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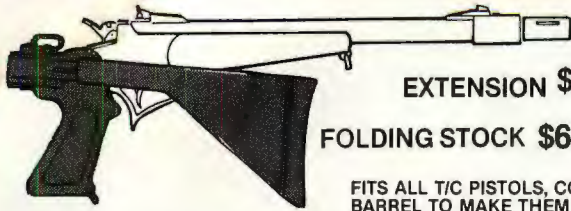
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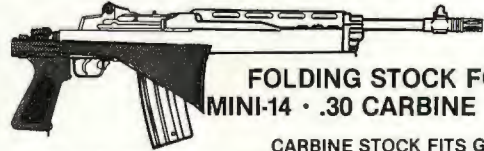
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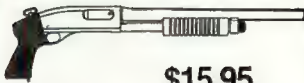
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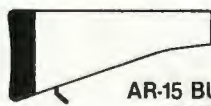
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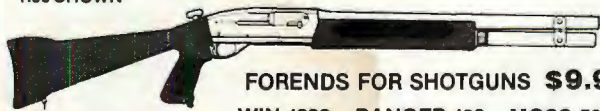


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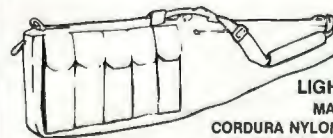
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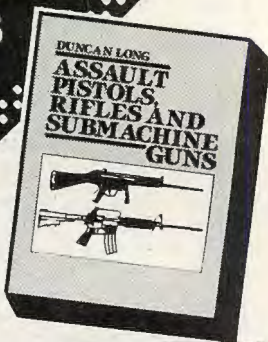
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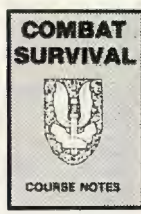
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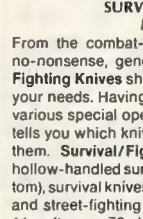
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by Duncan Long

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COMMAND GUIDANCE

by Robert K. Brown

HOW should a nation handle internal security? Should it be by coercion or cooperation?

Almost half a million KGB and MVD troops show that Soviets think citizens are sheep to be herded. Although Soviet security troops work for their Department of the Interior, those formations shouldn't be confused with the U.S. Forest Service. KGB and MVD units are police armies formed to protect the rulers from the ruled.

Cooperation is the operant word in the mission of American police. They are formed by elected authority to help constituents keep their peace. Cops aren't hired to protect the mayor from the voters.

That's a truism, but restrictive gun laws of the last 50 years have eroded that relationship between police and the civil population. Americans have forsaken a tradition of an armed populace responsible for and cooperating with elected authority in defense of its own peace for an embattled position where bearing arms and self-defense are privileges dispensed by self-constituted higher authority. Bad gun laws are responsible for this gulf between electors and officials. Bluntly, we are creating law enforcement and social problems of the future by turning police into armed watchdogs of an unarmed electorate.

Then there's paperwork. Registration and confiscation schemes have multiplied the cost of government and reduced the effectiveness of duty police. Already struggling with legal redefinition of their role and multicopy forms for every activity, American sheriffs and police are being further buried by

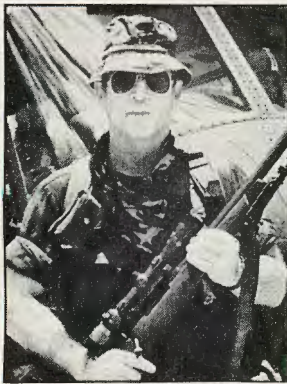
invented crime that proceeds from bad laws. Even BATF officials have testified before the Senate that 75 percent of prosecutions under the 1968 Gun Control Act are against citizens who have no other criminal record.

For the welfare of our society we need simplified gun laws. A streamlined code will cut paperwork and court costs, and reinstate the proper relationship between citizens and police.

And yet, some have misrepresented the McClure/Volkmer Bill (S.49/H.R.645) to peace officers as a law that will put more guns in more criminals hands. That's nonsense. It's a bill to minimize book-keeping, ensure the rights of law-abiding gun owners, and to prevent the creation of criminals by an artificially restrictive code.

For more specific information or comment on the Volkmer/McClure Bill, police and gun owners should write to the National Rifle Association (Dept. SOF, 1600 Rhode Island Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20036). If you haven't joined the NRA yet: Join. It's the best protection you can buy for your rights.

Immediately, sheriffs and police should end-run bureaucrats and self-appointed spokesmen by writing their representatives to tell them that working police understand and recognize the necessity of the Volkmer/McClure Bill, and that those representatives should sign Congressman Volkmer's discharge petition so the House can vote to clean up our gun laws. Write: The Honorable John Doe, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. ✕



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COVER: Though men still make wars, weapons have their part. This month, SOF tells the true story of weapons development in Howard Sochurek's illustrated history of Project Agile. Pete Kokalis throws a body blow at another procurement snafu in his exposé of the bureaucratic blundering behind the Army's mishandling of the squad automatic weapon project. Further delays may endanger American soldiers' lives for yet another decade.

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MONUMENTAL MENACE...

Sirs:

I recently heard that some clown plans to make a park in Phoenix, Arizona, in dedication of (get this) draft dodgers, protesters and cowards that ran to Canada. This is an outrage.

E. Stockert
Jackson, New Jersey

On 15 December, the Arizona Repulsive (. . . er, Republic) ran an article on the man who intends to erect a 30-foot "memorial" to Vietnam War protesters. Terry Choate, formerly a radio show announcer and now a cab company owner, is portrayed as a right wing Libertarian, but his actions are leaning more toward Jane Fonda than Sam Steiger. I cannot comprehend a man who would build a pillar of concrete, top it with a peace symbol, surround it with flags of the United States and communist Vietnam, and dedicate it to peace protesters.

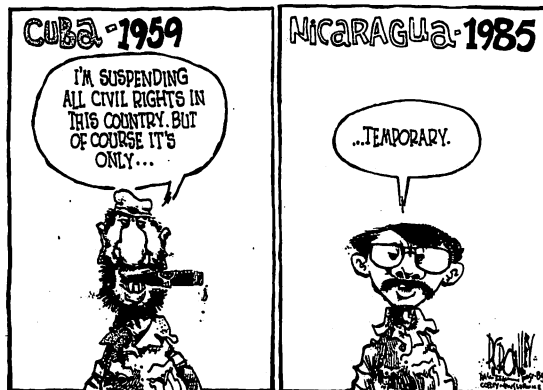
Terry Choate has yet to build his monument to cowardice. Such a structure will need the approval of the County Attorney's Office of Maricopa County. To voice your opinions on this matter, please write:
Tom Collins, County Attorney, Maricopa County, 101 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85003.

Paul Doi
Phoenix, Arizona

For those readers who are interested in the story behind the story, turn back to the article in the March '86 issue, "Monumental Cowards," and check out SOF's nominations for the Vietnam Victory Memorial.



FLAK



ON SENTRY REMOVAL...

Sirs:

Just read the January 1986 *Battle Blades* column. It was great. I am the proud owner of a Gurkha kukri which I got from Atlanta Cutlery. I am well-pleased with the \$17.95 I spent for it. Thanks for putting my head-hunter in the spotlight it deserves.

Tom Coffman
Jacksonville, Florida

American military planners seem to have the habit of worshipping the false goddesses Technica and Exotica. They seem to think that the more complex or unusual the weaponry, the more effective in solving the soldier's tactical problems... even as far down as the problem of sentry removal.

I agree that the kukri is an effective tool for sentry removal. What I don't agree with is the need to go halfway around the world to find the tool. An effective device for the purpose of silently removing sentries is right around the corner. The standard military issue machete can be sharpened with a file, sharpening stone or rock and is heavy enough to do the trick. If it can cut through vines and heavy brush, it can do the same to a skull or spinal cord.

Dr. Ron Shaver
Las Vegas, Nevada

And to think we received such a tremendous response on Gurkha kukris from an article on sentry removal. *Battle Blades* fans will be happy to know that Bill Bagwell will address the topic of kukris as well as machetes in a future issue of SOF.

EXPOSING UNCLE SAM...

Sirs:

"POWs vs. Uncle Sam, A Sad Saga of Forgotten Heroes" (SOF, January '86) has been one of the best articles I have read yet from *Soldier of Fortune*. It is very disheartening to read to what lengths the government and military will go to suppress and discredit the integrity of servicemen concerning the POW/MIAs. Where are America's priorities? How long are the families going to have to wait for an end to this nightmare?

David D. Brooks
Issaquah, Washington

The article on POW/MIAs was the most shocking I've ever read. A lot of people have asked me why I am so concerned about this situation. They tell me that if there was anything our government could do, they would do it. Well, now I just let them read your article and they sing a different tune. I'm glad there are people like SOF who write articles on the truth about our POWs that the government won't tell us.

Mark Felton
South St. Paul, Minnesota

COLD STEEL'S OFFERINGS...

Sirs:

I consider Lynn Thompson's article, "Edged Weapon Arsenal" (SOF, February '86) nothing more than a paid advertisement for something he sells. I am somewhat surprised to hear him claim credit for designing the traditional Japanese blade but I appreciate his choice and quality control so I'll let that pass.

The rest of the article is horse shit. There is not to my knowledge a usable machete made for real work in the U.S. That corn knife is a flimsy, cheap, blister-grabbing grass cutter that will let you down every time you really need it. The length and shape is OK except that the end should be squared and chisel sharpened to cut roots in holes. The handle should wrap around since the full tang leaves a ridge that will yank blisters. The blade needs added weight for that heavy hardwood mountain brush. The first time you hit a knot and that flexible



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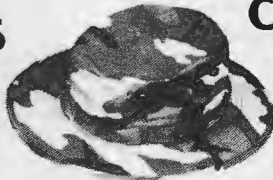
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blade runs a real torque up your already sore wrist, you'll see what I mean.

Billy J. Hall
Marietta, Oklahoma

We understand your problem with a manufacturer reviewing his own product. But please note that Thompson didn't test and evaluate his knife; he was allowed to present his argument that one knife won't do everything required of edged tools and weapons carried to the bush. This month's Battle Blades column, beginning on page 22, features a test and evaluation of Cold Steel's tanto and a little bit about the traditional Japanese blade from which Lynn Thompson's weapon was patterned.

TO BARE ARMS...

Sirs:

It seems highly hypocritical to read various articles and movie reviews bemoaning the technical inaccuracies of movies like *Rambo* or *Commando*, and yet on the following pages you print ads for posters depicting women and weapons in some very technically inaccurate poses. Why is it that photos of men in SOF are realistic, outfitted in attire appropriate to the terrain, but the pictures of women are so silly? Let's see more articles about real women in the world of weapons and war.

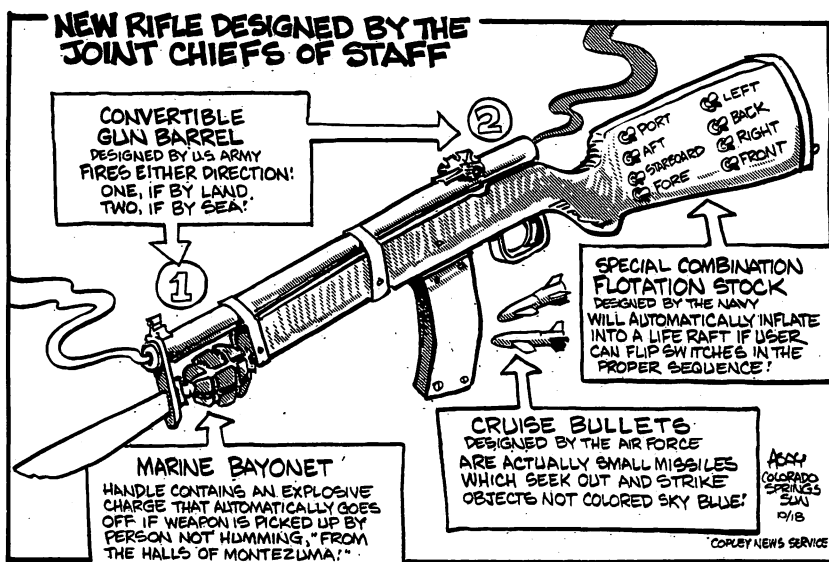
Elisabeth Clingman
Madison, Wisconsin

The poses of women in advertising are not something we control — companies using women in their ads are interested in profits, not realism. SOF's article on women in the Salvadoran army, however, portrayed them in the field as they really are (see "Salvadoreñas at War," SOF, February 1985).

HIND D DEFECTIONS...

Sirs:

Just read the December '85 SOF and was quite amused by the results of the reward offered to any Hind D pilot defecting. Congratulations on one of the slickest psywar ops ever



pulled. A Hind on the ground is useless.

Frank Tireur
Calgary, Alta, Canada

Upon reading the September '85 issue of *Soldier of Fortune*, we became aware of your offer to pay \$1,000,000 to a pilot who defects to a non-communist country with an Mi-24 Hind D attack helicopter. It is of interest to us whether your offer would equally apply to, say, a Czechoslovak pilot defecting with such a machine, or a Czechoslovak pilot defecting with an Mi-24 from the Sandinista government.

Jaroslav Capek
Vice-Chairman
Czechoslovak Federal
Council-in-Exile

At this point Publisher Robert K. Brown has not opened the award to other Hind defections. Only the following conditions apply: The pilot must be Nicaraguan, the ship must be of Sandinista provenance, and it must be the first one to be flown out of Nicaragua.

WELCOME, BARRY...

Sirs:

I was pleased to see that you have added Barry Sadler to your staff. I have been a reader of his *Casca* series since the first and have enjoyed reading every one of the series to date. His contributions can only add to your already excellent magazine.

R.D. Schlegel
Manhattan, Kansas

IS THE END IN SIGHT?...

Sirs:

Regarding the escapades of Dornaus & Dixon Enterprises Inc. of Huntington Beach, California: You may wish to inform your readers that any dissatisfied purchasers of Bren Tens should voice their complaints in writing to: Mr. Eric G. Larson, Regional Chief Postal Inspector, San Bruno, CA 94098-0100.

Philip R. Wagner
R&A Firearms Inc.
Canton, Ohio

My Bren Ten finally arrived. It had been ordered in August 1982. Promises of timely delivery had been made — and broken — time and time again by the manufacturer. I ordered a Bren Ten and waited a long time for it, but it was worth the wait. True, it came with only one 10mm magazine (I ordered three), and I did not receive my .22LR conversion kit. But what I have — the Standard Model with a .45 ACP conversion kit — is quality. I will wait for the rest.

I am not happy with the missed shipping dates, but my mind now rests easier knowing that Dornaus & Dixon is manufacturing pistols. Yes, it is possible, readers.

Mark Hunt
NRA Life Member

Continued on page 104

CHINA GETS ISRAELI GUN...

While Israel Military Industries (IMI) has acknowledged selling to a foreign buyer their 60mm hyper-velocity medium support (HVMS) gun, the government in Tel Aviv has declined to identify the end user. Despite the lack of official confirmation, *Soldier of Fortune* sources say the new Israeli tank-killing guns are bound for the People's Republic of China. The sources would not speculate on the precise size of the order, although one said "the order was a substantial one."

Israel's HVMS gun would be a formidable anti-tank weapon if mounted on a light armored vehicle (LAV). The Marine Corps is taking a second look at it as a possible replacement for the 25mm chain gun now deployed on Marine LAVs. And no wonder. The HVMS gun will penetrate 120mm of tank armor at a 60-degree angle from 2,000 meters. By contrast, NATO's 105mm L-52 tank gun's maximum range for that performance is 1,830 meters. The HVMS gun also will fire semiautomatically or in three-round bursts. Each of these bursts can be fired in 1.5 seconds so the gun can deliver 100 rounds per minute on a target.

Although Israel and China have no official ties, sources say the relationship behind closed doors is close, particularly regarding scientific and military topics. For instance, foreign observers were surprised, at China's Army Day parade on 1 October 1985, to see 105mm Israeli tank guns mounted on the turrets of Chinese T-69s.

BULLETIN BOARD



"Mister" Rahmatullah Safi, as he likes to be called, poses with SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown on a recent visit to the magazine's headquarters. Safi, who at one time served as a colonel in command of Afghan Special Forces of His Majesty the King of Afghanistan, later took over the SF training command for the freedom fighters opposing Soviet invaders (see "Afghan Elite Forces," SOF, December 1983).

MX AIMED AT YOU...

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Afghan Freedom Fighters Fund: Lawrence Stier, Donald E. Raulerson Jr., Military Surplus Supply Survival Equipment, John H. Klein, Charles R. Hornung, John C. Lerch Jr.

MIKHAIL'S NAVY...

Top Soviet dog Mikhail Gorbachev has a new man running his navy. That's not news. But press reports at the time said Admiral of the Fleet Sergei Georgievich Gorshkov, former commander in chief of the Soviet navy, had been replaced by an "Admiral Chernievov." But one Soviet diplomat told *Soldier of Fortune* that "there is no Admiral Chernievov, at least not in the Soviet navy." The Soviet source said the 76-year-old Gorshkov was replaced by Admiral of the Fleet Vladimir Nikolayevich Chernavin.

Solid biographical information on the 57-year-old Chernavin unfortunately is about as hard to come by as the fictitious "Admiral Chernievov." Checking other SOF sources revealed that Chernavin entered the navy in 1951. He has a strong background in attack and missile-launching submarines and is regarded as a pioneer of "boomers," Soviet nuclear missile submarines. In addition, Chernavin commanded the Northern Fleet, based in Severomorsk near Murmansk, from July 1977 to 1 December 1981, when he was appointed chief of the main naval staff, roughly equivalent to the chief of naval operations in the United States. He remained in this post until replacing Gorshkov in December 1985.

The big question is what



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SF6A

happened to the venerable Gorshkov? A veritable Soviet institution unto himself, Gorshkov was like a Hyman Rickover and John Paul Jones rolled into one. Under his tutelage the Soviet navy was transformed from an adequate coastal defense force into a true-blue water fleet second only to the U.S. Navy. In some areas, most notably submarine warfare, Gorshkov's command saw the Soviets actually surpass the U.S. Navy. Most likely his retirement after 30 years of running the Soviet navy is part of the move toward younger leaders since Gorbachev took office. There were no reports of Gorshkov's illness or death, despite his advanced age. The younger Chernavin is sure to assert Gorbachev's policies and political control in what rapidly is becoming "Mikhail's Navy."

IRAN NEXT ON SOVIET MENU...

The precarious health of the Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's religious dictator, is increasing Soviet interest in a possible invasion of Afghanistan's easterly neighbor. Detailed logistical work for such a contingency plan is already off and running, SOF sources say, spurred by widespread rumors that Khomeini most likely will not live to see 1987. One internal sign is the recent naming of Ayatollah Montazeri as Khomeini's officially designated successor. But Khomeini's death still is expected to ignite turbulent factional struggles between the mullahs and the long-suppressed political opposition.

The Soviets hope to exploit the certain social and political unrest either internally, or if necessary by military invasion. Certainly the Kremlin would rather win Iran through easier means, such as the communist student movement or Mujahideen-e-Khalq, The People's Mujahideen, which translates as Marxists in mullahs' clothing, the Islamic version of Central America's "liberation theology."

The Soviet army is still preparing for a military alternative, SOF sources say. There are approximately 175,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union's Southern TVD (military district) has about 30 divisions, although many are not at full strength, as well as about 5,200 tanks and 900 tactical support planes. In the event of such an invasion of Iran — something the Soviets would like to avoid — these



Ayatollah Montazeri, heir apparent to Khomeini.

units probably would be reinforced with first-line units from the strategic reserves.

There has already been one ominous sign of Soviet preparation for an Iran invasion contingency, however. Over 25,000 Soviet ground-pounders marched last July in *Kavkaz 85*, a massive six-day exercise staged in a 100 square kilometer area about 200 miles from the Soviet border with Iran and Turkey. Although it was billed as an anti-NATO defense exercise aimed at Turkey, the Soviets seemed no less interested in nearby Iran, and the exercises were suitable to an invasion scenario. For instance, *Spetsnaz* teams carried out raids on enemy rear command areas and communications installations. And small units practiced advancing independently to secure strategic mountain passes for larger formations. There were also rapid advances in mountainous terrain in hot weather and maximum employment of firepower and mobility assets. Colonel General Arkhipov, CO of the Soviet Union's Southern TVD, oversaw these war games.

No matter what evolves, a pro-Moscow regime in Tehran would combine with the Soviet ally in Iraq to pose a serious threat of the Persian Gulf oil supply to the West. And the Afghan freedom fighters could forget about any more assistance from Iran in their struggle to oust Soviet invaders already in their country.

SANDINO'S GRANDSON...

The Sandinista Party has forsaken its own patron saint, according to Aristides Pavon, who lives in Houston, Texas. Pavon is the grandson and only known living descendant of General Augusto Cesar Sandino, the Nicaraguan folk hero from whom the Sandinista Party got its name.

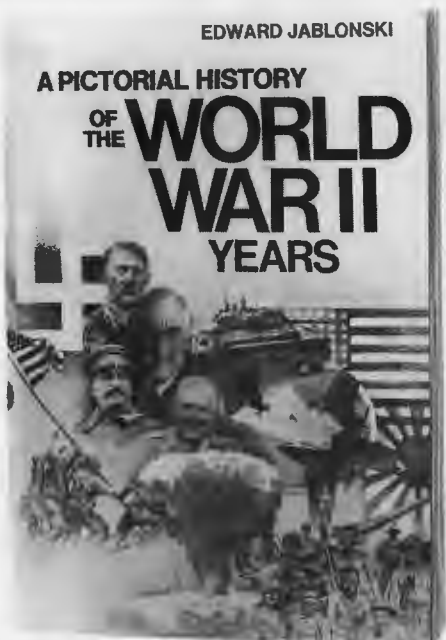
The communist ideologues, who used the name of Augusto Sandino to steal Nicaragua's revolution from the coalition that made it possible, have betrayed the original nationalistic spirit of their namesake, Sandino's grandson said in an interview with *Washington Inquirer*. Pavon's mother was Blanca Segovia, Sandino's only child. Sandino's wife died in childbirth.

Although Sandino was a nationalist who fought U.S. Marines in the 1920s and '30s, and believed in certain socialist policies, Pavon said his grandfather was more interested in national self-determination and strongly resisted efforts by communists to exploit Sandino's following for the benefit of international expansionist goals espoused by ComIntern.

Ironically, Pavon was a member of the National Guard when the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime. After the revolution, Pavon was jailed, tortured and threatened with a 30-year prison term if he did not endorse the communist government as the grandson of the ruling party's namesake.

In another of history's ironies, the grandson of the man who assassinated Sandino now prospers under the communist government. The grandfather of Samuel Santos, until recently mayor of Managua, is credited with murdering Sandino.

Pavon, on the other hand, managed to escape this "worker's paradise" three years after being imprisoned and fled to the United States with his two sons. He makes enough money to get by as a part-time factory worker. ✕



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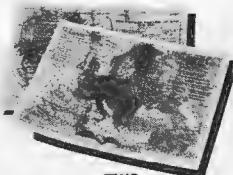
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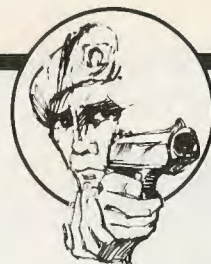


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I WAS THERE

by William Stodgel

Hot Nights, Hot Tempers, Hot Lead

VIENTNAM was hot, very hot, and a blue haze drifted foglike just above the ground. A pungent smell of cordite blew in the wind as shrapnel and bullets whizzed madly around like crazed hornets, the air snapping crisply as they passed close by. Battle was an electrifying mixture of fear and exhilaration.

Reddish-pink tracers arced fading trajectories into the heavy tree line — high-velocity neon bees sounding like a symphony of chain saws. Machine gun barrels warped from intense heat were replaced and fired again. Ejected brass shell casings lay smoking in the mud. Hot blood throbbed in your temples. Hot days! Hot tempers! Hot nights! Hot adrenalin! Hot lead! The body adjusted to the infernal heat of battle, but the conscience would not accept the coldness in man's heart. This was war.

The choppers came swooping into the small dusty clearing of the base camp. Fading yellow sunlight glistened off their windshields as rotor wash churned the heavy elephant grass like great birds of prey. Bodies in neatly zippered industrial bags were stacked perpendicular to the aircraft, heads facing one open cargo door, feet the other. Dead Americans were placed in a pile like carefully stacked cordwood, bodies that bowed in the middle when carried. Fresh kills. Very professional and businesslike, the war was a machine of casualties. Disturbing was the way they were handled, irreverent and nonchalant, like an everyday chore.

One sweltering night in 1967 the Viet Cong attacked the northeast wall of our base camp. Small-arms fire hissed wickedly overhead, and the air sang with incoming and outgoing rounds. A half-dozen mortars thumped brazenly across the interior of the camp as soldiers ran from their beds to reinforce the perimeter. A rocket screamed over the berm wall to land with a ground-shaking blast.

To awaken under fire is extremely disorienting. Are you safe at home

dreaming of gunfire or are you in danger and dreaming of home? Precious seconds race by. Which is reality?

Our lieutenant must have awakened under these conditions: foggy-headed, blurry-eyed, and listening to the sounds of gunfire in disbelief. He was a 25-year-old gung-ho officer with airborne insignia sewn proudly on his uniform. Boyish brown hair and freckled face offset his professional soldier manner, and when the troops were gone he quietly spoke of returning home.

Jumping from bed, he threw on his armored flak jacket, donned his camouflaged steel pot, grabbed his M16 and sprinted for the door. A recoilless rifle round came looping over the low protective berm making a direct hit. Overkill! No arms. No legs. No head. Only the trunk remained. A 50-pound bag of potatoes. It was hot, man! It was hot as hell!

Sinewy pieces of red meat were strewn haphazardly about the floor and walls. Shards of bone were driven into the horizontal wooden slats of the building. Man-made nails. Some were buried so deeply that pliers were needed to extract them. Transformation of man to thing: a semi-rectangular slab of meat encircled by pools of bloody chum and slivered bone. It was chilling to the marrow. A gulp of liquid oxygen. How could such a hot place turn so cold?

The heat of anger, the heat of battle, hot gun barrels, blue-tinged brass and heady cyanic smoke. Pumped-up blood raced madly through expanded veins. Breath came convulsively. Hearts pumped strongly. You were tenaciously alive. Bravery and fear seemed to methodically intermingle with dank nights of ebony terror. That was 'Nam.

Though long behind us now, the heat of danger is easy to remember and cold reality impossible to absolve. Of one thing you can be certain, there will be other such battles. We have left the portal slightly larger for the narrow-shouldered beast. ✕

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THE AK47 STORY: Evolution of the Kalashnikov Weapons. By Edward Clinton Ezell. Stackpole Books, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1831, Harrisburg, PA 17105. 1986. \$29.95. Review by Bill Guthrie.

SOF readers seem to buy a lot of TMs but few collectors' coffee-table books. Why? Because most military men are more interested in how a weapon works and where it's used than in memorizing tables of proof-marks. **The AK47 Story** is the perfect antidote to the glossy coffee-table book of Mauser 98 variants. Clinton Ezell's latest work is clear, coherent, highly readable and it's a gun book either a soldier or general reader would enjoy.

Visibly well-organized, systematically illustrated and written in lucid narrative, **The AK47 Story** is certainly a better read than the average formula mercenary novel. The central character is a wounded war hero who educates himself to become the most influential arms designer of the 20th century. His lineage is traced exhaustively, and his invention is described in minute detail. All in all, it's an impressive production.

All kinds of data are available to satisfy the most serious weapons scholar or war historian, but the best feature of this small arms epic is Ezell's writing. Those familiar with his *Small Arms of the World* will be pleasantly surprised by the flow, balance and vigor of Ezell's expression in **The AK47 Story**. This infusion of style, so unusual in arms books, extends to Ezell's discussion of technical subjects. The development and function of the Kalashnikov is related in narrative and argument, so the general reader can absorb an enormous amount of information with little or no discomfort.

For the reviewer, the major problem with **The AK47 Story** is the absence of nits to pick. It is clear, intelligent, balanced and not obtrusively argumentative. Honestly, over the years SOF has reviewed many technical books for the sole purpose of giving digested technical information to our average reader without the expense and inconvenience of purchasing and reading another reference work, but this review has another function entirely. We recommend this book highly for general readers and specialists alike. For military reading on a specific subject **The AK47 Story** is unlikely to be matched in 1986.

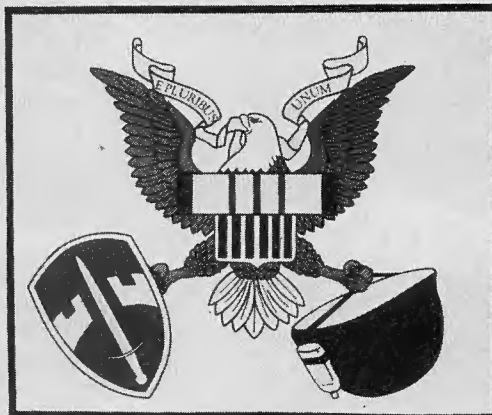
THE RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN ARMY: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973. By Shelby L. Stanton. Presidio Press,

IN REVIEW



The Rise and Fall of an American Army

U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973



Shelby L. Stanton

Dept. SOF, 31 Pamaron Way,
Novato, CA 94947. 1985. 411 pp.
\$22.50. Review by Dale Andrade.

ARMIES have marched through Vietnam for centuries. They came from different parts of the world — China, Japan, France and the U.S. — but they all had one thing in common. All were defeated.

Vietnam is a small country with a small population of technologically backward people. How could they defeat such great armies? Without directly addressing that issue many writers have sniped at the area around it hoping to find targets for blame. Perhaps a clear answer will give historians a better idea of why we lost.

Shelby Stanton takes careful aim at the subject and scores a direct hit. A better account of the U.S. Army with all its foibles and fortes cannot be found in print today. **The Rise and Fall of an American Army** goes through each phase of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam — from the adviser days through the final withdrawal in 1973 — and analyzes both

the performance of the U.S. military (for the information of you USMC fans, mostly Army) and the forces and tactics of the elusive enemy they were up against.

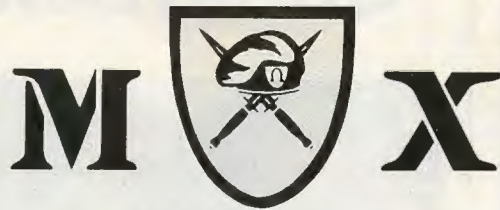
Stanton is no stranger to the U.S. military in Vietnam. He is the author of *Vietnam Order of Battle*, the widely acclaimed volume that breaks down Army units into easily accessible tables, charts and historical sketches. His new book is equally easy to handle.

Readers with a strong background in the Vietnam War will find **The Rise and Fall of an American Army** the perfect source book for facts on U.S. Army involvement in the war. Even if your knowledge of the war is cursory this book will fill in gaps. It follows a chronological line and sticks to the point: no confusing leaps and bounds here.

More than 10 years have passed since the fall of Saigon, more than enough time to put out a Vietnam War book devoid of rationalization and moralization. Stanton has done it. Anyone looking for yet another volume to fill his Vietnam bookshelf should seriously consider this one. ✕

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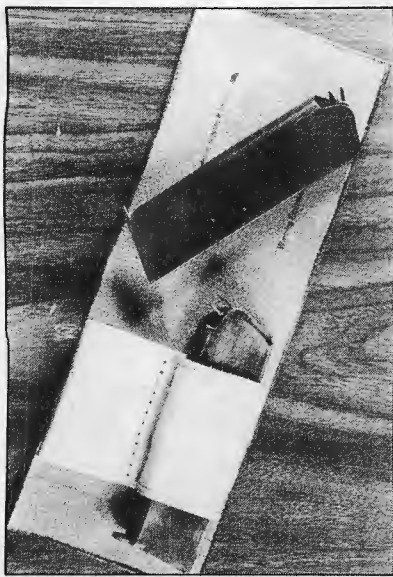
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MAG WALLET

Ever wondered where cops carry spare magazines for their undercover autos? Well, there are a couple of possibilities. They can stuff them into their waistband; not always a good idea unless you're used to having them drop through your pant leg and clank onto the ground. Very embarrassing. Or they might use a mag holster on a belt. Very conventional. How about something new?

Laramie Leather Works thinks they have the answer. Most people carry a wallet around in their back pocket, so why not make one that can hold a couple of autoloader magazines? It's certainly a convenient way to carry them, but it's not all that fast. Any cop who has to quickly shove a new mag into his pistol during a tense situation may not be too happy when he tries to drag out his wallet for a fresh magazine. Maybe there's a better use for it.

Any cop on a potentially dangerous job might want to carry his standard magazine pouch on his belt and use the mag wallet for backup. That way he can have two more mags in case things get really nasty.

One minor modification needed on this product is a thinner leather cover. With two magazines sandwiched between two thick slabs of leather you might think there's an egg in your back pocket. But that may prove a minor consideration when all you want is extra firepower.

The mag wallet comfortably holds two .45 auto or 9mm single-column magazines side by side and goes for around \$23. Contact Donn Sneddon at Laramie Leather Works, Dept. SOF, 1354 N. 18th St., Laramie, WY 82070. Phone: (307) 745-9639.

ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER



RAPPELLING RIG

One of the biggest problems with current rappelling harnesses is that they're uncomfortable. They either cut into your legs or waist — whichever you prefer. Many outdoor outfits have tried to wrestle with the problem, but most end up getting pinned.

There's a new product put out by a company called The Gendarme. They've taken the hassle out of climbing into a rappelling harness and adjusting it to fit comfortably. One size fits all, it's almost impossible to put it on wrong and the standard of workmanship is high. But because they have come up with a one-size-fits-all unit, some problems arise.

While it can be adjusted to fit well while rappelling or walking, it won't work for both. If the harness is adjusted for comfort while dangling from a rope it will be loose in the leg loops while strolling around on the ground. The reverse is also true. Because the leg loops and waist belt are made from the same long piece

of material there is no adequate way to prevent one of the two from cinching up.

Since the only thing that holds the entire contraption together is a buckle, it makes sense that it should be strong. This one is, but it's too small. The buckle is of the double pass variety and manipulating the web strap through the little buckle is both slow and cumbersome — two undesirable characteristics in a military or police situation.

All of these problems are little more than nitpicking, but they do need some attention if The Gendarme intends to go after the law enforcement market. For the civilian this harness is more than adequate; indeed, there are guide services already employing this adjustable harness because it is cheap, simple, safe and one size really does fit all. And at \$32 it's competitively priced. For more information write: The Gendarme, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 53, Seneca Rocks, WV 26884. Phone: (304) 567-2600. ✕

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Actual size



The new Colt Stainless Steel Officer's ACP.

STOPPING abruptly in his tracks, the point man signaled "danger" to the patrol behind him. Everyone froze. The lieutenant sent security out on the flanks and, like green ghosts, the patrol moved off the trail and around the danger area.

The point man's caution paid off. A few enemy assault rifles barked from the bush, but the patrol's return fire quickly suppressed the hastily reorganized ambush. The enemy melted back into the jungle.

Why did the ambush fail? Why did the point man catch on to what was in store for his patrol? Simple. He saw something that was out of place with the surroundings. Something had moved or presented a shape that was unusual. The point man may not be able to say exactly what caught his attention — he just knew that all was not right.

Modern infantry war is fought in the shadows. No longer do foot soldiers clash in massed formations, rolling over huge chunks of the countryside. Now it's small-unit warfare designed along a lightning-quick strike capability where stealth and concealment are the key to a successful mission.

Soldiers camouflage themselves in order to defeat enemy observation. When you're sneaking up on an enemy, staying undetected is more than half the battle. Then again, you need to see through the enemy's camouflage. See him without being seen. Kill him without being killed. So how do soldiers become part of the landscape and avoid detection? By remembering the six things that are dead giveaways in the bush — Shape, Shine, Shadow, Silhouette, Spacing and Movement.

Observation is one of the basic skills taught to soldiers; sergeants pound it into their heads day after day. Since I can't be there to pound it into your head, I'll try to do it on paper. Let's take it from the top.

Shape. One reason soldiers show up when they're hiding has to do with their distinctive shape. Heads and shoulders, not to mention packs and web gear, are not found in nature. Break them up by sticking branches or camouflaged strips of cloth into helmets, LBE shoulder straps and pack straps.

Shine. Brass is fine for the parade field, but Mother Nature has never heard of it. Keep it out of the bush. Shiny objects reflect light and nothing is easier to spot than something that looks like a signal mirror flashing out Morse code. The Army issues black belt buckles and the like, but that is often not enough. Metal needs to be dull, even if it's black, and that often means repainting. In Africa, we used to



COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

by Jack Thompson

Blending with the Bush



Careful camouflage breaks up the human shape, making it harder to spot in the bush. Photo: DOD

"paint things old" to keep them from shining in the field. It doesn't take much time to repaint your buckles.

Shadow. Concealed objects can sometimes be seen because they cast a shadow. An enemy behind a bush can be seen if the light is directly behind him. One of the best ways to prevent throwing a shadow is by staying low to the ground.

Silhouette. You would think that only an idiot would present the enemy with a silhouette to shoot at, but it hap-

pens all the time. The most common form of silhouette occurs when someone stands on a ridgeline or the top of a hill. Don't do that. Always avoid the topographic crest of a hill and, once again, stay low.

Spacing. On the surface it may not appear to be so, but man has a tendency to space things evenly. Nature, on the other hand, does not. Staggered columns of troops moving in the field will often fool an observer's eye, but it's not an easy trick to master. After a few miles of staggered patrolling, soldiers just seem to drift back into an evenly spaced sequence.

Understanding man's proclivity for order can also be used to your advantage if you're the observer. I remember watching a column of guerrillas and noticing gaps at uneven intervals in their ranks. These guys can't be that well-trained, I remember thinking to myself. I looked closer. Sure enough, each of those gaps was filled by a particularly well-camouflaged guerrilla. My knowledge of concealment had prevented me from underestimating what we were up against.

Movement. I always save the best for last. Movement is without question the main reason soldiers are spotted. No matter how good your camouflage is, it won't do any good if you move around. If you're on an ambush and you start to squirm after a few hours, the enemy will probably spot you. People move, trees and bushes don't, and if your camouflage is meant to look like a tree, then act like one.

Tactical decisions on the lower level are often made on the spur of the moment by officers using data from intelligence sources that have reported enemy movement. That's the key. If an enemy has been spotted, it's no great feat to outfox him . . . as long as you have remained unseen, that is. That's no great revelation — the enemy knows it and will do his damndest to avoid being seen. So do your best to know and understand camouflage and the nature of concealment, and you will succeed in seeing your enemy and still avoid being seen by him. ✕

CONFIDENT IN COMBAT

Few people are better qualified to write *Combat Weaponcraft* than Jack Thompson. He has been around weapons and warfare most of his adult life and his experience in dealing with them has spanned the globe. Thompson served in the USMC in Vietnam, fought terrors in Rhodesia with both the SAS and the Selous Scouts, trained troopers in Central America and provided bodyguard services for diplomatic personnel.

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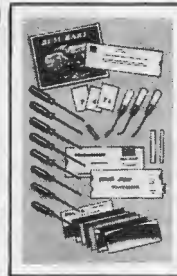
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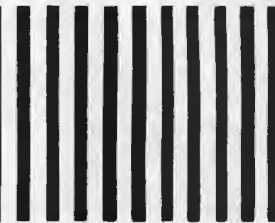
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EVERYONE'S heard of the tanto. With all the attention it's been receiving lately that's no surprise. True connoisseurs already know it from the Japanese blade tradition, but newcomers to knives and knifemaking may only be familiar with the proliferation of recent commercial copies that have become available. The tanto has Oriental mystique and tradition going for it, and in some quarters it is highly touted as an excellent all-around fighting and survival blade. Let's look at this knife from the standpoint of its origins and its application and check out the design for its strengths and weaknesses, and how it stacks up as a fighting knife.

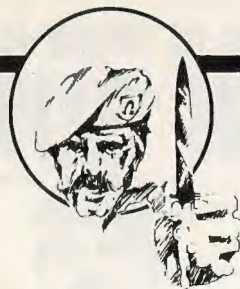
The study and understanding of Japanese edged weapons is a field that is wide, broad and deep, and few Americans look below the surface. We tend to see what we *want* to see, and when commercial opportunity beckons, profit motive often gets in the way of serious scholarship. Today's tanto craze is a case in point.

Japanese edged artifacts come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. The social fabric of Japanese culture is woven in an incredibly complex manner, replete with all kinds of badges and symbols of rank, honor and information. The blades of Japan were in large part indicators of rank and circumstance, and while Japanese edged weapons are generally well-thought-out and effective, not all Japanese blades are considered as edged weapons by the Japanese.

In the strictest sense, a tanto is a Japanese dagger with a guard and has a blade between 11 and 16 inches long. It has all the fittings and mountings of a sword and is carried constantly. Unlike the sword, it is not left at the door of the host's dwelling when visiting. A fighting man left his sword or swords at the door to show his respect for his host, but carried his tanto as a badge of rank and not as a weapon. Older men, past their prime and with their fighting days behind them, carried a blade called an aikuchi. It is identical in size and shape to the tanto, but does *not* have a guard, and it is sometimes used for ceremonial suicide in the form of hara-ki or seppuku.

Another Japanese knife bears mentioning at this time. Called the kwaiken, it has a single- or double-edged blade from 3 to 6 inches in length. Resembling the aikuchi in form, this knife is carried by women and it is used for ceremonial suicide by cutting the veins in the left side of the neck.

These are only three of the many different knives in the Japanese culture, but they are indicative of the high degree of specialization in the blades of



BATTLE BLADES

by Bill Bagwell

Japanese Knife Stands Texas Test



Lynn Thompson's product is the cream of the tanto crop and one of the best factory-made knives in the world.

the Japanese. Consider that all of these knives are badges of social standing, for no peasant carried knives such as these. Consider also that two, the aikuchi and the kwaiken, were intended as instruments of suicide as their primary purpose. The tanto was carried as a badge of rank as a matter of course, but in the event that the owner of a tanto disgraced himself, the tanto was often the blade used for *his* ritual disembowelment.

A study of Japanese blades and blade lengths reveals that, except for some shuriken and the kozuka, or throwing dagger, no blade is deemed suitable for use as a weapon by the male unless it is a minimum of 9 inches in length. The shortest Japanese edged weapon cataloged by George Cameron Stone's *Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor* is the yori toshi, a blade from 9

to 12 inches in length that is used for penetrating armor. The tanto and aikuchi traditionally have blades a minimum of 11 inches in length by Japanese definition. Only the kwaiken has a blade of 6 inches or less in length, and the Japanese consider it a ritual blade for women.

The Japanese invented the tanto, and *they* don't consider it to be a front-line edged weapon. I wholeheartedly agree with this. When you consider that the commercial versions sold in the U.S. have blades that are 6 inches or slightly less in length and do not have guards that dismount in the manner of traditional tsuba, you have to accept the fact that Americans are not buying a tanto in any traditional sense of the term. What is being sold as a weapon on the American market is, by the traditional Japanese definition, an amalgamation of a ritual suicide knife to be used by women (short blade) and by old, retired men (no tsuba). Other nations in the world have laughed at us for far less and I'm sure that this semantic indiscretion has caused plenty of amusement in the Far East.

All this aside, how does this Americanized tanto stack up as a blade for combat or survival? To find out, SOF contacted several importers and/or manufacturers of the commercial versions of this knife. Only Lynn Thompson of Cold Steel Inc. sent samples for the round of tests which included evaluations of cutting, edge holding, stress and shock. Cold Steel provided two of their tantos for testing, and another was obtained from a private source.

The market version of the tanto with its 6-inch blade length gives away too much reach in a knife fight. With its single cutting edge, the tanto has no cutting capability on the backstroke and the high point placement makes its stabbing capability less than it could be. The blade is also too short to enable one to generate real chopping power which is needed if you are building a brush shelter in a survival situation, or to split the skull of man or

Continued on page 103

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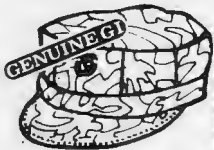
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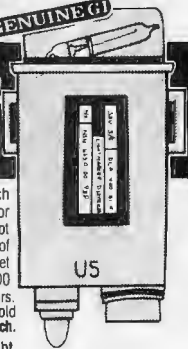
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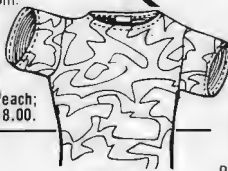
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THE submachine gun reached its zenith during World War II. Although there has been no lack of good and bad designs since then, it has never again seen such widespread use on the battlefield. The United States did not produce a submachine gun worthy of the contemporary Allied or Axis competition. While the Germans blazed away with the legendary MP40 and the Brits and Russians fought back with Stens and PPSH-41s, we started the fracas with a submachine gun made famous by Al Capone. Heavy, expensive and fabricated almost entirely from intricate milled forgings, the Thompson was a thing of beauty, but simply could not be produced in the required quantities.

The design of its eventual replacement was directed by Colonel Rene Studler, Ordnance Department, U.S. Army, Chief of the Small Arms Development Branch, Technical Staff. Studler was later to gain fame — infamy in some minds — by jamming the 7.62x51mm cartridge down NATO's collective throat and forcing the M14 on the Pentagon, which came within a cross hair of adopting the superior FN FAL.

Studler initiated a T&E program at Aberdeen Proving Ground in February 1941, which included more than 20 foreign and domestic submachine guns. The most promising proved to be a gun designed by George J. Hyde and developed by the Inland Division of General Motors Corporation and Frederick W. Sampson, GMC's chief engineer. A contract for the wooden-stocked, Hyde-Inland design of the M2 caliber .45 ACP submachine gun was awarded to Marlin Firearms Company on 18 April 1942. Marlin had trouble with their subcontractors and the M2 was never produced in quantity. It was declared obsolescent 14 months later. Development by the Guide Lamp Division of General Motors of a simplified, all-metal version of the Hyde design — the T15 — had continued. This weapon was redesignated the T20 when the requirement for a selector was eliminated. Thus, on 24 December 1942, the T20 or M3 submachine gun was adopted. It was the first U.S.-made submachine gun to be manufactured by means of extensive sheet-metal stamping and forming, procedures in which Guide Lamp was highly experienced. The M3 was first issued to U.S. troops in the fall of 1943.

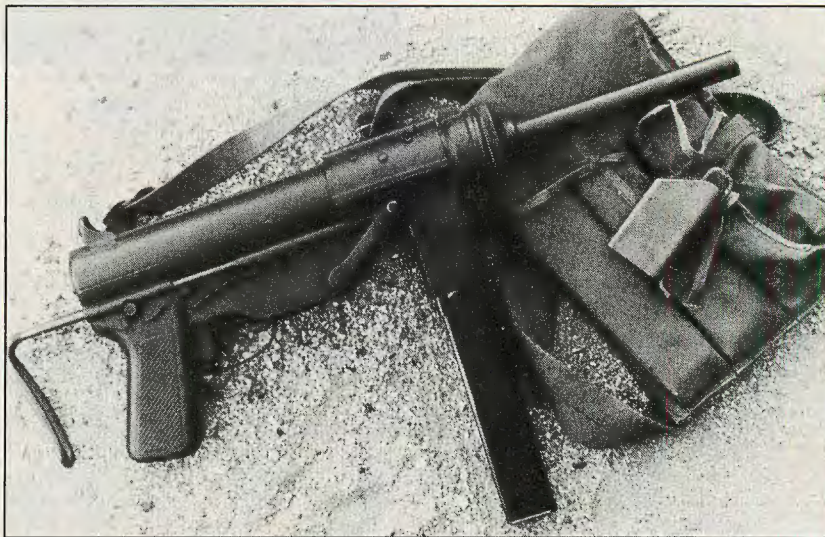
Quickly dubbed the "greasegun" or "cake decorator" by troops accustomed to the Thompson's classic appearance, the M3 fires from the open-bolt position. With a loaded magazine in place and the gun cocked, pulling the trigger will release the bolt,



FULL AUTO

by Peter G. Kokalis

Greasegun Greased



The M3 Greasegun got its start in WWII and enjoyed wide usage after the war. But is it really any good?

which is driven forward by two compressed recoil springs. The bolt face engages the base of the top cartridge in the magazine and strips it forward into the chamber. At the moment the round is completely chambered, the extractor snaps over the case rim and the fixed firing pin, which is milled into the bolt face, strikes the primer. The heavy bolt body holds the case in the chamber until the bullet has left the barrel and pressures have dropped to a safe level. Pushing back against the bolt face after the empty case has overcome the bolt's inertia, it drives the bolt rearward. The empty case is ejected and the operating springs are compressed once more to propel the bolt forward again, unless the trigger is released and the sear catches the bolt. All very conventional. But the means by which some of this was accomplished was considerably more complicated.

While tubular in configuration, the receiver is comprised of two stamped sheet-metal halves that include the pistol grip, magazine well and trigger housing, all welded together. A barrel bushing with right-hand threads is welded to the front of the receiver. A bent, flat spring made of sheet metal with a serrated end has been riveted to the front of the magazine well. It bears against serrations on the barrel collar to

prevent the barrel from unscrewing. The ejection port is capped by a hinged cover riveted to the left half of the receiver. It carries a sheet-metal safety stud which engages the bolt when the cover is closed. If the cover is closed with the bolt forward, the gun cannot be cocked. If the bolt is retracted, the safety stud forces it back off the sear, locking the bolt and deactivating the trigger and sear. Thus the cover must be swung open before the M3 can be fired. Sounds great. But you must manually pivot the cover before you fire. And if you don't swing it completely out of the way, or it gets brushed back down slightly, the bolt will reciprocate, but an empty shell case can hit the cover and fly back down inside the receiver. You'll be sorry if that happens in the real world.

A flimsy wire stock rides in sheet-metal guides punch-welded to the receiver side plates. Its spring-loaded catch often is difficult to depress, especially under stress, and the stock itself usually fights against extension.

A massive bolt, a cylinder almost five inches long, contributes significantly to the M3's total weight of almost nine pounds empty. The extractor is held in place by a cross pin staked to the bolt body. Two longitudinal holes are drilled through the bolt body to accept the twin guide rods. The recoil springs ride on the guide rods behind the bolt. The guide rods are permanently fixed to a steel plate at the rear. There is no

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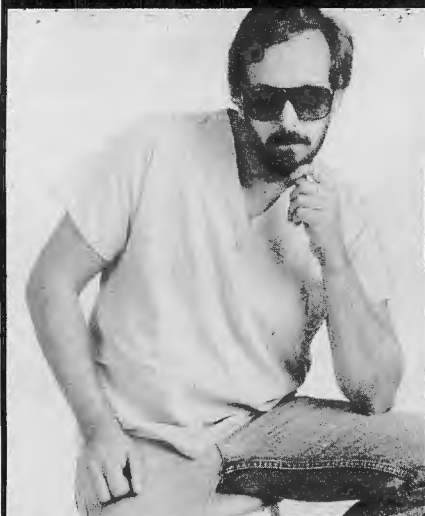
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buffer. The guide rods protrude through the front on the bolt body and pass through a steel bolt cover plate with nubs that mate with keyways cut into the receiver's barrel bushing. The complete bolt assembly is held together by a steel spring clip. This retaining clip and front cover plate would not have been required if the guide rod holes did not pass completely through the bolt body.

A slot cut on the bottom of the bolt permits the ejector to pass freely through the bolt face and also allows movement of one of the M3's most peculiar features. A sheet-metal housing in front of the trigger housing contains not only the ejector, which is riveted in place, but also a 12-component retracting lever assembly. Located on the right side of the receiver, when the retracting handle is rolled rearward it rotates the spring-loaded retracting lever. Connected to the retracting lever by an axis pin, the retracting handle pushes a hinged pawl — also spring-loaded — against the end of the bottom bolt slot, drawing the bolt back to its cocked position. Too many parts here. All too often the retracting handle separates from this convoluted assembly.

The M3's sights were not designed with Camp Perry in mind. The fixed, unprotected front sight is integral with the receiver stamping. Early rear sights were simply L-shaped pieces of sheet metal welded to the receiver. In February 1944, the rear sight was reinforced by an enlarged stamping with strengthening webs folded to the sides. The peephole on my specimen is quite visibly offset to the right. These sights are supposedly set for 100 yards. But don't bet your life on it.

The four-groove barrel has a right-handed twist and is eight inches long. With the stock retracted, the overall length of the M3 is a compact 22.8 inches. Extending the stock adds another seven inches.

There is no selector and the M3 fires only on full auto. But the cyclic rate is only 350-450 rpm. Even a child can tap off single rounds. No other mass-produced submachine gun has such a low cyclic rate. Nothing wrong with that.

Patterned somewhat after that of the Sten gun, the M3's trigger mechanism is quite simple. As the trigger is pivoted on the trigger pin when pulled, the top rotates forward. The trigger bar then moves forward as well. It's connected to the bottom of the sear block, so the sear simultaneously rotates down out of engagement with the bolt's bent. When the trigger is released, the spring between the trigger and the trigger bar contracts, pulling the trigger forward. It also pulls the trigger bar back and the sear up to hold the bolt to the rear. It is this trigger spring that imparts the

unique and very spongy feel to the M3's trigger system.

The magazine well is not flared and magazines must be inserted with care. The magazine catch button is unguarded and if inadvertently struck will dump the magazine on the ground.

Most of the M3's defects soon became apparent and in December 1944 a revised version, known as the M3A1, was adopted. The complicated retracting lever assembly was eliminated. The ejection port was enlarged and a finger hole was drilled into the bolt so it could be retracted by inserting a finger and pulling the bolt rearward. Somewhat better, but still awkward, especially when wearing gloves. The ejector slot cut on the bottom of the bolt was extended full length so the bolt assembly could be removed without first removing the ejector housing. The barrel collar was cut to allow the wire stock to be used as a disassembly tool. A bracket was also added to the wire stock to act as a magazine loader and one of the stock ends drilled for use as a cleaning rod. A shield was added to the magazine catch release to prevent accidental loss of the magazine. The barrel ratchet was redesigned and some other small changes were made to the bolt and ejector. An oiler was added to the pistol grip. Its stylus also serves as a tool to remove the extractor pin. As a result, production costs were cut and its weight reduced by almost a pound.

But the M3's most glaring deficiency was not addressed. With the exception of the Thompson and Beretta 38/42, almost all of the submachine guns fielded during World War II, such as the MP40 and the Sten, used single-position-feed magazines. Thus, stoppages were frequent. The 30-round M3 magazines, patterned after the MP40 magazine, were the worst of a bad lot. Inland eventually designed a transparent, tenite dust cap which fits tightly over the open end of the magazine. Too tightly. Do not try to remove it with your finger unless you don't mind losing a fingernail. It must be struck firmly against the open edge of the ejection port. Even when finally in place, the M3 magazine remains only marginal in reliability in a battlefield environment. A magazine loader, independent of the wire stock, also was issued. So-called "CIA pouches," which hold three magazines and a loader, still can be found at local gun shows. Their size allows them to accommodate magazines from various SMGs. But I doubt the CIA was involved in either their design or distribution.

The M3/M3A1 series uses the .30 cal. M1 Carbine sling. A cone-type flash hider, developed after World War II and called the T34, can be attached

Continued on page 102

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BMF Gerber's New Combat Blade

by Greg Walker



TOP: Gerber's newest addition to the Mark I and Mark II family of quality combat blades: the BMF (Big Military Fighter).

ABOVE: The Gerber BMF model with sawteeth. Included are compass, black ballistic sheath and diamond hone.

BLAME it on Rambo. If it wasn't for the latest in movie mania we wouldn't be stuck with all the cheap survival knives that have flooded the market. They are no more than media-hyped market pieces — poorly designed, cheaply produced and highly overpriced junk. Sure, you can have your Rambo-inspired blade, but if you want a reliable, all-purpose blade skip the overweighted and gadget-laden hollow-handled sawteeth survival knives. Here's something

better.

Gerber Legendary Blades has developed the big brother to their already famous Mark II combat knife, the Gerber BMF (Big Military Fighter). The BMF may presage the demise of the hollow-handle as both a viable combat blade and a utility knife. Gerber has brought the trend full circle with the BMF, and at an affordable price.

The Gerber Fighter started out several months ago as a design lark of the research and development crew at Gerber headquarters in Portland, Oregon. The initial design of the introduction model was immediately impressive, the design and materials ensuring that the knife will stand up for both self-defense and tough utility tasks. In its preproduction stage some obvious changes needed to be made before the knife could perform in its chosen role.

Both John McCrea, marketing services manager, and I felt that the BMF needed to follow in the tradition of Bo Randall's No. 1 Fighter which was designed as a soldier's knife — one that would not only perform in combat, but would endure the many uses and abuses that the grunt unavoidably found for it.

What is obvious to those who follow edged weapon developments is that there is no practical purpose in having fully combat-style knives for the civilian market. They are meant for killing and are not designed to perform camp chores, nor are they ideal as a utility blade.

On the other hand, the utility blade is built for such heavy tasks as cutting wood, gutting deer and chopping small trees. Utility blades *can* be used in personal combat situations, but they are not designed for such.

The Gerber BMF was designed for serious combat use while at the same time having the attributes and innovations that would serve not only military buyers but the civilian who was unsure of other offerings on the already glutted market.

The Gerber BMF's blade is 440A steel with a Rockwell rating of Rc54-55. This is not overly hard and allows the blade to be easily sharpened when necessary. It is 8 inches in length — an acceptable length for a combat knife. The point of the blade is not so long as to be unwieldy, yet not so short as to defeat its ability to penetrate clothing and equipment.

With a 1½-inch width and a thickness of .250 inches it is strong enough to survive the

extremes of usage commonly encountered in the field. The blade is bowie-shaped and will be offered without a sawtooth edge. Sawteeth can be special ordered. I see no use for sawteeth on a knife, especially on a combat blade, but that's personal preference. Teeth catch when entering and/or withdrawing from flesh and can cause the owner to lose control of his knife and lose the fight. Sawteeth require too much energy to employ, but they do sell knives.

The handle of the BMF is a Gerber innovation and unique to this class of fighter. It is formed from DuPont Hypalon which ensures a firm grip regardless of climatic conditions and provides a squeezable cushion for the hand during use. Chopping and hacking pose no problem with the BMF as the Hypalon absorbs the hardest strokes given, saving the palm from abrasion and minor cuts caused by checkering or layering. The Hypalon handle may become smooth and slippery with extremely hard use, but a simple rough-up with fine sandpaper will solve that problem.

The black contoured handle is 4¼ inches in length, 1⅜ inches in width and 1⅛ inches thick. The guard and butt cap are stainless steel with a non-reflective finish. There is more than enough handle to hold on to for even the largest hand. And it's comfortable.

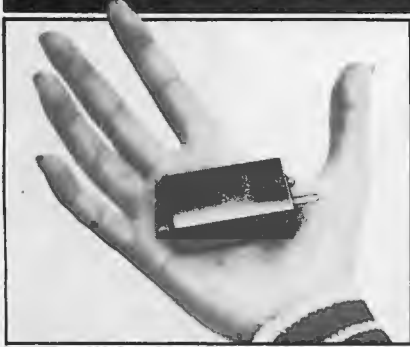
The overall length of the knife is 13¼ inches with a weight of 15 ounces. In its black cordura cloth sheath the knife weighs in at 1 pound, 12 ounces. Again, weight is an important factor to the man who has to carry his load on his back or harness.

Gerber steers away from such mercenary and armchair commando images, such as blacking the blade, which so many other knife makers cultivate in order to sell their wares. Gerber elects to remain with the non-reflective bead-blasted finish. The BMF is a serious knife meant for serious folks.

The BMF comes with a small compass in the sheath as well as a diamond hone attached to the reverse side of the sheath. It will soon be available as the No. 05910 BMF with sawteeth or the No. 05920 without sawteeth, priced at about \$150. Projected release date is late November '86. Contact Gerber Legendary Blades, Dept. SOF, 14200 Southwest 72nd Ave., Portland, OR 97223.

Does BMF really stand for what Gerber says? Only John McCrea knows for sure. But I think it's without a doubt the baddest SOB on the market to date. ✕

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ABOVE: Lenin referred to people like these as “useful idiots” for doing the dirty work of communist propagandists. Photo: Cord McGwire

RIGHT: On a positive note, demonstrators generated a modest amount of free publicity for the magazine. Photo: Cord McGwire

BELOW: One member of the Halloweenish street menagerie that showed up at SOF. Many demonstrators apparently did not have the courage of their own convictions and, apparently worried about being photographed, hid behind masks. Photo: Cord McGwire



TERROR IN BOULDER: Part I

Peace marchers rally against SOF and carry a coffin to protest our involvement in Central America, but the staff didn't really care and Bob Brown went back to sleep...

by James L. Pate

JANE Fonda's Workout. That's what they needed. Because somewhere near the Anatomy Asylum in Boulder, Colo., the loons lugging that damned coffin started chuffing. They were dutifully relieved by some other misguided but well-meaning marchers in their five-mile, ragtag procession down Arapahoe Avenue to *Soldier of Fortune* offices. Watching, I suddenly realized what Lenin meant by "useful idiots."

"Maybe they're just trying to get in shape," observed SOF Executive Editor Bill Guthrie. A Denver newspaper had called to ask why such groups as Witness for Peace, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, the Peace Action Network and the local Community in Action were marching against SOF.

Pizza delivery. That was our one big worry. And it was high priority, close-hold intel. Letting out info like that could disrupt the entire editorial process. And these people were obviously desperate. They would do *anything*. Then Guthrie had a rare mental lapse with the reporter. "It might make it harder to get our pizza delivery," he was later quoted.

"They'll be taking us seriously when we get there," vowed one marcher. "We're planning on having a funeral service out front" to honor Nicaragua's Sandinista soldiers, El Salvador's Marxist guerrillas and

civilians sympathetic to those causes, killed in Central American fighting.

"I'll be very touched," replied Guthrie when he heard the sad news. "I'll be sure to wear my veil."

So here they came, marching down Arapahoe Avenue, which rolls out of Boulder Canyon and eastward through the overhanging maple boughs like some asphalt time tunnel. And located on Boulder's opposite fringe at the other end of Arapahoe — right around the corner from the Celestial Seasonings Herbal Tea company — is *Soldier of Fortune*. In between are a Californicated, time-warped smorgasbord of services guaranteed to choreograph your life-style situations: the Holy Karmic Oneness Retreat, the Center for Holistic Dispute Resolution, and the Naropa Institute, academic game refuge for the 1950s poet Alan Ginsburg. Local classifieds offer European waxing by Lisa, Buddhism and Feminism, Eagles and Energy, Stress Busters, Personalized Body Therapeutics Massage Center and, oh yes, "we do data sheets." Welcome to the Land of Nirvanic Nod.

Guthrie tried to minimize the danger of 120 of Boulder's hardcore peace creeps marching on what in their myopic delusion they imagined to be Boulder's own Death Star, publishing headquarters of the Dark Forces and its spiritual leader, Robert K.

"Darth Vader" Brown. But I had seen this Halloweenish street menagerie of scruffy, (many) unwashed and (still) largely unemployed 1960s throwbacks. Where had these people *been* all these years? I looked around for Rod Serling, hoping for *any* explanation to the high weirdness unfolding in the Promised Land for the Yuppie's Hip Trip to the Used Lotus Lot of Fruits and Nuts. There was none and I shuddered.

The only seriously considered response to the march on SOF was going to be to dress the editors in "conspicuously conservative business suits," as one newspaper later noted our attire, and have them rappel out of a helicopter hovering over the office as the marchers arrived and TV cameras rolled. Dan Rather would be on our LZ for sure. But the Boulder PD said no such thing was allowed in the city limits. Might upset the zoning karma. Besides, so serious a response would have been ungenerous to our home town.

"One of the good things we have done for Boulder by failing to respond to any of this is that we are preventing Boulder from being seen as any sillier place than it already is," Guthrie told the reporter.

Then it got serious. The column of balding longhairs and matrons wearing homespun which was popular on urban college campuses when they were young shuffled



LEFT: Misguided but well-meaning citizens like these mass like lemmings. Photo: Dale Andradé



BELOW LEFT: Marching on what in their myopic delusion they imagined to be Boulder's own Death Star, two marchers do a Jane Fonda workout on their way to stage a funeral at SOF. "I'll be very touched," said Executive Editor Bill Guthrie. "I'll be sure to wear my veil." Photo: Dale Andradé

into the parking lot under the bored gaze of the Boulder Police — they'd seen this before. It was time for us to act. We woke Brown up from his afternoon nap. He yawned when we told him what was going on, muttered some unprintable deprecation, rolled over on the couch and went back to his dreams of a free Nicaragua.

In its wisdom the Boulder City Council had recognized its solemn responsibility to bring "peace" to Central America. Accordingly, it had allied itself with the Sandinista government as a "sister city" of Jalapa, Nicaragua. As a matter of fact, Boulder has two sister cities. The other is in the Soviet Union. Boulder City Council also graced us with the presence of two of its members among the left-wing fossils assembled at our door.

This all came to a head (albeit an empty one) in the city elections. Question Three on November's Boulder City Ballot proposed: "Shall the citizens of Boulder call for cessation of private assistance to the 'contras' of Nicaragua and the Salvadoran military?" It became locally known as "the *Soldier of Fortune* initiative."

It might be our admitted ideological bias, but the wording of the question sounded suspiciously like Boulderites were implicitly promoting Marxism in Central America, not peace. At least that's the inference of the specifically worded measure. But it wasn't the only far-fetched ballot question.

Question Two proposed making Boulder a nuclear-free zone. Although the nuclear bomb trigger factory at Rocky Flats is only 10 miles away, no doubt Boulder's comrades on the Politburo would take Question Two into consideration when assigning primary U.S. nuclear target designations. Like most of the measures on the city ballot, neither of these questions carried any weight of law.

But supporters of the initiative waged a vigorous propaganda campaign and Question Three passed. ComIntern pawns in Boulder won with 55 percent of the votes cast. Boulder's registered voters were obviously mesmerized by the importance of this election. Almost one in four went to the polls.

By the way, the march on SOF ended up being an anticlimax to all the hoopla generated in the left-leaning Boulder press. One marcher made death threats against two magazine staffers. "The next time I see you it'll be in the sights of my AK," the Witness for Peace marcher promised them before

QUIT PICKIN' ON BOULDER

The demonstrators' press reception wasn't what they would have liked. Although a politicized Boulder press was sympathetic, the conventional daily news organs of the rest of conservative Colorado had a field day with Boulder's self-appointed office as arbiter of U.S. foreign policy and universal morality. One of the best examples of this humorous hue and cry was The Denver Post's jibe at Colorado's would-be commune.

— The Editors

Every state seems to pick one city as a butt of regional humor. New Yorkers tell Brooklyn gags, Texans aim "Aggie" barbs at College Station and Colorado loves to laugh at Boulder.

Boulder lawyer and University of Colorado Regent Peter Dietze complained recently that the city "is getting the image of being an eccentric, arrogant and frivolous community."

Eccentric? Why would anyone think that of a city that refused to let its mayor go to New Orleans to pick up a presti-

gious civic award, but promotes travel to a "sister city" in pro-Soviet Nicaragua? Viewed from behind the Brie Curtain, Louisiana's failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment was simply more offensive than Daniel Ortega's ban on freedom of speech, press and religion.

But conservative barbs about "The People's Republic of Boulder" gloss over the right's own growing presence beneath the Flatirons [rock formations above Boulder]. While Boulder's aging liberal establishment carried the city for Mondale in the 1984 elections, student voters gave the CU campus precincts to Reagan.

Boulder is also the home of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, which is a major conduit for private aid to the anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua. Publisher Bob Brown is a master at fanning liberal outrage into publicity — and cash — for anti-communist causes.

So quit pickin' on Boulder. You don't have to be a left-wing crazy to live happily there. It's enough just to be crazy.

— Editorial, reprinted by permission of *The Denver Post*

Continued on page 99

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Saudi Arabian paratrooper at international military parachute event in Switzerland. Photo: Adrian Bohlen

ISLAMIC SPECIAL FORCES

Just How Special Are They?

by Leroy Thompson

THE Middle East is a flashpoint on the keg of dynamite we call world politics. Its strategic location and oil reserves — critical to both East and West — coupled with the crusading nature of the Islamic faith and the volatile nature of Islamic society make it a war just waiting to explode.

And if the balloon goes up and Uncle Sam becomes committed to the fray? Just what sort of modern Islamic warrior will our forces confront or aid?

Despite a faith which encourages military virtues and great individual courage, the average Islamic soldier is simply below par in military performance. As with most countries, however, Islamic nations have a hard core of professional soldiers assigned to their elite special mission units — men who will be on the cutting edge of any military confrontation. Since these men are the most likely adversaries — or allies — of U.S. forces sent to fight in the Middle East, it's vital that we take a critical look at their special operations capabilities.

Iran and Iraq top the list since they are actively engaged in a war, and their elite troops have had the most recent combat experience. Under the Shah, Iran's U.S.-trained special forces were considered competent, many officers having attended the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. More than 1,000 Iranian special forces troops had also gained experience fighting alongside the SAS in Oman during 1972-74. But because of their loyalty to the Shah, a large number of veteran special forces NCOs and officers have been purged and many others have been wasted on suicide missions. Recent reports claim, however, that some raids on Iraqi oil facilities have been carried out

by what's left of the Iranian special forces.

There seem to be few other Iranian special ops units left due to Iran's war of attrition with Iraq and internal purges. Despite claims to the contrary, the Islamic Guards (Pasdaran) are not really elite troops except in a religious sense. Under the Shah, there were also ranger and mountain ranger units, remnants of which have been used to battle the Kurds.

One elite unit known to have been in existence as late as 1982 was the 55th Parachute Regiment at Shiraz. The Paras,

however, were decimated when thrown in as regular infantry against the Iraqi offensive in the fall of 1982.

On the other side, Iraq's special mission capability rests with two special forces/commando brigades. Like Iran, Iraq has without doubt seen its special operations capability eroded by war losses. Unlike Iran, Iraq has lost men to combat action, and internal strife and purges haven't touched experienced NCO and officer ranks so vital to special operations. Between the two, Iraq has an edge in special warfare capability.

An Egyptian paratrooper checks out his fellow soldiers before a jump. Photo Adrian Bohlen



Moroccan para-commando sporting readily identifiable green beret. Photo: Adrian Bohlen



Occasional reports claim that a few Western mercenaries have worked with the Iraqi special forces although there's been no hard confirmation. There have also been reports of Iraq using parachutists against Iranian targets, these troops probably members of their special forces/commandos.

Iraq's western neighbor, Syria, boasts some of the best special mission troops in the Middle East, because of continuing combat experience in Lebanon. Syria's first paratroop unit was formed in 1958. Since then it has evolved into an airborne brigade and a commando brigade.

Syria's commandos have proven effective and are respected by the Israelis. Within the commando brigade are commando battalions, known as *fugs*, and each *fug* can be identified by a different colored backing to the death's head commando badge they wear. *Fugs* in turn are divided into three companies, heavily armed by light infantry standards with HOT (Haut subsonique optique teleguide tire d'un tube) and MILAN (missile d'infanterie leger antichar) anti-tank missiles, Soviet-made RPG rocket launchers, and a variety of heavy and medium machine guns.

During the Yom Kippur War, Syrian commandos fought fiercely against Israeli paras in the Golan Heights. They later enhanced their reputation during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 when they carried out effective ambushes against Israeli armored columns in the Bekaa Valley. Commandos have also been active in the Shouf Mountains. Israelis, who should know, rate the commandos as tough, motivated, and willing to fight to the death rather than surrender. Members of the PLO and other Middle Eastern elite units have also gone through the Syrian commando course.

Lebanon's continuing political disarray has thoroughly disrupted its own armed forces. Strictly speaking, Lebanon's military are not Islamic but a mixture of Moslems and Christians. Still, that country's theoretical special mission capability should be discussed in light of a past and continuing U.S. interest in the area.

In the 1970s, the *Gardiens du Cedre* (Guard of the Cedar) was an elite Christian unit. Later, the army's tactical strike force, trained by U.S. Special Forces, was formed as a company-sized commando/anti-terrorist unit. Currently, the Moukafaha forms the Lebanese anti-terrorist/ranger unit. U.S. Special Forces advisers continue to work with Lebanese special ops troops in a training and advisory role.

Within the Moslem militias there are usually a few men who have received guerrilla or other special training although militia "elite" troops are of questionable quality. Within the PLO there have been special operations troops including combat swimmers and HALO-trained parachutists. Often these have been Fedayeen specially trained to infiltrate Israel.

Of the more aggressive Islamic states, Libya is one of those most likely to come into direct conflict with U.S. combat forces.

On paper, Libya's special operations capability appears impressive, but in practice the reverse is true.

Libya's original paratroops were trained in Egypt in 1971, but by the mid-70s an indigenous jump school had been established at Ukba bin Naf'i (formerly Wheelus AFB). Egypt, Syria, Taiwan and various Warsaw Pact countries have provided parachute or other instructors at various times to Libya. Battalions of the brigade are normally stationed at Ukba bin Naf'i, Benghazi, Gamal Abdul Nasser AFB, and Al Kufra.

One para-commando battalion, identifiable by its blue beret, serves as Colonel Khadaffi's personal bodyguard. Combat swimmer units also exist and are stationed at Benghazi harbor, Dernah, Tobruk and Burayyah. Though Libyan para-commandos have been used operationally in Egypt, Chad, Uganda and elsewhere, their showing has not been outstanding. Ed Wilson and some of the ex-U.S. Special Forces men hired by him reportedly were attempting to upgrade the Libyan para-commandos. There is certainly little doubt that Khadaffi would like to have a highly trained and professional unit capable of spearheading his quest for power.

Like Syria, Egypt impressed many people with its special ops capabilities during the Yom Kippur War. Egypt's commandos, which may number up to 20 battalions assigned to five commando groups, come under a joint special forces command; the 170th Parachute Brigade falls under air landing headquarters. Egypt's best special mission unit, equivalent to the U.S. "Delta Force," is Unit 777 which handles anti-terrorist and other sensitive clandestine missions.

Although they were used in earlier actions against the Israelis, Egyptian para-commandos really came into their own during the Yom Kippur War. At the beginning of that conflict, the 140th and 182nd Parachute Brigades and the 127th, 129th and 133rd Commando Groups were poised for action with other commando groups standing by in reserve. Commandos, including combat swimmers, spearheaded the crossing of the Suez Canal while others were lifted by helicopter into the Sinai to disrupt Israeli communications.

Since the improvement in relations with Israel, the emphasis on Egyptian para-commando operations has been shifted to deal with an external threat from Libya. During the Bright Star '82 joint maneuvers, 10 Egyptian paras jumped with members of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, while other Egyptians have worked with U.S. Special Forces teams both at Fort Bragg and in Egypt.

Among the United States' staunchest allies in the area are Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia — all of which have good special operations capabilities. Since the United States has been emphasizing Jordan's role as a key ally, King Hussein's three special forces battalions may assume even greater importance.

Hand-picked from Bedouins loyal to the



Iraqi commando. The Iran/Iraq war of attrition is decimating special operations units on both sides.

king, Jordanian special forces troops first complete a nine-week ranger course and then a three-week jump school. Additional SF training emphasizes guerrilla and counter-guerrilla training, sabotage and reconnaissance.

The Special Forces Brigade, possibly to be expanded to two brigades if a suggestion by the Pentagon is followed, is based 17 kilometers (10 miles) east of Zarqa. Included within its strength is the 101st Special Forces Battalion which has been trained by the SAS and which acts as the Jordanian anti-terrorist unit. Each SF battalion is comprised of three companies, each with three platoons. In a few situations the special forces have been used for internal security duties such as the Black September actions in September 1970 against the PLO.

On the other end of the Arabian peninsula, Oman's special forces comprise the best special operations troops in the Middle East. Contract officers and NCOs from the British army, former members of the Rhodesian SAS, Selous Scouts and RLI, and personnel from a few other Western forces have contributed much toward this success. The 400-man Sultan of Oman's special forces unit is modeled on the British SAS, from which most of its officers are drawn, and is trained for LRRP (long range reconnaissance patrol) and small boat operations, raids and rescues.

Enlisted personnel are primarily hill tribesmen from Dhofar Province, and combined with the excellent contract officers make the royal-purple-bereted Sultan's special force a true elite — even by Western standards. Other Omani elite units include a parachute squadron at Rustaq and a small

OVERLEAF: map of Middle East.

Continued on page 97



Shoulder insignia, breast tape and beret badge of Tunisian Groupement des Commandos.

Libyan wings — imported by former CIA operative Ed Wilson.



Lebanese special ops unit insignia.



Algerian Para officer. Photo: Adrian Bohlen



Egyptian para wings. 4th class has no stars, 1st has three.



Sudanese LRRP/anti-terrorist unit insignia.



Syrian commando badges. Different color backgrounds designate different *fugs*.

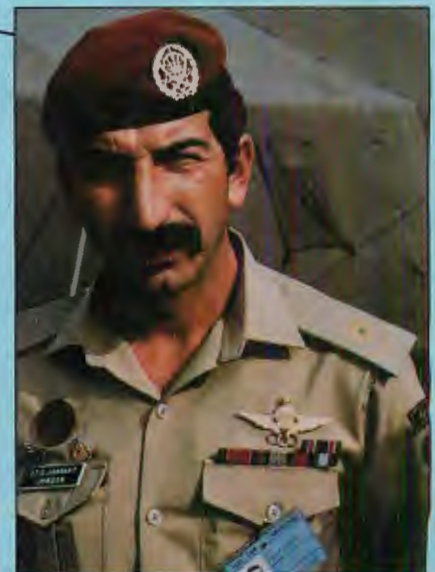
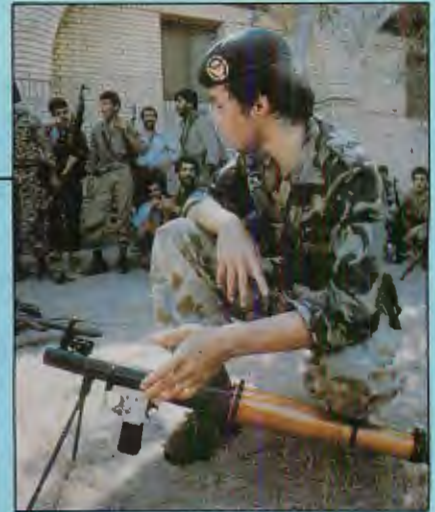
Syrian para wings.



Iraqi para (upper right) and instructor wings (lower left).



Member of Iranian special forces demonstrates RPG-7.



Jordanian special forces officer. Photo: Adrian Bohlen



Old-style Saudi Arabian para wings — gold for officers and silver for enlisted.



Omani para wings. Upper right wings are for Sultan's special forces; note SAS influence.

HIGH-TECH WAR IN VIETNAM

Circuit Boards Couldn't Sniff the Enemy

Text & Photos by Howard Sochurek



IT was an unusual war. Men sweated and died in vine-choked jungles and sweltering rice paddies fighting an enemy who adhered to a classic guerrilla war strategy. But there was another side to the war, a side that heralded the coming of a new age in warfare. Could this new technology have ever made a difference in the outcome of the Vietnam War?

The battlefields have long been silent and we are still assessing the

This flexwing precision glider can drop 500 lbs. of supplies to remote areas. Ground troops can directly guide it down by radio. Dropped from a transport plane, the flexwing locks onto a command beacon sent by a small radio in the target area. At an altitude of 30,000 feet the glider has enough lift to be brought down anywhere in a 36-mile area.

results of our efforts and a haunting question in this era of "Star Wars" remains: Why didn't our superiority in technology and weapons blunt the communists' charge to take over Indochina?

The answer lies in two facts. First, the weapons themselves often had limitations in usage, and second, weapons themselves are not the decisive factor in winning a war.

Dr. John Foster, once in charge of research at Livermore Labs in California and later director of research and engineering in the Department of Defense, once told the House Armed Services Committee, "It is clear, especially from our experience in Vietnam, that we have only fragmentary understanding of the causes and consequences of limited wars. Military hardware and tactics, no matter how ingenious and effective, cannot provide a long-term answer to the problems we face."

Advances in aerial bombing quickly catch the public eye, but such

sophisticated weaponry rarely does everything for which it is designed. Even so-called "smart bombs" find target selection and exact discrimination extremely difficult so the inflated claim of increased bombing precision is open to question.

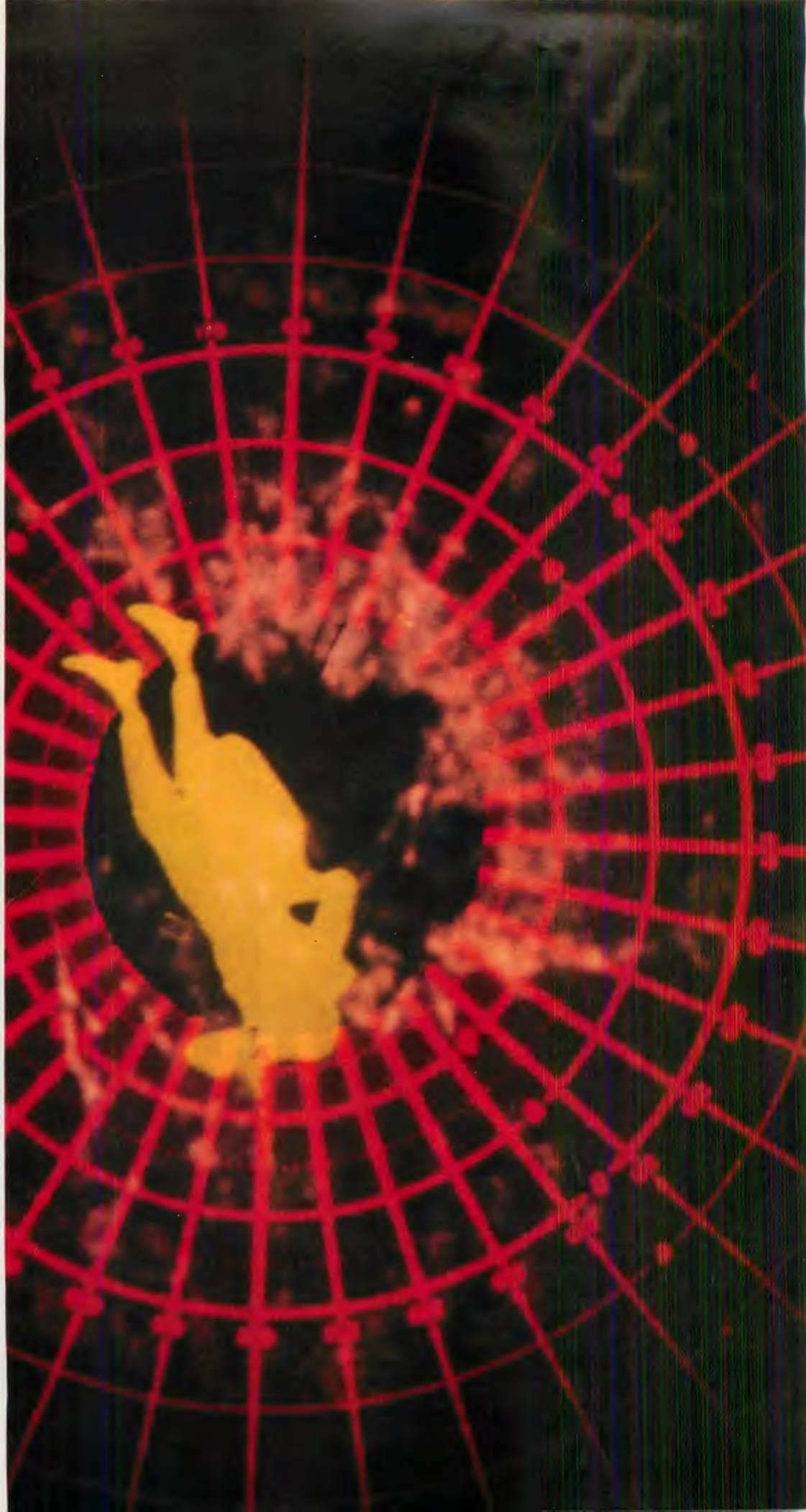
"We can bomb a little better in all kinds of weather," a Rand consultant told me, "but there has been no substantial increase in bombing accuracy since World War II." It is still a man who must make the critical decision in the final analysis.

"When you see that SAM coming at you," a Vietnam War pilot with over 100 missions under his belt told me, "you don't think of anything except dumping your bomb load and getting the hell out of there." So much for smart bombs.

Another great technical innovation of the Vietnam War was the night-vision devices that electronically magnify the level of existing light as much as 100,000 times. The night was a GI's enemy, but night vision never did take back the night from Charley. That would have required putting Sniperscopes into the hands of almost every soldier in the Army.

"Even then it would not be conclusive. It would be progress, but don't underestimate the enemy. He uses night because it's cheaper. Take that away from him and he'll find other methods like camouflage and small unit operations. More costly, but effective all the same." Every technical innovation often produced

A starlight scope that magnifies light up to 100,000 times is used in night rescue operations of downed pilots. Here a man seen through the reticle of the scope is pulled to safety from the jungle below.





a counterreaction by the enemy that reduced the desired results.

I recall one peculiar experiment from my days covering the Vietnam War — a breath test for manioc root.

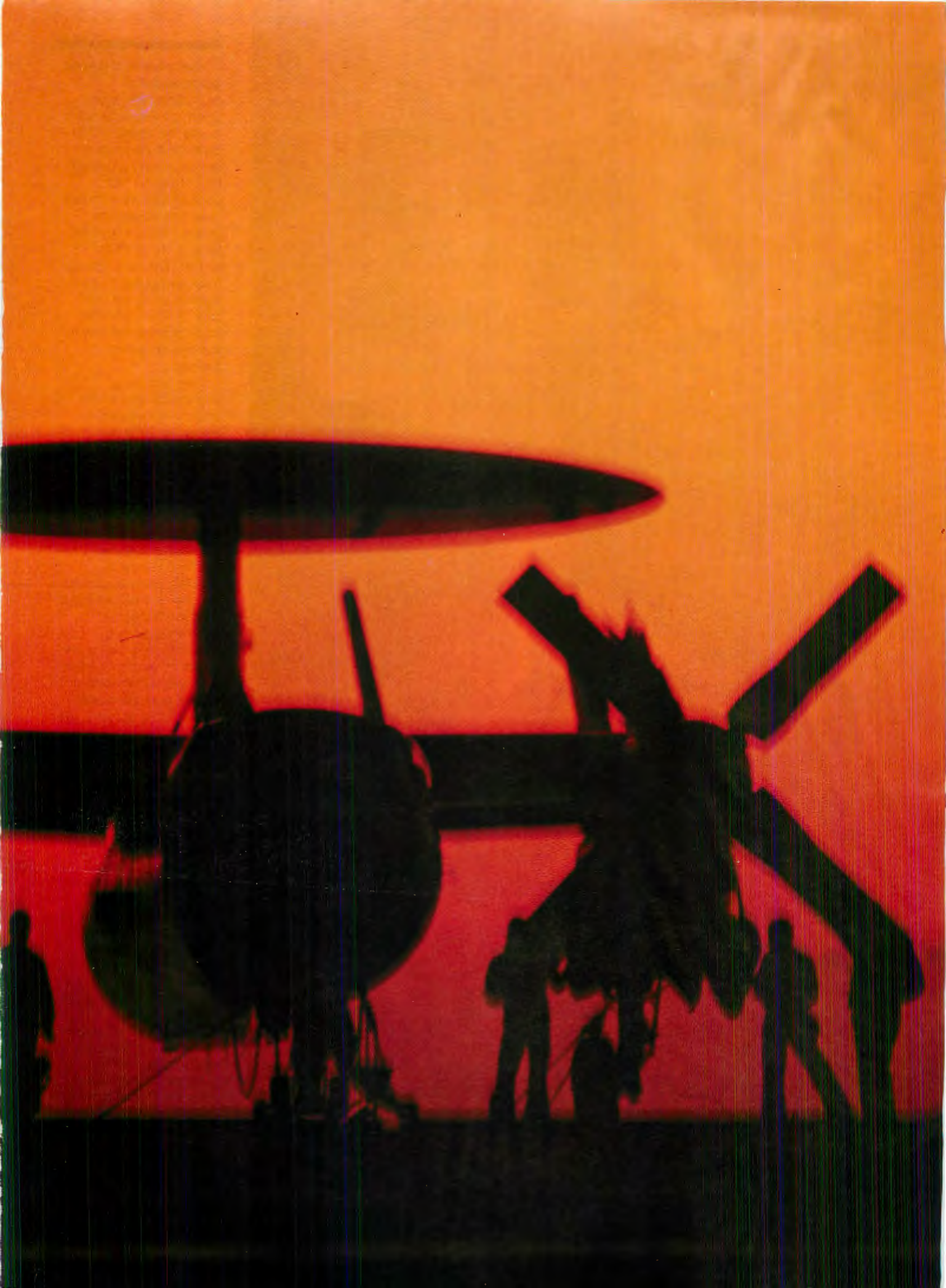
Jungle-grown manioc was a staple in the Viet Cong diet and the powers that be figured the United States could root out the enemy by smelling his breath. A simple breath test for manioc was devised but, like the General Electric device that detected body odors in the jungle, it could not discriminate — friend and foe tend to smell alike.

A Pentagon official set the record straight: "For all the gadgets that sniffed, sensed, measured and recorded, we could still not tell effectively friendlies from unfriendlies. You can mark villagers with special dyes or test for powder burns but that doesn't tell you whose side they are on or what they do when you are out of sight. We had tried virtually everything anybody had suggested, but the problem of target discrimination persists, much as does the problem of how you knock out a missile site without inflicting casualties on everything else close to it."

Inside Combat Information Center of the *Enterprise*. The carrier cost \$500 million and has more computers than any single U.S. corporation. Its decks house another \$500 million in aircraft.

Even chemical weapons had severe problems both in the sense of public opposition and ease of control. For instance, United States forces defoliated over a million acres of jungle in Vietnam in an attempt to deprive the enemy of cover and concealment. But terrain and atmospheric — such as ground dampness — and the preparedness of the enemy made use of such sophistication, in the words of some chemical warfare specialists, "just not worth the trouble." The long-range physical problems that have turned up among the men who dealt with chemical defoliants add another negative factor.

As dawn approaches an E-2A Hawkeye prepares for flight from the *Enterprise*. The E-2A Hawkeye was first delivered to the U.S. Navy on 19 January 1964. A total of 59 were built, including three prototypes. The Hawkeye sports a 24-foot rotating radar dome atop the fuselage which can track over 100 aircraft simultaneously.





War requires a specific plan directed at neutralizing the enemy. Chemical weapons used during the Vietnam War defied that principle by demonstrating a general lack of control that contradicted what should have been a plan to concentrate on selective targets. It's all quite simple. The right weapon must be applied to the right target at the right time. A Rand research study pointed the way to the right target in Vietnam.

"We had done everything else to the enemy in Vietnam, except destroy his willingness to fight. That should have been our target. Suppose we had hit that target with a chemical agent. That would be *some* doomsday weapon."

There is now a growing consensus that an enemy's willingness to fight in Vietnam, in Nicaragua or in El Salvador may be the real target in modern warfare. And ever since Vietnam placed guerrilla warfare under public scrutiny, the Defense Department has been applying technology in a worldwide program of research into the causes and cures of guerrilla warfare. Begun in the late 1960s and called Project Agile, the program is being run through the department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) which does research of its own, hires private organizations such as Rand, and funds similar research in the three services.

Agile grew out of the Vietnam War where it was focused both in Vietnam and Thailand, although it runs projects in tight cooperation with host governments in about 10 countries

Non-toxic face-paint camouflage worn by Navy SEAL for behind-the-lines missions.

including Southeast Asia and Latin America. It has field offices in Panama, Lebanon and Thailand. Agile engages dozens of anthropologists, psychologists, scientists, communications experts and military technicians to define problems of both internal and border security. A basic premise behind the program addresses what has long been viewed as a major problem in Third World nations — the lack of communication between the governments and their people.

Agile's evolution since birth gives revealing testimony to the Pentagon's widening search for a solution in many countries facing similar problems. Starting as a "quick-fix" project to develop and test hardware (including some weapons) for immediate application in Vietnam, Agile then became involved in longer-range investigations into devices most useful in making areas secure. Most significantly in today's troubled world, Agile is developing methods for applying social sciences and technology to assist countries in understanding their own problems. The Philippines is a prime study area.

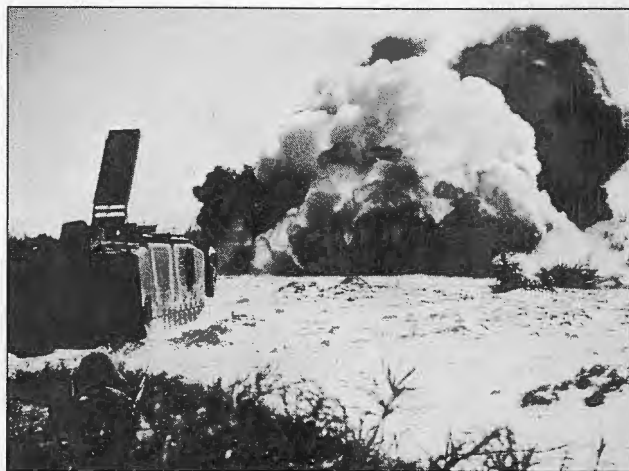
Project Agile's many fingers have been into the entire spectrum of high-tech projects. During the Vietnam War it developed and tested everything from a laser-illuminated night photography system and remote-controlled cargo gliders for supplying distant outposts to infrared intrusion-detection devices and electronic image-intensification devices. It wasn't all Star Wars, though. Such mundane equipment as field rations, packs and gear, or the possible military application of bicycles were examined.

Sophisticated surveillance was used in the area below the DMZ in Vietnam where the U.S. built an "electronic barrier" to prohibit infiltration from the North. The project was never finished so we will never know whether or not the idea was sound.

Today Project Agile leans more toward the cultural and psychological: enemy motivation, a study spurred on by the Vietnam-era Chieu Hoi (open arms) Program and how to assimilate them into society; what methods give accurate information on how people are reacting to the government's programs; and patterns of land ownership now fall into Project Agile's broad grasp.

"Many of these countries have a very complicated culture," a spokesman said. "In almost every study we have to find out what the biases are and government people are not always able to do this objectively — any more than somebody from New York might do in Mississippi. All we from the United States have to offer such governments is an assurance of objective analysis."

All this is not to say that Project Agile has changed direction in midstride. True, things look radically different, but today's trends are echoes of lessons learned in Vietnam. For example, to keep a given Third World area secure, the concept of yesterday's anti-intrusion and surveillance systems might be combined with



Engineers check optical guidance systems at Martin Company test facility near Orlando, Fla. The object is for missiles and bombs to home in automatically on targets. This facility uses models of cities, thatched huts, mountains and rivers to simulate a bomb run.

modern mobility, dependable communications, and, most importantly, social sciences and reform.

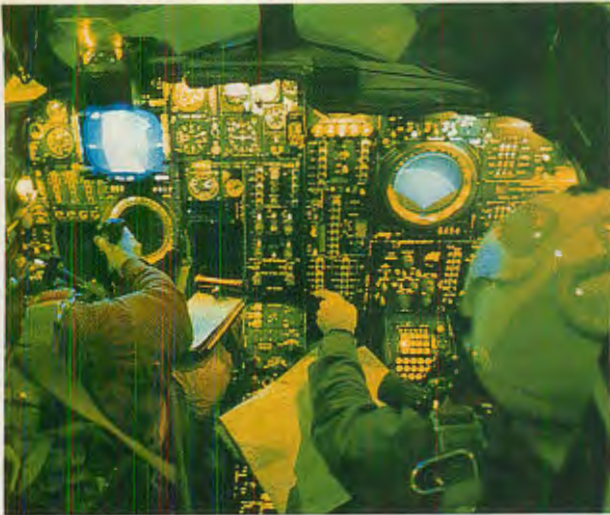
"The time to start all this in Vietnam was in 1954," an Agile official said, "but we simply didn't have the techniques. If we *had*, we might have avoided the war altogether. There's been acceptance of scientific methods of analysis here for a long time, but nobody ever applied it to foreign policy before."

Maybe someone is doing just that now. The work has begun on a small scale in Central America and Asia, "to see what works and what doesn't," in the words of a program leader. "We hope to learn in Thailand how effective the methods are. But it may be years before we know." Little has been made known about the results of social-science work so far, but according to another official, "we now understand more about using troops for civic action in rural areas. If we had used the techniques we now have for gathering information

about attitudes and environment, we might have avoided having the troops become predators just like the VC were."

The Pentagon isn't giving out a lot of information on Agile for a couple of reasons. First, cooperation with the host governments is very sensitive because of the implications of American dominance in their internal affairs, and second, selling the whole idea to the military and Congress requires subtle methods.

"It's been hard to sell the military and the Congress on the value of Agile," a Pentagon officer admitted, adding that some key Congressional leaders would rather hear about weapons than enemy motivation. Agile was allocated only \$28 million out of a total Defense Department research and development budget of \$7 billion. ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) has 50 or 60 of its own personnel working outside the United States in "remote-area conflict" along with about 300 personnel under contract from private research firms. About 1,000 people — here and abroad — are working for Agile,



according to an ARPA spokesman.

"These concepts grow slowly," an ARPA officer observed. "In the earlier days we were just a gadfly on the backs of the services. But now there's a real revolution going on in the military. People like Secretary of Defense Weinberger really understand and support what we're trying to do. There are fewer and fewer military men like World War II General Curtis LeMay who think we can bomb peace into everybody."

One Pentagon official even went so far as to call the Project Agile approach the ultimate key to halting insurgency warfare. As Secretary McNamara once said, "...our military strength a decade or more hence will depend importantly on how well we do now in expanding our fund of basic knowledge in the fields of the physical, chemical, biological, medical and social sciences. It is from this realm of ideas, theory and basic measurements that the new devices and inventions needed for the development of future weapons will

Cockpit of Navy A-6 all-weather bomber. Bombs are delivered on target by computer which matches visual pairs. Computer is preprogrammed with recon photo. When on-board camera matches previous input, bombs are released. Other input into system is search radar, track radar, inertial navigational systems and Doppler. All these inputs give velocity, altitude and slant angle to target. The computer feeds a seven-inch video screen in front of pilot.

eventually emerge."

The soldier of tomorrow faces increasingly difficult challenges. In addition to mastering the complexity of the high-tech weaponry, he must also deal with that abstract and intangible problem — motivation. Dealing with that problem will require a continued long-term commitment in both men and money. And while space-age weapons raise the ante in modern warfare, technology alone will never win wars. ✖

Huge lights carried in UH-1 helicopter assist night rescue operations. Three 6,000-watt lights generate 658,000 candlepower and can operate from as high as 6,000 feet. This was one of many lighting technologies the U.S. developed to try to take the night back from Charlie.

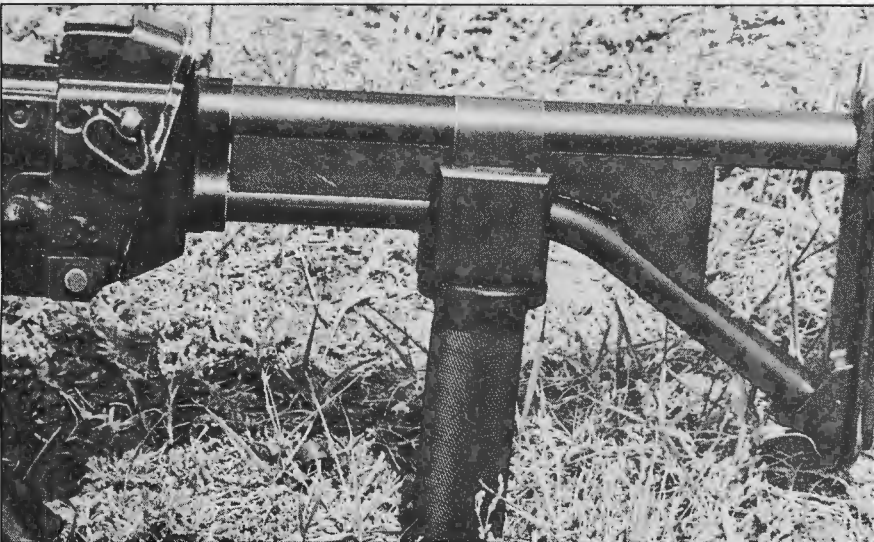




MILITARY MISAPPROPRIATIONS

Army Procurement of the M249 SAW Could Endanger U.S. Troops in the Field

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis



miscarriage that gave us the M60 effectively deprived American troops of a good squad automatic for several decades, but at least it was there. Now the production lines for the '60 have ground to a halt, and the Army is not proceeding with reasonable haste to replace the M60.

Rather than work with the new system and product-improve it as all armies do with all procurements, the U.S. Army is aborting the first CONUS production run of the M249, and recommending another delay in replacing the M60 while special interest groups within the military bicker. If the usual rituals are followed the Army will have to patch together aging M60s until the year 2000. In Soldier of Fortune, for the first time anywhere, you can read how uniformed bureaucrats imperil the defense of the nation as they argue trivia and throw money at questions that demand judgement.

Unfortunately, we would compromise our sources in the military and industry to name the individual offenders. Nevertheless, you read here the process by which our money is wasted and our troops are unnecessarily exposed to battlefield hazards. We owe our soldiers better than that.

— Robert K. Brown

JUST when it looked like the United States Army was about to settle the battle for a SAW (squad automatic weapon), someone had to throw a monkey wrench into the works. Actually, it wasn't just someone — it was a large part of the DOA (Department of the Army). In fact, one U.S. Army general, highly placed in the DOA, recently stated that he wanted to gather up all 6,955 M249 machine guns produced to date under the initial contract (total order of 13,296) with Fabrique Nationale, Herstal, Belgium, place them in a warehouse and sell them to a local junk dealer. That attitude should set the stage for a new fight on the old issue of an effective squad automatic weapon.

Sure, there are problems with the M249: It won't actually feed from the M16

"Military appropriations" is becoming a synonym for waste. There's waste in every big business, so — naturally — there's more waste in one of the world's biggest businesses: the U.S. government. That's a given.

No matter how misuse of public funds may inure me to such abuse it still makes my blood boil to think that lawmakers, policy-makers and the leaders of the American military would allow disorganized and misdirected procurement programs to compromise the safety and com-

TOP: M249 attached to elaborate (and expensive) "soft-mount" tripod. ABOVE: Skeletonized aluminum buttstock with plastic spacer and upper tube sleeve shown with FN sling attached and wire buttstrap extended.

bat effectiveness of American troops. And that's exactly what the Army's muddle over the M249 SAW is doing.

This isn't just another overpriced toilet seat; it's life and death for the soldier in the field. The General Purpose Machine Gun

magazines for which the second feed system was designed. It's not as reliable as it was proclaimed. Its cone of fire sprays vertically, compromising hit probability. But those problems haven't stopped the Marines. Their intensive experience with close infantry combat has taught them that they can't afford to be caught with their squad automatics down.

As a high-ranking officer in Marine Corps procurement told SOF, "The Marine Corps approach has been to obtain a weapon that wasn't completely satisfactory but the weapon could perform the mission. We begin product improvement as soon as we have feedback from the troops . . . just like the M16A2." But this way isn't good enough for the Army. Having delayed four years since type classification, Army brass has quit buying the M249. They now seem to want to wait 10 years to select yet another SAW.

On 1 February 1982 the M249 machine gun was officially type classified (adopted) by the United States Army — 10 years after the SAW program was initiated on 8 March 1972 by a Material Need Document (MND) entitled "Squad Automatic Weapon, Light Machine Gun" (see "Now See The SAW," SOF, August '82). In the fall of 1985, more than three years after the M249's adoption, the U.S. Army canceled its solicitation for CONUS (Continental United States) manufacture of 28,750 M249 machine guns. Before 10 May 1985, 4,370 Belgian-made M249s had been delivered to the Army and 2,585 to the Marine Corps. Following a six-month halt, FN-produced M249s from the initial contract are once more on their way to the U.S. armed forces after numerous Engineering Change Proposals (ECPs) and Screening and Rework Procedures (SRPs) had been instituted. Most of them were cosmetic in nature, but as the clock runs, the Army is still waffling.

At one time or another up to seven companies had bid on CONUS production of the M249. They were Remington, Harrington & Richardson (no longer in business), Mossberg, Maremont, FN Manufacturing, Dunham Plastics and Ross Bicycle. Several dropped by the wayside before the solicitation was canceled. Rumors are rampant. Some say the solicitation will be re-introduced in 18 to 24 months after substantial revision of the weapon. Others say there will be more SAW trials, introducing entirely new systems, such as the CETME Ameli and Singapore Ultimex 100. There is even speculation that the weapon will be re-designed at Picatinny Arsenal under the supervision of the individuals who were responsible for the XM248, developed by the Rodman Labs at Rock Island Arsenal, and a competing (and losing) design in the original SAW trials.

Let me state right now that — based on over 10,000 test rounds through my own weapon — I believe the M249 is a generically sound design that needs attention in



TOP: Firing the M249 from the bipod: Weapon handles easily and accurately.

ABOVE: 200-round assault pack gives grunts plenty of firepower without bulk.

BELOW: The M249 SAW should fulfill the U.S. military's requirement for a small, light machine gun. Photo courtesy 82nd Airborne Division



but a few areas. No one's military small arms are immaculately conceived, not even the Soviets'. However, with the embarrassment of DIVAD and the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle hanging over their heads the U.S. Army has once again waltzed itself to a tune of remarkable incompetence and buck-passing at both the user and procurement levels.

The M249 (FN Minimi) machine gun was selected from a competitive evaluation of four candidate systems. In addition to the FN Minimi and Rodman XM248 (which was belt-fed with rotary drive and operated by means of a unique dual gas system with three-lug rotating bolt), a highly modified M16 developed by the Ballistics Research Laboratory at Aberdeen, Md., and the XM262 (a roller-locked, retarded blowback Heckler & Koch entry) were tested. Trials were grueling, comprehensive and thorough.

After visual, non-destructive examination of the candidate systems — during which time measurements were taken and parts interchangeability tests were conducted — the trials heated up with cook-off



ABOVE: 200-rd. assault pack gives the M249 plenty of punch.
RIGHT: M249 SAW can also be fired with a standard M16 magazine.

tests followed by firing without lubricant, position disclosure tests, saltwater immersion, humidity, mud bath, sand and dust, water spray, sustained firing, ballistic performance and endurance testing. About 50,000 rounds were fired through each specimen of the candidate SAWs. The XM249 exceeded the specified reliability levels (so-called "Blue Sky" performance) for Class 1 (immediately clearable in 10 seconds or less) and Class 2 (clearable in 10 seconds to 10 minutes) failures and came close to specified reliability levels in Class 3 (a severe stoppage which requires an armorer) failures. The FN Minimi was the clear winner of the SAW trials. And now, three and a half years after its adoption, a group of Pentagon generals is ready to toss the M249 on a junk pile. During this time frame the M249 has been adopted by the armed forces of Canada, Australia and Indonesia.

There is a legitimate and serious problem with the magazine well. The M249 was designed to accept the M16 magazine, although the users are apparently unaware of that fact. One of the U.S. Army reports on the M249 states, "We cannot use the M16 magazine with the SAW." Their recommendation is to "develop a magazine



that can be used with both the SAW and M16." This thread of confusion and misunderstanding runs throughout the Army's criticisms of the M249. The issue most certainly does not lie with the magazine. I have fired the M249 with Colt-made M16 magazines, FNC magazines and the new Canadian-issue plastic Thermold magazines, loaded to 30-rd. capacity, and with only 20 rounds. The M249 will not function reliably with any magazine, loaded to any capacity.

The answer must be sought in two other areas. First of all the magazine well's interior dimensions are too large. There is far too much lateral and vertical play. When a magazine is pushed firmly by the palm of the support hand during the firing sequence, reliability goes up. But there's more. As the bolt group moves rearward on the recoil stroke, the bolt's left locking lug strikes the top cartridge in the magazine, driving it, all the other rounds, the magazine follower and spring downward,



should be reduced, if possible, to 600 rpm. If that, and holding the magazine well to tighter tolerances, do not improve reliability with magazines, then the dual-feed feature, as appealing as it is, should be discarded.

The Army has leveled two bizarre criticisms of the M249 in the area of the feed mechanism that once more clearly demonstrate their inability to correctly assess end user needs. In a signed memorandum for the undersecretary of the Army, the sergeant major of the Army states, "The double latches on the feed tray cover impede the swift opening and closing of the feed tray cover." His recommendation: "The double latches on the feed tray cover should be modified to a single latch system similar to that of the M60 machine gun."

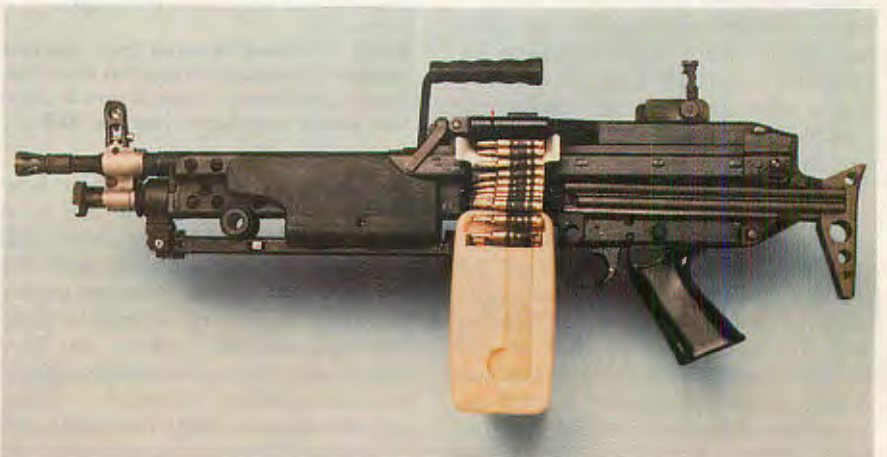
The double latches on the M249's top cover are taken directly from the FN MAG 58 GPMG which is in service with more than 80 countries in the world. Besides the United States, only Australia and the Republics of Korea and China (Taiwan) adopted the M60 — the latter two under some coercion. The M60 top cover's single latch-lever assembly is far too fragile and I have seen too many broken ones in

BELOW: M249 with night vision scope. Mount is still experimental. Photo: Fabrique Nationale
BOTTOM: Early experimental para model variant. It included a telescoping stock and shortened barrel. Photo: Fabrique Nationale

away from the magazine's feed lips. If the gun's firing rate is high, the follower spring will not have sufficient time to rebound and drive the cartridges tightly against the feed lips before the bolt returns in counter-recoil to strip a round from the magazine. As a consequence, the top round is not at the correct approach angle to the chamber and a bolt-over-base stoppage is the inevitable result.

The faster the cyclic rate, the more frequently this stoppage will occur. The M249 is supposed to fire at 750 rpm when the gas regulator is turned to the 'N' (normal) position and 1,050 rpm when the 'A' (adverse) position is used. When set to the "normal" position, both barrels on my M249 fired close to the "adverse" rate, 977 and 980 rpm, respectively. Why? I think that someone in FN quality control backed off the gas control screw in the gas block to obtain sufficient energy for the gun to pass the belt-load test.

After delivery, as thousands of rounds were fired through the gun, burrs were removed, tolerances loosened and the cycle rate began to zoom upward. God knows how many guns were shipped to the U.S. armed forces in this condition. One of the Army's complaints was that the rate of fire was too high. Reduced to 766 and 784 rpm, respectively, I still experience frequent magazine failures with either barrel. I think the normal rate of fire



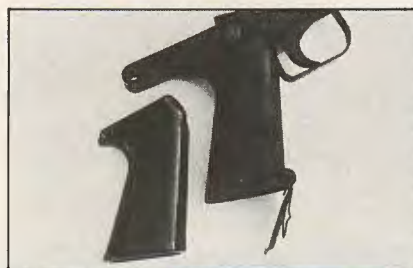


ABOVE: SAW trials at Aberdeen Proving Ground: Even mud couldn't stop the M249. Photo: U.S. Army

El Salvador (See "M60," SOF, August '85). The Army also feels the feed tray is too wide and that this somehow affects the ability to fire belts without starter tabs. I have fired close to 9,000 linked rounds through the M249 without a single stoppage. If the belt does not have a starter tab, you must lift the top cover and place the first round against the feed tray's cartridge stop — as with any other belt-fed machine gun. Proper loading with the top cover down is possible only when the belt has a starter tab. It's really quite simple, and the feed tray is just dandy as it is.

The plastic 200-rd. assault pack has also received more than its share of criticism from the Army's infantry "experts." They would like to see a transparent back so the number of remaining rounds can be determined. Transparent "cartridge-counting" magazines and drums are nice, but unnecessary. The M16 magazine is not transparent, nor is the RPD belt carrier, RPK 75-rd. drum, MAG 58 100-rd. assault pack, PKM belt box and on and on. There is just no end to the expensive gingerbread demanded by the U.S. armed forces. Another of their high whines concerns the assault pack parting company from the weapon when the gunner hits the deck. If they would just take a few lessons from the Israeli Defence Forces on how to fall properly when they engage the enemy, the assault pack would not strike the ground first. There is nothing whatever wrong with the FN designed 200-rd. assault pack.

Another area of lawful concern, however, is the M249's accuracy potential. Firing single shots with the gun mounted on the FN "soft-mount" tripod and heavily sand-bagged, I have never been able to achieve anything better than 18 MOA at 100 meters, regardless of the ammunition employed. Worse yet is the fact that this extreme spread is always vertical. The horizontal spread is never more than two to



TOP: Original FN pistol grip (left). New grip (right) has horizontal grooves and no bottom flare. It is also less swept back than the original. Note hinged trap door for storage of lubricant bottle.

ABOVE: Original forearm (top). Current forearm (bottom) is larger but does not cover top of barrel. Army wants a metal heat shield over barrel like the M60.

three inches. We can accept more horizontal spread in a machine gun burst group (such as we obtain with the MG42) because it does not adversely affect the size of the beaten zone, but a large vertical dispersion is just not acceptable. Fired from rigid test beds, indoors, my three barrels will produce an extreme spread from 5.6 inches to 13.8 inches — again, vertical in shape — when 10-round bursts are fired at 100 meters. In my opinion, still

not good enough. What's the problem?

I believe the answer rests (no pun intended) with the barrel's interface to the receiver body. At the rear, the barrel extension drops downward in the receiver's vertically elliptical barrel socket and a protrusion on the bottom of the barrel extension catches against the rear of the socket. The barrel is then held in place by pressure from the spring-loaded barrel locking lever on top of the socket and nothing else. The barrel does not contact the curved barrel guide at the front of the receiver on top of the bipod/gas cylinder socket.

If it does not impede barrel changing, we would be moving in the right direction if the barrel guide was changed to a rest for the front end of the barrel. More important, the barrel socket should be circular, not elliptical, since this is without doubt the source of the excessive vertical dispersion. Excessive barrel float, which constantly alters the magazine feedway's angle, may also be partially responsible for the low reliability with magazines. There are no easy solutions, but intensive redesign efforts must be directed to this portion of the weapon.

Mounted to a dovetail on the gas block, the front sight is on its fourth U.S. Army modification. The tempest in a teapot concerns how the front post, adjustable for both elevation and windage zero, should be guarded. The first unit I examined at Aberdeen had a partial hood that permitted access to the front post by the operator without any special tool. This was followed by an assembly that used two protective ears that still permitted the operator to adjust elevation zero with just a pair of pliers. A hood with a hole in the top, requiring a special sight tool, represents the current configuration. This still doesn't satisfy the users, who want the operator to be able to adjust the zero on his weapon. Instead of just issuing a tool for this purpose, like the Russians do, the dog and pony show is moving on to another front sight. Smart thinking, guys.

The rear sight is only on its third modification. The first rear sight unit was somewhat like that of the M60. Although it had to be flipped up to use, there was an open U-notch battle sight that could be employed when the sight was folded down. The peep aperture was adjusted for elevation by a knob on top of the sight. At least the elevation markings were engraved on the steel sight frame itself, rather than on a strip of soft aluminum such as on the M60. Windage adjustment was by means of a knob on the left side. But the sight was unprotected when flipped up and an improved model was already incorporated in time for the SAW trials. The peep aperture is now shielded from harm's way by larger protective ears as it is elevated from 300 to 1,000 meters.

The aperture bar is pushed upward by a rod attached in an offset manner to the two elevation drums as they rotate. Both windage and elevation adjustment knobs

are on the left side. The operator can make both windage and elevation zero adjustments on the rear sight unit also. This is a more than acceptable sight . . . but not good enough for the Army. They want a windage adjustment assembly like that of the M14 rifle, more clearance between the adjustment knobs and protective ear for maintenance purposes, smaller increments of elevation adjustment than 100 meters and the peep aperture replaced with an open V-notch.

The open V-notch request is most peculiar. I have always felt that sighting down the Luger pistol's open V-notch was probably similar to looking up a pig's ass and just about as useful for engaging targets on the battlefield.

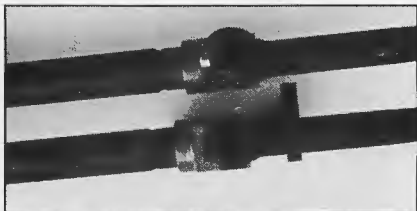
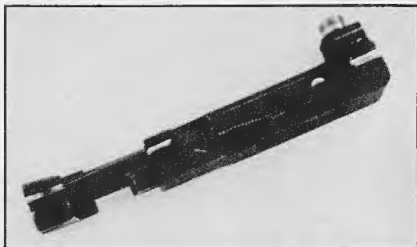
A more serious complaint is the lack of a mount for night vision equipment. The rear sight unit is mounted to the top cover. This is secure enough for the iron sights as the top cover's free-play is not sufficient to affect the gun's burst-group accuracy potential, but a light aluminum top cover is no place for heavy night vision optics. A proper NOD mount for the M249 will require attachment to the receiver.

One of the Army's most astounding complaints is: "The bolt body sometimes separates from the slide [bolt carrier] during airborne operations." The rotary bolt system employed in the M249 is essentially that of the highly successful Kalashnikov series, from rifles to PKM machine guns. The only way for the bolt's cam to separate from the carrier of an M249 or PKM during an airborne operation would be to jump with the barrel out of the gun. No jumpmaster on the face of the earth is going to shove me out of a plane into a hot LZ with a partially field-stripped weapon.

Another bone of contention lies within the trigger group. The trigger housing itself is an anodized aluminum casting. The trigger mechanism is that of the FN MAG 58,

BELOW: M249 bolt and bolt carrier. U.S. Army states that the bolt separates from carrier during airborne operations.

BOTTOM: Two front sight configurations: hood type (top) and protective ears (bottom).



ABOVE: Two-position gas regulator set to the "normal" position will yield a cyclic rate of 750 rpm. Current front sight hood requires a tool, for front post zero adjustments, that is not issued to gunners.

BELOW: M249 SAW field-stripped.



which in turn is that of the MG42. There is none better. A spring-loaded sear trip, unfortunately deleted from the M60, is attached to the top of the trigger

The sear trip fulfills two important functions. It keeps the sear in a low position except at the final moment of engagement with the operating rod, which reduces wear and chipping of the two mating surfaces. It also prevents the trigger mechanism from being placed on "safe" when the operating rod/bolt group is forward, as the sear could be damaged if the operator attempted to retract the bolt with the cross bolt in the safe position.

Continued on page 78

M249 SAW SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber	5.56x45mm NATO.
Operation	Gas. Two-position adjustable regulator (Normal and Adverse). Short-stroke piston. Two-lug rotary bolt. Fires from the open-bolt position.
Cyclic rate	750 rpm (Normal gas position) and 1,050 rpm (Adverse gas position).
Feed mechanism	20- or 30-rd. M16-type magazines or belts using M27 disintegrating links (loose belts or in 200-rd. assault pack).
Weight, empty w/bipod & stock	14.3 lbs.
Weight, w/200-rd. assault pack	21.3 lbs.
Barrel	Air-cooled, quick-change type. Chrome-plated chamber and bore. Six grooves with a right-hand twist of either one turn in 7 inches (TW7 for SS109-type ammunition) or one turn in 12 inches (TW12 for M193 ammunition).
Barrel length	18.6 inches, without muzzle device or extension. 14-inch Para barrel also available.
Sights	Round, post-type front with protective ears or hood; adjustable for both elevation and windage zero. Peep aperture rear with protective ears; elevation adjustable in 100-meter increments from 300 meters to 1,000 meters; adjustable for windage and horizontal zero.
Accessories	Sling, cleaning kit (stored in forearm), 200-rd. plastic assault packs and tripod.
Status	Adopted by the armed forces of the United States, Canada, Australia and Indonesia.
Manufacturer	Fabrique Nationale, Branche Defense et Securite, B-4400 Herstal, Belgium.

LOSING GROUND IN BURMA?

Karens Fight on Borrowed Time

Text & Photos by Mike Winchester

ALONG the jungled banks of the Moei River that divides Thailand from Burma the wet season of 1985 was proving to be ominously quiet. With the beginning of the rains in May an uneasy lull settled along a borderline that is fast becoming one of Asia's flashpoints.

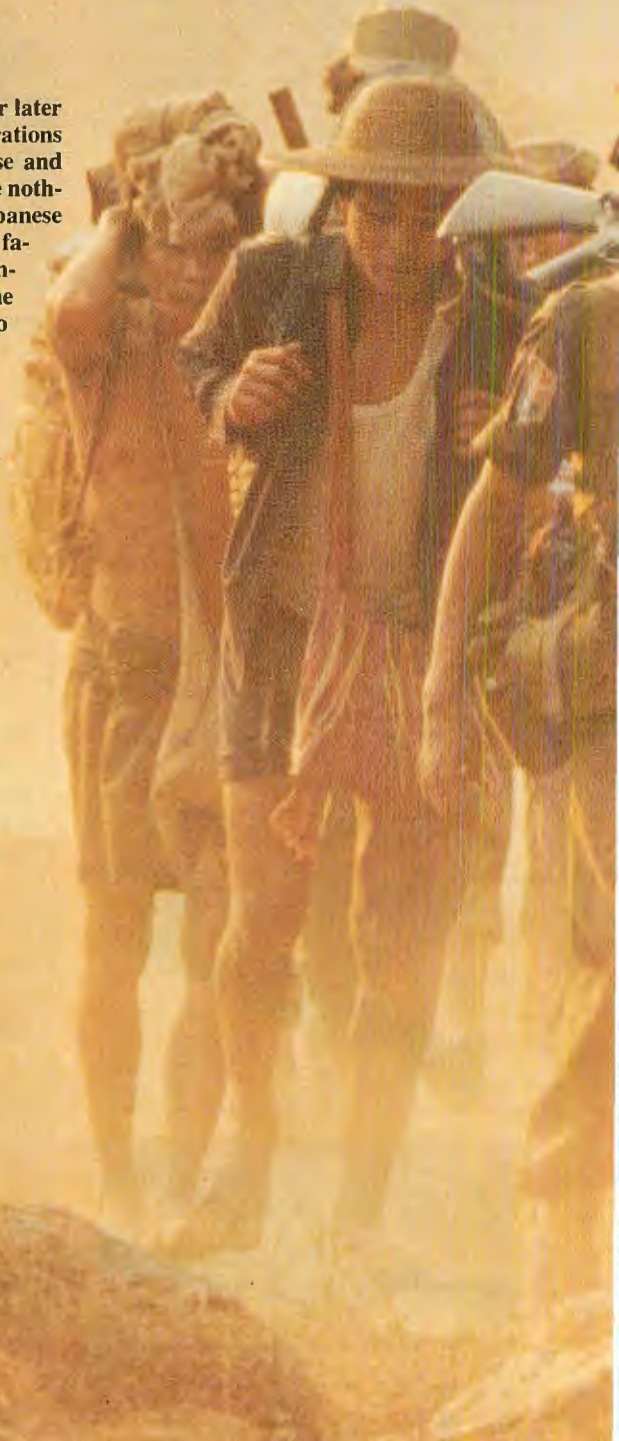
But even before the onset of the dry weather in November it was clear that the relative calm was not going to last. As up to 30 Burmese army battalions along the Karen front replenished ammunition and manpower, both sides braced for the decisive months ahead. Caught in a tightening vise between the Thai border and the weight of Burma's military might, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is undeniably in deep trouble.

As some KNLA commanders, veterans of the 37-year-old struggle with Rangoon, themselves reckon, the Ne Win regime may be finally be ready to go for broke. Today that means only one thing: launch the final assault to overrun the Karens' last strongholds on the Moei.

The Christian-led Karens have never before had their backs so firmly against the wall. But there's a certain bitter logic in their current predicament. The Karens, in a sense, have been fighting a rear-guard war for close to four decades and only in the first year of the uprising did they look remotely like forcing concessions from Rangoon, let alone fighting their way out of the "Union of Burma" into which the British had dumped them when Burma gained independence in 1948.

The Karen revolt began one year later in early 1949, the outcome of generations of racial friction between Burmese and Karen that World War II had done nothing to soothe. When in 1942 the Japanese invaded Burma, the Karens, long favored by the British colonial administration, sided with London. The Burmese, hoping for a shortcut to independence, threw in their lot with the rising power of Tokyo. And with the British driven out of the country, the Burmese wasted no time in turning on the Karen minority and exacting a brutal revenge.

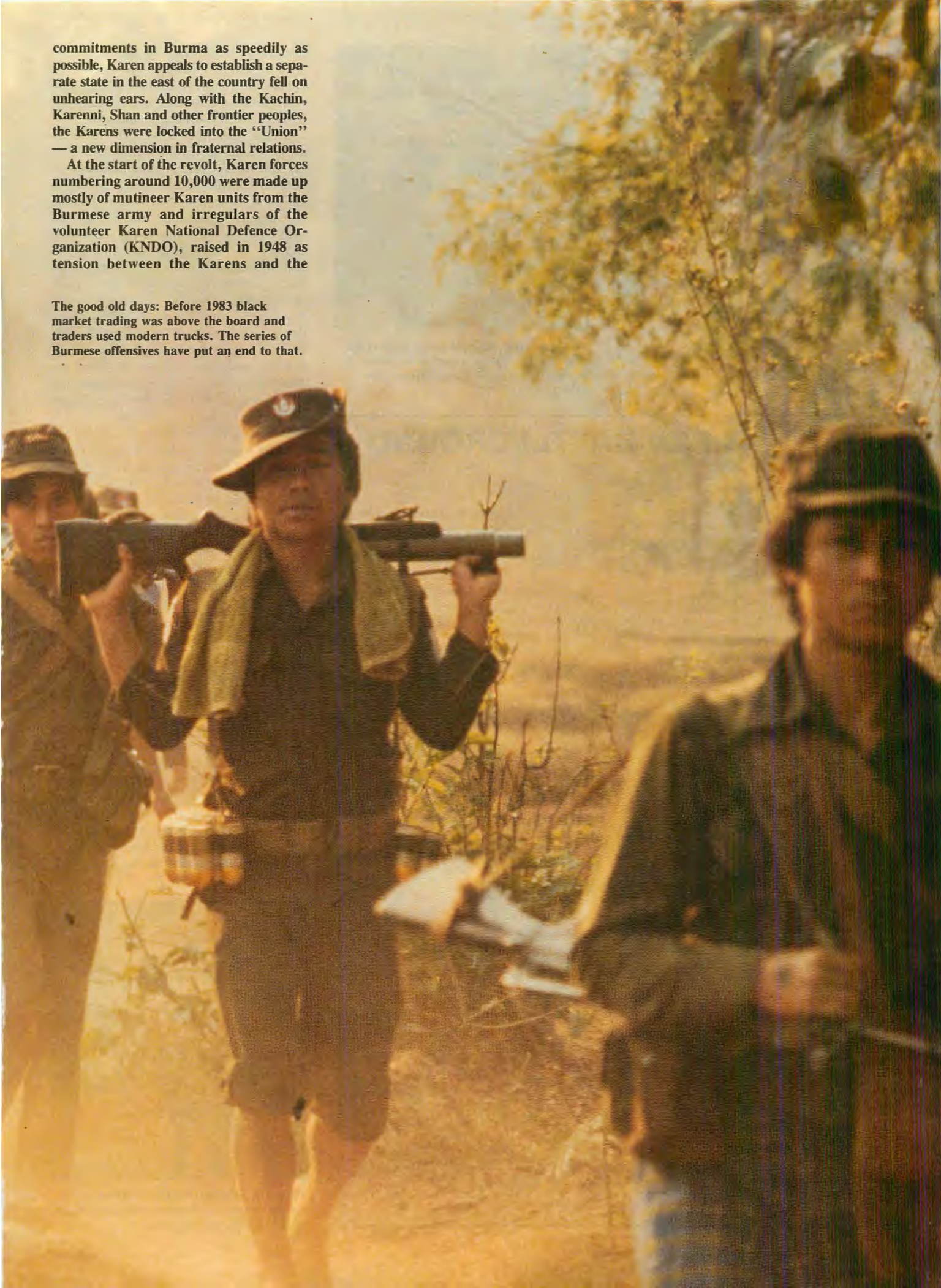
After the war, with Britain anxious to rid itself of imperial



commitments in Burma as speedily as possible, Karen appeals to establish a separate state in the east of the country fell on unhearing ears. Along with the Kachin, Karenni, Shan and other frontier peoples, the Karens were locked into the "Union" — a new dimension in fraternal relations.

At the start of the revolt, Karen forces numbering around 10,000 were made up mostly of mutineer Karen units from the Burmese army and irregulars of the volunteer Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), raised in 1948 as tension between the Karens and the

The good old days: Before 1983 black market trading was above the board and traders used modern trucks. The series of Burmese offensives have put an end to that.





KNU strongman and KNLA commander in chief, Gen. Saw Bo Mya.



This old soldier has seen battle most of his life. The war has been smoldering since Burma was granted independence after WWII.

majority Burmese mounted. And in the first chaotic year of fighting, the KNDO, in alliance with an array of other anti-Rangoon insurgent forces, looked like they might just topple the feeble Union government.

Serious hostilities erupted in late January after a massacre of Karen civilians during Christmas Eve church service. In February Karen troops seized Insein, a mainly Karen-populated town just outside the capital. Before long, the KNDO had swept into other major cities across the country — Taunggyi and Loikaw in the east, Meiktila in central Burma, and Mandalay to the north. But the KNDO's main strength was in two majority-Karen areas, the rice-growing Irrawady Delta, where they held the towns of Bassein and Einme, and, to the east, the Lower Salween valley and the wedge of hill country along the Thai border. There, the towns of Papun and Hlaingbwe and the tungsten mines of Mawchi were all solidly Karen-held.

But as the KNDO advance stalled at Insein, the most vital target, Rangoon itself, remained in government hands. Worse, by the end of 1949 the early impetus of revolt was flagging and the tide of war slowly swung in the government's favor. Toungoo, a key railroad town and capital of the Karen state of Kawthoolay proclaimed in March 1949, fell to a Burmese thrust in March 1950. In August the same year the KNDO leader Saw Ba U Gyi was killed in an ambush near the Thai border. And in November, Einme, the last major Karen-held town in the Delta, fell to Rangoon forces.

Hardly a better year was 1953. In March, a Burmese offensive pushed the Karens out of their eastern headquarters at Hlaingbwe. Then in November government troops took the Mawchi mines, a serious loss since sale of the ore to Thailand had been an important Karen source of revenue from the beginning of the revolt. Finally, in March 1955 came another major setback with the loss of Papun which for seven years had acted as the de facto capital of the Karen free state. The insurgents had lost all the towns they once held.



Weight is no object to this porter as he pauses at the Thai/Burmese border with his load of black market goods.

But in the jungle and hills the struggle continued. By the 1960s guerrilla strength was concentrated in the Delta and the other major area of Karen settlement, the eastern valleys of the Sittang and Salween and the hills along the Thai border (see map). Between them lay a key zone, the sparsely populated but strategic Pegu Yoma mountain range that dominates south central Burma.

Splits within the Karen movement and continuous Burmese pressure were taking a toll, however. In 1964 the best-known Karen leader, Saw Hunter Thahmwe, surrendered after negotiations with the military government of General Ne Win that had seized power two years earlier. The Karen forces that remained in the field were badly fractured in leftist and right-wing parties. By the mid-'70s Rangoon had finally succeeded in securing both the Delta and the Pegu Yoma, forcing out Karen and communist guerrillas and driving the Karens back into the border hills.

The late 1970s brought some stabilization. Rangoon had no lack of other problems to contend with, in particular a growing threat along the Chinese border in the northeastern Shan State posed by the Peking-backed Burma Communist Party (BCP). The communist tide peaked between 1977 and 1980 as BCP hill tribe forces launched major operations against government-held towns.

On their side, the Karens had bolstered their own position by re-establishing unity in 1974 with the formation of the staunchly anti-communist Karen National Union (KNU) under the leadership of General Bo Mya, a burly brigade commander long opposed to communist influence in the Karen movement. The armed wing of the movement was rechristened the Karen National Liberation Army.

With growing revenue from taxation of cross-border trade between Thailand and Burma, the Karens found themselves in better economic shape as well. As a result of Ne Win's imposition of socialist policies, Burma's economy — once the richest in Southeast Asia — had been reduced to a stagnant, inefficient and corruption-ridden shambles. But what the "system" could not provide the black market could — and did. From Thailand came a flood of consumer goods and textiles, while in the opposite direction passed Burma's own natural resources — teak, cattle, minerals, jade, gems and opium.

Groups of ethnic minority insurgents controlling border crossing points suddenly found themselves sitting on a gold mine. Along Thailand's northern border, various Shan factions were soon bogged down in the profitable but politically divisive opium trade. Christians who take their religion seriously, the Karens steered clear of the narcotics racket. Dope running on Karen turf still carries the death penalty. But they did levy a five-percent tax on all goods passing through their tollgates.

The revenue meant funds to buy the best available on the Thai arms market — M16s,



M79s, 60mm and 81mm mortars and more recently Chinese Type 56 assault rifles probably intended for the anti-Vietnamese resistance in Cambodia. You can also find plenty of HK 33s, which the Thais produce under license, and G3s captured from the Burmese, as well as an older generation of U.S.-made M1s and even the odd 3.5-inch bazooka. Obviously, the KNLA is a long way from standardization.

Tax revenue also meant funds for setting up a shadow government in Kawthoolay along the border area with its own ministries, schools, hospitals and churches. It wasn't independence, but the way the Karens saw it, it was a whole lot better than Rangoon's plans for their future.

Militarily, a pattern of stalemate and stand-off set in. Content to leave the wild frontier hills east of the Salween to the insurgents, the overstretched Burmese military limited operations to dry-season forays across the river. After indulging in some raping, looting and pillaging, they'd then pull back for the rains. The KNLA hit back, harassing army columns and raiding army positions and government-held towns.

But with the 1980s the picture began to shift. Under pressure from a new generation of younger Karens, the KNU leadership began adopting a more aggressive strategy. To the embarrassment and fury of Rangoon's crusty dictator, Ne Win, a series of incidents erupted that put the Karen struggle, long forgotten by the rest of the world, back into the headlines:

- September 1982: For the first time ever, a KNLA commando squad staged an assault in Rangoon itself, attacking the Burma Broadcasting Corporation headquarters and a police station before being tracked down. Two Karens were killed and three captured in the firefight that followed.

- January 1983: The KNU set up a border-based radio station beaming programs into Burma. The radio reflected a new awareness among the KNU of the importance of propaganda and the need to reactivate support among the Karen population in government-controlled areas, the Delta in particular.

- February 1983: A KNLA commando



TOP: Karen officer sights in on a Burmese position prior to ordering an attack.

ABOVE: Karen soldier with a 3.5-inch bazooka scans the bush for signs of the enemy.

unit of some 150 guerrillas attempted to reinfiltate the Karens' old stamping ground in the Pegu Yoma range. After a clash with government troops the Karens were scattered, losing 37 men KIA. But Rangoon was clearly alarmed by the first attempt in years to break out from the eastern border and cross the Rangoon-Mandalay railway into central Burma.

- October 1983: KNLA commandos raided a cement plant under construction near the eastern town of Pa'an and snatched a French technician and his wife. The couple was later released unharmed in a blaze of publicity on the Thai border. But Rangoon was severely embarrassed by the attention focused on the Karen struggle and the issue of Western aid to a socialist regime engaged in a range of wars against its own national minorities.

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SOF AFRICA

Skull found by patrolling South African forces near the Angolan border. Another MIA who will never be accounted for in this bloody bush war.

WAR IN ANGOLA

Two Decades with No End in Sight

Text & Photos by Al J. Venter

SOUTHERN Africa, specifically Angola and South West Africa, seems to be in the throes of a nonstop war. The guns are never silent for long and 1986 will be no exception — it marks the 20th year of conflict along the South West African frontier with Angola. In Angola proper this new

year ushers in a quarter-century of inter-cine strife which began with a limited terrorist action by Moscow-supported insurgents against the Portuguese colonists.

Angola, a Marxist state propped up by a variety of international oil companies (Chevron-Gulf and Texaco from the United States, France's Elf Aquitaine, and Italy's government-owned AGIP), Cuban troops and a variety of ComBloc "advisers," remains a country wracked by civil war. Pro-Western UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) forces have made massive inroads through territory formerly controlled by the MPLA — the rather farcically named "Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola." These days, it is unquestionably Dr. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement which is doing the liberating.

But there are other developments inside Angola worth noting since the Soviet Union and other ComBloc forces are so heavily involved in the country's security. Western

diplomatic sources in Luanda, the country's coastal capital, have recently made some interesting disclosures about the nature and extent of FAPLA (the Angolan army) deployment in and around Luanda.

These sources maintain that the Luanda regime has followed Soviet doctrine fairly closely in maintaining the "two lines of defense" structure, the first static and the second mobile. The first, the static line, is comprised largely of Cuban cadres in the country, at last count between 30,000 and 35,000 of Castro's "volunteers." FAPLA makes up the mobile force line of defense.

The actual final defense structure of the country is also segmented, this time into three lines of control: The first stretches, broadly speaking, from the coast at Namibe (formerly the Portuguese port of Moçamedes) through Lubango (Sa de Bandeira) along the rail link to Menongue (Serra Pinto) to Cuito Cuanavale. North of this is the second bastion which extends in a line from Lobito, at present acquiring a massive new Soviet-built air base, through Huamba (Nova Lisboa) to Luso and the Zaire border. Finally comes the defensive iron ring around Luanda itself, a bristling armory that



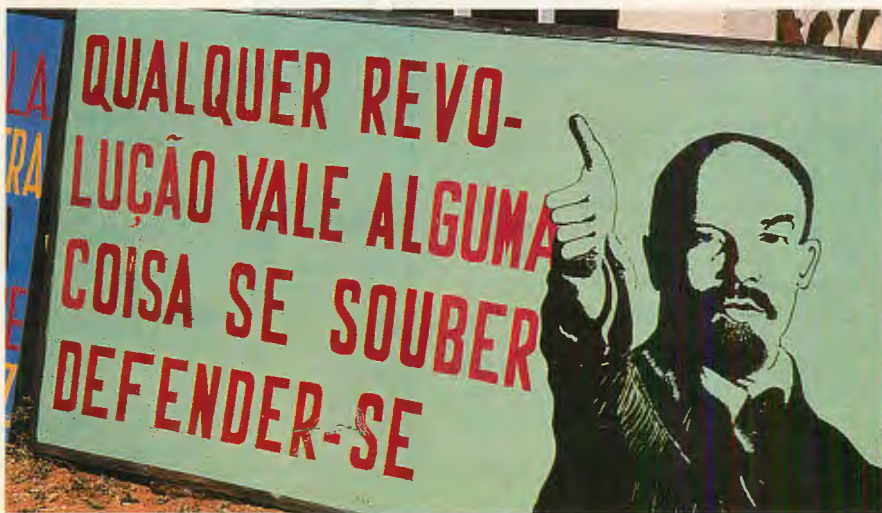
South African troops check out a wounded guerrilla during a recent follow-up action into Angola.

extends outward 200 kilometers from the capital. It is interesting to note that Savimbi's UNITA has penetrated all three of these defense lines.

But activity in the south adjacent to the South West African border, where the South Africans are deployed, presents the most significant developments in Angola. There are between 1,500 and 1,800 Cubans deployed in three regiments in the south. They are based at Chibemba, Matala and Jamba (not to be confused with Savimbi's Jamba, another of four places with the same name in southern Angola). Prior to Operation Protea, an earlier major incursion into Angola by the South Africans, Cuban forces were located much farther south than their present lines of deployment. Now, Castro's surrogate headquarters in the south are found behind huge defensive installations that would offer massive natural obstacles to any invading South African force. Equally important is the fact that when the South Africans pulled back to their own borders in May 1985, the Cubans did not fill the vacuum. UNITA did, and their forces regularly harass and ambush FAPLA troops operating in the area.

Cubans presently stationed in Angola are a mixed bag. Few of them are happy with their postings or conditions although they are paid much better than their compadres back home — the average Angolan soldier receives about U.S. \$30 per month, and Cuban soldiers receive 10 times that amount. This has led to friction with black Angolan forces at a fairly basic level. It's the white and lighter-skinned Cubans who have the cash, and consequently they are in a better position than the average FAPLA soldier to buy food in this terribly impoverished country. Supplies for the Cuban troops usually arrive in special convoys which are heavily protected from ambush by Mi-24 helicopter gunships.

Many of the Cuban and other ComBloc advisers operating with FAPLA forces are first-rate soldiers with years of African experience behind them. But in many instances they are encountering the same problem the Soviets are facing in Afghanistan, and that some U.S. advisers ran into in Vietnam: a poor caliber of indigenous troops, espe-



TOP: Captured Soviet AGS-17s. Outside of Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, SWAPO is one of the few groups to use this devastating automatic grenade launcher.

ABOVE: SWAPO graffiti immortalizes comrade Lenin — leaving little doubt as to which side of the political fence they travel.

cially at the grunt level.

South African troops discovered during Operation Savannah in the mid-70s that a single artillery air-burst shell severely disoriented FAPLA troops — and more than once their foreign advisers. With that fact established a future pattern was set, and things have changed little in the past 10 years. Savimbi's UNITA troops are still fond of using air-burst shells during their increasingly frequent attacks on FAPLA and Cuban-defended strongpoints and towns. But it would be silly to totally discount all FAPLA forces as incompetent and inept.

FAPLA's mixed ratings as a fighting force gets a shot in the arm by the massive amounts of Soviet aid pouring into Angola, a sure sign that Moscow has no intention of giving up on Angola. The Cubans and FAPLA are much better armed than they

This South African armored troop carrier found one of the biggest hazards in a counterinsurgency war: a Soviet landmine.



Soviet field piece highlights a part of the massive amount of ComBloc equipment captured in Angola.

were only a few years ago. The new Soviet AGS-17, a multibareled 30mm grenade launcher (see "Raiders of the Lost Grenade Launcher," an SOF exclusive, February 1983), is now standard equipment throughout FAPLA forces — the only country outside of Afghanistan and eastern Europe to see it. The Soviet SA-9 missile system is also now widely deployed by the Angolans, and with Russian expertise nearby, they know how to use it.

The Angolan air force remains something

of a wild card in the bitter fight for control of the country. The aircraft are available: MiG-21 Fishbeds, MiG-23 Floggers, Mi-8 Hip and Mi-24 Hind D helicopters, among other aircraft, fill out the air force ranks. Angolan pilots fly these aircraft to a degree, but an Angolan pilot, 22-year-old Francisco Matamba, who was shot down by UNITA forces during the major FAPLA offensive in late 1985, stated that Russians and Cubans were also keeping the air force airborne.

There's little doubt that this is true. Political reasons aside, Angola, like Afghanistan, is a military training and testing ground for ComBloc pilots. Since Savimbi doesn't have his own tactical air force, and the South Africans are leery about initiating an air war, Soviet, East German and Cuban pilots have the opportunity to hone their combat air and ground attack skills in Angola.

On the ground, security control of the country is in military or paramilitary hands. Recent estimates show FAPLA to have a strength of about 45,000 troops while the lightly armed People's Militia numbers some 65,000. Dos Santos has also established regional military councils to maintain "law and order" in contested areas; these councils have the power to arrest and try citizens for crimes against the state, and use People's vigilante brigades as their enforcement arm.

Coupled with this, of course, are the numerous "advisers" supplied from the communist bloc. These number some 3,000 Soviet military and civilian advisers, 1,500 other Eastern bloc advisers, between 8,000-10,000 Cuban civilian advisers, and an estimated 30,000 Cuban combat troops.

All this presents a formidable barrier to UNITA's attempts to win freedom for Angola. But there's more. SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) and their military arm, PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia), have also placed their forces in the fray. South African sources estimate that there are 8,000 trained SWAPO fighters in uniform of which only 1,500 are earmarked for operations against South African forces positioned along the Angolan border. The rest are regarded as ransom for Angola's hospitality and are used against UNITA forces. SWAPO is known to have at its disposal two mechanized brigades fully equipped with Soviet BTR armored personnel carriers and other heavy equipment.

At present, the war along the South West African/Angolan border is at its lowest ebb in the last 15 years. In eight months of military activity, South Africa has lost only a handful of soldiers although patrols and other military activity continue around the clock. For the first time in this 20-year war, South African forces have had more losses through accidents than as a consequence of enemy activity.

The "war" between the South Africans and SWAPO, and less directly the Angolan MPLA government, has become one of wait



Continued on page 100



SWATF 1, SWAPO 0

Angola was dry and drab, a reflection of the low-intensity type of cross-border stabs the South Africans and SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) were taking at each other. It had been a hard winter if one were to judge by the sparse bush country across the border north of Eenhana. Normally the undergrowth in these parts is thick, even during the dry season. Thick enough, in any event, to have provided two generations of SWAPO insurgents with the sanctuary they sought when follow-up teams were on their spoor. But in September 1985 the land was dry, gray and sparse.

It was a hot Sunday morning, 15 September to be exact, when Commandant Willem Welgemoed, officer commanding the elite 101 (Ovambo) battalion, South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF), received his marching orders: Be prepared to move against SWAPO terrorists in Angola who are planning an offensive against South African forces, and sabotage activities against the civilian population in South West Africa.

The departure date? Monday, 16 September. Welgemoed wasted no time in implementing contingency plans for just such an operation. Troops were quickly recalled from leave (Welgemoed himself was on his way to church when he received his orders), and the next morning the force of about 500 officers and men crossed the border into Angola.

101 Battalion was organized into highly mobile and independent reaction teams consisting of 40 men each, mounted on Casspir armored cars designed for rugged bush counterinsurgency operations. Most were vets of count-

A former member of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia, SWAPO's military arm.

less such ops in the past, and many had seen action inside Angola. They weren't overly worried about this particular mission, but as always, the adrenalin flowed and caution became the key word as they crossed the border.

According to intelligence teams at Sector 10 headquarters at Oshakati, SWAPO, having suffered heavy losses during the past year, had decided to concentrate more on intimidation, sabotage, and stand-off mortar attacks rather than carry on with face-to-face confrontations with Security Forces. Their main campaign, which was to take place during the coming short rainy season, involved the unprecedented act of pulling out several hundred men from its 8 Battalion — a conventional unit operating with FAPLA forces several hundred kilometers to the northeast — and employ them as insurgents in the south.

SWAPO's plan was to give them several weeks of motivation and retraining as terrorists, and then infiltrate them as far south as Windhoek and Tsumeb when the rains began. Other SWAPO insurgents, specifically from the so-called "Charlie Detachment," would also be involved in the operation as would SWAPO agents already located inside South West Africa.

Because of the political ramifications involved, the Angolan government was notified of the follow-up operation and assured that the South Africans were not after FAPLA or ComBloc advisory troops. Commandant Welgemoed was specifically instructed to avoid encounters with FAPLA, and in fact ordered to stay at least five kilometers away from

any populated area garrisoned by FAPLA troops (there was one chance encounter which was settled quite amicably).

101 Battalion moved northward to the limit of its prescribed area, an imaginary east-west line about 120 kilometers inside Angola, and then swung westward until they reached the so-called "white road." Troops began to sweep southward along this main highway, and that's when the contacts began.

Guided by their expert trackers and freely supplied with information by the locals, 101's reaction teams combed the virtually trackless bush, turning up several arms caches, killing a number of insurgents, and picking up evidence that hundreds of others had fled the area.

Papers found on the dead provided proof that SWAPO had been preparing for an intensive motivation and retraining session for members of 8 Battalion, while 101 Battalion troops cited as additional evidence that most of the SWAPO troops captured showed complete ignorance of standard insurgent fighting and movement techniques.

101 Battalion's mission inside Angola lasted exactly seven days, with the unit crossing back into South West Africa at 0940 on Sunday, 22 September.

By all accounts, the operation was a success. Fifteen members of PLAN, SWAPO's military wing, were eliminated, five others were arrested, and 32 local SWAPO agents were detained for possessing explosives. A further 17 agents who were tasked with gathering information and transporting explosives were also put in the bag.

More importantly, in terms of materiel, 384 kilograms (844 pounds) of plastic explosive was recovered — 124 kilograms (272 pounds) from the Katature Township outside Windhoek. This was enough to fashion about 12 car bombs of the size that devastated Church Street in Pretoria in 1983. Other captured arms of war included a variety of Eastern European assault rifles, RPG-7 rocket launchers, grenades and several different categories of land mines. Two SWAPO terrs killed in Angola were also carrying Soviet Makarov pistols in addition to their standard AKMs, and intelligence reports indicate they were officers in charge of one of the SWAPO groups.

The most important fruit of the operation, however, was intangible. SWAPO's timetable for its campaign during the short rainy season at the end of 1985 was seriously disrupted, and this will without doubt hamper their operations during the full rainy season in early 1986. Terrorists operate best in wet weather when there's plenty of standing water and tracking is nearly impossible, but this time, it was SWAPO who was left out in the proverbial rain.





SOF WEAPONS

CHICOM AK

PRC Kalashnikov in 5.56mm

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

Firing PRC AKS 223 from the so-called "rice paddy prone" position as now taught at Jeff Cooper's Gunsite Ranch. This is, in reality, nothing more than the old USMC squatting position. Whatever it's called, it's quick to both assume and move out of.

KALASHNIKOVs, in one form or another, blanket the communist portion of the planet. Poised on the Great Wall of China, Avtomat Kalashnikovs, now chambered for a caliber more desired by U.S. shooters than the 7.62x39mm ComBloc cartridge, are about to invade the home territory of the "black stick" M16 with a terrible vengeance.

The People's Republic of China is stepping forward into the murky and treacherous waters of the American firearms marketplace to garner its share of the black gun game.

Designed by Mikhail Kalashnikov, the AK series is the most successful rifle ever put into service by anyone at any time. Millions upon untold millions (estimates range from 30 to 50 million) have been

manufactured and issued since the first model of 1947 (AK-47) was introduced in 1951. It has been produced, with minor alterations, not only in the USSR, but in Bulgaria, Poland, East Germany, Romania, North Korea, Yugoslavia, Finland, Hungary, People's Republic of China and even in Israel (as the Galil).

PRC manufactured a Type 56 series assault rifle which was essentially an AK-47 (forged and milled receiver). There were three models: the Type 56 rifle had a wooden buttstock and folding triangular bayonet, the Type 56-1 had a folding stock in the manner of the Soviet AK-47/AKM and the Type 56-2 (rarely encountered and currently under redesign) had a buttstock which folded sideways along the right side of the receiver.

In the fall of 1982, I examined a new variant of the PRC Kalashnikov in Afghanistan. It had the AKM's stamped sheet-metal receiver body and the standard folding stock. There was no bayonet lug or muzzle device. The receiver cover did not have the transverse ribs found on the Russian AKM. The so-called "rate-reducer" of the Soviet AKM/AK-74 series, in reality an anti-bounce device which mechanically delays the hammer's drop, was also missing. The upper and lower handguards were fabricated from a bright reddish-brown, fiber-reinforced phenolic plastic. The pistol grip, composed of the same material, had a unique shape which resembled that of the Colt Browning M1917A1 and M1919A4/A6 machine guns.

Within two years, semiautomatic-only versions of these PRC AKMs began to appear in the U.S. (see "Bamboo Curtain Imports," SOF, September '84). There were further changes, designed to appeal to the U.S. buyer. The reddish-brown furniture turned black. A muzzle device in the Russian AKM style was attached to the barrel. The shape of the pistol grip was altered to the Russian configuration. With a plentiful supply of Yugoslavian and PRC 7.62x39mm ammunition simultaneously made available at reasonable prices, these rifles have sold as fast as they can be unloaded from dockside freighters. And now the AKS 223 has arrived — the compact, robust and reliable Kalashnikov chambered for the ubiquitous M193 5.56x45mm NATO cartridge.

The choice was only natural. RCBS ranks their .223 Rem. (5.56x45mm NATO) reloading dies as the number four seller on a list of the top 30. The 7.62x39mm cartridge does not appear on this list (due, no doubt, to the fact that most of the available cases are Berdan primed). In a shrewd business move, the PRC has presented Western customers with a combination that's hard to ignore.

Before we take a closer look at this intriguing new rifle, a brief review of the Kalashnikov's method of gas operation is in order. After ignition of the primer and propellant, gases are diverted into the gas cylinder on top of the barrel. The piston is driven rearward and the bolt carrier, attached to the piston extension, goes through the necessary amount of free-play travel until the gas pressure drops to a safe level. A cam-slot milled into the bolt carrier engages the bolt's cam stud and rotates the bolt about 35 degrees to unlock it from the receiver (AK-47), or barrel extension in the case of the AKM.

As the bolt travels back it rolls the hammer over and compresses the recoil spring. The bolt ceases its rearward travel by slamming into the end of the receiver. There is no buffer. The recoil spring then drives the bolt forward, another round is stripped from the magazines and chambered, and the bolt comes to rest. The bolt carrier continues onward for about

5.5mm after the two-lug rotary-bolt locking has been completed.

During this last forward movement of the bolt carrier, the secondary or safety sear is released and control of the hammer's rotation goes back to the primary or trigger sear. When the carrier hits the receiver stop on the heavy forged AK-47

receiver, the chance of the carrier and bolt bouncing momentarily out of battery is quite low. However, the lightweight, pinned sheet-metal receiver of the AKM possesses much higher bounce characteristics. To eliminate the possibility of firing out of battery, the Russians added a five-component device which delays hammer drop until the complete cessation of all bolt-carrier bounce. This device, mistakenly referred to as a "rate reducer" by

PRC AKS 223, field-stripped.



AKS 223 SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber	5.56x45mm NATO (.223 REM)
Operation	Gas, no regulator, with conventional piston. Locking by means of rotary two-lug bolt. Fire from the closed-bolt position. Imported as semiautomatic only.
Feed	30-rd. detachable staggered box or 91-rd. spring-wound drum.
Weight, with empty magazine	8.5 pounds
Length, overall	34 ⁷ / ₈ inches
Barrel	Four-groove with a right-hand twist of one turn in 12 inches (for M193 ball ammunition). Chrome-plated bore and chamber.
Barrel length	17 inches, including muzzle device.
Sights	Post-type front with protective hood; adjustable for windage and elevation zero. Sliding tangent-type rear with open U-notch; adjustable for elevation from 100 to 800 meters with 300-meter battle sight position.
Finish	Blued. Flash chromed piston, bolt carrier and bolt group.
Buttstock	Rigid wood type or metal folding.
Forearms and pistol grip	Manchurian Chu wood with oiled finish.
Price	\$475 for wooden buttstock or \$495 for folding-stock version; each complete with three magazines (two 28-rd. and one blocked five-rd.), bayonet, sling, cleaning rod, oil bottle and buttstock cleaning kit.
Accessories	91-rd. drum, \$149.95.
Manufacturer	State Arsenal No. 416, People's Republic of China.
Exporter	Poly Technologies Inc.
Exclusive distributor	Keng's Firearms Specialty, Dept. SOF, 6030 Highway 85, Suite 222, Riverdale, GA 30274.

Jane's and other authorities, has been deleted from the entire PRC AKM series.

With an overall length of 34 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches (rigid wooden buttstock model), the new AKS 223 is slightly shorter than the Russian AKM (35.5 inches). The four-groove barrel has a right-hand twist of one turn in 12 inches (for M193 ball ammunition) and a length of 17 inches with the muzzle device in place. Both bore and chamber are chrome plated. At 8.5 pounds with an empty magazine, the AKS 223 is considerably lighter than the Soviet AKM, which comes close to 10.25 pounds with sling and empty magazine.

The barrel, sweated and pinned to the barrel extension which in turn has been riveted to the receiver pressing, has been salt-blued along with all other metal components, except the bolt carrier, piston and bolt group, which have been flash chromed.

The receiver is a one-millimeter-thick "U" section of stamped sheet metal extensively supported by pins and rivets. The rails on which the bolt carrier reciprocate are also stampings which have been spot welded to the inside of the receiver body. Housed within the receiver body is a standard Kalashnikov trigger mechanism minus the auto safety sear and the Soviet AKM's anti-bounce device. The hammer and trigger spring is made of multiple-strand cable. Multistrand springs avoid the "surging" (wave movement) associated with high firing rates by increasing friction. These springs last longer and give better performance under adverse conditions. The noisy Kalashnikov selector bar, located on the receiver's right side, offers but two positions. When placed on the uppermost position, "S" (safe), the trigger is locked and the selector bar itself physically prevents the bolt group from being retracted enough to pass beyond the rear of a cartridge in the magazine, but sufficiently rearward to check the chamber. When lowered to "F" (fire) — the middle and full-auto position on a selective-fire Kalashnikov — the rifle can be fired semiautomatically. A block, riveted to the front of the trigger guard at BATF behest, prevents the selector bar from being lowered into the third position (which would be semiautomatic on a military Kalashnikov). The trigger pull weight on my test specimen was an astoundingly crisp and light 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds.

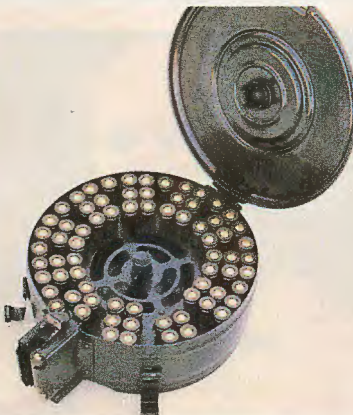
The bolt group remains pure Kalashnikov with only minor modifications. Two lightening cuts normally found on the bolt's shaft are missing. The extractor claw, while slightly larger than that employed for the 7.62x39mm cartridge, is not as large as the one used on the Soviet AK-74 (caliber 5.45x39mm). The firing pin is not spring-loaded and this is a serious omission, which the Israelis discovered when they first imported the semiautomatic Galil to the United States. If commercial or reloaded ammunition — with primers much softer than MilSpec —



TOP: Firing the PRC AKS 223.

ABOVE: PRC Type 81 75-rd. drum fitted to selective-fire Mini AKS in caliber 7.62x39mm. There was little perceptible muzzle rise during three-shot burst sequences and the system operated without stoppages of any kind.

BELOW: PRC Type 81 drum holds 75 rounds in 7.62x39mm and 91 rounds in its 5.56mm caliber version. Easy to load, it can be stored indefinitely with minimum spring tension.



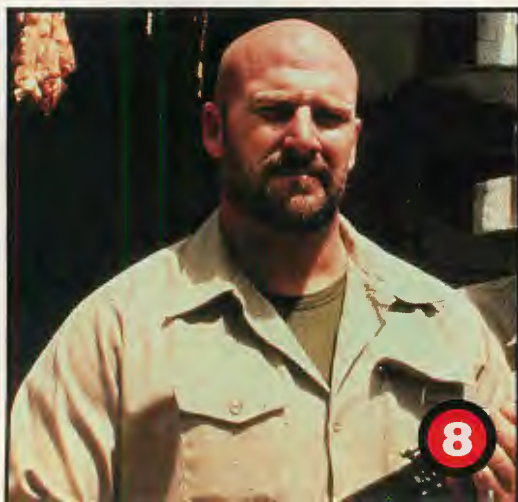
is used in a rifle of this type, the free-floating firing pin can, and eventually will, result in a slam fire with ignition out of battery. The resulting explosion will lead to self-destruction of the firearm and anatomical damage of varying severity to the shooter. This situation should be corrected immediately and all bolts not equipped with firing pin springs must be retrofitted. In the meantime, fire only GI ball ammunition if your Galil or AKS 223 has a free-floating firing pin.

With two sets of four relief holes, the standard AKM gas tube is employed with longitudinal depressions around the entire circumference to provide a reduced bearing surface for the piston head and permit excess gas blow-by. The gas block's vent hole has been altered to achieve the port pressure its PRC designers felt was required of the 5.56mm NATO cartridge, which has higher breech pressure than the 7.62x39mm ComBloc round.

Fitted to the gas tube is a top handguard of tough Chu wood from Manchuria. Used also in the bottom handguard, pistol grip and buttstock, Chu wood is crack resistant, almost impervious to water and

Continued on page 93

Can you name these 9 Soldiers of Fortune?



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If you read S.O.F. every month, you know these 9 Soldiers of Fortune are:

9. Mike Hoare
8. John Donovan
7. Robert K. Brown
6. Harry Claffin
5. Salvo Freedom Fighter
4. Michael Echanis
3. Peter Kokalis
2. Paul Fanshaw
1. Afghan Freedom Fighter

BRAVO FOR BRAVO

America's Joint Task Force in Honduras

Text & Photos by Jim Perry

“YOU really gonna stay the night?” a surprised trooper asked as I unfolded my sleeping bag in his hootch, instantly disbelieving that anyone would volunteer to remain overnight at Palmerola, Honduras. As an “indeterminate” — the Army’s own term for it — U.S. Army forward operating base, Palmerola isn’t the most pleasant of places to live.

“For sure,” I answered with a grin, inserting a roll of film in my camera.

“Hey,” he said, “you better be careful with that. You’ve got to have clearance to take pictures.”

“I’ve got it,” I replied, confident that my clearance with Major Michael Johnson, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO), was enough. It wasn’t. I had to secure a special pass from the J-2 (intelligence) section, and their instructions were explicit and very restrictive.

“Nothing behind barbed wire, no Honduran personnel, Honduran structures, flags or Honduran aircraft,” I was told. “No pictures of radar antennas” — they used the term “antenna signatures” — “and no pictures of the J-2 sleeping hootch.”

“Which one is that?” I asked. I thought it an intelligent question. It wasn’t.

“Never mind,” said the officer. “We just don’t want any pictures of the J-2 hootch.” I told myself that if I could figure out which one it was, I would avoid it.

All those restrictions took in just about everything at this joint United States-Honduran base situated deep in the central highlands of Honduras near the sleepy town of Comayagua, about 100 clicks from the nation’s capital of Tegucigalpa.

Palmerola is actually the *Escuela Militar de Fuerzas Aérea*, the Honduran air force academy. Nestled up against its backside is the headquarters of JTF-Bravo, a joint task force formed to train and assist the Honduran military, both army and air force. It is under the command of U.S. Army Colonel William C. Comee Jr., and he is subordi-

nate to General James Galvin, USSOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command) in Panama. Gen. Galvin answers to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that puts JTF-Bravo pretty high up on the DOD things-to-be-done-in-Central-America list.

In deference to the tough job the American military has to do in this region while still maintaining a low profile, it can be said that security is no joke at Palmerola. The sprawling installation is shrouded in secrecy so tight that it’s difficult to determine just exactly what Americans do at Palmerola. There are two separate smaller commands of JTF-Bravo — ARFOR and AFFOR (Army and Air forces) — which apparently mean the difference between Army support and Air Force support. But the entire base is so drab and nondescript that nothing apparently designates these distinctive functions. Or if they do, I wasn’t permitted behind the barbed wire enclosures that house them.

“We are not a permanent base,” Maj. Johnson explained. “Palmerola, as temporary as it appears, is not that either. We prefer the word ‘indeterminate.’”

But one quick glance around convinces you that Palmerola is about as permanent as the Army can make it despite Maj. Johnson’s assurance “that Palmerola can be bulldozed to the ground and we can be out of here in a week.”

“How many personnel live here?” I asked. No one seemed really anxious to

“Rakassans” of the 187th jump on nearby DZ. Aircraft is a C-130 from the 146th Tactical Airlift Wing, California Air National Guard, pulling TDY in support of Central America tactical airlift requirements.



answer that question. Estimates ranged between 400 and 1,200.

“About 800,” said one, taking a fling at a number somewhere in between.

“Aw, man,” another groaned, “you know that’s classified information.”

Major Johnson was nebulous. “Maybe less than that,” he said, sweeping an arm across the cantonment. “You know how personnel figures fluctuate.” But he finally settled on 400, and that seemed to be closer to the exact figure. Palmerola’s facilities didn’t appear sophisticated enough to support more than that.

If the personnel figure of 400 people is correct, then it looked like about 10 percent of them are women.

“Secretaries?” I asked stupidly. Johnson laughed.

“Hell no! Soldiers. Our headquarters commandant is a woman captain pulling her first command time here.” I met her and she asked me not to take her picture or use her name.

“I want to be as anonymous as the men,”

she said softly. "Women here are soldiers. Palmerola is not combat duty and so the assignment is similar to Panama." The captain must have been a good boss; every man I talked with who served under her command had only positive comments about her leadership ability.

But the men and women live painfully close together for soldierly comfort. Shorts and T-shirts are the off-duty uniform and no one seems to violate that arrangement. I saw only one female soldier in a halter top. Most seemed to prefer an OD or "cammie" top, often labeled with a humorous inscription.

"I Survived Hootch 43," read one, with "Pride of JTF-Bravo, Palmerola, Honduras" on the back.

Even in the tight confines of JTF-Bravo, though, relationships have remained businesslike and professional. Mission and morale make that an absolute necessity.

Morale does seem to be pretty high among the troops at Palmerola, one of the reasons being a WATS telephone connection. Troops are able to call home for 10 minutes any night after 1800.

"But it's still Danang South," a Vietnam veteran told me, alluding to Palmerola as if it was a temporary pimple in the middle of no-man's land.

It might well have been. There were enough sandbagged shelters dotting the landscape to hide a regiment. Still, none of them were as dank or dusky as I had remembered those in 'Nam. None of them had that smell of fear and sweat or burning cordite, and none of them were ankle-deep in water.

"Counterterrorist measures only," Maj. Johnson assured me, but as I watched a group of men tearing down an old one, one of the troopers growled under his breath.

"Nothing ever happens here," he spat, "so what the hell's the use in putting 'em up, tearing 'em down . . ." Then, as if to show his complete dislike for the labor of hefting sandbags, he kicked one.

JTF-Bravo also has a fully equipped field hospital complete with Huey medevacs continually standing by on nearby pads. Their red crosses brought back too many memories. Medevacs on dust-off pads give me the shakes; their very presence says that somebody somewhere may need help fast. While I watched, one took off.

"Where's that bird going?" I asked, again hoping for an answer. My escort shrugged his shoulders.

You're a real bundle of info, I thought to myself, but then I had been told that medevacs were routine here since JTF-Bravo is heavily involved in civic action. Perhaps the Huey was on its way to evacuate an injured Honduran child. That made me feel better for not getting an answer.

There is an absence of Honduran personnel at JTF-Bravo, however, either military or civilian. A few laborers routinely swish at the weeds with machetes and the main gate is co-owned; at least one American MP is there at all times to regulate U.S. personnel. The Honduran flag flies proudly near the airbase's control tower, yet I can't re-

member seeing an American flag anywhere. To me, that's *too* low a profile.

Ominous warning signs are everywhere. One had a skull and crossbones etched on it with the words "No Entry. The use of deadly force is authorized." I wanted to take a picture of that. Denied. The sign was too close to a bunkered guard. Farther down the line we found another sign, not so graphic, but just as assertive. I sighed, resolved that I couldn't photograph that either, but handed my camera to my escort anyway.

"Okay," I said, "you take it." He did, and handed me back the camera, perplexed that I was interested in something that indicated GLs at Palmerola might be ready to shoot.

"Aw hell," he said, "nobody here's gonna kill anyone."

I had heard differently from another source during the day. Someone had been killed a few months back, a child rummaging through the dump, shot by a Honduran guard. There were also instances of troopers sneaking back in after curfew who'd had a few rounds thrown at them. The words "use of deadly force" take on a different meaning when a ripple of 5.56 goes over your head. I decided not to push my luck anymore and folded up my camera.

There was an uneasiness at having a representative from *Soldier of Fortune* in camp. The "mercenary" image that prevailed in El Salvador was just as evident in Honduras. It was defeating to have one man say, "I read and enjoy your magazine," and to have another turn his head away.

"Don't take my picture, man."

I had requested a landing permit for El Salvador, and since I was flying in on a C-130 from the Air National Guard at Van Nuys, California, I was surprised when it



Member of the drop zone and safety party during airborne drop. Beret and flash indicates that this NCO is probably permanent at JTF-Bravo, used for both U.S. and Honduran parachute operations.



Life is taken seriously at Palmerola, but author notes that his military escort had to take this photo so that he wouldn't "compromise" the nearby guard, barbed wire or sandbags.

was denied. MilGroup in San Salvador would allow the visit of the UPI correspondent, John Bilotta, who accompanied me, but not Perry.

The TWX read: "Country clearance for Mr. James M. Perry is denied. Mission does not consider travel of Mr. Perry or another representative of *Soldier of Fortune* to El Salvador via Milair [military air] to be opportune. Given that the embassy has had to deal repeatedly with allegations that SOF's 'volunteer trainers' in El Salvador work under the direction or control of this mission, we decline country clearance if the SOF representative is aboard."

It's a bitch not to be "opportune."

Security, especially photographic security, at Palmerola was tight. I asked the PAO if he had any Class III, photographically sensitive people around. He only knew of a couple.

"You won't run into them, though, so don't worry," he said. He was wrong. Within an hour I'd found one. He shielded his face, turning away.

"Hey!" he complained, "No pictures." That line was becoming the story of my life.

Later, when I asked the PAO why I hadn't been permitted to photograph the Blackhawk helicopters at the base, he denied that there was anything secret about their mission. Perhaps it was because the Blackhawk had been involved in some fatal accidents, he suggested. Twelve troopers at Bragg had recently died in a flaming Blackhawk crash.

"True," a Blackhawk mechanic told me. "I ride the bastards every day. They leak from every seam." Another mechanic disagreed.

"Naw . . . shit," he said, "it isn't that. It's all those Green Beans hanging around. Come on," he said, "I'll show you."

When we went to look, I couldn't spot one Green Beret at all. If there had been any

Continued on page 101



SOF LAW ENFORCEMENT

LOW-LIGHT SHOOTING

Hit Your Mark with a Shot in the Dark

Text by Emanuel Kapelsohn

Photos by R. Britson

THE officer's feet pound the pavement as he runs, his breathing so loud in his own ears it almost drowns out the sound of the approaching sirens. Twenty-odd pounds of equipment on his duty belt don't make the chase any easier. Adding insult to injury, a glimpse of his younger quarry sprinting through the circle of light from a streetlamp thirty yards ahead shows he is wearing running shoes. The teenager takes a hard right

turn and ducks into an alley. Seconds later, the cop stops short at the alley mouth and listens, but all he can hear is his own tortured breathing and the sirens converging on the liquor store several blocks behind him. His eyes strain to pierce the darkness, but can make out only a dumpster, several metal trash cans and some broken wooden produce crates. Beyond that, darkness and silence. His pulse pounding in his temples,

the officer starts down the alley, uncomfortably aware that he is an easy target with the streetlight behind him. Halfway to the dumpster, he hears a movement in the shadows, and freezes in his tracks just as a deafening blast, and then two more, shatter the darkness ahead of him. In the light of the muzzle flashes he can make out the form of his attacker less than 10 yards from him. The officer's gun comes up, and he fires. . .

LEFT: Most gunfights occur in darkened conditions at extremely short ranges.

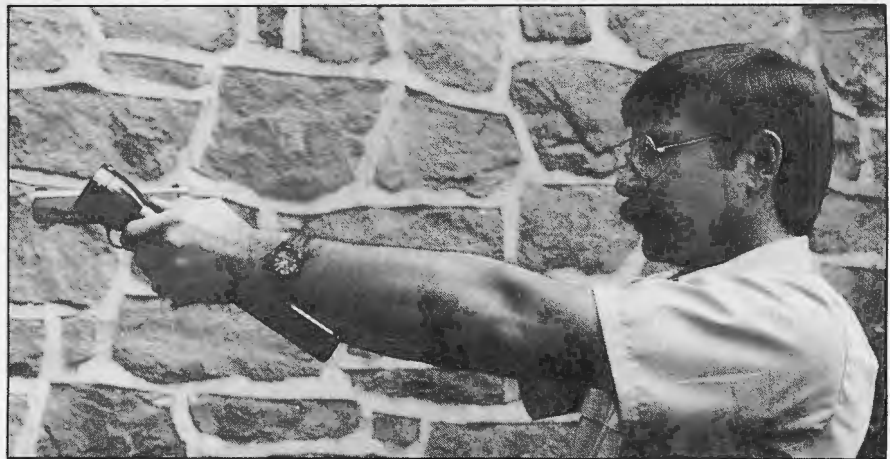
Statistics — the FBI's Uniform Crime Report and NYPD's SOP-9 Summary Report, to name two — indicate that at least 65 percent of officer-involved shootings take place under conditions of dim light. The reason is obvious: most violent crime also takes place at night. For the same reason, the self-defense oriented civilian can expect that his need to use a gun will occur under less than ideal lighting conditions. Illumination can range from streetlights, headlights or the flashing lights on the top of the patrol car, to the officer's flashlight, moonlight or almost no light at all. Typical firearms training conducted on sunny days or on well-lit indoor ranges does not adequately prepare the shooter — be he police officer, soldier or civilian — for the conditions most likely encountered in a life or death situation. Effective techniques for dim-light handgun shooting are not hard to master, but the time to start working on them is now — not during a gunfight.

The vast majority of handgun fights take place at very close range. In the police and civilian context, over 80 percent occur at seven yards or less, and the statistically average gunfight distance is between 6½ and 7 feet. Accordingly, there is rarely either the need or the time to use a flashlight as a shooting aid, despite the darkness.

It should not come as a surprise (despite the effect of television on our attitudes) that the best way to ensure solid hits with the handgun, or any other firearm, is to bring it up to eye level and use the sights. Some pretty fancy missing can be done from the hip, even at close range. As one seasoned officer I know likes to put it, "If you don't think you have time to use the sights, you certainly don't have time to miss." Even at night, there is frequently enough light in urban streets or parking lots to see the handgun's sights. If you can see the sights, use them. Sights appear in low light because there is enough light falling on the sights themselves, or because there is enough light on the target to silhouette the sights while the shooter remains in the darkness — a position of great advantage.

When there is not enough light to see the sights at all, hitting with the handgun depends on the shooter's ability to grip, draw and point the handgun by virtue of physical indexing or body memory. This skill must first be developed by repetitively drawing and aiming the handgun in the daylight, using the flash sight picture as the gun comes up into the line of sight as instant positive reinforcement, until the grip, draw and stance become consistent from draw to draw. This practice will eventually present the handgun directly on the line between the shooter's eye and his target, minimizing the need to make visually aided corrections to the gun's alignment on the target.

After sufficient practice, the ability to point — more accurately, "feel" — the handgun on target can be tested with the



TOP: Ayoob technique: Shooter places thumbs of gun hand and flashlight hand together.

ABOVE: Flashlight becomes angled sharply upward from direction of aim.

eyes off drill. Simply look at the target and start to draw, shutting the eyes as soon as the hand touches the holstered gun. Complete the draw, open your eyes, and check where the gun is pointing. If the gun isn't on target, it means that your grip, draw and stance are not consistently pointing the gun. In daylight, you'll pay for this inconsistency by taking time to make visual corrections before firing. When darkness prevents visual correction, you will simply miss the target unless you have developed the ability to point the gun where you are looking.

After reasonable consistency is developed (usually a matter of only a few hours of proper practice), the average shooter will have no trouble placing all of his shots at seven yards in the center chest of a man-sized target in almost pitch blackness. In fact, strange as it may seem, many shooters actually fire smaller groups at this distance in the dark than they do in the daylight using the sights.

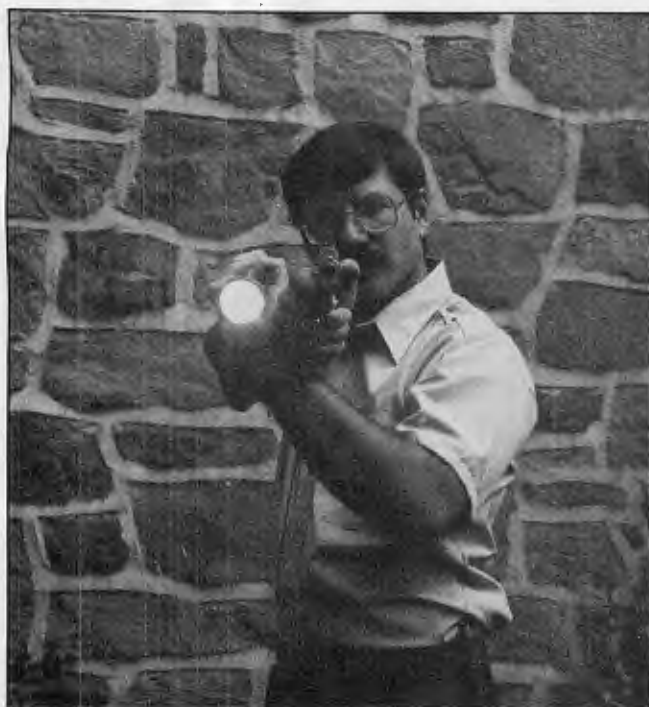
Once your body can automatically draw and point the gun consistently, the key to hitting in the dark is to let your body take over: Do not interfere by consciously attempting to correct your body's aim.

Simply look at the target, draw and squeeze the trigger. Form alone will produce the hits.

Accordingly, it is important to use the same shooting stance you have practiced in the daylight — the one your body has memorized. In other words, even though you can't see the sights, bring the gun up to eye level in the dark to take advantage of the consistency you have developed in that position. Don't try to shoot from the hip, unless that is what you've spent your time practicing.

This method can be used to deliver accurate fire not only at a target barely visible in the dark, but also at a muzzle flash, a sound, or even the bedroom doorway one cannot see but knows is there. Beware: The ability to hit someone you can hardly see does not relieve you of the need to make positive identification of the target before firing.

Another lighting condition sometimes encountered is one in which the target is brightly backlit, appearing only as a black silhouette. At close range such a target can be hit by form alone as described above. A more distant backlit target presents a problem, since the sights will become invisible when moved into the black target. One technique that works is to align the sights by silhouetting them against the light near the target, then shift them to the target and fire. This technique can even be made to work with a rifle at surprising distances.



Recalling our statistic that over 80 percent of shootings occur at ranges of seven yards or less, we see that the ability to place solid hits on a man-sized target at that distance even when there is barely enough light to locate it will suffice for the great majority of dim-light shooting encounters.

Nevertheless, there are a number of circumstances in which the shooter will need to use a flashlight. These fall into four categories:

1. To find the target in the darkness;
2. To identify the target as hostile or friendly;
3. To hit the target when it is beyond the range at which it can reliably be hit without illumination (say beyond 8 yards for most shooters);
4. To enable the shooter to move in the dark without getting lost or falling over obstacles.

While the flashlight is necessary to deal with specific situations, it should be used as sparingly as possible. Concealment of darkness greatly increases the officer's chances of survival against an armed attacker. As soon as the officer turns on his flashlight, he becomes the target. It is imperative that the light be turned off again as quickly as possible, and that the officer then move immediately away from the location he was in when the light was on. It takes only a second of light for the eye to scan the next segment of terrain to be searched and pick a clear area — after the light has been turned off. While the light unavoidably announces the officer's location this method minimizes the opponent's ability to react and fire an accurate shot before the officer has moved off into the darkness. If the situation is one in which it is appropriate to move with the handgun already drawn, the gun and light are moved together to hunt the area being illuminated.

When a target is spotted, the goal is to get

ABOVE LEFT: Front view of Harries method.

ABOVE RIGHT: Harries method provides stable platform for shooting hand. Tail end of flashlight can be indexed on shooting arm as shown.

a shot off within not much over 1½ seconds, then move to another position. If terrain or tactics prevent moving, turn the light off. Even if the adversary has been hit and falls, you should still turn the light off and move — he may have a partner out there in the dark who is aiming at you while you stand there with the light on, thinking it is all over. Be sure it's over before you drop your guard.

It should now be apparent that in order to be effective, the gun-and-flashlight technique must be one which allows a target to be spotted and hit in the shortest possible time. One of the worst methods is the old FBI technique in which the light is held at arm's length, preferably above and slightly forward of the body, while the gun is held unsupported in the other hand. The theory is that the attacker will not see the officer, and will fire at the light and miss. Unfortunately, an individual using this method does not become invisible, but looks exactly like a man holding a light in one hand and a gun in the other. If you don't believe it, try it with a friend. Holding a heavy flashlight at arm's length is also exhausting and the light gets closer and closer to the body as the search goes on. The greatest drawback of the FBI technique is that, lacking any solid connection between light and gun, it simply takes too long to find the target with the light, then find it with the gun, fire an accurate shot one-handed, and turn the light off. The target may not oblige by waiting around that long before taking cover or firing back. The goal of placing an accurate hit on target in

1½ seconds becomes nearly impossible.

Connection of light and gun is a common element in all the better flashlight methods: The gun is already pointed where the beam of light will be before the light is even turned on. Each of the following three methods achieves this to one degree or another, and each has its strong and weak points making it good for some uses and poor for others.

The Ayooob method, named for instructor/gunwriter Massad Ayooob, has the shooter hold the flashlight normally in the weak hand, hold the gun as usual in the strong hand, and simply bring the hands together until the bases of the two thumbs meet. Because the flashlight is a straight tube while the butt of the gun is at nearly a right angle to its barrel, the Ayooob method will angle the light sharply upward — about 35 degrees — when the gun is leveled on target. At ranges up to six or seven yards this is satisfactory and can even serve to put the light in the suspect's eyes while the sights are centered on his chest.

Beyond this close range, and especially outdoors where there are no ceiling and walls to reflect the upward-angled lights, the Ayooob method is ineffective. The connection between the two hands is not solid, but that is not a serious disadvantage to either finding the target or hitting it at close range.

A greater disadvantage is the Ayooob method's basic position which is suited only to the isosceles shooting stance. It is incredibly awkward to combine with the Weaver stance and results in the light pointing almost straight up. The great advantage of the Ayooob method is the speed with which it can be employed for close-range confrontations, including ones in which the officer starts with his light in hand, but his gun still holstered. Remember, even at ranges under seven yards, where hitting a man in the dark

is easy, the officer will most often need his light to identify and/or challenge a suspect, rather than shooting.

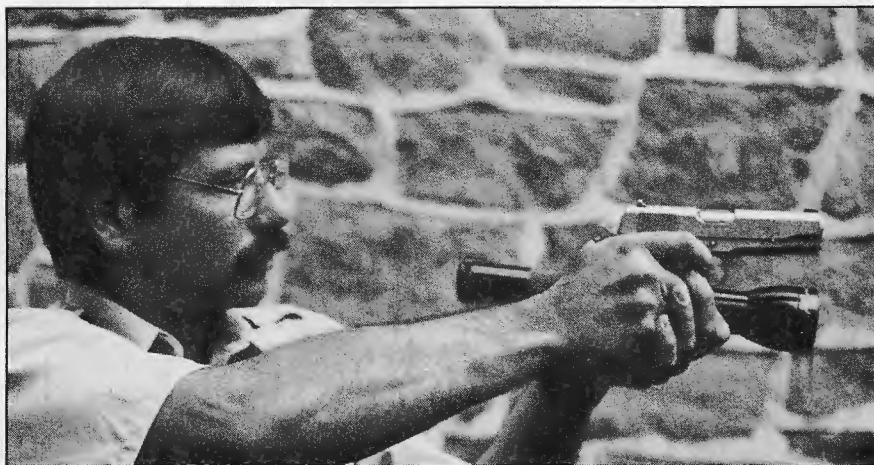
The Chapman method, named for practical shooting champion and instructor Ray Chapman, has the shooter hold the flashlight encircled in the thumb and index finger of the weak hand, with the lower three fingers extended and wrapped around the butt of the gun and shooting hand. The Chapman method is almost as fast to assume as the Ayooob, and is compatible with either the Weaver or the isosceles stances. It's a bit precarious for shooters with average-sized hands, especially when using large-gripped service handguns and long D-cell flashlights common in police and security work. Because of this, recoil control is not ideal. On the credit side, the Chapman is a comfortable and easily learned position for many shooters, and unlike the close-range-only Ayooob method, fairly well aligns the light beam and the gun barrel for searching or shooting at any distance.

The Harries method, named for Southwest Pistol League shooter Mike Harries, is a superb technique for use with the Weaver stance, especially when a dark area is to be searched with the gun already drawn. In the Harries method, the light is held *backhanded* (reversed) in the weak hand, with the pinky, ring, or second finger operating the switch. The gun hand is brought over the top of the light (do NOT let the muzzle cross the weak arm), and the backs of the wrists are brought together so the fists interlock, allowing a bit of isometric tension to be exerted between the two arms. If the flashlight is long enough, its back end can be indexed and rested against the strong arm near the elbow.

The Harries method is a bit more difficult to learn than the Ayooob or Chapman, feels awkward at first to many shooters, and is not usable with the isosceles stance. The position is also slower to get into, especially if the light is not held in a backhanded position from the start, while searching with the gun still holstered. Another drawback of the Harries method is that it quickly becomes tiring, although fatigue can be reduced by letting the weak elbow rest on the hip while waiting or moving in the Weaver ready position.

Against these drawbacks is balanced the superior stability of the Harries position, which creates a tighter lockup between the gun and flashlight than any other position. A shooter who has mastered this technique can keep the light and the gun bore almost exactly parallel, allowing the fastest hits. For my money, the Harries method also provides the most support for the gun hand, allowing accurate shot placement and good recoil control.

Regardless of flashlight position, it is critical that the shooter obtain a proper sight picture and press off the shot without disturbing that picture — darkness does *not* magically cure yanking the trigger. A usable sight picture is most easily acquired if the beam of light is placed directly on the



TOP: Chapman technique: Shooter begins by extending lower three fingers of flashlight hand.

ABOVE: Three fingers of flashlight hand are wrapped around bottom of the shooting hand.

adversary, so that the sights can be seen clearly silhouetted against him. This also serves to blind the adversary.

When a light is needed, a high-quality, reliable flashlight can be more important than the officer's gun, and it should be selected as carefully. Made especially for outdoor use, the high-intensity rechargeable flashlights — notably the Mag-Charger and the Streamlight — are worth their weight in gold. With up to 35,000 candlepower, these lights make it much easier to find, identify, blind and, if necessary, hit the target than even the best conventional flashlights. While they retail for \$100-\$150, for the man who uses a flashlight often these rechargeable lights will pay for themselves in less than a year by saving the cost of replacing conventional batteries every few weeks.

One serious drawback of the high-intensity lights, however, is that when used indoors, especially in close quarters with light-colored walls, their reflected brightness tends to blind the shooter, leaving him with poor night vision when he turns the light off. Another problem is that the good rechargeables currently on the market are all D-cell diameter, uncomfortably large for individuals with small or medium hands to

use with the suggested shooting techniques, and also quite heavy if chosen in a length which can allow the light to double as a baton. For these reasons, some shooters may prefer a conventional C-cell police flashlight. My preference in a non-rechargeable is the Mag-Lite.

It is important that whatever light is chosen have a push-button switch with momentary flash capability. The sliding switches are awkward and slow to use while shooting, and the momentary flash is important so that light will go off as soon as pressure on the button is released. This allows the light to be doused instantly after the shot is fired, and also ensures that the light will go off by itself if the officer drops it, takes a fall or is hit. Under such circumstances, a light which remains on and falls out of reach can continue to illuminate a disabled officer, making him an easy target.

It should go without saying that the shooter should be able to perform operations like reloading the weapon and clearing malfunctions in the dark, without need for the light (see "Getting Out of A Gun Jam," SOF, July 1985). If much night shooting is done, the greater ease and speed of reloading an auto pistol without any visual cues will become apparent, as will the ability of the auto user to clear malfunctions easily in the dark. Revolver malfunctions, such as an empty case trapped under the extractor, are difficult to clear even in the daylight, and become virtually impossible to solve in the

Continued on page 104

MILLIONS and millions of military small arms are piling up outside foreign arsenals awaiting shipment to the United States, the result of an amendment to the Gun Control Act of 1968. No doubt this prospect is prompting the onset of cardiopulmonary arrest in every anti-gun lunatic from San Francisco to New York.

Signed into law by President Reagan on 30 October 1984, the amendment was authored by Robert Dole, a Kansas Republican who serves as majority leader in the United States Senate. Known as the Dole Amendment, the new law once again makes it legal for licensed citizens to import certain surplus military weapons.

Weapons imports legalized under the Dole Amendment include military small arms manufactured between 1899 and 1946. The weapons in this particular category already had been classified as curios and relics by the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF). They are now eligible for importation if they remain in their original military configuration. A BATF import license is still required. Firearms manufactured prior to 1899 were already exempt from import restrictions because they are considered antiques.

Such weapons as the French M1949, the M1949/56 semiautomatic rifle and a few others manufactured after 1946 may also presumably enter U.S. borders because they are on BATF's curios and relics list.

Still banned are imports of weapons manufactured by officially blacklisted nations such as ComBloc members. However, there are specifically listed exceptions to this provision. Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of China are two examples.

Weapons manufactured before a ComBloc nation became blacklisted — which usually means before the country turned communist — are allowable. One example in this category would be Mosin Nagant rifles manufactured in Russia prior to 1917. The catch is that these weapons must have been stored in a non-proscribed country for at least five years prior to importation.

Previous restrictions still stand against the importation of U.S. manufactured firearms given to other nations under Lend Lease or other assistance programs. U.S. weaponry purchased by foreign governments can be imported if the initial transaction can be documented.

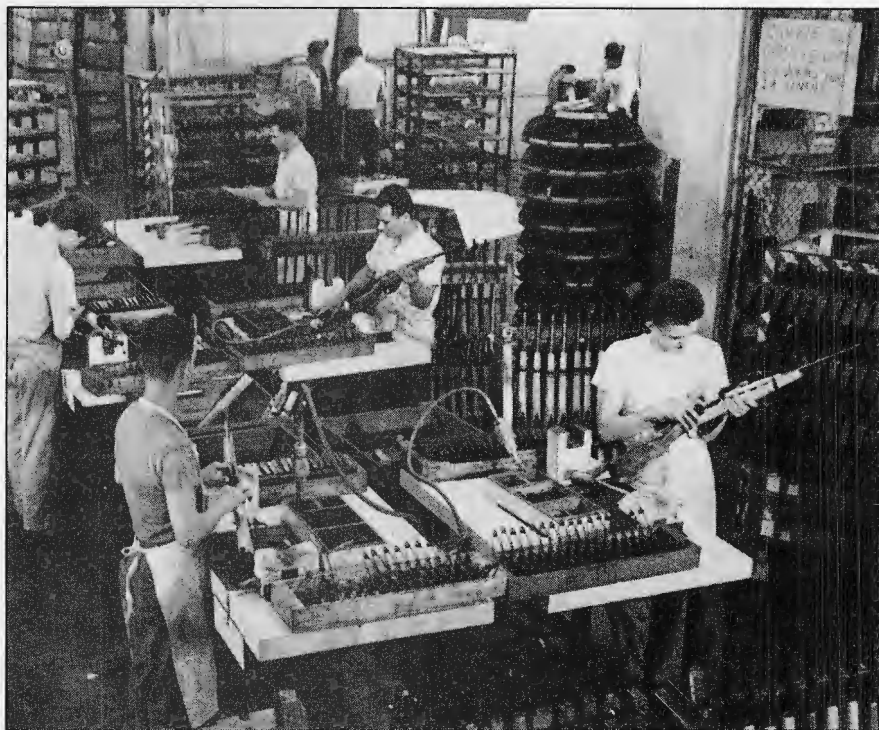
In all cases, the importer's name and address must be conspicuously marked on the receiver or barrel.

Military pistols, revolvers, semiautomatic and bolt-action rifles constitute the vast bulk of the weaponry available for importation. Previous restrictions on the importation of Title II firearms (machine guns, sound suppressors, etc.) were not affected by the Dole Amendment.

In fact, the BATF has recently extended its interpretation of the law to make it even more restrictive. In early 1985, BATF held that Class 3 dealers must provide a letter from a law enforcement agency as

SOF GUN LAW

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND



documented proof that the item the dealer wishes to import has been requested for demonstration and/or purchase by that law enforcement agency. Further proof must be furnished by the dealer that their Title II dealers' samples are being used in actual demonstrations to legal recipients. Finally, they must document each attempt to make a sale to a qualified buyer.

Now BATF has made the Class 3 dealer's business even more difficult. Samples imported after 22 July 1985 cannot be transferred unless the dealer fails to renew his license. Such weapons samples in the dealer's inventory are frozen until his license expires. Only then can he transfer the item to another Class 3 dealer, a law enforcement agency or back to the importer. As they are chattel, Title II dealers' samples can, of course, also be retained by the dealer himself after he gives up his Class 3 license. These rulings have, for all practical pur-

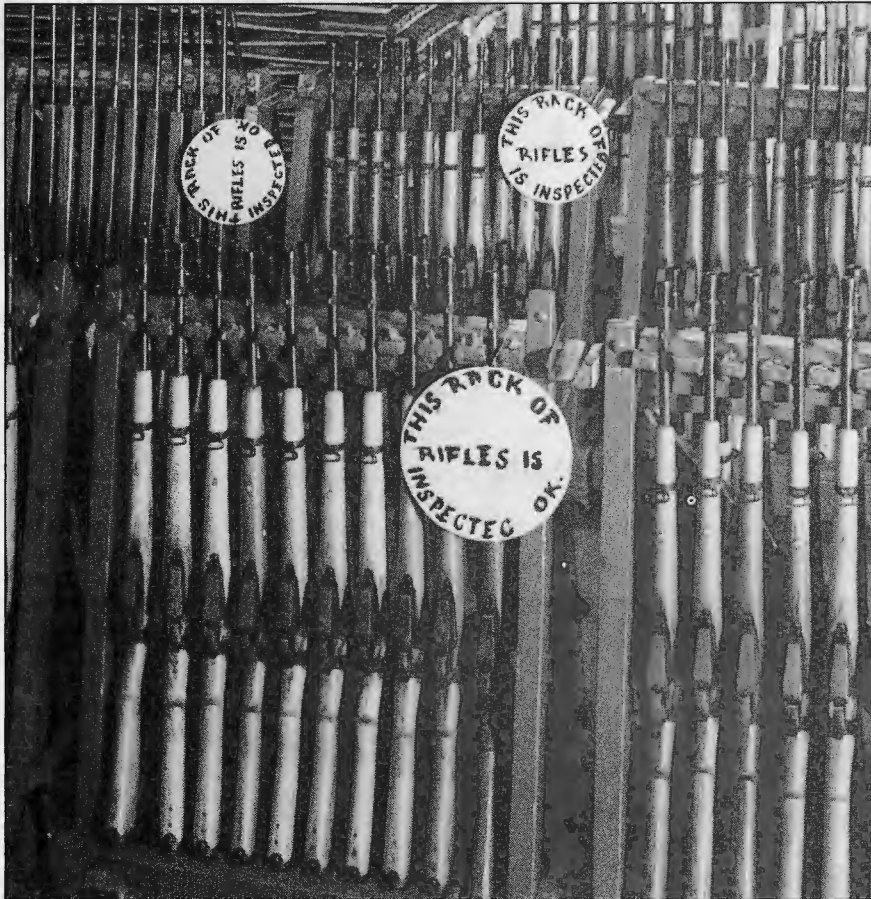
poses, killed the dealer sample program, as Class 1 importers no longer have enough qualified Class 3 dealers to sustain their efforts.

Not many handguns have been imported yet under the new provisions of the Dole Amendment. Handguns must be "particularly" suitable for "sporting purposes" to be eligible for importation.

But a few pistols have begun showing up. A more interesting example is the Canadian Inglis-manufactured Browning HiPowers. The serial numbers on all these weapons contain the letters "CH," which indicates they were part of a World War II contract between Canada and the Nationalist Chinese. They're fitted with tangent rear sights and slotted to accept the wooden shoulder stock/holster, a legal combination ever since these pistols were classified as curios and relics. A few early arrivals had the original black paint over phosphate fin-

Foreign Firearms Flow Resumes

by Peter G. Kokalis



During the selling heyday of low-cost surplus weapons imports before the 1968 Gun Control Act, hundreds of No. 5 Mkl rifles, above, were reconditioned for sale to U.S. customers. The armory, opposite page, was run by Golden State Arms in California. Photo courtesy of Federal Ordnance Inc.

ish in excellent condition. However, most were re-blued by the People's Republic of China.

Also available are U.S. M1911A1 pistols, British Enfield Commando revolvers (caliber .38 S&W), Lugers and Mauser Broomhandles (including the so-called "Bolo" variant).

The import spectrum expands considerably when it comes to rifles. M1 Garands, Johnson M1941 rifles and .30 M1 Carbines are the only semiautos I have seen to date. No doubt others will appear.

The selection of bolt-action rifles is even

greater: Japanese Arisaka Model 1905 rifles and carbines, Russian M1891 and M1891/30 Mosin Nagants, British Pattern 14s and SMLEs (No. 1 MkIII, No. 4 MkI and No. 5 MkI "Jungle Carbines") and Mausers of every type, including Swedish Models 38 and 96, Chilean M1935, Czech Vz24, Brazilian M1908, Syrian K98, Israeli K98 (7.62x51mm NATO), Turkish M93, Spanish M93 and M44, Polish M29 and KAR, Belgian FN98 carbine and Dutch M95. The entire line of French bolt-action military rifles and carbines can be purchased as one complete set and includes the Model 1886/93 Lebel rifle and carbine, Model 1907/15 and Model 1916 rifles, Mannlicher-Berthier Model 1892/1916 carbine and the MAS Model 1936. There are others and there will be more.

Prices range from \$50 to \$375. Condition varies from poor to excellent. Very few of these firearms are even close to "advanced

collector grade." Most are pretty beat up, but some can serve as representative examples in beginning collections. And as is true for the avid collector of about anything who carefully peruses his chosen interest, there are occasionally a few pearls to find. One is the Israeli K98s which were rebarreled to 7.62x51mm NATO, phosphated, fitted with new wood and slings and then never issued. Remember, the vast majority of these pieces went to war — in some cases, numerous times. Non-violent people that they are, the Swedish rifles are in the best overall condition.

Most of the importers gauge both the headspace and firing pin protrusion, check the safeties and function the weapons with dummy rounds. But, it will still be next to impossible for the average shooter to fire some of these rifles and pistols. Cartridges in 8x50Rmm Lebel, 7.62x54Rmm Russian, 6.5x53Rmm Dutch Mannlicher, 6.5x50mm Jap and 7.5x54mm French MAS are not easy to locate in shootable quantities at affordable prices. Rifles chambered for these long-obsolete (or in the case of Russian Rimmed, difficult to obtain) calibers will never be more than wall hangers. Although generally no longer in service, 7.57mm, 6.5x55mm Swedish, .303 British, 7.92mm, .30-06 and 7.63mm Mauser pistol military ball ammunition still exists in fairly large quantities at reasonable prices.

Thus far, advanced collectors have little to fear from the Dole Amendment. The value of weapons in the highest category of condition should remain largely unaffected. Collectors and shooters will absorb 250,000 of these "curios and relics" within the next two years. They will serve only to expose many thousands of young people with limited budgets to the fascinating hobby of military small arms collecting and history. As before, the entire firearms industry will eventually benefit from this expanded base of interest in firearms.

A list of the very best and most reliable importers follows. Please send a signed, certified copy of your current FFL for their lists.

Armcorp of America (Israeli K98 rifles, ammunition and M14 parts kits), Dept. SOF, 9162 Brookville Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Century Arms Inc. (rifles, especially French, and ammo), Dept. SOF, 5 Federal St., St. Albans, VT 05478.

Federal Ordnance Inc. (rifles, ammunition and military accouterments), Dept. SOF, 1443 Potrero Ave., So. El Monte, CA 91733.

Pacific International Merchandising Corporation (rifles, pistols and ammunition), Dept. SOF, 2215 'J' St., Sacramento, CA 95816.

Samco Enterprises Inc. (rifles and ammunition), Dept. SOF, Suite 335, 7270 N.W. 12th St., Miami, FL 33126.

Springfield Sporters Inc. (Mauser rifle specialists and military accouterments), Dept. SOF, R.D. #1, Penn Run, PA 15765. ✕

SOC TRANG TIGERS

**Shawnees, Sticky Tape
and .30 Cals**

by Jack Watford



WHAT is large, slippery, slow and equipped with five thumbs?

That's easy. A machine-gunner's hand while reloading in the face of a charging enemy.

Carl was 22, he was terminally scared and everyone was shouting at him. The pilot, dragging the old H-21 Shawnee helicopter's nose around to bring the World War II-vintage .30 cal. air-cooled machine gun to bear on the VC, was screaming. The crew chief, trying frantically to bundle the frightened ARVN out of the cargo doors on the other side of the bird, was screaming. One of the ARVN who had got his equipment hooked on his rifle was screaming.

Carl was not screaming. It was more of a sob. Another row of holes appeared in the helo's skin and an irrational part of his mind was thinking of the sticky tape which would be used for the repair. Meanwhile his slippery hands struggled to secure the ridiculous wing nuts which held the ammo box in place, responding more to hours of training than to any conscious thoughts.

What am I doing here?

Carl Morgan wasn't exactly used to war, but he certainly was no stranger to it. Born in Germany during the heady days of 1940, he still has a birth certificate bearing the Nazi swastika. The fates of war carried him to England, where he was educated as the son of a Welshman. After a number of embarrassing incidents, including one in which he was arrested by German frontier police while trying to sneak across the border from Austria at night, his family finally decided that his rather uncertain nationality

Ready for action: Carl Morgan with his .30 cal. machine gun.

On the way to Ap Bac soldiers offload a helicopter before the battle.





must be resolved, so with the aid of pressure from a local member of Parliament, he was soon the bearer of a British passport.

Armed with his passport, he did what millions have done before him and headed for the New World. It was no easy matter back in 1958, but after a few months of dock work, Carl had earned his passage money plus the princely sum of \$50.

Aboard a ship bound for Mobile, Alabama, Carl was halfway home — under U.S. immigration laws of that time, he would be admitted as a permanent resident of the United States upon arrival.

Immigration was not a problem, but work was hard to get. Fortunately, the Boy Scouts of America recognized that he had something to offer, and he was employed as a counselor at Camp Strake, near Houston, Texas, until his 18th birthday. Then he joined the Army.

Maybe someone asked about his nationality, but it cannot have been thought to be important. He soon found himself, unloved but fully employed, as a United States Military Policeman (Airborne) in Germany. After training in counterinsurgency, he was employed as translator for the commanding general.

Such pleasant jobs rarely last long, and in 1962, he was ordered to Vietnam to act as a counterinsurgency adviser to the ARVN. It was a convenient moment, since he had just failed his history test and been refused U.S. citizenship, until the next test a year ahead. No matter — he showed his commanding officer his British passport. In the car on the way back to the courtroom, he was given

another test.

"Who is the President of these United States, son?"

"Is it President Kennedy?"

"Congratulations, son. You just passed." Within minutes of arriving at the courthouse, Carl Morgan was a U.S. citizen. By the time he reached San Francisco en route for Vietnam, he was the proud owner of a U.S. "official" passport, although the description and the birthplace were incorrect. In those early days of the Vietnam War — the Adviser War — the formalities between the United States and Vietnam were strictly observed. Every adviser was equipped with a special passport, marked "Abroad on an official assignment for the U.S. Government." The passport was also endorsed "not valid for travel to or in communist-controlled portions of Vietnam." The trick, he supposed, was to know which areas that applied to.

The 93rd Transport Company sought volunteers to ride shotgun in old, Korean War-vintage H-21 helicopters which were being used to reinforce the ARVN. Carl volunteered.

He loved it.

Say what you will about war, the final approaches into a fire zone are the most exciting experiences of my life. We flew low, very low, hopping over hedges and houses, and going at a great pace. At times it could not have been more than a handful of feet above the ground. Choosing targets or being directed at hot-spots by the pilots, firing like a madman. Hot, empty cartridge casings spewing through the helo's interior,

hitting and burning some of the troops and winding the tension up to fever pitch because they couldn't see what was going on outside.

The Shawnee helicopters were never designed to operate in the hot and humid climate of Vietnam. Everything that was not vital was discarded, even the insulation was stripped out, but the helos could still only carry between nine and 11 fully armed ARVN, and that was only if the engine was feeling good that day. They were by no stretch of the imagination gunships.

The H-21 had a single door on the starboard side at the front, and that was where the gunner always stood, harnessed to the main airframe. In order to return hostile fire, he had to lean far out of the door to get a good view of the countryside. The crew chief manned the double cargo doors on the port side at the back. They tried giving the crew chief a machine gun, but changed their minds after the first pilot had been shot and killed by accident.

It was chaos in the back there, with the passengers falling over, getting their equipment stuck on parts of the helicopter, or on parts of other soldiers. The crew chiefs had too much to do already. They armed themselves with something maneuverable like the BAR. Our gunnery training was perfunctory — one day of shooting at floating barrels in the South China Sea. I suppose we missed more than we hit, but the combined firepower of the group was relatively formidable for those early and less sophisticated days, and was enough to keep most heads down.

The basic job of the helicopters was to take reinforcements or supplies to the location of a firefight, to lay down some machine gun fire while the new troops established themselves, and then to take out casualties. But there were problems. At first they tried attaching a Browning .50 cal. machine gun but it ripped the side off the helicopter, so they reduced it to a .30 cal. air-cooled machine gun.

The gun was mounted on a cross member stretched between the door posts by a swivel held in place by a ball bearing. Ammunition was contained in a box which was held in place by two wing nuts. The belt then had to be fed down through a guide to the gun. As with many weapons, it was simple enough on the ground at the Soc Trang base, but in action it was dangerously slow. This was doubly serious, since the mounting of the gun made it difficult to depress. The VC soon learned that if they could get close enough, they were safe from the machine gun. It was a gunner's recurrent nightmare, seeing grinning faces emerging from their holes below the trajectory of the gun. Volunteers were allowed to work out their own solutions to the problem.

We could get any amount of World War II equipment. At one time I had a German MP-40, a Thompson and a Swedish K. I had also picked up a Walther PPK complete with a couple of spare magazines from a dead VC. Supplies of weapons arrived in



Communist soldier blasts away at ARVN and American soldiers.

big boxes, and as long as we signed for them, there was no check. It was a collector's paradise, but the weapon I liked most was the M2 Carbine. It was short enough to sling by the door, but in the fully automatic mode it was a capable weapon in a crisis. I gave the MP-40 and Thompson to one of the U.S. pilots before I left Nam. I had a standard .45 side arm issued by the U.S., but I had to return that, of course.

The helos had other duties, supporting the squadron itself. They called themselves the Soc Trang Tigers, and were soon offered a mascot. It was a cuddly little Bengal tiger cub which was shortly to be without a home when its parent unit, a MAAG detachment, was ejected from Laos. A helo with a confident crew chief holding a thin chain and a cub-sized collar went to collect. The whole squadron was waiting when the helo returned, and a white-faced crew chief leapt down followed by an almost full-grown, hungry-looking, 250-pound tiger.

Tuffy the Tiger was fine with us — he understood that Americans were family, and he was just like a family hound — almost, anyway. The only thing is that when a pooch jumps out on you to play, it usually fails to smash you to the ground, and when the dog licks your face it does not feel like coarse sandpaper. Also if the family dog decides to chase a Vietnamese neighbor, it is not likely to spread mass panic through a whole town. Tuffy's designated keeper was a Brooklyn mortician who found himself in 'Nam in charge of our water supply'. This meant that when our showers delivered more than the usual quantity of cold, green slime, he had to climb up the water tower — the most popular VC training target in the area. Tuffy was fed every kind of food except red meat, which someone thought

might have given him some funny ideas, and his favorite food was a mountain of hot dogs and scrambled eggs. He lived inside a small wooden garden fence and was secured by a thin chain. When he felt like a wander in the village, neither was an effective deterrent. So in the end Tuffy had to go. One sad day, Tuffy was loaded into a Pan Am plane at Saigon en route to the Toledo, Ohio, zoo. They bought each member of the aircrew a miniature Minolta camera in payment.

It was exciting in those less mechanical days. The helicopters performed the dual role of gunship and pack horse and were kept flying all over the Mekong Delta . . . with the aid of the ubiquitous sticky tape.

Landing and looking for spider holes. Landing in the middle of burning villages, the helos added to the chaos with their great roar and rush of wind. Every fourth round a tracer, arcing its way to the target. "Gunner! Goddammit, Gunner! To the right of the pagoda. By the steps. The steps! Gunner! That sampan. Get that goddam sampan!" Sometimes the chaos was demonstrably worthwhile. When I hit that sampan, its cargo exploded and the whole thing just disappeared.

By late 1962, the H-21s were supported by some Hueys, but they were still under-equipped for the war they were fighting. Flak jackets arrived at the start of 1963, and the pilots used homemade, hand-held steel breastplates to protect them in their glass bubbles. The VC were learning fast about anti-helicopter fire.

The VC finally caught on the day after New Year's in 1963. There was a firefight going on at Ap Bac and we were called in for fire support and reinforcements. The first two deliveries were fine. We hedge-hopped in and landed our men under covering fire from the .30 cal. The third time, we were

Chinese propaganda prints show VC downing U.S. helicopters.



seventh or eighth out of the 10 to go in. They screamed us. We lost nine of the 10 helicopters. The VC proclaimed a great victory, and they were right.

The ARVN were not always ready to take the risks which the VC regarded as normal, and it is hard to blame them. The streets of Saigon were full of bemedaled ARVN vets with limbs missing, begging for their survival. Getting wounded was to be avoided at all costs. If a wife was waiting nearby (as they often were) then there was a chance of some rudimentary treatment. It not they were often left until any treatment was a waste of time.

A young soldier we carried back once had been lying around untreated for so long that the soft mud he was covered in had hardened. It was like a peanut shell. Taking it off probably finished the poor kid off. One mother was carrying her wounded child at the rear of our chopper to the hospital, and even at my gun position at the front I could smell perfume. It turned out that the mother was scattering perfume on her son because he was so gangrenous she thought the smell would offend us and make us put her down.

The VC knew they had done well at Ap Bac. Years later they were still publishing posters and cartoons of "The Iron and Steel Squad of Ap Bac."

It could be that there was a more ironic result. One of the parts always stripped quickly from downed U.S. H-21s was the front strut. It was easily converted into an fairly effective VC mortar.

So it was that six months after Ap Bac, when Carl was making a sweep on foot toward a suspect village with an element of the 5th ARVN Airborne Brigade, they came under mortar fire. As they lay in the paddy, it crossed Carl's mind that he had worked out the pattern being laid down by the mortars. The ARVN would be slow to make the first move, so Carl stood and walked forward.

It was weird — all in slow motion. There was no sound, and no feeling, just the visuals — blue-gray light with red flashes and streaks in it. I knew it was a mortar round as I lost consciousness. When I woke up I was bleeding from everywhere, but heavily dosed with morphine. I seemed to be floating above my body, which I could see with great clarity lying in six to eight inches of water in the paddy. We were under machine gun fire, but all in super slo-mo. The water splashes looked like great columns rising and falling.

The next thing Carl knew he was in the U.S. Field Hospital at Nha Trang about to become a veteran with GI bill rights which would lead to a doctorate and a career as an officer in the Navy Reserves. Professional gunners from Hawaii were arriving in Vietnam to ride the still outdated helos as that slow escalation, always a step behind the enemy, always a little less than necessary, began. ✕

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MILITARY MISAPPROPRIATIONS

Continued from page 51

And, it is the location of this cross bolt safety that the Army objects to. It is, without doubt, not as easy to reach as the safety lever on the M60. But it operates directly on the sear and this dictates its position on the trigger housing. Manipulated only when the gun is cocked, pushing the cross bolt all the way to the right will place the gun on "safe" by engaging the safety catch against the heel of the sear. Moving the cross bolt all the way to the left will expose a red line around the cross bolt and disengage the safety catch from the heel of the sear. If the cross bolt is modified to slide back and forth with greater ease, gunners will be able to engage and disengage the safety mechanism without shifting their hand on the pistol grip. Another less palatable alternative would be to redesign the safety mechanism into an ambidextrous rotary lever system of the .30 M1 Carbine/M16 type. There is no provision for semiautomatic fire.

Let's take a look at the M249's furniture and firing platforms and see what zany comments the U.S. Army has about these appendages. The bipod is attached to the receiver about 10 inches in back of the muzzle and retained by the gas cylinder. This compromise location provides both acceptable accuracy and a useful distribution of fire at normal combat ranges for squad automatics. In addition, the arc of lateral movement possible without having to lift the weapon momentarily off the bipod, as one must do with either the M60 or BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), is more than adequate for flanking coverage and the engagement of quickly moving frontal targets. Command height can be adjusted by three positions from 9.5 inches to 13 inches. But the bipod legs need to be held more securely in the forearm's storage well as they tend to drop out at inopportune moments.

If the original forearm is used, the M249 can be mounted on the expensive FN "soft-mount" tripod for the MAG 58 which boasts legs of titanium. A spring-buffered cradle diminishes recoil and enhances accuracy potential. Nevertheless, this complex monument to Belgian engineering is overkill, in my estimation. A special pintle and adapter for the T&E mechanism permit the M249 to be mounted to the more spartan—but lighter and more useful—U.S. M122 tripod (the M2 Browning machine gun tripod adapted for the M60).

Forced to redesign the forearm, FN has still not managed to satisfy the U.S. Army. The first forearm, fabricated from high impact black plastic, had checkered sides. The current forearm is 3/8-inch higher, 1/4-inch thicker and has four longitudinal



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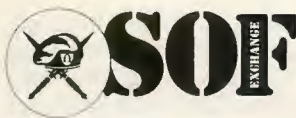
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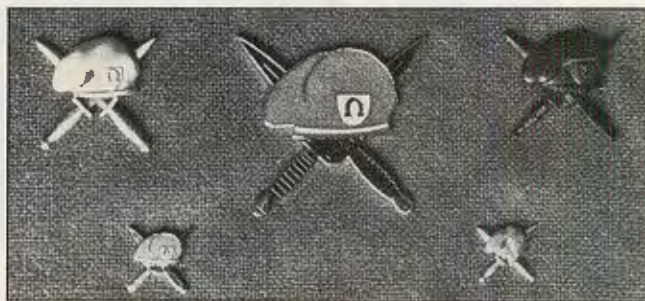
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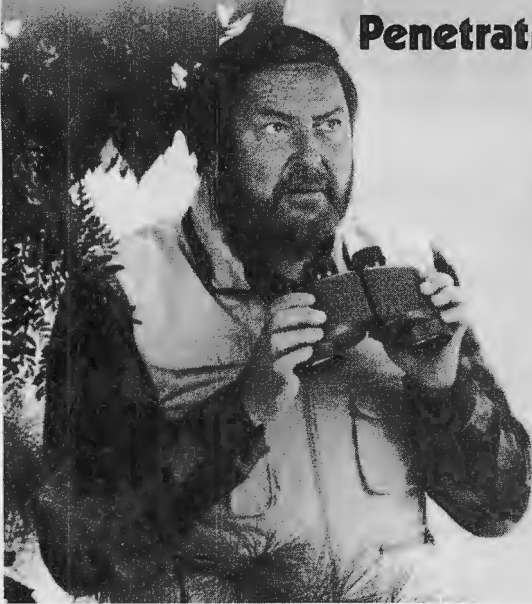
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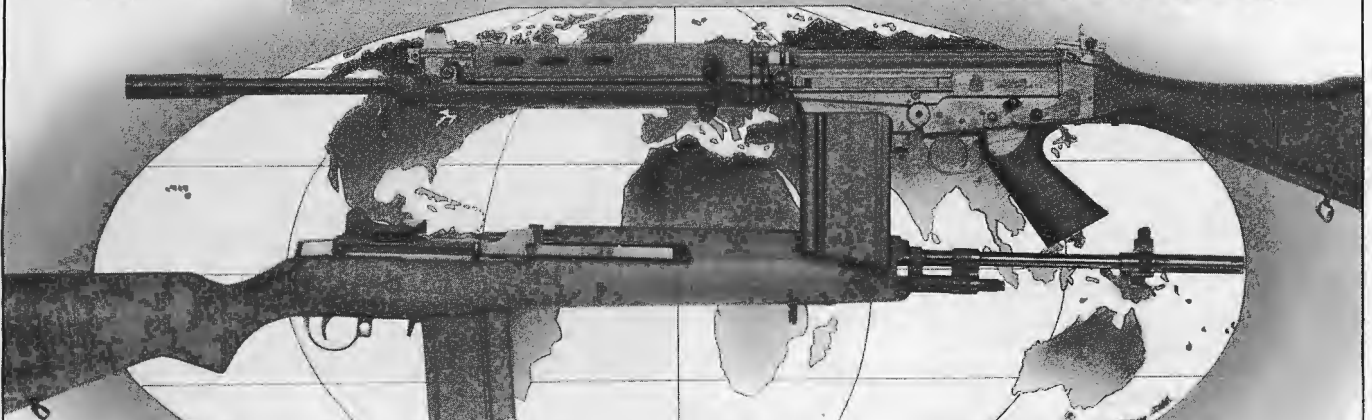


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grooves on each side. Not good enough. They want a heat shield over the top like the M60. The following first-line light machine guns have neither a forearm nor heat shield above: FN MAG 58, Czech Model 59, French AA 52, Soviet PKM and Bren — and there are many others. On the rare occasions weapons like these are fired from the hip assault position, the support hand should hold the left leg of the bipod. When the barrel becomes hot, we use either the carrying handle or sling to tote the weapon. There is no need for a forearm on a squad automatic weapon, let alone a ventilated sheet-metal heat shield in the manner of the M60. And yet that's precisely a major part of the problem. Neither the procuring agencies nor the user have any frame of reference beyond their limited experience with weapons in current U.S. inventory.

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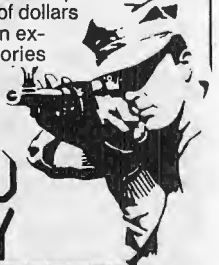
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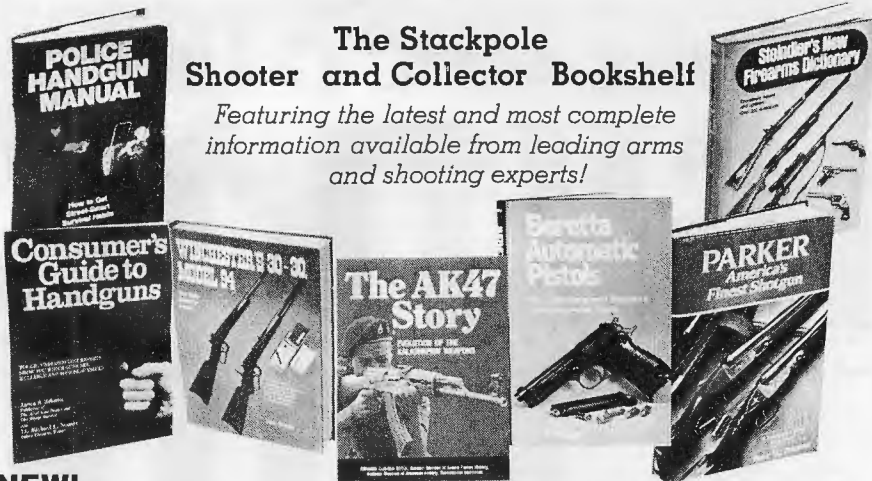
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ated with excessive barrel float, lower the rate of fire to increase the reliability with magazines (or delete this feature entirely) and quickly product-improve its very minor deficiencies, the M249 has the potential for greatness. Let's just get on with it. Our troops need the M249 — now.

M249 MECHANICS

Chambered for the new M855 5.56x45mm NATO ball cartridge, which uses the 62-grain Belgian SS109 bullet with steel penetrator frontal core, and M856 tracer cartridge with the longer 64-grain L110 projectile, the M249 is fed by magazine or the M27 link (a scaled-down version of the M13 link used on the M60 and FN MAG 58 GPMGs). It is gas operated and fires from the open-bolt position. As difficult as gas systems are to clean, only gas operation — when combined with a regulator — can effectively control the system's available power to match the energy needs of the moment.

After the bullet passes the barrel's gas vent, gas forced into the gas cylinder drives the piston rearward. The bolt carrier commences its rearward motion with the two-lug bolt still locked into the barrel extension. By the time chamber pressure has dropped to a safe level, a cam on the bolt carrier rotates and unlocks the bolt. Primary extraction commences only after the bolt has unlocked. This slight delay permits the case to contract and release its frictional grip on the chamber walls. Gas escaping from the system is directed upward into the atmosphere, not downward as with the M60, which is notorious for its position-disclosing dust swirls. After the bolt group reaches the full extension of rearward travel, it is propelled forward, stripping and chambering a round from a magazine or belt, and the process is repeated until pressure on the trigger is released or there is no more ammunition in the system.

The receiver body is fabricated from a single piece of sheet metal bent into a U shape with 35 circular ventilation holes punched into the sides and bottom at the front end. The bolt carrier reciprocates on two steel rails which have been robot welded to the interior of the receiver. FN factory literature states that these rails contribute to the smoothness of the gun's operation and its "remarkable" freedom from stoppages and breakage. I doubt this, but the principle has worked since it was first used in the German World War II MG42 GPMG. Tripod brackets, gas cylinder and barrel mounts, assault pack bracket and end plates have also been robot welded to the receiver frame. Only the magazine well has

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been TIG welded — to the left side of the receiver body.

To this has been added a hinged dust cover for the link ejection port, a two-piece cartridge guide pawl, a spring-loaded dust cover mounted to the right side of the top cover over the retracting handle's slot (taken directly from the FNC Carbine — see "FNC," SOF, December '85), and a cartridge indicator whose red flag pops up through the top cover whenever a cartridge is poised in the tray's feed way.

A non-reciprocating retracting handle rides in rails robot welded to the right side of the receiver body. The small retaining pin that prevents its removal needs to be peened more securely to the front end of the rail assembly. A spring-loaded, pivoting bar ejector port is located on the right side and the ejection pattern is to the right and downward — excellent because it does not compromise position disclosure. However, the ejection port's cover — a spring-loaded piece of sheet metal — has sharp edges that will cut the hand when the retracting handle is pulled rearward. We need either a rolled edge on the dust cover or the retracting handle moved rearward on its slide.

The receiver on my M249 has been covered with black baked enamel over the phosphate (Parkerized) finish, but I understand U.S. MilSpec does not call for paint. If not, this is a mistake. The British, Belgians, Germans and Russians learned long ago that while painted finishes will chip on surface edges and soon look unsightly, they provide far more protection against oxidation in tropical climates than either bluing or phosphating alone.

The M249's belt feed mechanism is essentially that of the FN MAG 58 (see "Belgium's MAGnificent MG," SOF, March '85) and a fine one it is. The system operates in two distinct phases. This method, adopted from the MG42, produces a smooth belt flow instead of a series of jerks.

The 18.6-inch-long barrels (without muzzle device or extension) have six grooves with a right-hand twist of either one turn in seven inches (marked 'TW7') or one turn in 12 inches (marked 'TW12'). The flash suppressor flares outward at the muzzle end and has six slots around its circumference. Although adequate, it will shortly be replaced by the new M16A2 flash suppressor (See "M16A2: The Final Verdict," SOF, January '85). There is a so-called Para model that sports a 14-inch barrel and retracting buttstock. A vehicular model, without front sight, forearm or bipod also exists in prototype form. To my knowledge, no one has adopted either of these variants.

The chambers and bores are flash

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chromed. In an effort to determine if accuracy problems were a result of faulty flash chroming techniques, such as Colt experienced with early M16A1 barrels, I had four barrels air gauged. The results were astounding. I was informed that the barrels were of the highest quality, in fact, match grade.

A fixed carrying handle has been welded to the barrel extension. I don't like this and neither does the Army. There appear to be two solutions. Remove it entirely and sew an asbestos pad to the sling or redesign the handle so it pivots like that of the M60.

Barrels are all phosphate finished and there were some problems in this area with early barrels. The situation has been corrected and FN has offered to refinish any barrels that were not properly phosphated.

The gas system is mounted to the barrel. A gas control screw and nut, mounted in the gas block, can be used to adjust the gas flow to the piston. After adjustment at the factory, the gas control nut is hit with a center punch to prevent the operator from tampering with the gas flow by turning the gas control screw. The gas block is fabricated from HNV-3, a high nickel content valve steel.

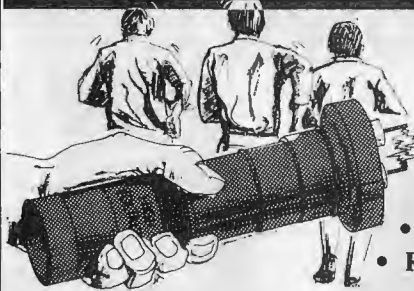
Gratefully, the gas system has been very much simplified from that of the FN MAG 58. The gas plug is chrome plated to ease maintenance, but is still the most troublesome component to clean. The gas regulator's two positions can be set by hand, even when the barrel is hot. Under no circumstances should gunners attempt to fire from magazines when the regulator is set to the adverse position.

Not surprisingly, in the gas system and its relation to the action group we find elements of both FN MAG 58 machine gun and FNC rifle. The end of the gas plug mates securely to the mouth of the gas cylinder which is 10.25 inches in length. As with the Kalashnikov, there are longitudinal depressions around the gas cylinder's entire circumference to provide a reduced bearing surface for the piston and permit excess gas blow-by. There are two sets of double relief holes which direct gas to the atmosphere after unlocking has taken place.

The piston head has been flash chromed, threaded to the piston extension and retained by a roll pin. Like the FN MAG 58, the piston has a cup-shaped end. While cleaning this type of piston head is a nasty job, it will operate longer without servicing and provides a sharper initial recoil impulse. The three-component operating rod assembly consists of a threaded stem, tube and the rear portion which is attached to the bolt carrier (slide) by a captive pin (held in place by another damn roll pin) that falls to the left dur-

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ing disassembly.

An actuator (feed) roller which operates the belt feed system is mounted on top of the bolt carrier. In the FN MAG 58 manner, it is spring-loaded — as it should have been on the M60. If the top cover is closed with the bolt in the forward position (they'll do it every time) neither the roller or feed channel will be damaged. In addition, the spring-loaded actuator-roller acts as a self-timing feeder. If the roller is not in the feed channel as the bolt moves rearward, the second phase of the feed cycle will not take place. Thus, rounds can never be out of sync with the bolt movement.

The firing pin is retained in the bolt carrier by a roll pin which is not easily removed. This should be modified with a split pin, such as the Israelis use in the MAG, which can be withdrawn without a punch. Early firing pins varied from too soft to too brittle. This situation has been corrected. The Army has criticized the firing pin spring as too weak and easily lost. If the rear end of the spring is pushed over the small ridge at the base end of the firing pin shaft, it will not fall off. Treated with normal care, the firing pin spring will last a long time. The extractor retaining pin system was improved in 1985 to provide improved functioning of the extractor, longer part life and restricted movement of the retaining pin.

Recoil spring and guide rod ride in the hollow operating rod tube. The recoil spring is made of long-lasting multiple-strand cable. Attached to the buffer spring guide, the recoil spring guide rod also serves as a disassembly tool. Threaded to an aluminum spacer, the buffer spring guide is retained by a roll pin which also fits into two positioning grooves on the receiver walls to hold these components in place.

In an effort to smooth the firing rate, the spring buffer will be replaced with a hydraulic buffer of the type now used in the M60. I doubt this will have much effect on the M249's operation. Remarkable as it is, the Soviets and their minions have fielded 50 million Kalashnikovs that do quite nicely without any buffer system whatever.

Both M249 forearms contain a cleaning kit that consists of a three-section rod, slotted tip, brass bore brush, nylon bristle chamber brush, and combo tool for cleaning the gas cylinder, piston head and gas plug. In fear that they might be used to maintain other weapons than the M249, the U.S. Army has removed the tools from the forearm.

An eyelet on top of the buttplate serves as a rear sling swivel. Holes on both the right and left sides of the receiver, up front, are used to attach the forward sling hook. The FN web sling has substantial steel spring hooks at

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each end, but is entirely too short for the proper assault position which places the gun at waist level or slightly below. The sling I saw at Aberdeen four years ago was the black padded M60 type with spring hooks.

Early pistol grips were in the exact configuration as those found on the FN FAL rifle. This was soon changed. The current grip is larger, not swept back at as sharp an angle as the former, has 10 horizontal grooves around its circumference, no flare at the bottom and a handy, hinged metal trap door for storage of the issue lubricant bottle. I think the only other modification we need to see here is a larger trigger guard. The current trigger guard is too close to the trigger. The first time someone trips and falls on a rock pile, the trigger guard will be bent upward enough to block the trigger's movement. I have seen this happen at least twice to M60s in El Salvador.

Overall, the M249 is a logical mechanical development of a combination of good features found in military small arms of all the world's modern armies. Unfortunately, it is not yet a mature system. That is to say, there is not yet enough user feedback available to perfect the system. This process will only occur with time. ✕

LOSING GROUND IN BURMA?

Continued from page 55

- December 1983: An alliance was announced between the KNLA and the newly formed Kawthoolay Muslim Liberation Force (KMLF). Fielding only some 200 men under the KNLA umbrella and in Karen territory, the KMLF was hardly significant militarily. But the formation of the Muslim group raised the possibility of insurgent infiltration of Burma's restless Muslim minority. It also posed the threat of financial support from oil-rich Persian Gulf states reaching the Karen revolt via the KMLF. Rangoon was alarmed on both counts.

- February 1984: A second Karen commando unit succeeded in infiltrating Rangoon but was broken up before making any attacks.

The result of the rising wave of Karen militancy was perhaps predictable. Sometime in mid-1983 a top-level decision appears to have been made in Rangoon — probably by Ne Win himself — finally to crush the Karen insurrection. "The policy in the past has been containment," one Burmese analyst in Rangoon told SOF.

The wet season of 1983 was unusually active with heavy clashes between the Burmese and the guerrillas (see SOF, April '84). But the real storm broke with the com-

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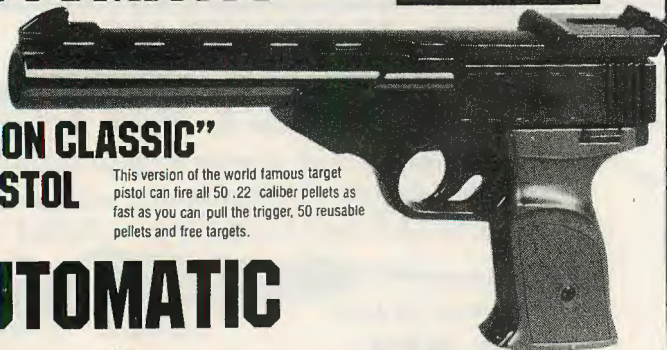


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ing of the dry weather in November. The beginnings were small — a two-battalion thrust toward a southernmost Karen border trading post at Three Pagodas Pass on the traditional invasion route from Burma into Thailand. By December a build-up to the north opposite key guerrilla bases and opening moves by battalions of the army's 44th and 66th Light Infantry Divisions (LID) indicated it was going to be no ordinary killing season.

To the surprise of the Karens and observers in Thailand, one of the most important KNLA bases, Maethawa, fell to a swift Burmese advance in late January after bitter fighting watched by crowds of villagers and newsmen on the Thai bank of the Moei. The loss of the base drove a sharp wedge between the KNLA's southern tier strongholds — Klerdey, Maw Po Kay, Mae La, Wangkha and Phalu — and the GHQ at Manerplaw farther north near the confluence of the Salween and the Moei.

After Maethawa, Burmese expectations were probably to punch south with a series of hammer blows against other bases, overrun them and so deprive the Karens of their taxation points and logistics dumps. Their mistake was the oldest in the book — underestimating the enemy. Today fielding only around 4,500 men, the KNLA is by no means the largest of the guerrilla armies ranged against the Ne Win regime. A lean, disciplined force with all the inborn tenacity of the Gurkhas or Pathans, it is undoubtedly one of the toughest and most experienced.

Rangoon's hopes for a quick kill were bloodily checked at the gates of the KNLA base at Maw Po Kay. Repulsing repeated human-wave infantry assaults, the guerrilla garrison sustained a dogged defense under a hail of 105mm and mortar fire.

Terrain favored the defenders. Like other major trading posts, Maw Po Kay backs onto the Moei and is situated to the east of the Dawna range that paralleled the border. Attacking Burmese have first to cross the densely jungled mountains along winding cart tracks — ideal for ambushes. Then, the settlement of Maw Po Kay itself lies in a horseshoe bend of the meandering Moei. With the river forming a natural defense to the rear and on both flanks, assaults are channeled into a murderously narrow front at the open end of the horseshoe.

As the 1984 dry season reached its hottest, the battle for Maw Po Kay took on a symbolism of its own. Widely reported in the Thai and international press, news of the siege filtered back into Burma on the waves of the Voice of America and the BBC. That presented Rangoon with a new problem — publicity inside Burma about a war the regime would like to pretend does not exist. Worse still, there was bad publicity about Burmese troops dying in large numbers. Orders are believed to have gone out to the commanders of 44th LID battalions dug in around the base to capture it at all costs in time for the annual Armed Forces Day celebrations in Rangoon on 27 March. But the casualties continued to rise.

Burmese frustration was underscored most dramatically when on the night of 12 March some 500 troops threw diplomacy to the wind, waded the waist-deep Moei and tried to overrun Maw Po Kay from the rear — from the Thai bank. An initial clash erupted as the Burmese stumbled on a Thai Border Patrol unit having breakfast, killing two and wounding 17 of them. At that point, Ma Po Kay's commander, Colonel Maung Maung, decided two could play the same game and ordered part of the garrison into the Thai bush where they promptly routed the Burmese, driving them back into Burma.

But if the Burmese army was frustrated during the dry season, the coming of the rains in May 1984 brought a surprise for the Karens — a new readiness to hang in on the border at the end of tenuous lines of communication and maintain an on-off pressure on KNLA bases by means of sporadic shelling. All of a sudden a significant part of one of Asia's most effective guerrilla forces found itself tied down in static defense of bunkers and trenches.

Malaria, a perennial scourge in the rain-sodden jungles along the border, took its toll on both sides. Among the Karens at Maw Po Kay it was running 15 percent of effectives during the rains. In Burmese ranks, where men from the plains have none of the natural immunity of the hill people, the toll was far higher — according to KNLA estimates, around 25-30 percent with a steady attrition

in deaths. Burmese morale suffered correspondingly.

Since the end of the 1984-1985 dry season last May, Rangoon's two-pronged strategy has become a lot clearer. On the one hand, along the border the army is hanging in close against KNLA bases, disrupting or entirely blocking off the trade in smuggled goods across the river and squeezing the Karens financially. At the same time, the real pressure has shifted back inland where the regime is attempting to establish control over the village population in Karen areas which have traditionally supported the KNLA. As things stood at the end of 1985, Rangoon appeared to have legitimate claims of relative successes in both areas.

The effect on trade during the ongoing fighting and the Burmese presence on the border has been devastating. In 1980 taxation of the two-way black market trade on the border was netting the KNU a massive monthly revenue of approximately 7 million *kyat* (or about U.S. \$875,000 at the official exchange rate). Today that has shrunk to almost zero. Since the height of the 1984 border fighting income at Wang Kha, the Karen's biggest trading post and an important KNLA base, has dropped from an average preoffensive figure of 100,000 *kyat* per day to nothing. The Karen movement is living on its savings.

Where the military stand-off along the Moei has not deterred traders, Burmese

troops have turned to more direct methods, specifically massacring groups of unarmed porters carrying smuggled goods along the jungle trails. In late June and early July 1985, men of the 44th LID's 6th Battalion operating between the KNLA base of Phalu and the government-held town of Kaw-kareik were responsible for two such massacres, according to survivors. On the first occasion 12 porters were gunned down and a further 14 were killed on the second.

Controlling the Karen population in guerrilla zones away from the border has hinged mainly on a strategic hamlet-type program that sees army units concentrating villagers into larger settlements, fencing them off and imposing classic food and movement control measures. As KNLA sources told SOF, the program has affected guerrilla contacts with the villagers to some degree, but it has failed conspicuously to win any hearts or minds for Rangoon-style socialism.

The indiscipline of Burmese troops in ethnic minority areas has long been notorious, involving pilfering of livestock, abuse of local women and most seriously the pressing of men into unpaid porter service with army units that often involves accompanying troops into combat. Casualties among the porters are common. Not surprisingly, the Burmese soldiers are about as popular as bubonic plague. In Karen country the result has been a sharply stepped-up exodus of refugees into Thai-

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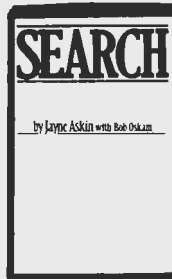


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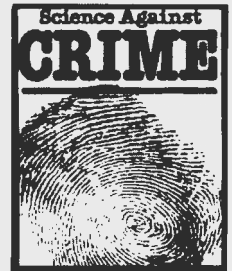
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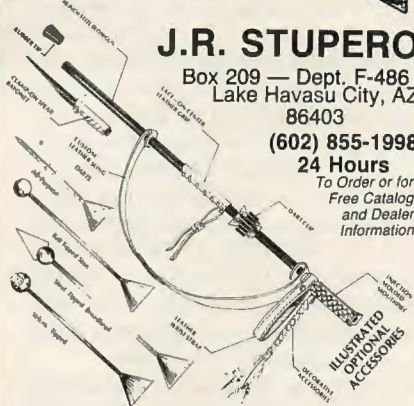
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land. At the end of 1985 over 17,000 were camped along the Thai side of the Moei.

Aş KNLA commanders see it, the current Burmese squeeze along the border and inland is building up for the big hit. "They'll round up all our civilian supporters first and block our economic lines," KNU Defense Secretary Saw Gladstone told SOF recently. "Then when we grow weak they'll make their big attack."

Not that the KNLA has been anybody's punchball. Over recent months guerrilla units have moved back inland to hit the Burmese along their lines of communication and in rear bases. Raids have struck at targets far from the front including the towns of Kyaikto on the Moulmein-Rangoon railway, and Tavoy to the south. Karen sappers also derailed two trains on Burma's north-south rail axis during the 1985 wet season.

The setting up in 1985 of a commando force officered by Western mercenaries was another index of basic changes in Karen tactical thinking. The first time mercs had played any part in the Karen struggle, the venture was aimed at training and running a company-sized special forces unit in long-range penetration and demolition operations. The mercs were mostly French with backgrounds in SF and Foreign Legion units; a former Australian SAS trooper was the unit's sole Anglo-Saxon.

In short, the merc involvement was no great success. Four of the nine Westerners, interested more in the cash than the Karens, pulled out early complaining they weren't being paid enough — or even at all. Those who stayed on ran into trouble in a dawn assault on a Burmese army position not far from the border on 4 October.

As one of them who later talked with SOF described it, the merc-officered units which led the attack all but overran the position after penetrating the perimeter defenses. The assault came unstuck when a regular unit of the KNLA's 7th Brigade failed to commit sufficient men in support. In the Burmese counterattack one Frenchman, armed with an HK 33 rifle, was killed and another wounded, while the Australian ex-SAS man took a bad shrapnel wound to the back of the head. Miraculously, he was dragged away as the Karens retreated and reached a Thai hospital over 24 hours later. He survived.

The abortive assault left the mercs bitter. "Our job was to take the position," one of them told SOF later. "So we took it and handed it over to the 7th Brigade. And they handed it right back to the Burmese."

Clearly embarrassed by the affair — which predictably got a lot of mileage on Rangoon's state-run media — Bangkok has since tightened generally lax security along its side of the Moei. Senior Thai brass have let it be known that prospective reinforcements for the KNLA from abroad will not be welcome and can expect trouble long before they reach the border.

For the record, the KNU leadership has said nothing. But privately KNLA officers



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concede that after four decades of Western indifference they're happy to see a few Westerners extending sympathy beyond Bangkok bars. Even the *New York Times* credits SOF with raising the profile of the Karen movement.

Along the bottom line, though, runs the inescapable fact that the KNLA is facing big battalions. More precisely, 30 light infantry battalions drawn from the crack 44th and 66th LIDs and a variety of independent regiments. Recent reports indicate Rangoon may also be shifting troops from the Shan State where hostilities with the Burma Communist Party have dropped off sharply as Peking moves to improve ties with governments across Southeast Asia, Burma included. Bad news for Burma's ethnic minorities is that Rangoon is now benefiting from a respite on its once most threatening front.

Increasingly the minorities are looking to their own resources. Since 1976, the KNU has been the leading force in the National Democratic Front (NDF) that groups 10 anti-communist ethnic parties fighting to shake off Rangoon domination. Over the past two years both political and military coordination in front ranks has improved notably.

Across Burma's northern Kachin State, the NDF's most powerful force, the 6,000-strong Kachin Independence Army (KIA), has stepped up its offensive operations against the Burmese army. KIA guerrillas have raided several towns and in early 1984 cut off the state capital Myitkyina from the rest of the country. In October 1985, Kachins shot and killed Rangoon's Northern Region commander Brigadier General Kun Phan as he was leaving Myitkyina's golf course.

But while hostilities across the north have increased sharply, there's no evidence that Rangoon has yet needed to withdraw units from the Karen front to bolster its defenses in Kachinland.

At the beginning of the 1985-1986 dry season, the KNLA finds itself bracing for what may well prove the toughest months it's faced in the last 37 years. If the Burmese succeed where they failed in 1984 and roll up the Karen border bases, it will certainly not be the end of Karen resistance. But the loss of the strongholds will cut off the guerrillas from easy access to arms and ammunition purchased in Thailand. Forced back into Burma with Rangoon consolidating its grip along the Moei, they'll then be fighting on borrowed time. For the Karens of Kawthoolay the stakes have never been higher than they are today. ✕

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Continued from page 63

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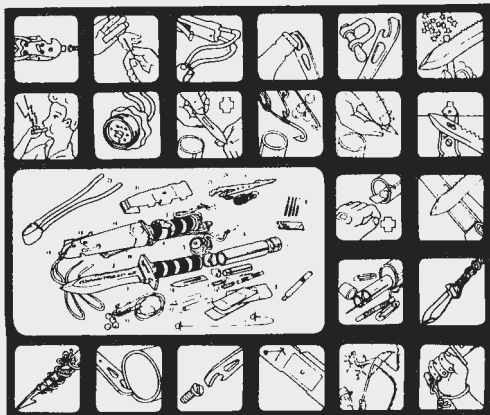
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and the plastic that covers most modern assault rifles. The furniture on my test rifle was covered with clear varnish, but the production series will feature a more practical oil finish. The wood-to-metal fit can best be described as generously oversized. The metal buttplate contains a storage trap which holds a conventional AK cleaning kit, used in conjunction with cleaning rod attached to the barrel's underside. The buttstock is too short for American shooters, but an optional, longer buttstock is available. The pistol grip housing torques visibly when twisted and needs to be more securely mounted to the receiver body.

Sight configuration also remains as before. The AKS 223 rear sight is a sliding tangent type with an open U-shaped notch. It's adjustable only for elevation out to 800 meters, but don't think for one moment that it's in the same league with the 800-meter sight on the M16A2. The 300-meter battle sight position to the rear of the 100-meter notch is marked "0." The hooded front sight is a threaded post type, adjustable for elevation zero with a Kalashnikov combo tool. Windage adjustment is accomplished by sliding the front sight in its dovetail.

The rear sling swivel is somewhat flimsy and mounted for the parade ground, not combat, on the bottom of the buttstock. A wire rod attached to the left side of the gas block serves as a front sling swivel. A standard ComBloc sling is provided, as well as the buttstock cleaning kit, plastic oil bottle, bayonet (with no wire-cutting capability) and three magazines (one blocked to hold only five rounds).

A 30-round all-steel magazine is standard, but my sample held only 28 cartridges due to a burr inside the magazine body. Its follower serves as a bolt hold-open after the last round has been fired. However, when the magazine is withdrawn, the bolt group will fly forward. This dubious feature should be eliminated, since it serves only to impede removal of empty magazines. The raised portion of the magazine follower also scuffs easily as the bolt rides across its surface. In fact, the entire magazine needs to be redesigned, in my opinion. While heavier and more substantial than the M16 magazine, bolt-over-base stoppages were encountered all too frequently. I think the magazine interfaces with the chamber's axis at an incorrect angle. Both the 35- and 50-round Galil and 30-round Valmet magazines can be used in the AKS 223 without modification, but with only marginal reliability. But — surprise! — offsetting this problem is the availability of a drum that actually works.

Developed with a 75-round capacity for the new 7.62x39mm PRC Type 81 assault rifle/squad machine gun family (watch for an exclusive evaluation in a future issue of SOF), the drum and weapons system were adopted by the Armed Forces of PRC in 1984 after three

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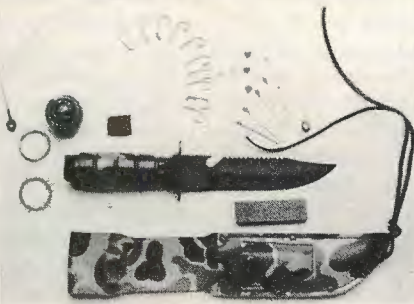
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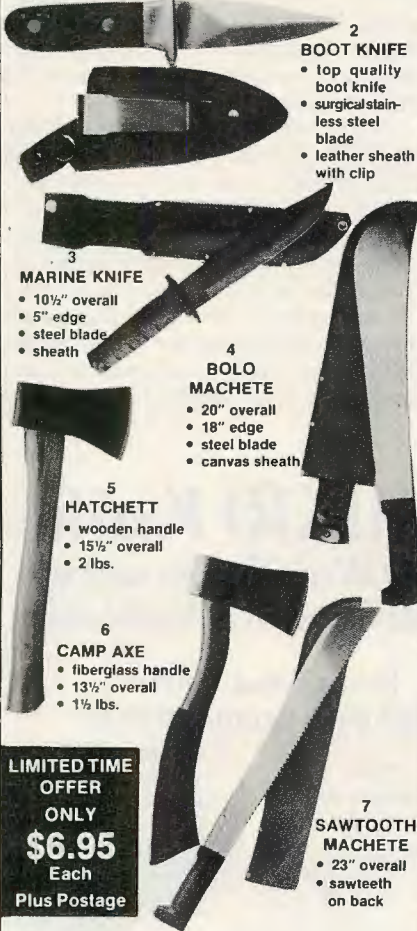
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years of extensive testing. While outwardly resembling the Russian 75-round PRK drum, the drum's mechanism is partially derived from the Soviet 71-round PPSH-41 submachine gun drum, in turn copied in part from the Finnish M1931 Suomi submachine gun drum. In its original configuration the drum will not latch into an AK-47/AKM magazine well. The importer has removed 2mm of metal from the drum's rear latch and the drum will now function in all Kalashnikov derivatives, including the Valmet series, chambered for the 7.62x39mm cartridge. A 91-round version is available for the AKS 223. Either drum carries a suggested retail price of only \$149.95 — far less than the \$300 a Russian RPK drum will cost, if you can locate one. The 91-round 5.56mm drum will eventually be adapted for other popular rifles, like the Colt M16/AR15 series, AR18/180 and Ruger Mini-14.

Soviet RPK drums must be loaded one round at a time — a tedious ordeal. To charge the PRC Type 81 drum, in either capacity or caliber, first open the hinged back cover. Depress the spring-tension release button at the center of the drum and rotate the spindle clockwise until the cartridge carrier stops at the end of the spiral track. Load five rounds into their slots on the outer track, immediately to the right of the magazine's feed slot. Hold the spindle and rotate the spring-tension knob one complete revolution. Release the spindle slowly and allow the five cartridges to move up into the feed slot. Drop in the remaining 70 or 86 rounds. Close the rear cover and secure the latches. Like a Thompson drum, the Type 81 drum can be stored loaded for an indefinite period. Only six more complete revolutions of the key winder on the outside of the drum are required to ready the drum for firing. While not quite as strong as the Soviet RPK drum, the Type 81 drum can be loaded faster and stored in a loaded condition. All these magazines and drums must be rolled rearward into the locked position in the magazine well. Press forward on the flapper-type magazine latch to release the magazine or drum.

As simple as this drum is, it's still more complicated than disassembly of the AKS 223, or any other Kalashnikov. Remove the magazine and clear the weapon. Leave the hammer cocked and the safety off. Press the guide rod inward to free the sheet-metal receiver cover. Lift off the receiver cover. Withdraw the guide rod and recoil spring assembly. Pull the bolt carrier to the rear and lift it out of the receiver along with the attached piston and bolt group. Rotate the bolt counterclockwise and withdraw it from the carrier. Rotate the gas tube's locking lever, located on the right side of the rear sight base, upward until the gas tube is free to pivot up and away from the gas block. Rotate the lower handguard's front band locking lever 180 degrees forward and slide the front band forward. Pull the lower handguard away

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More than 1,000 rounds were fired during SOF's test and evaluation of the AKS 223. In addition to bolt-over-base stoppages, there were numerous failures to extract, stovepipes and several malfunctions caused by empty cases wedged between the barrel extension and sheet-metal receiver cover. All of these problems can be corrected by minor alterations to the system. The extractor spring is weak and needs to be replaced by a stronger

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spring to prevent the extractor claw from slipping out of the case's extractor groove. I have encountered the identical situation with rifles in the M16 series and corrected it with a stronger spring.

The ejection pattern is erratic: up and to the right from four to 20 feet away from the rifle. As the rifle fouls the ejection path becomes weaker and cases land closer to the shooter. This indicates marginal port pressure, the same problem experienced by the Israelis when they converted the Kalashnikov design to 5.56mm NATO. The gas vent needs to be enlarged slightly. The stovepipes will disappear and the ejection pattern will increase in force and violence. Kalashnikovs invariably bash case mouths and dent the side walls during ejection — but not enough to inhibit reloading.

As expected, felt recoil was barely noticeable. Most astounding, however, was the accuracy potential. PMC M193 ball ammo will consistently fire 2 MOA through this rifle. Using Portuguese FNM (1982 manufacture) M193 ball ammunition, Mark Yuen of the SOF Demo Team fired a 1.5 MOA group from the sitting position at 100 yards. This is simply phenomenal for a Kalashnikov, none of which were built with Camp Perry in mind.

Once its minor idiosyncrasies are removed, the AKS 223 can expect to meet with large-scale approval in the U.S. With a suggested retail price of only \$475 for the wood buttstock version — all accessories included — it will provide stiff competition for the likes of Colt, Beretta and FN. A folding stock model, which features an unusual folding — but detachable — spike bayonet, is available for only \$495. A so-called "pistol" variant, without a buttstock and fitted with a 12-inch barrel, is also on its way from mainland China, and a heavy-barreled version with an integral bipod will be imported late in 1986.

For further information about any of these products contact the exclusive importer, Keng's Firearms Specialty (Dept. SOF, 6030 Highway 85, Suite 222, Riverdale, GA 30274). ✕

ISLAMIC SPECIAL FORCES

Continued from page 35

combat swimmer unit commanded by a former British frogman.

To the north, Saudi Arabia has a number of units which are airborne qualified. In addition to the two regular parachute battalions, there are other army parachutists as well as special units within the air force, navy, gendarmarie, national guard and special security force. This diversity stems partly from the fact that different members of the royal family command different branches of the armed forces, and rivalry

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between them dictates that each have his own elite unit.

Because of the close ties which exist between the United States and Saudi Arabia, there has been substantial cooperation between U.S. Special Forces and Saudi units.

Among the smaller Persian Gulf states, Bahrain has a special ops/anti-terrorist unit trained by the SAS, while the United Arab Emirates has a special forces unit. Within the federation, Dubai and Abu Dhabi have their own elite troops, and Kuwait maintains two commando battalions.

The two Marxist states in the region — Afghanistan and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen — have special ops capabilities as well. One of the reasons that the Sultan of Oman maintains his excellent special forces capability is the fact that his neighbor, Yemen, has at times tried to destabilize the Omani regime.

Yemen maintains a para-commando regiment comprised of many members who were originally trained in Egypt. As of 1975 Afghanistan had both an airborne battalion and the 444th Commando/Special Forces Brigade, both somewhat depleted due to defections to the mujahideen. However, the continuing presence of Soviet Spetsnaz (unconventional special warfare) and airborne "advisers" has no doubt bolstered the Afghan government's special forces capabilities.

Sometimes forgotten when discussing Islamic states is Afghanistan's neighbor, Pakistan. In the early 1960s, the U.S. 10th Special Forces Group trained the 19th Baluchi Regiment as a special warfare unit with one battalion specializing in mountain warfare, one in desert warfare and one in jungle warfare. Pakistani special forces and airborne troops saw action in the war against India and suffered heavy casualties, but since then the Special Service Group (SSG) has regained its strength.

The Special Service Group now consists of three battalions, each with four companies. Within the SSG are specialists in scuba, HALO and mountain warfare. So respected is the red beret of the SSG in other Islamic countries that many oil-rich and manpower-poor states have "former" members of the SSG on contract to serve in their special forces. Normally, Baluchis are favored for such contract work.

Another Islamic country which borders on the Middle East is Turkey, the only NATO member among the Islamic nations. Turkey has both airborne and commando units as well as an anti-terrorist unit, the Ozel Intihar Kommando Bolugu. Turks are a tough people, and their airborne and commando troops reflect that toughness.

Among the North African Moslem states, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria all have special operations potential, as does the Sudan to the southeast. Morocco's parachute brigade is based near Rabat International Airport, and its troops are readily identifiable by their green berets. Tunisia's Groupement de Commandos consists only of about 100 men, but they're a well-trained special ops/anti-terrorist unit. In addition to a para-

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chute battalion. Algeria also maintains up to a dozen desert commando units who are trained for a variety of ops in that sea of sand.

Sudan's 144th Parachute Battalion represents that country's unconventional warfare capability, and within that unit is a LRRP detachment which also functions as the national anti-terrorist unit. Although details are classified, this Sudanese unit carried out a classic hostage-rescue mission which would have made the SAS, Delta, GSG-9, or any other Western hostage rescue unit proud.

There's little doubt that the quality of these Islamic elite units varies greatly from country to country. A few — the Sultan of Oman's special forces, Syrian commandos, the Jordanian special forces and the Pakistani SSG — are true elites by anyone's standards. Others can only be considered elite when compared to the standard of the rest of their country's military forces — in some instances little more than an armed rabble.

Strategic planners as well as U.S. combat troops had better take them *all* seriously, either as potential allies or adversaries, if they expect any kind of military success in the Middle East.

After all, they do have the home court advantage. ✎

TERROR IN BOULDER

Continued from page 32

running away. So much for so-called peaceful intent. As it turned out, neither the staff nor most of the news media could hear much of their electronically amplified propaganda. Their cant was drowned by heavy equipment being used by a construction crew putting a new roof on SOF headquarters.

Now act one of this little circus is over. Act two will surely follow as congressional authorization for humanitarian aid to Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters is scheduled to expire in March. President Reagan is expected to ask Congress for a renewal of military aid. Capitol Hill observers think Reagan may have the votes he needs in the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives, especially after House Democrats were sorely embarrassed in 1984 by Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega. The day after Congress repealed military aid to the anti-Sandinista guerrillas, Ortega flew to visit his ideological mentors in Moscow to ask for an increase in Soviet military aid.

Topping the hidden agenda of the peace movement in the United States is their number-one priority: to preserve the Soviet toehold in Nicaragua at all costs and nurture it into a solidly established presence so it can serve as an expanding base of operations to forcibly export Marxist revolution to other parts of Latin America. Immediate targets include El Salvador, Guatemala,

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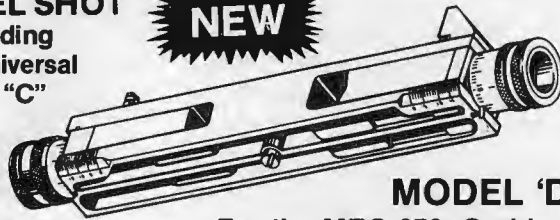
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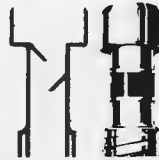
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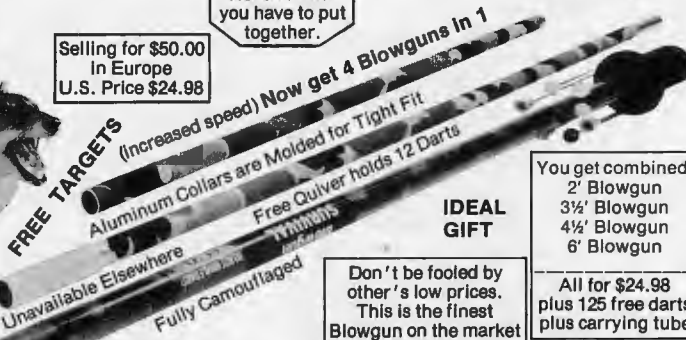
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In the final installment of this two-part report, *Soldier of Fortune* will present the findings of its investigation into these groups which oppose efforts by the U.S. government and private sector to thwart the spread of communism in Central America. If this report provided a chuckle or two on the low-level peons and dupes that carry out the propaganda bidding of their unseen political masters, Part II is decidedly *not* funny. SOF will provide the names of U.S. and Nicaraguan citizens working to exploit the peace movement on behalf of Marxist causes; when, where and how they started their campaigns; and how these organizations overlap. We will present inside evidence on how they are directly controlled by government security agencies in Nicaragua and Cuba.

Watch for the ugly truth in next month's *Soldier of Fortune*. ✖

WAR IN ANGOLA

Continued from page 58

and see. Resolution of the South West Africa/Namibia issue hinges on the withdrawal of foreign troops from Angola, and that is a condition Fidel Castro and his Soviet mentors are not prepared to meet — at least to Pretoria's satisfaction. Luanda, at least for the time being, is also unwilling to oust SWAPO from its territory, thereby providing the South Africans with just cause for cross-border incursions into Angola.

For a variety of reasons including mineral wealth and geographic proximity (both to Angola and the Republic), the South Africans are loath to let South West Africa summarily slide under SWAPO/MPLA (read Marxist) influence. It has become a costly war for South Africa in terms of money, equipment and manpower, and has earned them continual castigation from the United Nations and the international news community.

Yet Pretoria is prepared to hold out for as long as it takes and that may prove to be UNITA's best hope for a victory in Angola.

Jonas Savimbi and P. W. Botha may be strange bedfellows, but without more solid support from Western nations, UNITA has no place else to turn. And the reality of Savimbi's bid for a free Angola transcends ideological barriers. ✕

BRAVO FOR BRAVO

Continued from page 67

there before, they certainly weren't now. My coming must have scared them back into the shadows.

Yet their sergeant major, Bob Parks of the 3rd Battalion, 7th SFGA in Panama, had only recently told me: "These young Green Berets today have all got a 007 complex. They like to play the game. If there were Green Berets at Palmerola, I'd tell you. Hell, we don't have anything to hide!" Somehow I believe him. There didn't appear to be a Special Forces requirement at Palmerola.

Palmerola is nestled in a valley some 2,000 feet above sea level, 5,000-foot peaks rising around it. Air entry into the valley is north to south, with its approaches no less heart-stopping than it is landing anywhere else in this mountainous country. On the day I arrived the wind was wafting straight down the runway at a pleasant eight knots, 75 degrees in the shade and only slightly humid — good parachuting weather. It was a fine day to take your hat off and lie in the sun.

It's not always that nice, though. When a wind picks up it whistles through the valley, sometimes at high force, vacuuming up everything not tied down and dusting the whole area with powdery red laterite used to build temporary roads and runway overruns. If the wind doesn't lift up the dust, whirling helicopter blades of the Hueys, Chinooks and Blackhawks do. They depart somewhere to the south on a mysterious mission then return later, trying to sneak back in as if they'd never been gone. To me, they were the one single entity that gives rise to the mystery of Palmerola.

"Where do these birds fly?" I asked, and not waiting for an answer, I quickly took a shot of the CH-47 Chinooks sitting on their pads. No one tried to stop me this time. I later learned the CH-47s belonged to a 39-man unit from Company D, 34th Support Battalion, 6th Air Cavalry Combat Brigade out of Fort Hood, Texas. Their unit had been here since June and they would depart in October. A routine cargo-hauling job, I presumed. Wrong.

They also airlifted the Honduran airborne for its practice jumps. I immediately asked if it was possible to jump with the Hondurans the next morning. My parachuting qualifications as a former Golden Knight were well-known.

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When I saw the drop zone the next morning, it was just as well. My old legs don't take hard PLFs anymore.

One of Palmerola's DZs is located about 20 clicks from the base, a 30-second field that serves as a grazing pasture for about 250 cattle, all of them with long, sharp horns. In addition, irrigation and drainage ditches cross and crisscross the *mansonita* brush-filled field, making it desirable to have a steerable parachute.

The "Rakassans" of the 187th Parachute Regiment stationed in Panama, who would be jumping in to provide replacement personnel, had those — MC-1s, really nothing more than an oversized canopy with T-slots similar to the sport parachute version called the "Conquistador."

They came in first from the north, about four minutes out. They'd been sitting in canvas seats for almost three hours, equipment jammed up under their chins and parachute harnesses cutting at their crotches. It isn't a pleasant way to fly from one point to another. At four minutes, the "sticks" were on their feet. Doors were open and everyone was filled with that coursing adrenalin that makes airborne soldiers stand tall.

But the C-130 was on the wrong track and the ground controllers told him that. The Herc changed direction, got the green smoke, and started dumping his 35 troopers in three passes. There were supposed to have been much more than that as these paratroops would be taking over security duties at mysterious Tiger Island, another joint operation nearby. I started forming questions in my mind about their mission, and that's about as far as they went.

The parachute jump went without incident, but they wouldn't let me talk to any of the jumpers except to give them posing instructions. When I left the field the sticks were rolling up their chutes, and heavily burdened with combat equipment, the infantrymen loaded onto trucks. Tiger Island had to be somewhere too far away to walk to it.

These men were from Company C, 187th, there to relieve Company B, and the same number of men came out as went in. All were destined for Tiger Island and all were grunts. They had to be a security force, but security force for what? I couldn't get the answer to that.

Tuesday morning, 48 hours after I had arrived, I was winging out again. The heavily burdened C-130 raced down the 10,000-foot concrete runway, wheels bouncing, then finally lifted off. The door was open and I walked over to it, camera ready. Palmerola was below me, a spidery mark on the earth's surface. I aimed the long lens in that direction and almost clicked the shutter.

"Aw, what the hell," I said to myself, putting the lens cover back on. Who's going to believe that's Palmerola, anyway? It's just some old dingy base in the middle of nowhere, a bunch of Americans busting their keesters for an unappreciative audi-

ence.

And who was I to blow their cover? ✕

FULL AUTO

Continued from page 26

to the M3/M3A1 barrel by means of a wingnut clamp. In emulation of German experiments with the StG44 assault rifle, an M3A1 was assembled after World War II with a curved barrel. It was not developed beyond the prototype stage.

At the behest of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), 1,000 ported barrels with 48 holes in each were fabricated by Guide Lamp and furnished to High Standard, which assembled sound suppressor components for each barrel. Not quite as effective as the contemporary MkII Sten, this suppressed M3 has remained in the U.S. inventory and several were found in the ashes at Desert One after the rescue mission into Iran was aborted 24 April 1980.

A 9mm Parabellum conversion kit was designed and supposedly issued to partisans in Europe. Others say 25,000 copies of this variant were sent to the South Pacific by the OSS. Personally, I doubt it. European partisans never received the M3/M3A1 itself in any measurable quantity. They depended instead on the British MkII Sten. The OSS relied on the UD M42 submachine gun in the South Pacific. The M3 conversion kit consisted of a 9mm barrel, replacement bolt and a magazine adapter that accepted Sten magazines. I have not examined a single one of these conversion units that appeared authentic in every regard. Caveat emptor.

Disassembly presents no problem. First, remove the magazine and clear the gun. Press in the stock latch from the left side and competely withdraw the stock from the rear. Pry the trigger guard out of the pistol grip and roll it forward to unhook it from the ejector housing. Remove the ejector housing by pulling it up and to the rear. Separate the magazine catch assembly from the magazine well. With the bolt forward and the cover down, pry the ratchet (locking spring) away from the barrel collar and unscrew the barrel. Open the cover and withdraw the bolt assembly. Push out the sear pin, withdraw the trigger pin and drop the sear and trigger group out of the receiver. Reassemble in the reverse manner. The magazines should be disassembled after each use, carefully cleaned and only lightly oiled.

Over 620,000 M3/M3A1 submachine guns were manufactured by

Guide Lamp during World War II at an average cost of only \$22 each. All these weapons are marked "Guide" on the left side of the magazine well, above the serial number and U.S. Ordnance cartouche. The bolt bodies were manufactured by Buffalo Arms Corporation, which also fabricated Browning machine guns. Ithaca manufactured 33,000 M3A1s during the Korean War.

Yet M3/M3A1 submachine guns are not common in private collections. Most prevalent are a group of M3s sent first to Great Britain, where they received British proofs on the barrels and bolts; then to Central America, where their phosphate finishes were covered by hand-brushed flat black paint (after two studs had been welded to the magazine well to protect the magazine catch release) and finally to the United States by Interarms prior to the 1968 Gun Control Act. These variants will fetch between \$900 and \$1,200 today. M3A1s are almost unknown in private hands. Either Guide Lamp or Ithaca models will cost \$3,000 and up on the rare occasions they are offered for sale. These prices, of course, are for "non-restricted transfer" weapons, not "dealers' samples."

Too steep for you? Not to worry. The M3/M3A1 series offers no allure except for an advanced collector. When fired at targets under 50 yards, the M3's weight and low cyclic rate will yield high hit potential. But only when its pathetic magazine has been stored in a vacuum and it is fired in the safe and static environment of a range. There are a myriad of less expensive and more reliable submachine guns available for the less avid collector. ✕

BATTLE BLADES

Continued from page 22

beast. On the plus side is the extremely robust nature of the point due to this design. This is one point that you won't snap off in use. So much for the design in general. How about the knife as marketed by Cold Steel?

Frankly, in overall terms, it's a decent knife. As a mass-produced item it is far better than we have come to expect in a production knife. Grinding quality and finish on the blade rivals that of some custom blades costing three times as much, and while the stainless blade does not cut as aggressively or hold its edge as well as a first-rate carbon steel blade will, the stainless used by Cold Steel cuts as well or better than the blades of the custom variety made from 440C or 154CM. The Kraton handle on the

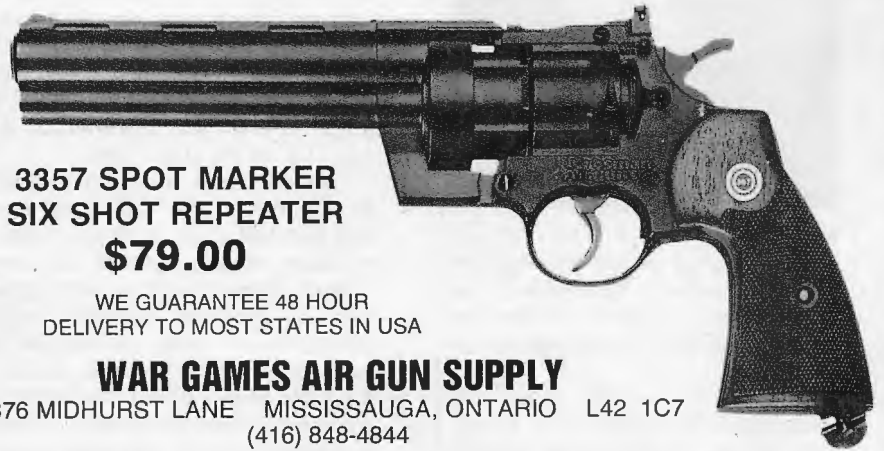


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Cold Steel version of the tanto is oval in shape, and its checkered surface gives a good grip. The Cold Steel tanto won't slip out of your hands.

Lynn Thompson feels that the Cold Steel tanto is an outstanding combat knife and told me by telephone that the knife is tough and can take stress and abuse. While I think that the combat capabilities of the tanto leave a lot to be desired — even the Japanese never considered the original as such — there is no doubt that Cold Steel's knife is tough. The blade was clamped in a vise, and although it is only $\frac{3}{16}$ of an inch thick, I was unable to break it with my bare hands. Nor did it snap when the back of the blade was struck sharply over the horn of an anvil. This is a good test for shock, for if a blade is prone to brittleness it will almost always fail on the anvil's horn.

Different things are different things to different people. Cold Steel says that their tanto is an outstanding fighting knife, but the Japanese definition defies Cold Steel's claim — and I agree with the Japanese. A fighting knife should have a blade of 9 inches in length or better, but I am not deriding the Cold Steel offering. I am simply trying to put it into perspective, and my perception of today's commercial tanto is that it makes a much better general-purpose utility knife than a fighter. The workmanship and quality of the Cold Steel tanto are very high for a commercial knife, and if you were going to buy a tanto for reasons of utility this would be a good place to spend your money.

Remember that just because it comes from the Japanese martial tradition doesn't make it a fighting knife. Even the Japanese don't consider all their blades to be edged weapons. ✂

LOW-LIGHT SHOOTING

Continued from page 71

dark under stress.

That still leaves the problem of what to do with the flashlight when the weak hand is needed for reloading or stoppage reduction. Replacing the light in the duty belt flashlight ring is slow, especially under stress. Some shooters slip the light into their waistband, feasible while standing but almost impossible to do while kneeling behind cover. Whatever you do, don't try to hold the light, or anything else, between your knees. When the ugly guy comes around the corner with the shotgun, diving for cover will take priority over hanging onto your flashlight, gun, or whatever else was clamped between your knees.

The best thing to do with the light when both hands are needed to work on the weapon is to slip the light into the armpit and clamp the arm down on it. This is the fastest alternative, and leaves the shooter free to run if necessary without dropping the light. When using an auto pistol, the light should be held under the strong arm, leaving the weak hand free to change magazines or work the slide. With a revolver, typically reloaded by shifting it into the weak hand, the light should be held under the weak arm so that the strong hand is free to perform the reload.

Finally, some consideration should be given to the muzzle flash of the ammunition being used, a good reason to practice with one's duty ammunition in the dark instead of underpowered practice loads. Military .45 cal. ball produces very little flash, and many 9mm loads are only slightly brighter. On the other hand, typical .357 Magnum rounds fired from barrels of four inches or less produce a blast of flame *several feet long* which not only illuminates the shooter and everything around him, but destroys his night vision in the process. If the choice of weapon and service ammunition is beyond the officer's control there is little that can be done about severe muzzle flash except to experience it on the range so it is not as disorienting when it occurs in a real confrontation.

With proper technique and a bit of practice, darkness can be changed from a serious enemy into a valuable ally.

Have a good night now. ✂

FLAK

Continued from page 7

PERSPECTIVE ON AFRICA...

Sirs:

I would like to thank you for your consistent, well-informed reporting on the current situation in southern Africa. Our tunnel-visioned media seems quite content to simply focus on the symptoms of South Africa's recent unrest while ignoring the Marxist agitators who seek violent revolution rather than peaceful reform in South Africa's future. Robert K. Brown's excellent article (SOF, Command Guidance, November 1985) did a fine job in pointing out these realities and putting things in perspective. I have enclosed my subscription to SOF, both for my enjoyment and benefit as a future Marine Corps officer.

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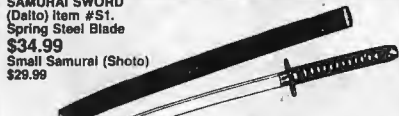
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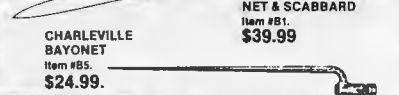
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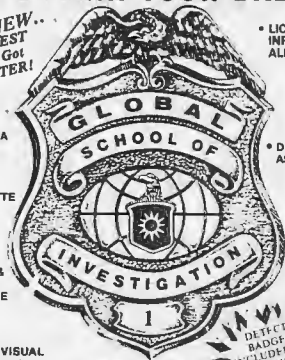
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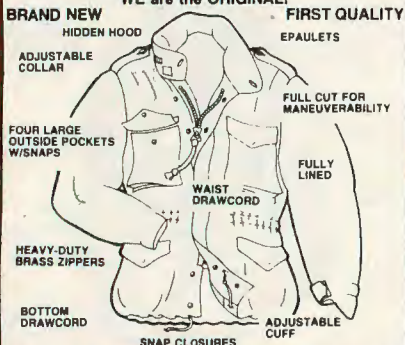
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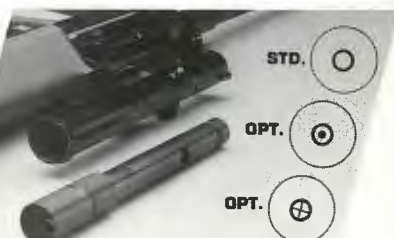
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