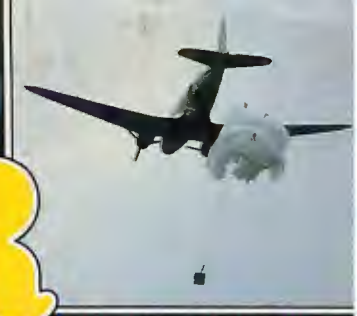
INSIDE THE CONTRA AIRLIFT



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

The Journal of Professional Adventurers

OCTOBER 1987
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OCTOBER/1987

VOL. 12 NO. 10

Page 34

COVER: Guatemalan *paracaidista* stalks enemy with FN MAG58 GPMG during training exercise near base at Puerto San José. Story on page 60. Photo: David Bjorkman
ABOVE: Contra Air pilots John Piowaty (left) and Bill Cooper (right), with manager Robert Dutton, stand in front of sign from C-123K used in resupply operation. *U.S. News & World Report* missed the subtlety of the FU-C123K designation when it ran the photo in June. Call letters stand for Fairchild Unconventional C-123K (sure they do). Dutton is holding H&K 21 machine gun later used as door gun. See contra airlift story beginning on page 34.

COMMAND GUIDANCE

by Robert K. Brown

Congress and the Contras

IN the next few weeks Congress will once again consider aid to the democratic resistance forces opposing the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Some events of the past year may have an impact on Congress' decision. Infighting among the political leadership of the contras has led to resignations and reorganization at the top levels of the United Nicaraguan Opposition. In addition, the Iran-Contra affair could make administration efforts to obtain aid more difficult.

But while events in Washington, Tehran, Miami and elsewhere may impact the debate, the facts of the issue remain unchanged. Thousands of Nicaraguan men and women, opposed to the tyranny of Sandinista rule, continue their fight for democracy. Consolidation of a communist state and the growing influence of the Soviet Union and its proxies on the North American continent continue to present a serious threat to the security of the United States. In other words, all the reasons for supporting the contras last year are still valid today.

It would seem logical that, since nothing of substance has changed regarding the issue, Congress would simply continue the support it gave last year. Debate would seem redundant. You would think that even an institution as whimsical as Congress would be loath to reverse itself so quickly on a policy it endorsed less than a year ago. Sadly, consistency and common sense seldom play a role in the deliberations on Capitol Hill. This year's battle will undoubtedly be as difficult as those of years past.

There is one recent event likely to have a *favorable* impact on the passage of an aid bill — the eloquent and forceful testimony of Lt. Col. Oliver North. The Reagan administration has failed miserably in its attempts to explain to the American people the importance of supporting the contras. It is ironic that this has at last been accomplished — not by the State Department or the president — but by a fired NSC staffer. At long last, the issue has been explained in a manner and in a forum that got the attention of the American people.

An interesting event in the testimony of Oliver North was the supportive letters, telegrams and phone calls that flooded Capitol Hill. Passage of aid this year will depend on many things, not least of which is support from those Americans who believe in helping the Nicaraguan resistance. What helped North can also work for the contras.

That means letters, telegrams and phone calls to Congress. It's not enough to believe in the cause of freedom and justice in Central America — we've all got to take an active role in achieving it. Now's the time to let Congress know where you stand and how you expect them to vote. Send your letters to:

Senator	Representative
U.S. Senate	U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC	Washington, DC
20510	20515

One of the few things that members of Congress have even passing respect for is the wrath of their constituents. So let them hear from you. Take advantage of your rights — rights that brave men and women in Central America are literally dying for every day.

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BULLETIN BOARD

KEEP BROWN ON BOARD...

SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, a member of the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, has been appointed to the finance committee and a special hunting lands task force by the NRA. Brown will be addressing the issue of hunting lands editorially in the future.

Brown, whose three-year director's term expires in 1988, has decided to seek renomination through the petition process. Petitions must be submitted to the Secretary, National Rifle Association, no later than 27 October 1987. If you are an eligible NRA member (five years of consecutive membership or life member status) and wish to circulate a petition on Brown's behalf, write to: Petitions, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306 for forms and instructions.

MARINE HERO...

Foes of contra aid on Capitol Hill are still in a state of shock from the outpouring of public warmth for Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North after he declined to crawl for having aided those holding the line against the Marxists in our hemisphere.

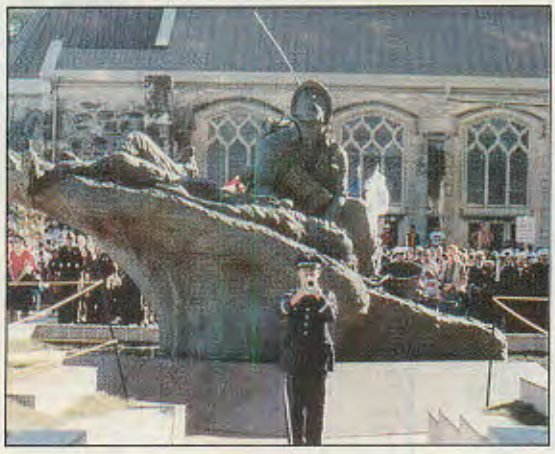
Letters of support for Lt. Col. North should be mailed care of Andy Messing, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 9992, McLean, VA 22102.

Contributions to Lt. Col. North's legal defense fund can be sent to the Oliver North Legal Assistance Fund, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 50096, Washington, DC 20004.

Well done, Ollie.

FITTING TRIBUTE...

South Texas veterans and visitors have developed a strong attachment to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial which was unveiled in November 1986. Created by Arizona artist Austin Deuel, the sculpture depicts a Marine radioman signaling for help for a wounded comrade at the Battle of Hill 881 South.



A photo of the dedication ceremony is available for a $5 contribution plus $1 postage and handling. Funds will be used to defray the costs of the memorial's construction. Orders should be sent to: Vietnam Veterans Memorial of San Antonio, Inc., Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 17699, San Antonio, TX 78217.

It's nice to see a Vietnam vets' memorial above ground for a change.

HONOR ROLL...

El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund contributors:

C.W. DeSpain & Associates; John Farsai; Kenneth Schustereit — in memory of Walker Haywood, WWI wounded veteran; Christopher Marquette; Dale Smither; In memory of Stephen Smoot, killed in Vietnam, 1972; Gary Christensen; Paul C. Ewing; In memory of the Marines who made the ultimate sacrifice in El Salvador; Tim Voss.

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Institute for Regional International Studies contributor:

Henry G. Rippe.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to these people and the numerous other donors who requested their names not be printed.

STINGING IVAN...

Afghan mujahideen have been blasting Soviet and Afghan government aircraft out of the sky at a rate of one per day this year, according to U.S. military intelligence sources, thanks largely to the infusion of U.S. Stinger antiaircraft missiles.

Stingers have all but neutralized the communists' air superiority, and the war is at last costing the Soviet Union as much in aircraft as the Vietnam War cost the United States.

What makes the aircraft downings — which include both fixed-wing types and choppers — more impressive is that the United States hasn't exactly flooded Afghanistan with Stingers. The United States has sent the mujahideen two Stinger shipments, one for 300 and the second for 600.

Resistance fighters are also reported to have received 300 British Blowpipe missiles and continue to use SAM-7s, but the missile of choice is the Stinger.

CUBAN BODY COUNT...

Fidel Castro's decision to rent the Cuban army to the Soviets for

Continued on page 8

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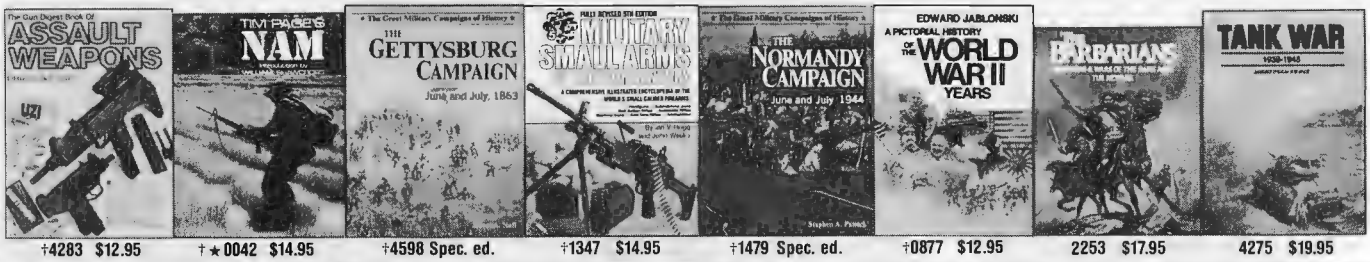

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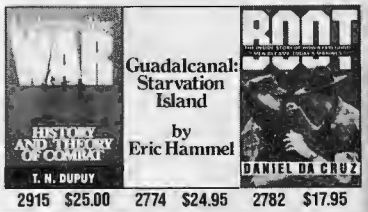

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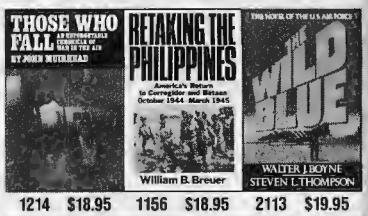

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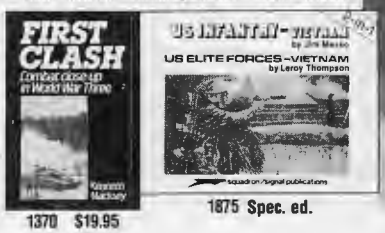

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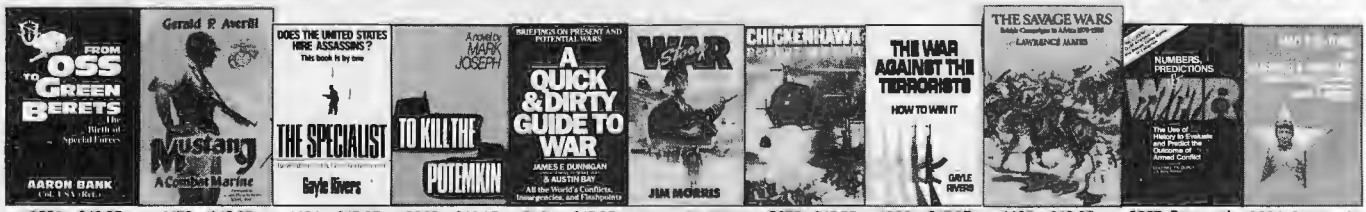

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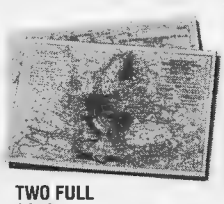

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counterinsurgency duties in Angola as a means of keeping his basket-case economy afloat has resulted in an astonishingly high death toll, given the size of the Cuban population and the fact that the war in Angola is sort of a slow-motion affair.

According to Rafael del Pino Diaz, a Cuban brigadier general who defected to the United States in a twin-engine Cessna late last May, Cuban forces in Angola have sustained 10,000 fatalities since 1976. Cuba's population is less than one-twentieth the size of the U.S. population. Proportionately, the Cuban toll would be the same as a country the size of the United States sustaining 220,000 deaths in battle, more than four times as many as the 50,000-plus dead the United States actually suffered in Vietnam.

Cubans have taken additional casualties, probably numbering in the thousands, while serving as Soviet surrogates in Mozambique and Ethiopia, to say nothing of Grenada, and assorted brush fire wars in Central and South America. Castro is bleeding the country white, and not just economically, it seems.

BEAN COUNTERS LIKE ARMY'S NEW BAYONET...

Stop the presses!

The General Accounting Office, Congress' leading bean counter, has finally found something the U.S. Army did right, even though the service didn't take the low bid.

The GAO likes the new M9 bayonet, even though it costs more than twice as much as a competitor's model.

The Army acted properly, the GAO concluded, by awarding the M9 contract to Phrobis III Ltd., which is offering the weapon with a sticker price (so to speak) of $50 each. The decision was appealed by Imperial Schrade Corp. of Providence, Rhode Island, which has supplied bayonets to the Army since World War II and was offering its model at $20 each.

Imperial protested that the M9 was designed to serve as a field knife, combat knife, wire cutter and saw — and was overpriced based on the prevailing market, to boot.

Tell it to the chaplain, replied the GAO. If the U.S. Army wants to turn the bayonet into a multi-role combat cutting system, that's its business. And besides, Schrade's offering had "safety defects" and an unsatisfactory scabbard.

It is unknown whether the GAO (which historically has known the price of everything and the value of very little) bothered to evaluate which weapon was better at cutting the guts out of an adversary in battle. Watch for SOF's T&E of the M9 in an upcoming issue.

FOUND: ONE SOVIET SUB...

This may be the rumor of the year or the intelligence coup of the decade — or both.

Unconfirmed reports have been circulating that the Soviet submarine *Dresnavia* is now docked in the San Diego Navy Yard.

These reports — which are firmly denied by both the Pentagon and Coast Guard — say that the sub had a mechanical problem 45 miles off the coast of Mexico and requested emergency aid.

Mexico's navy is said to have come to the scene but lacked the equipment to keep the Soviet boat from sinking.

Uncle Sam's Coast Guard then supposedly arrived and kept the sub afloat until it could be towed to San Diego and berthed in a "well-concealed dock" at the Navy base. No mention is made of the crew.

This is one of those rumors which if not true ought to be.

MIA HUNTER BAGGED...

According to the paper *Bangkok Nation,* a former American soldier who earlier this year crossed the Thai border into Cambodia is now being held by Vietnamese troops in the western province of Batdambang.

Vietnam war veteran Brian Bono Sterling, 35, reportedly crossed the border on 2 May in search of U.S. MIAs.

According to Cambodian resistance guerrillas, Sterling was arrested last month and sent to the S1 Sophon District of Batdambang, where he was jailed.

CONTRA CONTRIBUTIONS...

Despite all the yammer in Washington, Nicaraguan freedom fighters and their families are still getting shot, still coming down with the usual tropical diseases and still in need of help.

Refugee Relief International, Inc. (RRII) is still collecting and forwarding medical supplies for these very brave people.

They need:

- Anti-malaria drugs, Ceclor and other antibiotics, sulfa powders, Desenex ointment and powder and other antifungals, Neosporin ointment, water purification tablets, salt tablets, large and medium surgical and field dressings, Vaseline, gauze bandages, chest tubes, surgical drains, suture kits, small

Continued on page 120

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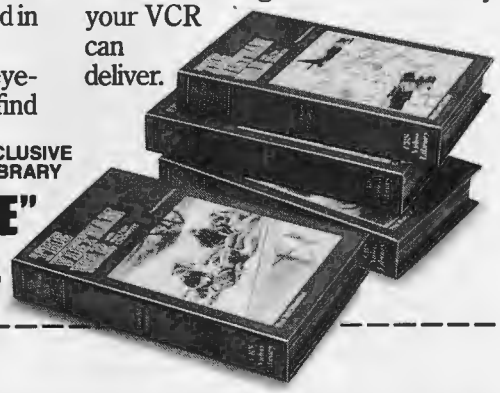

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FLAK

ESCAPE FROM MEXICO...

Sirs:

My family and I came to the United States six years ago, tired of the corrupt and socialist government of Mexico that has constantly supported the leftist bastards in all of Latin America. We came here looking for more freedom and opportunities, and we found them.

I joined the U.S. Army and then the Marine reserves. What amazes me is that many Americans do not appreciate their freedoms and economic and political advantages. Most of all I cannot comprehend the willingness of the liberals and their media to collaborate with communists all over the world.

Want to see how a "social democracy" works? You don't have to go far, not to Central America, the Middle East or Africa. Just go south of the border and visit the slums of Tijuana, Mexicali or Juarez. There are millions of people all over the world wishing to come to the United States just to get a chance to live and work in peace.

SOF is one of the few publications that has reported with accuracy and impartiality the struggle of the free world against the ruthless and expansionist monster of communism. I congratulate you and encourage you to keep fighting on the side of freedom.

Rudy Garcia

HANOI HILTON...

Sirs:

I believe your readers should know about the motion picture "The Hanoi Hilton." This film depicts the horrible treatment of our Vietnam POWs by the North Vietnamese, and also touches on how Hanoi Jane and her pinko supporters hurt our POWs. Initially released last March, the critics were outraged by the portrayal of the anti-war types, and the film was removed from the market. I strongly encourage all vets to see it if they get the chance.

Mark S. Hanneman
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Photo courtesy of Cannon Films

I'd like to comment on a very well-done and emotionally moving film about Vietnam POWs. "The Hanoi Hilton" presents a side of the war that most at home have never seen. I read a review that criticized the film for its support of the U.S. role in Vietnam and its less-than-complimentary portrayal of Jane Fonda, which are the two things I really liked about the movie.

David Liang
Metairie, Louisiana

"The Hanoi Hilton" died a quick box-office death this spring after being bombarded with negative publicity from left-wing reviewers who disagreed with the film's political stance. It will be released on videocassette this month and we, too, encourage SOF readers to see this atypical Hollywood product.

THE BOYS IN BRAZIL...

Sirs:

As one of the Rio 8 [see "Soldiers of Misfortune," SOF, April, May, June '87], I would like to thank Bob Brown and the SOF staff for the much-needed support. The packages of food and medicine that managed to get through the double pilfering of the guards and, sad to say, our own State Department meant a lot to us; and for Bob's willingness to dispatch John Coleman to meet us in La Paz — I couldn't think of a better Christmas present.

The final part of "Soldiers of Misfortune" caught the feeling of Brazilian injustice quite nicely. It told our story factually and managed to catch most of the details down to the last double-cross.

Tim Carmody
San Francisco, California

CBS COVER-UP...

The original of this letter was sent to Dan Rather at CBS News and a copy forwarded by the author to SOF.

Dear Mr. Rather:

On 13 July 1987 you showed a clip of someone you agree with politically, Paul Simon. CBS News showed Mr. Simon haranguing Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North's actions. What CBS News failed to do, therefore knowingly misleading viewers, was to show that Mr. Simon was booed from the speaker's stand. You covered up the truth, Mr. Rather. You lied to the American people. The question that must now be asked is, did you have orders from the top, or did you take this upon yourself . . . this deceit. I think a special prosecutor should be named to look into this cover-up. What do you think, Mr. Rather? If you were indicted, how many of the American people would stand beside you as we have stood by Lt. Col. North? You and I know the answer to that question would call for another CBS cover-up.

Capt. Kenneth G. Paynter
San Antonio, Texas

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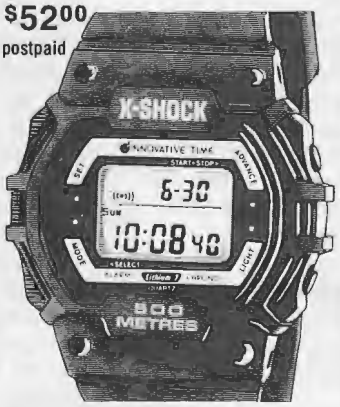

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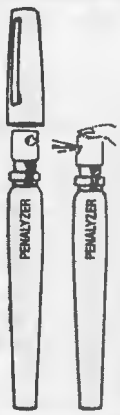

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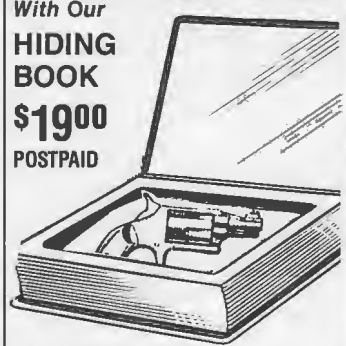

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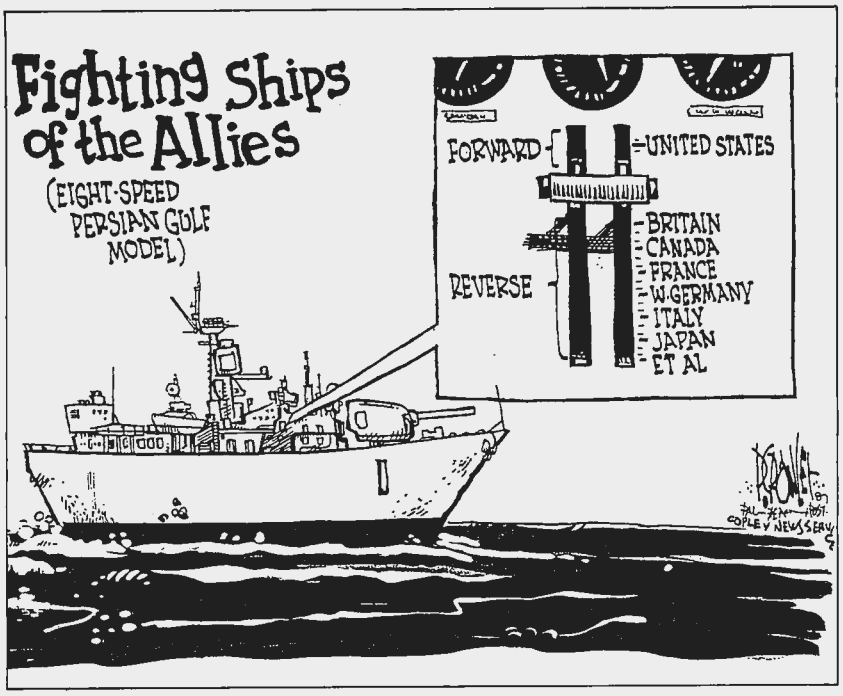

BATTLING BLADES...

Sirs:

I just took what I supposed would be the usual quick look at the June Battle Blades column only to see that it was written by Robert Terzuola. Seeing his byline, I paid more attention.

After handling a number of his knives and talking with him at last year's Guild show, I am convinced that Terzuola has a far better idea of what constitutes a "battle blade" than do most of his knifemaking peers.

The idea of guest columnists in this space has much to recommend it, and Mr. Terzuola's selection as the first such guest lends considerable prestige and credibility to SOF as a source of knife information.

Jim Williamson
Contributing Editor
National Knife Magazine

I have a question about the Battle Blades column, usually ably manned by Bill Bagwell. Recently, you have had a guest writer contribute to this feature whose opinions are exactly the opposite of those proven by Mr. Bagwell over the years. Through empirical and logical arguments, Bagwell has shown the forged Bowie design to be the "king" of knives, so why run conflicting articles in space normally reserved for him?

William Aprill
New Orleans, Louisiana

SOF, like other innovative magazines, is an open forum for new ideas and, when competently handled, differing or controversial opinions. Bill Bagwell has written scores of informative Battle Blades columns for SOF and will continue to do so in the future. However, we welcome other viewpoints from qualified knife writers such as Bob Terzuola. Our purpose is to offer expert opinions — and let you be the final judge of the facts.

KOREAN VET WON'T FORGET...

Sirs:

I served in the USMC in Korea in 1951. Most of my friends who did not go to Korea didn't even know that I had gone. Nobody cared! As an avid reader of SOF, I am fully aware that your magazine is both Vietnam- and Army-oriented. I hope that some day you will do an intelligent piece on just how poorly the U.S. Army performed in combat in Korea and why, which would help to put Vietnam and political meddling into proper perspective.

Korea was the first war that we "lost" due to our two-bit politicians who sold us out at Panmunjom — a fact that I will never forget.

Jerry D. Sims
San Dimas, California

To generalize by stating that the U.S. Army performed poorly in Korea simply ignores the facts — far too many to present here. One example, however, bears mention. During the period 28 November-3 December 1950, the 31st Regimental Combat Team of the Army's 7th Division was sent to relieve the 5th Marine Regiment, bottled up in the area east of what's known as the Chosin Reservoir. This hastily conceived RCT (some 3,000 officers and men, most without World War II combat experience) was tossed into the breach and took nearly 2,000 casualties, primarily due to lack of coherent organization and an ineffective chain of command. However, their efforts literally destroyed the Chinese 80th Division, which threatened to capture the village of Hagaru-ri; had this happened, the 1st Marine Division would have been cut off, unable to make their subsequent — and historic — fighting withdrawal to the coast.

GUATEMALAN GUERRILLAS...

Sirs:

Steve Salisbury ["El Quiche Patrol," SOF, August '87] mentions the torture, mutilation and execution in November 1986 of seven prisoners of war by the Guatemalan Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization EGP. One month later, the same guerrilla organization tied, doused with gasoline and burned alive two other prisoners of war; I saw the victims' ashes 2 kilometers southwest of Chajul on the road from Nebaj.

It is interesting that human rights monitoring organizations such as Americas Watch, WOLA and Amnesty International, which purport to present an unbiased analysis, have failed to investigate and report these guerrilla atrocities. In contrast, these groups reserve intense scrutiny for the Guatemalan government and army.

Richard H. Ebright
Brookline, Massachusetts

TWO SIDES OF THE BORDER...

Sirs:

Lately I've seen articles in SOF regarding the U.S. Border Patrol [see "San Diego DMZ" and "Border

Continued on page 16

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RY SHOPPE

Legend," July '87 and "Interview: Harold W. Ezell," September '87], and I am glad to see the positive publicity. We seem to get so much negative publicity that articles such as yours are welcomed.

I have worked as a Border Patrol agent for nine years on the San Diego/Mexico border and have also served two terms as president of Union Local 1613, which represents the interests of the rank and file Border Patrol agents. During my tenure as president, I emphasized public education and awareness of the border issues and problems, and I am glad to see that you are doing the same.

Albert W. Cummings
Chula Vista, California

After reading the article "San Diego DMZ" a second time in an attempt to determine why the Border Crime Prevention Unit of the San Diego Police Department even exists, I am perplexed and angry. It appears that the sole reason for the existence of the unit is to help illegal aliens enter the United States without problems.

That seems unbelievably stupid considering that the Mexicans are breaking U.S. laws; the many problems illegal aliens are causing in California; the Mexican police treatment of Americans; and how the San Diego police are constantly crying that they do not have the resources to fulfill their duties within that city. What's next? Loading the illegal aliens into San Diego police cars and personally escorting them north?

Gary Laughman
Anaheim, California

KEEPING POW/MIA ISSUE ALIVE...

Sirs:

I am writing to commend your fine magazine for printing recent articles on the POW/MIA issue [see "Private Rescue Attempts" and "MIA Mystery Photo," SOF, June '87]. I feel that this issue is too important to drop.

The U.S. government is not doing everything in its power to bring our sons home. We all must keep on pressing for immediate and decisive government action to resolve this troubling issue.

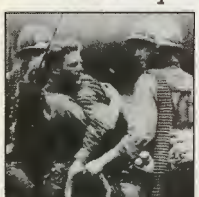
I look forward to seeing more articles on POW/MIAs in the future.

John A. McCartan
Newark, Delaware

Continued on page 109

THE DIRTY DOZEN.* VIETNAM-STYLE.

They were Navy SEALS—among the best we had in Vietnam. An elite force of highly trained commandos, their specialty was covert operations. That December morning, twelve were choppered in to surprise Charlie in his own backyard. And when enemy snipers opened up, they poured it on with M-16's and grenade launchers. The firefight was over in a matter of minutes. Later, SEAL Team 1 would pose with pride, holding the flag it had captured.



Did we just get lucky that day on the Cua Lon? Or were our troops winning the war all along, only to have politicians lose it at home? It is more crucial than ever that we find the answers now.

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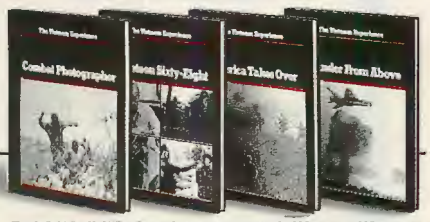

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*"The Dirty Dozen" by E. M. Nathanson, © 1965

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

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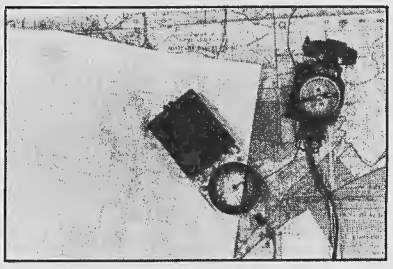


Sport orienteering method of navigating with map and compass works with either the orienteer's Silva (left) or the military-issue lensatic (right). Photo: J.D. Mayfield

ANYONE who has ever been in the U.S. armed services knows how to navigate with a map and compass. First you orient your map to the north, add or subtract the GM angle and use your plastic protractor to determine azimuth, then you're on your way. This is the best and quickest method. Right?

Wrong!

This method is still being taught to our armed forces and, while it works, it takes forever and requires a protractor, which breaks, gets lost and has numbers that eventually rub off.

Sport orienteers long ago developed a better method. While most sport orienteers use a Silva-type compass rather than a military lensatic, their technique, which I am about to describe, works as well with either.

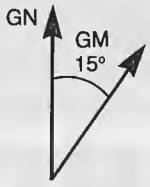
STEP ONE: Lay your map out flat. There is no reason to orient it to the north. Take the straightedge of your opened lensatic and place it on the map along the line from where you are to where you want to go.

STEP TWO: Rotate the compass bezel ring until the fluorescent line on the bezel is parallel with the north-south grid lines on the map. Make sure the line is pointing toward map north and not toward map south. (If the map is folded, this is an easy mistake to make.)

STEP THREE: Hold the compass flat in your hand and rotate your entire body until the north arrow is pointing to the fluorescent bezel line. The number read under the compass index is the grid azimuth.

STEP FOUR: Convert the grid azimuth to a magnetic azimuth. A grid azimuth is based on the map's grid lines. A magnetic azimuth, the one you navigate by, is determined by the compass needle pointing toward magnetic north.

Conversion is determined by referring to the map's declination diagram, which looks like this:



The angle between your map's grid north (GN) and magnetic north (MN) is called the GM angle. In this example, the GM angle is 15 degrees. You must add or subtract this angle to your grid azimuth to get a magnetic azimuth. Some military maps will tell you whether to add or subtract the GM angle right next to the declination diagram.

If your map doesn't tell you, you can use the simple LARS (Left Add, Right Subtract) rule. In this example, you must move to the right to convert grid north to magnetic north. By the LARS rule, therefore, you must subtract 15 degrees from the grid azimuth to get a magnetic azimuth.

STEP FIVE: Set the new magnetic azimuth under the index by rotating the bezel ring. Rotate your entire body until the north arrow points to the fluorescent line on the bezel and follow your compass center line. You're on your way.

With practice, these five steps can be completed in less than a minute. Sport orienteers do it on the run!

Let me talk a little here about compasses. Many people use Silva-type compasses because they are transparent and the bezel lines are easy to parallel to the map's grid lines. Lensatics, on the other hand, incorporate a lens sighting device to facilitate reading azimuths. While I agree that Silvas are slightly quicker to use than the issued lensatics, I personally prefer the lensat-

Continued on page 106

Brigade Quartermasters

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N11555, Lunar Grey
N11666, Bronze
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N11333, Arctic Clear
N91456, Belt Case **$9.99**

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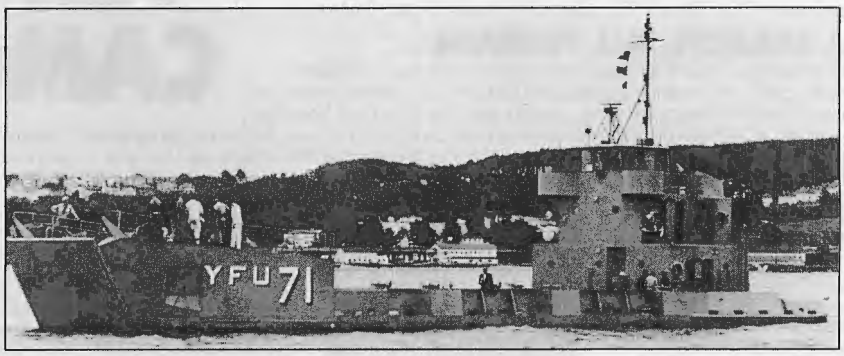
I WAS THERE

by Robert Andrews

Riding a Powder Keg



Riding aboard a harbor utility craft loaded with black powder is dangerous enough — but danger takes on new meaning when Charlie begins firing for effect. Photo: Naval Institute

NAVY supply boats working the small rivers of I Corps in Vietnam weren't as glamorous as PBRs or Swift boats. Most of the time we moved at a snail's pace carrying heavy loads. Our cargo was often black powder or artillery shells, so we were usually about as welcome dockside as a toothache. If we took a hit, a lot of real estate would get relocated in a flash.

Thankfully our command took every precaution possible when we were transporting a hot load. We had standing orders to stay 3 miles off the coastline when at sea and were not to go inland at night. Trying to negotiate a river in near total darkness was a good way to get hung up on a sandbar, and Charlie knew where all the sandbars were.

On this particular afternoon in mid-July 1970 we picked up a load of black powder and mail near Da Nang and, since it was already late in the day, we had our fingers crossed that it would be a quick run. We didn't get our travel orders until we pulled seaside from Da Nang. Harbor security always radioed our destination orders to us in code. I took the radio message and disconnected the booby trap on the boat's safe so I could get the code book to decode the message. We always kept a white phosphorus grenade in the safe with a detonator cord attached to the code books. I don't know who we thought we were fooling. If anyone wanted a copy of the code book they probably could've bought one from the Vietnamese barber on base.

Our orders were for Tan My, 60 miles north, and we were going to have to hurry to make it before dark. The weather at sea was lousy. We took one hell of a beating in the rough water. Our normal top speed of 9 knots dropped to about 5 knots because of the strong winds and high swells.

When we reached the mouth of the river, the sun was starting to set. We made the 3-mile run to the cargo ramp in record time, but it was all for nothing. The Rampmaster radioed that the ramp was full and there were two boats ahead of us to be offloaded. Our Craftmaster decided to take a chance and wait it out. He beached the boat near the ramp and went ashore with Tom Hemmer, our engineer, to see if he could speed things up.

They'd been gone for about 10 minutes when suddenly a red alert sounded and the area came under rocket attack. I thought of trying to take the boat off the ramp area and out to sea, but I didn't think I could handle the river by myself. Even if I did make it through the river, I'd have 4- to 6-foot swells waiting for me seaside.

I started the engines and paced from one end of the boat to the other, waiting for the Craftmaster and Tom to get back. Charlie had dialed in on the ramp and was pouring it in. The rounds began landing closer and closer to the boat.

I opened a case of concussion grenades and threw several into the water behind the boat to keep swimmers from trying to get to us with underwater charges. Charlie was great with distractions. During a rocket attack a few months before, swimmers had planted charges on the bottom of a boat and killed a half-dozen men. I couldn't do anything about the rockets but I was sure going to keep Charlie out of the water with a steady diet of concussion grenades.

Tom was the first one back. He grabbed a case of grenades and went aft. I took another case and went to the welldeck. We took turns throwing grenades into the muddy water. Then the Craftmaster came aboard with a fistful of pop flares. We soon got a nice little routine going. Every time a pop flare was launched we'd both follow with grenades.

The next few minutes raced by. Everything was happening so rapidly that I couldn't think straight. Men on the ramp were firing small arms into the water, small boats were trying to get underway and rockets kept landing closer to our hot cargo. One of the pop flares screwed up, burned its parachute and came down in the welldeck. Tom quickly washed it off with a fire hose before it could do any damage. Then I screwed up. I was paying too much attention to Tom instead of what I was doing.

I pulled the pin on a concussion grenade and, as I cocked my arm back to throw it, my hand hit a crate filled with black powder tubes. The grenade dropped from my hand and fell into the welldeck.

I couldn't move. I just stood there staring wide-eyed at the grenade. I knew that my tour of duty was about to end and I was going home, not first class but as baggage. Then out of nowhere Tom rushed by me and dove for the grenade. He scooped it up with both hands and threw it straight in the air. A split second later there was an air burst that shook the boat and knocked me on my ass.

I guess the fat lady must have sung because everything suddenly turned real quiet. After a few moments things began to return to normal, normal for Vietnam, that is. It seemed we had weathered the attack. I sat on the boat's deck for 10 minutes afterward, just trying to get my heart to stop racing.

I stared at the deck and found 16 grenade pins and one spoon. That spoon became my lucky charm, and a few months later I went home — first class.

Tom Hemmer's actions that July night in Vietnam saved the lives of at least 50 men on and near the boat. After Vietnam, Tom was promoted to chief petty officer and assigned to his hometown's recruiting office. In 1985 his car was struck head-on by a drunk driver and he was killed. The author dedicates this story to Tom Hemmer, his wife and two teenage sons.

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BATTLE BLADES

by Robert Terzuola

Sharp Hideaways

CARRY systems for knives are at least as important as those designed for firearms and possibly more so. One can always tuck a pistol in his waistband or stuff it in a pocket for want of a holster. Woe unto him, however, who tries a trick like that with a razor-sharp knife.

Virtually every part of the human anatomy can be — and has been — used to conceal and carry knives of every description. Slim, special purpose knives have been taped, tied or glued to the soles of the feet, the small of the back and under the armpits. Small but dangerous knives were smuggled onto Devil's Island in metal suppositories, and women's prison guards need to be even more thorough in body searches to ensure shiv-free inmates.

A flat, one-sided knife taped to the inner wrist was a favorite carry of OSS operatives in World War II and was often used by Colonel Rex Applegate during some of his Latin American adventures. It was Applegate who told me about the most unusual knife carry I have ever heard of. The famed British knife designer Colonel Fairbairn created a small, double-edged knife with a leather sheath which was tied or taped under and behind the scrotum of an OSS agent (necessarily the male variety). Fairbairn called this his "testicle knife" and delighted in provoking the inevitable exclamation, "He carried it *where?*"

In determining the ideal knife carry system, one should consider a number of factors, including (not necessarily in order of importance):

- Knife size and style.
- Concealment needs.
- Accessibility.
- Safety.

Generally speaking, a smaller knife offers more carry options than a larger knife. Even with combat weapons, utility of carry styles may outweigh the need or desire for a large, heavy knife. (Combat knives really *do* come in patterns other than 9-inch hand-forged Bowies!)

Very small commercial and custom knives come in endless varieties, both folding and fixed-blade. Tekna and Blackie Collins molded-plastic sheaths offer the user many options for affixing his knife in out-of-the-way places, and Pat Crawford's Penknife and keychain Claw are fine examples of thoughtful craftsmanship. In the more exotic, albeit useful mode, there is Crawford's Devil's Dart with velcro wrist sheath. Wrist carries can be very fast and effective for certain types of small, lightweight knives, but they require deftness and practice to avoid embarrassing foul-ups on cuffs or wristwatch.

Larger knives, particularly the double-edged variety, require a bit more anchoring in the carry, both of the knife to the sheath and the sheath to the person. The greater the mass, the more inertia is generated by a fall, jump or sudden movement. Whenever possible, a knife should have a positive lock to keep it in the sheath. Good examples of these locks are the Collins bayonet-type snap, my own Terzuola multi-use sheath and Tom Maringer's molded Kydex shoulder rig. Leather keeper straps are usually safe on larger knives if they are secured with a good snap like TRW's Pull The Dot. Velcro closures are adequate for medium- to light-weight knives, but should generally not be trusted for camp or combat heavyweights.

Any knife carry system should be comfortable, unobtrusive, secure enough to prevent loss and safe enough to protect the wearer. For fixed-blade knives, the hip carry location with a high-carry sheath is the most comfortable and affords good accessibility. Photo: J.D. Mayfield

Concealment is a delicate subject at best. The major current drawback to concealing a knife appears to be the laws of many states. Certainly the law is a factor to be reckoned with in determining one's carry style, but this private, personal, important decision may be affected by the exigencies of the situation.

Regarding the practicalities of concealing a knife, a general rule of thumb is that the more concealed a knife is, the less accessible it is. Also, the smaller the package, the better it can be concealed. A very flat, skeleton-handle knife with a minimum sheath (if any) lends itself nicely to being taped to the body in a variety of locations. Wide, flesh-colored surgical tape is best for this, but only in a flexible cloth variety. (Paper tapes tend to fatigue and rip.) Experience will quickly show that shaving the hair from the taping site will greatly add to the comfort of the carry.

Sewing, taping or tying a sheath to one's clothing can be an effective carry system for a surprisingly wide variety of knives, even large ones. Care must be taken, however, to avoid fouling the knife on the draw or slashing your new Gucci jacket to rags.

Affixing a sheath to the inside of a boot is an old favorite, but once again this demands a good bit of skill for proper effect. Unless the trouser cuffs are boot-cut and short enough for quick lifting, don't depend on this carry for a fast draw. A knife in this location is best drawn from a sitting position. The sheath should be very secure in the boot, held with snaps if possible, and should be smooth on the inside to

NEW MEXICAN KNIFEMAKER

Robert Terzuola produced his first knife in December 1979 while living in Guatemala. In June 1984 he relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he now works as a full-time knifemaker.

While in Guatemala, Terzuola was honored with the Maya Indian name *Chapoi Kumatz,* meaning "Serpent Hunter." His knives bear as a mark the dragon-head glyph of *Etz'nab,* the Mayan patron god of edged tools and weapons.

Terzuola's most recent Battle Blades column for SOF was "Skill Outreaches Size" in June 1987.

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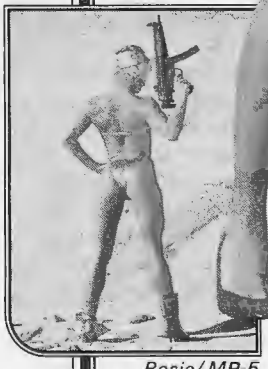

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avoid chafing the anklebone.

Partial concealment is an option that provides a number of acceptable compromises. A knife whose sheath is tucked inside the pants with the handle exposed above the belt can be adequately covered with a jacket or sweater. It can be drawn from this position with a minimum of contortions and allows for secure attachment. Over the years, I have found that many of my customers prefer this "inside the pants" carry while in civilian clothes, particularly for undercover work. Like most custom knifemakers, I have designed sheaths specifically for this type of carry. When choosing this type of system, one should be careful to select a sheath that is as thin and comfortable as possible. Kydex is practically ideal for this purpose, but metal or fiberglass will also serve.

Accessibility should be a prime factor when considering any knife carry system. In general, the less you do to get the knife in your hand, the better off you are. This holds true even for a non-combat utility or work situation. One of the most accessible types of knives is the Clipit series of folders by Spyderco. They come in a wide variety of styles and are secured to the pocket with a spring clip. They can be drawn, opened, used and replaced in a matter of seconds using only one hand. Bob Jones also makes a fine folding knife with a serrated stud on the blade for very fast access and opening.

Accessibility of fixed-blade knives tends to be a function of sheath design. These sheaths can be made from a variety of materials, some more functional than others and each with its own unique properties. Leather, Cordura, metal or fiberglass generally needs keeper straps, which can reduce accessibility or compromise knife security. Plastics such as Delrin or Kydex can be molded into intricate shapes and generally provide a less massive, highly accessible sheath.

In my opinion, fixed-blade knives tend to be most amenable to a fast, smooth draw when affixed to an LBE harness strap or to the outside thigh area (about where a BDU cargo pocket would be located). The calf carry is a good one for scuba work, but if you're not diving, a heavy knife will flop around there unless it is securely strapped to the leg, not just the trousers. For most purposes, the hip carry location with a high-carry sheath is the most comfortable, affording good accessibility, adequate concealment options and minimum obstruction.

However one chooses to carry a knife, whether for defense, sport or work, the carry system should be comfortable, unobtrusive, secure enough to prevent loss and safe enough to protect the wearer.

NEW ISSUE M-9 BAYONET

Official military issue M-9 Bayonet is manufactured by Buck Knives and designed by Phrobis III. It's much, much more than a bayonet. It's also a versatile field tool.

SPECIFICATIONS

1) Length: 12¼" (blade: 7⅛"; handle: 5⅛"), 2) "Zone heat-treated" forged steel blade with Rockwell "C" 56-58, 3) ½ tang blade with extension attached to butt cap, 4) Handle and Sheath made of DuPont ST 801 glass-filled plastic, and 5) Weight (knife and sheath): 1.76 lbs.

FEATURES

1) Wire cutter, 2) Sawtooth back edge cuts wood, metal, rope, or ice, 3) Bayonet for M16/AR15 rifle, 4) Built-in sharpening stone, 5) Ambidextrous sheath with new quick-release belt clip, 6) Bottle opener, 7) Screwdriver, and 8) Velcro® attached Cordura® pouch. Rugged quality, collectability, and versatility!

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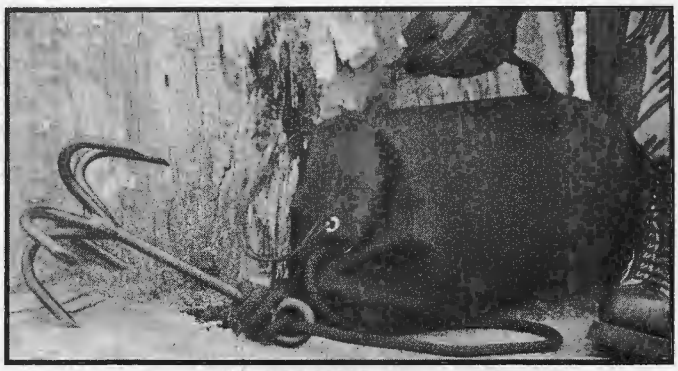

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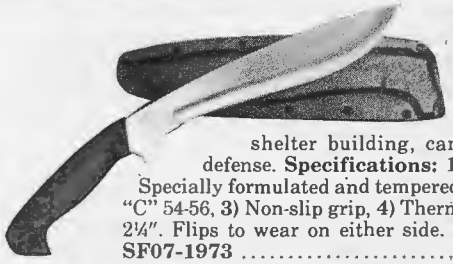

BUSHMASTER KNIFE

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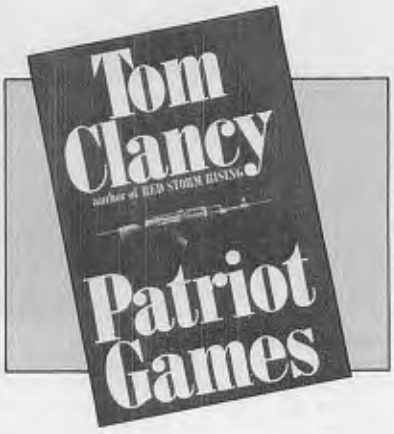

PATRIOT GAMES. A novel by Tom Clancy. G.P. Putnam's Sons, Dept. SOF, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016. 1987. Hardcover. 540 pages. $19.95. Review by G.B. Crouse.

BY NOW everyone has heard of Tom Clancy. His first novel, **The Hunt for Red October,** quickly climbed to the top of the bestseller list. The technical accuracy and minute detail led to speculation that someone in the government had leaked classified information to the author. That, of course, was nonsense, but the publicity boosted sales and gained Clancy an audience with President Reagan. His second novel, **Red Storm Rising** (see In Review, SOF, December '86), enjoyed similar success.

Now we have Clancy's third novel, **Patriot Games.** Our hero, Jack Ryan, is pitted against a splinter group of the IRA. While on vacation, Ryan stumbles into a terrorist attack and foils an attempt to kidnap the Queen's grandson. Naturally, this could only mean two things: dinner at Buckingham Palace and crazed Irish gunmen out to murder Jack's family. The plot is predictable and so is the outcome.

Clancy made errors in his previous books, and does so in **Patriot Games** as well. But in his previous books these small matters, along with the silly dialogue and shallow characters, were overshadowed by the technical detail and interesting plots. But in **Patriot Games,** people are the whole show, and what was easy to overlook in the other books becomes impossible to ignore in this one.

Submarines, stealth aircraft and spy satellites have been replaced by the all-American family, with adorable children, doting parents, and pregnant women who positively glow. Clancy spends too much time idolizing the military, bowing to English royalty and repeating tired clichés about the Irish problem.

Patriot Games is 540 pages of "I love my family and just want these terrorists to go home." Who cares.... The book is too long, too predictable and too shallow. In a word, it's dull. That's disappointing, because Clancy has demonstrated that he can produce books that are none of these things.

VIETNAM VETERANS PARADE — CHICAGO 1986. Photographs by Tom Conroy & text by Kris Colt. Nam Vets Publishing Co., Dept. SOF, Room 791, 142 Lincoln Ave., Santa Fe, NM 87501. 1987. Softcover. 144 pages. $16. Review by Robert K. Brown.

NAM VETS Publishing Company of Santa Fe, New Mexico, has put together **Vietnam Veterans Parade — Chicago 1986,** a 144-page photo essay book covering the June 1986 Chicago "Welcome Home" Parade for Vietnam veterans. The book's five chapters — Pre-Parade, Parade, The Party, POW/MIA Vigil, The Moving Wall — are almost completely given over to black-and-white photographs showing the people and events.

Photographer Tom Conroy and writer Kris Colt acknowledge Dr. Victor Westphall — builder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire, New Mexico — and Jimmy Enocencio — the lone soldier of the "Lone Soldier Freedom March" of 1986 — as being the inspirations behind the book, which is dedicated to renowned combat photographer Larry Burrows, who was shot down over Laos in 1971.

Nam Vets Publishing is now at work on **Vietnam Veterans Parade — Houston 1987,** which also will feature photographs by Conroy.

AMERICA THE VULNERABLE — The Threat of Chemical/Biological Warfare. By Joseph D. Douglass Jr. and Neil C. Livingstone. Lexington Books, D.C. Heath & Co., Dept. SOF, 125 Spring St., Lexington, MA 02173. 1987. Hardcover. 204 pages. $19.95. Review by G.B. Crouse.

IMAGINE, if you will, nerve agents being used against Israeli settlements on the west bank of the Jordan. Or entire military formations and urban populations in Western Europe suddenly being incapacitated by chemical weapons.

Science fiction? Hardly. These scenarios are very possible. Furthermore, attacks such as these are difficult to defend against and, once initiated, the catastrophic results would prove nearly impossible to prevent.

America the Vulnerable examines the entire issue of chemical/biological warfare, from mass-produced weapons being stockpiled by the Soviets to deadly compounds that could be produced in the bathtubs of terrorist safe houses. The book looks at the weapons themselves, the technology involved in producing and delivering them, and the likely effects their use could have on the unprepared West. Douglass and Livingstone further recommend steps the United States can take in an effort to address the issue.

The most disturbing facet of the book — and of the chemical/biological warfare issue itself — is the potential use of these weapons by terrorists. Coauthor Neil Livingstone, an acknowledged expert on terrorism, paints a grim picture of the devastation a terrorist group so equipped could visit on the rest of the world.

The point of the book is clear: Not thinking about chemical/biological warfare won't make it go away, and our present efforts to deal with the issue are clearly inadequate. There is a sense of urgency in **America the Vulnerable,** and rightfully so. The result of failing to act could well be an inability to survive.

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ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER

by Tom Slizewski

SNAKEBITE

For the last few years the knife market has been awash with gadget/survival blades. But current trends in knife design indicate that manufacturers are getting back to basics. Knives replete with compasses, fishing reels and flashlights are being replaced by good combat steel, *sans* the extras. Blackjack's Mamba follows this trend.

Mamba is manufactured from 15 inches of cold-rolled tool steel, 9 inches of which make up the blade, and it weighs in at 17 ounces. The dramatic blade curve, designed to provide a continuous cutting surface, is reminiscent of the Gurkha kukri. As with the kukri, the Mamba's balance is slightly forward, which permits greater cutting power with less effort. Other features of note are the Kraton handle, textured to provide a sure grip, and a high-quality leather sheath, manufactured by Galco International.

The Mamba does offer a couple of features beyond those essential in a fighting knife. The lug guards are double notched to allow conversion into a spear, and notches on the blade can be used to open bottles. However, these extras don't detract from the knife's performance as a battle blade.

Priced at $129.95, which includes the sheath, Mambas are available from Blackjack Knives, Dept. SOF, 21620 Lassen St., Chatsworth, CA 91311; phone (818) 718-7010.

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The reasonable price of only $35, regardless of model, adds "bargain" to the long list of Minute Man's features. For further info, or to order, contact Minute Man Handgun Leather, Dept. SOF, 4304 Sixth Ave., Tacoma, WA 98406; phone 1-800-233-2734.

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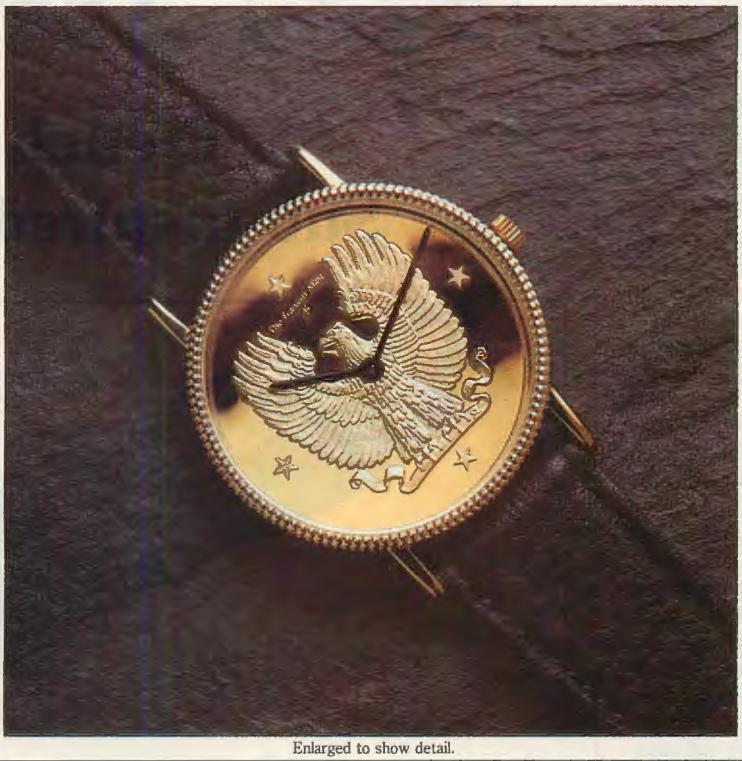

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FULL AUTO

by Peter G. Kokalis

French MAT 49: Sub-inspired Subgun

Compact but equipped with unreliable Sten-type magazines, the MAT 49 was generally well-received by French paras. Photo: Peter G. Kokalis

DIEN Bien Phu. Bernard Fall described it as "hell in a very small place." When the French paras dropped into their final caldron of the Indochina War on 20 November 1953, many were armed with the MAT 49 submachine gun. Generally well-received by French troops, the MAT 49 was robust, although only marginally reliable, and mostly unremarkable in design, with an odd mixture of both unique and undesirable features.

Experience during World War II had demonstrated the 7.65mm French Long cartridge (used in the MAS 38 submachine gun) to be less than adequate. In 1946, the *Section Technique de l'Arme (ETA)* established a program for the development of a new submachine gun in caliber 9mm Parabellum. The design submitted by Tulle Arsenal was adopted three years later.

Except for the barrel and bolt, the major components were fabricated from heavy gauge sheet-metal stampings, all of which were gray phosphate or black oxide finished. The result was a compact 18.5 inches with the stock collapsed and 27.5 inches when the stock was fully retracted. At 8 pounds, empty, the MAT 49 weighs more than some modern assault rifles.

Firing from the open-bolt position, the method of operation is by conventional unlocked blowback with advanced primer ignition due to a fixed firing pin. The cyclic rate is a righteous 600 rpm, so there is no need for a semiautomatic mode.

Rectangular in shape, the formed, sheet-metal receiver has a spring-loaded dust cover over the ejection port that pops open when the bolt is moved to the rear. A fixed ejector has been mounted to the left receiver wall. Also mounted on the left side, the retracting handle does not reciprocate and should be shoved forward after the bolt has been pulled back. In addition to the serial number, the top of the receiver is marked "MANUFACTURE NATIONALE D'ARMES DE TULLE" and "MODELE 1949."

MAT 49 barrels are 9 inches in length with four grooves and a left-hand twist. The barrel is held to the receiver by a large roll pin. A 4.7-inch-long ventilated jacket with 32 ports was punch-welded to the receiver's front cap.

The blade-type front sight with its protective hood and base have been sweated and roll-pinned to the muzzle. The front sling swivel is attached to the front sight's base. A crude, unprotected, flip-type rear sight has apertures marked for 100 and 200 meters.

Tulle Arsenal designers parted company from complete conventionality when they developed the MAT 49's bolt. The bolt face and extractor project 0.3-inch beyond the bolt's body. An extension at the breech end of the barrel, with two gas relief holes, envelops the bolt head just prior to detonation and protects the operator from premature ignition. Both the recoil spring and its guide rod ride partially within a hollow through the upper portion of the bolt. During recoil, as the bolt travels rearward, the guide rod protrudes beyond the bolt head. This reduces the receiver's required length to only 8.5 inches.

Another unusual feature is the magazine-well, which can be pivoted upward (even with a loaded magazine in place) to lock under the barrel on a U-shaped hook (welded to the barrel jacket) by depressing a spring-loaded catch lever in front of the trigger guard. This dramatic increase in the weapon's overall compactness was especially appealing to airborne troops. Pressing a spring-loaded catch button on the bottom of the magazine-well permits it to be rotated downward into the firing position. More than 6 inches in overall length, the magazine-well has front finger grooves and serves as a vertical foregrip when locked in the firing position.

Patterned after those of the British Sten, the MAT 49's 32-round, staggered-column, single-position-feed magazine is its weakest link. Difficult to load by hand, these magazines are every bit as unreliable, except under the most ideal conditions, as those of the U.S. M3/A1 "grease gun." So dreadful were the MAT 49 magazines that, when stationed in Djibouti, Africa, with the 13th Demi-Brigade of the French Foreign Legion, SOF's Bill Brooks was issued 20-round, single-column magazines. Internally blocked, this 20-round magazine was designed to reduce feeding failures in desert environments at the undesirable expense of reduced capacity.

As there is no provision for semiautomatic fire, and thus no disconnector, the trigger mechanism is fairly simple. The rear end of the trigger's top extension rests under a cross-pin in the receiver. The front end of the trigger extension is connected by an axis pin to the sear. When the trigger is pulled rearward, the sear rotates downward out of its notch in the bottom of the bolt.

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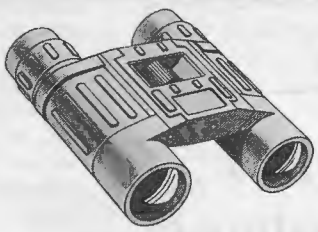

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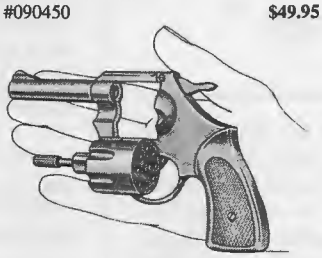

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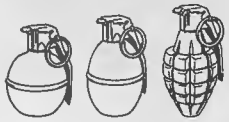

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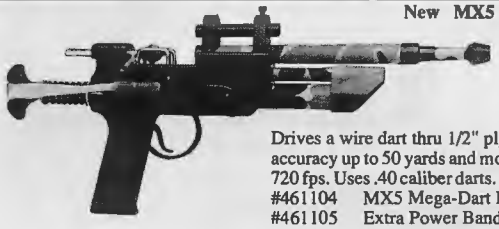

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functions. When the spring-loaded brown plastic grip safety is depressed, a bar preventing the bolt's forward or rearward movement is lowered and another bar restraining the trigger is raised.

The brown plastic, checkered grip panels are retained by a single screw. There is a thumb rest on the left grip panel.

Taken directly from the M3/A1 "grease gun," the telescoping, "wire"-type stock is, if anything, much worse than its predecessor. This flimsy affair can be locked in two positions. Those of normal proportions will use the stock, for whatever little support it offers, fully retracted. The second position, which reduces the stock's length by almost 5 inches, was thoughtfully provided for elves. Either leather or web slings were attached to the front swivel and the bottom or top crossbars on the butt end of the stock.

There is no submachine gun that is any simpler to disassemble than the MAT 49. Remove the magazine, clear the weapon and allow the bolt to move forward into battery, under control. Rotate the magazine-well away from the receiver, but do not latch it to the barrel jacket. Depress the spring-loaded, knurled latch button under the chamber and lift the barrel/receiver group up and away from the end cap on the trigger frame. Withdraw the recoil spring, guide rod and bolt out the rear of the receiver. Pull the retracting handle to the rear and away from the receiver. Depress the catch-release button on the left side of the trigger frame and separate the stock from the frame. No further disassembly should be attempted. Reassemble in the reverse order.

"The MAT 49 ... an odd mixture of both unique and undesirable features."

If the magazines are kept scrupulously clean, lightly lubricated and remain undamaged, the MAT 49 is every bit as reliable as any other submachine gun with single-position-feed magazines. At ranges up to 50 meters, the accuracy potential is no better, or worse, than any other slam-fire burp gun. Due to its excessive weight, the perceived recoil impulse is quite low. Both the pistol grip's excellent grip-to-frame angle and the use of the magazine-well as a vertical foregrip mitigate muzzle climb to a considerable extent and enhance the weapon's handling characteristics. But the MAT 49's wire stock is an abominable firing platform.

No longer in production, the MAT 49 has been largely replaced in French service by the bullpup FA MAS assault rifle, which weighs the same, is but 3 inches longer and fires the far more powerful 5.56x45mm NATO cartridge.

There are no more than a dozen registered specimens in the United States. Most are reactivated dewats (deactivated war trophies) brought back from Vietnam, as a fair number were captured by, and then subsequently from, the Viet Cong. Some were converted to 7.62x25mm by the North Vietnamese and can be distinguished by their longer barrels. Current values range from $1,200 to $1,800, depending upon condition and availability.

Although interesting, the MAT 49 holds little appeal except to collectors of French and/or Vietnam War militaria.

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ABOVE LEFT: Pilots John Piowaty (left) and Bill Cooper (right) with Robert Dutton, one of the directors of contra airlift operation, in front of C-123K aircraft. The H&K 21 machine gun was mounted as a door weapon.

ABOVE: Contra Air's first landing at The Plantation — a secret airfield in northern Costa Rica — did not go well, as the C-123K ended up buried in mud. It took days to dig it out.

SOF EXCLUSIVE

CONTRA AIR

Secord's Central American Flying Circus

Text & Photos by John Piowaty

In April 1986, John F. Piowaty accepted an offer to do some "interesting" flying in "friendly skies" in an unnamed place south of the border.

Shortly thereafter, Piowaty learned he had been recruited as a pilot for "Contra Air" (actually it was called ACE, or Amalgamated Commercial Enterprises), a resupply effort for the Nicaraguan resistance cobbled together by retired Air Force Major General Richard Secord. He suspected the operation involved National Security Council member Lieutenant Colonel Ollie North, but didn't learn until after it was over that North had actually initiated the operation.

Piowaty also discovered later that the skies were definitely not "friendly," and what made the flying "interesting" was that he and others were being asked to penetrate sophisticated Soviet radar nets to avoid close encounters with surface-to-air missiles and Mi-24 helicopters. And they were to do this in airplanes which either had poor capabilities for their intended role or were so battered they should have been rusting away in a boneyard.

If that were not enough to doom Contra Air to failure, the chain of command was Byzantine beyond belief, impossibly inefficient and the commanders ill-prepared to or incapable of running a covert air resupply operation.

William J. Cooper, the chief pilot and commander on the ground in Central America, had a lot of flying time with Air America (the CIA proprietary in Southeast Asia), but Cooper was a straight line-pilot and had never managed one of Air America's covert projects.

From Cooper the chain went to Bob Dutton and then to Dick Gadd (both former U.S. Air Force officers who had served under Secord) and finally to Secord himself. While they had experience in running covert air operations within the framework of the American military, when it came to running covert operations without all those aides, supplies and resources, the Contra Air bosses were bumblers.

The airplanes (two worn-out C-123Ks, two ancient and nearly worn-out C-7A Caribous and an inappropriate single-engine Maule) came without such necessities as

ABOVE: Contras using muscle power and two forklifts to load fuel bladders for air delivery.

RIGHT: Load of medicine going out of a Caribou to contra ground troops along northern border of Nicaragua.

reliable radars and navigation systems. The spare parts inventory was virtually nonexistent. To boot, the operation ran with intelligence on enemy assets gleaned from newspapers, Jane's All the World's Aircraft *and* Soldier of Fortune *Magazine. Communications security consisted of assigning code words to the various characters and activities and "talking around" subjects. Liaison with the host countries (El Salvador, Honduras and, for a brief time, Costa Rica) was complex, confusing and subject to breakdowns. The customers (the Nicaraguan resistance) were less than prepared to coordinate drops since they lacked maps, strobe lights and training in marking DZs. In addition, since most of the customers spoke only Spanish and most of the Contra Air crew members spoke only English, communication was intermittent. Crew members were also expected to fly over hostile territory with no parachutes or survival gear.*

Since the majority of the crew members were professionals, recruited because of previous flying experience in covert projects for either Air America or Continental Air Service in Southeast Asia, they suggested it might be expedient to get some state-of-the-art radar and navigation equipment, parachutes, survival kits, spare parts, airplanes, strobes for the customers, and a reliable source for enemy, weather and terrain intelligence. Contra Air almost came a cropper early in its history when a C-123K flying in clouds brushed a tree 1,200 feet above the nearest mountaintop located on their maps. The plane was either someplace besides where the instruments said it was or the mountains had grown since their maps had been printed.

Expedient yes, but the bosses ran Contra Air as if it were expendable. Requests for necessary equipment, supplies and support were either pigeonholed at one level or another in order to keep from making waves, or turned down as too expensive. For instance, Dutton nixed parachutes for the crew members as too expensive and, as a witness before the Iran/Contra committee in Congress, Gen. Secord claimed the "enterprise" couldn't afford the $150,000 Internal Navigation System (INS) the pilots wanted. The committee members, not an overly bright lot, failed to ask why he couldn't have bought an INS with some of the $8 million the "enterprise" had tucked away in Swiss bank accounts.

Pioway contends that with an INS system, Contra Air would not have been forced to fly daylight missions. The C-123K that was shot down by a SAM in October (killing two Americans and a contra radioman and leaving American Gene Hasenfus stranded in the jungle to be captured) was flying in daylight, in clear skies.

In spite of the problems and obvious dangers, Contra Air crews worked tirelessly to get their battered planes up and flying. After a lot of false starts and missed rendezvous with contra fighters in-country due to weather, equipment failures, communications and recognition problems, they managed to deliver food, uniforms, medical supplies, arms and ammunition to the resistance fighters. These brave crew members are some of the real heroes in the ongoing battle against the communist Sandinistas.

The following article, from Pioway's as

yet unpublished book, Contra Pilot, *describes one such mission.*

— Jim Graves

BACK at the Farm (Aguacate, Honduras), we redid our flight planning. Buz decided to take off about one hour before sunset. With the skies darkened by heavy overcast, Buz figured this would make aerial intercept unlikely and reduce the range from which we might be seen. He planned to go into the DZ at very low altitude, dropping just at dark. Then on the way out, we'd be able to go at a more comfortable altitude, secure in the darkness and in the thick clouds.

We discussed routing and decided to make a few changes in order to stay in the eastern foothills where we'd have cover behind the ridgeline. Again, we double-checked our figures for accuracy. The plane was loaded quickly in midafternoon. Some changes were made in the load: Two pallets of munitions were swapped for four pallets of boots. Each pallet held six rice sacks stuffed with that vital piece of equipment. We now had a load that ran from the cargo ramp all the way forward to the single row of canvas seats at the forward bulkhead. Vern had pulled out the second row of seats to make room for the added supplies we were carrying.

I put together another flight lunch. This one had sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, a canteen of coffee, some small packets of raisins and another iced jug of water. We put the food on board and distributed AK-47s around the plane. Contra commander Colonel Johnny Gómez gave me a set of night vision goggles (NVG) to try out during the mission. I was excited at the prospect of using them. If we had a means of seeing the contras on the ground at night while flying at low level, that would sure as hell make our work safer and surer.

Our "talker" (radioman) for the mission was introduced as "Comandante." And volunteering to come along was Emile, who, like Ernesto from the night before, was a contra pilot. As we taxied out for takeoff, Comandante told me he had 900 men in the jungle. He'd been lifted out by helicopter a few days before and had come to Gómez pleading for resupply. "How long have your men been without supply?" I asked Comandante.

"Three months. But now with your help [after multiple aerial resupply missions], they will receive 40,000 pounds."

"Hmmm," I thought. "That was the total Gómez wished us to deliver. Maybe he's promised it a couple times over." That amount sounded like a lot for 900 men until I mentally divided it out to only 44 pounds per man. They'd need that much in one good firefight! I wondered what the contra pilots had been doing with their DC-6. Compared to the C-7, it's a huge plane, easily capable of carrying five times our Caribou load. The next day, Ernie told me that, while the DC-6 crews were reputed to have made 160 drops, they never crossed the border. All their drops were, at the riskiest, just along the Rio Coco, which marks the northern border of Nicaragua. And even when dropping in that relatively safe area, they never descended below 12,000 feet, in order to stay out of the SA-7 surface-to-air missiles' lethal envelope. I wondered about the accuracy of a parachute drop from that altitude, and especially, "Why were we North Americans flying missions lower, slower and farther in-country?"

ABOVE: Mechanic John Coble and pilot Bill Cooper (right) with Maule aircraft used to ferry personnel between various airstrips. RIGHT: Author John Piowaty.

Perhaps the contra pilots' caution was due to their inexperience in tactical operations. More likely it was because the DC-6 and its crew represented the only significant airlift capability the contras possessed and its loss would be a serious one, not easily replaced. I didn't think it at all a reflection on Ernesto or Emile's bravery. After all, they volunteered to go with us.

Buz took off to the northeast and made a climbing left turn of 270 degrees to gain altitude before entering the mountain pass south of the Farm. Unfortunately for our plans to go at low level, the clouds had dropped to below the height of the pass, so Buz pushed up into the clouds. Until we were sure we had cleared the mountains and could make a blind letdown, we were stuck at a higher altitude than planned.

Comandante seemed worried. "The mountains here reach to 5,000 feet," he exclaimed. "How high are we flying?"

I stepped up between the radio racks and looked into the cockpit at Buz's altimeter. I turned back and sat on the strap locker that Vern had positioned inside the cockpit door. "We're at 4,500 feet, about 3,000 to 3,500 above most of the terrain." (A sinking feeling kept returning to my stomach as I looked out my window into the dark gray of our flight environment. If we had to fly in the clouds, I was glad Buz was using plenty of clearance. A month before, a large tree and a segment of a map legended "Nubes," combined with too little vertical separation, nearly killed a few of us.)

The tallest mountains shown along our route reached to just over 3,000 feet. However, there were large sections on the maps devoid of any topographical information where the legend read, "RELIEF DATA INCOMPLETE." What lay in these areas was anybody's guess.

This was my first flight in northern Nicaragua, but I doubted there were peaks as high as Comandante spoke of this far east. "We're not going directly to your troops. We're going to approach from the east. The tall mountains are well off to our right."

Comandante seemed worried next about the Russian SA-7 heat-seeking antiaircraft missiles. "They go 10,000 feet!" he yelled.

I glibly explained that, in the first place, missile operators couldn't see us for the initial aiming and, in the second, the clouds themselves were a powerful infrared source which would mask and diffuse our infrared signature. I went on, confidently, explaining that the best a 12.7mm or 14.5mm antiaircraft gunner could hope for was a "sound shot," so we were in little danger from them.

Then Emile entered the discussion. He'd

picked up on my saying the radar altimeter showed good terrain clearance. "But can't the Russians paint the radar altimeter?"

I explained that, while the Sandinistas were surely capable of picking up radar emissions, our radar altimeter was very low-powered and it directed its energy straight down beneath the plane. An interception and attack from that signal was unlikely. Furthermore, I doubted they would attempt an aerial intercept through the weather in darkening skies. While they do possess two AT-33 jet trainers armed with .50-caliber machine guns, a good-weather, daylight intercept was all we had to worry about from that quarter.

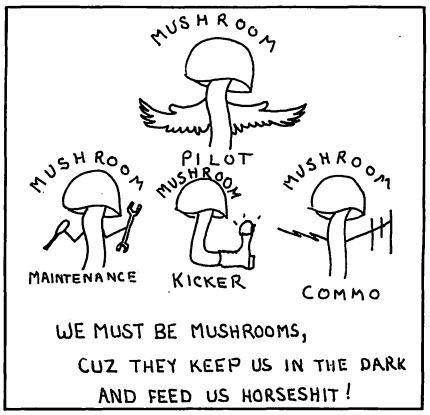
"What about the ZSU?" asked Emile. He was referring to the Soviet ZSU-23-4 highly mobile, radar-directed, four-barreled 23mm antiaircraft vehicle operated by the Sandinistas. Its radar might be blocked by heavy storms, but it wouldn't be bothered by the dissipating, thinning clouds we were flying in.

Unable to explain away that danger, I could only hope we didn't fly within range of any ZSUs. Since we were going to cross one major east-west road on our inbound track, I prayed we would be either below 50 feet or above 10,000 when passing over.

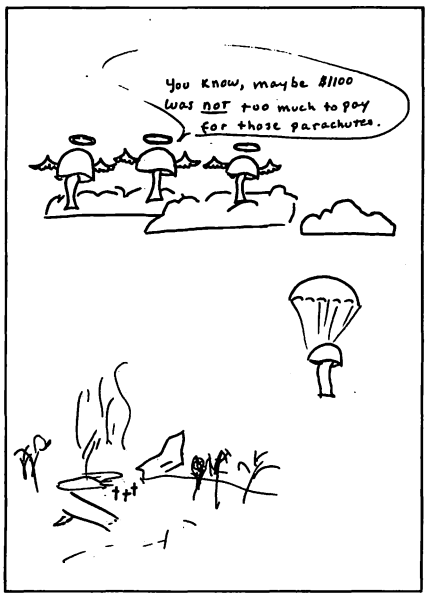
Before I had to explain away any more dangers, Vern called me back to help him with the load. He showed me how it had shifted and compressed itself to the rear on takeoff and during our climb. As we went around the load, tightening straps and resetting the front chains, he showed me the trouble with our "soft" load. The bundles of boots hung over the skidboards, allowing for a lot of shifting and squeezing together. A properly assembled load would have had skidboards at least as wide as the loads they held so that the boards would butt firmly against one another.

After we adjusted the load, I returned to my seat up front and noticed we were leaving the mountains and the clouds that covered them. We could see the jungle below — and be seen, as well, by the Sandinistas with their SA-7 missiles. Emile was quick to remind me of the SA-7 threat. The best reply I could offer him now was to describe some C-7 features designed to reduce the plane's vulnerability to heat-seeking missiles. Before reaching the atmosphere, all cylinder exhausts enter a collector ring that channels the hot gases into a stack which is cooled by prop-blasted air. This cooled exhaust travels from the stack, out the top rear of the engine nacelle and is finally dispersed over the wing's trailing edge. Also, the engine nacelles are crafted to close tolerances and consist of two titanium layers with insulating airspace sandwiched in between. This design radiates engine heat efficiently and uniformly, preventing hot spots from forming on the metal which could be picked up by heat-seeking missiles.

Nonetheless, one hour after takeoff, as we saw lots of large holes in the cloud cover, Buz pointed the nose down and headed for the treetops, leveling off at less



Author John Piowaty did sketches showing the ups, downs and funny moments of the operation, utilizing mushroom figures to represent the Contra Air members.



than 100 feet above the jungle to confound any would-be antiaircraft gunners.

What a scene below — the terrain changed dramatically every minute! First there was a clearing with tall grasses and a few pines. Next came canopied jungle with clusters of tall palms dwarfed by huge hardwoods that surrounded them. In some places the top of the jungle was so smooth, it looked like a giant clipper had trimmed it. Now and then a slight depression appeared, narrow and twisting, which traced through the jungle, indicating a stream beneath it. No stream narrower than about 30 feet could be seen from the air because they are canopied over. The larger rivers were brown from the washings of the previous night's rains. Some were slow moving, others had tortuous rapids. In some spots the darker greens of the jungle gave way to the more yellow color of bamboo thickets and stands of tree ferns. Above all this, flocks of green parrots flew west to their roosts, and pairs of scarlet macaws broke the endless miles of green as they skimmed over the trees.

Suddenly we came upon the main road to Puerto Cabezas on the northeast coast. Then, just as suddenly, it passed out of sight. I noted that in the future we should probably feint and change direction before crossing this road, because if we were being tracked, the Sandinistas could easily move ZSUs and other armaments along that road for an intercept.

As we approached the end of our run south, it got quite dark, but we could still see the jungle beneath us. Vern called me back again and handed me several "light sticks" — plastic tubes containing two chemicals that give off a glow when mixed. We tied one stick to each pallet. Just before the drop we would bend each tube, releasing the chemicals inside. They'd glow for about one hour and serve as a beacon for the contras in case any pallets drifted away from the DZ.

We were about 10 minutes from the DZ. Buz had timed this mission perfectly. We could see just enough of the forest to avoid running into the trees. But it was dark enough that the signal fires could easily be seen. Buz waved me forward. Ernie leaned toward me and said, "Twenty miles. Have talker try a call now, and one more in five minutes."

I took one step back on the tie-down locker and leaned around the cockpit bulkhead toward Comandante and said, "We're 10 minutes away. Try a call now, please."

He switched on his radio, checked the frequency and started calling. The roar of the Caribou engines was so loud, he had to jam the speaker against one ear while clamping a hand over his other ear to block out the plane's noise. After a few moments he raised up to me and shouted, "OK! They hear us."

I stepped forward and yelled that information to Buz and Ernie. Then I wondered to myself, "That far away? They heard us? Are we more west than the Omega shows?" I looked down, between their seats, at the present position coordinates on the Omega display. They looked good and matched Ernie's dead reckoning of 20, now 18 miles to go. I know the Caribou is notoriously noisy, worse than the C-123, but could they hear us from nearly 20 miles away?

Vern was standing near the cargo ramp. I made my way back to him and gave him our

Continued on page 89

BEIRUT'S CHRISTIAN COMMANDOS

Merc Trains Phalange Strike Force

Text & Photos by Gene Scroft

LOOKING at the well-heeled Lebanese sipping cocktails as the ship sailed from Cyprus, you wouldn't guess that their destination was the chaotic, war-torn country of Lebanon. Looking at me, you wouldn't suspect that I was on my way to train commandos who were fighting for control of that country.

I was hired in Paris by the Maronite Christian Lebanese Forces (otherwise known as the Phalange). My job was to train a new commando unit that was just being organized. Initially, I was leery of the assignment. I imagined that the people I was supposed to train would be undisciplined gangster types, and I didn't look forward to the headaches I would certainly encounter. On the other hand, I've never been one to pass up an adventure. Eventually adventure won out over good sense, and I found myself sitting on a ship headed for Lebanon.

On my arrival in Beirut, I was surprised to find that rather than gangsters, the men I was supposed to train were a well-organized militia valiantly trying to become an army. The Lebanese Forces (LF) had even created an officer academy in the hills overlooking

RIGHT: Too much parade drill and classroom work aren't useful for tactically proficient, self-motivated commando candidates.

WEST POINT MERC

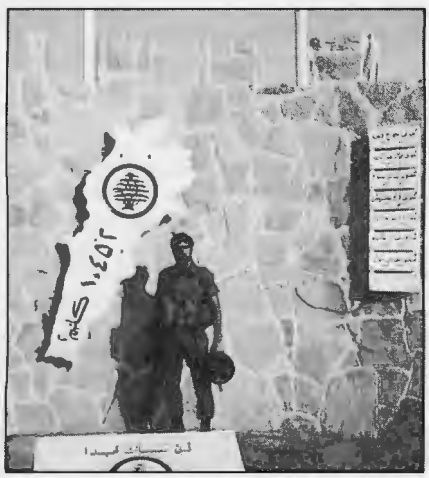
Gene Scroft is the *nom de guerre* of a soldier of fortune who has seen action in many different corners of the world. A West Point graduate who served in the 75th Rangers and the 82nd Airborne, Scroft longed for more excitement than he found in the peacetime Army. After fulfilling his five-year obligation to the U.S. military, Scroft traveled to Central America and then to Afghanistan, where he fought with the mujahideen in some of the most remote regions of the country.

Most recently, Gene was in Nicaragua with the contras, covering the war for SOF (see "War Zone Bocay," SOF, September '87).

Author Scroft cleaning weapon at the commando training camp. Kit is Israeli, knife is Soviet, weapon is American. Lebanon is an arms merchant's dream.

RIGHT: It's a long way down for this first-time rappeller. Rappelling was emphasized in commando training because of its importance in urban warfare.

BELOW: Author in front of a monument to LF war dead at the officer academy. This academy turned out highly capable young officers for Lebanese Forces.



the port of Juniyah and an NCO academy in the Qarantina district of Beirut. I discovered that much of the technical instruction given at these schools is superior to the training offered in the American military. This is largely due to the fact that the LF has access to American, Arab, European and Israeli training materials. Heavy emphasis is given not only to handling the weapons but to their mechanical function as well. Since the weapons available to the LF range from AKs to M16s and T-55s to Shermans, detailed and thorough training is an absolute necessity.

This was not always the case in the LF. Throughout most of its history, the LF was merely a gang of feuding militias, each loyal to its own leader and political party. After Bashir Gemayel was assassinated by persons unknown (the preponderance of evidence points to the Syrians operating through the pro-Syrian Lebanese Socialist Party), the LF was commanded by Fadi Frem and his intelligence officer Elie Hobieka.

When the Israelis left Lebanon, the LF was left without a mentor. Hobieka tried to fill this gap by making overtures to the Syrians. These overtures, along with the deteriorating discipline of the LF, were too much for a northern commander named Samir Geagea. Geagea and his troops were largely from the Syrian-occupied north and were a tightly knit and dedicated group. In January 1986, Geagea moved in to take over. Hobieka's men were no match for Geagea's smaller but more efficient forces. After a brief fight, Hobieka was allowed to flee with his loyalists to an area under Syrian control.

The new professionalism of the LF is due to Geagea's vision of a professional army dedicated to the Maronite community rather than loyal to individual warlords.

An incident I observed during one of Geagea's weekly meetings with his officers illustrates his commitment to creating a disciplined military force. During the meeting

Commando trainees prepare for night maneuvers. Lack of camouflage sticks forced the use of ash. A bit overdone, but effective.

Rappelling down a 30-foot wall. Rappelling was used as a confidence-builder as well as a city fighting technique. Notice bullet holes from a previous skirmish.

he severely dressed down a junior lieutenant in front of the entire LF officer corps for falsifying the number of men under his control. This is analogous to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs disciplining a second lieutenant during a joint session of Congress for falsifying arms room records. Geagea means business and his officers know it.

I was attached to the Sadem special force (*sadem* means "strike" in Arabic) for the purpose of training the commando unit.

Sadem specializes in deep strike, hostage rescue and "black" missions and is the most elite unit in the LF. Many of Sadem's members, however, were loyal to Hobieka and the coup so decimated its numbers that a mere team of men remained with the LF. In fact, the commander of this team was jailed after the coup for suspected Hobieka sympathies. Not an unreasonable suspicion given the fact that his brother was killed fighting against Geagea. When he was later released he proved his loyalty by remaining in the LF when he could easily have fled to the Hobieka side. In my work with them I found the Sadem team extremely professional and intensely loyal to the Maronite cause — though disappointed at the breakup of their unit.

We started our training with the traditional harassment phase — PT three times a day (morning, evening and at midnight) and basic tactics. Dry runs and live fires were conducted often to teach fire and maneuver and direct assault techniques. Rappelling, swimming and armored personnel carrier tactics (the LF used M113s) were also taught.

Sadem's expertise and experience were impressive and I seldom questioned their tactics, but I had to object to their direct assault technique. Direct assault should only be used as a last resort, such as when you're caught in an ambush: Then deliver maximum firepower on the run, as you close with the enemy. It's not accurate, but it may force his head down and give you a chance to survive. The Sadem team tried to solve the inaccuracy problem by having the trainee quick-fire from the shoulder as he ran toward the enemy. This only slowed the man down, caused him to trip over rocks and, as the live fires demonstrated, didn't improve accuracy.

While the tactical training was generally excellent, the organization of the program left much to be desired. Instead of preplanning and using a written training schedule, the Sadem commander would decide what was to be taught only the night before the training was to be conducted. This left little time for instructor and material preparation. This caused instructors to give slightly different versions of the same material to the trainees — hardly the way to run a railroad.

Another major problem was the class structure. The LF command decided to put officers and men in separate platoons. This only increased the prevalent officer attitude of superiority. I suggested that the officers be used as squad leaders in each platoon. This would give the young officers leadership experience while increasing camaraderie. No one seemed to agree.

In their rush to create a commando force, the LF command also placed officers and men into the program in a non-volunteer status and without screening.

The effects of these organizational decisions were immediately apparent — there were mass resignations by the second week and it became clear that more basic training was absolutely necessary. After three weeks, the LF command wisely decided to end the program and provide more basic training to the men by using the officers as instructors. The plan was for the commando program to be reinstituted in four months. I hope that they are successful but, after observing the basic training, I'm doubtful. It consisted mostly of classroom work and parade drill — hardly the training needed for tactically proficient, self-motivated commando candidates.

After the course cancellation, I volunteered to write a complete day-to-day training schedule for a commando course. This task took me about a month and a half. Although I knew it was important, it was pretty boring. Not what I had expected to do in Lebanon.

LF officer giving instruction on blindfold disassembly of British 7.62mm L7A1 GPMG. Though somewhat heavy, the L7A1 is extremely reliable and a favorite of the LF.

Quick assault out of a moving M113 is important training in Lebanon. Quick reaction force vehicles are visible at the upper right. Tarp covers a captured T-55.

While I was there, the LF was not involved in combat because its Muslim enemies were busy killing each other in west Beirut. Beirut is a city of stark contrasts — chaos and murder in the west and tranquillity in the east. This contrast was brought home to me when I visited a friend who lived directly on the Green Line dividing the Muslim and Christian sectors of the city. From his seventh floor balcony we could clearly see the Amal and Palestinian forces fighting in the streets. As the battle raged below us we drank tea and ate doughnuts, and when we lost interest in the spectacle we went downtown for burgers and a movie. Only in Beirut!

Only once in Lebanon did I think that I would be involved in combat. The month before I arrived, Hobieka tried to invade east Beirut with the help of his Syrian allies. He was turned back only when units of the Lebanese army actively intervened. (According to LF sources, captured Hobiekan loyalists were executed after this attack.) Intelligence sources indicated that Hobieka might try again, so a company of M113s was stationed at our training base as a quick reaction force. One day we received word that the Syrians were attacking LF positions in the mountains. I grabbed my M16 and rode with this force toward the front line. Halfway up the mountain we received a radio call explaining that it was a false alarm. It seems that a Syrian recon patrol ran over an LF mine — hardly a major attack.

Once the program was written, it was time for me to leave Lebanon. What the future holds for the Maronites is unclear. Everyone hopes that Samir Geagea will be able to bring professionalism and purpose to the Lebanese Forces, but after years of corruption and warlords, it won't be easy. The prevailing attitude seems to be wait and see.

REEVE'S MARK IV

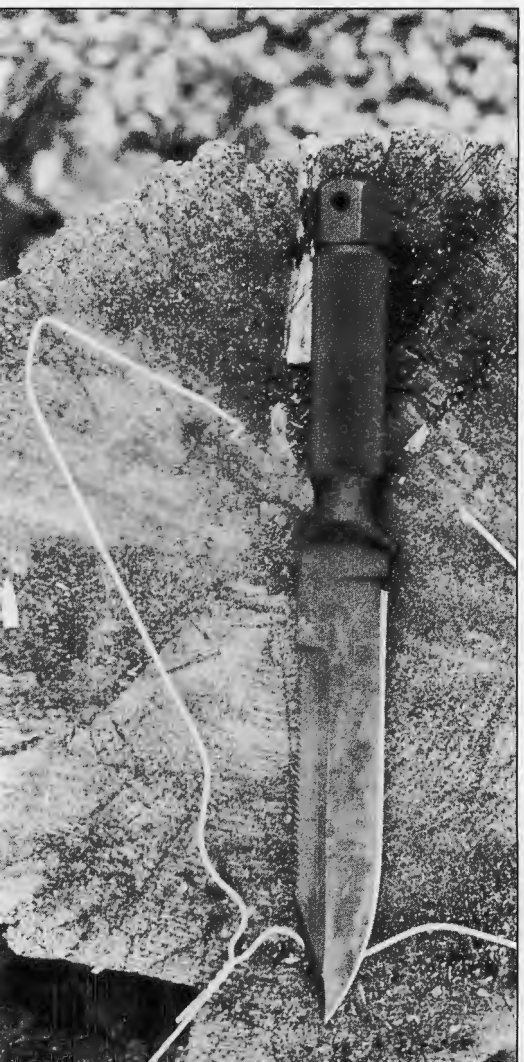
Single-Piece Superknife for Survival

by Kevin E. Steele

AS unbelievable as it may sound, South African cutler Chris Reeve has succeeded in creating a survival knife that's news. Several unique features in Reeve's new design make this knife equal to or better than the very best blades made in America.

Reeve, a South African Defence Force vet and former South African motocross champion, is a tool and die maker by trade. Although he's only been making custom knives full-time for three years, Reeve's creations have received international acclaim for their excellent design and craftsmanship. Now, for the first time, a selection of Reeve's knives are available to buyers in the United States. Since SOF readers are always interested in the newest and best cutlery, we tested and evaluated Reeve's Mark IV Survival Knife.

The Mark IV performs well on hard materials, severing #8-gauge coat-hanger wire without difficulty. Photo: Kevin E. Steele



The Mark IV features a 7-inch Ka-Bar type blade, with a sharpened clip point and saw-toothed serrated spine measuring 3¼ inches. Across the flats, the blade measures a broad 1¼ inch. Overall length of the Mark IV is 11¾ inches, with a weight of 10½ ounces.

While the foregoing specs are somewhat typical for a survival knife, the fact that the Mark IV is made from a *single* bar of D2 tool stock isn't. This unique design creates a true one-piece, hollow-handle survival knife with exceptional strength and durability.

The stock used in the Mark IV is Austrian Bohler steel, the same as that used by Steyr-Mannlicher in the construction of their rifle barrels. This steel is rolled and annealed, not cast, which increases the strength of the Mark IV by 30 percent over cast-steel blades. Without welds, threads or bolts to secure the blade to the handle, the Mark IV is a truly revolutionary hollow-handle design — and inherently the strongest we've seen by far.

Since the interior of the Mark IV's handle is not occupied by threaded tang projections and bolts to affix the blade to the handle, its storage capacity is greater than other survival knives of this type and size. Reeve is a cutler, not a gimmick dealer; therefore, the Mark IV's handle cavity comes empty — the owner is responsible for selecting his own survival gear. An aircraft-strength aluminum cap sealed with the traditional neoprene "O" ring protects the contents of the hollow handle from the elements. A counter-bored hole has been drilled through the side of the handle-cap to facilitate the use of a lanyard, should the owner desire.

Workmanship on the Mark IV is most impressive. As this entire one-piece knife has been turned down from a single piece of steel using the stock removal method, you'd expect to find a flaw or two in the finish — perhaps a tool mark on the integral cross-guard, or an asymmetrical grind along the blade flats. Our test sample was nothing short of perfect. In addition, the handle has been checkered around its entire circumference with a borderless pattern running 22 lines per square inch. This beautiful fine checkering pattern provides excellent purchase on the knife and is also very attractive. A truly custom touch.

The Mark IV's handle is larger than that of other survival knives because the handle is machined out of a solid bar and no tang or locknut gets in the way of storage space. A neoprene "O" ring on the threaded handle cap seals out dirt and moisture. Photo: Kevin E. Steele

The entire surface of the Mark IV has been treated with a synthetic finish known as Kalgard. According to the Reeve knife literature, Kalgard has been developed for use in the U.S. space industry. I must confess complete ignorance of this finish — but it appears very similar to finishes found in the Teflon family. The color is a dark, nonreflective charcoal gray. While the finish appears to prevent rust (I soaked the sample in a salt-water bath for two days, and minimal oxidation occurred), it does scratch very easily on the surface, although normal

MAN OF STEELE

Author Kevin E. Steele is an experienced outdoorsman and writer. A former editor of *Guns and Action* and *Survive* magazines, Steele is now a full-time writer concentrating on the topics he knows best — outdoor survival and weapons of all types.

scratches do not penetrate to the white steel. My preliminary tests indicate that the Kalgard finish is effective for field usage and superior to the more familiar phosphate finishes in durability and rust inhibition.

A survival knife should be able to perform many dissimilar functions fairly well. Apart from its basic duty as a cutting implement, the survival blade must also serve as an expedient saw, pry-bar, wire cutter, ax, root digger and whatever else is required to secure food and shelter under the worst possible conditions served up by Mother Nature. I'm happy to report that the Reeve Mark IV meets these criteria admirably.

Using the Mark IV as an ax, I pared the end of a cedar two-by-four into a sharp point, then proceeded to cut wedges out of a solid pine butt. The Mark IV's blade cut very well, but I found the weight of the knife a bit light for serious chopping. However, as is, the Mark IV is quite capable of cutting poles for the construction of shelter, whittling tent pegs, etc.

Attacking a 4-foot section of cedar fencing that had slats secured to cross-beams with #10 nails, the Mark IV ably pried the slats from their anchors without damage of any kind to the blade. At certain points, the blade would visibly bend with the strain, but the nails would always give way prior to the blade over-stressing and breaking.

The Mark IV's serrated teeth along the spine do indeed saw — both wood and plastic. While the Mark IV is far from a Black & Decker, the teeth are functional and not just decoration.

Apart from its ability to perform basic cutting functions on soft materials, the Mark IV also severed a #8-gauge coat-hanger wire without difficulty. Placing the wire on a hard surface, I simply chopped downward with the blade, and the wire broke in two as if it had been cut by tin snips. Although I had none on hand, I would not be a bit surprised if the Mark IV could also sever aircraft cable with a couple of well-placed blows.

ABOVE: A survival knife must do many things well. Here, the Mark IV easily pries slats nailed to cross-beams in a 4-foot section of cedar fencing. Photo: Kevin E. Steele

ABOVE: Displayed with five other Chris Reeve designs, the Mark IV is third from the top. The knives shown, from top to bottom, are the Jereboam Mark I, Jereboam Mark II, Mark IV, Mark V, 7-inch Tanto and 7-inch Sable.

Following these tests, I cleaned the blade and then sectioned a large fryer chicken with the Mark IV. Despite the abuse to the blade, the knife had not lost its edge, and the Mark IV easily sliced through the skin and fat without hesitation.

The high-carbon/high-chrome makeup of the D2, hardened to 56/58 Rockwell, not only lets it hold a keen edge, but also makes it soft enough to allow easy sharpening. Following the tests outlined above, I gave the Mark IV blade a few swipes on the crock-sticks, and the edge was once again honed like the proverbial razor.

In all, I abused this test sample in ways most people wouldn't even try, especially with a knife that cost several hundred dollars. However, the duty of a survival blade is to save your life under the most drastic circumstances. Should you purchase a Chris Reeve Mark IV, you can rest assured that your knife will rise to any occasion, and you can be confident in the Mark IV's ability to assist you in saving your life.

If you're impressed enough to purchase a Chris Reeve Mark IV, or want additional information on the complete line of Reeve products, contact Blackjack, 21620 Lassen, Chatsworth, CA 91311 or American Manor House, 6433 Frederick Rd., Baltimore, MD 21228. Current retail on the Mark IV is $225, and you'll get what you pay for. Of course, a hand-sewn leather sheath is included.

I'd have to rate the Mark IV a true survival *tool* — that being high praise indeed when most of the competition are mere gaudy conversation pieces.

DEEP DESERT RAID

Oromo Rebels Battle Ethiopia's Red Emperor

Text & Photos by Almerigo Grilz

OUR column halted for a while in the shadow of some trees. In the heat of the Ethiopian dry season the long march was exhausting, across burned-out plains where, every now and then, natural fires started in the bush and slowly devoured square kilometers of cane and yellow grass. I was following guerrillas who were members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), one of the insurgent forces fighting against Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam's pro-Soviet government.

It was only five years ago that the OLF started its activities in western Ethiopia, but support spread very quickly in the countryside, building from scratch a sizable armed organization.

Gabbisa Tasisa, 30, the commander of the force I was traveling with, was one of the dozen-odd rebels who first infiltrated from neighboring Sudan trying to stir up the local peasants.

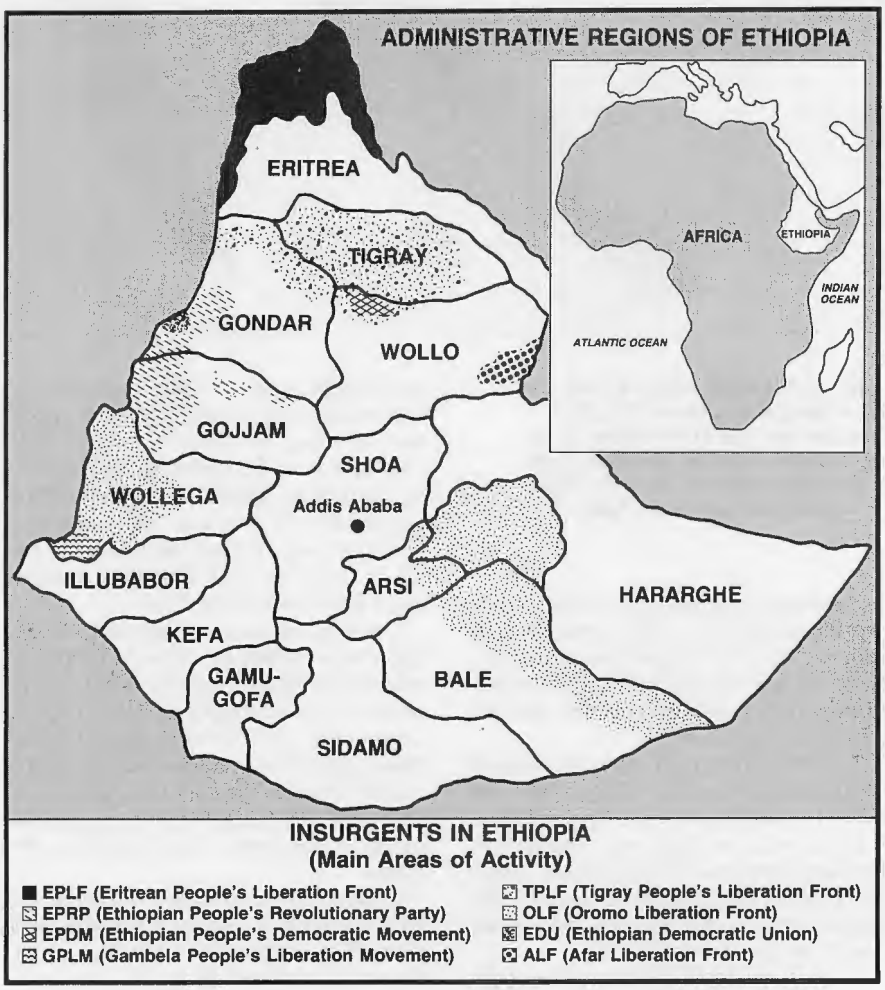
"It was a very hard time," he recalled. "The people didn't know us or what we were fighting for, and it was very difficult to contact them. They agreed to see us only at night under the cover of darkness. Eventually, however, the population became more and more disaffected because their economic conditions worsened and they had to suffer increasing pressure from the government. Roughly two years ago the regime started losing its grip. Now contacts with the people are easy and they aren't afraid anymore to meet us during the daytime."

The OLF wants to assert the "national rights" of the Oromos, who are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, with roughly 35-40 percent of the total population. Oromo rebels claim that their nation "was subjugated by force of arms by the Abyssinian Empire during the last century, when Menelik II brought them under the rule of his Amhara people" (nowadays 19 percent of the population). There are Oromos throughout central and southern Ethiopia, which means that the OLF is potentially the most powerful of the insurgent groups.

Anti-Amhara feelings are deeply rooted among the other nationalities of Ethiopia, who tend to feel that the Amharas are as favored today under the Marxist regime as they were in the past under the monarchy.

In the north of Ethiopia, in Eritrea and Tigray, there is a history of rebellion against the Addis Ababa government. As long as resistance was confined to the north, the threat to the stability of the regime was minimal, but now insurgencies are gaining momentum in the rest of Ethiopia.

Apparently the regime's harsh collectivization policies in the rural areas alienated large numbers of people. Mass displacements, herding of peasants into state farms and *kolkhoz*-style villages, heavy taxation and heavy-handed reprisals against those



Areas of guerrilla activity in Ethiopia. Oromos are largest ethnic population in Ethiopia, but there are at least seven other insurgent groups in the country.

TRIUMPHO MORTE TAM VITA

"I triumph in death, as in life."

Almerigo Grilz, Albatross Press Agency correspondent and frequent contributor to *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine, was killed in Mozambique shortly after filing this story. We extend our deepest sympathy to the family, friends and coworkers of a man who went after the truth.

who didn't comply with the orders to leave their fields and their houses to be regimented in the so-called "resettlement" or "villagization" areas — all that made the rebels' appeals much more attractive, and the government was feeling pressure from rebel groups all over the country.

Shots now echoed in the distance, followed by a few bursts of machine-gun fire. "That's the enemy," Gabbisa commented. "Three columns of Ethiopian troops moved a couple of days ago from their garrisons. They sweep the countryside, finally joining up at a given location. They try to find our units in the area and to gather peasants living scattered about, to deport them to collectivized villages. In this way they hope to cut off our grassroots support."

The short encounter had been initiated by the guerrillas; they refused to commit themselves to conventional battle, instead ha-

ABOVE: Government policies have brought many groups together. Here OLF rebels with FN FALs fight beside Nilotic tribesmen armed with spears and ancient rifles.

RIGHT: Three Russian M1944 Moisin Nagant 7.62x54R carbines and a Yugoslavian M48 7.92mm Mauser (right) captured from the militia during the raid in Debek'a.

rassing the government's column with sniper fire. "A few shots from the forest and then away," Gabbisa explained. "They don't know how many we are, where we are or where we'll strike next. In the meantime they have to slow down their advance, and the peasants can grab their few belongings and seek refuge until the enemy moves on."

My column paid little attention to the shots. Some local units had the job of monitoring and challenging the Ethiopians' operations in the area we were passing through. Gabbisa received constant status reports on his walkie-talkie, but his mission was different. His target, the town of Debek'a, was still three days march away. He was going to lead his 150-man force there without being diverted by whatever the government was trying to do in other areas.

He wanted to advance undetected. Surprise was crucial, as in all guerrilla operations. Besides that, he was worried about me; it was the first time that a journalist, and a white man, had traveled there with the rebels. He feared that, if such news were reported, the consequences might be very unpleasant and possibly jeopardize the operation.

We had left the OLF base area in Wollega region, somewhere in the hills near the Sudanese border, five days before. Oromos were manning several camps there, including training areas, schools, printing and communications facilities, and depots scattered in the bush. They had even built a trail connecting their base with the border; lorries and jeeps could thus travel easily and quickly, ferrying in supplies and carrying out wounded for better medical treatment in the Sudan.

Deep inside the country there were no such semi-permanent camps; the rebels lived in small, mobile and lightly equipped groups. Their bases were concealed in the forest and consisted of just a bunch of simple huts or even straw shelters. Some of those we saw along our route were empty. Guerrillas apparently used them every now and then for a short time before moving on to another area.

Finally we reached the OLF's headquarters for Ghimbi Province, which became an operational area only in 1986. Company Commander "Boro," 22, was in charge. Although a nervous-looking, thin, shifty-eyed character, he appeared to enjoy the total confidence of his men, and his orders were obeyed quickly. His personal weapon was an old, battered Luger pistol of the Imperial German Army, marked 1917. Many other elderly weapons were around, including Nagant revolvers dated 1898 and venerable Italian rifles from the end of the last century — these mainly in the hands of Nilotic tribesmen organized by the OLF in local defense groups.

"We are capturing a lot of equipment from the enemy, particularly from the militias, who have no stomach to fight," Boro explained. "The government generally equips the militiamen with old weapons, while the army and the party members [the Marxist Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was officially founded in 1984 as the political branch of the ruling military regime] are issued Kalashnikov assault rifles. We keep the latter for our guerrilla units and distribute the older stuff to the peasants who want to resist the regime while living with their families. Definitely we can't afford to throw away anything."

This hodgepodge of different weapons represents a century of turmoil: the first ill-fated Italian attempts to conquer Abyssinia (at the time supported by Czarist Russia and France); Mussolini's successful invasion in 1935 and the brief Italian colonial rule terminated by the British in 1941; the U.S.-supplied regime of Emperor Haile Selassie; and the so-called "Red Emperor," Mengistu Haile Mariam, massively armed by the Soviet Union.

OLF troopers were sporting Soviet-made AKs, Garand M1s, M14s, FN FALs (possibly brought along by the Cuban forces which intervened 10 years ago on Mengistu's side against the Somalis and the rebels in the east and north), RPD and PKM light machine guns.

Along with captured materiel, Oromos can rely upon a certain amount of support coming from across the border: ammunition as well as many Egyptian-made AKs and Czechoslovakian-made Vz58s are in fact

channeled through the Sudan.

"The Eritrean independence movements trained us in the early '80s," Gabbisa admitted, "and we still keep good relations with them and with the other national movements fighting against the Ethiopian dictatorship."

At Boro's base, the column finally enjoyed a day of rest; there was better food, a lot of coffee (the Oromos drink it with salt or butter) and refreshing bowls of water and honey. A wild buffalo was hunted down and slaughtered, providing meat. In the evening the commanders sat down and discussed for a long time the information given by the local people, examining the possible government reaction to the planned raid in Debek'a.

ABOVE: OLF guerrillas on the move in Wollega region bush, heading toward the town of Debek'a.

RIGHT: U.S. M14-armed rebel with captured Czech 7.62x25mm Vz24 SMG in Debek'a.

Next morning the platoons taking part in the operation were assembled at the edge of the emerald and dark-leafed wood concealing the base. After a short drill, off we went, once more a long column cutting its way through the high grass.

We would cover the last part of the

Nilotic (Komo) tribesmen with Enfield rifles. They acted as scouts for the OLF column that the author traveled with during part of the march.

REBELLION SPREADS INSIDE ETHIOPIA

For many years Eritrean separatists in northern Ethiopia have resisted the government on their own. Now insurgency is spreading throughout the country. Besides the Eritrean rebels, there are seven other rebel organizations involved in raiding towns, ambushing military convoys and disrupting communications in nine regions. The armed oppositions differ in their goals. Some are separatists while others aim to topple Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam's Marxist regime but not break up Ethiopia.

Different rebel forces have no common strategy and have different political ideas, but they all are rallying to a common battle cry: stop the regime's "resettlement" and "villagization" projects. The resettlement is a mass dislocation of the rural population from the Tigray and Wollo regions in the north to other areas in the southwest; villagization means gathering peasants who are normally scattered and isolated into new state farms, where the work and the production are collectivized.

Addis Ababa authorities claim that villagization is a way of improving conditions in the countryside, providing facilities and ensuring a more rationalized production. They used to raise the issue of the famine as one of the main reasons for gathering the peasants where it is easier to reach them and to reorganize agriculture. But several Western aid agencies, including the French *Medécins Sans Frontières* (MSF), contradict that.

"Villagization has nothing to do with the famine," contends MSF president Rony Brauman. "It's a tactic intended to ensure political control of the people and sever any contact between them and opposition groups."

In the north, in Tigray, where the rebels operate with large, brigade-sized units armed with heavy mortars and 23mm antiaircraft machine guns, government forces are unable to regain the initiative and in many cases are virtually under siege inside towns. In Eritrea, eight ill-fated offensives have been launched during the past years to dislodge the separatists from their mountain strongholds [see "Eritrea," SOF, February '87]. The conflict is now stalemated in trench warfare reminiscent of World War I. Eritreans are manning strongly fortified positions equipped with heavy guns and other hardware captured from the Ethiopians during a number of battles. Soviet, Cuban and other East Bloc advisers and combat units backing government forces have been unable to engineer a military victory like they did in 1978 during the Ogaden war against the Somalis. Analysts agree that there is no way for the Ethiopian army to gain the upper hand in Eritrea for the time being.

It has long been the strategy of the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front), the main Eritrean force, to help other rebel groups and to stir up opposition against Mengistu in Ethiopia proper, thus weakening the regime and stretching its army on different distant fronts. Prisoners belonging to different nationalities within modern Ethiopia have been encouraged to join their own "national liberation" forces.

Gabbisa Tasisa, 30, a commander in the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the Wollega region, admits that "at the beginning, in the early '80s, before starting our guerrilla activities, we received training by the EPLF."

At last this strategy is paying off. Although the EPLF has been totally unsuccessful in efforts to create a unified and coordinated opposition, the rebellions are becoming much more than a local nuisance for the regime. Insurgents easily exploit the dissatisfaction in rural areas, and in turn provide support and training to new resistance groups.

"In the Gambela Province the OLF is actively helping the local Nilotics to organize the Gambela People's Liberation Movement [GPLM]," says Yohannes Latta, member of the OLF executive committee. "The regime has a very racist attitude toward the Nilotics [Negro people living in Ethiopia and in the Sudan], not even considering them Ethiopians. Such a large number of people have been deported there from the north that the ethnic balance in Gambela has already been changed, and the Nilotics are now a minority in their own land, besides having been evicted from many areas . . . that were seized by the government to create resettlement sites for the newcomers.

"Their future is gloomy. They are given the choice of being exterminated or fleeing across the border into the Sudan."

The OLF is currently giving the Nilotics old weapons captured from government militias.

Thanks to the regime's harsh policy in the countryside, even Amhara-led rebel groups are gaining momentum. (The Amhara, who constitute 19 percent of the population, are historically the ruling ethnic group within the Abyssinian Empire and later within Ethiopia. Most of the rebel organizations are thus anti-Amhara oriented and aim toward secession for their own nationality.) Abraham Tafesse, a former Maoist intellectual who now advocates democracy, free economy and right of ownership of the land, claims that his Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) has grown 400 percent since 1984.

Last December the EPRP scored a good propaganda success by kidnapping two Italian technicians working on a construction project connected with the forced resettlements near Lake Tana. The insurgents warned foreign companies that "there is a war going on in Ethiopia and any target with military significance is liable to be attacked."

The guerrillas are stronger in the west of the country because Sudan does not interfere in their activities and provides them with a safe place for a support organization and a place from which ammunition and supplies can be shipped. The Khartoum government is reacting to the Ethiopian government's aid to the Southern Sudanese insurgents of John Garang's SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Army). On the east it's much more difficult, because Somalia wants to get along with the Addis Ababa government and doesn't want to be blamed for supporting the opposition. Rebels operating in the eastern regions are politically and militarily landlocked, and for supplies they have to depend entirely on what they're able to capture from the enemy. However, even in the east the guerrillas are reportedly getting stronger and more aggressive.

Some observers suggest that the government should moderate its collectivization drive in the countryside and try to find political compromise to appease some of the disaffected nationalities. "This won't be the case for the present regime," says Dema Younis, 36, commander of OLF's western front.

"They used to find inspiration in the Soviet experience, and now they're comparing the Ethiopian situation with what happened in Russia after Lenin's takeover. He faced the White Guards, the Western powers' intervention, the Muslim rebellion in Central Asia without compromising, and he eventually won. They claim that Mengistu is being confronted by a counterrevolution as well, and of course with counterrevolutionaries no other solution is conceivable but to fight and crush them."

No doubt Ethiopia is well on its way to more suffering and more tragedy.

approach route after sunset.

We passed quiet villages. In some, people were awake, chatting after dinner. You could see fires flickering inside their homes through the cane walls.

After the moon rose, the long file of advancing rebels became much more visible, even from far away. There were no longer woods to hide in; the area was densely inhabited and cultivated, with fields and ploughed land. Gabbisa was confident that the Oromo people living there would never betray us, but he didn't take chances. Advance squads reconnoitered in case government patrols were around.

Gabbisa received whispered reports on his walkie-talkie, and a couple of times the column halted as suspicious places were checked out. The men were quite tired after 10 hours of almost nonstop marching. Around 0200, when Debek'a was only 50 minutes away, Gabbisa sensibly decided to give his men a couple of hours of rest before going into battle.

ABOVE: Burning truck in road construction depot stormed by Oromo rebels.

RIGHT: Guerrillas burned flags and tore down Ethiopian hammer-and-sickle insignia at the *kebelle* and militia house in Debek'a.

The guerrillas deployed as usual, in a circular formation, ready to face any threats that might materialize while they were sleeping. I was to sleep within the circle. I jumped into my sleeping bag and fell sound asleep immediately.

When they woke me the column was ready to move. The night was still and silent, and the only sound was the rustle of the advancing men. At first light, as the countryside started to come alive with crowing cocks and chirping birds, our advance moved faster and faster. The main force was moving along a road leading straight to Debek'a, while two advance squads deployed in lines, their weapons ready, and started to run along a slope on both sides of the column. Soon we were all running through the outskirts of the town, past long buildings with corrugated-iron roofs. Suddenly shooting broke out: Tracers crossed in the sky, there were shouts, men ran low along the walls as bullets whistled by overhead.

Our target was the militia house and the party headquarters where a group of government men were barricaded, trying to resist.

Since the buildings were separated from the village it was easy for the rebels to encircle them. A platoon unleashed heavy covering fire for the assault party to approach and storm them, but the half-hearted militiamen were in no mood to die for Mengistu. From inside the house they screamed they were going to surrender and begged the rebels to stop shooting. The first prisoner was dragged out of the headquarters, a young chap shaking with fear. Seconds later the guerrillas broke into the militia house. There were more shouts and the noise of furniture crashing, then other men were pushed out at gunpoint, their hands over their heads. Two last militiamen tried to dash across the fields, but were immediately spotted and captured as well.

There were cries of exultation as precious booty was piled up in front of the Party headquarters: Soviet-made AKs and modern submachine guns, which belonged to the Party members, and aged Soviet PPSh41 submachine guns and M48 rifles belonging to the militia. The cadres and the militiamen, all in civilian clothes, were stunned; they had been sleeping when the dawn raid began and now they were in the hands of men their propaganda described as desperate ragtag gangs unable to challenge the power of the government and the "march of the revolution."

The rebels raided the offices of the *kebelle* (a sort of Ethiopian Soviet, in charge of political and administrative affairs in a particular section of countryside or urban neighborhood), bringing out documents and files. One of the rooms in the building was a library. On its shelves they found books in English by *Progress* publishers in Moscow, including the speeches of the late Soviet premiers Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov, and many works about socialist economics. The guerrillas smashed everything and threw the red flag of the Party and the green, yellow and red Ethiopian flag into the dust alongside a big hammer-and-sickle emblem. Finally the whole Party house was put to the torch. At the other end of Debek'a, columns of dense black smoke were rising from a road construction depot, where lorries and fuel stores had also been set on fire.

Eventually the rebels called on the civilians to assemble near the state-owned stores. They smashed open the wooden doors and hastily threw out the goods inside.

Many sacks of food, tools, packets of cigarettes and other items were distributed among the people. The guerrillas gathered a part of the booty for themselves. Some of them enthusiastically grabbed a number of thin pink umbrellas, apparently a sort of luxury in the Ethiopian countryside.

Boro and Nuraddin, a guerrilla company's second in command, were in constant wireless contact with the forces deployed around the town, but no Ethiopian government troops were being reported.

After they had taken everything they wanted, the guerrillas regrouped along the road. Many civilians were with them, people who had been previously deported there by the government, or who feared govern-

ment reprisals and preferred to follow the insurgents to their "liberated areas." Our column was longer and slower now; there were some 300 people, including the prisoners and the civilians, heavily loaded with huge boxes, sacks and weapons captured during the raid.

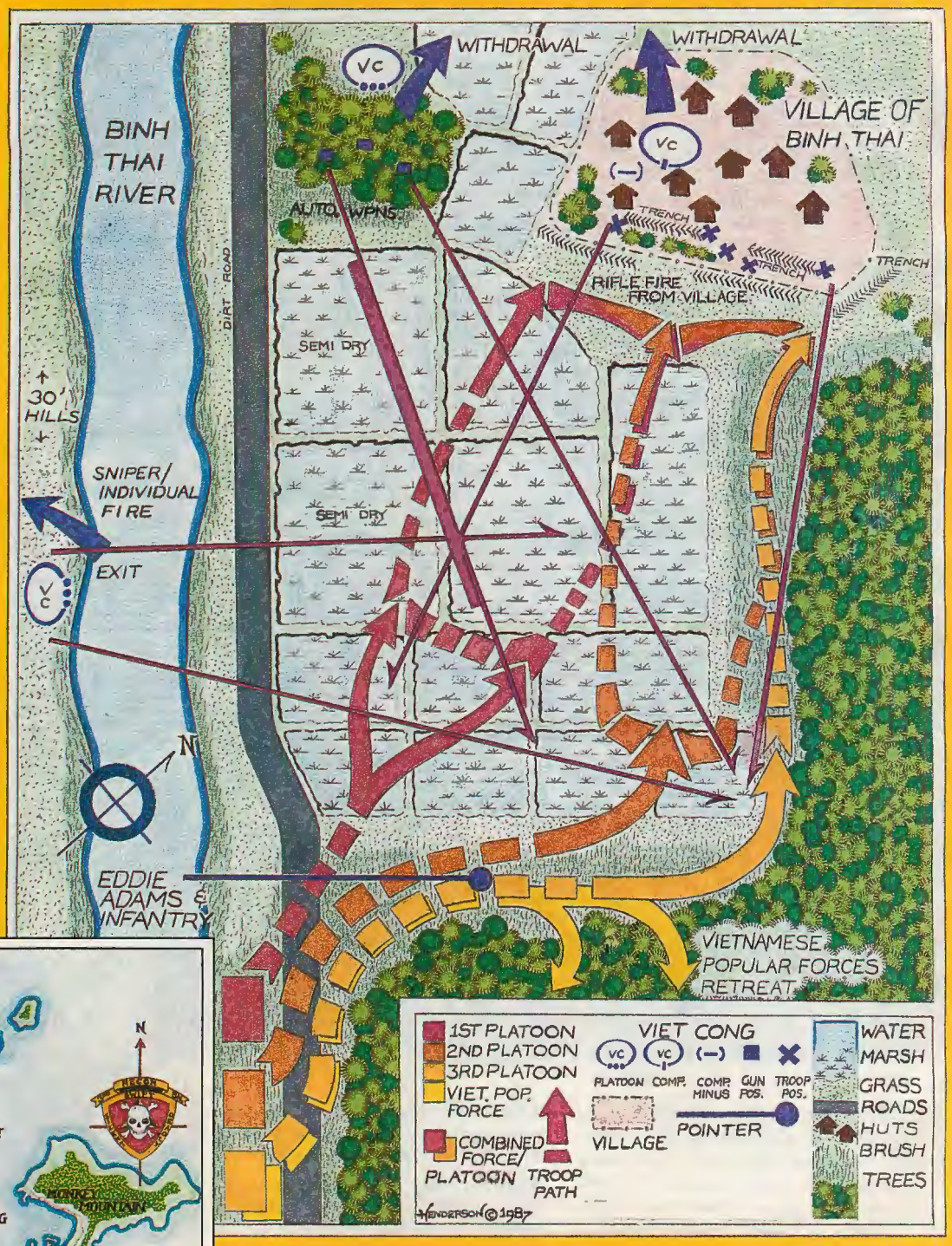
I considered it quite extraordinary that such a clumsy exodus could succeed in fading away, as government garrisons were not far away, and a hot pursuit shouldn't have been too difficult along the densely populated and sparsely forested area. There was in fact an exchange of small arms fire when the Oromo squads covering the main force stopped enemy troops rushing to follow up. Our column speeded its journey. One of the prisoners who pretended to be sick was

ABOVE: OLF guerrillas cross Ethiopia's plains during dry season, on way to do battle with supporters of the Mengistu regime.

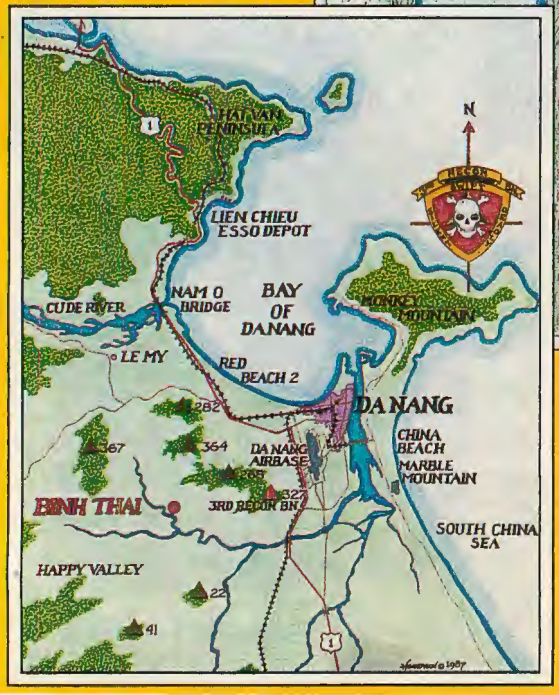
RIGHT: Oromo woman guerrilla holds captured AKM assault rifle. Mengistu regime's harsh collectivization policies have alienated peasants in rural areas and brought both men and women into the ranks of the rebels.

Continued on page 97

BAYONETS



BELOW: Despite Rules of Engagement restricting Marines to an 8-square-mile area encompassing Da Nang air base and the high ground to the west, by April 1965 recon patrols were beginning to venture well beyond these limits. The ambush of Captain Collins' patrol occurred during one of these early missions west of Hill 327. Map: Bob Henderson



ABOVE: The village of Binh Thai and rice paddies where ambush took place. Although only a skirmish when compared to later Marine Corps battles such as Khe Sanh or the retaking of Hue, Binh Thai was the first time the Marines went looking for — and found — the VC. Map: Bob Henderson

AT BINH THAI

Marines Take Charlie's War Beyond the Wire

by Charles Henderson

Photos by Eddie Adams/AP

PIG shit. Nothing else adequately describes the smell of the air most mornings in Vietnam. The stink seemed to dwindle as the days wore on, but it never completely burned off. On 22 April 1965, near the foot of Hill 327 about six miles west of Da Nang, the awful smell hung heavy in the morning's dank air.

Eddie Adams, an Associated Press photojournalist barely 30 years old — a man who would photograph a South Vietnamese general blowing a Viet Cong assassin's brains out, and be awarded the Pulitzer Prize — climbed down the tailgate of a Marine Corps truck — "six-bys" they call them — and stepped onto the dusty roadway near the foot of Hill 327, where he caught a full, double-nostril blast of the stench. Two cameras dangled from black straps looped around the photographer's neck, while a small green canvas bag hung from his right shoulder.

Himself a former Marine staff sergeant and veteran of the Korean War, Eddie had for several months been a veteran of this war, landing in-country just before Christmas. He worked out of the AP's Saigon bureau until he moved to Da Nang six weeks earlier to cover the landing of the first U.S. ground combat forces in Vietnam. That day, 8 March 1965, Adams photographed schoolgirls draping flower garlands around the necks of officers who led the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade ashore. He wondered at the irony of it all. Armed Marines, dressed for battle, charging ashore — just as they had done on Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal — but here they met no foe. No hail of bullets. Only well-wishing Vietnamese. Schoolgirls with flowers.

Actually, the first American ground unit to conduct independent operations in Vietnam had landed nearly a year earlier. It was a composite force designated Marine Detachment, Advisory Team One. The world took little note of them; they were hardly the stuff of headlines. These Marines, however, were under strict orders that explicitly prohibited them from patrolling or engaging in any activity that might be construed as "offensive in nature" — more or less a safeguard to ensure no unwanted headlines did come of it.

Captain Pat Collins, commanding officer of D Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. Collins, now a colonel, is one of the few remaining active-duty Marines to have fought in both Korea and Vietnam.

Team One arrived in Da Nang on 20 May 1964 under the command of Major Alfred M. Gray Jr., USMC (presently serving as commandant of the Marine Corps).

A radio detachment designated the Signal Engineering Survey Unit was the force's primary element. It consisted of three officers and 27 enlisted Marines from 1st Radio Company, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and from Headquarters Marine Corps. They were supported by a 76-man infantry detachment from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, reinforced with an 81mm mortar section (two mortars).

LEATHERNECK SCRIBE

"Bayonets at Binh Thai" is the first article Charles Henderson has written for *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine, although readers may recall "Marine Sniper" (SOF, February '87), an excerpt from his book of the same name. Henderson, a Marine Corps Public Affairs officer, currently has two books under way, both of which focus on the subject he knows best — the Corps.

During the final days of May, U.S. Air Force C-123 transports airlifted Team One to the Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp at Khe Sanh. Once there, the composite force built a solid supply base and began communications operations. By 21 June, Major Gray had managed to move 73 Marines, 100 Vietnamese troops and tons of communications equipment to a 5,000-foot peak on nearby Tiger Tooth Mountain. There they conducted communications operations in extremely primitive conditions (so primitive that the men were limited to two canteens of water daily, and they could neither bathe nor shave).

In mid-July a storm all but destroyed the Tiger Tooth Mountain base, and then on 17 July Viet Cong attacked the position. Since the Marines were under strict orders prohibiting them from any "offensive" activities, and with their position devastated by the storm and its location now known by the enemy, Major Gray withdrew his force and returned to Da Nang on 22 July 1964.

Gray's operation never received public attention and now, nearly a year later, it was merely one more bit of historical trivia lost in an increasing backwash of copy that tickered out from the AP's Saigon teletypes daily, most of which wound up on back pages near grocery or tire advertisements. On 22 April 1965 most Americans really didn't know or care that much about this *"Sale Guerre"* — "Dirty War," as the French continued to call it in their criticism of increased U.S. involvement. Most Americans — including the Marines in Vietnam on this stinking morning — really didn't care about it either.

The diesel exhaust, which blew in the trucks' beds during the short and very bumpy ride from Da Nang air base, had masked the morning air's odor enroute. Now, as the passengers piled out, the stink struck full force and caught the attention of several of the 80 Marines of Company D, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, whose patrol Adams had joined.

"Shit!" several men said, following the exclamation with lowly mumbled strings of profanities while they fanned the air in front of their faces. Everything in this backward and mostly rural country seemed to be coat-

ed with orange dirt and smelled either like rotting fish or pig shit. This morning smelled like both.

"Hey, Pat!" Adams shouted to a Marine captain who stood ten yards away, directing his men out of the trucks. "If we're lucky, we'll get ambushed!"

Both men laughed.

It was easy to laugh at such a comment. Few Americans had yet died in this war. No American ground units had yet engaged the enemy. There were no ambushes . . . yet. A year later, the same remark would, at the very least, receive in response a cold look and a raised middle finger.

Patrick G. Collins, the 34-year-old captain who stood at the road's edge directing his men, was a true stereotype of what Eddie Adams thought a Marine ought to be. Collins, square-jawed and tanned, was tough as a bulldog and built like a small tank. He had enlisted in 1952, made corporal and served in Korea as a scout/observer. He got out of the Corps in 1955, joined the reserves while he went to college in Detroit and returned to active duty as a sergeant in 1958. That same year, as a meritorious NCO, he went to Officer Candidate School and received his commission.

Now he commanded this reconnaissance company whose mission today was to patrol on a deep probe west of Hill 327, gathering intelligence on the lay of the land, nature of the countryside and habits of the people. They were also to demonstrate to the local peasants (who made up more than 80 percent of the Vietnamese population) that the United States was now here — presenting a "presence," as politicians put it. Leaders and thinkers far from the war — people who viewed the conflict from the sanitized perspective of pins in a map — hoped this "presence" would discourage further insurgency.

Collins knew better. He had studied revolution and insurgency much of his career. The captain clearly understood the communist doctrine of "protracted revolution" — war with no deadlines and, from the communist perspective, only one possible outcome. He also knew very well the manner in which this war should be fought.

The best tactics, he believed, relied on the use of small units spread far into the hills and jungles beneath the thick canopy that covered most infiltration routes. Rather than massive air strikes, Collins felt it would be more effective to use small units that could ambush and effectively interdict the enemy as they moved along the lacework of trails. Commenting on the tactics of trying to bomb the infiltration routes, Collins said: "All that the B-52 strikes ever did was piss off the monkeys."

Pentagon reports confirm his position. They note that at the war's close the United States had dropped two-and-one-half times the tonnage of bombs dropped in World War II, but had little to show for it in Vietnam.

Pat Collins and Eddie Adams quickly became friends during those first weeks of ground operations in 1965. Eddie felt safe with Pat, and Pat liked having Eddie along. Adams worked like one of the team: When in a rubber boat, Eddie helped paddle. He helped hump supplies, too. He also shared his water and helped those struck down by the heat. Eddie Adams still had a lot of Marine in him, and Pat Collins liked that.

Marines from 3rd Recon Battalion fire and maneuver after receiving enemy fire while on patrol near Binh Thai. Almost all of the equipment carried by these Marines would later be replaced by gear designed for fighting in Vietnam.

"That's the smell of money," one country boy drawled as the gaggle behind the trucks took shape and two lines of Marines route-stepped westward along each side of the roadway.

"Bet they don't rob many banks where you live," a gruff voice retorted, sending a ripple of yuks and chuckles down the extending line of Marines.

A sense of adventure stirred among these young men despite the morning heat. Less than six weeks earlier they had been part of the first (official) American ground combat force to land in Vietnam. That day, at 0918, on Red Beach 2 along the shoreline on the Bay of Da Nang, Brigadier General Frederick J. Karch led the lead element of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade — Battalion Landing Team, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment — ashore.

After the 9th MEB's historic 8 March 1965 landing, General Karch quickly discovered that many of the Marines had terribly inadequate training. He saw NCOs and officers who could not read maps. Small units that could not patrol. Therefore, the first order of business became training.

Collins' recon company proved no better than the rest. He had few good officers and staff noncommissioned officers. Normally, a recon patrol would be four Marines. He had already decided that strength would come from numbers because of the lack of trained leaders. So the patrols grew from the customary two-to-four Marine teams to eight-to-12-man patrols.

Compounding this lack of training, equipment — especially radios — was horribly inadequate. The PRC-10 radio's cumbersome batteries proved extremely unreliable. No one could know if the batteries

would last one hour or three days, so patrols carried many extra batteries and a spare PRC-47 radio as back-up. This also required extra men to hump the gear.

"Keep your intervals," a squad leader called back to his Marines, reminding them to keep several meters distance between each other. The first month in Vietnam had taught many lessons and had reminded leaders of other lessons from other wars which seemed to have lost their importance until now.

The first month that the 9th MEB spent in Vietnam wore on like a tragicomedy. The Marines' limited training contributed to several incidents — some funny, others heartbreaking.

The first night after the Marines put up TPQ (target acquisition radar) antennas on the west side of Hill 327, the night watch opened the final protective fire on what they thought was a large mass of Viet Cong trying to breach their defenses. When dawn broke, a patrol went out to appraise the damage and count enemy dead. There were no dead Viet Cong. Just 50 or so dead monkeys.

However, tragedy struck on one of the first nights that the Marines manned the extensive network of listening posts they had established throughout the distant fringe of their defensive positions. Three Marines silently stood watch in one of the listening post bunkers. They strained their senses to detect any movement or sign of the enemy in the blackness that surrounded them.

Time dragged while their tensions grew. Their only reassurance was the barely audible hissing noise of dead air on the radio net, broken briefly by the faint squawks of other posts reporting to headquarters.

But this special lull of intermittent radio talk in black wilderness suddenly shattered with the sound of a crack and a thud. The three men listened in heartsick silence. Was it nothing more than a night sound amplified by their nervousness? Or was it the enemy?

Two men climbed out of the bunker — rifles in hand — and walked into the nearby brush to investigate. The lone Marine left in the bunker, understandably frightened, continued to listen to the noises. Noises that seemed more amplified now that he was alone.

He waited. The longer he waited, the more concerned be became. Perhaps the enemy had captured his buddies, he fearfully considered, and now he must face whatever was out there . . . alone.

The solitary Marine sat still in the night, his hands wrapped white-knuckle on the stock and pistol grip of the M60 machine gun, which he hoped would not jam if the enemy suddenly attacked him. A crash in the brush behind the bunker sent his heart pounding so hard that his vision blurred from the rush of blood that came coursing from his excitement. Without hesitating, the frantic Marine pushed the barrel of his machine gun out the bunker's rear port and opened fire.

When help arrived, they discovered the bodies of his two buddies crumpled behind the bunker. They had apparently become disoriented and somehow managed to return to the listening post from the rear. Their lone and frightened buddy had killed them.

Until 20 April, all patrolling had been restricted mostly to the perimeter surrounding Da Nang air base and the area of Hill 327 where Battery B, 1st Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion, a Hawk missile battery, had set up with 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, which provided security for the missile positions.

This restriction came from several sources:

In the original landing order, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that the "U.S. Marine Force will not, repeat will not, engage in day-to-day actions against the Viet Cong." The 9th MEB's original responsibility was to protect the Da Nang air base from attack. This was in support of the current policy that provided the South Vietnamese government with helicopter support of its combat operations and the support of Operation Rolling Thunder, which was the strategic bombing of North Vietnam carried out in large part from Da Nang air base. President Johnson still had not made the decision to allow direct ground combat operations between the United States and the communist forces in South Vietnam.

Although busy with the task of establishing a base of operations and an adequate defense, the first three weeks were extremely confining for the Marines. Even before their landing, General Nguyen Van Thieu, minister of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, and General Tran Van Minh (commonly called "Little Minh"), chairman of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, both voiced concern about the reaction of the local population, and asked that the U.S. forces enter the country "in the most inconspicuous way feasible." The need to keep a low profile weighed heavily and added to the pressures to limit Marine activities.

But perhaps the greatest "stonewall" was in the person of Major General Nguyen Chanh Thi. He was by all classical definitions a warlord and ruled over the five northern provinces of South Vietnam — I Corps. Like any warlord, Thi was very reluctant to share control of the region with anyone, especially the Americans.

On 1 April President Johnson approved

an 18,000-to-20,000-man increase in U.S. forces committed to Vietnam, including deployment of additional Marines, and he permitted a change in the 9th MEB's mission, which would allow the use of Marines in "active combat under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State."

While visiting Vietnam in April, General Wallace M. Greene Jr., commandant of the Marine Corps, said that the Marines would be conducting more aggressive operations. He commented, "You don't defend a place by sitting on your ditty box."

However, General Thi kept the Marines restricted to an 8-square-mile area of unpopulated land that encompassed the Da Nang air base and the high ground to the west — Hills 268 and 327. Thi wanted to keep the Marines away from the populated areas, which were south and east of the air base, because he feared "the Americans might provoke incidents in the villages and would antagonize the local populace." Thus, Rules of Engagement were born.

The original Rules of Engagement not only restricted where the Marines could operate, but they also restricted their activities. The Marines were not allowed to fire at persons beyond the defensive wire of the air base boundary. Rather than fire, they were to "report those persons to the Combined Coordination Center."

General Karch voiced great displeasure with this arrangement. He later said, "As a practical matter, there is no doubt that the brigade commander would have been held responsible for any successful assault on the airfield."

Once General Karch and the 9th MEB were in place, commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, took what he termed a "classical commander's estimate of the situation to think through, in a logical and precise manner, strategy, objectives, enemy capabilities, and our own courses of action before making what may prove to be, in the light of history, a momentous recommendation." His recommendation greatly broadened the mission of the U.S. forces from simple air base security to a three-fold initiative: "Protection of vital U.S. installations, defeat of the communist efforts to control Kontum and Pleiku Provinces, and the establishment of enclaves in the coastal region."

The mission to protect vital installations meant doing what General Greene had said — getting off the "ditty box." More Marines arrived in April, including the first Marine fighter-attack squadron, VMFA-531, flying the F-4B Phantom II jet. And

TOP LEFT: A wounded radioman, hit in the head by VC sniper fire, is treated by an unidentified corpsman, as Lt. Vankat and SSgt. Kihlstrom look on.

LEFT: 22 April 1965. Captain Collins returning to Da Nang after his first meeting with the VC.

with President Johnson's lifting of restrictions, Marine infantry battalions could now "engage in counterinsurgency operations." General Westmoreland issued General Karch a four-phase concept of operations that called for: 1) establishment of defensive bases; 2) deep reconnaissance patrols of the enemy's avenues of approach; 3) offensive action as a reaction force in coordination with the Vietnamese; and 4) undertaking, "in coordination with Republic of Vietnam I Corps, an intensifying program of offensive operations to fix and destroy the Viet Cong in the general Da Nang area."

General Thi remained opposed to any patrolling or other offensive action by American troops outside the airfield. Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak (one of the Marine Corps' greatest thinkers on counterinsurgency, and designer of the plan that established the Chu Lai enclave 57 miles south of Da Nang) recalled that meeting and the remarks that Thi made. In regard to the area south of the air base and along the bank of the Da Nang River, Thi said, "This is enemy country. You are not ready to operate there."

Thi was right about one thing: It was "enemy country." Operation Starlite, the first major U.S. operation of the Vietnam War, would find it to be one of the greatest strongholds of Viet Cong, and prove one of the VC's greatest losses.

Although Thi only allowed the Marines to expand their tactical area of responsibility four additional square miles in response to General Westmoreland's concept of operations, the long-range recon patrols began to venture well beyond the limits of the TAOR Thi had assigned the Marines.

Up to this point, Pat Collins had called their patrolling around Hill 327 and Da Nang air base "candy patrols." The Marines took candy bars and other junk food along on the short and uneventful missions that were more a stroll in the country and a picnic than a combat patrol. Their greatest enemy proved to be the heat.

In one sense, the candy patrols served well to condition the Marines to the heat and train them on patrolling tactics, terrain appreciation and planning. Collins' men learned what to carry and what to leave behind. They put their skivvies in their seabags and left them there, along with other bulky items that wadded or rubbed or otherwise caused rashes and heat problems. In turn the Marines hung extra canteens on their ammo belts and increased their intake of salt.

By the time 20 April arrived and General Karch sent them on the first deep probe, Collins' Marines were ready.

When the first patrol went out, the Marines had already begun receiving scattered assaults on their defensive positions. Four days prior, two of Collins' men, Privates First Class Kenneth H. White and

After receiving enemy fire, a reconnaissance Marine advances toward the VC position while firing his M14.

Charles D. Lagle, had repelled a VC attack on their listening post, during which Lagle was slightly wounded from flying debris.

Because there was a lack of "good" intelligence concerning enemy strength and location, and considering the incident of 16 April — the enemy was clearly moving directly against U.S. forces — 9th MEB planners established a back-up for the recon patrols. Marine infantry companies stood ready with waiting aircraft at Da Nang air base. Should a patrol make contact, helicopters could rush the reinforcements into action like a hammer and anvil operation.

Today marked Company D's third patrol in three days that extended beyond the Hill 327 contours. The two previous days' patrols ended with little more than frustration from the heat, sore feet and a boring intelligence debrief. This day's outing, however, 22 April 1965, would be special.

While Company D marched westward in the rising heat, waiting near Da Nang were a flight of F-4B Phantoms, several UH-34D helicopters and Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment. The reaction force and air support would race into action should Collins call.

On the day when the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed in Vietnam, Second Lieutenant Bill Vankat led his reconnaissance platoon ashore with BLT 3/9. Today, Vankat and his platoon again led off, taking the point in the column of three platoons.

Another second lieutenant, barely 20 years old but senior in rank, followed with the second platoon. Carmine DelGrosso, being D Company's senior second lieutenant, was also the company's executive officer.

Collins and Adams walked ahead of the last platoon, with another second lieutenant and a Vietnamese Marine adviser.

A strict policy dictated that all patrols, no matter where, would be augmented with Vietnamese troops who could act as guides, advisers and translators as well as assist in a fight. However, the usefulness of the Vietnamese support was often questionable.

ARVN recruits periodically fired their rifles, inadvertently, into the Marine positions atop Hill 327. This lack of fire discipline left many Marines leery of having those same soldiers following in trace of their column. And, though the Vietnamese Marines and ARVN fought well, the Regional Forces and Popular Forces (rather like local reserves) were completely unreliable. In fact, they had a reputation for being quick to leave a post and, in a fight, even quicker to run. Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. McPartlin Jr., commanding officer of 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, understatedly said, "PFs were most unreliable military personnel."

Thirty-eight Popular Force troops had joined Pat Collins' patrol a mile west of Hill 327. The captain positioned them at the rear of his third platoon.

The Ambush

Throughout much of the patrol's route, curiosity-filled children intercepted and followed the three platoons of Marines and 38 PF troops. So many American soldiers were something new. But even now the youngsters had already learned that there was booty to be gained from the GIs. Marines often carried candy that they saved from their C-rations, and word of it spread.

Marines advance toward the village of Binh Thai.

"Chocolate?" the children asked again and again. Although they spoke little or no English, the small brown kids with wide, white toothy smiles had learned that this magic word, "chocolate," reaped a sweet reward.

The nearly naked and bone-skinny youngsters learned fast. So did the Marines. It was fun to toss a foil-covered disk and watch the ensuing scramble for the prize. Pitching out several boxes of chewing gum had an even wilder result.

Hot dust boiled in orange clouds around the Marines' feet as they pushed westward along the road. While the Marines' backs and brains cooked in the increasingly cruel heat, the sun rose higher toward 10 o'clock, pushing the temperature toward three digits. Almost as quickly as they had descended on the patrol near the foot of Hill 327, the children disappeared. It was as though the school bell had rung, and a once bustling playground suddenly stood silent.

Sounds from the world quieted too, leaving only the buzz of insects which swarmed undaunted by the rising temperature. The baked dry earth and dull green weeds, cooked to a dead-looking gray by the tropical sun, loudly crackled under each man's footsteps, adding a psychological accent to this day's tormenting heat. And as the men walked on, wilting and bored, the quietness caught Collins' attention.

"Something's up," the captain said to his radio operator, Adams and the Vietnamese Marine adviser who walked a few paces behind. The men stopped and the Marine with the radio strapped to his back put the handset to his ear and called forward for the column to "take five."

"I haven't heard a sound for nearly half an hour," Collins said in a voice that rose in concern. "No radios, no kids, no farmers. Nothing. Not even a bird. I think we're walking into something."

The radio operator interrupted the captain, who now sat while he talked, resting along the roadside like the other Marines. "Sir, Lieutenant Vankat reports that his platoon hears drums or something. He thinks it's coming from a village up ahead."

Collins looked at the Vietnamese Marine officer who now stood, dusting off his tiger-stripe uniform. "Captain, what's up?"

"I think maybe alarm at Binh Thai," the Vietnamese officer said. "Villagers know we coming."

"You think they're VC? Maybe they're gonna hit us."

"Don't know. Maybe they just scared."

"Maybe they just VC, too," Collins said in a grunting voice while scrambling to his feet. "Let's move up." Glancing back at his radioman, the captain said, "Tell Lieutenant Vankat to move up and reconnoiter the village. Second and third platoons will follow in column at 10-minute intervals."

The drums grew louder as the three platoons snaked cautiously forward along the road's edge. The Marines had walked nearly 9 miles this morning. For the past 4 miles,

the road had followed parallel to a river called Tuy Loan. It then turned northwest and continued along the Binh Thai River. On the column's left, low trees and brush grew along the river's bank while further, across the water, a bluff that ranged from 30 to 50 feet high extended into the distance. Trees and thick undergrowth flanked the right side of the column.

"Sounds like someone hammering steel," Collins said, tilting his ear toward the north. "Definitely an alarm of some sort."

Eddie Adams was jogging ahead of Collins' platoon, trying to get closer to the front, when the first volley of gunfire cracked through the air in an echoing cascade.

Bill Vankat and his platoon had broken out of the tree line that flanked the roadway and moved through an expanse of semi-dry rice paddies 300 meters wide by 400 meters long, cutting diagonally across them, heading directly toward Binh Thai proper, which stood at the far right-hand corner of this huge clearing.

Vankat's platoon had shifted from its column formation to on-line, and was halfway across the paddies when the first volleys of gunfire erupted from the village directly ahead. His Marines immediately dove for cover, and machine-gun fire from the trees on their left front began chewing through the field around them, sending black clods and debris flying skyward. Before Vankat's platoon could return fire, more small-arms and sniper fire chopped into the paddies from the knolls that stood across the river to their rear and left flank. They were caught in the three-way crossfire of a well-executed L-shaped ambush.

The Viet Cong had massed an organized company reinforced into Binh Thai. There, they sent out a platoon with a machine-gun section to set up a position right of the main force, 150-200 meters southwest of the village. Establishing the long axis of the L, another rifle platoon consisting of small arms, automatic weapons and snipers dug in across the river on the crest of the knolls 300 meters south-southwest of the village proper. This left the remaining VC to operate from a series of trenches, tunnels and fortified positions within the village.

When the first shots echoed through the trees, Carmine DelGrosso and his platoon rushed up the road and rapidly moved on-line along the southern edge of the fields, just outside the tree line. Once there, second platoon knelt in the knee-high grass that bordered the rice fields.

When DelGrosso looked back, he saw Collins and the third platoon running to positions among the trees to his rear.

"Sir, what now?" he asked his captain.

Collins was calm, yet in his typical rapid-fire manner of speaking assessed the situation and in a matter of moments decided on his company's battle plan. Normally, to counter an L-shaped ambush, the best move is to take out the long axis and turn on the enemy flank. But the river stood as an effective barrier, scrubbing that idea. The captain's only other reasonable option was an envelopment from the strong side.

"Vankat's gonna assault from the front and give us a base of fire," Collins said. "You sweep to his right and establish a frontal attack. We'll take third platoon and envelop around the end of your line."

DelGrosso rushed back to his men. Eddie Adams ran at his side, camera up, stopping a second to snap photos, then running again.

"Okay, men!" the lieutenant shouted as his Marines jumped to their feet. "Fix bayonets!"

When Eddie heard that order — "fix bayonets" — he couldn't believe it. He had never been in a "fix bayonets" situation, ever. Now, as each Marine quickly snapped the long blade beneath the muzzle on his M14, a shudder quivered through the photographer's body. "This is it! Action! Better than any John Wayne movie. But it is no movie. This is real!"

As the reality of the fight struck Eddie's consciousness, so did the gunfire's chatter. Bullets cracked overhead and snapped through the knee-high grass. He felt suddenly vulnerable. And somewhere in the midst of feeling extremely mortal, like a tattoo on his soul, that proud part of him that still called itself "Marine" left his heart swelling as he photographed these kids — his blood brothers — led by a skinny 20-year-old lieutenant, leaning at the fire, moving fearlessly forward, bayonets fixed.

"I'm hit!" a nearby voice cried out. Eddie let down his camera and looked to see a sprawled Marine with blood spreading across his face. Without a thought, Eddie fell to his knees and huddled over the youngster. A bullet had creased the side of the Marine's head and left a long cut cascading blood down his face. The sight of it proved much worse than the actual wound.

"Corpsman!" Eddie shouted. "Damn it! Corpsman, get over here! This guy's hit!"

Near the rear of the advancing third platoon, a corpsman huddled next to a tree that shielded him from the direct line of fire. He looked at the photographer kneeling beside the downed Marine and felt fear lock every muscle in his body.

Eddie saw the Navy "Doc" huddled beside the tree and became angry.

"You! Corpsman!" Eddie shouted. "I'm really getting pissed! Get over here. Now!"

The last syllables had no more than left the photographer's lips than the corpsman bolted from the tree's protecting cover, ran through the gunfire and squatted at the side of the bleeding Marine. Eddie patted the "Doc" on his shoulder, stood and then ran to DelGrosso's advancing platoon.

Days later the corpsman would tell Adams, "I was really scared. I couldn't move! But I saw you out there ... no weapon ... just your cameras. I thought, if you could be out there like that — so could I."

Later that year, the corpsman received the Silver Star Medal for valor in a subsequent battle.

At the moment that the first shots cracked overhead and he called for his forces to make a hasty advance forward, Collins turned to see the 38 Vietnamese Popular Force troops running for their lives.

"They were at high port — running like hell — headed the other way, last time I saw them," the exasperated captain shouted

Continued on page 99

SOF INTERVIEW

BRIG. GEN. GRAMAJO

Defending a Democratic Outpost

by Morgan Tanner

Photos by David Bjorkman/National News Service

SOF interviewed Guatemalan Minister of Defense Brigadier General Hector A. Gramajo at the National Palace in Guatemala City earlier this year. The ornate, century-old palace lay in shadows at 1800 hours, the time of our appointment, and the only footsteps echoing in the cavernous halls were those of Gen. Gramajo's bodyguards.

As minister of defense, Gen. Gramajo is second in command only to President Mario Vinicio Cerezo, Guatemala's first civilian president in 16 years (and the second since 1954). At 46, the general is energetic and compact. He spoke of Guatemala's continuing struggle against communist subversives:

SOF: Guatemala has now begun receiving $5 million in U.S. aid for spare parts. What does the Guatemalan army need the most?

GRAMAJO: What we need is time. If we have a period of time without serious threat from subversives, and without serious involvement in international or regional problems, we can increase our readiness by repairing our equipment. We need a time of peace so we can reinforce ourselves with more training.

In material resources, it depends on the threat. If we face an external threat, we need anti-tank and antiaircraft weapons. If we face an internal threat, we need more communication equipment, transportation and coordination with other government agencies. But time is paramount.

SOF: Has the new civilian democracy approached the issue of fighting the guerrillas differently than in the past, when the army headed the government?

GRAMAJO: No. Anyone opposing us with a weapon is outside the law. So the commander-in-chief — our president — is directing us to comply with the law.

SOF: So is the army now run exactly as it was before your new president was elected in December 1985?

GRAMAJO: It is not exactly the same. We have kept the focus, but perhaps changed the methods. We say we are fighting *friamente profesional* or, in English, "very cool, very professional, without personal involvement." We are fighting as an institution — not as individuals or as a group.

We strictly adhere to the principles of how an institution must fight. For example, it costs more to fight with uniforms and military trucks, but it is the price of being an institution.

We don't fight more than duty demands, because we don't have anything personal against the subversives. You have to understand that we are facing Guatemalans. So we have to keep calm and fight very coolly.

SOF: In your opinion, what is the main problem facing the United States in Central America?

GRAMAJO: The main problem is political, within the greater framework of the East-West conflict. In this framework, you have the whole spectrum of conflict ranging from Star Wars down to disinformation and the sabotage of international political forums. If the problem in Central America were just a military one, it would be easy for the United States because you have the resources to make war.

But the major problem is political. And the major influence on that is your own country's national opinion of how to deal with political problems outside the United States. This helps or hinders the outcome of the East-West conflict.

SOF: What is the main problem facing Guatemala?

GRAMAJO: In the national context, it is the economy. Even the military who were in power in 1983 when the Kissinger Commission came here told Kissinger, "Our priority isn't military aid, it is economic aid." But in the perspective of Central America, Guatemala embodies the more democratic way of life, and the economy here is not the worst. We perceive ourselves as being in very bad shape, but not in very, very bad shape, as the others are.

SOF: If you could leave a thought with SOF readers, what would it be?

GRAMAJO: Most of your readers belong to associations that are very deeply concerned with the threat of communism. In Guatemala, the communists here magnify any social and economic problems we have, but the underlying problem is actually international communism. Without saying it in any written agreement, we are, in fact, the outpost of the United States in fighting this common enemy.

"In the perspective of Central America, Guatemala embodies the more democratic way of life."

"The underlying problem is actually international communism. ... We are, in fact, the outpost of the United States in fighting this common enemy."

"In Guatemala, the communists magnify any social and economic problems we have."

PARAS OF PUERTO SAN JOSE

ABOVE: Former *paracaidista*, now a rigger, packs a chute — one of the 10 to 12 he packs in one day. This chute was packed in under 20 minutes. The date and name of the packer are written on the parachute's control card. The master ledger records the type, serial number, number of jumps used, reason for repacking if it was not used for a jump, packer's name and date. *Paracaidistas* routinely reject a chute that was packed more than three months previously.

Short on Equipment, Long on Determination

by Morgan Tanner

Photos by David Bjorkman/ National News Service

ABOVE: Learning how to handle himself at the moment of disembarkation, this *paracaidista* trainee gets ready to jump from the door of an old C-47 wrecked during World War II. In this case, land is only a foot below. When he touches ground, he counts out four seconds, head tucked and elbows over ears, before he looks skyward and shouts *"¡Cúpola!"* checking the imaginary green chute above him.

PARACAIDISTA trainees bellow a slogan about paratrooper supremacy into Guatemala's early morning sky and run out onto the grassy training field. While they're in jump training, the troops tromp around at full speed despite the humidity of this tropical base. Only officers and instructors are allowed to walk.

But morale among paratroopers is as high as the planes they jump from. At the end of the 30-month stint, re-enlistment is 40 percent.

"We're jumping elite," says one jumpmaster.

"Our mission is to maintain constant readiness and be able to move troops out in the fastest time — 90 minutes. That's what makes the difference between this base and the others," says the base commander, Colonel Juan Marroquin. "We train hard, and we're proud."

By 0700 hours, when troops report to the training field, they have spit-polished their living quarters and downed eggs, beans and bread. During the 21-day program, they'll train until 1745, except for a break to eat lunch and maintain their uniforms. Before they turn in at 2100 hours, they'll make time for any corrective activities, such as pushups.

"Ready?" The jump sergeant's query is a command to the troops outside the mottled hulk of an old and grounded C-47.

After days of leaping off ramps, keeping feet and knees together as feet, calves, knees, thighs, then dorsals contact the earth, they're ready. They duck into the cool, dark Dakota.

"Attention," the instructor snaps.

"We're going to jump!" they thunder in reply.

"Hook up," he commands.

Metal contacts metal as they comply. The instructor takes them through the static-line check, equipment check, the count.

"Go to the door," he shouts. They shuffle forward, bootleather buffing the fuse-

A DECADE AFIELD

Morgan Tanner is a correspondent for the Colorado-based National News Service with more than 10 years' experience covering foreign conflicts. Tanner's most recent article for an Omega Group publication was "Passing the Torch in Nicaragua" (SOF Action Series: *Soldiers of Freedom*, February '87).

ABOVE: "Hitting the silk," Guatemala style. *Paracaidista* makes a practice jump from a Dutch-made Fokker. Armed with a Galil 5.56mm assault rifle with folding stock and equipped with a T-10 main chute and T-10A reserve chute, this paratrooper is headed for an LZ on the *paracaidista* base near Puerto San José.

lage floor.

"Jump," he commands each one, dispatching him airborne with a sharp swat on the ass.

In the sandpit a foot below the door, each tucks his head between his elbows, waiting for the would-be chute to open above him, counting the seconds like a catechism: *"Mil uno, mil dos, mil tres, mil cuatro. . .*

"¡Cúpola!" each one shouts, gazing up at the imaginary billowing silk. *"¡Paracaidista!"*

But something only a jumpmaster can detect is wrong with this one's stance. The cure is pushups, and he's soon pushing down Guatemala, toes on a rock, so he won't repeat his mistake.

"I must be very demanding to get perfection," the jumpmaster says afterward. "They will need it when they perform a tactical jump."

Guatemalan *paracaidista* training is modeled after the U.S. course, and many of the older officers are well-versed in Fort Benning, Georgia, and Buckley Field, Colorado. In fact, the 12-square-kilometer *paracaidista* base near Puerto San José, on Guatemala's Pacific coast, was a U.S. base from 1939 to 1949.

Guatemala's elite airborne began in 1961 with 60 select personnel and has grown to nearly 2,000 men — 1,500 on the base and 500 reporting to other army units. In 1986, the *paracaidistas* sent troops to stifle subversives in the northern departments of San Marcos, Petén, Quiche and Alta Verapaz.

"This is a support base. Our men are sent out as needed, for as long as six months," says Col. Marroquin. "When everything is under control, they return here to receive further anti-guerrilla combat and jump training."

ABOVE: During training patrol, *paracaidistas* prepare to fire FN MAG58 7.62mm GPMG.

BELOW: After jumping off the 34-foot tower, this *paracaidista* trainee practices a malfunction exercise. He climbs down his reserve chute because he is "stuck in a tree."

Once new trainees get the routine in the C-47 down pat, they move to a concrete configuration of an Arava for practice.

Guatemalan *paracaidistas* jump from two planes: the C-47 and the Arava. The Arava can pass the jump zone at 110 knots and carry 16 with two pulling lines. The C-47 jump speed is about 90 knots, and it carries 22 with two pulling lines. At one point, they flew the Fokker, but the model they used couldn't travel slower than 115 knots for jumping, and the sides of the doors tore at static lines, probably because it wasn't intended for military use.

"But we couldn't buy more C-47s or Aravas, so we used what we had," says one instructor. "They are very tight with money — a closed, choking fist."

On the training field, once the stone planes have been mastered, the trainees practice on the gyro, learning to control the chute during descent with movement to the left and right to control the landing, and also how to handle emergencies, such as falling into trees, water and high-tension cables.

But it's in leaping out of the 34-foot tower that the *paracaidista* meets his fear as he buckles into a harness and jumps into the emptiness. Usually 65 men graduate from

an initial class of 70.

"Some of them just can't conquer their fear," says the jumpmaster.

For the last exercise, almost anticlimactic after the tower, trainees lie on their backs on the 400x1,000-foot jump zone. To give them experience for fighting a wind-blown chute, they're dragged by a jeep.

"This is our simulated wind tunnel," the jumpmaster jokes, as the trainees try to clamber to their feet or unfasten the harness.

Real, airworthy planes are hard to simulate, however, and the *paracaidistas* find it hard to get enough actual jump time due to a shortage of aircraft. In early 1987, only two of 12 transports sitting in hangars at the air force base in Guatemala City were operable. "Maintain to the Maximum" is the motto the Guatemalan army successfully lives by, but baling wire goes only so far in making up for a lack of spare parts.

There's also a shortage of helicopters to deliver food and ammo to rural areas where the guerrillas control roads. According to one air force pilot, only three UH-1 Hueys were airworthy in early 1987, and two Fokkers sitting in Holland weren't paid for. The C-47s are flown only when necessary, as are the Bell 412 helicopters, which cost $4,000 an hour to fly, according to the pilot.

"Not being able to get training planes affects our practice," says one jumpmaster. "We send in our requirements, then modify them because there are no planes. We have a tough air force and, if one of the planes is down, they'll fix it and fly it in even if they have to come at night, even if it breaks down again. But it's a problem."

The problem is a result of an embargo on U.S. military aid since 1977, when President Carter cited human rights infringements as justification for cutting aid. The Guatemalan army was in dire straits by 1980, when the guerrillas were pounding in. The country responded by manufacturing its own ammo, uniforms, knapsacks, web gear and 15 armored vehicles. But spare parts were in short supply.

For fiscal year 1986, the United States has designated $5 million in "non-lethal" aid to Guatemala, primarily for spare parts for ground and air transportation. In May 1987, Guatemalan President Mario Vinicio Cerezo met with President Reagan in Washington, and another $5 million in aid has been promised for fiscal year 1987, according to the U.S. State Department.

"With this, we are putting our planes in good flying condition," says Guatemalan Minister of Defense Brigadier General Hector A. Gramajo. "We have had problems, but by July [1987] we will have most of our planes flying."

But whether the *paracaidistas* are jumping 1,250 feet into battle from the door of a C-47 or 3 feet off the back of a military truck, they stand ready to fight. Short on planes, they're long on determination.

"If the location is perfect, we'll land," says Col. Marroquin. "If there's time, we'll go by surface. We can replace planes by walking or by trucking troops. In the type of war we're fighting, planes are for transportation only. It's the men that count."

For the trainees, the last step in the 21 days of training is that first step out of the plane. For most, it requires a quantum leap of courage and faith in the jumpmaster.

"Ninety-nine percent of these men have never flown in a plane before they go up and jump out," says the jumpmaster. "They make it because high discipline and courage are the duty here."

The reward is a diploma and the wings that signify *Paracaidista*.

Continued on page 96

ABOVE: *Paracaidista* carries standard-issue Galil 5.56mm assault rifle on swamp penetration segment of training patrol. Guatemalan paratroopers can be transported to steaming, swampy, coastal lowlands or to the cold mountains of the central highlands at the drop of a chute. They train to operate in diverse terrain and varying weather conditions.

LEFT: *Paracaidista* runs the grueling obstacle course under the intense tropical sun. This new course, the largest in Guatemala, weaves through the jungle, making for stiff training. If a trainee fails a certain segment, he must redo it, along with doing the mandatory "pushing down Guatemala" pushups.

SOF EXCLUSIVE

GUNS BEHIND THE GREAT WALL PART 2

China's Hind-Killer HMGs

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

This is the second of an eight-part series documenting SOF's intel coup behind the Bamboo Curtain, where Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, Technical Editor Peter G. Kokalis and Contributing Editor Bob Jordan conducted extensive tests and evaluations of People's Republic of China military small arms at a People's Liberation Army weapons facility previously off-limits to foreigners. Our staff wishes again to thank the PRC government for its gracious invitation to the SOF test team to freely examine, on location and unhindered, that country's military hardware.

NO matter what its cyclic rate, the sharp, painful pounding of a heavy machine gun can be instantly distinguished from its more feeble cousins. But do 80-pound machine guns firing ammunition designed in World War I really have any legitimate applications in modern counterinsurgency warfare? You bet they do.

Russia's Model 38/46, caliber 12.7x108mm heavy machine gun remains a principal weapon in the inventory of the Afghan freedom fighters. While originally designed to penetrate light vehicular armor and now overshadowed by Stingers and Blowpipes, the "Dashika" has popped its share of Soviet aircraft. In El Salvador,

LEFT: PLA soldier employs the Type 77 in antiaircraft role.

BELOW: Type 77 HMG's superb new optical antiaircraft sight.

BACKGROUND OF 12.7x108mm HMG ROUND

As a result of General Pershing's demand for a large-caliber machine gun, John Browning commenced development of an up-scaled version of his .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun in July 1917. It took Browning little more than a year to complete his efforts, using a cartridge based upon the German 13mm anti-tank cartridge.

Soviet work in this area did not start until the early 1930s and eventually resulted in the DShK 38 (Degtyarev Shpagin Heavy Machine Gun — 1938). Based also upon the 13mm German round, the 12.7x108mm cartridge's case is 9mm longer than the U.S. .50-caliber case (12.7x99mm). At approximately 765 grains, depending upon the bullet type, its projectiles are about 50 to 60 grains heavier than the U.S. equivalents, and performance is marginally superior. Muzzle velocity, usually about 2,750 fps, is almost 100 fps slower than the U.S. round. Both are exceptionally accurate and reliable.

Most commonly encountered 12.7x108mm rounds are Armor Piercing (AP), Armor Piercing Incendiary (API), Armor Piercing Incendiary Tracer (API-T) and sometimes a High Explosive Incendiary (HEI Type ZP) with a flat-tipped, hollow-point projectile containing an air-gap fuze and PETN explosive charge. Handle this latter cartridge with caution.

The metallic "push-through" links are non-disintegrating and difficult to charge by hand. I have observed the mujahideen beating fresh cartridges into these belts with rocks.

ABOVE: SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown firing Type 77 HMG in People's Republic of China.

RIGHT: SOF Technical Editor Peter G. Kokalis fires PRC Type 54, caliber 12.7x108mm HMG. Note huge fireball which invariably throws burning powder embers back into the operator's face.

Immediate Reaction Battalions have found John Browning's .50-caliber M2 HB (so-called "Ma Deuce") to be an effective long-range antipersonnel weapon.

Military planners in the PRC are equally convinced of the HMG's utility on the modern battlefield. During SOF's recent trip

TYPE 77 METHOD OF OPERATION

Patterned directly after that of the M16 series, the method of gas operation is unique for a weapon of this type. There is no traveling piston. A long gas tube, attached to the gas block (which contains a three-position adjustable regulator) on the underside of the barrel, connects to a shorter segment on the receiver with a piston-shaped head. This hard-chromed, double-ringed head mates with a hollow extension on the bottom of the bolt carrier that projects below the receiver. Gas traveling down the tube impinges directly onto the bolt carrier to blow it rearward during the recoil cycle. Empty cases are ejected downward through a port in the bottom of the receiver. After the bolt group has been driven rearward to compress the multiple-strand recoil spring, it strikes the sealed buffer (a series of saucer-shaped Belleville washers) in the spade-grip assembly and commences forward in counter-recoil.

Locking is by means of two "flappers" resting in curved notches on each side of the bolt head. As the bolt group moves into battery, the carrier pivots these flapper-shaped locking lugs into recesses on the sides of the tubular-shaped receiver body (of both increased diameter and fluted in the area below the feed mechanism). The bolt carrier continues forward in free-travel to strike the firing pin and drive it against the cartridge's primer. During counter-recoil the locking lugs pivot back against the bolt head.

Firing is from the open-bolt position. Due to the decreased mass of the reciprocating parts, the cyclic rate has been driven upward to 760-780 rpm. There is no provision for semiautomatic fire.

When the curved, sheet-metal trigger bars adjacent to each spade grip are pulled rearward, they drive a steel rod forward to rotate the sear downward, away from its bent (notch) on the bolt carrier. Releasing the trigger bar permits the spring-loaded sear to pivot upward and catch the bolt carrier before it travels forward. A safety lever on the right side of the sear housing can be rotated to block the sear in its upward position.

A padded shoulder brace can be inserted into the end of the buffer housing when the weapon is employed in the antiaircraft role.

The shuttle-type feed mechanism, duplicating that of the Type 54, permits feeding from the left side only. In this instance the open hook on the feed lever engages a round knob on the left side of the bolt carrier's bottom extension. Also reminiscent of the Type 54 is the steel rod, attached to a bracket on the tripod's pintle and connected to the bolt carrier by means of a removable pin, which is used to retract the bolt group for charging or clearing the weapon. The end of this retracting rod has been bent to the right and fitted with a finger-grooved plastic handle.

behind the Bamboo Curtain, we had the opportunity to thoroughly test and evaluate two PRC HMGs, one a direct copy of the Russian Model 38/46, the other a new and unique lightweight 12.7x108mm gun never previously exposed to Western small arms authorities.

PRC's Type 54 HMG in caliber 12.7x108mm is an exact duplicate of the Russian Model 38/46.

PRC Type 54 HMG

All PRC small arms carry type designations indicating the last two digits of the year of adoption or commencement of development. Those with type designations in the 50s range were invariably Soviet clones. The Type 54 (1954) HMG is an exact duplicate of the Degtyarev Pekhotnyy (DP) Model 38/46 machine gun. This weapon was itself a modification of the DShK 38, which featured a rotary feed system designed by G.S. Shpagin. In 1946 this rather complicated feed mechanism was replaced by the more conventional shuttle system used on the RP46 (a belt-fed version of the pan-fed DP).

While usually encountered mounted on armored vehicles, pity the poor grunts who have to tote the ground version of this horrendous weapon. Sans the barrel, the receiver group alone weighs 78.5 pounds, empty — 18.5 pounds more than Ma Deuce. Add another 28 pounds for the barrel and you can see why it's commonly dragged along the ground on a wheeled mount. Let's not forget the ammo load either. Each 70-round belt comes close to 35 pounds. Overall length of the Type 54 is 62.5 inches.

Barrels on the DShK 38 were difficult to change and this problem was also addressed when the Model 38/46 (PRC Type 54) was developed. Using the combination tool usually supplied with the weapon, you need only unscrew the barrel lock's retaining nut, push the barrel lock to the side and pull the barrel forward and out of the receiver. Since the barrel has no carrying handle, removal

TYPE 54 SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber: 12.7x108mm.

Operation: Gas operated with adjustable three-position regulator. Flapper-type locking lugs. Fire from the open-bolt position. Employs conventional slide and piston.

Cyclic rate: 550 rpm.

Feed mechanism: Conventional shuttle-type with feed lever pivoted by operating stud on slide. Seventy-round non-disintegrating metallic belts with "push through" links. Feeds from right or left.

Weight, empty, without tripod: 106.5 pounds.

Weight, tripod (Type 54-1): 64.3 pounds.

Length, overall: 62.5 inches.

Barrel: Eight-groove with a right-hand twist of one turn in 15.2 inches. Chrome-plated chamber and bore. Radial cooling fins.

Barrel length: 42.1 inches.

Sights (ground): Hooded, post-type front; adjustable for windage and elevation zero. Open, U-notch rear, sliding tangent-type; adjustable for elevation in 100-meter increments from zero to 3,300 meters; windage adjustment knob on base.

Sights (antiaircraft): Double rings for two-man operation; assistant gunner aligns sight by means of hand crank; lead gauge on gunner's ring.

Finish: Black oxide and phosphate; hard-chromed gas components.

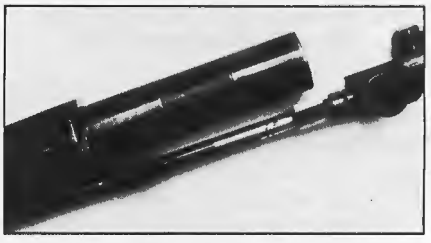
Accessories: Spare belts, ammo chests and padded shoulder braces.

Status: Currently in production; in service with the People's Liberation Army.

Manufacturer: PRC government arsenals.

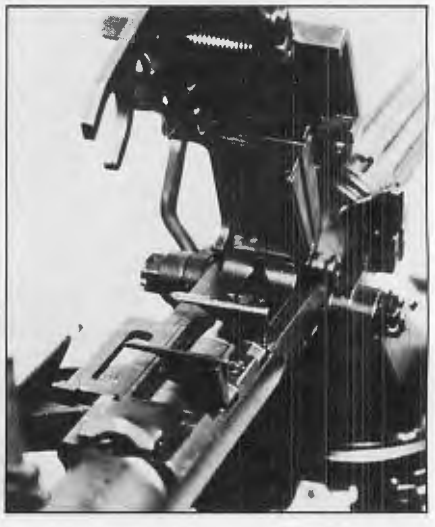
Exporter: Poly Technologies, Inc., Dept. SOF, 5/F, Citic Building, 19, Jian Guo Men Wai Street, Beijing, People's Republic of China.

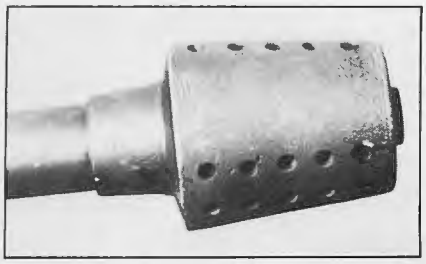
T&E summary: Sturdy and reliable; excellent accuracy potential and high hit probability; heavy; barrel has no carrying handle and its radial cooling fins are of dubious value; excessive muzzle flash; antiaircraft sight requires two operators and is slow to place in action.



ABOVE: Type 77 HMG uses the M16's method of gas operation. Gas tube under barrel connects with shorter segment under receiver, which mates with a hollow in the bolt carrier's extension outside of the receiver. Gas traveling down the gas tubes blows the bolt carrier rearward during the recoil cycle.

BELOW: Type 77 shuttle-type feed mechanism is very similar to that of Type 54 (Soviet Model 38/46).



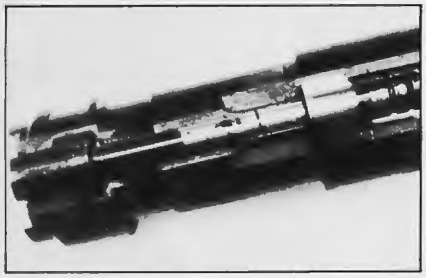


ABOVE: Type 77 muzzle brake effectively controls muzzle climb and flash, but its blast sends up swirling clouds of dust when the weapon is fired from the low prone position.

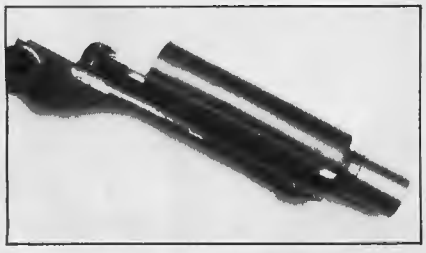
when it's overheated (precisely the time a barrel change is required) is still an unwieldy process.

Type 54 barrels have radial cooling fins over almost their entire length, supposedly to increase the barrel's surface area and improve the rate of heat loss to the atmosphere. In practice, however, the improvement in heat loss is minimal unless there is a constant air flow over the barrel. The majority of post-World War II weapons designs have abandoned cooling fins for this reason. Also, the labor-intensive machining process required to make the fins is not a cost-effective production technique.

These barrels are 42.1 inches in length. The bores have eight grooves with a right-hand twist of one turn in 15.2 inches. The distinctive bulbous muzzle device is moderately effective in controlling muzzle jump at the expense of considerable side blast and muzzle flash. Great balls of fire spew out of the muzzle and burning embers of propellant all too frequently fly back into the operator's face.



Short gas tube under Type 77's receiver ends with a piston-like hard-chromed head that mates with a hollow in the bolt carrier's extension.



Type 77 bolt carrier. Note extension which travels below receiver body and contains the round operating stud that pivots feed lever in a manner similar to the Dashika.

Both the ground and antiaircraft sights on this weapon leave a great deal to be desired. Little thought was expended on the design of the ground sights. A protected, round, post-type front sight can be adjusted for windage and elevation zero. An open, U-notch rear sight of the sliding tangent-type can be adjusted in elevation from zero to 3,300 meters (markings: 0 to 33) in 100-meter increments. There is a windage knob on the rear sight's base. Attempting to engage a target at 3,300 meters with an open

Continued on page 92

Type 77 HMG, fieldstripped.

TYPE 77 SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber: . . . . . 12.7x108mm.

Operation: . . . . . Gas operated with adjustable three-position regulator. Flapper-type locking lugs. Fire from the open-bolt position. Uses M16-type direct gas impingement on bolt carrier.

Cyclic rate: . . . . . 760-780 rpm.

Feed mechanism: . . . . . Conventional shuttle-type with feed lever pivoted by operating stud on bolt carrier's extension. Seventy-round nondisintegrating metallic belts with "push through" links. Feeds from left only.

Weight, empty, without tripod: . . . . . 65 pounds.

Weight, tripod: . . . . . 62 pounds.

Length, overall: . . . . . 86 inches.

Barrel: . . . . . Eight-groove with a right-hand twist of one turn in 15.2 inches. Chrome-plated chamber and bore. Fluted cooling fins.

Barrel length: . . . . . 40 inches.

Sights (ground): . . . . . Hooded, post-type front; adjustable for windage and elevation zero. Open, U-notch rear, sliding tangent-type; adjustable for elevation in 100-meter increments from zero to 2,400 meters; windage adjustment knob on base.

Sights (antiaircraft): . . . Optical with 2X magnification and multiple-ring reticle pattern; built-in sliding, neutral-density light diffuser; exterior lead gauge; auxiliary battery pack for night illumination.

Finish: . . . . . Black oxide and phosphate; hard-chromed gas components.

Accessories: . . . . . Spare belts, ammo chests and padded shoulder braces.

Status: . . . . . Currently in production; in service with the People's Liberation Army.

Manufacturer: . . . . . PRC government arsenals.

Exporter: . . . . . Poly Technologies, Inc., Dept. SOF, 5/F, Citic Building, 19, Jian Guo Men Wai Street, Beijing, People's Republic of China.

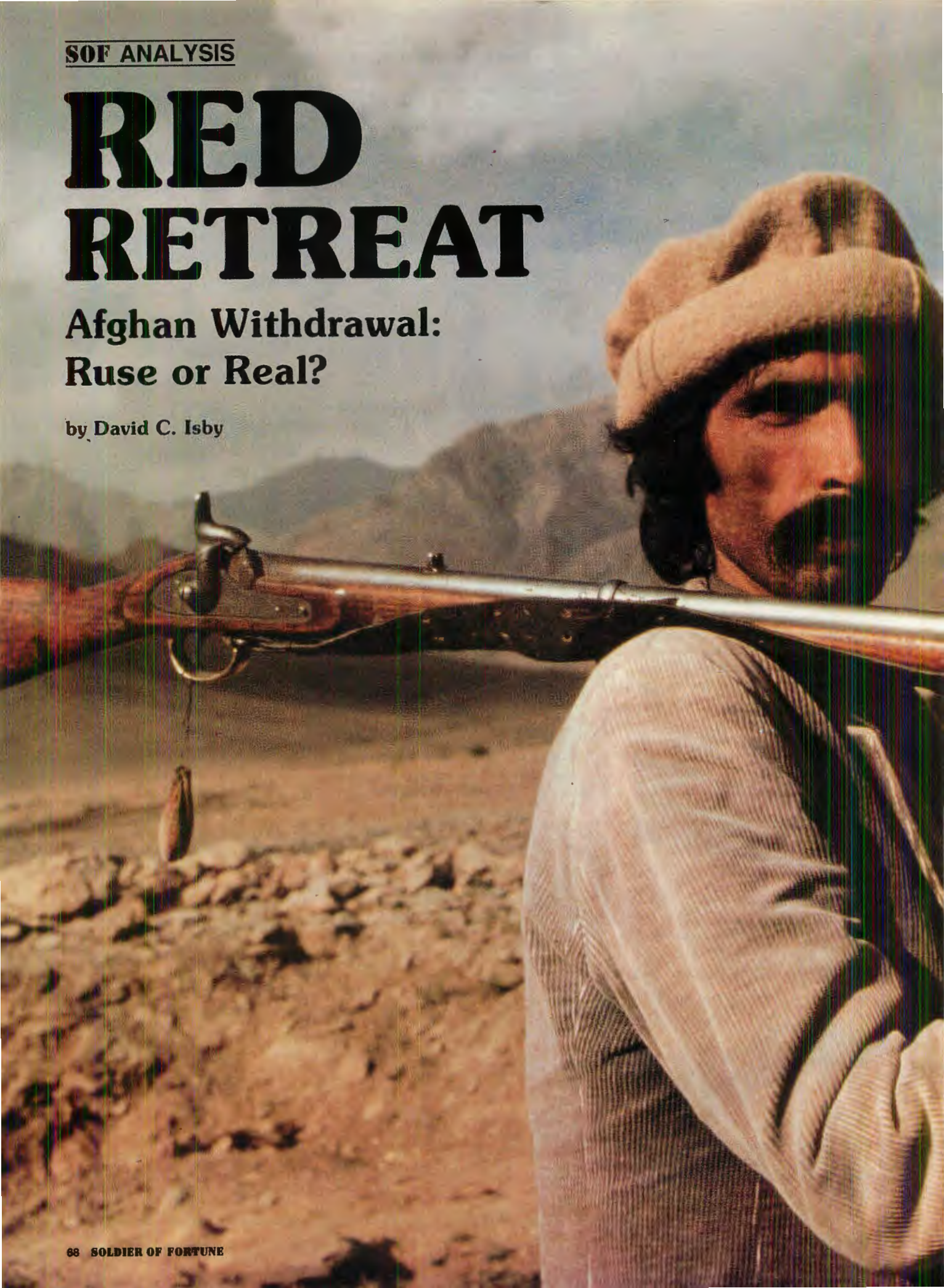
T&E summary: . . . . . Acceptable reliability; excellent accuracy potential and high hit probability; lightweight; carrying handle permits barrel to be easily changed when overheated; excessive muzzle blast; superb optical antiaircraft sight; outstanding dual-purpose tripod.

SOF ANALYSIS

RED RETREAT

Afghan Withdrawal: Ruse or Real?

by David C. Isby



THE Soviet withdrawal of six regiments — one tank, two motorized rifle, three air defense — from Afghanistan in 1986 and the announcement that more withdrawals will follow, whether or not a peace settlement is reached, have raised hopes in the West for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Are the Soviets serious about withdrawal? Probably only on their own terms — terms that are likely to be unacceptable to the vast majority of the people of Afghanistan. But the potential exists to convert what may be a stratagem of a withdrawal into the real thing.

Soviet soldiers do not always remain where they have once set foot. Soviets have withdrawn in the past from areas they have occupied. Stalin withdrew from northern Iran in 1946 in response to U.S. pressure. They withdrew, in the 1950s, from Austria and Finland after treaties were made guaranteeing those countries international neutrality but allowing them to have democratically elected governments in which the communists would play but a minimal part.

Elsewhere, the Soviets have also been willing to remove garrisons from countries where they think communist dominance would not be imperiled by the absence of the army. To facilitate this, they have proven to be even willing to tolerate some maverick behavior from countries such as Rumania.

Withdrawal need not follow only on battlefield defeat. Other governments have lost guerrilla wars that they were militarily winning up until the day they lost. The French in Algeria, the Portuguese in Africa, and the Rhodesians are all examples of militarily successful forces that still had to concede victory to much less militarily successful and adept guerrillas.

An analysis of Soviet initiatives involving Afghanistan in 1986-87 gives the distinct impression that the Gorbachev peace offensive does *not* represent a significant change in policy.

Today, as throughout the war, the basic Soviet goal is still to have a government in Kabul that is acceptable to Moscow. That is the bottom-line reason they invaded, and it is the reason they are still there, because such a government cannot be maintained without Soviet armed forces.

Despite their efforts to create a Kabul regime that could stand on its own in the

AFGHAN EXPERT

David Isby is widely known in military circles as an expert on the Soviet military. He authored the definitive *Jane's Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army* and *Armies of NATO's Central Front*. He has special expertise on Afghanistan and is the author of *Russia's War in Afghanistan*.

When he isn't traveling, Isby spends his time as a lawyer specializing in international affairs in Washington, D.C.

A mujahid from Wardak Province armed with a 130-year-old 12-gauge caplock shotgun made in England. He said his gun was "good for shooting partridge or Russians in the face." Photo: Philip Edwards

wake of the 1979 invasion and the redoubling of those efforts after the accession of Dr. Najib as head of state in 1986, the Soviets are still faced with a communist regime whose leader is probably more like a Red version of Baby Doc than Fidel Castro. Najib's base is still not significantly broader or stronger than Karmal's.

This lack of progress must certainly be painful to the Soviets. In the summer of 1979, before the invasion, the Soviets apparently, after a diplomatic mission by Deputy Minister of Defense Yepishev, realized that a government acceptable to Moscow would last only "x" months in Kabul without the presence of significant numbers of Soviet troops. The number represented by "x" is known only to the Soviets, but it was probably a single digit and not a very big one.

Today it may well be that all the years and all the casualties the Soviets have suffered have done nothing more than change the "x" months that represented how long a pro-Moscow government would last in Kabul in 1979 to "x minus" in 1987. It may well be that, without Soviet troops, a pro-Moscow government in Kabul would last only until sundown.

However, although the Soviets have not achieved their aims in Afghanistan and there has been no reduction in the war's intensity, it is not beyond the realm of possibility to hope for an Afghanistan without Soviet troops in the near future. It would, unfortunately, be foolish to hope for a Poland without Soviet troops, even though this would undoubtedly be the wish of the Polish people. A change that would result in the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland would be so extensive that it would require the fundamental alteration of the Soviet state. That is not impending.

But in Afghanistan, the Soviets have sent mixed signals. Afghanistan is not Poland. It is not so vital to Soviet geopolitics that it must be occupied. To the Soviets, in their doctrinal division of the world, the Kabul regime is only "a state in the national democratic stage of development." In the Marxist-Leninist-Gorbachev world view, this is a relatively low position. While there were signs of a strengthened relationship in late 1986, most especially an unprecedented visit of almost the entire Politburo of the quisling Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) to the Soviet Politburo, the Soviets have made a point of keeping their distance from the government in Kabul. Thus, while the DRA is economically dependent on the Soviets, it has not been economically integrated into the Comecon economies to the same extent as Vietnam or Cuba.

Afghanistan is not Gorbachev's war. He was not even a voting member of the Politburo when the decision was made to invade. He thus does not have the same degree of personal involvement in the war as his predecessors. Another example of the Soviets keeping their distance, and hence their options open, in regard to their relations with

ABOVE: Soviet BTR-152 armored personnel carrier destroyed in road ambush in Panjsher Valley. Photo: Mike Winchester

BELOW: Paintings done by Afghan children in refugee camps in Pakistan reflect the wave of death and destruction that drove them out of their homes. Photos: Jim Graves

the DRA is that there has not been any strong policy statement on the war as there was under Brezhnev.

Withdrawals are the most obvious policy change in 1986. They raised hopes that Gorbachev was prepared to change the overall policy on Afghanistan, not just pull out a number of regiments of limited combat usefulness. Yet the Soviets have talked about withdrawals in the past. In early 1980, they actually made a substantial withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. As in 1986, the withdrawal in 1980 consisted mainly of air defense and tank units that had minimal impact in war. It was also significant that these same units eventually came over the border again after the 1980 withdrawal. There is evidence that the Soviets have brought in more troops that have more than made up for those that were pulled over the border in 1986.

Why, if they were not intended to have a military impact, did the Soviets order the 1986 withdrawal? The 1986 withdrawal was playing to a number of audiences. It certainly had an impact on the Afghan supporters of the Kabul regime. Along with Najib's reforms, the withdrawal sent a message to the Afghan communists. If they do not straighten out and pull together under Najib, the Soviets will leave them to their friends and relations up in the hills, who will cut them into little pieces. One result of the 1986 withdrawal has been that some low-level DRA people have started to flow out of Kabul and into Pakistan, to distance them-

selves from the regime and to let it be known that their hearts were always with the Afghan resistance.

Withdrawals have also helped develop pro-Soviet sentiment in the Third World. Despite its lack of actual impact, just the announcement of the withdrawals makes it easier for the Soviets' few friends in the Third World — countries such as India and Syria — to justify to their own internal audiences their support for the Soviets on the Afghan issue.

It is also possible that the withdrawal is aimed at the Left in Europe. Though the European Left has been anti-Soviet on the Afghanistan issue, historically they have always been willing to believe the best of the Soviets. It is not impossible that they could be persuaded that it is now the United States that is prolonging the war.

This reflects a key policy difference between Brezhnev and Gorbachev. Brezhnev, in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate and what he saw as a weakening of U.S. worldwide strength, was more interested in what could be acquired in terms of Soviet influence worldwide, filling a vacuum he saw as emerging. Gorbachev is less interested in Brezhnev-era globalism. He would constrain this and the resultant tensions for the hope of the big prize — neutralizing Europe and then the United States in the moderate-term future. Thus, it is possible that Gorbachev could believe that any short-term geopolitical losses in Afghanistan would be more than compensated for if Europe or the Third World were persuaded by a withdrawal that the Soviets are really good guys and interested only in peace.

ABOVE: Mi-8 helicopter skimming the surface looking for mujahideen is "shot" instead by SOF contributor Mark Warman. Photo: Mark Warman

ABOVE: Wazir warrior with his 12.7mm DShK heavy machine gun. Weapon is generally used in an antiaircraft role by mujahideen. Photo: Jim Graves

The most important audience for whose benefit the 1986 withdrawal was made is Pakistan. Soviet use of the withdrawals to reach Pakistan must be seen in context with the long-running indirect Geneva talks between the DRA and Pakistan. Both of these are, in effect, part of a Soviet peace offensive. The Soviets realize that there should be no military offensive without a peace offensive. To the Soviets, diplomacy and force of arms are not polar opposites but simply different points in the spectrum of statecraft.

By always keeping open the possibility of Soviet diplomatic action to wind down the war, the Soviets hope to pre-empt the Pakistanis and their friends and allies, especially China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from taking strong diplomatic action of their own on Afghanistan. By holding out the hope of a diplomatic settlement on Afghanistan, the Soviets have ensured that no one wants to make a strong diplomatic move against them for fear of being perceived as spoiling an imminent agreement.

This Soviet aim was most apparent during the February 1987 meeting, in Kuwait, of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. There, following Soviet withdrawals and reports that in the Geneva talks all that remained to be resolved was the timetable for the Soviet withdrawal, there was no consensus for a strong action on Afghanistan. Neither Pakistan nor the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wanted to appear to disturb what may be a fruitful diplomatic process. The result: Afghan resistance did not get to occupy the currently vacant seat of Afghanistan in the conference, and therefore missed the chance to increase international recognition for the resistance. In Kuwait, there was no concerted push to make Afghanistan an agenda item. Maintaining a consensus in the Islamic world, which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia values especially highly in the wake of increased Gulf War fighting, took precedence over the Afghan cause. This must be seen as a success of Gorbachev's policies.

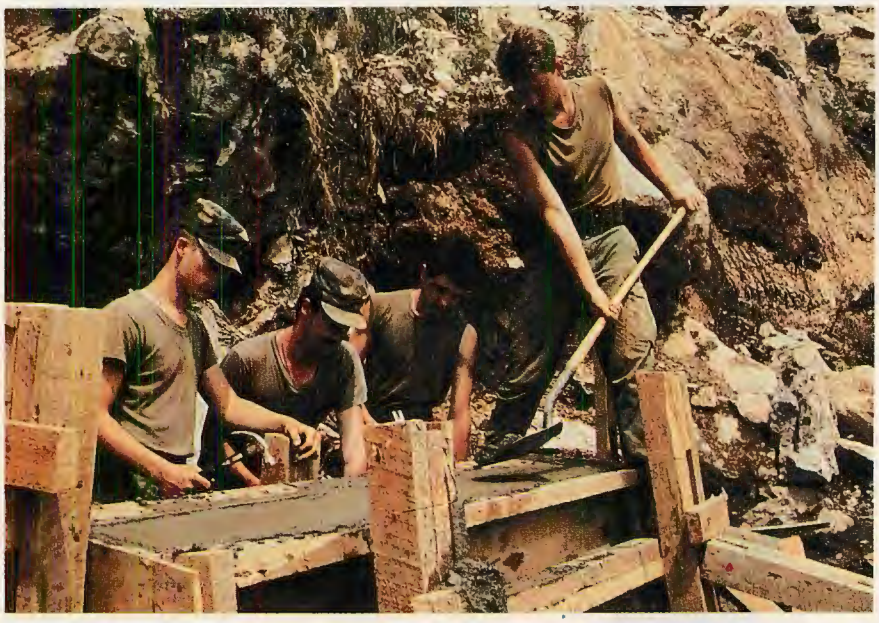
It is possible that the Soviets would like to withdraw, but they give every indication that they still want to win the war as well and leave Kabul in the hands of a government acceptable to Moscow. But any government acceptable to Moscow is not going to be acceptable to the vast majority of the people of Afghanistan, which is why the war has lasted since 1979.

Yet, for whatever reason it started, the process of withdrawal can develop its own momentum. Now is the time for those supporting the Afghan resistance to redouble their efforts. If all efforts were made to raise the cost of the war to the Soviets — militarily, economically and politically — it's possible that a continued withdrawal process would become their easiest option. Only this action will make an Afghanistan without Soviet troops more than a dream.

ROAD WARRIORS

U.S. Army Reserves Clear Path to the Future

Text & Photos by John Coleman



LEFT: "Those kids are here because they want to be, and they're busting ass doing a fine piece of work."

BELOW: Blazing Trails 87 — Exercise General Terencio-Sierra — "is a unified Reserve component effort that melds National Guard and Reserves in action. It's a total effort, the way we'd respond to any emergency." — Col. Terrence Mulcahy, Task Force 364 commander

IT'S only 5.5 kilometers — about 3.3 miles — of winding dirt road, blasted and carved out of rocky mountain sides, snaking its way through hills covered with pale green pine and across stream lowlands thick with dense, tropical shrub. Back in the States, you'd probably do your best to give it a miss unless you were out four-wheeling on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

But in central Honduras, that little stretch of road is the U.S. Army's pride and joy.

Blazing Trails 87, or by its Honduran name, Exercise General Terencio-Sierra, is designed to "conduct a field training exercise, construct 5.5 kilometers of farm-to-market road and represent the United States in Honduras." And, during SOF's brief stay with the troops of Task Force 364, based in Camp Oso Grande ("Big Bear"), about a five-hour drive north of Tegucigalpa, that mission was under a full head of steam.

Task Force 364, commanded by Army

ABOVE: Maintenance of the scores of heavy movers was one of the biggest problems during Blazing Trails 87. Equipment continually went down due to almost constant usage.

RIGHT: Maybe slow, but they get you there.

BELOW: Liftoff. Hills around Oso Grande and poor visibility due to smoke from slash-and-burn agriculture made flying something of a challenge.

Reserve Colonel Terrence Mulcahy, who served as a company commander with the Big Red One during his tour in Vietnam, is part of a joint U.S.-Honduran three-year program involving Army Reserve and National Guard units which deploy from the United States to Honduras, build their stretch of road and redeploy back home.

The project, designed to give Honduran farmers in the area the first usable access road they've ever had in getting their products to market, began in 1986 with Blazing Trails 86/Task Force 135 and was run mainly by National Guard forces from five states who built the first stretch of 9 kilometers of road. The concept was initially proposed by the Hondurans in the mid-1960s; Uncle Sam's involvement physically kicked off in 1986 and is expected to be completed in 1988.

For Col. Mulcahy and his staff, Blazing Trails 87 is just what the doctor ordered for Reserve and Guard engineers.

"Seventy-five percent of all the Army's heavy construction capacity is in the Reserve components," Mulcahy said during SOF's first afternoon in Oso Grande's tent city. "We just can't do this kind of training in the United States. They can prepare for training, but they have to be in the environment where you can do it properly. Here, the troops are blazing a trail, turning virgin timber into a finished farm-to-market road."

At first glimpse, cutting a mere 3-plus mile dirt road through the Honduran countryside would seem a relatively easy task — and it would be if there were permanent on-site engineers doing the job. Because this is a Reserve/National Guard effort, however, troops are continually rotating in and out for their annual active-duty call up. Task Force 364 called for 11 17-day rotations of personnel, Midwesterners under operational control of the 416th Engineer Command headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, with the first troops, Rotation 1, arriving on 11 December 1986 to set up the tent city at Oso Grande. Except for what are termed "duration" personnel — various staff, aviation and medical officers and troops, and regular Army soldiers manning the power generation unit — who'll remain on-site for the entire five-plus month project, everyone else pulls their 17 days and heads for home.

"The planning phase was absolutely intense," Major Randy Kopitzke, the former active-duty first sergeant and hard-as-nails Task Force Operations officer, said. "This wasn't like Reforger [the annual deployment of U.S. troops to Germany]; the institutional knowledge wasn't there. This hadn't been done over and over to where the process was akin to second nature."

But the bugs were worked out in the early stages, and by the time Rotation 8 came along in late April, the incoming and outgoing troops "physically passed each other at Palmerola [headquarters for Joint Task Force Bravo, the U.S. Army command in Honduras]," Kopitzke said. "Some troops

AIRBORNE *GRINGA* IN HONDURAS

American Lorri Marcil, 23-year-old chief of Liaison Office for the Honduran armed forces' *Relaciones Públicas,* has tucked some 200 military jumps under her harness. Photo: Lorri Marcil

In this line of work, you tend to run into a few . . . well, *unusual* people in your travels.

I was coordinating some of my activities in Honduras through the U.S. Information Service office across the street from the embassy in Tegucigalpa when I got the word: "There's someone in the Honduran armed forces public relations office you should meet. An American who jumps with the Honduran military."

SOF correspondent Steve Salisbury and I caught a cab, and a few minutes later were sitting in the fourth floor office of *Relaciones Públicas, Fuerzas Armadas.*

A young *gringa* came through the door and held out her hand. "Hi, I'm Lorri Marcil, chief of Liaison Office."

This was the airborne Yank? We settled down into a Q&A session.

"I've done 200 jumps with the Honduran military," she said. "Thirty-seven have been combat jumps."

That caught my attention. An American, and a 23-year-old woman at that, combat blasting with the Hondurans? But she didn't really mean airborning into war. I found out she used the term "combat jump" interchangeably with a standard military, equipment and weapons static-line blast. Impressive, nonetheless. And so is she.

After jaunting around the world as a "professional college student" for a number of years (and learning to speak five other languages — Danish, Swedish, German, Japanese and French — in the process), Lorri came to Honduras in 1985 to study and quickly picked up Spanish — language number six.

She became involved with a local jump club, "The Eagles of the Air," made up mainly of officers and senior NCOs of the Honduran 2nd Battalion Infantry Airborne. With her free-fall background (some 300 jumps back in the States, her first at the ripe old age of 16), she was quickly accepted.

After a demonstration jump for an official function, she caught the eye of some senior Honduran army officers and was offered her present job with armed forces public relations, a post she's held since December 1986.

In exchange for running swimming classes for troops of the 2nd Battalion, Lorri has since been able to jump the Honduran air asset stable, which ranges from C-130s and C-47s to Chinooks and Hueys, both static line and free fall.

Her highest jump? Forty-two thousand feet, free-falling with oxygen. Lowest? Eight hundred on a static line.

On that final note, Salisbury and I thanked Lorri for her time and headed back out onto the streets of Tegucigalpa.

"You know, that girl's mad," Steve shouted over traffic while deftly dodging a moped and a wildly careening taxi.

Coming from a guy who'd spent more than six years living in Central America and covering its wars firsthand, it was quite a compliment.

— cooks and MPs — are flown out [to Oso Grande] and are working within three hours."

For the approximately 475 engineer and support troops of Rotation 8 — fresh out of the frigid Midwest — Honduran humidity, 95-degree temperatures plus the immediate transition from civvy street came as something of a shock.

"You have the problems of acclimatization and frame-of-mind changeover," Task Force S1 Major John Plahovinsak explained one sweltering afternoon in his canvas tent office. "They're expected to go to work right away."

"It took me about three days to get used to all this," one young trooper out on the construction site said during a break from clearing the fledgling road of rock with his bulldozer. "Within a couple of hours, they had me out here pushing this rig, and it's not something I do for a living back home.

"But I'm really enjoying this now," he continued, wiping the sweat off his face with a rag. "Back home we'd spend our (call ups) digging stuff like tank traps, then filling them in again. Here, we're leaving something behind for these people to use."

Beyond the road, another legacy left by Task Force 364 will be good will in the form of medical and other civic action projects. Few peasants in this isolated area of north central Honduras had ever seen a medic, much less one dressed in a U.S. Army uniform. But their fear of the military, founded upon years of conscription and harsh treatment by the Honduran forces, quickly melted away.

"When we'd first go in, all we'd see were the women and children. After they realized what we were there to do, the old men with their machetes would sort of drift in, then the younger men," Staff Sergeant Sharon DeForest, Patient Administration NCO for the Task Force's medical detachment, told SOF. "We'd fly out to local villages, check out the needs of the villagers, conduct an environmental site survey and spend about three days with them. Their problems were mostly internal parasites, dental, and rashes, and we'd treat them."

Another hugely successful medical program was the "storefront" clinic set up by the sandbagged entrance to Oso Grande. Every day, swarms of Honduran civilians lined up to be treated for, as DeForest put it, "every problem imaginable."

"You see a lot of the same faces every day," SSG DeForest, one of the duration medics, said, "stocking up on pharmaceuticals they won't be able to get when we leave."

Such was the trust built up between the medics and their patients that, during the period December 1986 through April 1987, more than 5,000 Hondurans were seen and treated.

Perhaps the biggest impact on the local population, though, came from the civic action program and the troops themselves. Major Rafael Quintero, Task Force S5 officer, had the responsibility of coordinating scores of self-help and distribution programs throughout the area.

TOP: You can't build a road — at least one that goes the right way — without surveyors.

ABOVE: Although road building shut down at night, quarry operations ran around the clock.

"I grab whatever equipment I can that isn't being used on the road for civic action," he said in his ops tent, filled to overflowing with clothing and food destined for the locals. "We blaze new trails for the people to use, level the ground for schools and a football field."

He pointed to a large flip chart covered with numbers and dates. "It's the soldiers who make the difference. Each rotation brings down more clothing, school supplies and other donations."

The numbers *were* impressive. From December to April, Reservists and Guard personnel contributed 15,320 pounds of clothing for 591 families, 3,430 pounds of MREs (lunch for the troops at Oso Grande), and school supplies for 1,181 students.

"It's not just donations, though," he continued. "We do the distribution; there's a tree reforestation project to replace those torn up by road building; we help repair the hospital; we're building a school and adding on to another one; doing swimming hole construction; and my one big project is supplying the finished materials for 300 school desks, to be built by the Hondurans."

(Even the aviation detachment, CO'd by Major John Hibbs and ramrodded by Sergeant First Class Clark, held its own fund-raising effort to build two local schoolrooms by holding after-hours beer and lobster parties. ["It's all purchased on the local economy, too," Clark was quick to emphasize.] At Oso Grande, where the mess hall and a small PX were the only alternatives for food, lobsters made a hit: The Huey drivers were able to raise more than 2,000 *lempiras* ($1,000) to help build their schoolrooms.)

"My one big problem is that we're getting too many letters, too many requests for help that we just can't handle," Major Quintera said with more than a bit of frustration in his voice. "But the locals are highly positive. They see us working with the Honduran armed forces; they respect what we're doing. They're fighting the war of poverty;

Continued on page 92

This revolution goes beyond our borders. — Sandinista Interior Minister Tomás Borge, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 19 July 1981.

WHEN Congress next votes on aid to the Nicaraguan resistance, the outcome will stretch far beyond the impact of speeches or election-time votes. If the contra guerrillas fighting the communist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua are not funded by the United States, it will lead to a communist victory in the Nicaraguan civil war. With the Sandinistas in control of Nicaragua, assuming that they continue with their avowed policy of exporting revolution, the United States may well face the following alternatives in the 1990s: communism approaching the Rio Grande; having to make great efforts to support Nicaragua's democratic neighbors; or being forced to commit U.S. troops for an invasion of Nicaragua. Without the Nicaraguan resistance, or contras, one or all of these unpalatable consequences will be inevitable.

The United States has vital interests in Central America. These vital interests helped lead to the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 — long before Teddy Roosevelt, the Panama Canal, or commercial interests or investments. Then the United States was willing to use military force, along with diplomacy and other elements of statecraft, to safeguard these interests. The world has certainly become a more dangerous place since long-past 1823. Military force must still back up our efforts, be they diplomatic or economic.

The Monroe Doctrine was aimed, in part, at deterring colonial expansion into the western hemisphere by Russia. The United States knew then that having Russian colonies in the Americas was not in its national interest, much as today neither a Soviet client state nor a revolutionary state nor a repressive dictatorship in Central America is in the interest of the United States. Under the Sandinistas, Nicaragua is all three.

If the United States ever has to use armed force to oust the Sandinista regime, whatever the result on the battlefield, it will have demonstrated not so much the capability of our armed forces, but the weakness of all our other measures of demonstrating international strength and will. An invasion of Nicaragua would be an American victory, but it has the potential of being a victory with great cost. If we win on the battlefield, it will only be because we have lost elsewhere.

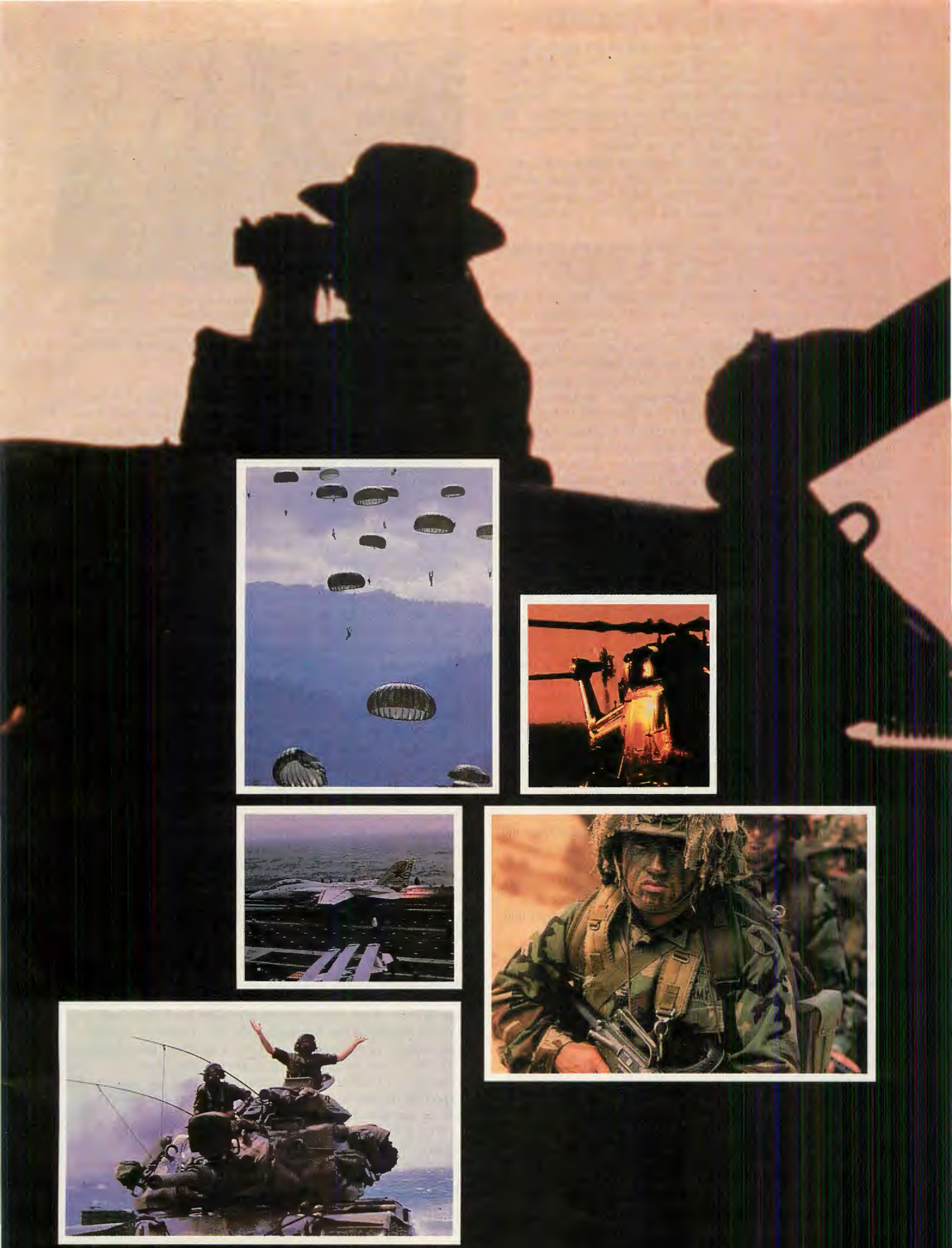
Nicaragua: The Client State

Any inclination the Sandinista leaders gave of wanting something other than a Leninist system in Nicaragua was, as they admitted several times, for tactical or strategic purposes, not for reasons of substance. . . . [The Sandinistas gave]

SOF CENTRAL AMERICA

NICARAGUAN INVASION — THE FINAL OPTION?

by David C. Isby



themselves meekly to the Soviets in exchange for more and more weaponry. In a sense, they sold themselves for the means to stay in power in the face of failed policies and widespread unhappiness. — Pulitzer Prize-winning author Shirley Christian, *Revolution in the Family,* 1985, p. 306.

Nicaragua is a Soviet client state. Soviet policy is to support "national liberation movements" and avowedly Marxist-Leninist regimes. The Soviets are willing to back up their belief in Marxism-Leninism with money and arms, as has been seen throughout the Third World for the last generation. They at least have the courage to aid those willing to fight for goals the Soviets share.

Client-state status has given the Sandinistas some advantages. Large amounts of military hardware, fuel and civilian aid, including food to make up for the disastrous domestic agricultural policies, have been supplied. In the first half of this year, the Soviets delivered more than $300 million worth of weapons to the Sandinistas — about *nine times* the amount provided by the United States to the Nicaraguan resistance in that period. Additionally, the Soviets have mobilized their friends, supporters and sympathizers worldwide — especially among the left in the West — in the name of "solidarity with Nicaragua" pursuant, in the words of author John Barron, "to the objective of installing Marxist regimes in Central America."

The Soviets certainly gain from their relationship with the Sandinistas. While not a single Soviet-owned airplane, ship or submarine is currently in Nicaragua (the one Antonov twin-engine reconnaissance aircraft, a type that has seen much action in Afghanistan, has apparently gone home), the Soviets do have potential air, land and sea bases throughout Nicaragua. Because the Soviets already have the Caribbean covered from bases in Cuba, the Pacific coast is especially interesting to them. Nicaragua also provides a base for Soviet political and economic penetration northward toward Mexico, a prize the Soviets value far more than Nicaragua.

But the Soviets have hedged their bets. They have refused to wholeheartedly embrace the Sandinistas. In Soviet terms they are not a full-fledged socialist state, but rather remain in the "national democratic stage of development." To a Communist Party ideologue, all this means a grade of Not Good Enough. The Nicaraguans have also not received full membership in the CMEA, the Soviet-bloc international economic organization. The Soviets have been reluctant to supply Nicaragua's fuel needs on credit, while they spend about $4 billion per year subsidizing Fidel Castro's Cuba. Another expensive commitment in North America may not be high on the Politburo's list of priorities.

Another reason the Soviets have kept their distance from the Sandinistas is, perhaps, to send a signal to the United States that an invasion would be unlikely to lead to direct confrontation. Indeed, some might say that Mikhail Gorbachev would be the person with the most to gain in any possible invasion because it would give him a propaganda windfall that could serve Soviet interests far beyond Nicaragua.

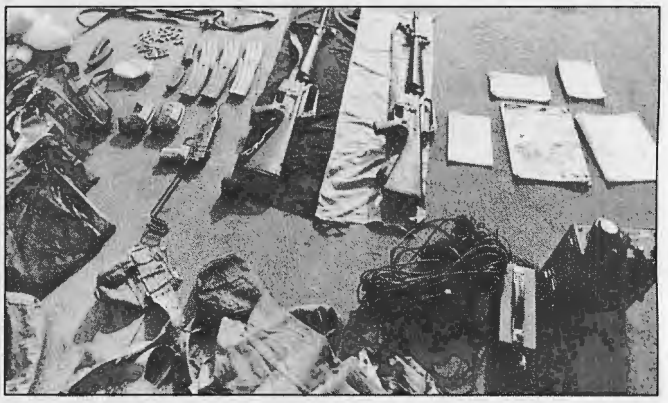
The Soviet Union already has received much of the military advantage of having a client on the mainland of North America through Cuba. While it is harder to work internal penetration of Latin American nations from an offshore base, Cuba has had years to establish networks, train agents and fund sympathizers. Cuba provides the Soviets with extensive naval, air and intelligence bases.

However, the Sandinista threat to the United States runs far beyond Soviet bases or even forces. Nicaragua is committed to exporting its revolution.

Nicaragua: The Revolutionary State

In 40 years of Somocismo, we never had the threat that we have in four years of Sandinismo. — Luis Alberto Monge, president of Costa Rica, December 1983.

A Sandinista regime committed to exporting "revolution without frontiers" is a potential disaster for Central America. In Central America, the Reagan years have seen the emergence of democracy in countries where it has never been seen before: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have all joined Costa Rica in being ruled by elected governments rather than dictators. An inept dictator is Moscow's best friend: Somoza made the Sandinistas possible more than Castro did.



These weapons captured from Salvadoran guerrillas came from Nicaragua. In the future, support for a "revolution without frontiers" could take form of Sandinista Soviet-built tanks moving along the Pan-American Highway toward Tegucigalpa or San José. Photo: U.S. State Department

Today there is cause for guarded optimism. The internal terror in Guatemala and El Salvador has been brought under control. The communist guerrillas, while still active and capable of inflicting casualties, are clearly on the defensive. While the military enjoys more sway than is good for it in these three new democracies, it remains under as firm control as it is anywhere south of the Rio Grande.

Part of the credit for this must go to the Nicaraguan resistance. Since the Nicaraguan civil war has intensified, the Sandinistas have had to curtail their support for a "revolution without frontiers." This is not only because the weapons and resources that might be used to support communist guerrillas in other countries are needed at home, but also because the Sandinistas want to preclude their neighbors becoming more hostile toward them.

But while the emergence of democracy is hopeful, there are long-range problems. Populations are growing in Central America; opportunities are not. The economies of these countries are based on exporting commodities; today, commodity price levels are at their lowest overall in over a decade. These countries' lack of energy resources makes them vulnerable to future price increases. The continuing Latin American debt crisis presents more problems.

Farther north, Mexico's vast problems make it a powder keg that could dwarf Iran under the Shah. Even without Nicaragua, the situation in Mexico is dangerous; with a communist base near its borders, the situation in Mexico could become disastrous indeed in the near future.

Even if the Sandinistas do not act immediately to export revolution, they will remain a threat for decades. Cuba reduced its attempts to export revolution for almost a decade after communist insurrections failed in Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Bolivia in the 1960s. It was only after the Soviets and Cubans perceived that the worldwide "correlation of forces" had changed in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia that Castro re-emphasized support to guerrillas in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. If the Sandinistas stop exporting revolution even for a decade, it does not mean they will be harmless forever.

With a Sandinista regime waiting to provide arms and training for guerrillas, fund communist parties and act as a safe haven for *insurrectos,* a dangerous future may become an explosive one. It was the Sandinistas who recruited and inserted Cuban-trained Honduran guerrillas over the border in 1983. The Sandinista commitment to a "revolution without frontiers" is not an empty one. They have already acted to back it up. In the

future, this could take the form of Sandinista Soviet-built T-55 tanks moving on the Pan-American highway toward Tegucigalpa or San José. But as this would probably bring the U.S. military into the picture, the weapon of choice will probably be guerrilla warfare, supporting internal insurgents and subversion.

It is often stated that diplomacy can provide an answer to the threat of Sandinista destabilization in Central America without any need to fund the Nicaraguan resistance. Diplomacy, even when coupled with economic sanctions, has proven a failure at stopping Cuba, Libya and Iran in their attempts to export revolution. Force without diplomacy is often force wasted, but diplomacy without the backing of force is often even more impotent.

Nicaragua: The Repressive State

In the American continent, there is no regime more barbaric and bloody, no regime that violates human rights in a manner more constant and permanent, than the Sandinista regime. — Nicaraguan Red Cross President Ismael Reyes, "The Genocides Continue in Nicaragua," *Diario de las Americas,* 11 November 1983.

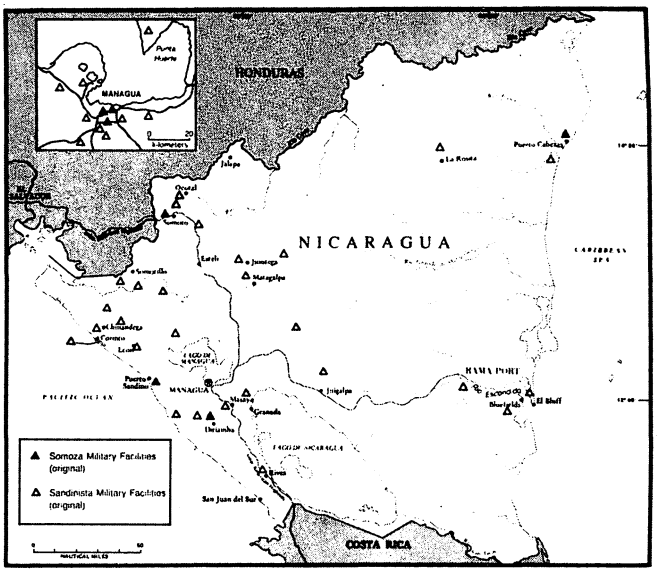
The issue of human rights has become an integral element in U.S. foreign policy. Under the Reagan administration, human rights has not been simply a bludgeon to strike our friends. It has been more skillfully used, in the Philippines, Korea, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti, to help bring about changes that should lead to stronger, more democratic governments better able to resist both internal subversion and external aggression. If the United States has an interest in these countries, then it has an interest in democracy and human rights in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas are the antithesis of the progress in human rights that has been going on elsewhere in Central America. Sandinista repression is creating refugees heading north — though only a fraction of what a communist takeover throughout Central America would create.

Even the Sandinistas' apologists have had a difficult time recently. The most recent human rights innovation in Nicaragua has been depopulating the countryside in areas of the highlands, removing *campesinos* who have been increasingly supporting *los niños,* "the boys," as they call the guerrilla groups moving down from the north. Forced resettlement is a long-standing staple of Marxist (and non-Marxist) counterinsurgency. It demonstrates that the hearts and minds of Nicaraguans in the countryside by no means belong to the Sandinistas. The evidence is that in the last two years the Nicaraguan resistance has benefited more from a rising tide of discontentment against the Sandinistas than from the outside aid it has received.

The Sandinista human rights record remains dreadful. Their oppression of the Miskito Indians and the Atlantic coast black Creole population, reminiscent of the darker days of the 19th century, would have doubtlessly produced an international outcry if carried out elsewhere. The suppression of the press, of individual liberties and religion is well-documented.

One reason the Sandinistas have not pressed their campaign to turn Nicaragua further toward more orthodox communism and to crack down harder internally is because of the Nicaraguan resistance. As long as the civil war is going on, moves to further restructure religion in the Sandinista vision and to clamp down further on trade unions, media and the economy will have the effect of increasing support for the Nicaraguan resistance. If there were no Nicaraguan resistance, the Sandinistas would have no incentive to hold off, especially since such actions would likely increase their standing with the Soviet Union, to which the sight of independent trade union leaders and opposition journalists outside of a prison camp is a sign that truly effective government has not yet taken root.

The human rights record of the Sandinistas is important, however, because the Sandinistas are actively trying to export their system of government. The human rights situation in much of Africa and Asia is rather dreadful, but few of these regimes are trying to turn their neighbors into clones of themselves.



Conventional Sandinista forces hold key areas throughout Nicaragua, including towns, airfields, Managua and the area between Managua and the Pacific coast, as shown on this map. Map: U.S. State Department

Whatever one thinks of the internal policies of the Republic of South Africa, they are not seeking to create "apartheid without frontiers."

The Means

United States interests in 1987 are for a Central America with no Soviet client states, no revolutionary communist regimes committed to "revolution without frontiers," and in which democracy and human rights flourish. To achieve these goals, the United States has the options of supporting the Nicaraguan resistance, supporting a wide range of diplomatic and economic actions, and/or resorting to armed force.

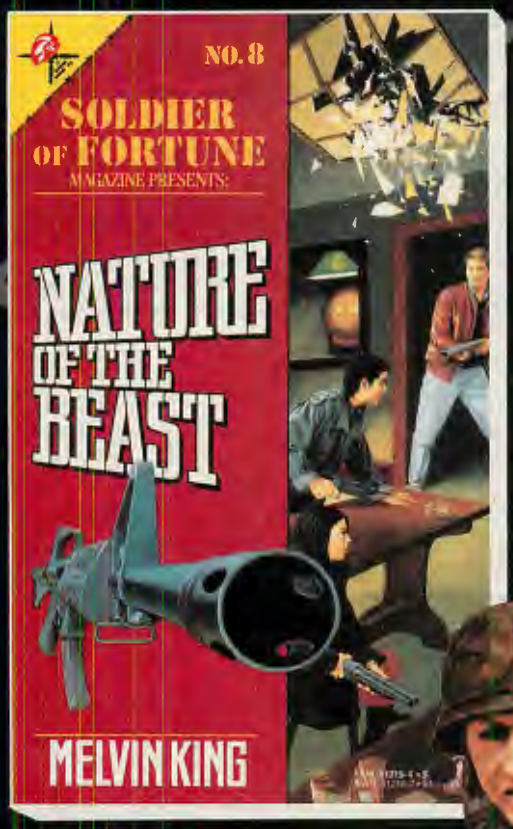
Central America's air would be much purer without the Sandinistas. The Nicaraguan civil war offers the United States what may be the easiest and most effective way of realizing its interests in Central America. A resistance success need not be total. If the Sandinistas can be forced to abandon their roles as Soviet client, exporter of revolution and oppressor of their own people, then the resistance will have won even if their fighting men have not marched through the center of Managua.

The resistance has already had success in reducing Sandinista support for communist guerrillas throughout Central America and in preventing the Sandinistas from cracking down harder on human rights. If the resistance were to be defeated, it would not only remove the chance of them gaining a larger success, but would also reduce the impact these successes have had on the region.

While the U.S. media makes much of the alleged lack of battlefield successes by the resistance, a success, such as taking a town, that would register on the U.S. media would require a massing of forces that would present a superb target for the Sandinistas' Soviet-built and (at least partially) Cuban-manned Mi-25 Hind-D (export version of the Mi-24 Hind-D) attack helicopters and their long-range Soviet-built 152mm D-20 howitzers and BM-21 122mm multiple rocket launchers. The successful guerrilla fights "the war of the flea" and does not shift to conventional operations until they have the strength and training to sustain them.

The resistance needs U.S. support, firm and predictable support, if it is to wage an effective guerrilla war. All successful guerrilla forces, whether they win militarily or politically, need a secure base. Sometimes this base is internal, but more often, especially when the enemy has complete control of the air, it must be external. The resistance needs cross-border bases as much as the guerrillas did in Rhodesia or South Vietnam. These bases will not be there if the United States does

TO KILL OR BE KILLED. THAT IS THE IMPERATIVE.



Garrett is a mercenary so ruthless and skilled his services are in demand around the world. But he's had enough of soldiering. Until terrorists kidnap the only woman he ever loved. Now, with his veteran buddy from special forces, he's back in action. In a big, bad way. And before the party's over, the blood will flow.

ON SALE IN OCTOBER

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not show itself willing to back the countries that contain them.

But, with limited U.S. support, which might be put forward as a political compromise acceptable to Congress, there is no guarantee that the Nicaraguan resistance will win. In Latin America, most insurgencies have failed. Much as the press likes to portray communist insurgents as motivated and often victorious, they have only succeeded in Batista's Cuba and Somoza's Nicaragua, countries with regimes corrupt and unpopular even by comparison with their neighbors and possessing weak armed forces with no will to fight. It is possible that the only thing American aid delivered in small driblets will yield is a long, drawn-out Bay of Pigs.

Another option is economic and diplomatic action. Many in the United States still have too much of a tendency to see this as being the opposite of military action, rather than its necessary accompaniment. Certainly more can be done. In Europe, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev has seemingly produced new arms control or diplomatic initiatives on a near-monthly basis. There is no reason why the United States could not do the same in Central America.

The diplomatic isolation of the Sandinistas, combined with strong efforts to strengthen other regimes in Central America and so hold the line against the Sandinistas short of Mexico or the Rio Grande is an obvious solution. Yet it may not be the permanent solution. It would require lots of money to overcome the long-range problems of Central America — perhaps more money than the U.S. Congress or a future administration would be willing or able to spend. It would also require a great deal of patience, another commodity that short-term-oriented U.S. policy finds hard to provide. It would mean coming to grips with the distrust of the United States by just about all the governments in Latin America.

A broad range of approaches and initiatives is necessary, but the politicians' glib line that "the United States needs to rely more on diplomacy and less on saber-rattling" does not recognize that success in diplomacy is no more guaranteed than success in the guerrilla war.

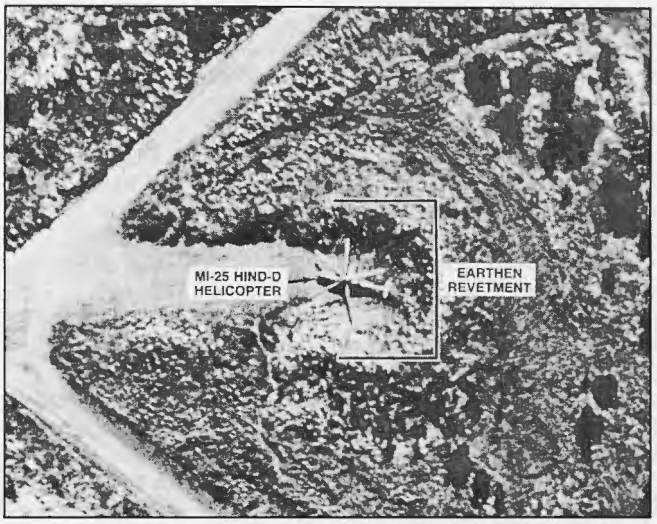
The Sandinistas have also demonstrated their willingness to flout international agreements — such as the promises given to the Organization of American States on their domestic policy. They have also used international initiatives, such as those of the Contadora Group of nations or Costa Rica's President Arias, as diplomatic fig leaves to cover their actions while they continue the war against the Nicaraguan resistance. While El Salvador's president, José Napoleón Duarte, has negotiated with the communist guerrillas in that country, the Sandinistas still refuse to open any negotiation with the Nicaraguan resistance. They seem to be betting they can ride out any diplomatic or economic sanctions and that, in the end, their military strength will prevail. If this is the case, the solution may also have to be military in nature.

Military action, the third option, ranges from provision of U.S. advisers and commanders for the resistance to surgical air strikes, a naval and air blockade, mining of ports or, if a final resolution is required, invasion. This cannot be discounted. In the end, if the first two options fail, the American people will have to decide whether or not they are willing to fight to achieve national goals in Central America.

Invasion

Today, great powers cannot have small conflicts. When Teddy Roosevelt's big stick was factory-fresh, cruisers and Marines could determine events in Latin America with little cost, either domestically or internationally. Today, the exercise of any U.S. military option in Nicaragua is not going to come cheap. It will be condemned domestically and internationally, which should not be surprising considering how 55 U.S. trainers in El Salvador were seen by the left as a resurgence of Yankee imperialism during the first Reagan term.

A full-scale invasion of Nicaragua is not the only military option the United States has for achieving its policy goals. A naval and air blockade of Nicaragua, possibly accompanied by mining, would lead to few, if any, U.S. casualties. Results,



The United States might opt for a surgical air strike against the Sandinista helicopter force, their most important single weapon in the war against the contras. Here, an aerial view of an Mi-25 Hind-D helicopter in Nicaragua. Photo: U.S. State Department

however, would not be immediate. Unlike Libya, where a quick cutoff in oil exports and food imports would have had fairly dramatic results, a blockade on Nicaragua would take longer to have an impact although, without oil and food coming in, the economy would eventually grind to a standstill. Of course, much of the impact would fall on the Nicaraguan people, pro- or anti-Sandinista, and the crisis would allow the regime to rally popular support and crack down further on the internal opposition.

For U.S. policy makers, the use of airpower without a ground commitment has always been a relatively attractive way to use military force. Losses can be minimized (although getting back shot-down aircrew may be a problem) and it can be a one-time action. However, fighter-bombers are not precision political instruments. The whole series of "surgical" air strikes against North Vietnam in 1964-65 which preceded the more intense Rolling Thunder bombing campaign did not diminish the will or capability of North Vietnam to continue the war. On the other hand, the 1986 strikes against Libya did apparently lead to a direct reduction of Libyan support for terrorism.

If the United States were to use a surgical strike, it could lead to the destruction of the Sandinista helicopter force, their most important single weapon in the war against the resistance. This would certainly help resistance efforts, although it is unlikely to be decisive in itself. If, however, MiG-21 Fishbed jet fighters were to be deployed from Cuba — and there have been repeated reports of Sandinista aircrew being trained on such aircraft — to Nicaraguan airfields, it would so alter the Central American balance of power that a surgical strike would become an important U.S. policy option.

But of all the options for the use of U.S. military force, only a full-scale invasion would be guaranteed to remove the Sandinista government.

For an invasion to be seriously considered, the U.S. domestic political situation would have to change. This could come about as a result of actions by the Sandinistas which undercut their support, or by a changing perception that the situation in Central America really is important to the future of the United States and that a long-term policy of taking the course that results from the broad compromises of U.S. politics may simply not be adequate to the realities of a harsh and dangerous world.

The U.S. military would probably be the last people who would like to see an invasion of Nicaragua. The military does not want to fight another war with a significant domestic opposition (although, historically, all U.S. conflicts except the Second World War have had extensive domestic political opposition). The U.S. military certainly does not want to see

money they want for modernization and rebuilding of the force structure going into operations funds for a war. The military would also have to change its perceptions of the situation in Nicaragua before it started to see an invasion as the possible result of the failure of other policy tools.

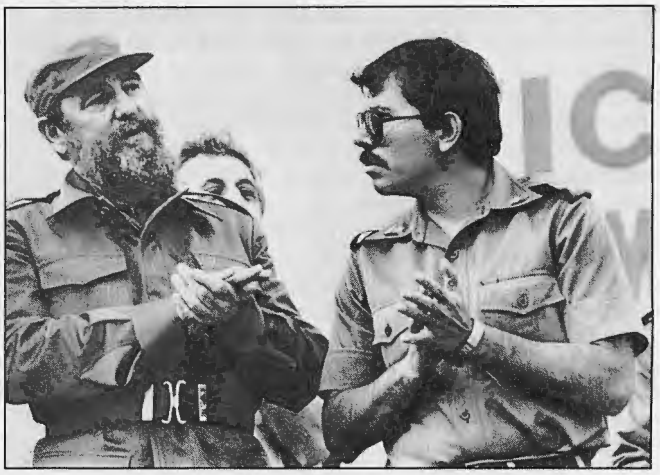
Mikhail Gorbachev would probably love to see a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua. True, he would probably not like to see his client state go under, but the Soviet Union has lost a western hemisphere client (Grenada) and a would-be client (Chile) before without affecting the flow of its foreign policy. In the 1980s the Soviets have been less enthusiastic about taking on the burden of having more poor overseas allies that need large infusions of Soviet aid, from MiGs to oil to food. So, losing Nicaragua would not necessarily lead to much wailing in the Kremlin. Rather, it may lead to rubbing of hands in glee at this opportunity to rally all of Latin America against the *yanqui,* while portraying themselves as its defender. It would be an ideal tool to sow dissension in the Western alliance, part of the Soviets' long-term effort to decouple Western Europe from the United States. The United Nations and the Third World could be counted on to see the Soviet point of view.

The Soviets would do everything in their power to see that an invasion of Nicaragua became Vietnam. From the Soviet perspective, Vietnam not only soaked up a decade of U.S. defense spending, led to another decade in which U.S. forces were hollow and are only now recovering, greatly reduced U.S. prestige and power worldwide, and allowed the Soviets to cement their control over the Vietnamese communists. If they were to lose Nicaragua but could split the Western alliance or gain leverage in, say, Mexico and Brazil, it would be a very good trade indeed.

A U.S. invasion of Nicaragua would fall basically into two parts. First, the invasion itself — the defeat of whatever Sandinista military units stand and fight in a "conventional" battle and the occupation of Managua and other cities, the transportation net, including the airfields, and other critical targets. The second, and probably more difficult, part would be dealing with the resulting Sandinista guerrilla war and setting up a non-communist Nicaraguan government that can carry on the war against the Sandinistas and run the country as effectively as, say, the government in Guatemala has done in recent years. The Sandinistas obviously realize that their chances for success are greater in the second part than in the first. Even if they cannot repulse a U.S. invasion, they can hope to increase the political cost with a prolonged guerrilla war. The main questions are therefore political: Can the non-communist Nicaraguans set up a government that would enjoy broad-based support and be able to carry much of the burden of the counterguerrilla war? Would the Sandinistas have sufficient popular support, weapons and logistics to carry out a long-term guerrilla war against an anti-communist Nicaraguan regime installed in the wake of a U.S. invasion?

The invasion would probably have to involve the other democratic governments in Central America. As with the U.S. public and the U.S. military, existing attitudes in other Central American countries would probably have to change. Politically, joint action is a key to any use of military force. The U.S. intervention in Grenada in 1983 involved the armed forces of friendly Caribbean nations. U.S. troop commitments to Lebanon, Southeast Asia and Korea were all framed in the context of international efforts. Having El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica along would probably be a political necessity, even if their armed forces would have only a limited role to play, being oriented primarily toward counterinsurgency at home. By providing forward bases for U.S. forces, however, they could make an invasion much more effective.

For an invasion, the United States would have to start forward deploying forces into the region, along with stockpiles to support their operation. Amphibious warfare shipping would have to be assembled on both coasts, along with carrier and battleship task forces. The Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)



Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega chats with his mentor Fidel Castro. If the Sandinistas aren't turned away from avowed policy of exporting revolution, we may have to confront communism at the Rio Grande. Photo: AP/ Wide World

headquarters would have to be expanded for operational command of a vastly increased number of forces. The amphibious component, which would probably require almost all of the U.S. Navy's amphibious warfare capability, would probably consist of one to one-and-a-third Marine divisions with their supporting air units, divided between both oceans, with the Pacific Ocean forces being much more significant. The 82nd Airborne represents the Army's primary "forcible entry" asset. It would move from Fort Bragg to a forward base, preferably a Central American country, or at least to Texas. It would certainly play a vital role in any invasion. The 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division, with its many helicopters, would be invaluable in the limited road net and bad terrain of Nicaragua. In its case, forward deployment in a neighboring country would be the best way to deploy. If not, it would have to be flown into an airfield seized by the Marines and paratroopers.

The Army's light infantry divisions would also be an appropriate force for a Central American contingency. Their light equipment is not only suited to low-intensity operations against an enemy without many tanks, but it also allows them to be airlifted in fewer sorties than a standard division. While they are not seen as having a forcible entry capability, they could arrive by air or sea to follow up the Marines and paratroopers or could move overland after assembling in an adjacent country.

The Army's Rangers constitute part of the "forcible entry" capability and would undoubtedly be heavily involved, as would a wide range of special operations forces. Special operations forces would prove vital in both stages of a military operation in Nicaragua. In the opening stage, they would be used to prevent organization of effective resistance. Restrictive rules of engagement for the use of airpower will be necessary in order to minimize casualties among a potentially friendly Nicaraguan civilian population. Therefore, many targets that might otherwise be hit by air strikes may have to be hit by special operations forces in the opening stages of an invasion.

In the beginning of the counterguerrilla phase of the campaign, U.S. forces would probably be heavily engaged, hopefully weakening the guerrillas enough for U.S.-trained anti-communist Nicaraguan forces to take over most of the fighting within a few years, sooner if the Sandinistas have less popular support than they currently imagine. Special operations forces would be vital not only in offensive anti-guerrilla operations, but in training Nicaraguan forces.

In an invasion, the Air Force would join with the Navy in a preliminary strike, disabling any Sandinista air assets, such as their helicopter force or MiGs (if there are any flown in

Continued on page 107

T&E

IMPS

by Tom Slizewski

IMPS is a revolutionary new concept in lightweight all-weather tent design, combining versatility with first-rate construction. Shown here are two IMPSs used together to make a two-man shelter.

COLORADO'S forecast called for sunshine, mixed with sunshine, with a 90-percent chance for more sunshine — this wouldn't do. My assignment was to extensively test the U.S. military's new Individual Multipurpose Shelter (IMPS) system — not spend a week in Jamaican-style weather with it.

I needed to know how IMPS would hold up through hellish weather and hard humping. I needed blistering heat, monsoon rains and hurricane winds to do a serious evaluation.

This called for a change of locale.

Help soon came from an old friend residing near South Dakota's Badlands. He informed me they were experiencing scorching heat during the day and downpours and dropping temperatures at night — perfect. I made plans to spend a week there.

After the 400-odd mile drive, my legs were begging for exercise. A half-day hike with full pack soon re-established my circulation and put me deep in Black Hills country.

Though I hadn't set up IMPS in more than five months, I still managed it in under seven minutes, without referring to the instructions; by the end of the week, I could set up or pack up in less than five minutes.

I initially tested IMPS on a snowy Colorado night in February and it held up admirably, providing more than adequate protection from cold and moisture. However, a more extensive test was in order for what will soon be standard-issue military gear. IMPS is already in use by U.S. Army light infantry units and some Special Forces and Marine Recon groups. By the end of 1988 it should be well on its way to replacing the poncho and shelter half.

My test IMPS featured rugged, 5-ounce laminated nylon with urethane vinyl coating woven into the fabric to provide wind- and water-proofing; all seams are double stitched and a small mesh window provides air flow.

Two shock-corded poles support the shelter. These poles are intentionally made longer than they need be. The added length is used in constructing the two-man and larger shelters. This expandability is an innovation uniquely suited for military use. Simply put, the more IMPS shelters you have, the larger the shelter you can build. A single IMPS makes a one-man shelter, two IMPSs used together make a two-man shelter, and 10 IMPSs will house an entire squad or serve to shelter a large amount of equipment.

All openings are at least three inches above the ground, making IMPS perfect for setting up in such cover as trenches, where water accumulation is a problem. I was forced to make camp on wet ground several times and every morning I woke warm and dry. Basically, IMPS can be set up anywhere short of in a running stream and still keep water out. However, I learned on the first day to leave the poncho hood *outside* the shelter. Otherwise the hood acts as a rain catcher and funnels water inside, even if tied off tightly.

By the end of the week I reaffirmed the conclusion I reached while the snow was dropping around me in February: IMPS is an extremely versatile, built-to-take-it shelter system that you can count on for protection from the elements — no matter what those elements may be.

There are a few problems. IMPS's low profile, for example, makes it impossible for an average-sized person to sit upright in the one-man shelter. To convert from the standard (cold weather) shelter to the summer shelter, summer netting must be zipped along the length of the tent; this requires that you stand or crouch. Since IMPS's low profile makes standing or crouching impossible, you must crawl out, possibly in the rain, to make the conversion.

Also, Ecotat, the manufacturer, should have made the carry sack out of the same, or a similar, rugged material as the shelter. As it stands, the carry sack is single-stitched nylon and barely lasted the week without splitting a seam.

IMPS is also *hot* in the summer, even with net-screen employed. No more so than comparable tents, but don't expect a miracle: When it's hot outside it's even hotter in a tent, and IMPS doesn't change that.

"Multipurpose" is IMPS's middle name and you'd be hard pressed to find anything similar that's this versatile. In addition to being a summer and winter tent, IMPS also converts into a hammock, greatcoat/poncho, short coat, "sit" shelter and "bivsac" sleeping bag cover.

I experimented with IMPS's other incarnations and they lived up to manufacturer's claims. The greatcoat/poncho impressed me most because of its sheer usefulness. It's large enough to cover a trooper carrying a full pack and provides all-around protection while also offering the wearer effective ventilation control. Due to its light weight and good fit, you're not constrained and can operate weapons and machinery with near total freedom of movement. The one low point is that the poncho hood is designed for someone wearing a helmet, making it too large to wear without one. There's a Velcro fastener to reduce the size of the hood, but no amount of jockeying around will make it fit right.

Because IMPS is an entire shelter system, it requires a somewhat lengthy set of instructions on how to construct the various features. It's a mistake to assume that you can "dummy" out how to set it up. Practice in the backyard before trying it in the bush or woods.

In addition to the one-piece fabric, each IMPS comes with two shock-corded poles, four polycarb stakes, summer netting, built-in YKK zippers and a carry sack with handle. The entire package weighs a mere 6 pounds and rolls into a cylinder smaller than most sleeping bags. The heavy construction, 5-ounce nylon IMPS is currently available in desert tan, royal blue and woodland camouflage; a lighter 3-ounce nylon IMPS is available only in desert tan.

Lightweight yet rugged, extremely versatile and utile, IMPS is one piece of gear you want to have when outdoors, whether in the field or just camping. Note that the civilian version of IMPS is known as "Freedom Shelter."

For ordering information, contact Kaufman's West Inc., Dept. SOF, 1660 Eubank NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112, or U.S. Cavalry, Dept. SOF, 1375 N. Wilson Rd., Radcliff, KY 40160. Suggested price is $179.95 ($174.00 for the lighter fabric). For further information about IMPS, contact Ecotat, Dept. SOF, 5825 Ward Court, Virginia Beach, VA 23455.

SOF NICARAGUA

• Text & Photos by Bill Price

Sandinista troops unload Soviet antiaircraft gun from an Mi-17 helicopter in jungle clearing in northern Nicaragua.

Last month, SOF combat correspondent Gene Scroft, in his article "War Zone Bocay," covered the Bocay River Valley battle from the perspective of the contra democratic resistance. Here, American newspaper reporter Bill Price covers that same battle from the other side of the fence. He accompanied communist Sandinista troops on their May 1987 offensive to the Bocay region.

DAWN comes slowly to the jungles of northern Nicaragua. Gray light filters through the thick canopy of trees and undergrowth, while birds and insects break the stillness with soft sounds. But this tranquillity is deceptive. Like many jungles in Central America, warfare often shatters this peaceful setting.

Accompanied by 400 soldiers of the elite Sandinista Irregular Warfare Battalion (BLI) "Francisco Estrada," I bivouacked near the hotly contested Bocay River region, deep inside Jinotega Department, just miles from the Honduran border (see maps). The river systems here have provided the anti-Sandinista resistance, or contras, a highly efficient means of infiltrating their forces and supplies into Nicaragua. Operating out of San Andrés de Bocay across the Coco River in the no man's land between Honduras and Nicaragua, and out of another smaller camp on the Amaka River where it joins the Bocay River, the contras have saturated this portion of Nicaragua with their troops. Though both sides have waged a seesaw battle for control of this strategic area, it is the contras who have taken advantage of the jungle and mountainous terrain and who now move about here with relative impunity.

Dislodging the contras from the Bocay region and interdicting their overland resupply network has become a top Sandinista military priority. At a news conference in Managua on 25 April, Nicaraguan Defense Minister Humberto Ortega announced a massive offensive to do precisely that. Upon his announcement, I immediately sought permission to accompany a Sandinista BLI on its mission into the Bocay Valley.

Fortunately, I had already been negotiating for some time with the Nicaraguan Defense Ministry to join a BLI unit in the field. Along with even more mobile and specialized *Batallones de Ligero Cazadores,* or Light Hunter Battalions, the BLIs spend months in the field playing a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with the equally mobile contras. Sandinista Defense Ministry officials finally agreed to my request, with the caveat that the Ministry could not guarantee my safety. With that admonishment, I was sent to the Sixth Regional Military Headquarters at Waswali, just outside the city of Matagalpa.

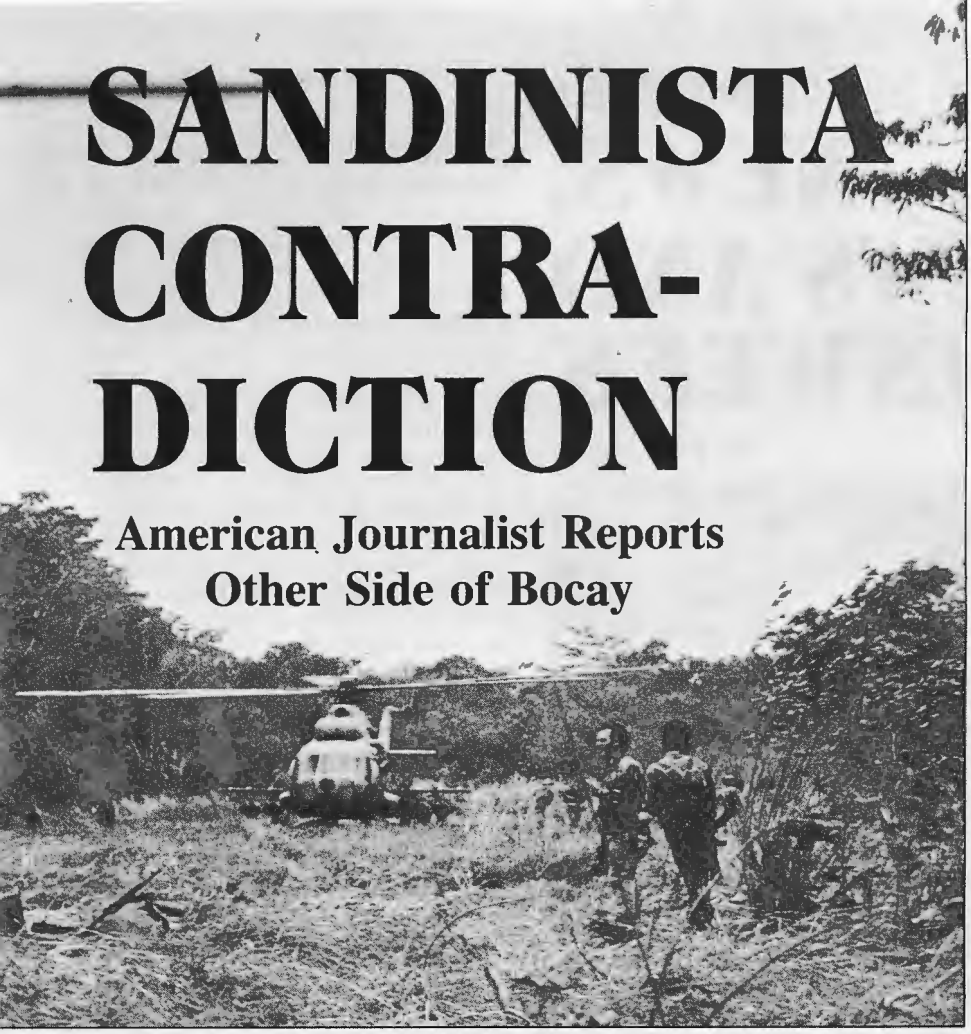
As the nerve center of the Sandinista fight against the contras in northern Nicaragua, it was from the headquarters at Waswali that the largest offensive of the almost six-year war between the Sandinistas and the contras was about to be executed. Thirty-one-year-old regional commander Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Salvatierra, whose name translates as "landsaver," briefed me on the operation: "For the first time we will be using Vietnam War-style tactics, combining our helicopter firepower and airlift capability with ground forces to rout the enemy." He added that the current operation had been dubbed *Unidad Entre Armas,* or Inter-Force Unity. At the helicopter landing strip at the base, Salvatierra proudly pointed to two Soviet-made Mi-17 helicopters that had been modified, and said, "We are experimenting with 23mm cannon; they are capable of firing 160 rounds per minute each." Mounted next to the rocket pods on each side of the helicopters are two cannons capable of firing 32 rounds per second each.

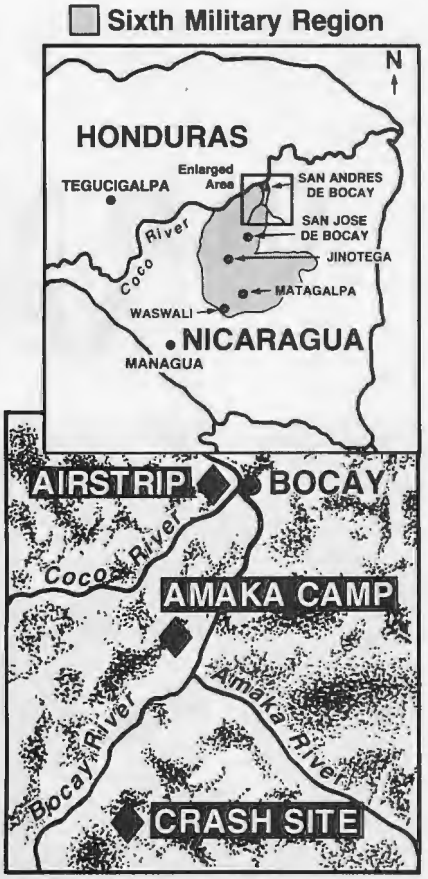
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Bill Price is an American freelance journalist who has reported on Latin America for newspapers and magazines during the past five years. Price has covered both sides of the conflict in Nicaragua, traveling to fighting zones with the contras and the communist Sandinistas.

SANDINISTA CONTRA-DICTION

American Journalist Reports Other Side of Bocay





Sandinista May 1987 offensive took place in Sixth Military Region of northern Nicaragua, Bocay River Valley.

In addition, the Mi-17s have a 12.7x108mm HMG (the equivalent of a .50-caliber machine gun) mounted in the nose and gun ports in the door from which AK-47 assault rifles can be fired.

Unlike the Mi-25 Hinds, the Mi-17 is designed to carry as many as 25 to 30 combatants in the main cabin. With a top speed of about 170 kilometers per hour fully loaded and 240 kilometers per hour empty, the Mi-17 is the workhorse of the Sandinista air force. It's also becoming increasingly vulnerable to U.S.-supplied contra Redeye and the less accurate SAM-7 antiaircraft missiles. Sandinista helicopter pilots take the threat seriously, and rightfully so. The contras have racked up an impressive score of downed helicopters since the missiles and training in their use began with the latest $100-million-dollar aid package from the United States. That, along with rumors of maintenance problems and inexperienced pilots, makes riding in one a memorable experience.

After the briefing, Lt. Col. Salvatierra, a retinue of officers and aides (some with distinctly foreign accents and appearances) and I departed Waswali in two Mi-17s and one Mi-25 Hind for the strategically important Sandinista military base at San José de Bocay, launching pad for the offensive. The base serves as the forward line of the Sandinista military presence in this war zone. Heavily defended with artillery and antiaircraft emplacements on the surrounding hills, the base is the last relatively safe bastion of the Sandinistas in the area. Although the contras have yet to attack the base in force, combat in the surrounding hills can be frequently heard, and the road from Matagalpa to the base is virtually impassable by civilian traffic. Ben Linder, the American working for the Nicaraguan government, was killed within earshot of the base, and in broad daylight.

We flew at full speed and at treetop level from Waswali to San José de Bocay. It was like being on a 40-minute roller-coaster ride as the pilots, aware of the contra antiaircraft missile threat, used the hills and contours of the flight path to dizzily wind their way to the base, while the helicopter gunners vigilantly manned their stations. It was clear that getting blown out of the sky was a real possibility.

Upon arrival at the base, it was readily apparent the Sandinistas were putting a major effort into the offensive. The scene was one of frenetic activity and preparation. Mi-17s in relays of four flew in and out, disgorging men and supplies and raising a cloud of dust high over the landing strip. While Lt. Col. Salvatierra gathered his field officers for a briefing on the operation, I was handed over to a field lieutenant to observe the first assembly stage of the offensive force. The Sandinistas were using about 25 percent of their Irregular Warfare forces — some 3600 men comprising four BLIs. To ferry this force over 100 kilometers of hostile territory into combat, almost the entire Sandinista fleet of helicopters, about 36 Mi-17s and Mi-25s, were used. The scale of the operation was such that working out the logistics, from planning to actual deployment, took several weeks, giving ample notice to the contras that something major was in the works.

Later that day I climbed into another Mi-17, this time with 20 heavily armed men of the BLI "Francisco Estrada." With three other Mi-17s filled with soldiers from the BLI, we headed at low altitude and high speed, twisting and turning to take advantage of the terrain, to a recently secured landing zone on the Bocay River, deep in the jungle. One after another, the helicopters set down for what seemed like only seconds, as troops and supplies were quickly unloaded. After deployment was completed, we set off through the jungle, walking some 5 kilometers to where another larger landing strip had been secured along the river. Ironically, the landing zone had been used by an American logging company during the Somoza era. It now served as the ideal launching point for the final stage of the offensive.

The oppressive heat and humidity made slogging through the jungle an exercise in endurance. This was just a short jaunt for these troops, who are sometimes forced to walk hundreds of kilometers carrying 80 to

Continued on page 104

SOF COMMENTARY

NEWS, OLD NEWS AND *NEWSWEEK*

by Jim Graves

Remains of Soviet-supplied Sandinista Mi-17 helicopter shot down by contra forces during the battle of the Bocay River. *Newsweek*'s Rod Nordland failed to mention the downing of this or a second Mi-17 by the contras in his story because he felt it was "old news." Photo: Gene Scroft

WHILE reporting on Central America has shown some improvement in the last few years, a story published by *Newsweek* magazine indicates the American news media still have trouble sorting out realities down south.

Newsweek's Rod Nordland took the contras to task in his feature article of 1 June 1987, in which he claimed the contras were "losing the war for the people's hearts and minds" due to their harsh food foraging policies and press ganging of local guides. Nordland's critique of contra conduct during his 30-day march with them in Nicaragua would certainly be valid if it were true. But if his reporting later in the article about the contra battle along the Bocay River from 8-10 May is any indication of his professional regard for the facts, his observations about the contras are suspect, if not downright worthless.

Nordland's account of the battle, which he obtained in briefings from Sandinista officers after fighting had ended, was that five battalions of Sandinistas fought their way through withering fire to overrun the contra camps at the Amaka River and at Star Base on the Bocay River. In Nordland's view, the overland supply routes from Star Base (actually alongside a small airstrip in Honduras) to the forward base on the Amaka were vital and implied that their loss was, ipso facto, a serious blow.

SOF's view varies a bit from *Newsweek*'s. While reporter Nordland and his photographer arrived after the shooting was over, SOF contributor Gene Scroft was actually with the contras inside both the Amaka camp and Star Base during the fighting. We also picked up the other side of that firefight from freelance writer Bill Price, who accompanied the Sandinista assault forces.

Scroft, a 1979 West Point graduate and veteran of the 75th Rangers and 82nd Airborne, saw the battle as a spirited, although not tactically proficient, defense-in-depth. His main critique of the contras' defense was that they could have and should have used more mines, booby traps and ambushes along the Sandinistas' line of approach, to extract the maximum amount of enemy blood before pulling out of the area.

Days before the battle, Scroft was told by the contras' Bocay region commander, Mike Lima, that the Sandinistas were coming and that the plan was to inflict casualties and withdraw. Lima, visiting in our Boulder offices in July, called it a plan of *desgastar*. This translates as attrition. Actually the whole thing was a mousetrap. The contras moved into the Bocay and started running in journalists to show them some terrain under contra control. This made El-Presidente-for-Life Danny Ortega so mad he whipped together a sizable assault force (five battalions, about 3,000 men) ferried into action by just about the entire Sandinista helicopter fleet. Lima kicked out the journalists, except for Scroft. Our reporter was allowed to stay on the battlefield because he had established a working rapport with Lima and his commanders based on his extensive military experience. He had also demonstrated to the contras that he was in excellent physical condition and that he would not become a burden to them in a fast-paced action.

Scroft was, therefore, on hand to witness Lima's defense-in-depth when 350 contras backed out from the Bocay as the Sandinistas airlifted in troops and gained fire superiority.

Price, who was with the Sandinista BLIs (Battalion Light Infantry, or Irregular Warfare Battalion) during the battle, didn't get as close to the fighting as Scroft but still saw or learned enough to realize the high price to be paid for overrunning two Xs along the border. Two Sandinista Mi-17 helicopters were shot down (one by a U.S.-supplied Redeye missile, the other by small arms fire — see maps on page 85) and roughly 60 Sandinistas were killed and another 60 wounded. One suspects the odd casualty count (usually wounded outnumber dead three to one) resulted from a lack of medical evacuation transport and primitive medical facilities.

Lima reported that he had 10 killed and four missing. He didn't have a firm count on wounded due to his own evacuation shortly after the battle.

But the significant point about the Battle of the Bocay was that the contras shot down a helicopter with a Redeye. Lima said they had just received the Redeye launcher and had only a few rounds for it, but that he was ecstatic about the results. "The battle would have turned out different had they made more than one gun run on us," said Lima, "but after we shot down the Mi-17, the pilots kept the helicopters well back." Lima is convinced that with sufficient Redeyes he'll be able to really *desgastar* Sandinista helicopter assets, and he's looking forward to fighting their infantry, grunt-to-grunt.

Nordland, in a telephone interview with SOF, said he was in Miami when the battle started, returned to Nicaragua on Monday, 11 May, and flew over the battle zone on a Sandinista-led press tour on 12 May. He said the wreckage was pointed out to him as they flew over, but they didn't get on the ground to examine it and he didn't mention the downed helicopter as he considered it "old news."

When Nordland was told that *Newsweek*'s photo editors had in their possession photos taken by Scroft of the Mi-17 helicopter impacting and burning on the ground and close-ups of the wreckage *before* his article was published, he repeated he considered the downing of the Mi-17 "old news." In contrast, ABC News, not normally in the

Continued on page 106

SOF WANTS YOU!

I. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your age? _____
2. If you buy SOF on the newsstand, how long have you been reading SOF _____ and how many issues have you bought in the last six months? _____
3. Are you a: veteran ___, active duty military ___, reservist ___, law enforcement officer ___; other (describe)? _____

II. READER SURVEY

1. If you are a subscriber, go to question 2. If you bought this issue at a newsstand, what influence did the cover have on your purchasing decision? Please rate on a scale from 1 (excellent — influenced you to buy this issue) to 5 (poor — bought this issue in spite of the cover). _____

2. SOF is interested in what its readers think about the subjects of the articles in the October 1987 issue and how well the readers feel the authors handled those subjects.

A) How interesting did you find the subject matter? Circle the number under the appropriate heading.

Title	Very Interesting	Somewhat Interesting	Not Interesting
Air Contra	1	2	3
Sandinista Contra-Diction	1	2	3
Reeve's Mark IV	1	2	3
Deep Desert Raid	1	2	3
Bayonets at Binh Thai	1	2	3
Paras of Puerto San José	1	2	3
Gramajo Interview	1	2	3
Guns Behind the Great Wall Part 2	1	2	3
Red Retreat	1	2	3
Road Warriors	1	2	3
Nicaraguan Invasion — The Final Option?	1	2	3
IMPS Test & Evaluation	1	2	3
Beirut's Christian Commandos	1	2	3
News, Old News and *Newsweek*	1	2	3

FIRST FOLD ➧ DOWN

B) How do you rate the quality of the features (how well did the author handle his article)? Circle the number under the appropriate heading.

Title	Excellent	Good	Poor
Air Contra	1	2	3
Sandinista Contra-Diction	1	2	3
Reeve's Mark IV	1	2	3
Deep Desert Raid	1	2	3
Bayonets at Binh Thai	1	2	3
Paras of Puerto San José	1	2	3
Gramajo Interview	1	2	3
Guns Behind the Great Wall Part 2	1	2	3
Red Retreat	1	2	3
Road Warriors	1	2	3
Nicaraguan Invasion — The Final Option?	1	2	3
IMPS Test & Evaluation	1	2	3
Beirut's Christian Commandos	1	2	3
News, Old News and *Newsweek*	1	2	3

SECOND FOLD ➧ UP

3. If SOF were to publish a newsletter specializing in coverage of on-going conflicts around the world, including recent battlefield news, would you be interested?

   Yes____ No____

4. If you answered yes, what would be a fair price for a one-year subscription if the newsletter were eight to 10 pages (8½x11) and published every two weeks? _____

5. Does SOF run too much, just the right amount or too little on the following topics? Make an "X" under the appropriate heading.

	Too Much	Right Amount	Too Little
Vietnam	____	____	____
Firearms	____	____	____
Combat Reporting	____	____	____
Rifles	____	____	____
Pistols	____	____	____
Mercenary Topics	____	____	____
Terrorism	____	____	____
Military Unit Reports	____	____	____
History (prior to Vietnam)	____	____	____

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

6. A) Was this issue Excellent ____ Average ____ or Poor ____.

B) Why?_____

_____

_____

7. What would you do to improve SOF? _____

_____

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*This is a confidential survey — your name is not required. Opinions expressed will provide *Soldier of Fortune* editors with an insight as to what our readers are most interested in.

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FLYING CIRCUS

Continued from page 37

distance out. Against the noise, hand signals were better than shouting. I motioned toward the front, then pointed to my ears, then gave a thumbs-up, indicating we had radio contact with the DZ reception party. I tapped my watch and held up both hands, fingers spread. He nodded. Did he want me to release the tie-downs over the top of the load? Vern shook his head no and tapped his own chest. He'd do that. He then pointed to the light stick on the pallet next to us and made a breaking motion indicating I was to activate the light sticks, which I did immediately. One by one they gave off their soft green glow.

Back at my seat I tried the NVGs, but there was too much light inside the plane reflecting off the Plexiglas window. All I could see was a wavering green reflection on the inside of the window. I could still see some features below, but it was now dark enough to make out the pattern of signal fires when we got to the DZ. This area seemed to be pretty well populated compared to other parts we'd flown over — there were more clearings and some smoke from cooking fires.

I left the NVGs on my seat and positioned myself on the strap locker. From his position I could communicate between our talker and the cockpit. Comandante was getting very excited. I could hear some of his shouting, but over the engine noise and my translation of Spanish, all I could make out was, "I hear you, brothers! We're coming, brothers!"

"Which way?" I shouted to him. "Straight ahead? North or south?"

"Keep coming!" he answered.

I turned to the cockpit and yelled at Buz, "He says keep coming." With my hand I signaled, "Straight ahead!"

I turned back to the talker. "Which way now?"

He queried the ground troops. "Turn left!" he said. I passed that info to Buz with a shout and a hand signal.

"How far?" Buz yelled back.

"I don't know!" I said. "Try 45 degrees. I'll go back and check!"

I turned back to meet Comandante coming forward. "The other way!" he shouted. "Not left! Right! Right!"

I yelled that instruction to Buz, who racked the Caribou out of the left bank and over to the right. We all searched for the signal fires and continually glanced back to the needle on the radar altimeter — 350, 360, 400, 420, 380, 350, 300, 280! "Buz! Altitude!" I frantically pointed across his left knee to the descending pointer.

He rolled out of the bank, scanned his instruments and said, "Where does he want us to be going now?"

I turned around to the talker, who was now standing right behind me on the locker. He was alternating between shouting into the radio and listening to it. Had we lost radio contact? I knew the problem. He was standing in the center of the plane between two racks of electronic gear — radios, alternators, transformers — there was too much blanking and interference.

ABOVE: Part of Contra Air in maintenance. Lack of operational funds often kept resupply ships grounded.

RIGHT: Non-availability of accurate maps and up-to-date navigational gear made low-level nighttime flying a hazard when it came to treetops.

I shouted to him, "Get back in your seat! Get back by the window! Put the antenna by the window!"

He understood and quickly got back to his seat and picked up the call from the ground — the first really definitive one of the night — "Come back left, 180 degrees!"

I passed that info forward. Buz swung the Caribou into a hard turn and scanned the instrument panel. He held us 400 feet above the terrain (that was not net altitude — there were trees between us and the ground) and kept a smooth, steady turn back to the southeast. Just as he rolled out of his turn we saw the signal fires off left of the nose. They were very faint at first and I thought we must be several miles away from them, but the angle to the fires and the intensity of the fires was rapidly increasing. They must have been lit while we passed by, flying almost blindly in the dark.

"How many fires?" I asked Comandante. "Ask them, *'¿Cuántos fuegos?'* "

The answer came back, "*Seis. ¡Seis fuegos!* I mean, six. Six fires!"

"Are you sure this is the contra camp? *¿Son las contras — no son las Sandinistas?* "

"*¡Si!* Yes! Contras! No Sandinistas!"

Back forward in the cockpit I said, "Buz, that's it! The right number of fires. He says these are the contras."

We were now passing down the right side of the drop zone. By the light of the fires we could see a clearing perhaps 200 yards long. Buz shouted to me, "I'm going to teardrop and come back around left for a final run. Tell Vern that. Watch for the drop light after about 30 seconds straight and level!"

I went back past Comandante and Emile. They shouted with excitement at each other and into the radio. Vern was stolidly positioned at the back of the Caribou, steadying himself with one hand on the overhead cable to which all the static lines were hooked. As I reached him, the fires were receding out of view, blocked by the surrounding trees. I felt Buz go into his left bank. I shouted to Vern, "This is the DZ. Good radio contact. Right number of fires. Buz will roll out, inbound, and give you the ready light. You'll have about 30 seconds straight and level before the drop light comes on."

Vern nodded his understanding, brandished his Ka-Bar knife at the cut strap to signify all was ready, then motioned for me to get back to the front of the load. He had briefed me earlier that it never hurt to have someone coax the front pallet out when it was time for the drop. Obviously, there is no way one man can push a 5,000-pound pallet out of a plane, but a good shove on the

front pallet as the pilot advances the throttle and gains altitude keeps it from getting hung up at the door. Also, though Vern packed a neat airplane — all tiedowns were rolled up and static lines neatly bundled with elastic retainers — having me push the front pallet helped make sure I was well clear of the load when it started out.

I shouted to Buz, "Vern's ready!" and stepped to the front pallet and put my weight against it. I practiced a grab for the back of my seat, ready to make that move when the load started. We rolled level, the red "ready" light over at the rear jump door came on. Steady . . . steady. Time seemed to enter another, slower dimension. The preparation, the planning, the hours inbound, even our different years of varied experiences all came focused onto these final anxious seconds.

Then the green light came on! Vern's Ka-Bar severed the cut strap. The throttles went to climb power, prop blades took bigger bites of air, the wheel was drawn back and the nose began to lift. Then the load started to move. Within seconds it wasn't ours anymore. The static lines, like so many ragged umbilical cords, had torn loose from the chutes and were streaming out the plane's open rear section. Parachutes popped and banged full of air. We saw that the last pallet, one of those with six bundles of boots, had a chute malfunction and landed long. But it landed in a clearing just short of the trees. The rest of the pallets drifted down and landed silently. We were quiet too, for a moment, then we broke into backslaps, handshakes and cheers. In the darkness, I scribbled on a notepad I had dropped after radio contact: *Turn left . . . no, right! Then left, 180 degrees. Did right a bit, then left 270 for drop. Last chute lost (boots). Congrats around! Dropped 1825. Still ground contact at that time. By 1850 DARK.*

We started out from the DZ under clearing skies. Buz searched for cover in the scattered cloud layers. Vern and I pulled in the whipping static lines and then removed the clevises from the overhead cable. I rigged a safety strap to a tiedown ring and around my waist, then joined Vern back by the ramp. I brought the NVGs back with me and tried them out again. I soon found that they were useless in humid conditions if even a faint light source was nearby, since this light reflects off the water droplets suspended in the air. I scanned the cargo compartment with the goggles and found the offending light source — it was coming from the tiny red intercom control panel lights on the overhead by the rear passenger door. After I turned them off with the rheostat, I could see clearly out the rear of the plane.

With consideration for the clearing skies, and now realizing the great distance over which our engines could be heard, SA-7s suddenly seemed more of a threat. I'd been asking for decoy flares since I joined the group, but got no response. I searched the two survival vests that had been loaned to us by the Farm and found two handheld signal flares in each.

TOP: Cliff Hamilton and a contra prepare a skid of ammunition to be dropped to guerrillas inside Nicaragua.

ABOVE: Contra Air's birds on the flight line at Ilopango, El Salvador. Shown are a C-123K (left) and two C-7 Caribous.

I went back to the rear of the plane and sat on the passenger door sill a few feet from the cargo ramp. I put one finger through the pull chain that would ignite the flare and send it out the back of the plane. Of course, I had no idea of where or even if we might be the target of a SAM, but if one did come up, we'd likely die unless it could be decoyed away. Vern and I sat quietly, looking out over the cargo ramp into the gray sky behind. When Buz and Ernie were between clouds, they had clear night air ahead, but Vern and I were always looking out into a faint gray mist. The infusion of exhaust gases into the air, cooled by its passage over the wings, created a thin fog. It took a conscious effort to keep my eyes focused out through the gray toward the darker jungle below. Even if we took ground fire from automatic weapons, I planned to use the flare. Its brightness might distract any gunners taking aim at us, and the reflection of the flare off the moist air would be a sort of mirror above which we couldn't be seen.

That forced alertness, that waiting for a missile motor burn or the visual staccato of automatic weapons flashes, created an almost painful readiness for something to happen. Suddenly it did! Two small red balls dashed into view, passing right beside the open cargo ramp, and then faded away behind us. My heart leapt! My stomach tightened! My breath caught! Then my mind puzzled. No tracers could have come from head-on, directly opposite our flight path. What I'd just seen were two sparks from the exhaust! I got back into control of my senses and had regained some composure when another stream of sparks went by. Over the next hour, bits of glowing carbon startled me some eight times before I finally grew used to these "enemy tracers."

We were back over the valley at Aguacate by about 2000. Buz flew over the field and turned left for the downwind of his approach. His calls to the tower had gone unanswered, but the contras had apparently recognized the sound of the approaching

Continued on page 106

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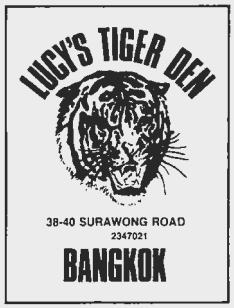

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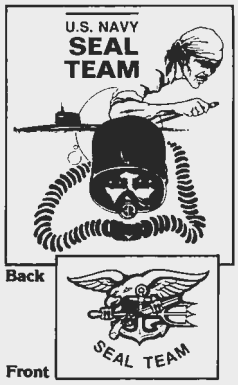

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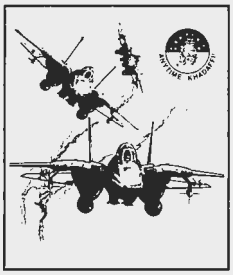

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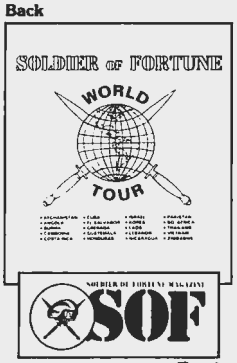

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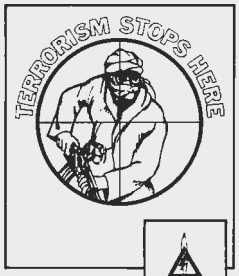

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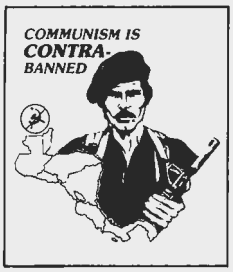

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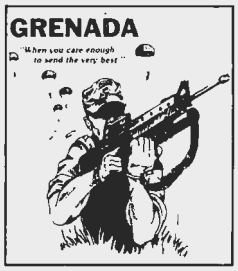

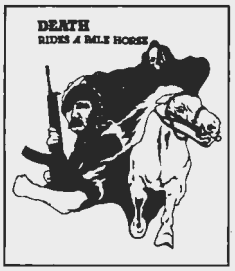

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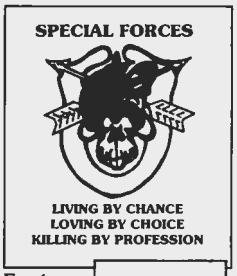

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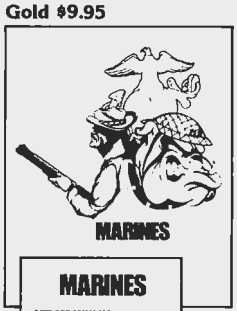

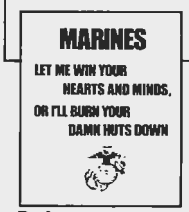

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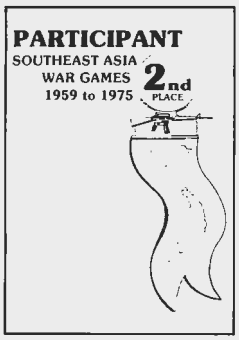

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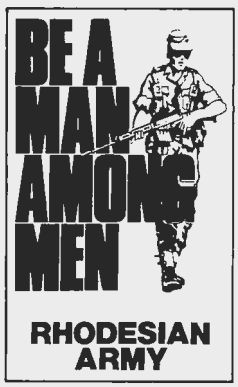

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ROAD WARRIORS

Continued from page 75

they need help, and for this short period, we are helping."

It may be the war of poverty for Hondurans (who have a per capita yearly income of only $815), but for critics of American involvement in Central America, the presence of U.S. troops such as those involved in Blazing Trails 87 foreshadows what they believe will be a war against Nicaragua. It would be naive to think that, of all the places around the world where Reserve and Guard troops can and do train, Honduras just happens to be another area chosen at random. There can be little doubt that troops are being exposed to the climate, terrain, population and problems of a region where they may one day come to fight — or build roads to move the fighters to the front lines.

But that's for the politicians to decide. Troops at Camp Oso Grande came to train, to build and to help; to learn a little about Honduras and perhaps leave a lot of future good will behind.

"The critics have never been to Central America and talked to the Hondurans or seen our road," Major Plahovinsak told us. "We're putting in a road that will last a long time after we leave."

Perhaps a grizzled Reserve captain who was overseeing operations out at road's end put it best. "These folks asked us to build 'em a road. We're building it. And we're doing a fair bit to help the locals out as well."

He paused to light another cigarette and squinted up at a point along the road running up the mountainside, where a handful of troops was laying in a drainage culvert. "Those kids are here because they want to be, and they're busting ass doing a fine piece of work. Those 'critics' you ask about — they're not doing anything for anybody. Nothing at all."

Right on, captain.

GREAT GUNS

Continued from page 67

U-notch is an example of Marxist optimism, especially so since the maximum effective range of this weapon is no more than 2,000 meters.

The antiaircraft sight is, if anything, worse and requires the coordinated efforts of two individuals, as it consists of two sights coupled together. By laboriously turning a hand crank, the assistant gunner rotates his and the gunner's sights to align them with the target (certainly moving much faster than he can turn the crank handle) and thus indicate its angle of approach. Estimating the target's speed, the gunner aligns his sight with an appropriate amount of lead using one of the markers on the main ring. In most instances, before all of this has

been completed, the gun crew has been zapped by the enemy plane.

Usually fitted with an armored shield, Russian two-wheeled mounts for this weapon would be more appropriate on an artillery piece, as these atavistic devices weigh 259 pounds. While the mount permits coarse free-traverse and elevation movement, there is provision for the fine adjustment of elevation only. The improved PRC Type 54-1 ground mount, with a telescoping rear leg for antiaircraft applications, weighs a more modest 64.3 pounds and is equipped with adjustable elbow rests. Adjustable padded shoulder braces can be attached to the receiver.

Within the limitations imposed by its salient features, the Type 54 HMG is a robust and reliable weapon. It needs only a reduction in overall weight, a less complex antiaircraft sight, a more cost-effective aircooled barrel and an improved method of barrel-changing to effectively meet the needs of modern, highly mobile infantry units. PRC designers have addressed these problems and presented the People's Liberation Army with an intriguing new lightweight HMG.

PRC Type 77 HMG

As the Type 77's receiver group weighs but 47 pounds, PRC designers have managed to whittle 31.5 pounds off the weight of the Type 54's receiver group. This is also 13 pounds lighter than the Browning M2 HB's receiver group. At 18 pounds, the Type 77's barrel is 10 pounds less than the Dashika barrel and 6 pounds lighter than Ma Deuce's. While the 62-pound tripod weighs 18 pounds more than the U.S. M3 ground mount for the M2 HB, it also serves in the antiaircraft role and so its legs are of necessity considerably longer. Removal or attachment of the weapon to the tripod is rapidly accomplished by means of a hinged, U-shaped clamp with a single locking screw. Overall length of the Type 77 HMG is 86 inches (21 inches longer than the M2 HB).

To both reduce weight and improve heat dispersion, the Type 77's 40-inch barrel has been fluted from the gas block to the receiver. Bore and chamber are chrome lined and the rifling remains eight grooves with a right-hand twist of one turn in 15.2 inches. Barrels can be changed rapidly by turning the carrying handle on top of the receiver, which also acts as a wrench to loosen the barrel's locking ring. The carrying handle is then placed in a slot on the front sight base and the barrel is pulled forward and out of the receiver. Headspace is fixed. A large brake on the end of the barrel effectively reduces muzzle climb and suppresses the flash signature but does nothing to moderate the horrendous muzzle blast, which generates target-obscuring clouds of dust when the Type 77 is fired from the prone position.

While the front sight remains a hooded, round post-type, adjustable for both elevation and windage zero, the rear sight, an open U-notch of the sliding tangent-type, has more realistic elevation gradations from zero to 2,400 meters in 100-meter increments. A knurled ring at the bottom right

adjusts windage and the entire unit can be folded forward when not in use.

A decided improvement over the Type 54's clumsy antiaircraft sight, the Type 77's optical unit can be attached or removed instantly from its dovetail in back of the rear ground sight. A single locking screw with a sliding handle holds the unit firmly in place. With 2X magnification, the reticle pattern is a typical series of antiaircraft rings. There is a built-in sliding, neutral-density light diffuser. A lead gauge is mounted to the right of the optical housing and the entire system is operated by the gunner alone. A separate battery pack provides illumination for use at night.

A simple, uncomplicated design, disassembly procedures for the Type 77 are easily mastered by even the most inexperienced operators. First, remove the belt and clear the weapon. Allow the bolt group to move forward under control. Remove the antiaircraft sight. Remove the barrel in the manner already described, while the weapon remains on the tripod. Depress the spring-loaded locking latch at the aft end of the rear sight base and rotate the spade-grips assembly in either direction until this unit is free of the receiver body. Unscrew the mounting clamp and remove the weapon from the tripod. Withdraw the sear housing's retaining pin and separate this component from the receiver. Tilt the receiver upward and withdraw the recoil spring and bolt assembly. Pull the bolt head away from the carrier and remove the flapper locks. Pull the feed cover's axis pin out to the right and lift the feed cover off the receiver. Both segments of the gas tube can be removed for cleaning. No further disassembly is required. Since all of the gas action takes place outside of the receiver group, the Type 77 is considerably easier to clean and maintain than conventional gas-operated systems. Reassemble in the reverse manner.

Mounted on its sturdy tripod, the Type 77 HMG has excellent accuracy potential. Although the cyclic rate is somewhat high, most operators can be readily trained to fire short, three- to four-round bursts with high hit probability. At the tail end of SOF's test and evaluation there were a few failures to extract, due only to inadequate lubrication of the reciprocating components but, overall, reliability was more than acceptable. While the muzzle brake needs modification to reduce the possibility of position disclosure when the weapon is fired close to the ground, the Type 77 HMG represents an ingenious, and long overdue, attempt to eliminate the Dashika's shortcomings.

Nevertheless, 12.7mm-caliber machine guns need dramatically improved ammunition to overtake the strides made in the armor plating of their potential hard targets. SOF has learned that Soviet Mi-24 Hind-D helicopters carry titanium armor plate, varying in thickness from 7 to 18mm, under the nose and cockpit.

An example of the type of response required to counter this threat is the Norwegian Raufoss Multipurpose NM-140 .50-

caliber BMG cartridge adopted by the Norwegian army in 1979. Developed for attacking helicopters of the Soviet genre, it resembles a normal AP projectile but contains a tungsten carbide core and a small charge of RDX high explosive/incendiary mixture. Detonation is delayed somewhat after impact so the bullet can first penetrate the target's armor plate before exploding to deliver its fragments and incendiary material inside the aircraft. Capable of penetrating 11mm of armor plate at ranges in excess of 1,000 meters, performance is supposedly comparable to 20mm cannons. Another alternative appears to be the U.S. SLAP (Saboted Light Armor Penetrator) round with either fin-stabilized or spin-stabilized projectiles.

You can be sure that PLA designers are experimenting with similar 12.7x108mm cartridges. With armor-piercing ammunition of the Raufoss Arsenal type, PRC's Type 77 HMG would provide the Afghan mujahideen with a cost-effective and highly portable Hind killer.

TYPE 54 METHOD OF OPERATION

Gas operated, with an adjustable three-position gas regulator (marked "3," "4" and "5"), the Type 54 fires from the open-bolt position. There is no provision for semiautomatic fire. No matter, as the cyclic rate is a mere 550 rpm and experienced operators can easily tap off single shots. For the first 1,000 rounds, the gas regulator should be set to the middle position. After that, the cyclic rate will increase, causing excessive wear on the reciprocating parts, and the regulator must be rotated to the smallest port (position "3"). As firing continues, increased fouling will mandate readjustment to a larger port.

After the primer has been ignited and the bullet passes down the bore, gases enter the cylinder, mounted under the barrel, and drive the piston rearward. After about ⅝-inch of free travel, to allow pressures to drop to a safe level, the slide, attached to the piston, carries the firing pin to the rear. This permits the flapper-type locks to pivot back into the bolt body. Primary extraction occurs during this initial unlocking movement. As the empty case is pulled rearward by the extractor claw, it strikes the ejector and is propelled out an ejection port in the bottom of the receiver. The reciprocating parts continue rearward until they strike the buffer in the spade-grip assembly and begin their counter-recoil momentum.

If the trigger is still depressed, the bolt group moves forward under the force from the compressed recoil spring and the feed rib pushes the next round forward and into the chamber. When the bolt starts into battery, the two flapper-type locks reach a point beyond the lock-

ing shoulders milled in the receiver. As the firing pin, attached to the slide, travels forward, it cams the locks into their recesses.

When the slide recoils rearward, a so-called "operating stud" projecting out the right side of the receiver enters the open hook of the feed lever and pivots it back. This operates the feed slide under the top cover. As the feed slide moves inward on its cam path, the feed pawl transports the next round to the cartridge guide and up over the stop pawl. When the operating stud moves forward in counter-recoil, it rotates the feed lever forward which, in turn, draws the feed slide back outward while the feed pawl moves out to engage the next cartridge in the belt. Feeding is normally from the left out of a 70-round ammo can attached to the tripod's cradle, although the Type 54 can be altered to feed from the right. The bolt remains closed on an empty chamber when the last round in the belt has been fired.

An uncomplicated and robust trigger mechanism controls this problem firing sequence. When the trigger is pressed, it rotates a trigger release lever upward. This lever pivots and depresses the sear to release the slide. A safety lever on the right side of the receiver blocks the trigger release lever when rotated forward.

GUATEMALA

Continued from page 63

For first-phase jumping, troops use the T-10 main chute and T-10A reserve. Chutes are considered good for 100 jumps or 10 years, and chutes packed over three months earlier are rejected.

Second-phase jumping simulates combat conditions, and troops carry the standard-issue Galil 5.56mm assault rifle, rations, backpack and about 250 rounds of ammunition. The jumpmaster carries an FN MAG58 7.62mm GPMG, radio and extra rations and medicine, and he jumps in extra ammunition spread among his personnel.

Extra arms are the FN MAG58, which replaced the Browning .30-caliber four years ago, and 60mm mortars and M79 40mm grenade launchers. Officers' handguns include the Colt .45, 9mm Walther and 9mm SIG-Sauer.

After the initial 21 days of training, the *paracaidistas* spend 29 months practicing advanced techniques in jumping and anti-guerrilla combat. They have the longest obstacle course in the army, and also train extensively in jungle tactics.

To infiltrate for special operations, paratroopers use the MC-3 paracommando chute for its mobility, or the Merlin Vector when they must jump undetected. The Merlin is also used by base sporting teams.

One recent change in equipment has been to dark woodland pattern cammies. The guerrillas are beginning to wear the lighter pattern cammies, which could be confusing.

"The civilians — no, the whole world — have cammies now," says one frustrated officer. "At least the new ones aren't on the street yet."

One of the *paracaidistas'* security duties is establishing roadblocks and searching vehicles for weapons. Guatemala is about the size of Ohio, and its few major cities are connected by narrow asphalt highways that cut steep mountains and canyons with switchbacks. The southern third of the country is densely populated and is virtually clean of guerrillas due to the security roadblocks. The north is wilderness and rural farms served by few roads.

The weathered asphalt is pock-marked with potholes, any of which might hold a mine. As a New Year's greeting, the guerrillas ambushed two army convoys carrying food and supplies to northern Indians. Six soldiers were killed by homemade claymores in two hit-and-run attacks.

The face of the war is changing, according to Gen. Gramajo. Guerrilla warfare in 1987 will probably continue at the level of 1986, but sabotage is expected to increase — with the target being Guatemala's highways.

"We believe the subversives will work within the framework of the new democracy to try to infiltrate popular organizations like unions," says Gen. Gramajo. "We expect more terrorism, more sabotage, more kid-

napping and assassinations, and more disruption of traffic on the roads."

Last year, the *paracaidistas* estimated that there were 2,500 to 3,500 actual subversive combatants with weapons and training. The revised figure for 1987 is 2,000. But one intelligence officer reports that 1,000 M16s entered the country in early 1987 and fighting may escalate.

"How do you count guerrillas?" asks Col. Marroquin, regarding the estimates. "A few years ago, we heard there were 5,000 in the mountains. When we convinced some of them to come down, we found it was only 20 or 30 armed men controlling them with threats."

If the living are hard to count, the dead are impossible. "The guerrillas have maybe 100,000 *porras,*" says one officer, referring to the "tortilla brigade" of guerrilla sympathizers.

"If 20 guerrillas make an ambush, there are 100 *porras* standing on the ridge, watching the fighting, making applause like cheerleaders," he says. "Afterwards, they recuperate the equipment and carry off the dead guerrillas to deny the army morale."

Of the goods the army has recovered from the guerrillas, the anti-tank weapons have proven to be Chinese-made, and most of the M16s can be traced to Vietnam, where they were left by U.S. forces.

"Obviously, the communist bloc is supplying them," says Gen. Gramajo, "the 'International Solidarity.' "

It is believed that professional leaders are orchestrating Guatemala's communists from Mexico, while guerrilla camps on Mexico's southern border traffic more than contraband rugs into Guatemala. Uniforms, food and munitions flow across the border in torrents.

And what the guerrillas can't get, they make: workbench claymores stuffed with nails and screws and covered with rubber shoesole material, rock projectiles, and handmade grenades patterned after Russian grenades.

"We have no proof they have foreign instructors," says Gen. Gramajo, "but we know the fighters have had training in North Vietnam and Cuba, with some traffic in other countries in the vicinity."

A cataloging of guerrilla weapons reads like a shopping list from a used arms supplier: M16s, AR-15s, HK G3s, UZIs, FALs and a few AKs.

"We just pray they don't have surface-to-air missiles," says one pilot.

Standard issue for the Guatemalan *paracaidistas* (and the Guatemalan army) is the Galil 5.56mm, which they say falls short in a firefight. They'd prefer M16s, FALs or AK-47s.

"The little Galil can be covered in mud for weeks and still fire when it is cleaned," says one officer. "But when the guerrillas are shooting at us from across a canyon with an M16, our bullets drop off short."

Regardless of firepower, the *paracaidistas* take intense pride in their training that enables them to defeat the guerrillas. In March 1986, *paracaidistas* counted heavily in repelling communist subversives who promised to blow an oil well — along with its executives — sky high. It was a serious threat to the economy (Guatemala exports crude oil to the United States) and to national security.

The *paracaidistas* landed enough men to stave off the initial attack, along with other army units, then moved in 250 troops by truck. In mopping up, *paracaidistas* stayed six months to secure the area, while the rest returned to home base.

"You can't imagine how difficult it is to be the chief of staff of an army that is growing and needs not only basic supplies, but also moral support," says Gen. Gramajo. "To have a barefoot army, in a sense, and to face the enemy and succeed is very rewarding.

"We know how to wage war, but we don't have the resources."

DESERT RAID

Continued from page 51

pushed on with rifle butts. He probably hoped that his comrades were coming to the rescue, but the shooting slowly died away and the march continued at a normal pace.

After some hours, Gabbisa finally gave

the order to stop for a rest. Food was cooked and the booty was screened. Boro carefully recorded every single item which had been captured, from the ammunition to the pairs of boots. Most of the foodstuffs looted from the government stores had been donated from Western aid agencies. Sacks were marked "EEC to the people of Ethiopia," "Canadian International Development Agency," "World Food Programme of the RFT," alongside several U.S. projects. The rebels took this opportunity to stress once more their assessment of the Western aid given to Ethiopia, particularly during the last two years.

"The government exploited the compassion of the West about the famine in the north for its own goals. Food is in fact being used as a weapon by the regime to secure control of the rural population. The aid is distributed only to the peasants living in the collectivized villages or in the resettlement areas. The people who don't have the proper paper issued by the AEPA (All Ethiopian Peasants' Association) or who live in the resistance-controlled areas won't get any food, regardless of whether they're starving," explained one of my companions.

Western aid policy toward Ethiopia has been very controversial since the French voluntary organization MSF (*Médecins Sans Frontières,* or Doctors Without Borders) exposed it at the end of 1985. According to MSF president Rony Brauman: "The Western aid has been instrumental in helping the deportation of millions of people, a policy similar to the one implemented by Stalin in the '30s or by Pol Pot in the Khmer Rouge's Cambodia in 1975."

Ethiopian opposition spokesmen remark ironically that "Mengistu is eating for free thanks to the West, while he uses his money to buy arms from the East Bloc." The Ethiopian army is the strongest in black Africa, with 210,000 men, 150 fighting-type aircraft and several thousand Soviet, Cuban and East German advisers. It is a powerful military machine that has already cost four billion dollars so far.

Its counterinsurgency capability, however, appears very limited, at least in the part of the country where I was traveling. There were no heliborne troops operating, nor ground forces capable of a quick reaction. Two days after the OLF's raid in Debek'a, the army swept the town itself and the countryside surrounding it. Hundreds of civilians were rounded up, forced into lorries and brought away for interrogation, a tactic which seemed designed to arouse more opposition. The Ethiopians even shot mortars at random against woods which they suspected to be rebel hideouts. Boro's base and the forest sheltering it were not approached by the army. They were apparently unable to gather any valuable intelligence from the people. The only people to reach the camp were more displaced peasants. They said that the army had burned down their houses in an apparent effort to speed up "villagization," and that they could not go back to their land. Most of them were enlisted as new recruits, and organized in nine- to 11-man squads. More than 100 of them would travel to the big bases near the border for training. After a few days Gabbisa's column left with the recruits and me in tow. The prisoners remained in Boro's camp.

On the fourth day of the march we stopped in the bush for a long while. Gabbisa looked worried. "We just received information that the enemy has laid many ambushes in an area we must cross on our way to the liberated areas," he explained. "Their regional headquarters apparently gave the order to stop us at all costs. They know there are many recruits with us and they're particularly furious that a foreign reporter has been able to travel with us so deeply inside and witness what happened in Debek'a. They've been ordered to get hold of you."

A local OLF unit joined us, bringing fresh news. Some ambush sites had been spotted, but they couldn't be sure whether there were more. The rebel commanders had a long conference, trying to choose the safest way to proceed. They talked, drank many cups of coffee (Oromo rebels carry small cups bound to their hand-sewn packs) and finally decided on a route that was very difficult, through high grass and cane and thick forest. We had to struggle with branches, roots and rotten vegetation to

negotiate a painfully slow advance. We continued marching after dark, on better terrain.

We were climbing up a slope when the night suddenly erupted in a hail of explosions and fire. Tracers followed each other toward our position, flashes illuminated an area some 300 feet to our right. It was obvious that we had stumbled into one of the ambushes laid for us. Fortunately, the Ethiopians had started to shoot too early. Our column was in range but not close enough to guarantee a deadly accuracy to their barrage of automatic fire. Disarray among the recruits was nonetheless considerable. They rushed frantically down the slope, pushing each other to run faster and scattering blankets and whatever else they were carrying along the way. The fleeing rabble ran into the platoons which were still climbing up, causing an even greater confusion.

In sharp contrast to the panicking recruits, the regular guerrillas of the forward force reacted coolly. I could see their silhouettes moving quickly against the dark sky as they maneuvered, one squad covering the other's withdrawal. Tracers were raining in all directions. Gabbisa was screaming in his walkie-talkie, trying to organize a coordinated disengagement. Eventually he succeeded, and the recruits were reassembled and marched to a nearby wood, where all of the column gradually gathered. The night was still and peaceful again, and the rebels didn't seem particularly worried. The ambushing force mustn't have been very strong. They had not even stepped out of their ambush site to pursue the insurgents. You would have expected other troops to be rushed there once the contact had been made, to try to encircle and annihilate the guerrillas.

"This happens only in theory," Gabbisa said. "Here the army doesn't move at night, because they fear that we might lay an ambush for them in turn. They won't leave their garrisons before dawn, although the nearest one is only a one-hour march from where we are." There are nowadays 56 military garrisons in the three provinces of Wollega region, where the OLF is strongest; in 1983 there were only three. But their increased number hasn't stopped the tide of the insurgency.

Two wounded rebels received treatment from one of the roughly trained medics who accompanied the operation. After scouts radioed back that the new way chosen by Gabbisa was clear, the march began again. It was to be an exhausting forced march, without stops until we reached a safe area in the hills, completely out of government control. Around 1030 we finally camped near a river.

Observers left behind reported that two Mi-8 helicopters had landed at the ambush site, apparently to evacuate some wounded and to ferry in top officers. A battalion-sized force was now in the area. "Too late, once more," commented one of the guerrillas.

The peasants who had fled to join the OLF congratulated each other. "I'd rather be killed than go back to the state farm where the government had deported me," one of them proclaimed. "There I had to work like a slave, and all my crops were confiscated by the government. No property was allowed. We have no other choice but to fight to topple this system. If I won't be able to do it, my children will."

BAYONETS

Continued from page 59

over the radio as he reported his position to 3rd Marine Regiment's operations section. "Those PFs were out of here like a shot!" Collins exclaimed. "They'll probably still be running come nightfall."

Moments later, the Bravo 1/3 Marines jammed aboard the UH-34D helicopters and, in a swirl of churning dirt and chopping rotors, launched skyward, each man excited and scared as he rushed toward the unknown finality of his first battle. At the same time, half a dozen strapped and saddled, wide-eyed pilots — like jockeys in a derby — raced their flight of VMFA-531 Phantom jets two by two, seething their blue-flame

thunder of twin pairs of 30-foot-long, 44,000-pound-thrust afterburner tails down Da Nang's runway, bristling for a first fight too.

His arm gashed by a bullet, Vankat stood. The chattering crossfire chewed through the grass and dirt all around him as he shouted to his men to get to their feet and charge forward. DelGrosso's men linked to first platoon's right and began to concentrate their fire into the village as well.

When the shooting began, the battle seemed nearly metaphysical for many Marines who had never before felt battle's numbing first jolt: that split second, dream-like mind-cloud that requires a brain-clearing blink or two before the virgin warrior can grasp the mortal reality of first combat. Yet the crack and pop of bullets clipping past their ears quickly shattered any sense of dream. Their awakening was a rattling one, punctuated by sudden terror and amplified reactions. For these Marines, the heat and excitement of first battle came at its fullest.

"Slow your fire," DelGrosso shouted to his men, who in the blur of excitement — or awakening as newly baptized combat veterans — sent their volleys into the ground, trees and air. "Take aim! Don't waste your ammo!"

DelGrosso, himself still shaking from the reality of first combat, continued to scold his Marines until their fire settled into the bodies of several VC who stood in the open. This sight of first blood further steadied the Marines with feelings of added confidence.

While DelGrosso and Vankat's platoons found marks with their rifles and advanced on the village from the front, Collins and what was left of third platoon now moved quickly through the cover that the trees offered them, in hopes of closing on the VC's exposed flank.

More than 20 minutes had now passed since the first shots had sounded in this firefight, and already the Viet Cong were showing signs of second thoughts. Usually when the VC ambushed a South Vietnamese patrol, the government force would either withdraw under fire or squat like sitting ducks while "Charlie" picked them off. However, the tactics that the Marines displayed caught Charlie by surprise. Rather than squat and be picked off, the Marines attacked.

By the time that DelGrosso's platoon linked on-line with Vankat's and closed toward the village, the VC began their withdrawal. Several Viet Cong lay wounded between huts after jumping from two long trenches that paralleled the line of Marines now 100 meters away. One guerrilla sprawled, hacked and bloody — clearly dead.

High in the blue, 90-degree-warm sky, a hollow roar cascaded to earth and echoed off the bluffs across the river and through the trees and across the rice paddies where the battle still raged. It seemed, at first, distant and unassuming. Few men even noticed. But in a second, the thunder and

horrifying squall of two diving F-4 jets — sling-shotting over the village at treetop height — sent shudders booming through the earth and adrenaline spiking the heartbeats of every man on the ground, including the Marines. There are few things so immediately frightening as an F-4 Phantom jet suddenly and without warning screaming past at more than 500 knots and a few feet above the trees. At one moment, all is quiet. And in a second, the world quakes with the sudden shake and boom as the gray flash thunders past, literally bending trees in its wake.

Several Marines cheered. Captain Collins only watched in increased frustration. During the early weeks in Vietnam, ground units could not talk directly to the fighter pilots — their radios did not mesh. Ground forces had to radio coordinate instructions in relay through helicopters, who had the radios that could talk to the jets. The three-party conversation risked more hazard than help. Only distant targets were safe bets for the air.

Collins later said, laughing about the early display of close air support, "All the jets could do was fly through the treetops, knock down branches and try to scare the hell out of Charlie."

The sound of the clanking iron, followed by several sharp whistle blasts, rang through the village and surrounding trees and hills. As this similar signal had alerted the ambush a good 30 to 40 minutes earlier, it now signalled retreat. At the sight of Charlie's withdrawal, several squads of Marines leaped to their feet and charged forward, yelling and firing at the fleeing enemy.

While the two platoons intensified their assault from the front, Collins and the several Marines from third platoon closed on the right flank, provoking the VC to scatter and run. When the Marines were not moving forward, they lay prone to present the smallest target and have the steadiest of aiming positions.

The distant and familiar beat of helicopter blades chopping through the late-morning heat caught the attention of several dozen Marines who now lay in the open field and fired with careful aim at the retreating enemy. The VC who manned the machine guns to the Marines' left had long since withdrawn, as had the rifle platoon located on the knolls across the river. The company-sized ambush — approximately 90 to 100 guerrillas — had in effect carried out its mission of making contact and now wisely "bugged out" before it was too late.

As he too lay on his belly, Pat Collins looked over his shoulder and watched several helicopters swooping in low over the trees. He was about to stand and wave the choppers into the rice field when they turned nose up and banked hard right, climbing up and away to the rear.

"What in hell's going on!" the captain exclaimed to no one in particular. He jumped to his feet and yelled, "Where in hell they goin'?"

Only a few rifle shots cracked and chattered, and they were mostly friendly. The confused captain took a moment before he realized that the appearance of his Marines, all lying flat in the rice paddy, must have given the pilots the impression that the Marines on the ground were pinned down — that this was an LZ under fire. Collins swore that he would never again let incoming helicopters see his men on their bellies. No matter how heavy the fire, they would be up walking around.

Seeing the Marines "under fire," the helicopters turned away and landed at alternate landing sites hundreds of meters away from the fight. There they unloaded Bravo Company.

By the time the point Marines of Bravo 1/3 found their way to the complex of grass huts and rice fields, the fight had completely died away. The only remaining sound of war was the squall of several Phantom jets still circling high overhead, hoping for an enemy target far enough away so that an air strike would not threaten the friendly forces.

"Where's the war?" one of their officers asked Collins.

"Scattered west, south and southwest," the captain replied. Several of his squads sought to catch a final shot or two at the retreating enemy, but had no luck.

While Bravo Company fanned out along the tree line and established security around the village, Collins and his Marines entered Binh Thai.

Eddie Adams took out a gray handkerchief and wiped his brow and the top of his head, where only a few strands of black hair covered an otherwise bald scalp. He felt the distinctive soreness of a working sunburn and now looked for his hat.

Pat Collins also wiped sweat from the stubble of hair on his balding head. As he tucked on his soft cap, he saw Carmine DelGrosso inspecting the line of trenches and punji pits just behind the thorn-branch and stick fence that surrounded Binh Thai. Several tunnels opened at the ends of the trenches and under the huts. And between the tunnel entrances and trenches were splatters of blood and scars in the dirt where wounded Viet Cong had fallen and their fellows had dragged them away in retreat.

"See any bodies?" Collins asked.

"No, sir. But I think we killed one of 'em. Look here."

The two Marines examined a large, smeared puddle of blood and bowels where obviously one man had died.

"They were good," Collins said.

"Yes, sir. You have to give them good marks. They knew what they were doing," DelGrosso said as he took a quick survey of the village. "I have fire teams checking out these tunnels. They have all sorts of underground earthworks here. Maybe some wounded hiding down there."

"What about arms?" Collins asked.

"Yes, sir. Come and look."

The two officers walked to a hut where four Marines had stabbed the mud walls

with their bayonets.

"Look here, skipper," DelGrosso said, pointing to several packages of ammunition wrapped in plastic. "They wrap it in this and pack it in the mud walls. We found all sorts of explosives and rounds like this. And look in here," the lieutenant said, stepping inside the hut and picking up a rifle. "We found these stuffed up in roofs and down in the floor mats."

Collins looked at the several dozen huts and looked back at DelGrosso, "Regular little ammo dump." The captain knew they could not pick the huts apart and collect everything the Viet Cong had stored in this cache. That would take the rest of the day, and he did not want to spend the night here . . . alone.

"Think we could blow 'em in place?" the captain asked, watching the Marines pull another book-sized package of ammunition out of the hut wall.

"Only explosives we have are the grenades for the M79. They'll blow right through the walls and out the other side. We need to burn 'em."

The captain walked to the side of the hut, put his cigarette lighter under the banana leaf roof and tried to set the roof on fire. Nothing happened.

"We're gonna have to use toilet paper," DelGrosso said. "Stuff it in the rafters and set it off. The banana leaves won't burn by themselves."

An hour later, half a dozen helicopters lifted away the last of Bravo Company. Pat Collins, Carmine DelGrosso, Bill Vankat, a Vietnamese Marine captain, Eddie Adams and all the Marines of Company D, 3rd Recon Battalion walked southeastward along the roadway that had led them into this first American firefight of the Vietnam War.

Several Marines looked over their shoulders as they walked and watched the village of Binh Thai burn in the fire storm they set — explosions in the flames confirming why they did it. As they walked away from the scene of this fight — only two Americans slightly wounded and one VC believed killed — black smoke billowed into the sky.

Eddie Adams would write of U.S. Marines ambushed by more than 100 Viet Cong this day, marking the first action of American ground forces in Vietnam. George MacArthur, the Associated Press Saigon bureau chief, would send the story and Eddie's photographs throughout the planet, where headlines would herald, "U.S. Marines Engage Viet Cong for the First Time."

But as the Marines left this village — a farm community turned VC fortress — not a single man, except Eddie Adams, even considered that they had made history that day.

They did not consider the fact that they were the first American unit to fight in this war. Nor did they care. As they looked in the sky at the smoke's black signature boiling up from Binh Thai, these grimy, sweat-soaked Marines — who again stirred the roadway's hot, orange dust in nasty clouds

around their feet as they strode the long walk toward home and now smelled smoke instead of pig shit — thought only of being finished with this day. They wished only to rest.

CONTRA-DICTION

Continued from page 85

100 pounds of gear up and down steep jungle trails. Soaked with sweat, I was relieved to arrive at our designated bivouac and to begin carving out a campsite along the tangled undergrowth on the riverbank. Initially wary of my presence, the soldiers began to relax around me, joking and bantering with one another. The lieutenant in charge of the company I was with offered me an AK-47 to carry, saying, "Out here, no one is a noncombatant." While he no doubt had a point, I declined the offer.

The elite and highly mobile BLIs have carried the war for the Sandinistas because they are better trained, organized and equipped than the militias. Usually a complement of 500-800 men divided into four companies, they are the cutting edge of the Sandinista response to the highly motivated contra guerrillas.

Most BLIs are made up of young peasants, recruited for a mandatory two-year tour of duty, of which most is spent in the field. Some are as young as 15 and, aside from the officers, few are older than 21. Being *campesinos* born and raised in the hardship of rural life in Nicaragua, they make excellent soldiers since they are used to the deprivation and physical demands of primitive living conditions. After training, the average BLI soldier is a tough, simple-minded, highly skilled jungle fighter.

Like the rank and file of any army, a BLI soldier has few concerns beyond filling his stomach and saving his skin. It is in the officer corps that political ideology becomes a major concern. In each Sandinista BLI there is a political officer, and under his command are company-level political officers, all concerned with maintaining the proper revolutionary attitude toward the war. In practical terms, this usually means that the political officers spend most of their time addressing day-to-day gripes of field soldiers, acting as go-betweens to the troops and the battalion commander. Captain Silvio González, typical of such BLI commanders, is 26 years old and has already spent eight years in the jungle: first fighting against the government of Anastasio Somoza, and now against the contras.

In keeping with their capability for rapid deployment and long stays in the field, the BLIs are lightly but effectively armed. Each battalion has an antiaircraft unit with 12.7x108mm heavy machine guns and SA-7 ground-to-air missiles, a mortar squad equipped with 82mm mortars, six 7.62x39mm RPK light machine guns and a squad armed with 7.62x54R Dragunov sniper rifles. In addition, each company has one

rapid-fire AGS-17 grenade launcher (called *La Araña,* or "The Spider," by Nicaraguan troops because of the shape of its tripod) which, when it works — it tends to overheat and jam up — has an effective rate of 58 rpm. Every soldier carries an AK-47 and an assortment of grenades and small arms. Most important is the Sandinistas' ability to introduce heavy artillery into remote battle zones to provide covering fire.

Well-provisioned and anxious after four days of waiting and anticipation, the rest of the BLI and I were ready to move out. We heard that another BLI had left by land to outflank the contras and force them to engage the major Sandinista forces headed their way. But the contras apparently had prior knowledge of Sandinista troop movements and were not about to engage the Sandinistas head-on.

But skirmishes between Sandinista and contra units in the area soon became common. By 0515 the morning of the main deployment of Sandinista troops into the target area, fighting occurred throughout the Bocay River Valley. We lined up in 25-man squads to await our turn to be dropped into the battle zone. As the echoes of battle to the north reached the clearing, the helicopters started to arrive. Within 20 minutes we were deployed along the exposed banks of the Bocay River just a few kilometers from the contra camp on the Amaka, which was our objective. By 0700 the other three waves (the BLI had eight helicopters operating in groups of four during the offensive) had arrived and we moved out and overran the contra camp with little resistance. Briefly under mortar fire from the opposite bank, the BLI took cover until a helicopter strafing run discouraged further contra artillery fire. A column of contras later entered the area of the camp, mistakenly believing it was still in friendly hands. In the ensuing ambush, two were killed while the rest fled. Our objectives met, the BLI settled down to await further orders.

The BLIs had basically achieved their objectives throughout the offensive. The problem is, the contras refuse to fight on BLI terms, choosing to melt back into the bush to wait until they can effectively confront smaller Sandinista units. Captain González scornfully noted that, "The contras refuse to fight us; they just turn around and run."

The offensive cost the Sandinistas at least two Mi-17s, one of which was shot down by a Redeye missile, the other reportedly by small arms fire. I also learned from a contra source that they came close to downing another Mi-17 the day after the battle for the camp. This source said that they were tracking it for a shot and lost it behind a hill at the last possible second. He said it was only "by the grace of God we didn't blow it away." Later the contras learned that onboard this helicopter were 18 of the 70 journalists who came up from Managua to see the battlefield.

Though the Sandinistas claim they lost an estimated 60 soldiers in this battle, with

another 60 wounded, both sides issue unreliable battlefield statistics, making it difficult to gauge fighting effectiveness of either the contras or Sandinistas. Nevertheless, one fact is abundantly clear: Nicaragua's northern war zone is the scene of almost daily combat where both sides are determined to win the final battle for control of the country.

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

Continued from page 18

ic for military use for one reason: It glows in the dark.

The lighting elements on the lensatic are radioactive, so they don't have to be "primed" with a flashlight. The elements allow you to line up the north arrow and the bezel mark *and* clearly read the azimuth. The compass also serves as a great signalling device in tactical situations.

Some Silva-type compasses have fluorescent elements on the north arrow and bezel, but they need to be "primed" with a flashlight, and azimuths cannot be read at night.

No matter what type of compass you prefer to use, the orienteering method of navigation will allow you to get there quickly and easily, without a protractor. This is a technique everyone who doesn't want to get lost in the woods should master.

In the feature article "Beirut's Christian Commandos" beginning on page 38 of this issue, frequent SOF contributor Gene Scroft relates his experiences training Phalange commandos in war-torn Lebanon.

FLYING CIRCUS

Continued from page 90

Caribou and were quickly lighting the torches. On downwind, the flares and the runway showed clear. We rolled into a left turn to final. Buz called for the gear, and a few seconds after Ernie lowered the handle, the runway disappeared in a blanket of fog. The heat from the torches stirred the damp air and mixed the sooty exhaust of the flaming rags in the ammo cans. The result? We were making our own fog! When we were only a few feet from the ground, Buz broke off the approach, added power and climbed out. I looked out my side window and, behind and below, I could see the runway. Ahead was only the brilliance of the landing light reflecting back. Buz shouted the solution for this problem to Ernie before I could offer it myself, "Next time around, no landing light!"

With that change in our approach, we could make out the parallel lines of the torch heads, and Buz brought down the C-7 with no trouble. We taxied into the parking area and shut down. Colonel Gómez was waiting with congratulations and thanks and, in his hand, a message confirming receipt of the drop. As we gathered outside the plane, Buz gave us another of his unintelligible mumbles, "Ah fulls good 'bout thet. Aughta go agin."

NEWS

Continued from page 86

business of running still photos and certainly not still photos of "old news," decided to use the Scroft photos.

Bill Price was aware of the Sandinista "press junket" overhead on 12 May and reported that a contra source told him that only through good luck had the contras not nailed one of the press Mi-17s with a Redeye. Condor, the contra Redeye shooter, had the Mi-17 lined up for a shot but lost it at the last possible second behind a hill. The contras later learned that there were 18 journalists on board.

If Condor had hit his target, would that have been treated by *Newsweek* as "old news"? Nordland might not have had the opportunity to treat it at all.

NICARAGUAN INVASION

Continued from page 82

from Cuba). In the absence of a strong air threat, however, the Air Force's primary missions will be transport and air-to-ground operations. The forcible entry will include the 82nd dropping from C-130s and C-141s. As soon as an airfield is taken, heavier forces will fly in.

The geography of Nicaragua will strongly determine the course of a potential future conflict. Between the Pacific coast and Managua are densely populated, heavily cultivated, fertile lowland plains. These, along with Managua, would be the initial "conventional" battleground of an invasion. The central highlands, to the north, would probably be the seat of any Sandinista guerrilla resistance, being relatively populous and fertile. The Atlantic coast's ports and airfields would certainly have to be seized in the initial phase, but after that the potential for advance would be limited by the swampy, roadless terrain.

The nature of the Sandinista forces and their strategy also helps divide the war into two parts. The Sandinista army is basically divided into two forces, one for garrison and conventional combat, the other for counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare.

Conventional forces include the bulk of the armor and mechanized forces, active force infantry, artillery, air defense units and the militia. They are not currently carrying the burden of the offensive in the war against the contras. Rather, they hold key areas including towns, airfields, Managua and the area between Managua and the Pacific coast. In case of a U.S. invasion, they would try to delay the U.S. forces as they land and move on Managua as well as try to gain as much time as possible for the Sandinistas to mobilize resistance in the countryside. The Sandinista conventional forces, aware of superior U.S. firepower and mobility, would probably seek to counter them with camouflaged positions and, where possible, extensive field fortifications. The armored units would probably not be concentrated as a central reserve due to the danger of U.S. air attack, but would most likely be kept in smaller, tactical reserves to engage U.S. beachheads and airdrops before they can be consolidated.

If the Sandinistas were able to carry out their mobilization of resistance in the countryside — and because a U.S. invasion would certainly not be a surprise, they may be able to — it would lead to the second phase of the war. The Sandinistas have apparently adopted the idea of "total defense" based on the Cuban model. They realize that they cannot defeat a U.S. invasion in a conventional conflict. They will try to make the conventional phase of the conflict, including the taking of Managua, as lengthy and costly as possible. This will give the Sandinista leadership and cadres time to organize resistance, to move weapons and food into the hills, and to allow world and U.S. opposition a chance to take hold and increase the political cost of the war.

One of the most significant uncertainties in a potential invasion of Nicaragua is how many Nicaraguans would be willing to fight for the Sandinistas during either the initial phase or the prolonged guerrilla conflict. While the Sandinistas may have a great deal of internal opposition, nationalism is always a powerful rallying force. Even Stalin found out that his people — who had suffered terrible and tragic losses at his hands — turned out to fight the invader if the motherland was in danger. It may be that Nicaraguans will fight the *yanquis* out of nationalism. It may be that many of those fighting for the Sandinistas will fade away once the size of the U.S. effort becomes apparent. Some will certainly welcome U.S. forces with open arms, as on Grenada in 1983.

The war will not end once Managua is taken. In a modern war, the objective is not the enemy capital, but the enemy's means and will to resist. In looking to a longer-term strategy of Cuban-style defense, the Sandinistas aim to make both phases independent of towns, ports and airfields. While, in the long term, a guerrilla movement without outside support or sanctuaries

will not succeed, they can hope that the United States will become impatient, that the non-communist Nicaraguans will feud amongst themselves or that U.S. politics will change.

Once the initial conventional phase of the conflict has been concluded, the U.S. task (and that of its Central American allies) will be to install a non-communist Nicaraguan government in Managua and to help them create and train forces for a counterinsurgency conflict against the Sandinistas. The United States will not be able to sustain an indefinite counterinsurgency conflict in Nicaragua militarily or politically. Rather, it must act effectively to gain the initiative and then turn things over to the non-communist Nicaraguans as soon as possible.

How long will the counterinsurgency phase last? Possibly years. Certainly the wars in Guatemala and El Salvador have lasted for many years, and Nicaragua is the biggest country in Central America. The key elements will be U.S. political resolve, the continued ability of the surviving Sandinistas to motivate their supporters, and the ability of the non-communist Nicaraguans to form a government that will be supported by a majority of the people and to put effective armed forces into the field against the Sandinistas. If all of these things work out, then the Sandinistas may join Somoza on the junk pile of history.

While the United States is obviously capable of invading Nicaragua, it is equally obvious that it is not an easy thing to do. A

U.S. invasion would resolve many problems in Central America, but it would not remove the fundamental long-term bleak prospects for the region. It would also aid the enemies of freedom elsewhere. The best way to win a war is never having to fight it. If the United States can fund and implement an effective Central American policy, including real and meaningful supports for the Nicaraguan resistance and not just a drawn-out Bay of Pigs, then the invasion of Nicaragua is one battle which need never be fought.

FLAK

Continued from page 16

GURKHA PRIDE...

Sirs:

I must thank you for publishing "In Defense of the Realm" by Tom Marks in your July issue. It was both definitive and absolutely accurate — and I thoroughly enjoyed Marks' quiet and authoritative style.

I had the honor and privilege of serving in a Gurkha parachute unit during World War II in Southeast Asia. I was terribly hurt — as were all ex-Gurkha officers — when I read about the "Hawaii incident." Many of us suspected what had happened, and Tom Marks explained it all. Johnny Gurkha does not have to justify his existence to the likes of Major Pearce. Rather, it's the other way around.

John Kemp
Ottawa, Canada

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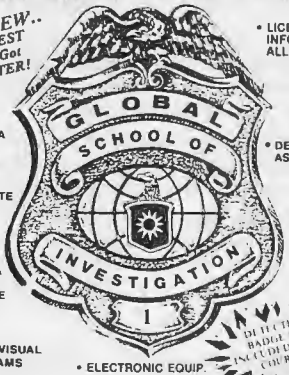

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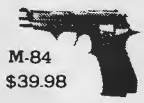
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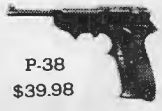
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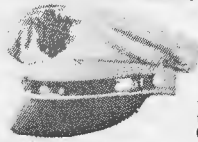

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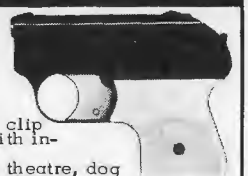

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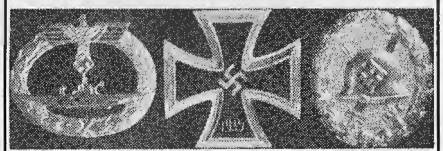

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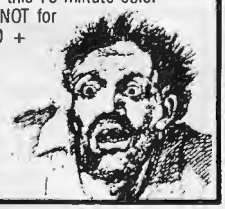

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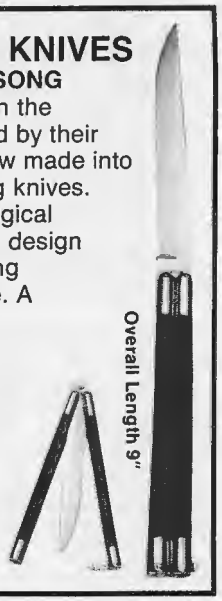

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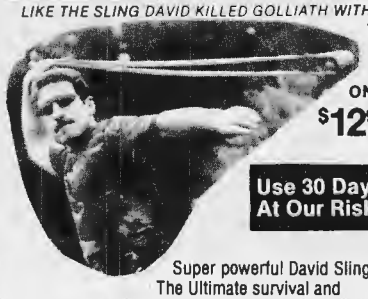

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Granted, it was a couple of days before April Fool's Day, but the KGB scored something of a coup when CBS news aired a report on 30 March — with a straight face — quoting a Soviet military publication's claims that the AIDS virus had leaked out of a U.S. Army biological warfare lab.

CBS didn't bother to ask any U.S. official for a comment on the report, which is bad journalistic practice and is particularly unfortunate in this case. Had CBS noticed, the State Department had held a press briefing on 3 November 1986 at which time a painfully documented paper-trail was presented exposing how Soviet spooks had gone about planting that particular lie in the world's press.

That CBS made a beginner's mistake (from Murrow to mediocrity, perhaps) might be forgivable; even overpaid network newscasters screw up. The real question, however, is why one of the world's most prestigious news organizations, when presented with a grotesque and obscene lie about the conduct of its country's armed forces, found it so unremarkable that they repeated it without comment.

What's next? A TASS-CBS merger?

ARGIE NAVY LOOKING FOR TROUBLE...

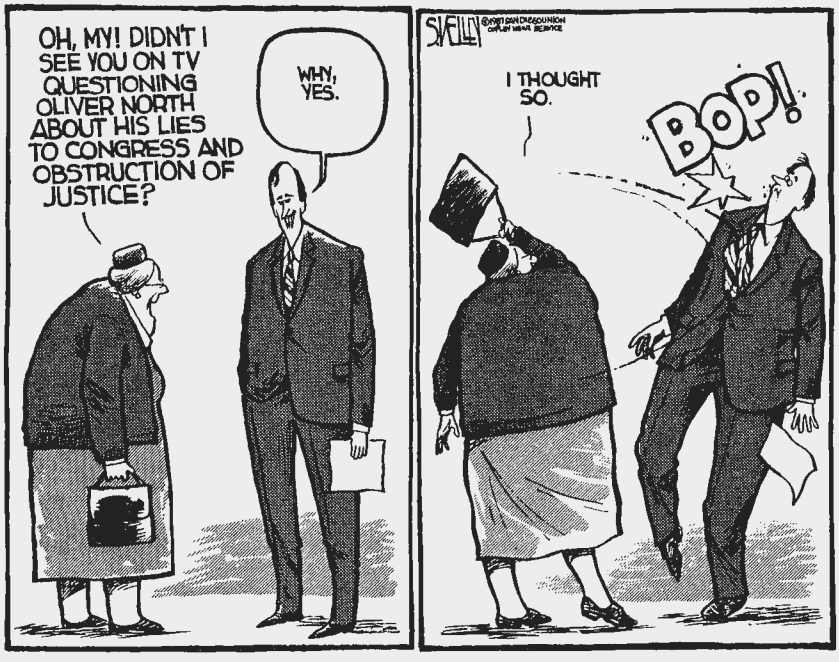
Argentina's navy has come out in favor of a plan to transfer the country's capital from Buenos Aires to the Viedma-Carmen de Patagones area, about 500 miles farther south (and that much closer to the Falklands).

The navy likes the site because it is a maritime location. In the same report it urged that special attention be given (whatever that means) to the development of Patagonia, the Falklands dispute and the British Fisheries Zone (the last is just Her Majesty's Civil Servants' rather literal-minded way of saying the Argies can't fish in troubled waters).

Argentina's air force, which did most of the fighting (and dying) during the Falklands war, thinks the admirals — whose principal accomplishments were losing the *General Belgrano* and failing to get the carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* out of port — are insane.

They favor an inland site, as does the Argentine army.

Views of the Royal Navy on the subject were not solicited.



NOVEMBER INCOMING...

• **California's Emerald Triangle** — SOF journeys to the lush and dangerous hills of the Emerald Triangle, northern California's infamous pot-growing capital. Amidst towering redwoods you'll find armed outlaw pot growers who protect their crops with Viet Cong-style booby traps, mayhem and murder. SOF goes behind the scenes with the men fighting these 20th-century American warlords.

• **Wounded Knee** — Wounded Knee's occupation by the American Indian Movement in 1973 resulted in the largest SWAT operation of all time. Was AIM linked to an international terrorist network? SOF examines this unexpected connection next month.

• **Dust-Off** — From Korea to Grenada, medevac helicopters have meant the difference between life and death for hundreds of thousands of GIs — a few SOF staffers included. Take a ride with these heliborne heroes as we examine the chopper's life-saving role in combat.

• **Operation Solid Shield** — Hit the beaches of North Carolina with SOF staffer and Marine vet G.B. Crouse as he covers one of the largest Joint Service combined amphibious ops held in the United States. Snafu or clockwork precision? SOF digs in to give you the answer.

• **Action, adventure, analysis** — join our team of SOF professionals who cover the globe from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, bringing you the latest combat and intelligence reports each month. If firsthand, up-to-date coverage is your style, then SOF is your magazine. Stay with us next month — on sale 6 October.

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☐ USAF Flight Jacket-

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

Specify:
- **Sage Green or Blue Shell - Regular Length Only.**
  Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL **$49.95/each**
- **Black (nylon shell) or Camouflage (50% cotton/50% nylon shell) - Regular Length Only.**
  Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL ..... **$49.95/each.**

New for 1986/87 Season!! **Long Lengths in Flight Jackets - ☐ Add $6.00 per jacket.**

Quality, Functionality and WARMTH . . .

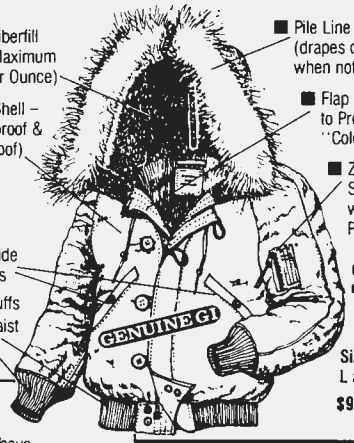
When it comes to winter clothing, the 3 main concerns of the military are quality, functionality and WARMTH. After this they think about price.

The US military wants its troops to keep warm in the winter in clothes that will last a bunch of winters. They know quality costs more.

Genuine military clothing isn't the cheapest. But as every ex-GI knows, the clothes seem to last forever, they're very, very warm and designed to be functional.

Most of the items in this ad are current military issue, brand new and unconditionally guaranteed to satisfy you or your money back. And when you consider the quality, do the prices seem high at all?

☐ USAF Heavyweight Flight Jacket–Type N2B
DESIGNED FOR TEMPERATURES OF -10° TO 32° F.



- Polyester Fiberfill Lining – (Maximum Warmth Per Ounce)
- Nylon Shell – (Waterproof & Windproof)
- 2 Outside Pockets
- Knit Cuffs and Waist
- Pile Line Hood – (drapes over shoulder when not needed)
- Flap Under Zipper to Prevent "Cold Spots"
- Zippered Sleeve Pocket with Pencil Holder

Choose: Black or Sage Green Outer Shell Color.

Sizes: S, M, L and XL.

$94.25/each.

☐ Watch Cap - 100% Wool -

- Tight Ribbed Weave
- Roll Down to Cover Ears When Desired
- One Size Fits All

Choose Color - Black or Olive Drab (OD) Green

$6.00.each.

MILITARY GOODS CATALOG

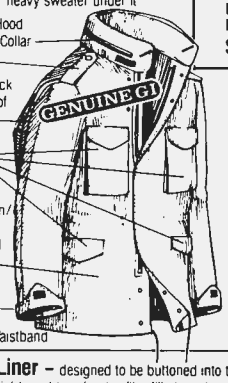
1987 edition. 84 pages, loaded with genuine military clothing, gear and equipment

$2.00/each. Free with order.

☐ Field Jacket – Type M65

In one form or another, this jacket has been the military workhorse for over 40 years and is still going strong.

The field jacket is designed for 3 season wear In winter you can button in the liner (see below) or wear a vest or heavy sweater under it



- Lightweight Hood Concealed in Collar
- Epaulets
- Gussetted Back for Freedom of Movement
- 4 Huge Outside Pockets
- Outershell of 50% Cotton/ 50% Nylon – Water & Wind Repellant
- Adjustable Cuffs
- Drawstring Waistband

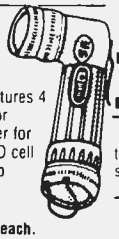
Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL (Send us your chest size for proper fit) **Long Length** (for person over 6 ft tall)
Choose: Olive Drab (OD) Green or Woodland Camouflage (Also Black or Tan Commercial Mfr. to GI Specs. - Reg. Length Only)
Reg Length **$55.00**
Long Length **$60.50**
Extra Large/ Long **$85.00**

☐ Special Forces Green Beret - Jaunty and daring and classy – like the professional's who wear them. These are **official regulation berets** of 100% vat dyed wool and meeting all military specs. Made expressly for us by the prime government contractor. Also available Official headgear for

- ☐ **Airborne Qualified (Maroon)**
- ☐ **Ranger Commandos (Black)**
- ☐ **Artillery & Guardian Angels (Red)**
- ☐ **Commando Dress (Camouflage)**

Sizes–6 7/8 to 7¾
(Not sure of head size? Tell us how many inches around your head where you wear your hat. We'll send the right one.) **$13.75/each**

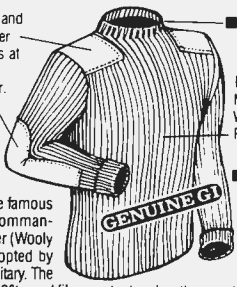
☐ Angle Head Flashlite– GENUINE GI



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

Choose:
Olive Drab (OD) green or black ..... **$6.50/each.**

☐ Commando Sweater -



- Sleeve and Shoulder Patches at Points of Wear.
- 100% Wool
- Crew Neck Design
- Tight Weave Makes Sweater Wind & Water Repellant
- Extra long body and sleeve (can be rolled up)

This is the famous British Commando Sweater (Wooly Pully) adopted by the US Military. The natural 100% wool fibre content makes the sweater super warm.
Specify size:
34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46 ..... **$44.75/each.**
Sizes 48, 50 ..... **add $5.00/each.**

Choose: ☐ ***Olive Drab (OD) Green Crewneck*** **(USMC approved);** ☐ ***Black V-Neck*** **with epaulets and name plate area on breast (US Army approved);** ☐ ***Black Crewneck*** **(no epaulets or nameplate area);** ☐ ***Camouflage Crewneck;*** ☐ ***Tan Crewneck;*** ☐ ***Maroon Crewneck.***

☐ M65 Liner – designed to be buttoned into the M65 Field Jacket, these liners are lightweight, polyester-fiberfilled, and very warm. Order same size as your field jacket. **Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL .... $19.00/each.**

☐ Ranger Combat Cap–Woodland Camouflage–latest Army issue.

This winterweight cap features lined flaps which can fold out to keep your ears warm and tuck into the hat when the weather's balmy. Sizes run small.
Also available in Olive Drab (OD) Green.
Sizes: 7, 7-1/4, 7-1/2, 7-3/4 .... **$8.50/each.**

☐ Commando Sweater - Commercially made - patterned after the GI ones, these are commercially made in easy care 100% acrylic. Although they are copies, they are constructed surprisingly true to the all wool ones, complete with sleeve and shoulder patches. **Choose between: Olive Drab (OD) Green or Black. Specify Size: S, M, L, XL $22.75/each.**

■ Black Commando Dog Tag Set – (A Kaufman's Exclusive): 2 GI stainless steel tags specially treated to be non-glare flat black plus 2 black (4" and 24") ball chains **$6.00/set**

☐ Regulation GI Dog Tags- GENUINE GI

set of 2 stainless steel tags and 2 stainless chains (4" and 24") ..... **$4.00/set.**
Want us to print them? WE'LL PRINT ANYTHING up to 6 lines and 15 spaces per line.
Printing ..... **only $1.50 per tag ($3.00/set).**

PLEASE, NO DOG TAG IMPRINTING ORDERS BY TELEPHONE.

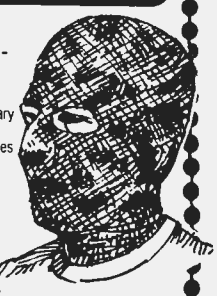
☐ Drill Instructor/Smokey the Bear Hat–Formally called the Campaign Hat, this is a really fine quality pressed felt headpiece. A hat with character. No one who wears it escapes a personality change. An uncontrollable urge to shout orders or heap abuses, pursue flamers or write traffic tickets. Let your true or wistful self be heard. **Commercially manufactured to exacting specs.** Sizes: 6-7/8 to 7-3/4 **$19.75/each.**

☐ **Genuine Leather Chin Strap** **$2.00/each.**
☐ **Acorn Hat Cord** (as shown) **$7.75/each.**
(Specify color: silver, gold metallic, black/gold, metallic, yellow, red or light blue)

☐ Dog Tag Silencers - black, non-glare rubber bumpers for tags **$1.25/pair.**

CAMOUFLAGE

Commando Camouflage Headnet - Spandoflage -



Expandable camouflage mesh fits comfortably on any size head. Cool in summer, warm in winter, this revolutionary new mesh material can be cut (but will not unravel) to form eye-holes for the comfort of eyeglass wearers.
Choose: Woodland Camouflage, Desert Camouflage or Solid Black ..... **$6.00/each; 2 for $11.00.**

Camouflage Face Paint –

Each metal tube contains 2 colors of facepaint which can be easily removed with soap and water. Current military issue
Choose: Woodland Camo (green & loam); desert camo (light green & sand); snow camo (white & loam) ..... **$2.75/tube; 2 tubes for $5.00**

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