughed 18-year-old TEA warrior Chico. "At least under Somoza we had good cigarettes."

The villagers crowded around the Spanish-speaking gringo to vent some of their hatred for the Sandinistas.

"The Sandinistas bombed our village with rockets and 500-pound bombs," complained an old man. "Yes, they used them against the civilians right here. The holes are over there." He pointed to a

**Misura SF patrol members watch for Sandinista security forces during the hazardous border crossing from Honduras to Nicaragua.**



grassy area a few meters from the village, but I was too tired to go and look at bomb craters.

"They burned my home," a bitter, middle-aged villager added. He gathered his family around him and walked with me toward a charred, rusting bed frame. "My house was right here." His family stood mute and stared at what had been the sum total of a paltry existence. They stared down into charred earth.

Later they took me to see an old lady who spoke only the Indian dialect. They translated her story into Spanish for me. "These are the remains of two Misura boys," she wailed, showing me a cardboard box full of ashes and charred lumps. "The Sandinistas captured them and burned them alive here. When we returned to the village [after the attack] this and their boots were all that was left."

During that same Sandinista sweep of this area, the villagers said government

**At rest in a soggy jungle camp, TEA patrols await orders to hit Sandinista strongholds in the Miskito Indian areas of Nicaragua.**

troops rounded up several village men on suspicion of collaborating with the Contras. Forty-eight-year-old Luis was one of those taken. I ran into him the next morning in a soggy Misura camp while he was distributing food to the fighters.

"The Sandinistas gathered all the people in the church," he said through an interpreter. "They talked about how the Contra were bad and they were good. They detained me and six other men and allowed everyone else to leave. They thought we were Contras. 'Where are the Contras? Where are the camps?' They asked us constant questions. If we didn't talk, they said they'd kill us. I told them to do what they wanted. I didn't know any-

thing. They beat us, one by one in a house next to the church, then took us by boat to Puerto Cabezas where they threw us in the UNAN. It's a fort that used to be a university. My cell was hardly big enough to stand up in. They kept me nude in the dark for the first eight days and didn't give me any food or water. Now and then they'd take me to a small room and beat me. They stuck pencils in my ears and nose. I fainted but they'd always revive me for further beating. Once four officers beat me. One must have been a Cuban. He spoke with a strange accent and seemed to be in charge of all the other Sandinistas. I was in jail for 94 days. They threatened to kill me but I never talked. I have always helped the Misura and I always will. They are my people."

The aging Indian's story was agonizing to hear. We had to push on. The TEA team was slated to meet another commando group, according to a briefing I

## MISKITO UPDATE

Spurred by correspondent Salisbury's reports of the desperate situation facing the Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indians as well as Creole blacks in the Misura anti-Sandinista formations, SOF Publisher Bob Brown flew to Tegucigalpa, Honduras to check things out for himself.

"What I discovered," commented Brown on his return to the States, "leads me to two basic conclusions: the Sandinistas in Nicaragua are conducting a racist campaign of oppression on these minorities that borders on the genocidal and the battle they are waging to resist it makes the American civil rights struggle of the '60s seem like a piece of cake."

More than 20,000 minority group refugees have fled Sandinista harassment over the past five years; most have formed squalid camps along the Honduran or Costa Rican borders with their native country. Misura resistance fighters, who form the third Contra organization along with the FDN and ARDE, have penetrated back into Nicaragua to fight against the Sandinista in their own areas. Many of them are trained by former Somoza regime soldiers in Honduras. This effort was backed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency until the American Congress voted to cut-off aid to anti-Sandinista rebels earlier this year. It was not a popular decision among the Contras and the CIA field agents who were working with them.

"I asked one of the Latin advisors who had been training the Misura forces (we can't use his name for fear of reprisals) how he found out that U.S. aid had been cancelled," Brown related. "The guy told me he had been present when the agent broke the news to the Miskito Council of Elders. He (the agent) said 'The sonofabitchin' politicians have done it again.'"

But the Misura formations, such as the TEA team SOF correspondent Salisbury accompanied on a perilous trek deep inside Nicaragua, continue to resist the best way they can. As Brown discovered during his series of interviews with minority group fighters in Honduras, that's not very well.

"These guys are in desperate need of practically everything," Brown commented. "They have been waiting to launch a mission back across the border but can't do it because they *don't have boots for the troopers*, for God's sake. They tell me the boots they can procure locally only last two or three weeks. Even a good pair of U.S.-made jungle boots will only last about three months in the terrain and conditions found in the Miskito areas."

The Misura financial picture, now



**At a jungle redoubt, a young Misura fighter rests in his hammock and clutches a Gall while waiting for orders to move against nearby Sandinistas.**

that U.S. dollars are no longer available to support the cause, is fairly desperate also. Earlier this year, there was a rumor that the FDN Contras, who also operate out of sanctuaries in Honduras, had loaned the Misura 10,000 *lempira* (about \$5,000) to continue the fight.

"That is strictly a rumor," the Latin Misura instructor told Brown. "We have nothing, not even one cent."

Even when the Misura formations had U.S. funding for their fight to survive under the cruelties of the Sandinista regime, and CIA advisors who helped in the training of combat troops, the business of sending and supplying units back into Nicaragua on combat missions was extremely difficult and badly managed for two apparent reasons.

The CIA advisors seemed unwilling to deal with the nuts and bolts aspects of fighting a guerilla war from bases outside the country involved, especially in the area of logistics. And, there was a certain recalcitrance on the part of all the Contra organizations to join efforts in resistance operations. The failure of the CIA to insist that the Misura establish a Forward Operating Base for staging and re-supply inside Nicaragua is most disturbing to military professionals who realize it often takes a month for a small unit to trek over the torturous terrain between the Honduran border and the Miskito territory which stretches from the Bocai River northeast to the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua.

"The Americans (CIA agents or em-

ployees) arrived in our camp to observe, facilitate logistics and to advise," the Latin Misura instructor told Brown in response to a question about logistical failures. "They were not getting themselves involved that much. Every now and then they would make a suggestion such as maybe we should form a paratrooper team or maybe we should form an amphibious troop or have a demolitions team. Sometimes they would bring new techniques to us, but it was usually only a matter of an hour [visit]."

Apparently the advisors, who did not accompany Misura formations on their torturous trips into the jungle, failed to suggest any sort of Forward Operating Base which would have allowed combat units to bring supplies and ammunition into Nicaragua by porter, bicycle or pack-animals in the effective method used by the NVA and VC in Vietnam. The result is that Misura fighters usually cross the border carrying 15 days rations in 60-pound packs and about 1,000 rounds of ammunition per man. When that runs out, they are on their own or faced with humping 20 or more days back to Honduras for resupply. There is no money to hire aircraft which could drop supplies to the maneuver units.

There is also no monetary or tactical help coming to the Misura from the two other Contra formations, FDN and ARDE. Given the cut-off of U.S. dollars, the first problem is understandable. Neither FDN nor ARDE (now united for the first time since 1979 following the ouster of ARDE leader Eden Pastora) have money from other sources to share with the Misura. And, the fight against the Sandinistas has been largely uncoordinated.

"That has been one of the major failures in this fight," Brown's source indicated. "If the FDN, ARDE and Misura were to coordinate the attacks, the results would be much more reverberating. When the politicians fight among themselves, it neutralizes [the effect of the] forces fighting against the communists. When, for example, Misura is inside fighting, the FDN is infiltrating. ARDE is asleep in their hammocks. Then when ARDE is in Nicaragua fighting, the FDN is infiltrating and the Misura are asleep in their hammocks. That makes the force of the combatants minimal. The politicians don't want a complete union to fight the communists because of their personal interests."

Despite such problems, particularly among Nicaragua's oppressed minorities, the fight against Sandinista cruelty continues. In a future issue, SOF presents a full assessment of the Misura situation in Nicaragua.

— Dale Dye



was finally given by the lanky *Comandante 50* who led our group. "When the other TEA group shows up, we are going to put in ambushes along the highway between here and Puerto Cabezas." Our leader was impatient for movement and contact. "I'm tired of waiting," he complained.

It's the nature of the beast named low-level insurgency. The commando team led by *Comandante 50* had been on only three active missions in the past seven months. It's a relatively cold combat climate. The Misura fighters in this area have lost only 125-150 men in three years of armed resistance to Sandinista cruelty. Those statistics don't make the situation any less thrilling for Misura SF teams when they do make contact and the shit really hits the fan. They are desperately out-gunned by the well-equipped Sandinistas and usually have to run after initiating ambushes.

Tales such as the one told by Luis haunted me as we continued our journey toward the designated rendezvous with the second TEA team. We slogged through alligator-infested marshes and paddled dugout canoes across bodies of water we could not ford. Just before dawn on our third day in Nicaragua we came to a Contra camp in the middle of a peat-moss bog that formed an oasis in the swamp. It looked more like a genuine gorilla colony than a guerrilla redoubt. All eight of the Contra rebels lived in the trees. Two of them were sick with typhoid. Roberto, the 21-year-old commander of Contra forces in this zone, complained bitterly to *Comandante 50*. "We have no

**Clutching a captured RPG-7, a Misura soldier prepares to go ashore after a long, wet crossing from Honduras to Nicaragua.**

medicine. We are forgotten. We do not fight. We only suffer."

Roberto introduced me to an old pastor who came to the Contra camp with his teenage son. Between listening to the three of them I had some time to consider these people's hatred for Sandinista troops. They've certainly got adequate reason for anger.

"The Spaniards have always exploited us," spat Roberto, "but these *piricoacos* want to dominate us also. We say no. That's why they destroy our villages and massacre our people."

"The Sandinistas say they want reconciliation with us," the pastor interjected. "It's only a trick. I went to an assembly recently where we were supposed to elect village leaders. It was a farce. We didn't elect anyone. The next day they published in the *Barricada* that we elected their candidates."

A villager who made his living seining for shrimp walked up to add his complaints to the strident litany of anti-Sandinista venom. "The Sandinistas control everything," he said. "You have to buy and sell to ENABAS [the Sandinista-controlled government food regulating agency]. If you don't, they make you a prisoner. They pay too little and charge too much. If you don't comply, they let you starve. We only survive because we have a garden. If the Sandinistas knew that, they would confiscate it too."

Just before dawn the next day our sister force of Misura SF troopers finally arrived. This team also carried western journalists. A reporter and photographer from *Time* Magazine staggered into the guerrilla camp on the verge of exhaustion and hypothermia. They did a few interviews, took a few pictures and returned to Honduras that evening. I was supposed to leave also, but the engine of my boat failed.

During the remaining nights, I talked to *Comandante 50* about previous missions against the Sandinistas. It was pretty tame stuff compared with what I'd seen elsewhere in Nicaragua and in El Salvador, but the thought of avoiding another roller-coaster boat ride kept my attention riveted on his stories.

He had been on three other sabotage missions in the past seven months. "On the first one," he recalled, "we drove the *piricoacos* from a bridge after an hour of fighting and then burned the structure. Unfortunately, we didn't have C-4 that time. On the second mission, we failed. We fell into an ambush. The third trip was perfect. We overran the troops guarding a bridge and blew it up.

"We would attack more if we had the means. We need boots, uniforms, everything. If people think we can win without U.S. support, they are believing a lie."

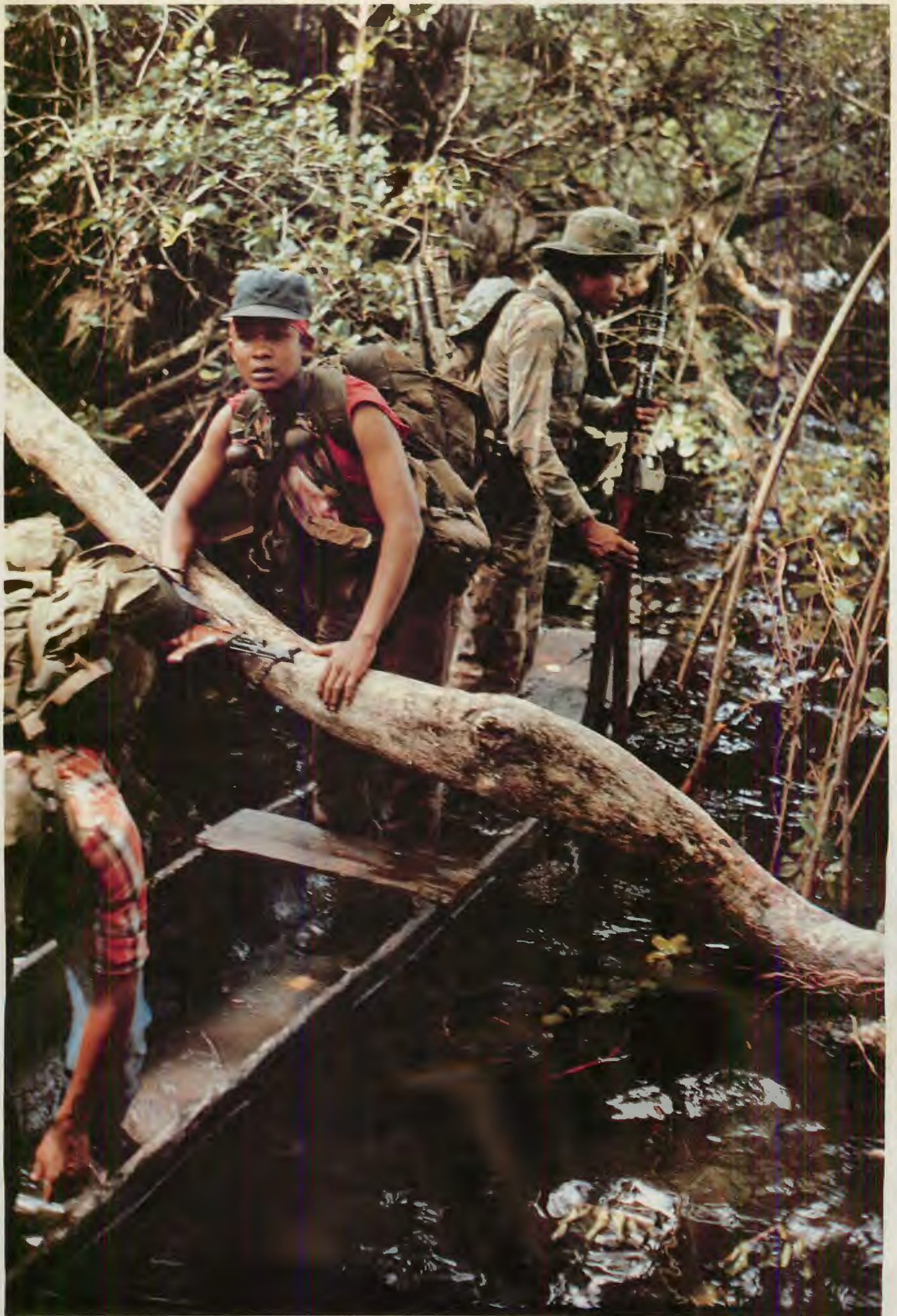
I finally got away from the treacherous Nicaraguan jungle on 7 July. A boat arrived, bearing film-makers for a Christian TV network and the final contingent of TEA commandos. The SF troopers wanted to get on with the mission. The film crew wanted out of Nicaragua. Lots of other people wanted a seat on that return boat also. Dozens of villagers squabbled for places. A Sandinista battalion was due on a sweep through the area to commemorate the fifth anniversary of their revolution. No one here — except the TEAs — wanted any part of that gala event.

Trying hard to concentrate on something besides the miserable conditions on the boat ride back, I watched carefully for Nicaraguan Coast Guard patrol boats and thought about the misery and mayhem I'd seen. I recalled an interview I'd had with Steadman Fagoth, the Misura leader, at his headquarters in Tegucigalpa before beginning this trip into the interior. He had complained of increasing harassment. Telephone lines to his headquarters had been cut and many of his staff members had been beaten or wounded. Still, Fagoth and his Misura patriots are hard people to deter.

"Even if we have to return [to Nicaragua] with only bows and arrows and .22 rifles, we will never stop fighting for our liberty," Fagoth vowed.

It's not Patrick Henry, but I can understand the sentiment. ✎

**Misura patrol members cautiously nose their boat into a tributary of the Coco River, watching for Sandinista security forces who cruise the same area.**







**SOF** CENTRAL AMERICA

# WITH THE BRITS IN BELIZE

“It’s Better  
than Belfast”


by D. Smith & David Mills

Photos by David Mills



**T**HE Royal Air Force Harriers provoked more than the usual degree of awe and excitement when they roared over Belize City that morning. For one thing, they flew in low, barely skimming the rooftops of the wooden houses. They also trailed huge plumes of red, white and blue smoke, matching the colors of the Union Jack that had been lowered for the last time the night before, and the new flag of a different design now flapping over the town square.

This was Independence Day, 21



September 1981. And as each pilot banked out over the Caribbean, he had a glimpse of colored mist drifting down over streets jammed with thousands of people celebrating the end of British colonial rule in Belize.

Sixty-eight miles and five minutes later, the Harriers reached the country's western border and streaked the sky with patriotic smoke again. Here, the audience was grim and cheerless. It was all Guatemalan, all airborne and all heading for Belize.

The Belizean people never knew what happened on their border that day each time the Harriers left the celebrations on the coast. They did not notice the British soldiers on hills and rooftops with Blowpipe missiles, and orders — had the Guatemalans carried out their plan to buzz and disrupt the ceremonies — to blow them out of the sky.

But the Harriers had made their point. The Guatemalan aircraft abandoned their gesture of defiance and turned home. Belizeans reggaed joyfully in the streets all day. And that is why Her Majesty's Forces stay on in Belize.

If it weren't for the Falklands, they might have left long ago. "It's an anachronistic position," said one Brit-

ish diplomat of his country's commitment to defend a newly independent nation.

"We've never done it before, looking after a former colony like this," said another. As a result, the commitment is deliberately vague; British troops are to stay only "for an appropriate time," and no one knows, or is saying, how long that will be.

**OP lookout observes and logs all unusual activity in the town of Melchor, Guatemala, including air movements and patrol activity.**



Guatemala claims it inherited the territory between its eastern border and the Caribbean from Spain. But British pirates and loggers settled there with slaves from the Caribbean in the early 17th century, and the two groups then fought side-by-side to repel powerful Spanish armadas during the War of Jenkins Ear and the Battle of St. George's Cay. They came under formal British protection as the Crown Colony of British Honduras in 1862, and more than a century has passed now without a shot being fired on either side. The last invasion scare was in 1977, when Guatemalan troops massed on the border. Prime Minister Harold Wilson reinforced the main British garrison, sent a gunboat to back it up, and the Guatemalans calmed down.

In the summer before independence, Guatemala appeared willing to drop its claim in return for a road through Belize to the sea, access to some of its coastal islands, or cays, and a handful of trade deals. The British were ecstatic, thinking they could leave Belize a stable parliamentary democracy at peace with its formerly hostile neighbor. But the Belizean people were having none of it. Normally peaceful, they



**Framed by concertina wire, a soldier from the Parachute Regiment scans the horizon.**

**Gazelle helicopter is used for liaison and observation duties. Operated by the Army Air Corps, pilots can be any rank from sergeant upwards.**

rioted, angry at what they perceived as a sell-out to a violent, undemocratic and racist neighbor.

Many Belizeans are black. "We know what happens to the black man in that crazy Spanish country," one man hissed. "The Guats just want our cays for their military bases." Belizean Prime Minister George Price had no choice. His country went into independence without a treaty. Hoping, if not confident, that world opinion would shield its former colony until a proper treaty could be worked out, Britain secretly prepared to withdraw its forces.

Then Argentina invaded the Falklands and everything changed, including Britain's faith in promises made by military juntas. When the war ended, Guatemala's then President Rios Montt renounced the use of force against Belize and said Guatemala would attempt to settle the dispute through diplomatic means. The British no longer dared to find out.

"We learned a lot in those months," said one of their diplomats. "And we're wiser now than we were. The Argies talked about so-called 'peaceful solutions' too. For the time being, we have to



## PHOTOJOURNALISM TEAM

DeWolf Smith first traveled to Belize in the summer of 1981 to produce radio documentaries on the former British colony for National Public Radio. Since then, Smith has returned twice to do documentaries and freelance articles on the tiny Central American nation for U.S. and British newspapers. During these visits, Smith spent considerable time traveling with the British Army.

While there in late 1982, the author

met the photographer, David Mills, who was serving a four-month jungle-operation stint with the British Army. They decided to collaborate on this article.

Mills has since completed his service, including tours in Oman and Northern Ireland, and is working as a free-lance photographer in Washington, D.C., specializing in military operations. At press time, Mills had just returned from Belize, where he participated in a military exercise with the 10th Gurkha Rifles for SOF.

assume that Guatemala wants at least a chunk of Belize."

British Forces Belize is there to make sure they don't even try. Compared to the 20,000-strong Guatemalan Army, it is a small deployment of only 1,800 men. The Brits think that is enough to deter aggression and, if attacked, hold the ground until 5,000 troops of the stand-by Spearhead Force are airlifted out from the United Kingdom. There is always one infantry battalion doing a six-month tour of duty in Belize. In September 1981, 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment was garrisoned there. After its tour, the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles replaced it followed by the 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment.

Belize is 8,600 square miles, about the size of New Hampshire. The terrain rises from mosquito-infested mangrove swamps along the coast, to dry brush savannah and, in the west, to rugged mountains covered with some of the dirtiest jungle on earth. Water is scarce — a long-range patrol may carry up to 40 pounds of it — and the canopy is low. In the secondary jungle grown up around old mahogany logging sites, a good team might thrash its way through three kilometers a day.

"It's quite foul, especially in the south, and supply is a problem," according to one infantry officer. "But fortunately for us, it's ground that lends itself to the defender."

In fact, so much of the border with Guatemala is considered impenetrable that the Brits have concentrated their forces in three areas. The main garrison is at Airport Camp, with its airfield outside Belize City near the Caribbean coast. In the west, where an invading force would have to travel down a two-lane highway, Holdfast Camp is HQ for Battle Group North with most of the armed garrison at Airport Camp. Rideau Camp and Salamanca Camp serve the same purpose for Battle Group South in the southern Toledo District, accessible to the invader only by sea or paratroops.

BRITFORBEL is small but powerful. It includes an infantry battalion, an artillery battery of six 105mm pack howitzers, and a cavalry troop of three Scimitar and three Scorpion CRV(T) light-track combat reconnaissance vehicles. Air support and mobility are provided by a flight of four Army Air Force Gazelle light observation and general-purpose helicopters, and the same number of Royal Air Force Pumas, the multi-role medium helicopter that can carry up to 16 men, lift the howitzers and resupply patrols in the jungle. The RAF flight of four ground-attack Harrier jump jets and the main airfield at Airport Camp are protected by the "rock apes" of the RAF Regiment and a battery of Rapier ground-to-air missiles.

The British arsenal is clearly sufficient for the potential threat but the squaddies face more potential harm from boredom

than bullets. As if to prove that point, each unit constantly perfects and updates a log of misadventures it will leave behind to greet and horrify the newly-arrived replacements.

The "Chuff Chart" is a day-by-day countdown for a six-month tour, using the same regression formula used by American GIs in Southeast Asia. The British version, however, includes a deliberately exaggerated saga of depression, drunkenness and sexual deprivation. Every British squaddy knows that at someone else's "gozome" (goes home) party, he will get a "chop on" (drunk), wake up in a "monk" (savage fit of depression) and if anyone hassles him, throw a "wobbly." By the time he leaves Belize, he'll also know how to order a "bottle and four" (quart of rum is 75 cents, the four cokes, or "stims," a little less) and say, "No big t'ing, mon," like he's been in the Caribbean all his life.

Because Belize is so close to the equator, the light was fading at 1630 when our Gazelle put down in a clearing below Cayo OP, the westernmost point within the British defensive zone.

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## **The British arsenal is clearly sufficient . . . the squaddies face more potential harm from boredom than bullets.**

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On the perimeter of the LZ, four men of B Company, 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, stood motionless, their SLRs at the ready, the silver wings on their dark red berets reflecting the last rays of the afternoon sun.

This was our first encounter in Belize with the Paras — "The Maroon Machine" — by reputation the meanest, roughest unit in the British Army. Scottish Regiments like the Black Watch and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders may brawl more. The Royal Marine commandos train harder, but don't try telling that to the Parachute Regiment, which calls all other units "crap hats."

The "Toms," as their officers call them, were part of a 10-man section in the middle of a week's duty at Cayo OP. They rotated each day patrolling the perimeters and taking turns at the twin telescopes mounted inside a small white hut on the hill.

It was dark inside the OP. Two huge Paras were silhouetted against the window. Beyond them, down 1,500 meters of valley, lay Guatemala and the road along which an invasion, if it ever comes, must begin.

According to Radio Mopan on the other side, they were being watched too. But the Paras concentrated on the Guatemalan border town of Melchor de Menchos and its airstrip, moving from the telescopes to their log books and back, recording every sign of movement, however small.

The scene has changed with the times. Before independence, the Gordon Highlanders sent bagpipers up to Cayo to fill the valleys with the sound of their presence. Later, during the height of Guatemala's anti-guerrilla campaign, the Brits could see severed heads on sticks in Melchor. Last summer, cows bellowed, roosters crowed and the town looked sleepy enough.

For our visit, some documents on the table had been covered with black cloths, but the walls were hung with charts and pictures of uniforms and dozens of Guatemalan military aircraft, including the president's Bell 206 Jet Rangers, Iroquois, and the A-37B Dragon Fly counterinsurgency jet — a grim reminder of what may be keeping the Guats' minds off Belize for now.

At the other end of Belize, on a mountaintop overlooking the southwest border, another section of Paras was doing the same thing. Cadenas is a Vietnam-type outpost accessible only by air, where the Pumas must do a hover. The only fast escape route is by ropes down the mountainside, when the Brits will make for trees with white marks leading to sites to be blown for LZs. Cadenas overlooks a Guatemalan military engineering camp and the road Guatemala wants to finish building right through Belize to the Caribbean. A Gurkha patrol turned their bulldozers back a few years ago and the road ends in a mound of dirt just inside the Belizean border.

"The Guats are casual by European standards," a lieutenant once observed. "We see the odd amusing incidents, like the sentry falling asleep at the main gate and the section commander *hitting* him around the head, but generally it's quiet up here."

It was quiet back at Cayo too. So quiet that the insects seemed to scream and the elephant grass roared underfoot. Time passes slowly, and like all the Paras we met in Belize, the men here were anxious to get on jungle patrol. They had two-man fire trenches dug in the hill outside, but no one expected to use them.

"We're just an early-warning device for Holdfast," explained Cpl. Les Standish, jerking his head toward the valley below. "Anything starts to happen down there, we get on the radio, then blow this place up and run away."

Holdfast is 58 miles from Belize City, off the Western Highway to Guatemala, and Company HQ for Battle Group North. In the summer of 1983, it was base camp for three platoons of Paras (about 110 men), a commando artillery battery that sup-

ported Royal Marines in the Falklands, and light tanks of the 16/5 Lancers.

In contrast to the Paras, who shave their heads and look menacingly fit, the Lancers have a wiry elegance. The one that bounded up to greet us was an off-duty officer. He looked like David Bowie, but with better teeth and what appeared to be designer sweatpants. "Hullo. Nick Lunt. Welcome to Holdfast. We Lancers are here to add a bit of tone to the whole affair."

Although the jungle limits their range, the little Scorpions and Scimitars are ideal for moving over the soft ground and savannah of central Belize. There are few paved roads and maps are notoriously inaccurate, so the tankies (crews) spend much of their time in track verification. With their lightly-armored aluminum hulls and six-cylinder Jaguar engines, the vehicles can do 70 mph without effort. Swamps and shallow rivers are no extra trouble. The hull has a flotation screen and the tank is propelled in water by tracks, although an auxiliary propulsion kit can be fitted for extra speed.

The Scimitar mounts a 30mm automatic Rarden cannon, the Scorpion a 76mm cannon. Otherwise, they are the same and travel in pairs. The U.S. Marine Corps evaluated the Scorpion and Lancer. Sgt. Dave Ireland highly recommends it. "Right now, the Yanks have nothing, really, between an M60 or Shendan and their APC," he said, lowering himself into his radio operator's seat.

Infantry patrols leave Holdfast in sections of four, eight or 12 men. Depending on the size of the patrol, they will stay in the jungle for up to two weeks.

On a table behind his quarters, Pvt. Lane Aldred of B Company, 2 Para, had laid his kit out in the sun to pack for a patrol. His personal weapon was a 7.62mm SLR, because the Armalite AR-15s usually issued for Belize had been sent back to the UK for refurbishing.

The Toms missed them. "The SLR is a powerful weapon," one of Aldred's mates pointed out. "But most jungle contacts occur at 50 or 60 meters and the SLR is too heavy at close range."

Pvt. Aldred had replaced his army-issue machete with a *kukri* he bought at the Gurkha barracks near his own in Aldershot, England. He ran his hand up and down the gold scrolled handle. "Nothing beats the *kukri*, whether you're hacking out jungle, or slicing up. . . ." His eyes lit up as his voice trailed off.

Officers loitered nearby, and the Brits aren't anxious to emphasize their potential combat role in Belize. Everyone seems to want a *kukri* now, but, according to Aldred, it takes a lot of practice to master the backward stroke of the curved blade.

For a 10-day patrol, Aldred had four quart water bottles, a lightweight blanket, mosquito net, poncho/hammock, spare socks and bootlaces. His Millbank water purification bag held foot powder to fight the fungal diseases endemic in Belize, in-



sect repellent (squaddies swear it is worthless) and steri-tabs.

British Army rations are highly prized. The going rate in NATO is two U.S. Army C-rats for one British 24-hour Ratpack. This might include an oatmeal block, chicken soup, a baconburger, sweet spangles and glucose, chicken supreme, apple sponge pudding, instant coffee, Nestle milk paste in a tube and the most important item of all — tea. The main courses are either boiled in their cans or dumped in a mess tin over the disposable solid-fuel cooker that burns hexamine blocks.

To all this, Aldred had added Rollo and Mars chocolate bars and personal items like a small waterproof Tekna light, waterproof matches, a flint and steel firestarter and a button compass.

Aldred admits that after the Falklands, "Some of the lads find Belize a bit tame." And all of the men we met were itching to

**ABOVE:** Helicopters are the lifeline to troops operating in rugged terrain and maintenance is crucial. Mechanics are as important to a heliborne operation as combat pilots.

**RIGHT:** Scimitar reconnaissance vehicle with its 30mm Rarden cannon at maximum elevation gets a once-over.

**FAR RIGHT:** This conspicuously placed map of Central America at a checkpoint shows Guatemala's refusal to recognize Belize as an independent country.

get into the jungle for a challenge and change from the boredom of guard and fatigue duties at camp.

But the Belizean jungle harbors an increasing number of problems that worry the British High Command.

Guatemalan guerrillas dressed as *cam-*



*pesinos* have sought refuge in Belize since 1979, and the potential for contact with a Guatemalan military patrol in hot pursuit "is a possibility that constantly alarms us," according to one major at Holdfast.

Like British soldiers in operational zones everywhere, the Paras carry a card with printed instructions carefully detailing the circumstances under which they may fire their weapons. Minimum force is the rule.

But one patrol of B Company had no time to consult the cards last June, when they came upon five armed civilians in the jungle.

"Halt!" The Para corporal called out the first, second and third mandatory warnings. A one-legged man raised a shotgun. The Brits opened fire with M16s.

"They're supposed to shoot to wound," an infantry officer observed later. "But being Paras, they killed him."

Another man was wounded and three more taken prisoner. All were drug dealers. At an inquest the Paras were determined to have acted within the scope of their orders. But the incident deeply disturbed the High Command. It involved action clearly outside the British mandate to deter aggression from Guatemala, and there's no reason to believe it won't happen again.

For the most part, though, the Paras had to content themselves with the rigors of jungle training and enemies like beef-worms, chiggers, scorpions, fatigue and extreme heat. For the lack of action, there is the compensation that Belize is a corporal's posting, where a "full screw" often gets to plan and lead section patrols with total responsibility for on-the-spot decisions miles from the nearest officer.

They weren't fussed about the Guatemalans either. Pvt. Tim Arpino explained: "Before we were here in Belize, it was the Royal Anglians. As I see it, the last time they did anything useful was at Waterloo. Now the Guats didn't attack the Anglians, so I can't see them ever messing with 2 Para."

It is an hour's ride by Puma to Rideau Camp, HQ for *Battle Group South*, in Belize's Toledo District. The dirt road below coils like a red snake through the dense, dark mangrove swamps for 110 miles; during the rainy season huge chunks wash away and the Brits travel the road by convoy only, carrying a full three days' supplies.

Toledo is the country's poorest and most isolated district. According to the Brits, it is also the most likely target for annexation by Guatemala. A recent Guatemalan proposal to drop its claim to the rest of Belize in exchange for all of Toledo (one-sixth of the country) was rejected out of hand by both Britain and Belize.

Most of Toledo's 5,000 inhabitants are Kechi Indians, who live in isolated villages like their Mayan ancestors. Guatemala professes a special interest in their well



being. "We feel those Indians are our people," says Guatemalan diplomat Francisco Villagran. "And we worry that the Belizean government wants to settle Haitian refugees among them."

The Kechis, in fact, fear and loathe Guatemala as much as they welcome British protection, according to their elected representative for the district. "When I campaign among the Kechis, I explain that our party, The United Democratic Party, is the strongest supporter for the British presence here," says Charles Wagner. Kechis serve as trackers for army patrols and have a special rapport with the Gurkhas, whose high cheekbones, straight black hair and rugged life in Nepal resemble their own.

Rideau Camp was hacked out of the jungle in 1977, after the invasion scare. Minutes away from an attack by sea — the Garifuna blacks call it "Three Mile Camp" after the distance to their coastal town of Punta Gorda — it is the army's most exposed position. The Royal Engineers blew a mountain of onyx to reach the site. Most squaddies wish they never had.

"You're either wet and hot or wet and cold in this place," said one signaller at Rideau for a week's exercise. "Move a hundred yards in any direction and you're covered with creepy crawlies. I pity the poor sods who are stuck here."

Rideau and Battle Group South were guarded that summer by three companies of the 1st Battalion, the Gordon Highlanders and the 7th Gurkha Rifles. We put down at a Gurkha encampment in a slimy wood, where smoke from their fires drifted sideways and stuck to the trees. They gave us something that tasted like curried twigs and giggled wildly when we refused a present of a viper in a bag. Later, we took on the Gordon Highlanders. As the Puma thumped down at one clearing *after another*, small bands of muddy, sweaty men emerged from the jungle, climbed aboard and sat silent and stinking, their weapons between their knees.

Deeper in the jungle, at the old logging camp of Salamanca, they were keeping up standards in true British style. At lunch under a hilltop tarp, at a table laid with regimental silver, we ate vegetables grown in the Gurkhas' weedless gardens and tried to understand the chatter in Gurkhali, which all British officers in Gurkha regiments speak.

If the Guats ever try to take Toledo District, they will probably start at "The Dump," the only ground flat enough to land a large number of paratroops. The Brits expect to engage an initial force of 300 with one company, for the 1:3 ratio a defender needs. During an exercise at The Dump, while his men lay on their bellies covering a large, soggy clearing in the jungle, their CO explained the plan to destroy at least half of the invading force while it was still in the air. He swept his hand from west to east.

"When they start coming in, we've got

Blowpipe low-level air-defense weapons, and an excellent shoot they'd have. Then, the Guats jump and they're hit by the gunners, hit by the mortars. Once they're on the deck, we've got the GPMG-SF up to 1,800 meters and, if they manage to outflank that, we use section weapons up to 300 meters, then small arms for the closer stuff. Their objective would be this high ground, that road junction and linking up with Punta Gorda forces landed by sea."

Belizean Independence was a hard blow to Guatemalan pride, humiliating proof before the world that Britain could do as it liked. "We feel Great Britain took advantage of our civil war in Guatemala, knowing there was nothing we could do about it at the time," says a Guatemalan political counselor.

In the diplomatic area, Guatemala has kept Belize from joining the Organization of American States (OAS). Revenge on the ground has taken the form of rare, but to Belizeans, terrifying armed incursions into their country.

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## **Belizean Independence was a hard blow to Guatemalan pride, humiliating proof before the world that Britain could do as it liked.**

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Last year, a British NCO from the Intelligence Corps sat in a bar in San Ignacio, about three miles from the Guatemalan border. At a corner table, three burly men with Hispanic features drank and bragged loudly. Although many Belizeans in San Ignacio are of Spanish descent, something about the manner of these men, the way they sprawled grandly in their chairs, alerted the Brit. The men's pockets bulged and, when one of them leaned over, a hard round object in a bag fell onto the floor. The 1 Corps guy casually paid his bill and left the bar. He returned five minutes later with Belizean policemen, who arrested two soldiers and their company commander of the elite Guatemalan Kaibile special forces.

As the three Guats sat outside waiting for the police van, one of them tried to throw a grenade away into the bushes. At the jail they were locked up without a search, and the British later found the officer trying to stuff his operations manual into a hole he'd ripped in his mattress.

Later that afternoon, Belizean border guards reported that a large group of soldiers had gathered at the checkpoint 100 yards away on the other side. The British arrived to find about 20 Kaibiles "armed to the teeth," waving their machine guns

and pistols and shouting threats to come across and rescue their companions. The threats and abuse continued until one of their officers managed to lead them away.

The men in jail were fingerprinted and photographed. "They were probably on a self-appointed mission to remind Belizeans of just how vulnerable they are. You know, a 'we can come here anytime we like' sort of thing," a British source said later. Belizeans felt even more vulnerable the next morning, when, rather than risk further tension, the Belizean government simply released their Kaibile captives at the border.

What happened in Toledo this summer was even more frightening. Jalacte is a small town on Belize's southwestern border. It was settled about 10 years ago by refugees fleeing the regime in Guatemala. One morning Guatemalan soldiers suddenly appeared in the town and announced that the town was under their control and authority. For several days, the townspeople lived in terror, taking orders from Guatemalans about every aspect of their daily lives. Again, the British took no action, but watched from the jungle as Belizean police ordered the Guatemalan civil and military "authorities" out. For the time being, they went.

By far the largest base in Belize, Airport Camp is also the busiest. Walls now guard the main gate too, but the locals still hang out there, checking out the jobs blackboard, hawking snakeskins, painted coconuts and playing cards on the hoods of their cabs. A taxi-man may wait all day to get a single \$20BZ (U.S.\$10) fare for the 15 minute drive into Belize City.

"The Harrier could win any war out here." Stripped to the waist and wearing shorts, Cpl. Smith straddled the tail of one, his heavy boots hanging down each side of the mosquito-like jet. We were at Airport Camp, home of the RAF "blue jobs" and one pair of their four Harriers in Belize.

The jets are a frequent and, to Belizeans, comforting sight, whether they're "showing the flag" down the western border or practicing air-intercepts out over the cays to check out the weekend-leave weather. On the ground, under their camouflage nets, they used to be plainly visible from the road at Belize Airport next door. But the Harriers are hidden now behind thick blast walls.

"It's to protect them from IRA- or PLO-type attacks," one armaments fitter told us. The jet is so technologically delicate that one saboteur's bullet could cripple it. And even though British officials insist there is no internal or "fifth column" threat in the country, the fortifications are a sign of the new times in Belize.

As we stumbled through muddy potholes to Airport Camp's guardroom one morning, the gate barrier rose to admit two extremely peculiar Land Rovers. Open bodied, with no windshields or doors, they had machine-gun mounts



**ABOVE: No more Falklands: British troops practice jungle maneuvers in order to keep a sharp fighting edge. The presence of crack British units in Belize deters any would-be aggressor.**

**RIGHT: Getting ready for action. Pilot and crewman check out a Harrier.**

**BELOW RIGHT: Camouflaged Harrier is virtually invisible to enemy planes overhead.**

front and back, and sported metal clusters of smoke grenade dischargers. Their drivers' hair was suspiciously long for the average squaddy. Were these vehicles the notorious Pink Panthers developed for remote area operations and originally painted pink as camouflage against deserts of the Middle East? (See "The Pink Panther," SOF, June '84.) If so, the SAS is in Belize.

British military officials say special forces have no role in the country. But some of the Pumas are equipped to fly without lights, using passive night goggles. And there is no unit in the British Army better suited for the intelligence and small special operations the situation in Belize requires.

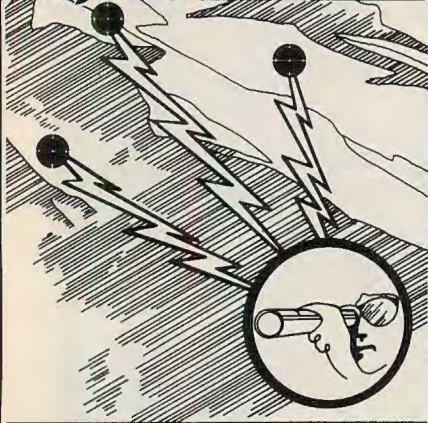
Like all others in Belize, Airport Camp quarters are cramped, with eight squaddies in single beds to a room. The lucky few with air conditioning lose it to frequent power outages. When they finally find the showers across camp, the stalls are often taken up by guys in full kit, water and jungle muck streaming off each man and his weapon.

Drugs, like homosexuality, are almost nonexistent among squaddies. Drink is





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another matter altogether. It's heavy and, while it lasts, heaven on earth. The idea is to head for the rum pits in town and then stagger on to discos at the Bellevue Hotel or the Studio 102, with their live reggae bands.

Women are a problem. Although a few squaddies marry Belizean girls each year, it's easier to meet whores, including refugees from El Salvador and Honduras. Many Belizean girls who hang out at the discos simply want a new dress, a good meal or the company of a British soldier.

The world recession hit Belize hard. Sugar prices fell and unemployment rose even higher. Unfortunately, the economic fiasco coincided with independence, increasing some Belizeans' resentment of the soldiers, their money and their race. The British Army has few internal racial problems. Regimental pride and solidarity are all that matter, whether a man is an Irish "Paddy" or a black "Snowball."

Guatemala no longer threatens to use force against Belize. Francisco Villagran at the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington maintains Guatemala's continuing internal problems make an attack on Belize "unthinkable at the present time."

There's no reason to believe an attack would succeed either. Although, as one squaddy put it, "the Kaibile is the finest jungle fighter in Central America," and the Guatemalan Army is considered the best disciplined in the region, in the end it is no match for the well-equipped Brits. Guatemala has limited supplies of ammunition for its WWII-vintage bazookas, for instance, and the ban on military aid initiated by the Carter administration has deprived it of essential spares for other vital equipment.

If an attack on Belize is unthinkable for whatever reason, what does Guatemala want? According to Villagran, "Since the current president, Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores, acted in Rios Montt's government as defense minister, he can be expected to share the same fundamental principles of achieving a settlement through diplomatic means."

The problem is that Guatemala insists on having a sizable piece of southern Belize for "access to the seas" and the infamous road through Belize to the Caribbean. Guatemala already borders on the Caribbean, but it claims the sea lanes would be squeezed closed if both Belize and Honduras chose to extend their 12-mile territorial limits from islands each owns.

Last fall, the British came up with a plan to pressure Belizean Prime Minister George Price into a treaty with Guatemala. According to the plan, the Brits would announce a partial reduction of force in southern Belize, and let Price know he could not count on British protection after, say, six months, during which he would be expected to make his best deal with the Guats — even if that meant giving up part of Belize's territory.

According to one high-ranking source,

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British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher wants all troops out of Belize as soon as possible because "she is afraid Reagan will do to her what he did to the French in Chad," and press for direct or indirect British military support in the campaign against Central American guerrillas.

But British military officials are afraid that if they leave Belize now, they might have to return to fight for it later. And there is public opinion to worry about. As one British Foreign Office diplomat put it: "How would it look if we fought for 1,800 white Falklanders and then seemed to abandon 150,000 black Belizeans?" For the time being, all of the British troops are staying.

As long as the British forces stay, Guatemala's eastern border is effectively closed to guerilla gunrunners, a point not lost on Guatemala or the United States. Until Central America becomes attractive to foreign investors again, Belize cannot afford to lose the money soldiers spend or the jobs the British Army provides.

There is no question of U.S. forces taking their place; although most Belizeans are staunchly anti-communist and identify with the United States, they remain proudly nonaligned. Even so, U.S. pressure may be the only reason the Brits have stayed on as long as they have. British officials will not confirm the widespread belief that the Americans have been picking up the \$30-million yearly tab since independence, although they do admit that "U.S. or NATO reimbursements have been discussed."

In the end, the decision will be made in part by the British Foreign Office, which has argued in the past for giving Belize only 24-hour notice of their intention to withdraw from the country. No matter that if Britain pulled out, the vacuum might be filled by guerrilla gunrunners (which the Guats would not tolerate) or Cubans (admired by the Belizean left), and then the Guatemalans.

"We got something out of this place as a colony for hundreds of years," one private said. "Belizeans are always saying that we owe them something back. I think that's true. We take some of their little Belize Defense Force (BDF) out on patrol with us, but they won't be ready to defend this country for 20 years."

On the eve of Belizean independence, a British officer summed up his feelings about Belize's past and future. "I remain desperately sorry for the real people of the country — naive and, on the whole, genuine and honest people. They are being taken for a ride, not an uncommon result from politics, but a distasteful sight at first hand. They have no sound police force, no economy of any depth and few friends."

Privately, many Belizeans admit that what the officer said is true. Publicly, however, they want no patronizing comments from anyone. Belize is independent and proud of it. For the time being, it is also safe from enemies known and unknown. ✕

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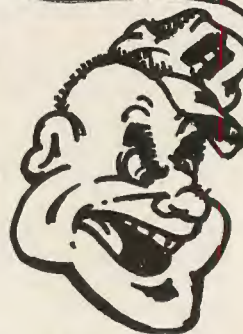
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**ADMINISTRATION:** All periodicals and public media will be closely examined to determine the position of the representatives and your candidate for Commander-in-Chief. Follow the necessary admin procedures to register and vote on 6 November.

**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.  
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# BIANCHI CUP

Continued from page 43

These mini-matches within a match add dimension to the contest and give a lot of competitors motivation to do well.

Arkansas' Lee Cole was having her problems on the Falling Plates. She forgot to reload and dropped four plates (-40 points). A true competitor, she put the mistake behind her and kept shooting like a champion. Although Sally Van Valzah and Joyce Faulkner kept the pressure on, Cole prevailed with a 1761-96X. Van Valzah was two points back at 1759-90X, and Faulkner tallied 1746-88X.

Match Six was a Ruger- and Winchester-sponsored special event. This Bianchi version of the International Rapid Fire used .22LRs and the official NRA/Bianchi target. Smith & Wesson's Tom Campbell displayed his talents with his Model 41 to take first with 296-15X, followed by Vance Schmid, a police officer from Illinois, who shot 284-10X, and Larry Bullock, who tallied 283-9X.

Heckler & Koch rewarded the top H&K shooter with a \$5,000 prize, a check gleefully tucked away by Angelo Spagnoli from California. Bruce Gray was the second-place H&K shooter and netted \$2,000, while Roger Burgess went home \$1,000 richer.

C. Wood was the high Tasco competitor and received \$1,250, while champ Enos added \$1,000 to his winnings for using an Aimpoint.

In the Team listings, the "Hosemasters," Brian Enos, Rob Leatham, Frank Glenn and Fred Wardell, came in first and earned \$2,000 and gold medallions. Second place went to the Arkansas Combat Team of Bill Wilson, Ross Carter, Jason Cole and Mike Plaxco. Defending champs, the ISI Team of Mickey Fowler, Mike Dalton, Mike Fichman and Jim Zubiena, were third.

Bianchi Cup Champions always look forward to getting John Bianchi's autograph, especially when "Pay To The Order Of" appears before their name. This year Enos received \$15,000 cash for his winning score, the richest payday in sport handgunning. Along with the cash award goes the precious Bianchi Cup itself, a gold medallion, an NRA Member's ring and buckle as well as merchandise worth another \$2,500.

Second-place shooter John Shaw shed no tears as he pocketed a check for \$6,000, plus a silver medallion and \$1,500 worth of merchandise.

Third place netted \$4,000, fourth \$3,000, fifth \$2,000, and the cash trickled down to the 25th-place shooter, who won \$250. Many more competitors won merchandise donated by the industry. (At 155th place, shooters were still winning merchandise worth \$100.)

The Bianchi Cup is oriented toward the shooters. NRA Action Shooting Committee Chairman Bill Jordan was on hand and spent

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his days on the range, talking with shooters and getting ideas. NRA Referee Dick Crawford also kept his ears open, and host Ray Chapman has always proven open to suggestions for improvement.

Each year the Cup competition changes a little. This year, for the Colt Speed event, the top 20 finishers shot qualifying runs on steel reactive targets, then the top six competed man-on-man in a round-robin tournament. It was a little slow, but the excitement of head-to-head shooting brought cheers and applause from the crowd.

Rob Leatham edged out John Shaw to take the special contest, demonstrating why he has become the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) World Champion.

Next year the Action Shooting Championships will return to the Chapman Academy. Each year the prize money has increased as has the merchandise, so look for a full field of competitors.

Professional shooting is on the map, and Bianchi put it there. From the range and its officers to the social events, the Cup deserves the title of the finest pistol match in the world. ✕

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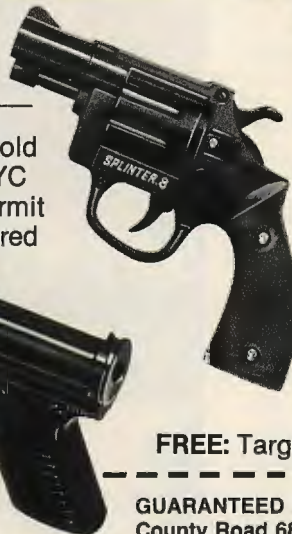
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## GROIN GUNS

Continued from page 38

The magazine catch-release is located on the butt of the frame, in the European style — inconsequential since speed reloads are not part of any realistic scenario for pistols of this type. There are no sights on the LWS-.25, as this also would only promise a nonexistent capability.

To unload the LWS-.25, the magazine catch must first be pivoted to the rear. The magazine will drop down only a small distance, allowing the slide to be retracted and emptying the chamber without another round entering the feed cycle. Afterwards, the magazine may be completely removed.

This unloading procedure should precede disassembly, which I found to be somewhat troublesome. Partially retract the slide and insert a cartridge, bullet end down, into the opening between the slide and frame. Release the slide. Insert a pin punch into the small hole located on the left side of the slide, and depress the spring-loaded slide-retainer plunger housed in the frame. Simultaneously, lift the slide up at the rear.

There's the rub. Unless, by blind luck, you have placed all the components in the most precisely correct geometrical relationship, the slide will not lift up, while you struggle and juggle, sweat and strain for an hour or more. When things finally fit, hold the rear of the slide upward and move the slide forward to separate it from the frame.

To reassemble, reinstall the recoil spring and guide, previously removed for cleaning. Pull back on the hammer ever so slightly until it engages the draw bar, and release the hammer. Position the slide on top of the frame and, with the magazine removed, cock the hammer as much as possible. Pull upward and rearward on the back of the slide until it clears the frame, then pivot the rear of the slide downward. When the slide contacts the slide-retainer plunger, release the trigger, continuing to press downward on the rear of the slide. Depress the slide-retainer plunger to seat the slide on the frame. Exerting downward pressure, manipulate the slide so it will lock in place. Luckily, the LWS-.25 is made of stainless steel and won't get frequent firing, so you won't have to repeat this ordeal too often.

Only two rounds failed to eject out of 175 fired through the LWS-.25. The accuracy potential is excellent and, due to its design, there is no hammer bite. Once the long trigger-pull is mastered, the overall handling characteristics are admirable. Since it is smaller than the Walther TPH, the bottom two fingers of the shooting hand extend below the frame, but a proper Weaver hold is possible, and the support hand helps to secure a firm grip. My overall impressions are quite favorable.

The Seecamp LWS-.25 is exclusively marketed by Sile Distributors, Inc. (Dept. SOF, 7 Centre Market Place, New York, NY 10013). The suggested list price is a very reasonable \$189.95.



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The M20's blued-steel slide rides on an aluminum-alloy forged frame which has a black anodized finish. The trigger guard is a sheet-metal stamping. The checkered, black-plastic grip panels wrap around the rear of the frame. Empty, the M20 weighs 10.9 ounces. The barrel is 2.5 inches long, and the overall length is 4.9 inches. Overall height is 3.4 inches, and the width is 1.1 inches.

The M20 has the largest magazine capacity — eight rounds — of the three pistols tested. With one up the spout this yields a comforting total of nine rounds, certainly sufficient for a small back-up pistol.

The M20 is unlocked blowback-operated. Two pivoting levers, one on each side of the frame, compress vertical coil springs to return the slide to the battery position. The springs are housed in each grip panel. The inertia-type firing pin is struck by an exposed hammer. The manual

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thumb safety can be operated with the hammer cocked or down. It can be manipulated to the "off" position quite easily with the inside web of the thumb when a Weaver hold is assumed. A distinct, audible click is heard when moving the safety on or off. The hammer should not be cocked nor the slide retracted while the safety is in the "on" position. There is no magazine safety.

The first round can be fired either double- or single-action. Subsequent rounds are normally fired single-action, although, if careful, one may lower the hammer with a loaded round in the chamber due to the inertia-type firing pin. The M20 is equipped with an almost-target-quality trigger system. The double-action pull on my specimen, untuned, out-of-the-box, is a consistently smooth 6.5 pounds. The single-action pull is an astounding 1.75 pounds!

The magazine catch release, a button with concentric rings, is recessed into the lower rear edge of the left grip panel. It cannot be depressed when holding the pistol in the firing position, but accidental release is impossible also. When depressed, the magazine falls freely from its well.

The rear sight is a square notch milled into the slide. The inverted-V front sight is part of the barrel's hinge. Nonadjustable and small, they are difficult to align quickly. But, again, who cares? Target acquisition with sights is hardly a consideration at derring distances.

The M20 has a spring-loaded tip-up barrel operated by a lever located on the left side of the frame just forward of the grip panel. This permits loading a round directly into the chamber and makes manual slide retraction totally unnecessary. The pistol may, of course, be unloaded in the same manner. The slide's traditional-looking serrations are thus cosmetic redundancies. There is no hold-open for the slide.

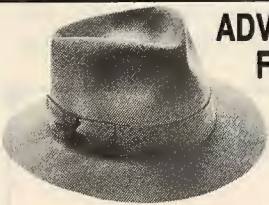
To disassemble the M20 for cleaning and maintenance, first remove the magazine. Release the barrel by pushing the barrel lever forward and withdraw the cartridge, if any, from the chamber. Swing the barrel forward over its hinge to the full stop position. Cock the hammer fully. Grasp the front of the slide, and retract it slightly. Lift the front end of the slide above the frame's barrel hinge, and pull the slide forward until it clears the frame. Reassemble in the reverse manner. When pressing the slide back down on the frame, a sharp click will indicate the proper engagement between the recoil spring levers and the slide cutouts.

During the firing test of 175 rounds, there was one failure to feed a Winchester-Western 45-gr. Expanding Point cartridge. Close-range groups were tight, including "double taps" with the first round fired double-action: more than adequate accuracy potential. The grip portion of the frame is large enough to allow purchase of two fingers during the firing sequence. The grip tang is long and effectively prevents hammer bite from the exposed hammer.

All three of these fine pistols are more than adequate in their intended role as back-up pieces. But what's the bottom line? What's my personal preference among the

three? It's a tough choice, made somewhat easier by the Walther TPH's general unavailability in the U.S. In the steaming humidity of Central America, or any other tropical climate, I'll take the Seecamp LWS-.25, since I've seen blued and nicked guns turn into rusted hulks in less than a year in this harsh environment. When this is not a consideration, you'll find me toting Beretta's little hair-triggered jewel. ✕

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# FULL AUTO

Continued from page 18

was not as severe as the early tests had indicated. Therefore, in May 1944 a project was instituted to develop the components required to convert the M1 carbine to selective fire. Standardized late in 1944 as the M2 carbine, a 30-rd. magazine (interchangeable with the 15-rd. type) was adopted as well. About 550,000 M2 carbines were eventually manufactured and many thousands more converted to this configuration by parts supplied in kit form.

The M2 carbine was the prevalent form of the Korean War. Cyclic rate in the full-auto mode is 750-775 rpm.

A proper M2 carbine consists of the following additions and modifications. The front handguard, prone to cracking under the stress of full-auto fire, was beefed up with four reinforcing rivets instead of the former two. The stock is inlet to accommodate the selector switch and all, except some used early on by the USMC, have a larger, bulbous forearm — again to prevent splitting. The magazine catch was strengthened with an added projection because of the 30-rd. magazine's increased weight. The bolt is heavier, with a round rather than flat-top surface to retard the cyclic rate and improve functioning. A new operating

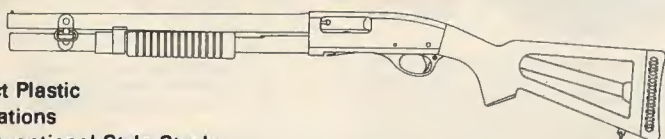
slide and trigger housing are required to accept the various components of the fire mechanism. The sear and hammer have an altered configuration. Added parts are a selector lever, disconnect lever and crank pin, selector spring, and disconnect with spring and plunger assembly.

The unregistered possession of these parts is illegal and can result in a great deal of suffering and anguish for the foolhardy. As the M2's trigger housing is the single key component (and the most difficult to alter correctly), the BATF has judiciously ruled that this part alone can be serial numbered and registered by a Class 2 manufacturer instead of a receiver. This permits the owner to float a registered M2 carbine kit from one weapon to another. "Papered" M2 kits currently sell for \$225 to \$275 from legitimate Class 3 dealers.

Performance of the M2 carbine is greatly enhanced if a late Korean War-vintage, stainless-steel piston and nut are installed. They should not be removed for normal maintenance. The sear and disconnect spring and plunger should also be periodically inspected for wear.

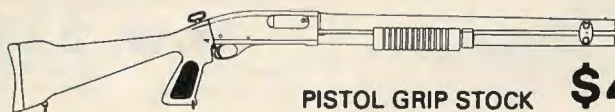
More than six million carbines of all models were manufactured. The denigrations of so-called experts aside, it served well with adequate reliability. Light and compact, with greater hit potential than any pistol and more than acceptable accuracy at the intended ranges of 300 yards or less, it was always popular with the troops and retains its favor with the general public to this day. While certainly superseded by the modern short-barreled assault rifle, it continues to perform a cost-effective mission in Third World countries — especially in Asia and Central America where its small size and low felt recoil ideally adapt it to the small stature of the average soldier. ✕

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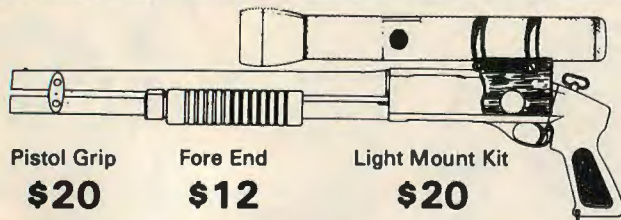
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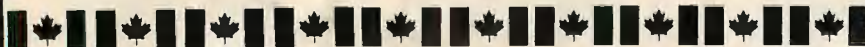
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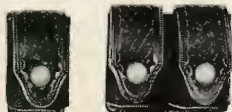
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## CHARGIN' CHARLIE

Continued from page 34

the Special Forces School and there he stayed until the Delta Force was activated on 9 October 1977. It was the unit he had been pushing for since the days of his SAS tour 27 years before.

With terrorism and highjacking becoming commonplace in the '70s, Pentagon leaders realized that the United States lacked the capability to carry out special surgical operations on short notice, and Charlie Beckwith grabbed the chance to form a special operations detachment. It was Charlie who wrote the proposal for Delta, briefed Washington and wrote the unit's Table of Organization and Equipment.

It was fitting for Charlie Beckwith to be the unit's first commander, and he considers it the high point of his career. The tragic end to the aborted rescue mission — an end that he considers entirely beyond his control — was the undisputed low point for the charismatic combat commander.

After plans for a second hostage rescue attempt were scrubbed by President Carter, Beckwith was given a desk at the top-secret Joint Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg. Unlike many other officers at a critical juncture in their careers, Beckwith was not merely marking time and waiting for promotion.

"Hell, I'll never make general," he commented. "I step on too many toes." It was an accurate assessment of his potential for success in the rarified political atmosphere surrounding the men who wear stars in America. He never did get his brigadier's star.

In 1981, stifled by the desk job, the combat-oriented Charlie Beckwith retired after almost 30 years of service, and embarked on a second career — teaching American corporations how to protect themselves against terrorists. ✕

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## TAKING EL TABLON

Continued from page 79

We broke into a clearing containing a cluster of huts and a corporal approached a *campesino* sitting near one of them to ask if guerrillas had been seen in the area. The trail was warm. The farmer indicated a rebel squad had passed by him late the previous afternoon. Martinez stepped up the pace. He had decided to simply keep going on this track in an attempt to run the rebels to ground. We were moving steadily uphill and he indicated he would make a decision about sniping with the .50 or continuing the chase when he had a better perspective on the area.

While we were struggling through the bush, Lt. Villaslobos was leading the remainder of 1st Company through the low ground in generally the same direction we were traveling. Via radio we discovered that he was making progress but no contact. We pushed on and ascended three treacherous peaks. It was a dicey walk in the stunning heat of mid-morning. One misstep on the narrow, lava-strewn trails would have tumbled a trooper to his death down the sheer cliffs. There was no shade and very little water since we were geared to travel light and fast. There were plenty of sun-bleached rocks to reflect the glare of daylight into our sweaty faces. We plodded on in a stupor with Martinez in the lead. He never seemed to tire and his legs worked over the rugged terrain like pistons.

At the base of a gigantic hill mass we paused to check the map. It was listed. Nothing that immense could be missed by a map-maker. The printing said *El Tisate*. The troops had been up there before and were not anxious for another expedition to the top. They called it *El Pisate*, literally "Fuck yourself." That seemed appropriate. Muttering to myself in English I said, "I love these fucking hills...and they love fucking me."

Ahead of us was 6,000 feet of bush. We simply shrugged and started to climb. Dazed and staggering, we finally reach the crest about two hours later and reunited with the company commander who had led his force to the top from a different approach.

I kept waiting for night to fall, but it was only 1000. Villaslobos and Martinez were scanning the hillside for guerrilla activity. Our three bandits were nowhere in sight but the commander's obvious disappointment didn't last long. Gunfire echoed across the valley below us. Someone had clearly bitten into a shit sandwich.

The radio revealed it was 2nd Company being fired on by an unknown number of Gs in a hillside position somewhere to our direct front. Villaslobos ordered Martinez to get the .50 pumping and in short order the gun crew was raking the hills with lead. The machine gun snarled

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and coughed in search and traverse, tearing up greenery, but it was not enough for Villaslobos. He wanted a bigger piece of the fight. A ragged roar went up from the troops when he ordered an advance at double-time. He intended to drive a wedge between the Gs and his besieged sister company.

We plunged down the mountainside, humping hard toward the fight, spurred on through the heat by the steady rattle of gunfire. As we passed *campesinos* in our route, the troops would drop out of formation, fill their canteens from proffered water jugs and then rush to rejoin the head-long advance Villaslobos was leading.

Spurred by our attack, 2nd Company got up from under fire and advanced on the Gs. We now had two formations putting on the pressure. The Gs broke contact and withdrew back toward the village of El Tablon. It was clearly time for a showdown with the Rafael Arce Zablah rebels. The Lenca Battalion commander wanted to mix it up *mano a mano* before the guerrillas could get to the village. If he couldn't pull it off and the Gs got inside the village there would undoubtedly be heavy civilian casualties. From the hills just north of El Tablon the rebels poured a hail of lead at the advancing troops. All units were now relatively on line and providing flank security for each other.

We'd have to move through El Tablon quickly, and the final advance under fire to reach the hamlet was an all-out foot race. The troopers took cover behind adobe buildings and low concrete walls. Several had been hit in the advance and medics rushed to provide first aid. Medevacs would be a long time coming to El Tablon. A lot of good men die on the ground when a nation's entire helicopter fleet consists of only a dozen or so worn-out birds.

Snipers went to work on suspected G gun positions. The enemy was within shouting distance as we discovered very quickly. "Viva la BRAZ," they screamed at us during intermittent lulls in the firing. BRAZ is the guerrilla nickname for the Rafael Arce Zablah Brigade. Salvadoran troopers snorted in derision. One NCO loudly voiced his opinion of the men firing down on us from the hills. "Faggots," he screamed. His comment concerning guerrilla sexual persuasions brought a hail of automatic-weapons fire.

It was time to tangle. Officers rushed from cover and urged their men into the assault. We advanced by sections across the open plaza in the center of El Tablon and ducked into a sheltered road leading up into the scrub brush. Guerrilla gunfire snapped and tore at the trees and bushes flanking our route. But the fire was lit in the Lenca Battalion troops. They plunged ahead, disregarding the incoming rounds.

We reached the military crest of the hill with Villaslobos on my right shouting for Martinez to get up here with *la cincuenta*. He arrived in just a few moments and kicked his crew into a frenzy. They stirred

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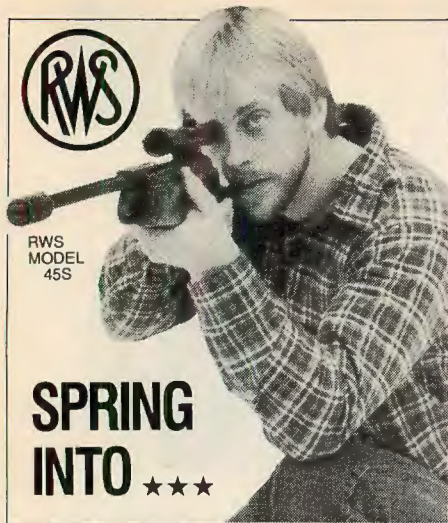
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up clouds of dust in their rush to get the gun in action. It would be important support for the squads advancing on the enemy. The gunner signified he was ready by plopping down behind the .50, racking the bolt to the rear twice and taking a firm grip on the firing handles. In a moment the roar of the gun drowned out the spang and pop of M16s. Spent brass twinkled into a huge heap at the gunner's feet as he swung the heavy barrel in a blazing arc.

A 90mm recoilless rifle crew ran past the gun position and began pumping high explosive rounds into the bush. At least three rebel gun positions had been spotted and the infantry squads were closing on them rapidly. The supporting fire from the .50 and the 90mm should keep their heads down until the Salvo grunts could get closer. But the Gs were rapidly realizing they were bound to lose this one. The 90mm was scaring hell out of them and we saw several break into the open. That's when the infantry marksmen began to do their thing.

We took off in pursuit, firing from the hip and calling the Gs everything but human. The Lenca Battalion troopers wanted a piece of someone's ass. And they got it on a second hill just outside El Tablon. Snipers covering the guerrilla retreat slowed our assault but once again the 90mm recoilless rifle blew a hole through the resistance for us. We followed blood trails up the hillside along a dry, dusty road. The battalion commander to our rear had reached the artillery battery and ordered up some fire from the 105s that created a wall of steel at the Gs backs. They had to stand and fight. They did...and they died.

By 1300 the hills outside El Tablon were quiet. Lenca Battalion sweep teams policed up four bodies and hauled them back into the village where *campesinos* loaded them into wheelbarrows and then into a truck for burial outside the hamlet. Colonel Cruz flew in to congratulate his troops. They had scored a victory at El Tablon more significant than the body-count would indicate. The villagers now realized they were safe from guerrilla harassment and free to vote in their country's elections.

And most of them did just that. Guerrillas attacked and pestered voters in San Miguel, Usulután, Cabanas, La Unión and San Vicente, but the runoff elections went peacefully in Morazan. Colonel Cruz and his Lenca Battalion had imposed a stringent poll tax on the guerrillas in the area. It was just too high a price for them to pay. ✕

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After our attack on the command post and the ambush of the would-be rescuers, motorized river traffic — which we could hear from *Luna Roja* — completely halted. However, after about a week the Sandinistas got brave again and we could hear the hum of their outboards as they ferried supplies up and down the river to their outposts.

We decided to hit it again. Surdo planned this mission. He said it was based upon an order from Commandante Pastora: The Rio San Juan was henceforth to be declared a *zona de guerra* (war-zone) and that no traffic on the river would be permitted, repeat, *no* traffic. This seemed reasonable to me: deprive them of the ability to resupply by river.

But, there was a catch. Civilians used the river too. There was a daily launch service between San Carlos, on Lake Nicaragua, and El Castillo (which had been retaken by the Sandinistas). I'll never forget Surdo's words as he gave his imitation of a Pastora harangue prior to going into battle, telling the entire formation, "*Si mata una mujer, mata una piri-cuaca; si mata un nino, mata un piri-cuaco.*"

*Piricuaco* is a derogatory term, meaning rabid dog, we used for the Sandinistas, so in effect Surdo was saying "If you kill a woman, you're killing a Sandinista, if you kill a child, you're killing a Sandinista." And off we went to kill women and children.

Once again I was part of 10 men who would actually perform the ambush. The site, selected by Surdo, had only soft cover, no thick trees or rocks, only palmetto and vines. We cleared our fields of fire and settled back to await the arrival of women and children and whatever other civilian passengers there might be on this launch.

Each man was alone with his thoughts. Not a word was spoken among any of us regarding the nature of this mission. Surdo paced back and forth nervously some yards behind us in the protection of the jungle.

The civilian launch was preceded by a Sandinista patrol boat with a .30-caliber Browning mounted. It roared by. The machine-gunners inserted their earplugs and we all hunkered down a little deeper, locked and loaded, and waited. The loud throb of the powerful diesels of the 70-foot launch preceded its arrival by a good two minutes. The signal to commence firing was given as it appeared in front of us and I watched the RPG-7 arc over the boat and into the jungle on the opposite bank. The M60 opened up, I rattled off a 20-round burst from my FAL. Brass was flying as thick as the jungle insects as our entire squad emptied their magazines. *Every bullet sailed harmlessly over the civilian craft.*

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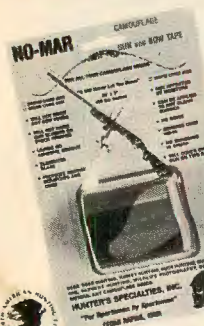
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When Surdo realized what was happening he came running out of the jungle cursing violently in Spanish and firing his AK at the disappearing launch. Nicaraguan peasants are mean bastards, and tough soldiers. But they're not murderers. I laughed aloud in relief and pride as we packed up and prepared to move out. My laughter stopped when I heard once again the sound of the AK-47, only this time it was incoming.

Our ambush had been ambushed. One of the road guards had been walking a post as if he were at the front gate at Camp Lejeune, rather than in enemy territory, and had been spotted. So there we were: no hard cover, with empty magazines in our weapons and under attack by a very angry enemy. They didn't know we'd fired over the heads of the civilian boat, and I'm sure the Sandinistas were feeling very self-righteous at that time. They were going to avenge this attack.

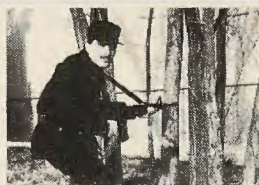
We were on a bullshit mission—a mission that violated international law, human decency and all ideas of right or wrong that I've ever had—we were led by a fool and had another fool draw attention to our position and I was scared, pissed off, wet, tired and, all of a sudden, sick.

In the middle of a fire fight, with the enemy very angry at us and determined to kill us, I came down with malaria. My fever, I learned later, was 104 degrees; the raindrops almost produced steam I was so hot. Fortunately, before the chills came,

the Sandinistas broke contact. I was glad they did. We got up, moved out and picked up our guards on the way back. I alternately cursed and shivered as the fever tightened its grip. We skirted an ambush on the route back. Fortunately, they were on the wrong trail, and never saw us, but they heard us, and unleashed a hail of .30-caliber machine-gun bullets in our direction.

As we pressed on toward the relative safety of *Luna Roja*, and I became weaker and more delirious, *El Gato Negro*, one of my NCOs, carried my pack and ultimately my web gear. I finally staggered into Costa Rica with only my FAL and a fresh magazine to weigh me down. I reported to Surdo that I was ill, seriously ill, and that I was going to evacuate myself to the ARDE hospital in San Jose and that I was going to make a full report of the debacle to San Pedro. With *El Gato Negro* helping me, we borrowed two horses from collaborators at a nearby farm, and began the two-day journey through rural Costa Rica until we got to a road that wasn't impassible because of rain and mud. An ARDE jeep picked me up and carried me back the rest of the way to San Jose where I was treated by ARDE doctors.

While I was recovering, Robelo and Pastora had a public argument. Pastora accused Robelo of sending ARDE troops loyal to the MDN faction for U.S. training in Honduras. Robelo revealed that Pastora had, through Carlos Coronel, tried to make contact with Fidel Castro and



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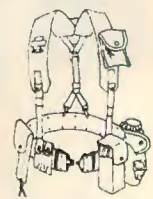
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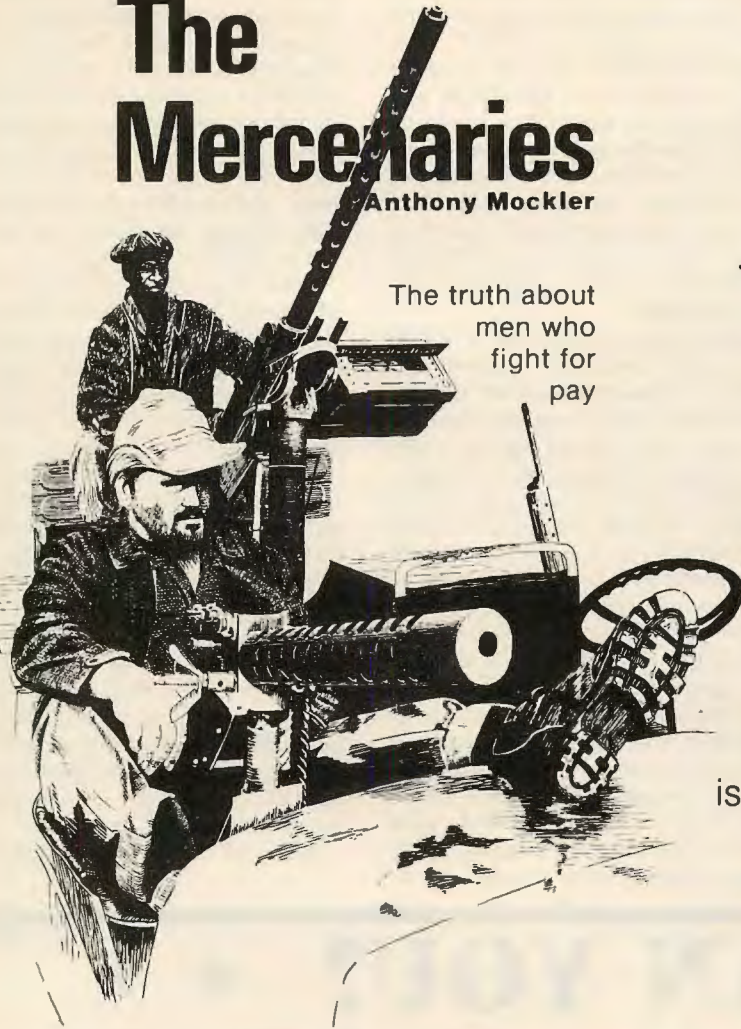
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negotiate a separate peace between the Sandinistas and the FRS. Each accused the other of multiple wrong-doings and Pastora threatened to shut down military operations unless Robelo resigned and gave him sole leadership of ARDE.

I had meanwhile made a report against Surdo's ordering us to kill women and children and was told that he would be removed from his position as executive officer of *Luna Roja* and that he probably would be kicked out of the army. As it turned out, nothing happened to Surdo. I was also told that when I was well I would be transferred to the command of Dr. Hugo Spadafora.

Formerly assistant director of public health in the Republic of Panama, Dr. Spadafora resigned to become a full-time fighter against the communist forces of Nicaragua. I didn't mind fighting under the command of Hugo at all, but frankly, at this time I was no longer happy fighting for ARDE. Fighting with junk weapons (my FAL's serial number was 1589) against communist forces I can handle — fighting with limited equipment is part of modern guerrilla warfare. But knowing that 50 kicks down the road is plenty of good equipment that is not allocated to your camp because the commander is not a loyal follower of Eden Pastora, *that* I had trouble dealing with. I didn't care for military ops commanded by fools whose qualifications for military command were their left-wing beliefs and personal loyalty to Eden Pastora. I also resented our re-

latively limited number of actions, when the FDN forces were fighting every day on the northern front. However, the FDN forces, which are led by conservative businessmen and church leaders, are unpalatable to the leftist Pastora and he refuses to join with them. While I was there he refused to coordinate attacks with their campaigns: attacks that would have taken pressure off the FDN and perhaps allowed them to seize a major city or even a province, and establish a provisional government. Morale, needless to say, was very low in ARDE at this time.

Luna Roja split into two camps after I left. During the split between FRS and the rest of ARDE, Robelo's group (MDN) cut off logistical support for the troops. This led to wholesale desertions and the end of most combat operations. During one week at the end of November or the beginning of December 1983, 600 combatants left the line. Some of these took their weapons with them and sold them for food in Costa Rican border towns. (You could buy an AK in Los Chiles for 500 colones — about \$13 U.S.) A group from one of my old camps reportedly hijacked a bus north of Ciudad Quesada and got free rides back into the interior of Costa Rica. Many military officers and political leaders left ARDE, some giving up in disgust and entirely abandoning the struggle, looking for civilian jobs with which to support their families.

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leaders formed other groups and vowed to carry on the fight without Pastora and the rest of ARDE. One of these groups was called the Third Movement (M3) and its aims included establishment of a philosophical and political middle ground between the ultra-leftist Pastora, the moderate Alfonso Robelo and the conservative FDN. M3 was headed politically by Alvaro Taboada, who holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and was formerly the Sandinista ambassador to Ecuador. His military commander was my old friend, Alejandro Gringo.

While enjoying a meal in San Jose, two men joined me in the restaurant, one of whom was a Costa Rican I had met before. The other fellow turned out to be from my old outfit in the 82nd Airborne Division. I had barely known him, and had not seen him since those glory days.

**"...I was disillusioned...  
with Pastora's military  
leadership, the logistical  
situation and the lack of  
professionalism..."**

They asked me how I was handling the split in ARDE. I told them, frankly, that I was disillusioned, not only with the political split but with Pastora's military leadership, the logistical situation and the lack of professionalism evidenced by some of Pastora's lieutenants. The Costa Rican then suggested that I investigate M3 and said that if I did so and participated in their military operations, I might be asked to do other things for other groups *for pay*. If I went along with the program and did some things for M3, I could be tapped to join the mercs who allegedly mined the harbors and did the Porto Corinto raid. That would be very nice as far as I was concerned. I prepared to meet the men of M3.

Dr. Taboada had been invited to become a member of the executive council of FRS, Pastora's group. Various high-level Nicaraguan political leaders of democratic leftist persuasion were asked to join this council and work out a political platform for FRS. At the end of their efforts, they were told the truth of the matter; they were only a rubber stamp. Pastora wanted the council to second all of his pronouncements and policies. Taboada and many others left the council insulted. Taboada had come out of his diplomatic and academic ivory tower and carried an FAL through the bush. He had put his ass on the line for democracy and wasn't about to play puppet to Pastora.

I was told that M3 would be helped by "American friends" and that a squad of anti-Castro Cuban volunteers, all veterans, were on the way. M3 was going to have a military arm composed of two branches; one a battalion-size regular

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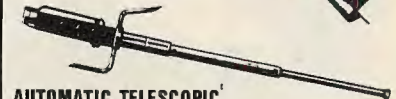
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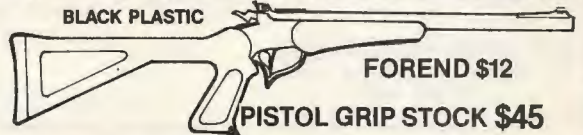
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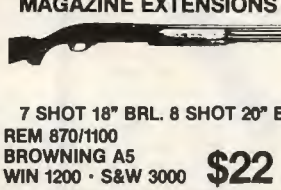
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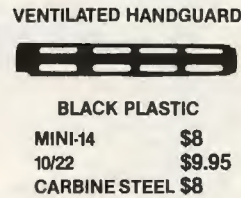
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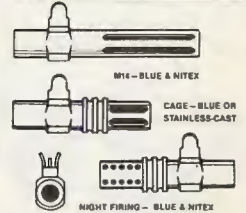


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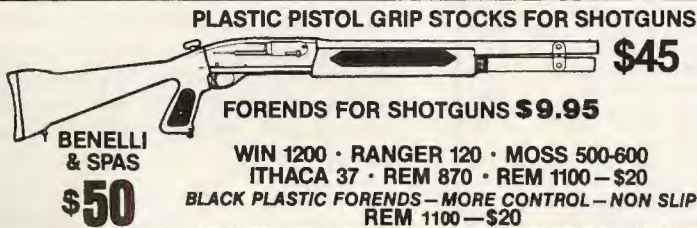


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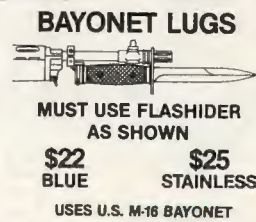
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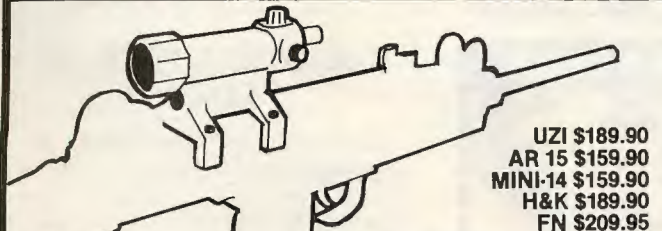
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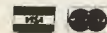


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army outfit, the other a smaller training cadre which would also perform special ops — sort of an elite unit. They guaranteed me all of the cadre would be veterans, if not of the U.S. Army, at least of the guerrilla war against the Sandinistas. Many of these guerrillas were former Sandinistas who had been to Cuba for special operations training and some of them were pretty good.

I was in a position to make good money, join an elite group of mercenaries working for American interests and carry on the fight against the Sandinistas. But first, I wanted to go back to the states to conduct some business and see my wife. M3 suggested that while I was there I try to counter some of Pastora's thunder.

Pastora and Robelo were leaving for the United States to conduct a fundraising tour and my job was to follow him around, talk to some of the same people he did and give them the real view of Pastora and his leadership and politics.

Pastora held a press conference in New York City and the reporters were so captivated by the rhythm of his voice that they were writing that revolution of love crap down as if he really had something to say. He went from there to Washington where I'm told the only politician that he fooled was Tip O'Neill who fell in love with him and gave him a guided tour of the Capitol.

Upon returning to Central America in December of '83, I learned that the "American friends" were not going to back M3, nor was FDN. In Costa Rica, Dr. Taboada and Alejandro Gringo told me that relations with ARDE were extremely bad. M3 staff members had been kidnapped by ARDE security forces and there had been bomb threats. They played a tape recording for me, which they claimed was an intercept of a radio transmission from San Pedro to Pastora in the field. San Pedro was reporting the location, size and probable armament of the M3 camp. I recognized the voice of Commander Zero, saying in Spanish, "Maybe we'll just go down there [to the M3 camp] and start another war." At that point I had had enough.

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believed when Zero blamed the CIA and the Honduras-based FDN, whom he has repeatedly referred to as "genocidal Somozistas," for any number of real or imagined problems that he has encountered.

What the believers did not know — and the dozen or so Western journalists who followed him to his not-so-secret base failed to reveal — was that there was a more than ample supply of meat, rice, beans and cigarettes for ARDE fighters. In fact, Zero's troops were wearing brand-new, U.S.-issue boots, web gear, camouflage uniforms, and toting new AK-47s. His personal bodyguards were, to a man, former members of Somoza's hated *Guardia Nacional*.

The only fighters who were truly suffering were the poor anti-communist *campesinos* to whom nothing had been given other than some well-worn AKs. The guerrillas had no training or resupply and they were the units sent far inland with nothing more than a terse order to "kill Sandinistas." To put it mildly, Pastora's view of the dual-based assault on the oppressive Sandinista regime was somewhat colonial. Commander Zero's attitude toward his Honduras-based supposed allies was "hooray for me, and screw you!"

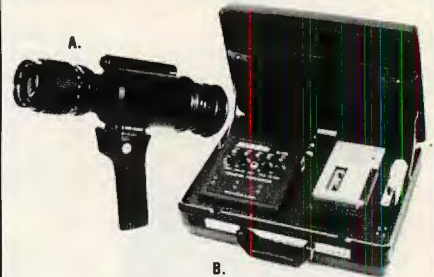
The efforts and lives of many Nicaraguan freedom fighters and millions of U.S. taxpayers' dollars had been wasted on the bizarre fiascos of the fabled guerrilla fighter.

When Zero left Nicaragua in the Spring of 1981 it was not a typical exile. He first went to Cuba to see his old buddy and mentor, Fidel Castro. While in Cuba, Zero begged Fidel to intercede with the Sandinistas for him. Zero was unhappy with the position given him by the Sandinistas and believed that he should be the 10th *Comandante*. No one with any knowledge of the situation really believed Zero when he said his trip to Cuba was to ask Castro to help him bring about a "democratization" of the Nicaraguan revolution. The truth is that the Sandinista leadership did not want Zero — not the other way around, as he claimed.

While in Cuba, Zero also conferred with none other than Col. Muammar Khadafy. Khadafy had promised Zero 10 million dollars for the overthrow of Gen. Lucas Garcia, then president of Guatemala. Zero did not get his Libyan money so he took his bat, ball and glove and sulked off to Costa Rica. While in Costa Rica, Zero joined with Alfonso Robelo and Brooklyn Rivera and formed an anti-Sandinista organization known as ARDE.

The charismatic Zero buffaloed both Robelo and the native Indian Rivera. He quickly usurped not only the military operation but also the supply and communication system that had been

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put in by Robello and effectively neutralized his main rival for military leadership, Fernando (*El Negro*) Chamorro. *El Negro* left ARDE after accusing Zero of harboring the man who shot and wounded his son in a San Jose assassination attempt. Before Zero took the supply system away from Robelo there had always been ample food, medicine and ammo to last through each month. After Zero let his cronies run it, shortages were commonplace and ARDE troops usually ran out of food and ammo before the middle of each month.

Zero instituted his own communications network and made it so simple that all his troops were in constant contact with their bases. He did not bother to make it secure from electronic eavesdropping.

Virtually everyone concerned in northern Costa Rica and southern Nicaragua — including the Sandinistas — was listening in and enjoying the numerous fights between Zero and Robelo as well as copying all of their secret military orders.

In November 1982, *El Negro* was booted out of Costa Rica when he was captured with a small quantity of arms. *El Negro* blames Zero for setting him up to be caught in the border snare.

Despite internecine quarrels, U.S. aid to Zero continued to flow. Some people in Foggy Bottom continued to believe Zero when he said that he and he alone could split the Sandinista army. That never happened, but *Comandante* Zero was made a revolutionary hero by the press. He never was a real field commander. Only after the taking of the Nicaraguan palace when he ripped off his mask and posed for the press did he become larger than life. The Sandinistas, who considered him a buffoon, happily let Zero strut for the press.

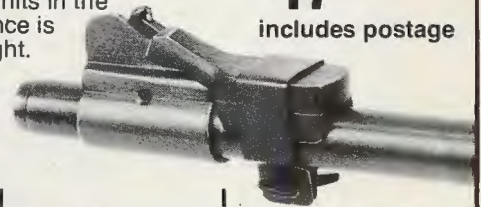
In the last days of the war against Somoza, Zero tried to send forces into southwest Nicaragua to take Rivas and declare a provisional government. Somoza's troops killed hundreds of Zero's guerrillas and Rivas did not fall until Somoza fled and the guard abandoned the country.

Since Zero became the military leader of ARDE he has never been content to let anyone but himself direct the war effort. It may have been a lack of trust on his part or a manifestation of megalomania, but Zero personally took control of the underground (internal front) and only when one of his old Sandinista buddies defected did he appoint a chief of that section. Within two months the underground was virtually destroyed. With 15 men and five women from the underground tortured to death and the rest fleeing for their lives, Zero's old buddy returned to Nicaragua and his former job as Sandinista chief of state security in the

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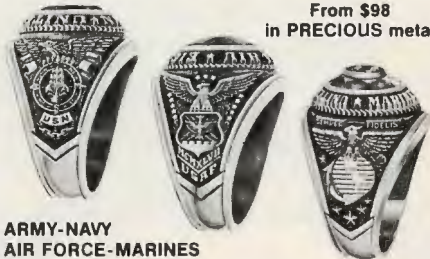
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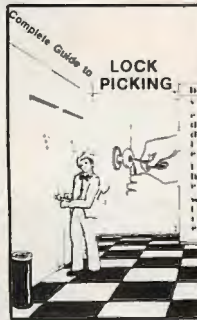
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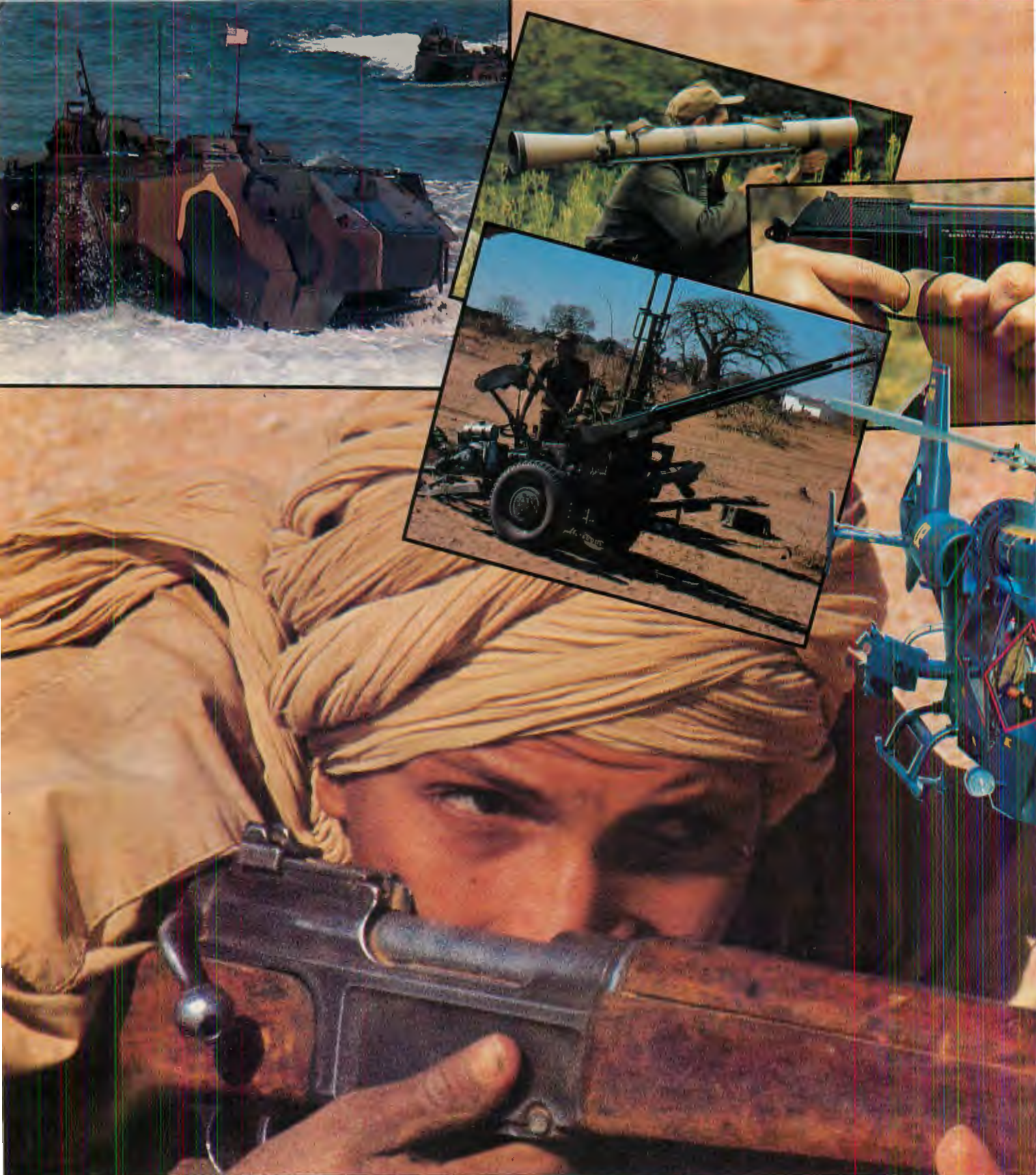
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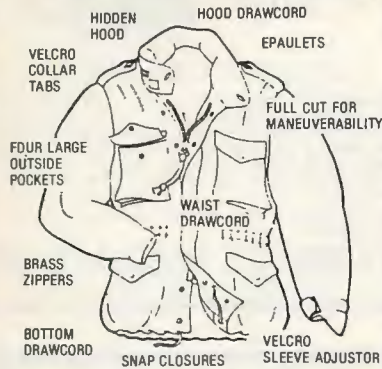
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Nicaraguan Department of Rivas.

The press ballyhooed the ARDE capture of San Juan Del Norte with its 54-man Sandinista garrison. In true guerrilla fashion, Zero's troops retired across the river into Costa Rica. The Western press tripped all over themselves hoping to be the first to announce his great military victory to the world. Bigger than most villages in the remote south, San Juan Del Norte housed 40 families including pigs, chickens and goats. According to Zero, two years of heavy fighting on the southern front produced heavy casualties. In reality, the monkeys hunted by Zero's men suffered heavier casualties than the Sandinistas.

The FDN, which is effectively battling Sandinistas in the north, is forced to fly resupply missions with one 1937 DC-3. The plane lacks an altimeter and has no artificial horizon to aid pilots in dodging the area's treacherous mountains. To resupply 10,000 men, the DC-3 crew must fly missions 160 kilometers into enemy territory with no air cover. Meanwhile, up until he was booted out of his leadership position by an overwhelming vote of the contra council, Zero had three helicopters and five fixed-wing aircraft to supply 2,000 men and women. Despite all this, U.S. aid, until the cut-off earlier this year, was directed primarily southward to Pastora's area of operation.

CIA control agents now admit that they made a big mistake in backing Zero. FDN sources have told SOF that with the money that has been wasted on Zero they could have doubled their forces long ago.

In the words of a twice-wounded FDN trooper, "He (Zero) is either the stupidest man alive or the greatest double agent of all times." Fortunately for ARDE and the entire contra movement, it doesn't make much difference which anymore.

— Francisco Carberry

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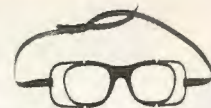
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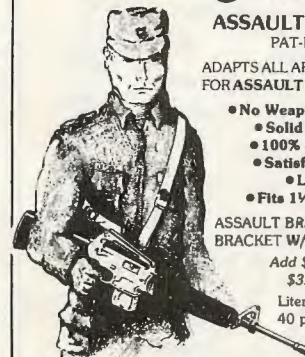
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## DE-BRIEF

Continued from page 4

nute-forty-five on the nightly news. What sells papers and improves ratings is drama and human conflict. Some journalists are willing to try for that at the expense of an accurate analysis of the situation.

"Superficiality is a killer," commented one source who has been observing the U.S. press corps in El Salvador for some time, "and there certainly is a tendency to chase non-stories on slow news days." Some of that's understandable, I suppose. Journalism is, after all, a commercial enterprise, not to mention an upwardly mobile career that demands constant competition for more vivid or exclusive coverage of any situation. But that doesn't explain or excuse blatantly biased coverage from reporters who should know that the situation in El Salvador - political and military - is improving with every passing day. Some reporters simply have no basis for such reference. Others simply saw too much blood and guts; too much laziness, greed, general incompetence and wanton violence in 1980-81 for the scars on their objectivity to ever heal properly.

Meanwhile, an undercurrent of negativism toward U.S. foreign policy — no matter what that may be — and even an element of perverse self-interest continues to cause a swivet of faulty assessments from too many reporters in El Salvador. No one is asking honest reporters to become advocates of U.S. policy in Central America, but neither should we expect the people who bring us the news from that area to assume anything we do down there is automatically suspect, wrong or stupid. We certainly should expect them to know, study and learn enough about military subjects to make an honest assessment of the tactical situation, rather than sit still for their breathless "coup-is-imminent-military-is-incompetent" blatherings.

And in my most humble, clearly biased opinion, we have every right to expect that American reporters will not hesitate to report guerrilla failures and defeats just to protect the insurgent sources who let them in on the date, time and location of terrorist activities days in advance.

I'm the first guy to admit that I don't have much time in El Salvador and probably shouldn't make generalizations but, like Will Rogers, I read the papers. I'm heartily sick and tired of hearing and reading that the Salvadoran government and its Army is bound to lose the struggle against communism due to bureaucratic corruption and bungling incompetence. It just isn't so, and we need to stop claiming it is before such predictions become self-fulfilling prophecy. ☒

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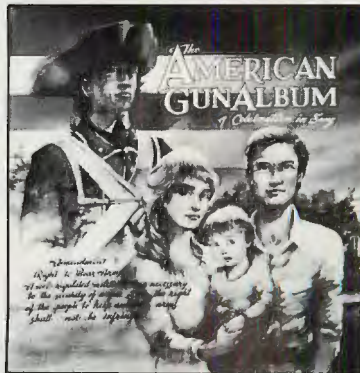
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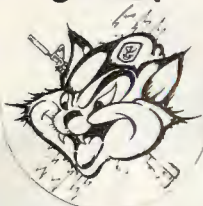
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