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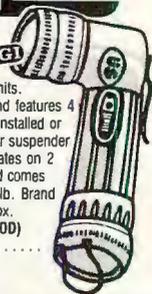


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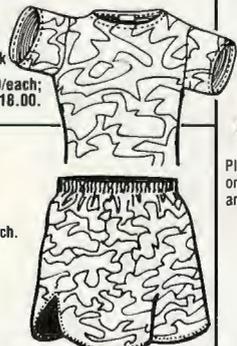
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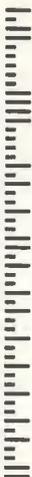
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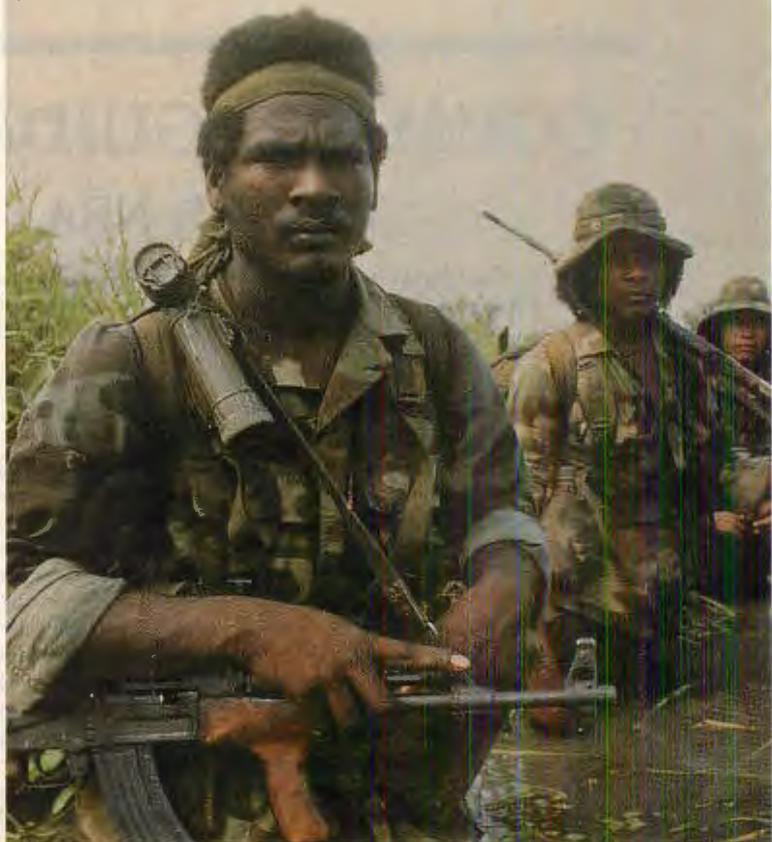
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COVER: Two SOF correspondents braved the front lines of the world's hottest hot spots — Afghanistan and Nicaragua — to bring you a pair of combat updates. See Hunter Penn's "Afghan Anniversary Attack" beginning on page 60 and Paul Larkin & Andy Stone's "Mosquito Coast Ambush" starting on page 42. Cover photo: Hunter Penn. Inset: Paul Larkin

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COMMAND GUIDANCE

TARGET: NRA

IT would be hard to find a large U.S. organization whose positions have been more lied about or distorted than the National Rifle Association.

The NRA was formed in 1877 by a group of New York National Guard officers. It always has followed the same objectives: to protect the constitutional right of Americans to own and bear arms, to promote public safety through firearms training and hunting education courses, to train people in marksmanship and firearms safety and to foster the shooting sports.

The enemies of the NRA are those people who want to deprive Americans of their right to bear arms. The NRA enemies rightly recognize that it is the single most effective voice in opposing foolish and unconstitutional legislation. They are dead wrong, however, in using the tactics of lies and half-truths rather than arguing the case on its own merits.

Handgun Control Inc., the most notorious of the anti-gun rights organizations, has consistently misrepresented the NRA in its advertising and mailings.

For example, it has charged the NRA with fighting a congressional ban on so-called cop killer bullets.

This never happened. Handgun Control Inc. is able to get away with this kind of phoney-charge propaganda because of the failings of two other institutions, Congress and the Washington press corps.

It was proposed that Congress ban the manufacture of a special armor-piercing bullet that could penetrate flak vests, although no police officer had ever been killed by such a bullet. No problem.

But Congress, as the devious politicians in it so often do, attempted to do one thing in the name of another. The bill as drafted not only banned that particular bullet but so broadly defined the bullets to be banned that many common types of ammunition used by sportsmen and recreational shooters also would have been banned. It was that bill, a Trojan horse trick, that the NRA opposed and so, for that matter, did the U.S. Treasury Department.

Yet it was reported *ad nauseum* that the NRA was against banning "cop-killer" bullets.

It was claimed that the NRA wants to legal-

ize the sale of machine guns and has opposed legislation "to prevent extremist hate groups from running paramilitary camps." Again, a distortion.

For 52 years Americans legally bought automatic guns. The buyers were the most heavily regulated gun owners in America. To buy an automatic weapon, they had to be fingerprinted, photographed, subject to a background investigation, have local police attest to their good character and pay a \$200 fee. Not surprisingly, there is not one instance of record in the past 52 years where a legally bought automatic weapon was used in the commission of a crime.

Congress' recent ban on the sale of automatic weapons was just one more demagogic trick, a solution to a non-problem, like banning the non-existent plastic gun. The NRA has sought to restore a right Americans had for 52 years and for which there is no evidence it ever was abused.

The NRA opposed again too broadly written legislation in some states that would have caused problems for legitimate groups such as sportsmen clubs and gun clubs, but supports carefully drafted bills that would hit at the paramilitary hate groups.

The NRA has been advocating for decades tough legislation to inflict mandatory penalties on people who use firearms in the commission of crimes. It is the rights of the honest citizen that the NRA defends, and it is the rights of the honest citizens that the anti-gunners attack in the name of being concerned about crime.

The NRA in a sense is an anachronism. It is part of that America when people unquestionably condemned criminals and sought ways to protect honest people. It is part of that America when freedom and rights of honest citizens, not those of criminals, were strongly defended.

By Charley Reese, Orlando Sentinel. Reprinted with special permission of King Features Syndicate.

Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, who felt Charley Reese's column amply expressed his own views concerning distortions of the NRA's intent, will return to handle Command Guidance in next month's issue. ✕

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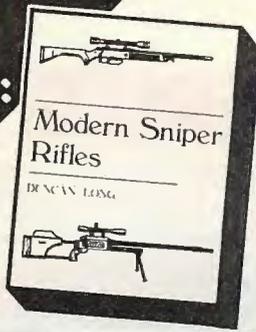
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by Duncan Long

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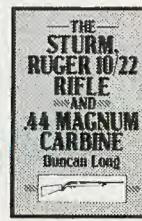
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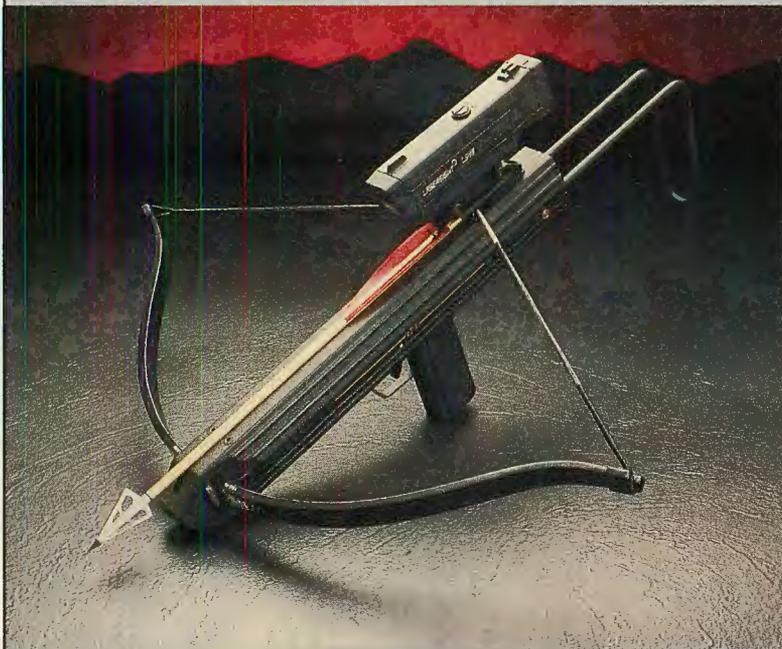
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FLAK

MERC TRAINING CAMPS...

Sirs:

I'm having difficulty getting information about mercenary training camps. Could you please send me information about them and where they are?

S.W.

Ontario, Canada

We receive this sort of request nearly every day, and we just can't help. What is a "mercenary" training camp? We don't even know for sure. Pros who are active in the business usually have years of specialized military training and combat experience — items you just can't learn in some clown's backyard using toy weapons for two weeks. Same goes for "survival schools," pretend "boot camps," and other pseudomilitary training courses. Also, many of these operations are fly-by-nighters run by certifiable lunatics; the only thing mercenary about them is that they take your money and vanish. It's just too difficult (and dull) for us to keep up with them, so we don't maintain lists of such schools. If you're determined to go waste your time and money anyway, do yourself a favor and check the course out thoroughly. By all means ask for references and verify them!



IRA ALL THE WAY...

Sirs:

It was a February afternoon when the older gent peacefully walked down the road; soon thereafter he lay dead. Why? Because a British commando in Northern Ireland shot the man in the back. The man was going to a sporting event — unarmed.

If you don't think the Irish people are repressed you've got some waking up to do. It's not a religious war like every SOF asshole thinks. It's a bunch of "freedom fighters" wanting their country back.

Oh my God! Did I say freedom fighter? Maybe I should leave the contra propaganda alone.

The right to vote without harassment, work without prejudice against nationality are basic rights. Even the right to a fair trial doesn't exist in Northern Ireland.

Now I honestly love SOF and support the contra cause. But bullshit like the anti-IRA cartoon in the February '88 FLAK makes me mad. I've been there. I've seen the harassment of innocent people, including children. I support the IRA. Wake up America.

Eric Kortz
U.S. Army

There have been wrongs committed by both sides in Northern Ireland but the IRA is in our opinion a leftist, terrorist group with a proclivity for bombs, targeted as often as not at soft targets without any regard or remorse for civilian casualties. When you plant bombs in front of Harrod's at Christmas, and blow up ceremonial cavalry troops, you're a terrorist.

FRIENDLY FIRE?...

Sirs:

Jack Thompson's "Core Skills for Combat" in the April 1988 Combat Weaponcraft column was to the point and excellent. However, the picture of the "effective combat soldier" was very disappointing. The chicken-foot peace symbol which hung around his neck brought to mind this question: Is this friendly fire? Is this chap a Jane Fonda regular? Or is this an illustration of "peace through superior firepower"?

Dave Smith

Chicago, Illinois

Actually, the soldier in the photograph was SP4 Richard Champion, a squad leader in B Company, 4th Battalion, 21st Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade. When the photo was taken, Champion was returning fire on a sniper and shouting instructions back to his squad on Hill 56, 70 miles southeast of Chu Lai on 19 January 1971. Troops in Vietnam, who were into black humor and irony, often wore "peace" symbols on chains, or peace signs on their helmet covers. The other medallion Champion wore appears to be a swastika but is in fact probably a Buddhist charm.

NOBEL WAR PRIZE...

Sirs:

As an Afghan refugee living in the United States, I appreciate your concern about Russian atrocities being committed daily in Afghanistan. We have suffered much and have the largest refugee community in the world.

It really bothers me that after all the destruction and mass murders in Afghanistan and other countries in the world Mr. Gorbachev is nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. I don't understand what the qualifications for such a nomination are, but if the criteria matches what Russian leaders have then all terrorists should be nominated.

Mr. R. Gandhi also will be nominated this coming October. I assume it is for his cooperation with the Russian atrocities in Afghanistan. If this quising behavior gets one nominated for the Nobel Prize then all Russian puppets should be nominated as well.

I would like to clarify to the American people that the war in Afghanistan is not a civil war, but a war between the Russian and Afghan nations. It may sound like a civil war but that's because Western society is being misled by media misinformation.

Abdul Ghafur
Lexington, Kentucky

STILL WALKIN' THE DMZ...

Sirs:

As a 19-year-old PFC with the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea, I'm surprised and upset with the lack of media coverage on soldiers serving here. Recently the 82nd Airborne made headlines for their "exercise" in Honduras. The media focused on how the 82nd was operating a mere 30 miles from a communist border.

Heck, I live three miles from a communist border in a tent with 13 other people and regularly patrol the DMZ separating North from South Korea. Unlike other Army units, soldiers in the 2nd ID may not bring their families, adding yet another burden. The soldiers of the 2nd ID are highly trained as a counter-active force and deserve some long overdue recognition. I hope SOF will provide some coverage and let your readers, especially Korean War vets, know the present situation.

PFC Mark Whitt
B Co. 2/503 Inf.
South Korea

Point well taken, PFC Whitt. Our military involvement in Korea is, and has been, a singularly neglected area in the press. Current scheduling does not allow for an immediate SOF visit to the U.S. troops in South Korea, but — thanks to your letter and others like it — it is on our future "trips to take" list. In the interim, we'd like to see articles and article ideas from military forces in South Korea. And perhaps a sharp jolt to the ribs of command Public Affairs Officers could result in a bit more coverage of you folks here in the States.

CAPS OFF...

Sirs:

Your April 1988 issue was excellent. However, I have one complaint about Parting Shot. Being a Vietnamese who grew up in a military family, I was shocked to see your failure to note that the badge on PFC Mosley's cap was ARVN, not NVA.

Such a small mistake may not mean anything to American GIs but it is an insult to the thousands of gallant ARVN soldiers who died defending their country, the Republic of Vietnam. An error like that requires an apology from the editors to the former ARVN soldiers (living and dead) and their families.

Hiep Le Pham
Gaithersburg, Maryland

Pham's right, we do owe our Vietnamese allies an apology. The original Department of Defense caption on the photo was incorrect and we just didn't pick it up.



POLITICIANS STRANGLE U.S. MILITARY...

Sirs:

I've been an avid reader of your magazine since I picked up my first issue in 1979. Currently I'm serving in the U.S. Army in West Germany. Two days ago my fellow soldiers and I heard on the radio that the Sandinistas pushed across the border into Honduras. We also heard that 3,200 U.S. troops left for Honduras for a "training" ex.

If this isn't the biggest bunch of bullshit I've ever heard, I don't know what is. Our politicians have been strangling the abilities of the U.S. military since before Vietnam. Will we ever be able to win a future conflict? Will we ever be able to support our allies without lying to them and the rest of the world?

My heart goes out to the contras and the mujahideen in Afghanistan who fight daily for freedom from communism, something all our goddamned politicians take for granted.

Cpl. L.C. Foltz
6/10 FA

GET JANE FONDA OFF U.S. NAVY SHIPS...

Sirs:

Hanoi Jane Alert! Jane Fonda has raised her ugly head aboard a U.S. naval vessel. Here we're sitting anchored near the Persian Gulf, defending this great country, when the ship's entertainment service has the audacity to show a Jane Fonda movie. I immediately went to the Command Master Chief and told him about the movie *Agnes of God*. He told me that the Navy Motion Picture Service is in charge of buying the films.

Help stop Hanoi Jane from getting rich with government money. Write: Officer in Charge, Navy Motion Picture Service, Flushing and Washington Aves., Brooklyn, NY 11251-8400.

Join in, this is an all hands effort. Why should we spend our hard-earned money to support some commie bitch and her equally pinko husband?

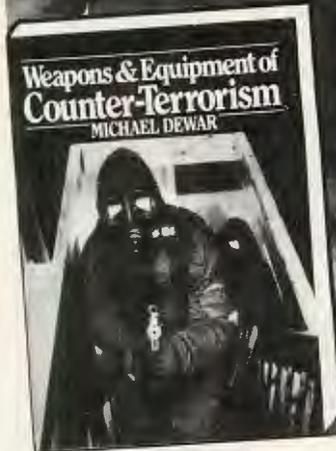
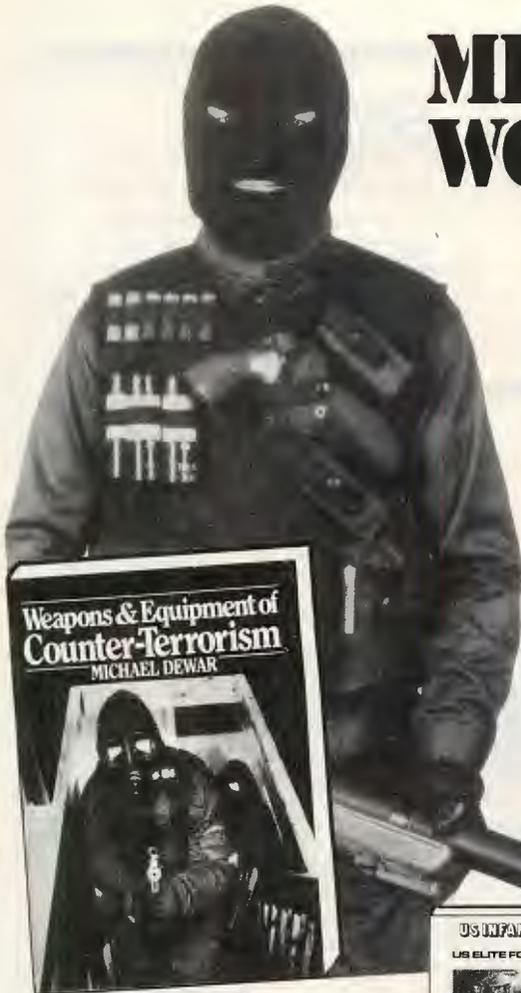
H.K.
U.S. Navy

LETTERS

Your input has made FLAK one of SOF's most popular columns. Write and tell us your opinion of SOF or any subject you consider worth our readers' attention. We reserve the right to edit for content and brevity. Send letters to FLAK, c/o SOF, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. ✂

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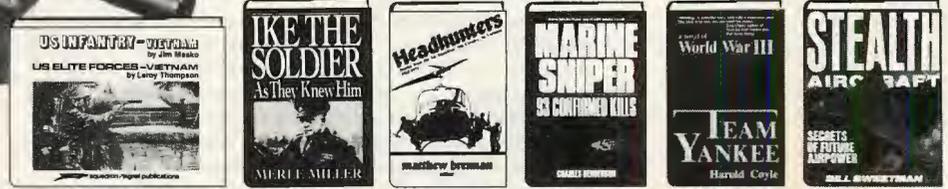
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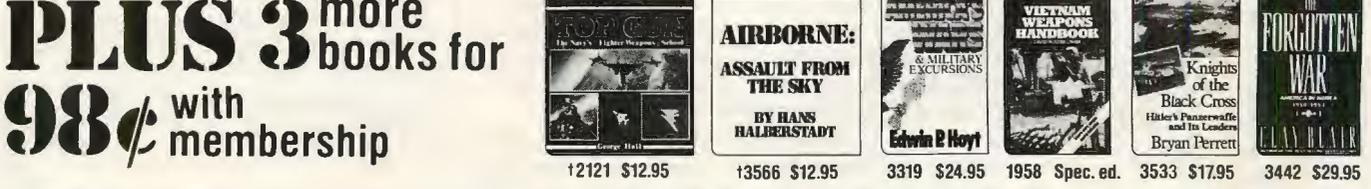
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FREEDOM'S FIGHT...

As we told you in last month's Command Guidance and Parting Shot, *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine and its parent company, Omega Group Ltd., have established the Omega First Amendment Legal Fund to help us defray legal expenses while we fight to uphold our guarantees of freedom of the press and speech under the Constitution.

This will not be an easy battle. There are many liberals and those of leftist persuasion who would like to see SOF go under, and they're marshalling their forces toward that end. Yet if we let this abridgement of our personal freedoms go unchallenged, then we surely open the door to Big Brother and his minions of the thought police.

Help us win this fight. Your donations (unfortunately, not tax deductible) to the Omega First Amendment Legal Fund will keep us on the front line. For donations of \$25 or more, Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown will send you a signed Certificate of Appreciation for your support of *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine.

Donations should be made payable to the "Omega First Amendment Legal Fund," and sent to Omega First Amendment Legal Fund, 1800 38th Street, Suite 202, Boulder, CO 80301.

Remember, there's no more worthwhile cause than freedom.

BULLETIN BOARD



SOF correspondent Howard Simpson caught this photo of observers Colonel Mikhail Krutenko (center) and Colonel Viktor Kozhin of the Red Army speaking with a senior British Army officer during Operation Purple Warrior held in the United Kingdom earlier this year. Purple Warrior was a large-scale mock assault, simulating a Falkland Islands-type scenario in which British Paras and Commandos retook Crown property. Welcome to SOF, gents.

FROM BOTTOM TO TOP...

Seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. Following World War II, confidence in the military was at an all-time high. Then came Vietnam, and we all know what happened to the U.S. public's faith in our armed forces. Now, a recent poll conducted by an affiliate of the respected Gallup organization shows that the military has tied with religion for first place in public confidence. This is the second year running that our troops in uniform have been accorded that honor by the American people.

The poll showed that 61 percent put the military and religion on top, with newspapers, television, and organized labor bringing up the rear.

We're glad to see it. It's a tough job our troops do around the world, and they deserve our respect.

SIBERIAN SUBTERFUGE...

"Bullshit" ... "You're chasing Bigfoot" ... "You guys got sold a bill of goods." These are just a sampling of the comments we received from U.S. military reps when our January '88 issue reported evidence of Soviet Spetsnaz activity in Alaska. On the other side of the coin, many of our readers up in the 49th state, as well as our intel sources in D.C., said the story was on target, but only touched the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Not ones to take being called liars or fools lightly, and damned interested to find out whether we were sold a bill of goods, SOF dispatched Associate Editor Tom Bates to the ice fields of northwest Alaska and the Bering Sea to see for himself if the alleged Soviet spoor did in fact lead to mainland Alaska, or back to the beltway.

Our tundra walker has just returned from his tracking mission with a backpack full of stories (some confirmed, some not) that will probably turn Tom Clancey's head. When his cameras thaw out and he gets the seal oil off his note pads, he'll give you the full sitrep, or as much of it as can be printed, concerning the truths, maybes, and fabrications concerning Soviet interest and/or presence in our last frontier.

At the other temperature extreme, Associate Editor Gary Crouse is, as we go to print, trekking through the north African country of Chad to bring you first-hand accounts of the little-reported border war between Chad and its northern "neighbor," Libya. To date, the Chadians and their French military advisers have been winning hands-down, pulverizing Libyan armor with Toyota-mounted TOW and MILAN missiles.

DONATIONS DOWN SOUTH...

The "peace process" and various truce negotiations have not ended the need to help Nicaraguan war refugees in Central America. Our Refugee Relief International, Inc.'s May '88 shipment of relief supplies down south came in at more than 200 pounds of medical gear (including a prosthetic leg and its attachments), clothing, food, and a wealth of items ranging from pocket

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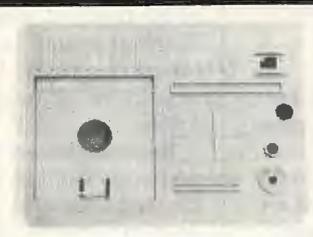


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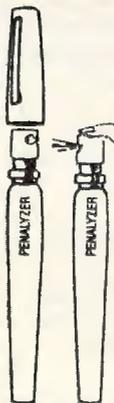
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Donations, gratefully accepted on behalf of the Nicaraguan war refugees, can be sent to: Refugee Relief International, Inc. c/o SOF Warehouse 5735 Arapahoe Avenue Boulder, CO 80303

Monetary contributions are also welcome at: Refugee Relief International, Inc. P.O. Box 693 Boulder, CO 80306

THE UNFLAPPABLE LOUIS DUPREE...

SOF readers not familiar with the sense of humor of Dr. Louis Dupree, the Duke University professor who's the world's foremost academic on Afghanistan and who debuted as an SOF contributor in the May issue, should be able to get an inkling of his wit from the following excerpts from an interview he did recently.

To Hafizullah Amin, president of Afghanistan from 1978 to 1979, when Amin told Dupree he was a communist: "You guys are Marxists but more Groucho than Karl."

On Zahir Shah, king of Afghanistan from 1963 to 1973, now in exile in Rome and a person who's been touted as a possible future ruler post-Russians: "I like to say about Zahir Shah that he was never a leader of men and always a follower of women. If he had more character or charisma or guts he could have made it between 1963 and 1973, but he never ruled."

On who should rule in Afghanistan after the Russians leave and on the political parties in Peshawar: "The party leaders want the three P's: prestige, personal power and petro dollars. We need to listen to the commanders and the people in the country doing the fighting."

It makes too much sense, Louis.



BATTLELINES DRAWN...

Five battalions of communist Laotian troops, possibly supported by 200 Vietnamese and an unspecified number of Cuban "advisers," invaded Thailand's Ban Rom Klao area in Phitsanulok's Chat Trakan district late last year, according to reports coming out of Thailand. Battles for control of the disputed area, which waged into 1988, centered around border hills taken by Pathet Lao troops, specifically hills 1146, 1370 and 1428, which were pounded by both Thai air and ground forces.

Relations between the two countries have been nominally fair, but according to Thai Army boss General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Thailand might have to resort to "drastic action" against Laos because of escalating border tension. "We thought they were our friends all along, but they aren't."

And events aren't all that calm inside Laos, either. A new anti-communist resistance group, the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL), led by Pa Kao Her (who won four U.S. decorations during the fighting in Vietnam in the late 1960s), has established itself among the 40,000-plus H'mong hill tribesmen persecuted by the Vientiane government of Haysone Phomvihane. Reports say Pa Kao Her has consolidated a tightly knit guerrilla organization comprising H'mongs and 11 other Laotian nationalities, and is gaining internal support from even the old hard-liners of CIA-backed Vang Pao's National United Front for the Liberation of Laos (NUFLL).

"We know Vang Pao and the NUFLL, because they are old leaders," Pa Kao Her is reported as saying, "but they are not the leaders of Laos today because they never come inside the country."

The ELOL is looking for external support for their cause, and has apparently contacted conservative American organizations toward that end. Would he like the United States government to become officially involved in his fight against the communists? "I think, in time, they might support us," the guerrilla leader said.

"Our number one goal is to get the Vietnamese out of Laos, to allow the Lao to control their own people. Kayson is a bad man. His brain is a Vietnamese brain."

We'll keep you posted.

GREMLIN ATTACK...

We had another gremlin attack here at the SOF offices last month, resulting in a few of those insidious devils getting into our May issue. In Contributing Editor Al J. Venter's article, "Siege at Cuito Cuanavale," we reworked world geography just a little bit. Yes, we do know that Lisbon is in Portugal, not Spain. Another glitch was to call Angola's news agency AIM, which it is not. Al's copy was changed during the editing process, and to clarify the problem area, the report he cites did indeed originate from AIM, which is actually Mozambique's official news service. Clear now?

Finally, for all you sharp-eyed paratroopers, the photo of the 82nd Airborne trooper in rough-terrain jump gear on page 32 is indeed flopped. All of our airborne types here were doing PLFs when the photo went through, and we missed the error.

HONOR ROLL...

El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund contributors:

Phoenix Arizona Patriots, Paul R. Brabeck, Esq., Richard "Doc" Woolfe.

Afghan Freedom Fighters Fund contributors:

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

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I'M a firearms instructor for a county sheriff's department in northern Indiana. One day last summer after a heavy rain, a few officers and I went to the outdoor pistol range to sight in some new weapons. Soon the sun came out from behind the clouds and the heat and humidity became unbearable. A new officer in our department pulled out a rifle case from the trunk of his car and asked if he could test fire his new long gun. I pulled the other guys off the line and waited for him at the 50-yard line.



I WAS THERE

by Robert Andrews

Black Rifle Flashback



"One persistent Viet Cong ran from cover to the edge of the river firing at us. I drew a bead on him and emptied a magazine."

I was taken aback when he opened the case. He'd bought a Colt AR-15. I hadn't seen one since I'd been in Vietnam, 16 years ago, but still remembered everything about it. He handed me the rifle and two 30-round magazines and asked me to test fire it.

I held it like an old friend and carefully checked it over from one end to the other. First I pulled the red plastic cover off the flash suppressor and pushed the take-down pin on the upper receiver. Then I examined the bolt and trigger mechanisms. The weapon looked used but not hurt. I closed it up and inserted a magazine. Chambering the first round, I heard the dust cover snap open. My right thumb instinctively moved the selector lever from safe to semi.

I took aim at the black silhouette target down range and fired three rounds. Placing the rifle on the table, I picked up the binoculars to confirm that I had not lost my touch. I hadn't. You could've covered the three holes with a half dollar.

Picking a new spot on the target I fired another three rounds. These were followed by three more, then six, then

ten. Hot sun and humidity, combined with the smell of gun oil and the blasting of rifle fire, soon caused my mind to drift, back through to the memories of 16 years past.

My riverboat was going up river to pick up six Marines cut off by sniper fire. When we beached the boat they weren't waiting for us and we were afraid that we'd landed at the wrong location. As the craftmaster called in to confirm the location we spotted the Marines running for the boat. Three were running full tilt toward us while the other three were periodically turning around and firing back into a wooded area.

It looked like a John Wayne movie being played out in slow motion. Bullets were exploding in the sand on the beach and everything sounded dull and muffled. Without thinking I'd gotten behind the boat's .50-caliber machine gun and was spraying the tree line.

The craftmaster was yelling and motioning the Marines to hurry when he got hit in the chest. The back of his shirt turned red as he fell to the deck. Rounds were beginning to hit the boat when another crewman got to the controls and backed us off the beach.

After the last Marine was on board he kicked on the power. I swung the .50 aft and laid down covering fire at

the tree line as we pulled away. The barrel soon got so hot that the gun jammed. I stepped out of the gun tub and picked up my M16 and continued firing at the tree line. I was going through magazines as fast as I could reload. One persistent Viet Cong ran from cover to the edge of the river firing at us. I drew a bead on him and emptied a magazine. The river seemed to boil around him as he went down. I changed magazines and noticed he was back on his feet and still running toward the boat. This time I took several short three-round bursts. I was bouncing him all over the river bank. But as I changed magazines again, he got on his feet again.

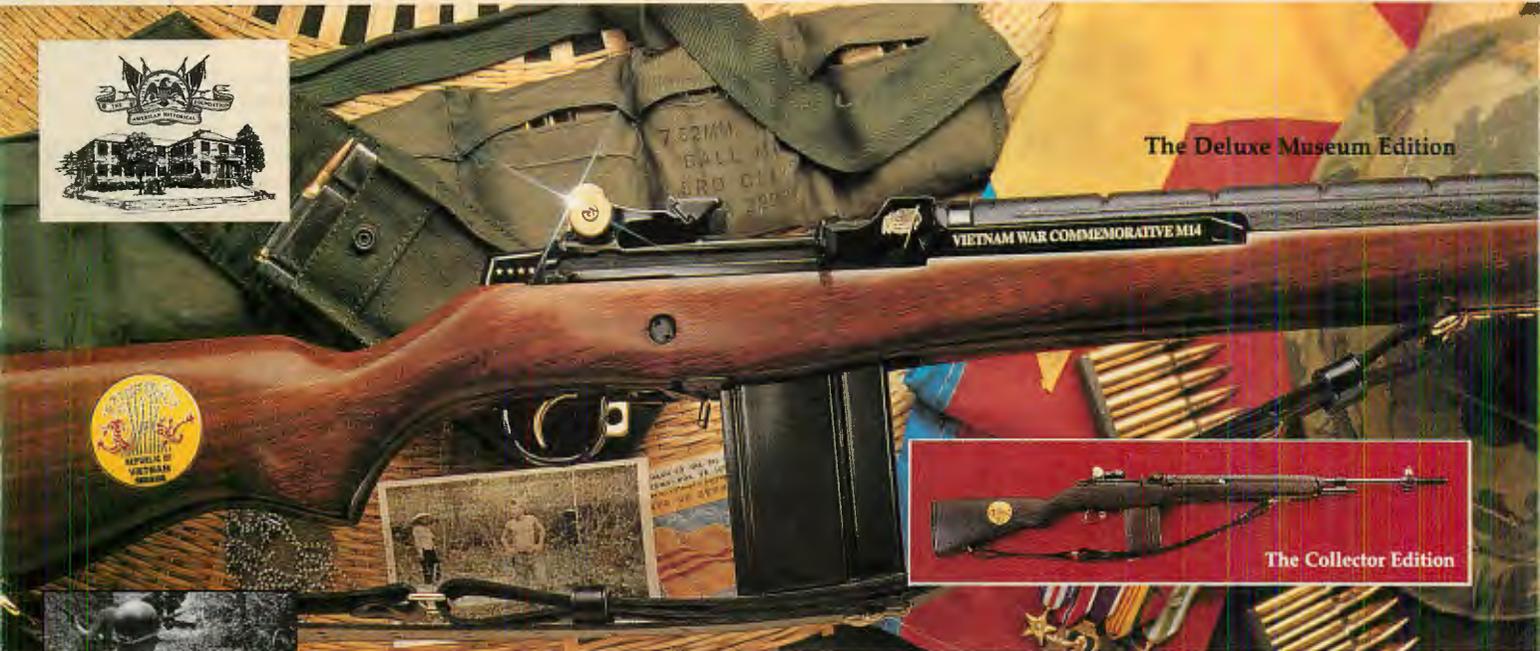
I kept my eyes on him as I reached for yet another magazine. He was now beginning to fire accurately and I couldn't put my hand on a full magazine. His rounds were walking down the river right to the end of the boat.

I couldn't feel for a full mag so I took my eyes off him for a split second and looked down for one. As I picked up a full magazine, a hand reached out and grabbed it away from me. I was enraged, until I looked into the eyes of the young deputy sheriff. He told me I was only supposed to test fire his new rifle, not wear it out. He didn't realize his new toy was my old nightmare. ✕

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Other components are polished and blued; the operating rod and receiver are deeply etched and gold-gilt inlaid with patriotic inscriptions.

The Deluxe Museum Edition

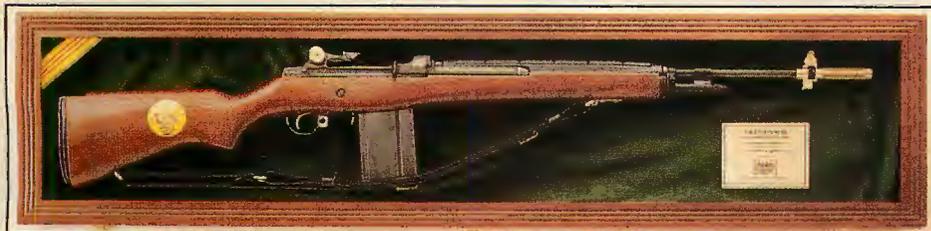
The Deluxe Museum Edition is custom built with a "Supreme"-grade American walnut stock by the respected firm of Reinhart Fajen; it gleams with seven coats of lacquer, hand-rubbed and polished to a museum-quality finish.

The serial numbers, between 001 and 500, with the prefix "VME" for "Vietnam—Museum Edition," further designate this to be a special edition. Serial No. 001 is being presented by the Foundation to General William Westmoreland.

The Collector Edition

The Collector Edition features a genuine G.I. wooden stock, specially finished in a black, highly-

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textured presentation-grade finish, symbolizing the black granite Vietnam Veterans Memorial; it complements the mirror polished and blued steel, and the 24-karat gold plated components. The serial numbers range between 001 and 500, with the prefix "VCE" for "Vietnam—Collector Edition."

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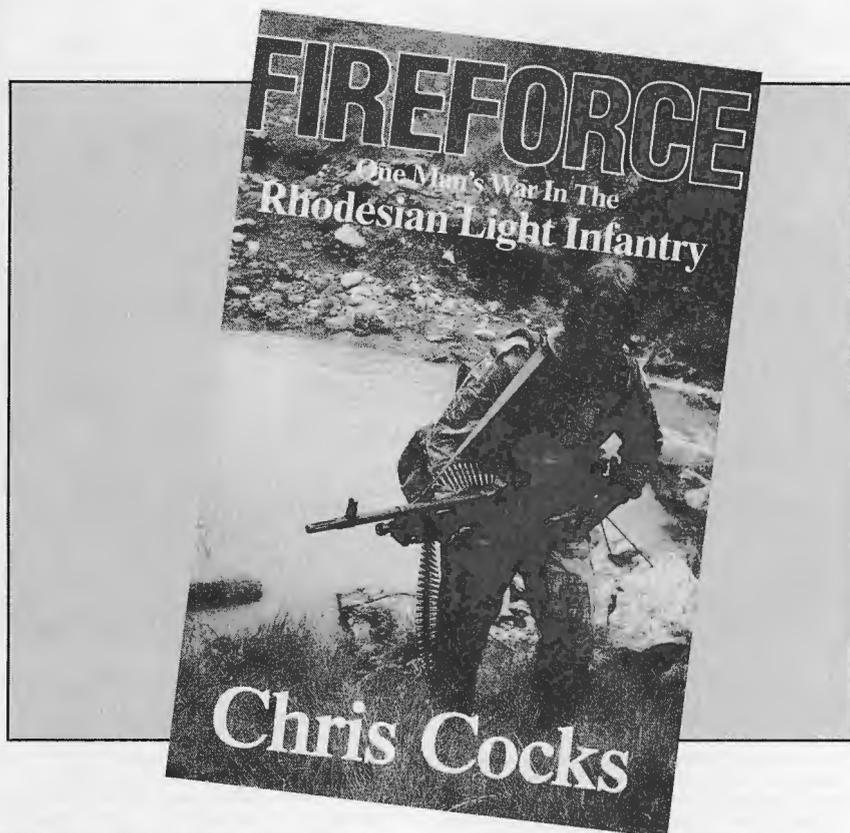
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FIREFORCE. By Chris Cocks. Galago Publishing (Pty) Ltd., P.O. Box 404, Alberton 1450, Republic of South Africa. 1988. 255 pages. Softcover. 16 pages of black & white photos. Review by John Coleman.

IN REVIEW



\$20.00. Available through SOF Exchange, P.O. Box 687, Boulder, CO 80306; credit card holders call toll free 1-800-323-1776, operator 131.

CHRISS Cocks spent four years with the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), fighting southern Africa's most vicious bush war to date. It was not a war he chose to fight. Conscription in the form of National Service thrust this quiet young man into one of Rhodesia's toughest and most successful strike forces — the RLI.

It was for Cocks the hardest decision of his life: to fight, and possibly die, for a political system led by Prime Minister Ian D. Smith in which he did not believe and did not support. Until the last minute, Cocks had decided he would not be part of Rhodesia's war.

And that makes this book all the more powerful because he did fight. Amidst jagged emotional conflict over the war and his dislike for the military, Cocks became caught up not only in the bitter fight for personal survival, but in the battle-hardened RLI camaraderie fostered by countless para jumps, firefights, booze-ups and external raids into neighboring Mozambique and

Zambia as well.

Fireforce is, above all, a soldier's book, with all the humor, pathos, bitterness, frustration and hardship common to combat infantrymen anywhere in the world. It's a stark and very real accounting of one man's war as seen from the door of an Alouette III helicopter, under the canopy of a Mark I Saviac parachute, along rocky slopes or thick African bushveld infested with terrorists — and from behind the iron sights of an FN rifle.

While not an in-depth military study of the RLI and its function as a quick-reaction commando battalion, **Fireforce** does deserve a place alongside the more scholarly works in print dealing with the Rhodesian Special Air Service, Air Force, Selous Scouts and Central Intelligence Organization, simply because it's one of the best grunt's-eye views to come out of the Rhodesian war so far.

Fireforce is a rough book, which may have some critics harping on its style, while others may simply discount as fiction the vicious intensity of the war Cocks describes. Yet for a first-time author, he tells his story well and truthfully, as any Rhodesian vet — this reviewer included — will attest.

[Editor's note: It comes as little surprise to anyone that the Marxist Zimbabwean government, successor to Ian Smith's Rhodesia, has reacted — read, "over-reacted" — to the publication of **Fireforce**. In fact, the book made front page news in the Herald, published in the capital, Harare, and the Bulawayo Chronicle, earlier this year.

"Gas Used to Kill Fighters," blared the Herald's headline. "A former Rhodesian soldier, who still lives in Zimbabwe, has written a book describing some of the atrocities committed by the Rhodesian troops against Zimbabwean civilians and freedom fighters," reads their lead. Unfortunately, there's no further mention of the supposed gas used, nor do the so-called atrocities — "A village had been accidentally bombed by the Air Force, and we swept through to pick up all the bodies" — rate as such.

The Chronicle's "Rhodesian Army War Atrocities Exposed" sounds like something out of the National Enquirer — with about as much substance. "Cocks confirmed the use of phosphorous and napalm 'to soften guerrilla resistance before a fireforce unit moved in for the kill.'" Very atrocious stuff in war. "He said that in 1977 he was moved to the Mozambique border and took part in several raids deep into Mozambique." Heaven forbid security forces attacking enemy supply and basecamps. "He recalled an ambush in which he took part on a column of ZANLA soldiers. Rhodesians doused the column with phosphorous and strafed it with machine-gun fire." How, one wonders, do you douse a column with phosphorous? Perhaps it was a secret weapon known only to the Rhodesian high command.

On and on this drivel goes, as front-page news no less. It would appear that the Zimbabwean government, which sent its infamous, North Korean-trained 5th Brigade into the south and west of the country to brutally hammer the minority Matabele tribe into submission, and which still uses its Emergency Powers Act to circumvent any semblance of the rule of law, uses blind-eye selectivity in judging the country's past.

And incidentally, both Zimbabwean articles referred to the book's title as **Firefighter** instead of **Fireforce**, only a moderate error when viewed in the context of Zimbabwean journalism.] ✕

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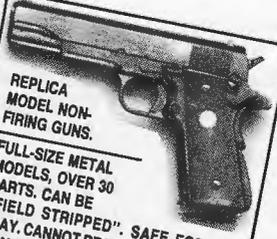
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Over/under double derringers have remained popular since introduction of the .41 Rimfire Remington in 1866. Though now chambered for more efficient center-fire cartridges, modern derringers are still frequently carried as backup sidearms by law enforcement personnel. Intratec has recently introduced a two-shot derringer of advanced design that merits consideration. It's called the Companion.

Investment cast from 4140 ordnance steel, the 2.9-inch barrels are hinged to a sturdy frame machined from 4140 barstock. The ergonomically-shaped grip panels are fabricated from virtually unbreakable 901 nylon. It weighs a scant 13 ounces, empty, and all sharp corners have been rounded off and smoothed to prevent snagging on pockets and clothing.

Equipped with a trigger-blocking front grip safety, the Companion's hammerless, double-action trigger mechanism features a unique firing-pin selector in the form of an offset cam attached to the trigger which moves back and forth to alternately cover one firing pin and expose the other.

ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER



by Tom Slizewski



Selling for suggested \$114.95, the Companion is offered in .38 Special, .357 Magnum and .32 H&R Magnum. A 9mm Parabellum will be forthcoming, but SOF recommends the .38 Special chambering as recoil in the other calibers compromises target re-acquisition, even at the close ranges for which these pocket pistols were designed.

Contact Intratec, Dept. SOF, 12405 SW 130th St., Miami, FL 33186; phone (305) 232-1821.

COMBAT CANDLE?

Sometimes it's impractical, if not impossible, to make a fire. Weather, proximity to the enemy, and lack of fuel can all put you in this situation. Whatever the reason, occasionally you'll find yourself cold and hungry at the end of the day. What to do? Eat cold C-rats again? Don't still more clothing? How about using something as ancient and simple as a candle.



Not just any candle will do, but "Pheylonian Life Light" fits the bill. What makes this candle different is that it's made from 100 percent Canadian beeswax, which burns three times hotter than paraffin (the wax used in most candles), as well as cleaner and longer. In fact, the manufacturer claims it releases no toxic emissions of any kind.

Additionally, this Life Light comes with two clamps to turn your heater into a small cookstove. Granted it's no portable field kitchen, but you can heat individual cans of food and water for your coffee. It works in extreme heat or cold and releases a sweet honey scent as it burns.

Life Light will burn continuously for three days or last for years of intermittent use. Sounds like an idea whose time has come. Cost is \$17.95 from Meridian Marketing Intl., Dept. SOF, 2092 Mayflower Blvd., Oakville, Ontario, Canada, L6H 4E7; phone (416) 842-2469. ✕

GHILLIE MONSTER

Ghillie suits are used primarily by snipers and scouts where the difference between being seen or not seen is often the difference between life or death. Scouts and snipers have known this fact for years, and they go to great lengths to design and construct their own version of "walking bush" suits. However, Ghillies have pretty much been restricted to military use — at least until now.

U.S. Cavalry believes there are enough closet snipers out there who want Ghillie suits, and has added



them to their 1988 product line.

For the \$150 asking price you get a camo mesh backpack, which serves as the suit's carrying bag, a camo mesh jacket equipped with numerous velcro attachments, as well as various field-colored burlap strips. The strips have the appropriate backing to stick to the mesh jacket. Assembly is quick and easy; it took our two evaluators less than 10 minutes using the simple and straightforward instructions.

I'll say this for it: Nearly five pounds of burlap wrapped around one's body goes a long way toward distorting the fine line between man and plant (see accompanying photo).

My major gripe, besides the price, is that the label proclaims the suit to be made of "Flame Retardant Material." Don't believe it. This Ghillie suit is about as flame retardant as napalm underwear. One match was all it took to send test burlap strips up in smoke. I've had a more difficult time firing up my barbecue.

But if you have a need to blend with leaves, shrubs and underbrush, U.S. Cavalry's Ghillie suit is for you. Contact U.S. Cavalry, Dept. SOF, 1375 N. Wilson Rd., Radcliff, KY 40160; phone 1-800-626-6171.

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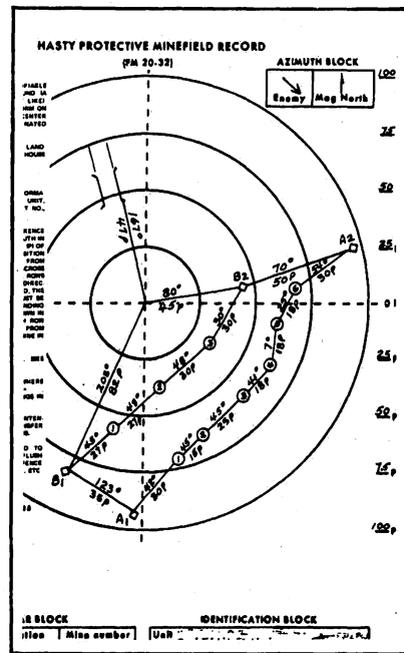
MINE warfare is one of the most effective forms of combat weaponcraft. It's also one of the most universally dangerous. Tripwires and pressure fuses don't differentiate between friend or foe, combatant or civilian. Modern mines can be damned hard to locate once emplaced, and they're getting lighter and cheaper, which guarantees that there will be plenty of them on future battlefields. A significant portion of the Soviet Union's gross national product seems to be devoted to production of lightweight plastic antipersonnel mines, and they're exporting these as efficiently as Japan exports Toyotas.

But mines in themselves are not stand-alone tools of war; you don't just pick a spot, bury them, and walk away. Recording their location, using proper methods, is a vital task — especially if you plan to go back into the area again.

Fortunately, the U.S. Army gives us the tools for this task in the form of minefield record cards, maps and compasses. Unfortunately, you rarely find them in the Third World inventory.

It comes as a real surprise to Special Forces soldiers on their first Mobile Training Team (MTT) assignment to a lesser developed country (LDC) when they realize that few company grade officers, let alone enlisted troops, carry a compass. And maps, if they exist at all, are likely to be Texaco or Michelin road maps rather than neatly gridded topographic sheets.

This may not matter too much for routine land navigation. A Bushman, for instance, doesn't need a compass to navigate between water holes in the Kalahari. The indigenous troops usually know their way around, though



Hasty Protective Minefield Record.

there sure can be exceptions. But problems arise when training LDC troops in standard U.S. infantry and combat engineer practices, particularly minefield recording, when such practices are predicated upon troops having access to a compass.

This fact was driven home to me recently while on duty in a fledgling democratic nation. As engineer in my "A" detachment, I was tasked with training the locals in proper layout and recording of appropriate minefields.

Mines were in short supply there, along with everything but dirt and heat, and an observation team on a frontier outpost had apparently forgotten where they had planted a "Bounc-

IDEA MAN

A Special Forces engineer/demolitions sergeant currently assigned as Assistant Operations and Intelligence NCO in his "A" detachment, Chuck Freemont has served on a number of overseas missions, and has appeared under the same nom de guerre in earlier issues of SOF. In this timely article, Chuck delineates his modification of the U.S. Army's standard "hasty protective minefield" for better use in Third World operations.

ing Betty." So the local battalion commander ordered a major police call around the outpost, with the predictable result that two troopies were blown away. There are much better ways to find a mine. The best way is not to lose it in the first place.

Much U.S. doctrine in mine warfare is based on the European battlefield. Large standard-pattern anti-armor minefields make a lot of sense in the Fulda Gap, but they're a little out of place in, say, Mindanao. An exception is the "hasty protective minefield" and its accompanying record (see first illustration).

This is a basic platoon-level combat engineering tactic that can be adapted to any terrain. It may consist of no more than a couple of M18A1 claymore mines on tripwires, but it should ideally include a mix of mine types and actuation devices. There is no standard pattern for this minefield, though layering of two or three rows is often a good strategy. Location of mines is determined by terrain, avenues of approach, and tactical considerations. The only absolute is that a record be made to allow rapid removal by the unit when it moves on or, if necessary, by others at a later time. A copy of the record is normally secured at higher headquarters.

So I dutifully pulled out my mine card and spent the evening duplicating the hasty minefield record on some scrounged cardboard and translating the instructions into the local language.

After breakfast the next day I headed out to the training area and nailed my training aid to a solid shade tree. Right after inspection, my students arrived. I saluted their lieutenant and had them take their seats on the limestone benches.

My training plan was to run through the reasons behind the hasty minefield layout and record, stressing the importance of standardized recording. Then I was going to let the lieutenant

and his NCOs split the class into teams for a practice session. Foreign troops are the same as American soldiers; they learn best by hands-on work.

The classroom session went well enough, though I was still a little shaky with the language. The problem began when we moved on to the practical exercise. The teams did fine picking landmarks and reference points, and they all made adequate defensive mine patterns, but that was as far as they could go without a compass, and guess what? Right. There was one compass in the Area of Operations (AO), and it was mine.

The only thing I could do was give my compass to the lieutenant, with instructions that he accompany it to each team in turn so they could compute the necessary azimuths. I got lucky. He was good with a compass, having been through an infantry officers' basic

course at Ft. Benning, and he was also a good instructor, so the troops received some impromptu compass training. And the lieutenant was happy to strut his U.S.-acquired skill. But he told me this was the first time he had held a compass since Ft. Benning.

That night I rethought my training approach. The class had been well-received, and I felt that they understood the importance of recording their minefields in a uniform way, which was the main point. But I hadn't given them a very good tool for doing that. Our hasty protective minefield record requires azimuths, which means a compass under field conditions, and they just didn't have any. With a topographic map, mine locations can be given by referencing grid coordinates, but these

The Simplified Platoon Minefield.
Drawing by author.

guys had no maps for their AO either. Clearly a recording format that didn't depend on azimuths or maps was the only answer.

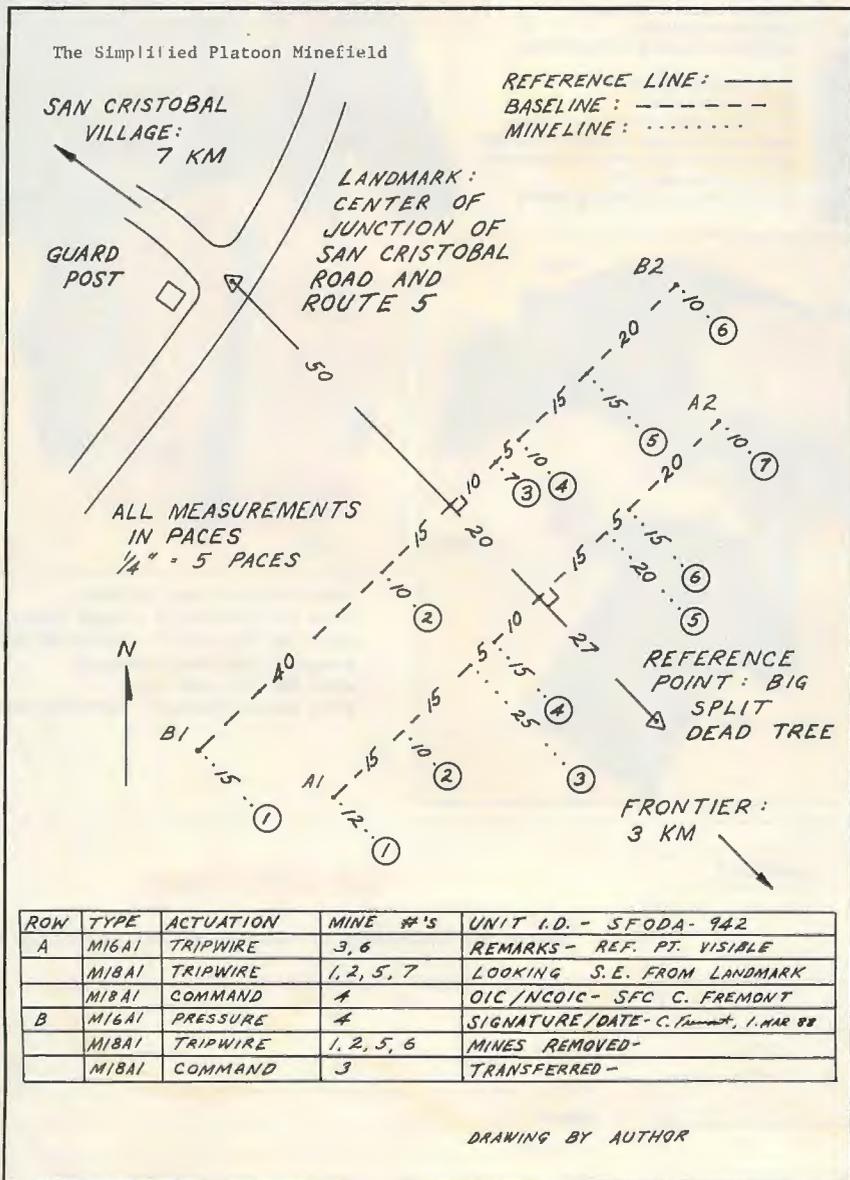
I thought about using landmarks for the ends of each mine row or even each mine, but there's a strong likelihood of error when too many landmarks are involved. And some of the terrain these guys operated in was pretty featureless. The fellow who originally worked out the hasty minefield format had the right idea in sticking to just one main landmark plus a reference point. I needed to follow the same "keep it simple, stupid" approach, making it even simpler, and germane for troops without a compass.

I recalled that the troops had done a good job of measuring distances by pace count. People in cultures that don't provide a lot of formal training in mathematics seem to have an inherent aptitude for measuring small ground distances by pace count. I'm not sure it's a universal skill, so it's smart to verify the abilities of the troops in your own AO. But let's assume for now that we can work with pace counts.

A grid system based on pace count might be one solution, but it would be pretty time-consuming, which defeats the purpose of the hasty minefield. I thought about the way the troops had marched into the training area that morning. Each squad had filed down its respective row of benches, and on command of the lieutenant each soldier did a smart right face, standing at attention until I had them take seats. Soldiers everywhere can do 90-degree facing movements, or they can sure learn. I would base my minefield record on pace counts and right angles.

So I sat down on my cot, laid some scratch paper on my footlocker, and started sketching. What I came up with appears in the second illustration.

This example shows a hypothetical minefield protecting a key road junction. The pattern is similar to that used on the hasty protective minefield, and it uses the landmark and reference point feature of that system. A general north arrow based on solar or astronomical observations is used, though it's not absolutely necessary when orientation is clear from the surroundings. The rest of the recording procedure is based entirely on right angles and pace counts. I call it the "simplified platoon minefield record," partly because "hasty" just has bad connotations for me when dealing with mines, and partly because this minefield record is ideally, though not exclusively, suited to platoon-sized operations. The



Continued on page 75



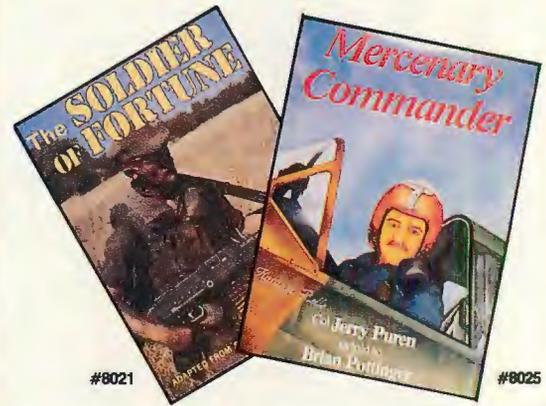
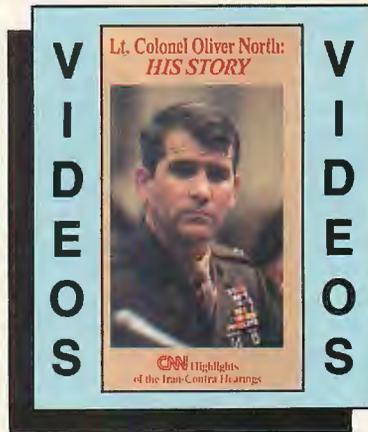
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THE shooting stopped as abruptly as it had begun and an ear-ringing silence descended over the jungle. There wasn't even a whisper of wind to clear away the acrid blue smoke that lingered over our position.

The Digger next to me began to chew his gum slowly, deliberately, as he inserted a new magazine into his M16. Then he squinted into the tangle of ferns in front of him, wiped the sweat from his eyes with the mesh towel he wore around his neck and waited.

"Anybody hit?" the Skipper asked in a half-whisper, half-shout. He was former Aussie-rules footballer Mike Deak, 23-year-old second lieutenant from Sydney, leader of the first and still (in 1967) the only reconnaissance platoon in the Australian Brigade in Vietnam. Then, when there were no answers in the affirmative, "Did anybody see which way they went?"

"That way, sir," said an unshaven soldier, using his L1A1 to point off to our right.

"Keep your eyes open to the flanks," Lt.

Australian recon platoon goes in at foot of Long Dien hills, courtesy of U.S. Army Hueys.

Deak commanded, just loud enough for the other 21 men in the platoon to hear. We kept our eyes wide open, but couldn't have seen a red elephant 10 meters away in the dense foliage.

The Skipper radioed the situation back to Delta Company, the nearest friendly unit, some four kilometers — two difficult hours — behind us. "Ah, this is King's Cross One Actual," he said into the handset, a bit out of breath. "We've sprung some Charlies on the perimeter of what appears to be a base camp. Position follows...." Deak was already studying his map. "Up three-niner, left zero-seven. Request standby arty. More data when we have it."

Our presence in the middle of what the Aussies enjoyed calling "Indian Country" (honoring their brothers-in-arms, the Yanks) was no longer a secret. Nevertheless, the questions were muffled as they radiated out to the perimeter of our tennis

court-sized "harbor." In answer to queries of "How many?" "What were they wearing?" and "What weapons did they have?" came replies identifying the VC (Viet Cong) as at least five strong, clad in black pajamas, firing automatic weapons, including at least one light machine gun, either an RPD or BAR. I watched Mike Deak's grim face as he evaluated the information — where was the carefree smile I'd seen back in the O-Club tent two nights before?

Private Tony Twaits, a freckle-faced 20-year-old from Melbourne, calmly withdrew a new 100-round belt of 7.62mm ammunition from its plastic sheath and fed it into his M60. He was sprawled in the middle of a mound of warm ashes from a VC cooking fire. A few feet to his front was a three-man bomb shelter, presumably empty. The freshly cut leaves camouflaging its new roof were evidence it had been built only the night before. Ahead of him were a half-dozen more shelters, spreading out to left and right. There was no way of telling how many more were hidden in the dense foliage beyond.



Quick smoke before continuing advance through elephant grass toward Long Dien foothills.

SOF VIETNAM

DEADLY DAY FOR DIGGERS

Aussies on 'Nam Jungle Recon

Text & Photos by Daryl Henry

One of the three section leaders, Corporal Bernie Smith, 28, from Sydney, squinted through a shock of black hair that tumbled out from under his frayed bush hat and lit up his first cigarette on patrol — the recon platoon forbade smoking unless and until there was no reason for remaining clandestine. "It might be a trap, Skipper," he suggested. He meant the VC force we had just engaged at close range might have withdrawn only to lure the Diggers into an ambush.

The fresh bunkers suggested a jungle base elaborate enough to shelter many times the number of our under-strength platoon, certainly more than we had just engaged in the brief firefight. It was uncharacteristic of the VC to spend all night digging a fortified camp only to evacuate it after a brief skirmish the next morning.

The job of our reconnaissance team was to locate the enemy and only to attack him unaided if there was a chance of success. I expected us to pull back and wait for reinforcements. But I underestimated the Diggers' traditional enthusiasm for combat.



Author, Canadian freelance correspondent Daryl Henry, at end of patrol. Photo: courtesy author

FREELANCE FREE-FALLER

Daryl Henry is a former Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman and architect currently working as a freelance writer. A skydiving instructor and captain of the Canadian National Team, Henry was coach to the U.S. Marine Corps free-fall contingent at the Military Olympics (CISM games) in Brazil and the Adriatic Cup in Yugoslavia, in addition to writing technical and travel articles for parachuting journals in Europe and the United States.

Serving in Vietnam as a freelance photojournalist with credentials from the *Toronto Star*, Henry sold articles and combat photos to papers in Australia and Canada. In addition, Henry has written short stories, a six-episode TV series and screenplays for feature films. We welcome his first contribution to *Soldier of Fortune Magazine*.



Patrol over, a week to go before heading home, Corporal Bernie Smith waits for chopper back to Task Force base at Nui Dat.

We had stumbled on the VC installation unexpectedly, thanks to the Aussie insistence on avoiding all trails (nor had the confident enemy posted any sentries). The afternoon before we had flown out with Delta Company to the base of the ridge in a composite squadron of U.S. and Australian Hueys. But not directly. Each flight touched down in at least three tight, dried-paddy LZs, disembarking the Diggers only at one (random) location. As a result, any Charlie OP (observation post) would know only that we were on the prowl but not from which direction.

We set up a defensive perimeter, first digging in the 75mm pack howitzers, then ourselves, but not without much sweat and grumbling — the ground was hard-baked red clay. Just before dark we suffered what was to become an ongoing assault from the dreaded III Corps “mossie” (rhymes with Aussie, means mosquito), which materialized in regimental droves. Naturally I’d only brought along one half-empty bottle of repellent.

The recce platoon, positioned along the fringe of the company harbor nearest the forbidding hills, sent out an LP (listening post) and went to sleep discussing the scuttlebutt that these Long Dien mountains were home to a 150-man VC heavy weapons company and that our job the next day was to pin it down. The drill was for Delta Company to monitor our fortunes from the valley floor and come running when we called.

Make that *if* we called. I listened to Lt. Deak announce into his handset: “That’s a negative, Picadilly Three, we’re all right so far. However, the installation looks a bit too strong to assault just yet. I prefer to let the artillery have a go.” He gave the coordin-

ates and requested HE (high explosive) with standard fuses.

I for one was relieved. If there were only 10 VC dug in, they could have stopped cold any assault we might have mounted. With 30 men they could have outflanked us, with 50, surrounded us, and with 150, it would have been, as Deak agreed when I asked him, “History. Past tense for us, mate.” Flaxen-haired, with pale blue eyes, Deak spoke pure “Strine” even though he had been born in Germany the year before the end of World War II. Rumor was his father had been a *Wehrmacht* general; he never said one way or another.

We all burrowed very close to the ground and listened to the artillery rattle overhead. The first rounds, all the way from the New Zealand 105mm battery supporting the 5th & 6th battalions RAR (Royal Australian Regiment) from the Task Force base at Nui Dat, landed a deliberate 300 meters to our front. Gradually Deak walked them closer until soon they were exploding in the midst of the enemy installation, shattering hardwood trees as though they were made of balsa.

When three-quarters of a ton of high explosive, some 50 rounds, had landed in the base camp, Deak was still not satisfied (neither was I). He decided to pull back a further 200 meters and saturate the area immediately to our front.

It took us more than half an hour to struggle back along the boulder-strewn shoulder of a stagnant creek to a new harbor. Lieutenant Deak routinely counted off every step we took — it was the only way to accurately determine our position at any given moment, vital if we needed accurate fire support. All machetes remained sheathed, as they were too noisy to use. The column climbed over, crawled under or detoured around knots of undergrowth too thick to penetrate. There was no talking, no smoking, no eating. All commands were hand signals. It was laborious, but it was safe. At least, up to that point in the war, no Aussie infantry column had ever been ambushed. And not many Diggers had tripped booby traps, either.

On our way up the Long Dien ridge that morning the odds ran about even that we’d make contact with Charlie. Some men said we would: “Playin’ the little bastard’s own game, we always surprise ‘em.” Some men said we wouldn’t: “Damn nogs hear you comin’ no matter what.” One Digger told me he didn’t give a damn either way, it was just a job to him. “Beats the hell out of muckin’ about for a living in the outback, mate,” he explained.

To the volunteers of the recce platoon this was just another of the 30-odd patrols they’d made during the past six months. Carrying food for four days, water for one, ammunition for three hours at most, the team was armed with one M60 for each of its three sections. It had no mortars nor LAWs (light antitank weapon). A quarter of the men were armed with the Belgian-designed 7.62x51mm NATO FN FAL (the L1A1



“SLR” of Aussie terminology), the rest with M16A1s. It was accepted, at this stage of the war, that the 7.62mm bullet was more effective for sniping and penetrating thick bush, while the faster 5.56mm slug was deadlier in the open. Given the option, everyone would have carried the American weapon — it was lighter. In addition, each of the three sections carried an M79 grenade launcher, but as extra, not primary weapons.

As had been the ANZAC (Australia-New Zealand Army Corps) custom in jungle warfare since World War II, none of the platoon wore steel helmets. In fact, every infantryman in the Australian Task Force wore a soft bush hat, invariably with a strip of colored cloth threaded around the crown (to distinguish it from enemy headgear), although all troopers were issued U.S.-designed steel pots “for use in air raids,” as one Digger put it.

The night before the operation began the platoon spent the hours of darkness close up behind Nui Dat’s wire. The infamous VC 5th Division was reportedly on the prowl



Platoon Sergeant John Lea-Smith, M16A1 ready, waits on edge of VC base camp to see enemy's next move.

and stand-to was ordered until dawn. I expected to find the men serious, perhaps even apprehensive. But they had been at war too long for that. "There ain't one of us," insisted lanky Corporal "Blue" Mulby, 24, from Melbourne, "who wouldn't rather be out in the scrub than back here in base."

Then, probably for the benefit of the regular infantrymen of the 5th Battalion, a dialogue began that went something like this:

First recon trooper (a downy-chinned tiger): "I can hardly fuckin' wait to get home to go dancin'."

Second trooper (older, more cynical): "Shit, you'll probably trip a booby trap tomorrow and blow your bloody legs off."

The first trooper got down on his knees, defiant. "So what, mate? I'll just hobble around on me stumps, like this."

But there was more than their bizarre humor to distinguish them from ordinary riflemen. Forty had volunteered for the

dangerous job; Mike Deak had hand-picked 28 of them for special training. (Some were currently away on R&R). Every man could act as medic, work the radio, read a map, call in arty or air, fire any of the variety of weapons they carried, move like a snake through the bush and out-hike the average mountain climber. And only half were professionals—the rest were National Servicemen, "just doing our two bloody years"—although I couldn't tell them apart by any variation in their professionalism.

The platoon, the mainstay of brigade reconnaissance until the SAS (Special Air Service) arrived later in the war, was as diabolical as it was tough. The day before, the column had chanced upon a dud U.S. Air Force 500-pound bomb glistening green at the foot of a vine-draped tree. No one had to be told to step around its unpredictable fuse with caution. The leader of the forward section, "Blue" Mulby, had passed the menacing cylinder slowly enough to leave a note impaled on a low branch. Addressed to Corporal Smith, soon to rotate back to "the world," the message was adorned with skull



Doing the decent thing, Corporal "Blue" Mulby gets help burying "Sheila" on trail where she fell.



and crossbones. It read: "Watch out, Bernie — only 11 more days to go! Tch, tch."

But now, after our recent close-range firefight, the platoon was more subdued as it settled into the new harbor. It was hot and dry, pushing above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and the LOH (light observation helicopter) was long overdue with our water resupply. As the men formed a defensive circle, the jungle grew unusually silent. The ubiquitous gibbons, who had resumed their raucous banter following the arty barrage, went quiet again. The men had barely slipped off their heavy packs when a shout broke the stillness.

"There's five of the bastards comin' this way!" a Digger yelled as he pulled the trigger on his M16.

Our whole front rank started shooting at the same time. Seven automatic weapons pulverized the shadows with more than 50 rounds per second. The rest of us, unable to see beyond spitting distance, hugged the ground. Several incoming rounds snapped the twigs over our heads at what would have been knee-level. They sounded like .30

Lieutenant Mike Deak reaches for his compass to verify coordinates of VC base camp.

caliber, possibly an M1 carbine. Soon they were joined by the unmistakable crunch of AK-47s.

"One of them ran to our left, Skipper," Mulby shouted. "The other four went right."

The shooting eventually stopped for want of targets. Palpable, thick silence collapsed over the blue-green tangle of ferns and roots. "Anybody hit?" Lt. Deak wanted to know. From several directions came reassuring, negative replies. "Then let's go get the bastards," hollered the Skipper, ordering Mulby's section on a rapid sweep around the front of our perimeter.

They hadn't gone 30 meters when Mulby yelled back, a note of absolute triumph in his hearty voice, "We brassed one, Skipper!" Mulby's six-man section kept going. Deak dispatched John Lea-Smith, 27, from Melbourne, the platoon sergeant, out to search the body.

"It's a Sheila!" the sergeant yelled back. From somewhere behind me came the irreverent suggestion: "Throw her on the hexy and keep her warm!"

I followed Sergeant Lea-Smith through the bush. The black-clad girl was face down in the middle of a wide trail. No more than 18, she wore a gold wedding ring on the second finger of her left hand. She had been hit in the eye with a single .223-caliber bullet travelling close to *Mach 2*. The back half of her head was missing. Brains, bone fragments and long strands of black hair mingled in a puddle of blood.

Although nobody liked to fight teenage girls, there was evident relief when the sergeant brought back her U.S.-issue carbine with its one 30-round and two spare 15-round magazines of ammunition. She carried enough ammunition to do each one of us in three times over.

Mulby's section returned to report no further contact and we settled in to continue our original mission, directing artillery fire on the VC bunkers. It took about 15 minutes for a total of 108 shells to landscape the



installation. Lieutenant Deak backed the barrage right up to our noses: He didn't want anybody left alive between us and the base camp. The rounds kept falling closer; the concussion was becoming unpleasant. When a knuckle-sized fragment of splintered metal struck the tree under which Deak was sheltering and fell sizzling to the ground beside his ear, somebody suggested we "give it a miss" and the skipper called off the shoot. Since it was now getting dark, he informed Delta Company we would harbor 200 meters away and investigate the results of the barrage in the morning.

When Lt. Deak asked what to do with the girl's body, Delta Company's commander radioed: "Better do the decent thing," and we buried the remains where they lay. As vulnerable as we were on the well-worn trail, the silent funeral was unhurried. I watched a Digger pluck a spray of leaves and plant it near the head of the dirt mound, but whether he was serious or joking I couldn't tell. Then we melted into the densest bush we could find to spend an uneasy night.

I didn't get to sleep until I watched the

moon go down about 0300. As far as I was concerned, we were effectively surrounded. The first firefight had been west along the ridge, the second to the east. We lay up about 25 meters off the main trail listening to faint whistles and Ho Chi Minh footsteps all night long. It was no consolation to hear the Skipper speculate that the VC probably felt just as insecure as we did.

For the rest of the platoon it was just one of a hundred nights similarly spent. They wrapped up in their mossie netting, curled up under the vines among the red ants, ticks, spiders, snakes and mosquitoes, and apparently slept soundly.

As it turned out the night was uneventful. The Viet Cong had either heard about the reputation of the recon platoon (as one Digger insisted) or they figured us to be better supported than we were. As was their SOP (standard operating procedure), they chose discretion as the more enduring part of valor and abandoned their installation by the time we reached it at dawn.

It was just as well — we counted 51 bunkers. At three men apiece, brigade intelligence had been right after all. We found two elaborate field kitchens, scraps of blue ignition wire for recoilless rifle projectiles, some 12.7mm heavy machine-gun cartridges, various spent PRC 10 and 25 batteries, and dozens of cigarette butts, mostly black-market U.S. brands.

The Charlies apparently withdrew to the back side of the ridge — which ironically overlooked the Aussie's favorite in-country R&R center, Vung Tau, known to the Diggers as "Vungers" (just as they referred to Hong Kong as "Honkers").

We staked out the complex and waited for Delta Company to join up. Their job would be to dismantle it while we pushed out to track its former occupants. As the lead troopers of D Company filtered past our



Sergeant John Lea-Smith and members of platoon attend briefing before leaving "comforts" of Nui Dat base. Platoon members carry M16A1 and L1A1 rifles.

unkempt bunch, I was impressed by their silent respect — the recon platoon was the elite and they were just the grunts.

We ran into the VC only once again, close enough to talk to, but there was no communication, not even a friendly firefight.

The recon platoon had traversed the last 3,000 meters of Long Dien ridge and was poised at the summit, a granite outcropping that had once housed a Buddhist shrine and more recently a Charlie OP. The VC had abandoned it for the same reason that we didn't linger; it had recently been saturated with CS (tear) gas. Merely climbing over the rocks kicked up the insidious powder and we hurriedly stumbled downhill on the far side, eyes stinging.

Just then we heard a distressing radio exchange. An Aussie APC (armored personnel carrier) transporting a section of Delta Company along the valley floor had been tossed upside down by a command-detonated mine, apparently a resurrected 250-pound bomb. "Bouncing Bettys" planted nearby did in many of the survivors, as well as some of the troopers who came up to tend the wounded. The VC responsible, another element of the tenacious 5th Division, were reported with-

Continued on page 74

AUSSIES IN VIETNAM

Australia's first military contribution to the Vietnam conflict was a small team of advisers who arrived in mid-1962. These 30 advisers joined the U.S. advisory teams training South Vietnamese forces, primarily in northern provinces.

In 1966, as part of an increasing Australian response to the escalating war, Headquarters, 1st Australian Task Force (ATF) replaced the 1,300-man Headquarters, Australian Army Force, Vietnam (HQ, AAFV). The principal infantry units were the 5th and 6th battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment and the 3rd Special Air Service Squadron. Artillery support was provided by two Australian batteries and one New Zealand battery.

The task force was given its own area of responsibility in Phuoc Tuy Province southeast of Saigon and the task force headquarters was established in a rubber plantation at Nui Dat, just north of the provincial capital of Baria.

This Australian task force was withdrawn from Vietnam in stages starting in 1971 and, except for security detachments for this withdrawal phase, combat troops had effectively returned to Australia by the end of 1971.

Following withdrawal of combat troops, the Australian Army Assistance Group, Vietnam (AAAGV) was established in March of 1972 to provide training and advisory assistance to South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops, primarily in Phuoc Tuy Province. AAAGV departed Vietnam 31 January 1973.

NPA NEMESIS

Scout-Rangers Worthy of Their Tradition

Text & Photos by Gene Scroft

RANGERS LEAD THE WAY

Gene Scroft, a regular contributor to SOF, is a West Pointer with official tours in the 75th Rangers and 82nd Airborne. After his five-year stint in the Army, his *unofficial* tours on assignment for SOF have taken Scroft to most of the hot-spots in the Middle East, Central America and southern Asia.

PERSISTENT reports indicated that Philippine communists of the New People's Army (NPA) were active in the area around Fort Magsaysay, so when armed men emerged from the bush near a local village, startled policemen immediately opened fire. Huddled waist deep in a rice paddy, the Scout-Ranger students couldn't believe their luck — or lack of it. Not only did they get lost during the land navigation exercise, but they were also shot at by policemen when they attempted to ask directions. This course was tougher than they thought!

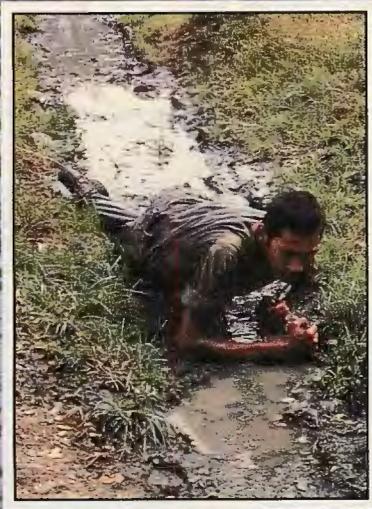
The Philippine Scout-Ranger course is located north of Manila at Ft. Magsaysay. The three-month school is organized into four phases: individual, which emphasizes basics like navigation, weapons and communications; the team phase, which teaches patrolling tactics; the combat maneuver phase, which grades the students during practice raids, recons and ambushes; and the final phase, which is supposedly a test mission but is more like the real thing. The class is moved to an area which is heavily infested with NPA guerrillas, and they do not graduate until they make contact with the enemy.

As if this schedule isn't demanding enough, students are required to complete three-and-a-half months of basic training, one year in the Scout-Ranger regiment, and a six-week, pre-Ranger course before even being considered for the Scout-Ranger school. On top of all this preparation, basic training in the Philippines is conducted by parent regiments rather than being consoli-

"Cinco, seis, siete..."



BELOW: "You afraid of a little mud? Get yo' face down in there, trooper!"



ABOVE: Attack!

LEFT: "Stand at attention, Scout-Ranger!"

Author observed the training to be tough and the discipline strict, but not chicken-shit.



Scout-Rangers conduct expedient river crossing techniques. It's "Keep those weapons outta the drink and kick harder, or it'll be dark before you get to the other side."

dated as in the U.S. armed forces, which allows the Scout-Ranger regiment to begin molding their recruits from the first day.

The Philippine army has one Scout-Ranger regiment and some independent Scout-Ranger companies, and they are considered the best units in the army. When the NPA recently blew some bridges in the Bicol region of Luzon, the government decided to fly in Scout-Rangers from hundreds of miles away to restore order, rather than use other army units which were already in the vicinity.

Unfortunately, some Scout-Rangers from Ft. Magsaysay took up arms against the Aquino government during the abortive coup attempt by "Gringo" Honasan in August 1987. This has caused many within the government to question the loyalty of the Scout-Ranger regiment. At the time of the coup Honasan was the commander of the Special Operations school at Ft. Magsaysay, and his command consisted of the Philippine Special Forces school as well as the Scout-Ranger school. When ordered to do so, the Scout-Ranger students and cadre dutifully followed their commander on his ill-fated adventure. Luckily for the future of the regiment, most Scout-Ranger units in the Philippines remained loyal to the Aquino government during the coup. Depending on who you talk to, the Magsaysay Scout-Rangers either displayed admirable loyalty or blind naivete when they supported Honasan. My personal view is that the latter is true, but as a foreigner my opinion may not be regarded as insightful here. Largely due to the loyalty of most of the Scout-Ranger regiment, the government hasn't disbanded the unit but it has placed the Special Forces and Scout-Ranger schools under different commands.

During my visit to the school, one of the classes that participated in the coup was released from four months detention in Manila to complete the course at Magsaysay. The government's immense capacity for forgiveness as well as the desperate need for trained men to fight the communists made their release possible. The returnees were immediately given a diagnostic PT test consisting of push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, the inverted crawl and a three-kilometer run. After the PT test they were required to take a written basic-skills test to determine how much they had forgotten during their confinement. No slack time at all was given for them to readjust to a training environment.

The next day the students were brought out to a lake located on post and given a swim test. In the U.S. Army swim tests are given in a pool under strict safety precautions, but not here. At the Scout-Ranger course the students are just lined up and told to swim across a lake inlet and back, a distance of about 60 meters, in their fatigues. No one was asked whether they could swim or not — that was taken for granted — but you could tell who would have trouble by the way they stayed to the rear of the formation before entering the

water, how they crossed themselves when their feet first touched the water, and by the look of stark terror on their faces when the bottom dropped out from under their feet. Two or three men had to be rescued as the other students laughed, and one man ran off into the jungle rather than swim back over the inlet, but most of the class did a good job and successfully completed the swim.

It was quite a homecoming for these men — a PT and written test, and a swim test.

RIGHT: Of World War II training, it was said that the battle was the payoff. In Philippine Scout-Ranger training, the battle is the *graduation exercise*. Their last phase of training is to be dropped off in NPA territory, and they don't graduate until they make contact with the enemy.

BELOW: Scout-Ranger discipline extends even to the mess hall. Shades of Fort Benning's Officer Candidate School.

BOTTOM: "You've got nine minutes to eat...move out!"





Above all else the Scout-Ranger school is tough and uncompromising. Just ask the returnees.

This no-nonsense approach is spearheaded by the school commandant, Captain Samuel Bulagay. As the highly-regarded senior captain of the Scout-Ranger regiment, Captain Bulagay has often been asked to take over problem units, and his success at this task made him the logical choice to get the school back on track after the coup attempt.

Scout-Rangers are the direct descendants of the Philippine Scout units which fought so valiantly against the Japanese in World War II. General, later Defense Secretary, Ilo, a member of the original Philippine Scouts, was the patron of the Scout-Rangers and modeled their training after the American Rangers. Thus the hyphenated title.

The regiment earned its outstanding reputation during the bloody campaigns against the Moro separatists on Mindanao in the 1970s. Given a few beers, Scout-Rangers will admit that they long for the days of frontal assaults against the separatists who would plant their banner on the highest hill and dare the army to kick them off. To the Scout-Rangers, this was a much more "honorable" form of warfare than the hit-and-run tactics of the NPA guerrillas.

Though the training conducted there is outstanding, Ft. Magsaysay itself looks like it was hit with a B-52 strike. Colonel Lim, the regiment's chief of staff, explained that typhoons in 1978 and again in 1982 blew the tops off of all the multi-storied buildings and disrupted the water supply, which is now hand-pumped from wells. The cadre apologized for the poor accommodations and pointed out construction projects aimed at repairing typhoon damage, but I assured them that it was all fine by me. The fact is, I thought it was great. Courses like this should be spartan. Barracks built like dormitories with company rec rooms have no place in a school preparing men to fight a war.

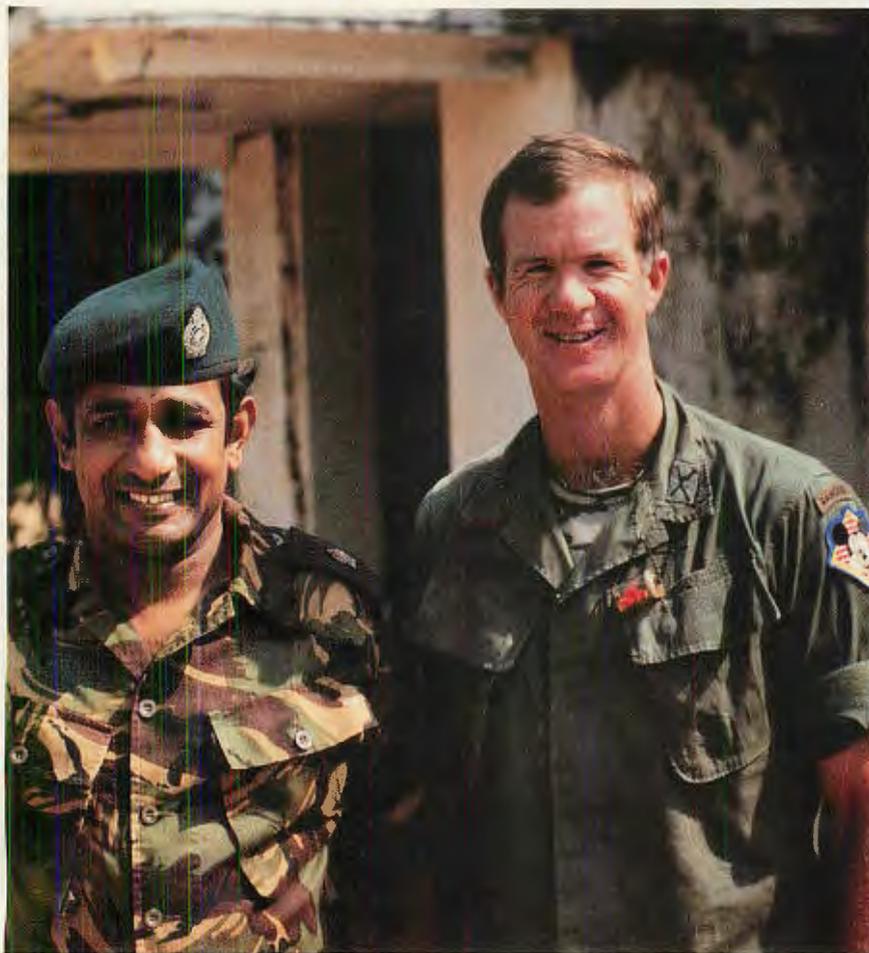
Many of the Scout-Ranger cadre are graduates of such foreign schools as the U.S. Ranger course and the British Marine Commando course, and appropriate aspects of these schools are incorporated into the Scout-Ranger program. This incorporation of tactical ideas from around the world makes the Scout-Ranger school a generally outstanding program, but I had to question why five valuable weeks were spent during the first phase reviewing basics that were more than adequately covered in basic training and pre-Ranger. I felt that the time could be better spent practicing patrolling techniques and operations orders, two important subjects inadequately covered at Magsaysay. The cadre said that the students needed to have their memories refreshed, but *five weeks worth!?*

These faults, however, detract little from the fact that the Scout-Ranger course gives these soldiers all of the tactical and hands-on knowledge that they need to defeat the NPA. Now it's up to the graduates to go out into the bush and get the job done. ✖

SRI LANKA'S SPECIAL FORCE

Professionalism in a Dirty War

Text & Photos by Tom Marks



Author with commander of STF unit at Batticaloa. Jungle fatigues have been stripped of unit patches and such, leaving only airborne, Ranger and Disneyland.

SRI LANKA SPECIALIST

Tom Marks, a West Point graduate and former infantry officer, is a frequent contributor to *Soldier of Fortune* Maga-

BEHAVIOR in combat remains the most enigmatic of subjects. What causes one unit to be elite, another a weak sister? Invariably, leadership is a crucial determining factor. Fifty years ago, in 1937 in north China, a Marine Corps captain summed it up: "Wars and battles are not lost by soldiers. They win them but don't lose them. They are lost by commanders, staffs, and troop leaders, and they are often lost before they start."

Five decades may have passed, but the statement is as accurate today as it was then. I have carried it about scribbled on the inside cover of my notebook. Seems to come in handy during conversations.

It was on my mind as I waited for a flight one August day in Sri Lanka. The war had gone on for nearly four years. None of us knew that secret negotiations between Colombo and New Delhi (India) were about to profoundly change the nature of the conflict, with Indian regular forces to be committed in support of the government against Tamil Marxist guerrillas. At the time, it was still very much a bush war.

In such battles, there will inevitably be at least one unit that will stand out. In the Sri Lankan conflict, no unit has attracted as much attention as the Special Task Force (STF). Trained by former British Special Air Service (SAS) men armed with the latest weapons, it is an elite police field force which has captured the imaginations of both sides. In the tales of guerrilla sympathizers, the STF is held up as illustrative of the Sinhalese brutality toward Tamils which has played a large role in fanning the embers of discontent into a raging fire. In contrast, to their admirers the STF men in their camouflage suits and green berets represent the finest armed force in Sri Lanka today — disciplined, well-led and professional. I decided there was only one way to find out which view was accurate: get into the field with them and observe.

Getting There

"I can see the headline now," cracked my Sri Lankan contact as we sat at the airstrip waiting for the transport that would take us to the STF's area of operations (AO), "Top Marks in Batti." "Top Marks" was a play on the Sri Lankan phrase "off your top" — out of your mind, as we would say. A Jaffna paper put out by a guerrilla sympathizer had used the phrase to describe me in a front page headline. As the text of the article made clear, the guerrillas had taken exception to my reporting of their activities. "Batti" (Bah-tea) is the local shortening of Batticaloa, the name of both the large Sri Lankan east coast city and its surrounding district, the whole comprising the STF's principal AO.

zine. His previous articles on Sri Lanka include "Sri Lankan Minefield" (March '88) and "Counterinsurgency in Sri Lanka" (February '87).

We both laughed. This war was filled with such BS. The locals often didn't know a machine gun from a rifle. Sri Lanka, after all, had virtually no army when the conflict began in earnest following the nationwide anti-Tamil riots in July 1983. The guerrillas always tried to portray their side as right. Hence, every instance of indiscipline by the security force became a "massacre," every building hit by fragments had been "bombed," and so on.

An efficient international propaganda network disseminated the charges, and they were normally reprinted in the Western press. This was how many who would otherwise be totally unconcerned with the STF and its activities — Amnesty International, for instance — seemed to follow the unit like so many statistics-minded baseball fans. What a picture they painted: a savage unit trained by mercenaries, raping, pillaging and plundering its way across the landscape of Sri Lanka.

It would all have been comical if it weren't so serious. Insurgencies, as a subtle blend of the political and the military, can use a well-constructed lie just as effectively as a mine or a rifle to immobilize a target. In the Philippines, for instance, the communists have long since discovered that constantly filing lawsuits can render whole units combat ineffective by keeping their chain-of-command tied up in court answering subpoenas. Small wonder, then, that such heavily communist-infiltrated groups as Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) have trained "documentalists" from Sri Lankan guerrilla groups.

I had no idea then, nor do I now, whether the specific individuals trained in the Philippines ever filed reports on STF. The mud, to be sure, was already being slung about in buckets even before the actual instruction was arranged. In any case, I figured as the hours slipped by that day, the amount of negative publicity the human rights types and their guerrilla counterparts were churning out about the STF was most likely a measure of the unit's combat effectiveness, not its poor human rights record.

To judge for myself, I first had to get to Batticaloa. That involved travel by air. Land routes were open but unsafe for those who stick out as completely as a six-foot journalist in combat boots. Plus, I had taken to wearing my old jungle fatigues. Utility and comfort were my motives, but with the guerrillas completely mesmerized by their belief that there were SAS troopers and Israeli Mossad agents under every bush, one had to be wary. I had already, a year earlier, wasted a day explaining to a tight circle of guerrillas that I could not possibly be an Israeli. I didn't want to repeat the exercise.

There were no guerrillas or terrorists to worry about on my impending flight, because only military transport was available. The perils there were of a different sort — just getting off the ground, for instance. In all my months of knocking about Sri Lanka, I never once rode on a military aircraft which took off at anything remotely re-



TOP: STF does not always travel by land. Familiar Hueys are used for quick strikes.

ABOVE: Each STF section has its own Land-Rover as organic transportation. The vehicle is not big enough, but its low cost and high performance characteristics make it ideal for the terrain and situation.

sembling projected departure time. My flight to Batticaloa was no exception.

"Fair enough," you say, "there's a war on." Yet the reasons for delay provide a useful glimpse into why the government effort had such a hard time getting off the ground, so to speak, and why a professional unit such as STF has come to be held in such high regard.

The flight couldn't get off because the ground crews and tower personnel had all been pulled out to participate in a practice parade in anticipation of some air force big-shot's arrival. Our delay this time stretched on and on, until half the day was gone.

For hours the troops idled, rifles in hand, gear strewn about, and watched the flight personnel march squares in British drill steps. That there was a war on, and that troop deployments ought to take precedence over playing at soldier, seemed not to trouble those in charge. Neither did the fact that on the other end, in the AO itself, sat an equal number of troops scanning the sky for the bird which was to be their ticket home.

Inevitably, the situations I bumped into were similar. Another time, we were in Jaffna, the principal area of combat, waiting under a blistering sun for a chopper to lift us to our unit. As the Huey came in, the troops rushed to board, wanting to get aloft quickly lest guerrilla mortars try their luck at something other than their normal harassing fire.

There was a momentary pile-up as the first troops reached the chopper, then confusion. A quick exchange followed. With a sense of resignation, the troops turned back. The pilots had announced that they were going to lunch!

And there the troops sat for yet another hour and a half while the chopper-jockeys, clean and well-looking after, sauntered into their air-conditioned club and had a bite to eat. All we needed was a band — Nero to fiddle while Rome burned. At times like that I wished I still wore my oak leaf. Such nonsense only happens in the absence of strong leadership.

It is unfair to single out the air force as being particularly guilty of the "9-to-5 syndrome." Its personnel simply happened to be involved in two of the most ludicrous incidents I came across while in-country. In reality there were more than enough shortcomings to go around. To see the exception, as I've mentioned, was the point of my trip to Batticaloa.

A Different Breed

From my first moments in their camp, it



was clear the STF was a different breed, a solid outfit which went about its business in a professional manner. A premium was placed on leadership and control.

To do this, the STF is deliberately officer-heavy. Each section (a squad in American terms) of 12 men has an NCO and an officer. Since three sections make up a platoon, which itself has a platoon leader and 2IC (second-in-command), an STF platoon counts five officers and three NCOs for 30 troops. This is an exceptionally favorable leader/follower ratio by any standards.

Control and flexibility are the result. The STF concept is, if possible, to employ a section together. To that end, each section is crafted so that it is capable of independent action. Its armament is substantial: a 40mm grenade launcher, either the West German Heckler & Koch *Granatpistole* or the South African Armscor six-shot; a light machine gun (various models used but normally the Belgian 5.56mm FN Minimi); and 11 assault rifles (the 11 count includes the weapon carried by the grenadier; one rifle will also be equipped with a scope). For transportation, the section has its own Land-Rover.

This structure is duplicated many times, for each company has five platoons (15 sections total), or some 150 men. The entire STF is a battalion of approximately 1,100 soldiers operating from seven company-size bases spread about Batticaloa. The enlarged battalion strength of 1,100 comes from the

TOP: STF troops returning from night ambush. Soldier in front carries the Armscor 40mm six-shot grenade launcher. Troops like its firepower, but dislike its weight and prefer the H&K *Granatpistole*.

ABOVE: As early light shines, troops move in from night ambush positions. Transportation back to the base was provided by commercial bus, a familiar mode of transport for Sri Lankan forces. Web gear is Chinese-made.

unique TO&E (Table of Organization & Equipment) adopted by the Sri Lankan armed forces early on in their struggle against the guerrillas. Rather than sticking with the conventional British model they had inherited from the colonial regime, the Sri Lankans opted for seven-company battalions of greater infantry manpower.

Some quick mathematics will reveal that the STF is able to field more than a hundred small, well-armed units of section size, each led by an officer and having its own organic transportation. The area saturation potential is impressive. To ensure that this potential becomes reality, the units are constantly on patrol, either on foot or by vehicle. No particular type of operation dominates. All — cordon and search, raids, ambush, route clearing, road block — are employed day and night, with the units coordinating amongst themselves. In addition to the section Land-Rovers, a South

African-manufactured Buffalo infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) is assigned to each company-size base. Regarded by many as one of the finest IFVs available in the world, it was specifically selected by the Sri Lankan armed forces because of its mine-resistant capabilities.

STF's active posture in populated areas requires firm discipline. Besides upping the level of leadership at all levels, the STF goes to considerable lengths to ensure that its manpower is more experienced and mature than in the average infantry battalion. To start with, all of its recruits are drawn from a pool of prior-service police volunteers. Hence, they are older than in comparable army units. Then, once selected, they are put through a rigorous training course lasting 10 weeks. Eight of the weeks are facility-based infantry training, but the final two are jungle operations conducted at one of the country's guerrilla-infested wildlife sanctuaries.

At the time I was with the STF, three batches of recruits were being trained per year, some 180 individuals per batch. Sections were always kept together. The officers reported a month earlier than the ranks, then went through the regular 10-week routine with their men. The result was that the officers were able to function as assistant instructors of sorts, earning the respect of their men.

Officers, it should be noted, though normally drawn from the police force, just as the troops are, may be commissioned directly following appropriate training. This has proved necessary lest senior police ranks be seriously depleted. For, as might be expected, there has been no shortage of applicants to don the STF camouflage uniform.

Together, officers and men became part of the STF elite at the battalion training facility located south of Colombo. There was nothing particularly unusual about the instruction. It was modeled after the SAS regimen the British senior instructors had themselves gone through years earlier. Emphasis was upon small unit maneuvers and total familiarity with all weapons. Weapons, unlike those of the army — which draws its arms from a variety of sources, especially the Chinese — were all of Western design (the SAR 80, for example, is manufactured by Chartered Industries in Singapore but is little more than an updated version of the Armalite AR-18). Additional anti-terrorist gear of Western origin was also utilized.

Having the sections run through the training with their officers leading them greatly facilitated not only control, but the pace and intensity with which the course could proceed. British senior instructors were accompanied by Sri Lankan assistants. The latter were selected from early graduates of the school who had performed well in the field. The ultimate goal was for the British instructors to work themselves out of the job.

It was the presence of the British instructors which added to the controversy of the STF. A number of sources, especially the

Indian press, routinely referred to them as "mercenaries" and hinted that they not only taught techniques of torture but actually participated in it with their charges once they deployed to the field.

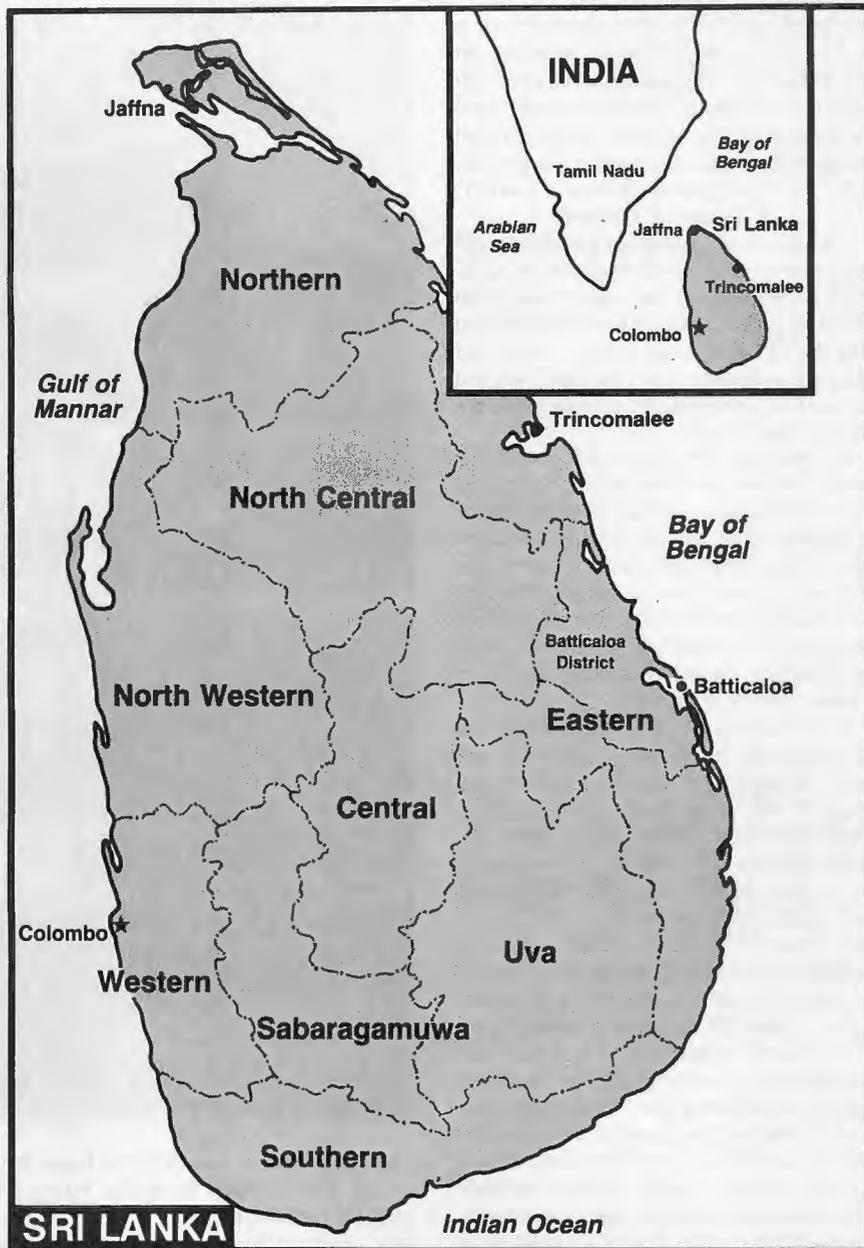
There are two issues here which deserve attention: the "mercenary" business, and the use of torture. The former SAS personnel were employed by Keeny Meeny Services, universally referred to as KMS, a British firm chartered in the Channel Islands which has seen work around the world, both as an independent operator and as a surrogate for the British government. It specializes in counterterrorism, bodyguard duty, and low intensity warfare training. Contact was apparently made through Sri Lankan contract personnel serving in Oman, where KMS maintains an extensive presence side by side with the official British "seconded" contingent. Under the terms of the contract, KMS provided instructors at the STF training center and, later, flight personnel for the Sri Lankan air force.

"Mercenary" would not seem to apply, at least not in the traditional sense of the word. The instructors were not paid directly by the Sri Lankan government but through KMS. Neither were they integrated into the Sri Lankan armed forces. Furthermore, in an important distinction, the personnel were not hired to fight Sri Lanka's battles. Indeed, fit though they were, the more than a dozen I observed were all older, former service SAS personnel, most retired. They were professionally passing on skills, not seeking to return to the bush. Some, naturally, made visits to the field, especially when a new guerrilla weapon was discovered or a new development occurred which might have an impact upon training, but they did no fighting.

Best evidence further indicates that while visiting operational areas, the KMS personnel did not act as advisers in the way Western armies would understand the term. They were purely along for the ride. Their treatment, in fact, was strictly in accordance with their former ranks, and at least one ex-corporal of the SAS was denied the use of the officer's mess facilities during a visit to an STF camp in Batticaloa, precisely because he was not an officer.

It was not always so easy to avoid blurring the role between trainer and combatant where the pilots were concerned, particularly when KMS personnel were utilized in hot areas, such as Jaffna, as regular flight personnel. (This was done while the Sri Lankan air force was training its own men.) The Indian Red Cross, for instance, has in its possession tapes of intercepted radio transmissions (provided by the Indian military/intelligence services) which include obviously foreign pilots directing gunship runs on guerrilla concentrations. Other evidence suggests direct application of suppressing fire by KMS pilots.

Assuming that the incidents did occur, they were clearly exceptions. The Sri Lankan rules of engagement, which prohibited foreign pilots from operating the weapons



Sri Lanka. Batticaloa District was the area of operations for the STF until the agreement between New Delhi and Colombo changed the war.

systems, seem to have been fairly consistently observed. Besides, most flights were more or less milk runs conducted for resupply, troop rotation, and communications purposes.

Also, the pilots were frequently recent veterans of African conflicts, especially the Rhodesian war. Hence, they were normally quite a bit younger than their counterparts who were training the STF. Being but in my mid-30s and normally clothed in fatigues, I found myself on several occasions assumed to be one of the KMS pilots. My nationality wasn't a problem, since there was at least one American on contract, though Yanks were avoided in the hiring process because of passport problems revolving around U.S. law.

In one such episode, I was actually being introduced to my "counterparts" when a bewildered KMS pilot appeared, having

just escaped from the command press officer and his interminably boring standard pitch. I gave way graciously. My previous attempts to fly a chopper had at the time only succeeded in terrifying my Thai counterparts, so I no doubt would have been unmasked in short order.

Still, I could have used the man's terms of service. Word was that the contract rate was 2,000 British pounds per month plus expenses, with a paid month off for every six months of service. STF trainers made less on the average, but their rate of payment depended to some extent upon their prior experience and grade, so they were doing just fine.

Whatever the precise rate, it cost Sri Lanka a great deal. At maximum strength sources claimed KMS had approximately 20 pilots in-country and 30-40 STF trainers. These figures may be accurate, but they seem a bit high. Graduating classes at the battalion training center, for instance, were accompanied by their British cadre of 10 personnel. Even allowing for administrative

overhead, personnel on leave and so forth, it is doubtful that 40 individuals were present simultaneously. Regardless, even a force at half the maximum estimates would have been expensive for a country with as limited means as Sri Lanka. Obviously, the government felt it was getting its money's worth!

Charges of Torture

As time passed, numerous foreign sources began to repeat allegations of torture. Contacts in Batticaloa, including some who could be called reasonably reliable, alleged that the STF was brutal in the extreme. At least one colleague, from the BBC, was led to what was purportedly a mass grave for STF torture victims.

It is perhaps a bit trite to say simply that none of us ever observed any such goings on — or came across witnesses or victims upon whom we were willing to hang a charge. Most of the stories I attempted to investigate ultimately came down to beatings and the use of chili pepper in the eyes and around the genitals — painful to be sure and not to be dismissed, but pretty standard fare in Sri Lankan arrests of all sorts.

Complicating the issue was the practice of using mass roundups to search for suspects. Hooded informers would pass before large intakes, indicating silently which should be kept for further questioning. The result was that most of those detained were let go fairly quickly; numerous others were not. In the first seven months of 1986 alone, for instance, STF figures listed 1,140 individuals as having been detained for alleged involvement with the guerrilla movement. Knowing how such matters frequently work in Sri Lanka under even the best of circumstances, it seems likely that the widespread talk of torture and "disappearances" were the natural consequence of procedures which combined three elements: widespread roundups, large numbers of individuals actually detained, and numerous individuals who undoubtedly took fright at detention and subsequently fled as soon as they were released.

Standard procedure called for STF to first obtain information of immediate tactical value, then to turn prisoners over to the local representative of the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB). For the prisoner, this meant only being interrogated in a different office in the same compound. Ultimately, however, he would be passed to the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of the police force, the body tasked with making a case for prosecution in the courts.

Despite this established procedure, talk of murder was routine, as were charges of brutality and torture. At least some of the KMS trainers, it is known, departed when unable to control what they charged was excessive force by their graduates. Again, it is difficult to separate what was normal practice in Sri Lankan police matters from actual brutality.

That the war itself was "dirty" is beyond doubt. Throughout, civilians regularly fell victim to all manner of assailants. Rival ethnic gangs would regularly massacre



opposing villages, and firefights frequently ended with trapped guerrillas biting on cyanide capsules rather than accepting capture. Eventually, to protect itself against charges, STF took to videotaping all encounters. Still, the issue of illegal conduct never has died down. It probably never will as long as the STF continues to be effective.

An Elite Force

And effective the STF surely has been, at least in wresting control of the district back from the guerrillas. It deployed in October 1984, and from that time the various guerrilla groups found themselves in trouble.

Batticaloa District, though only part of the much larger region, was the linchpin of the Eastern Province economically and in terms of population. Economically, Batticaloa city was the largest urban center in all of eastern Sri Lanka save Trincomalee port. The population of the area was not predominantly Tamil, as was the case in many centers of insurgency. Instead, its inhabitants were Sinhalese, Muslim, and Tamil. This made the people a much more difficult target for the guerrillas.

Knowing that the Sinhalese would not support them, the insurgents had simply driven off as many as they could. This, however, had not given the field to the guer-

ABOVE: Each company-size STF base has at its disposal a South African Buffalo IFV to augment transportation. Regarded as among the finest IFVs in the world, they were selected particularly for their mine-resistant capabilities.

rillas, as they might have expected. The Muslims, who spoke a Tamil dialect, remained generally opposed to the cause of independence, or *Eelam*. And even the Batticaloa Tamils were less than wholehearted in their welcome for the rebels, because the guerrilla leadership was overwhelmingly comprised of Jaffna Tamils, who were regarded as outsiders.

Nevertheless, all five major guerrilla groups were active in Batticaloa. Their principal activities involved using mines to inflict casualties on the security forces, because their attempts to attack police stations and to engage the STF directly had proved largely unsuccessful. Indeed, by the time I arrived, much of their activity focused on assaulting alleged traitors within their own Tamil community and on fund raising through extortion and kidnapping for ransom. Such conduct only made them all the more vulnerable to STF activity, since it caused individuals to inform on them.



Anxious to see the techniques which had kept the district relatively calm even while other areas of the country were effectively lost to the guerrillas, I endeavored to accompany as many different types of operations as I could. Leadership was everywhere in evidence. Execution of every movement, every phase of maneuver, was crisp, controlled, and professional, whether we were waiting in a night ambush or going through the tedious business of route-clearing. Suspects were routinely picked up in a no-nonsense fashion, but none were in any way abused.

A 24-hour period during my visit was typical. On a hot afternoon I linked up with a patrol of two sections waiting for me in the vicinity of the Batticaloa airport. Security having been posted, the remaining troops and the two Land-Rovers were clustered under the one available shade tree. It was like a scene from "Beau Geste" — dry vegetation, scrub pine and palms, all beneath a blazing sun so intense the eyes hurt.

Joined by a Buffalo, we began a random patrol in the vicinity of the town. Hours passed as the troops smartly executed the mind-numbing ritual: move down a road, vehicles at intervals sufficient to ensure that only one was destroyed should a mine be

TOP: STF section prepares to move out on patrol. Sand barrier is for loading/clearing weapons.

ABOVE: STF troops with section Land-Rover and light machine gun.

detonated; stop at all suspicious spots, bridges, and culverts; unass and set up security; search for mines or charges. Sweat poured down; heatwaves shimmered. As the vehicles slowly advanced, pairs of troops swept the sides of the road with long probes, searching for tripwires. Other troops kept a watchful eye on the surrounding compounds. Passersby who aroused suspicion were questioned.

Gradually we worked our way to a section of shops where we could fill an order for provisions needed at camp. Even for such a routine chore, security was posted. The troops chatted quietly with interested onlookers but never let down their guard. By and large all concerned simply tried to ignore the incongruity of grocery shoppers moving about with loaded weapons. The purchases properly stored, we moved on.

As evening approached, we wound our way to camp. All was as it should be. Guards posted, a group of troops enjoyed a lively round of cricket, a game so keenly followed by the entire populace that it must qualify as the Sri Lankan national sport. A small gathering watched, as others cleaned their equipment in the billets. Released, our

patrol moved off for their bays. One section ate immediately and sacked out. It had been picked to lay a night ambush.

In the barracks several officers and I talked quietly with troops. Each building housed three sections, all from different platoons. The mixture was deliberate — "to foster coordination," an officer told me. In what passed for the day room, a Tamil-language film played on the VCR, a surprising diversion given that the STF is almost universally Sinhalese. The electricity regularly flickered off and on, but no one was paying all that much attention to the plot. It was simply something to occupy the silence while preparations were made for the evening's business.

Some sleep, then a moveout at 0300 . . . our reinforced section moved out silently into the night. The 18 men were armed with the SAR 80 but also carried two LMGs and an Armscor grenade launcher. Our target was an outlying area near a railroad yard. Informants had pinpointed infiltration routes being used by the guerrillas. We wanted to hit the apparent linkup spot where local guides met incoming guerrilla parties.

No stars were out, so the blackness hid us completely. Familiar with the area, the troops had no trouble picking their way. Low commands brought swift execution, as the section set up an L-shaped trap covering a wide, open square bordered by low-lying school buildings. Like most such school facilities, in Sri Lanka this one had solid



were in business. Every vehicle, from a bicycle with a basket to a bus full of passengers, was searched. Always, the troops were looking for anything out of the ordinary. It could be a strange way of packing vegetables; or a shirt made from materials unlike those favored by the local folk; or a phrase not heard in these parts; or an unlikely reason for a visit on a hot day. When something could not be explained away, the individual involved was detained. Generally, release was swift. Others turned out to be involved in some way with the guerrillas and were arrested.

One soldier, in particular, was a natural at the business. He patiently explained to each person he stopped, often with superb dashes of humor, the reasons for the checkpoint and the regret felt by the troops at inconveniencing the travelers. He pumped for information, like a huckster working a crowd, always pointing out how unfair it was that people had to be hassled just because a bunch of fellows insisted upon killing people rather than settling their grievances through voting like everyone else (Sri Lanka is a functioning democracy). When he was finished, those stopped went away feeling as though they had been guests rather than suspects. The distinction is an important one in a battle to win popular trust and cooperation.

The afternoon began to fade as we mounted up. It had been an intense day of effort. Throughout the AO, sections were performing similar missions. The goal was to saturate the area with as much security force activity as possible, making movement of any sort difficult, if not impossible, for the guerrillas. The added benefit was that the people quickly got the message that the government was in charge. Support became more tangible, especially information slipped to the troops and to agents among the populace. Such an approach was possible with a well-trained, well-led force.

Dilemmas of Leadership

Most certainly, STF was a cut above the average army unit in performance. Its morale was high, its casualties minimal, and the damage it inflicted on the enemy substantial. It was effective in maintaining order in the district. Nevertheless, returning to my Marine Corps quotation, I was faced with something of a dilemma. Strong leadership and good training had produced an elite unit, one which had stabilized the situation. Yet did this make any real difference? What was being done to win the war?

At the tactical level, the STF was impressive, but on a strategic plane there was no movement. Even the most optimistic STF estimates classified a consistent 25 percent of the populace as guerrilla supporters. Further, there was no sign that the guerrillas had been in any way cut off from this mass base, since the conditions which allowed the guerrillas to recruit continued unabated.

In the absence of an overall strategic plan fashioned by the senior military and political leadership, the unit was placed in a situation of only maintaining the unsatisfactory

walls only waist-high, the remaining space to the roof being left open to allow the wind to blow through. Making use of such ideal barricades, the troops sited their weapons. Security was posted in 360 degrees.

Then, we waited. How many such ambushes have I sat through? Too many. The darkness seems to swirl and assume weird shades of purple and dark green. Spots make vision difficult; the lids grow heavy. The only cure is to shift the eyes constantly, sweeping the area. Anticipation soon gives way to boredom. The troops stay motionless in their positions.

Another familiar result . . . no contact this night. Before BMNT (Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight) we carefully slipped away. We moved to check an important road leading into town. At a key junction, small teams are set out to dominate all approaches. As first light appeared, the world stirred, and figures on foot materialized. All were quickly questioned. A number were detained for further processing at camp.

Training at STF center south of Colombo would be familiar to all who have been through advanced infantry training. Here, troops practice crossing water obstacles.

Eventually, the patrol returned to camp. Other units were preparing to depart. I joined one which would be setting up a checkpoint on a country road. In three vehicles we left the compound. Enroute to the predetermined area for the checkpoint, the troops again cleared the roads. By this time, the populace was up and about.

Once at the appropriate spot, the patrol element leaders selected the actual spots for their men. Stop points were located on the backside of blind turns, so that approaching vehicles could not tell they were about to be questioned. Portable puncture strips were laid out to seal off obvious escape routes, and lanes were marked with engineer tape to channel the vehicles selected for closer inspection. Various detectors and mirror sets (for searching undercarriages) were tested.

All of this took but a moment; soon we

status quo. They were faced, like the Israelis in the occupied territories, with a seemingly endless commitment. A senior officer recognized this problem immediately when I asked him, "What is planned to win in the long run?" His reply was telling: "That's a difficulty, because every time you press these fellows militarily, they just lie low. You must have a dual-track approach. You have to give these people [in the district] jobs and such."

We talked a bit longer. "There is another problem," he observed, "that we may get too good militarily and forget the rest." I had only that day seen an example of "forgetting the rest." As we moved down a road on a routine patrol, we encountered a heavily laden lorry [truck] broken down with a flat. The lone Tamil driver was struggling to change his tire. Militarily, the only significance of the man and his vehicle was their possible use for an ambush. Such was not the case, and we sped by.

Going strictly by the tactics book, we had behaved correctly. From a counterterrorism standpoint, we had passed up a good opportunity to make a friend and perhaps glean some information from him. The business at hand is normally not the counterterrorism which has become so much the fad — and which does require a great deal of security force finesse. Rather, the task is the dismantling of a guerrilla movement. Technical training is useful, of course, but it is not essential if the necessary social, economic, and political measures are being vigorously implemented. Guns, to make the point another way, are only necessary to keep guerrilla coercion away from the populace while the government deals with the real problem, the popular grievances.

What we should have done was to set up security and then help the man change his tire. We were so busy rushing about "clearing" that it was forgotten the target was the populace. The driver was a potential convert in our crusade, a potential friend, and a potential source of information. We let the opportunity slip by, and we did the same with countless others as we proceeded on our brisk, efficient way. Our patrols were flawless, but the mines would be back the next day.

Only winning popular support would change the situation. For this to happen, the STF would have to be employed more intelligently by its superiors. The problems were not with the unit but with the philosophy behind its employment. It simply had not been recognized that STF's professional superiority was only a means to an end, a way to support socio-economic-political measures for correcting structural inequities which bred radicalism. Until these measures were instituted, nothing permanent would come of military success. "Wars and battles," said my notebook, "are not lost by soldiers."

Postscript

It was shortly afterward that India's direct intervention of Sri Lanka changed the face of the conflict. Under the terms of the agree-



TOP: STF troops search whole buses and vans quickly, efficiently and with minimum fuss.

ABOVE: While on patrol, troops randomly stop and search vehicles. Here, agricultural produce is examined to ensure that nothing has been concealed within.

ment signed between Colombo and New Delhi, an Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was to have primary responsibility for suppression of the guerrillas in the north and east. This would, it was reasoned by India, assuage the irredentist passions being aroused in its own Tamil community, some 50 million strong, by charges that the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka was butchering its defenseless Tamil minority.

Quickly, the IPKF became locked in costly combat with the guerrillas. The struggle was largely conventional in nature — combat in a built-up area, Jaffna — and has continued to the present. An initial force of some 10,000 men had by February 1988 reportedly been augmented to nearly 60,000 men in an effort to quash guerrilla resistance. The effort was less than successful.

India's motives for intervening in the conflict — it had previously armed and trained the guerrillas and allowed them to set up bases on its soil — were not purely domestic. In fact, its internal concerns were far outweighed by its geostrategic designs. Its main goal was to secure a Sri Lanka free

from outside influence and obedient to Indian security concerns. To that end, in exchange for Indian help, Colombo agreed, among many other things, to consult with New Delhi on the introduction of outside forces into Sri Lanka. The Indians took this to mean that the KMS personnel and other foreign trainers (for example, Israeli and Pakistani) would be sent packing. The Sri Lankans took it to mean they would bear the Indian desires in mind while continuing to make their own decisions. A lower operational posture did allow most KMS personnel to depart, but a half-dozen were still in-country during my most recent visit last summer (see "Sri Lankan Minefield," SOF, March 1988).

Not surprisingly, another Indian demand, though not one written into the text of the joint agreement, was that the STF be disbanded. This, Colombo was not willing to do. Instead, it paid the unit the ultimate compliment for its professionalism: it made public the practice begun during the conflict of having STF units serve on a rotating basis as the quick reaction force responsible for presidential security. The remainder of the battalion was redeployed to the Sinhalese south, where Sinhalese Marxist insurgents continued to be active. The unit title was changed to "Police Special Force," and the troops were soon engaged in what they did best: hunting guerrillas. Time will tell whether strategic vision has now appropriately employed this superior unit. ✎

Text & Photos

by Tom Slizewski

TOP GUN. To a culture immersed in Hollywood fantasy the term conjures images of Tom Cruise downing evil, faceless Ruskies at a healthy clip, all to the beat of a rock 'n' roll soundtrack.

Reality, it turns out, is a bit more complex, and the only sound you hear is occasional radio traffic above the steady whine of jet engines rocketing you toward the horizon at upwards of 600 mph. A modern fighter carries enough fuel to fly 500 miles behind enemy lines and enough ordnance to erase a small city. Flying one of these powerful, high-tech babies is enough to give you a superiority complex. And often it does.

Ask any pilot. He'll tell you how good *he* is. That's why the U.S. Air Force decided it needed an objective way to judge who the best jet jockeys *really* are. Now, every two years competitions are held to determine who can rightfully lay claim to the title "top gun."

For air-to-ground gunnery and bombing, the competition is called "Gunsmoke," and it all happens amid the sand and sagebrush of the Nevada desert. I had a chance to witness their last joust in late 1987, as 18 teams from around the world gathered at Nellis Air Force Base outside Las Vegas to vie for bragging rights and the top gun title. After two weeks of intense competition only one pilot and one team would walk away with the prize.

"We compete amongst ourselves constantly, flight versus flight, aircraft versus aircraft, pilot versus pilot. Finally you get down to a point where someone says who really is best here. Beyond that, we compete to win, we do it to show what we can do. Gunsmoke tests the best guys a squadron can put together in the air and on the ground," said Major General John L. France, Colorado's Adjutant General, a fighter pilot himself, and commander of all



Lieutenant Colonel Bud Sittig, 140th TFW team leader, having just completed profile three.

Army and Air Guard units in Colorado.

On my arrival at Nellis, after a silky ride aboard an Army C-12 (Beechcraft Super King Air) flown by a pilot from the Colorado Army National Guard, it was readily apparent that this was not Hollywood — this was the *real* big time.

To say the air was thick with inflated egos is a bit hyperbolic, but nevertheless true. Ground crews bustled about with clock-like precision, while bomb load teams waited in the

wings, ready to jump to action as soon as they got the signal, and overhead the world's most advanced aircraft flew in tight pairs. The scene couldn't help but remind one of a well-orchestrated symphony, albeit a deadly one. No one had time to talk. They'd trained long and hard to be here and were now giving it 100 percent.

Gunsmoke's purpose is to find out which Air Force A7, A10, F4 or F16 team performs best in the crucial air-to-ground ordnance delivery mission. Of course, this competition also goes a long way toward building *esprit de corps* and honing the skills of everyone involved.

Once part of the William Tell program (an Air Force-wide air-to-air weapons meet currently held every two years at Tyndall AFB, Florida), Gunsmoke didn't get a life of its own until 1981 when the Air Force decided to conduct the air-to-ground competition separately. Every two years since, the Nevada desert has been host to this shootout.

Competitions are held separately because participants in the William Tell program have an entirely different mission. "The William Tell competition is a NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) mission. Their job is to be on alert, be able to scramble, go out, intercept and defeat the bomber threat, which is essentially a straight missile attack scenario," Maj. Gen. France told me.

Gunsmoke is first and foremost a bombing competition. "We're talking about not only close air support but deep interdiction into the

Who Is Air Force Top Gun? GUNSMOKE

SOF MILITARY AFFAIRS



second echelon of whatever enemy we'd be in a conflict with. A lot of our tactics now are focused on defeating radar and the SAM (surface-to-air missile) threat. We have to get down in the weeds to do that," the general continued.

At Gunsmoke, "down in the weeds" is an old M47 tank which serves as the target. The pilots' mission is to drop their ordnance accurately enough to destroy, or at least suppress, this imaginary armored threat.

It's tempting to draw hasty conclusions about how a team's performance at Gunsmoke reflects on the unit as a whole. But according to France, "As far as checking a particular squadron for its combat readiness, we do that in another way. We do that through the Inspector General system."

The Inspector General system involves the entire unit. A unit gets a call to mobilize, packs up its gear, transports that gear somewhere, simulates attacks, redeploys and makes it back home. And it is graded every step of the



An F16 Fighting Falcon from the 8th TFW "Wolfpack" based at Kunsan, South Korea, takes off for its last mission during Gunsmoke '87.

way. "That's what gives the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force knowledge of what his go-to-war capability is, not Gunsmoke. Gunsmoke, and competitions like it, are more of a glamour thing. Everyone strives to go to Gunsmoke and the people who get to go are the very, very best. Getting to go to this competition is an accomplishment in itself; it proves that you've really put something together. But the Air Force doesn't use the results of the competition as a vehicle to judge the entire unit."

Captain Dean "Hollywood" McDavid, an active-duty member of the 140th TFW, Buckley ANGB, Aurora, Colorado, salutes before taking off to perform the navigation/attack profile.

Gunsmoke is not a ceremonial affair; the competition here is genuine and fierce. Every team going into this contest counts on taking home the top gun trophy. Although some teams are at a nominal disadvantage due to the type of aircraft they fly, they compensate for this with more skilled pilots and razor-sharp ground crews. It's not just a matter of dropping your bombs accurately; numerous and diverse factors determine your final standing. Although putting your ordnance on target tops the list, aircraft appearance, time over target, loading and maintenance, crew performance and other factors make the difference between a team's winning or losing.

The first points logged on the score sheets were in the arrival category. Each participating team had a precise time to arrive at Nellis AFB. The 401st TFW, from Torrejon, Spain, arrived a mere one-tenth of a second early, and they didn't win. The 169th Air National Guard unit from McEntire Air National Guard Base, South Carolina, was early too, but only by .0736 seconds, allowing them to walk away with first place in this category. The difference between the five top slots was less than one second.

Of the 18 TFW teams that qualified to attend Gunsmoke, four made the trip from overseas bases, including the 51st and 8th from South Korea, the 81st from England and the 401st from Spain. The remaining teams were from active, Reserve and Guard components stationed stateside.

Each team consists of five pilots, four who take part in the competition plus an alternate, as well as a ground crew of approximately 40 people. Tons of tools and spare parts also travel with each unit. The logistics of getting to Gunsmoke with five good-looking and perfectly functioning aircraft is no easy task. More than one maintenance team lost sleep because they were fine-tuning their aircraft for the next day's flights.

Continued on page 70



MOSQUITO COAST AMBUSH

Yatama Indians Sting Sandinista Convoy

by Andy Stone

Photos by Paul Larkin

Much of the Miskito AO is marshland, swamp, and mangrove, providing them with a substantial home turf advantage.



[Editor's Note: To protect the Yatama, certain individual and place names have been changed throughout this article.]

DECEMBER 4, 1987: It was four days until my birthday, but I definitely wasn't planning any parties. Instead, I was lying flat on my face in the watery muck of a Nicaraguan mangrove swamp. Directly overhead, maybe 30 feet above me, were a pair of Soviet helicopter gunships, manned by Sandinistas, looking for someone to shoot.

I risked a quick look upward. I could see oil dripping from the bottom of one chopper. I could see the pilot's face; he had to be able to see me. The dense tangle of mangrove branches and trunks, which had seemed impenetrable as we fought our way through them for hours earlier that morning, now felt virtually transparent. I wanted more cover. I wanted to burrow under the roots of those damned trees.

EYE MAN, WORD MAN

Paul Larkin is a photographer who isn't content with secondhand news on Central America. He's been making regular trips down south since 1981 to report on and photograph the contra freedom fighters as well as American training ops (see "HALO Into Honduras," SOF July '87).

Andy Stone (not the American, "DH," referenced in the article) is a freelance writer who currently resides in Boulder, Colorado.

A burst of machine-gun fire cut through the jungle. Two rockets exploded, much too close. I could feel their blast wash over me; twigs and branches and bits of hot metal flew by, just a foot over my head. Part of me wanted to crawl for deeper

cover; the other part knew it would be madness to move.

First one chopper and then the other would circle off for a look-see, with one always remaining on station, directly above me. They were searching for any signs of the guerrilla team that I had been traveling with. The guerrillas were Yatama, Miskito Indians, the largely unknown third force in Nicaragua's civil war. Four days earlier they had ambushed a Sandinista convoy, killing more than 30 soldiers and destroying a tank truck of diesel fuel. But now the tables were turned and the element of surprise was on the Sandinistas' side. The helicopters had swept in out of the morning sun, catching us unprepared as we waited on a narrow strip of beach for a boat that was supposed to carry me north to safety.

Right now, safety seemed a long way away. Running back to get my pack when the choppers first flew in, I'd been the last man off the beach and there hadn't been time to get very deep into the mangroves. Earlier, I'd taken off my camouflage gear to dry in the morning's heat and now I was wearing a blue nylon windbreaker. I was certain the door gunners on the choppers were going to spot that flash of bright blue at any moment. Should I run? Should I stay? I held my breath, waiting for the bullets to hit. Why was I wearing bright blue? Why hadn't I heard the choppers a minute earlier? Couldn't I have run deeper into the jungle? Why was I in this stinking swamp in the first place?

The gunships circled once more, then flew off. I started to breathe again. I was all right. All was well, except for one problem: I was suddenly very much alone. I looked around, expecting to see the rest of the team emerge from cover, but there was no one there. I whistled — the bird calls the Yatama had used for signals during the three weeks I had been with them. There was no answer. Abandoning caution, I shouted. No one. The Yatama team had disappeared. I didn't know whether they were dead or just scattered. All I knew was that I was alone.

This felt like the final failure. For the past two days, the entire mission had felt like it was unraveling. The ambush had been a success; the retreat had been brutal, but we were all still alive. And then, when it came time to synchronize our team with other groups, to make the connections for our escape to the north, everything seemed to go to pieces. We had taken wrong turns, we'd missed connections, we'd been two days without food or water, and now it was beginning to look like everything had fallen apart completely. I was alone and if the pick-up boat ever did come, it was heading for a beach under Sandinista control. It was a long walk to safety and, in what

Yatama discuss configurations for placement of claymore mines in upcoming ambush. They had 20 claymores and four detonators with which to work.



Yatama traditionally pray before going into battle. This soldier is leaning on a Romanian AKM while reciting Psalm 121.

now seemed like a fatal excess of optimism, I'd given away most of my survival gear to members of the guerrilla team who were staying behind to fight.

I struggled through the mangroves to the bank of a nearby river that flowed to the beach where we'd been caught by the helicopter attack. I knew that there was a Miskito village about four hours up river — four hours by *cayucu* dugout canoe, that is. On foot, through the mangroves, the village seemed impossibly far away. I'd been on the move for almost a month, through deep mud, heavy rain and dense swamps; I'd been living on very little food and less sleep and now it was time to kick it into gear again. I'd been counting on an easy exit, a Hollywood escape, meeting a boat at a secret beach and motoring north to safety. Now I was going to have to do it the hard way, if I was going to do it at all.

And then, as if I'd walked to a curb and shouted "Taxi!", a lone Indian in a *cayucu* pulled alongside the riverbank and motioned me into his boat. I recognized him as a civilian who'd joined us on the beach shortly before the helicopter attacked. We paddled back toward the beach, looking for others, but there was no one in sight. We turned around and started back up river. We hadn't gone more than 100 meters when we heard the sound of the gunships returning.

We raced for the river's edge, paddling deep under the overhanging mangrove branches, jumped into the water and flipped the dugout over, so it looked like just one more log floating in the river. As the choppers buzzed down close above us, I held my breath and fought my way under mangrove roots that ran down the bank and under the water. I pushed myself as far below the surface as I could. I was still wearing that damned blue jacket and I wondered whether its high visibility was going to get me killed. Each time I bobbed up, gasping for breath, the copters were still circling above us.

Then we heard them set down, back at the beach. Minutes later, they flew away. It was time to move. We flipped the boat back upright and started paddling frantically up the river. Then, from behind us, I heard the sound of a mortar firing and, seconds later, there was an explosion in the jungle off to our right. The firing continued, a barrage of explosions; I counted 18 rounds and then there was silence.

We seemed to have escaped. The Indian smiled at me and handed me a fishing line with a big lure attached. I cast the line, amazed. A few minutes before, I'd been expecting to die at any moment, now I was fishing like someone on a weekend tour in the mountains. We paddled steadily and made good time heading to the village of Sandy Bay. Halfway there I caught an enormous perch. It was a small victory. I would have preferred a larger one but, come what may, at least we had lunch under control.

It had been mid-November when I'd made my first contact with the Yatama in the village of Kinara in the jungles of northeastern Nicaragua. As a freelance photographer, I'd been covering wars in Central America for the past six years. On this particular trip, I'd been working contacts I'd established in the past, getting access to Nicaraguan freedom fighters, or contras. Until just a few days before, I had expected to spend several weeks in the central mountains with them. My plans had changed at the last moment when the opportunity arose to accompany a Yatama guerrilla team in the northeastern territory. Although I'd equipped myself for dry-season mountain travel, there was no time to re-equip; but my contacts told me not to worry, the Yatama operation would take me mostly into jungle territory, with "only a little swamp." Regardless of what terrain lay ahead, the chance to join the Yatama was not one I could pass up.

The night before I left for Kinara, I was joined by an American writer who was working his way through most of the world's wars, low-intensity and otherwise. This was his seventh war in two years. Since he's still out there and his identity is his own business, for the purposes of this story I'll just call him "DH."

In Kinara, things seemed very relaxed — maybe disorganized would be a better word. We spent most of two days wondering what was happening. We were told we'd be leaving the first afternoon, but the day passed and we were still there. Small groups of Indian troops came and went. A cadre of Yatama special forces arrived and one of the group's officers, Comandante "Chocolat" (all of the Yatama troops use *noms de guerre* to protect their families from Sandinista reprisals), said we would be traveling with him and his team. Then, a few minutes later, they all left the village by boat, leaving us

Chocolat (front, carrying Romanian AKM), trained at Ft. Bragg and Swan Island in insurgency technology, leads a group of Yatama guerrillas through the swamps toward Sandy Bay.



This Yatama commander and his troops had recently escaped from the Sandinistas and joined our group after the ambush.

behind. We spent the night in the village and the second day passed very much like the first.

Finally, just after dark, the special forces returned and we joined them for an hour's journey down river to the village of Nathe. We traveled in the dark, 40 men in two *pongas* (large motorized dugouts). From time to time lights would flash from the darkness along the shore and Chocolat would flash back signals of his own; sign and countersign on a river they controlled. The Yatama are guerrillas in a nation under Sandinista rule, but there, in the jungles of the northeast, they are at home.

These fiercely independent Indian warriors are the "third force" in Nicaragua's volatile political situation. The Marxist Sandinistas control the government and rule the country from Managua; the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Front), or contras, are rebels seeking to overthrow that central government. But the Miskito Indians are an indigenous people who consider the eastern third of Nicaragua their homeland. They don't really care who rules in Managua; they are fighting for autonomy, the right to be left alone, or if possible, complete independence.

For now, the Yatama — fighting arm of the Indian nation — are allied with the contras, if only to obtain money, weapons, supplies and training. But the eventual outcome of the contra-Sandinista war doesn't really concern them. No matter who wins that conflict, no matter what settlement is reached, the Miskito Indians will keep on fighting until they achieve their own goals.

The Miskito lived in relative peace under the Somoza regime. Although the Indians' land was technically under central government control, Somoza — like his predecessors



throughout the 20th century — was generally content to leave them in peace to run their lives and villages as they chose. After the fall of Somoza, however, the new Sandinista government felt obliged to bring the Indians under its control. Miskito lands were seized under the guise of “agrarian reform”; Miskito villages were “relocated” at the government’s whim as part of its plan to run the country as it saw fit. As one scholar has written, “The [Sandinistas] believed that the revolution gave them the right to ‘integrate’ Indian lands and peoples into Nicaragua; the Indians saw that the revolution gave the [Sandinistas] the power to do so, but not the right.”

The result has been war, a guerrilla war in which the Indians, secure in their own homeland, have been fighting Sandinista control with modern weapons and training and centuries-old warrior tradition. The Indians of eastern Nicaragua were among the first natives of Central America to successfully battle European soldiers, when they drove the Spanish out of their territory in 1800, after several hundred years of constant battle. Now, almost 200 years later, they are fighting again for control of their home ground. The men with whom I was traveling were part of this tradition.

We spent the night in Nathe and set off early the next morning. However, despite our early start, we only made it as far as the other side of the village, where we sat for the rest of the morning waiting for supplies. There were only a few of us at that point — maybe half a dozen — but little by little the team assembled. At noon we were rejoined by the special forces team, 23 men. More men filtered in until the early afternoon, when there were 78 troops assembled and we headed out of the village.

In the first 30 minutes of travel, we found ourselves knee-deep in marsh, then waist-deep and then, finally, swimming. Our column of 78 men spent the next

three-and-a-half days moving steadily through waist- to chest-deep water in rolling, marshy grassland. It was raining on and off and somewhere not too far from Nathe I realized I was going to be wet all the time from there on in. I thought back to my contacts who had promised “only a little swamp.” They had said they’d like to make the same trip some day; I hoped they would get the chance.

On the fourth day, as we zigzagged through the swamp, we spotted a rare patch of solid ground where we discovered traces of a Sandinista patrol: sardine cans with labels in Russian and boot prints that DH identified as “definitely Bulgarian.” Later that day we stopped at Samba, the home village of one of the main leaders of the Miskito rebels and the Yatama movement. As with every other village to come, the guerrilla troops were welcomed like heroes coming home. Though the villagers were poor, with barely enough to feed their own people, children climbed trees to get coconuts, meals were prepared and bread was baked in order to feed the troops.

There have been three main Indian groups fighting against the Sandinistas since 1981: a southern guerrilla group known as the MISURASATA, led by Brooklyn Rivera; the MISURA, led by Steadman Faggoth; and KISAN, led by Wycliffe Diego. Although these three groups shared a common background and common purpose, their relations with one another were often difficult. Fueled by constant differences in philosophy, approach, and personality, the three groups feuded more often than they cooperated. In 1985, Faggoth was expelled from MISURA and Diego took over leadership of that group as well as KISAN. Although this seemed to leave the KISAN-MISURA alliance in a dominant position, the organization was still not a solid fighting unit.

Finally, in June of 1987, under internal pressures, as well as the incentive of \$5 million from the United States aimed at encouraging unity under a common banner, the Indian rebel movement called a conference at the Honduran border village of Rus Rus. Despite the difficulties of travel through the jungle territory during the June rainy season, some 1,000 Indian

Yatama independence fighters are, for the most part, well-equipped. Some, such as the one pictured here, carry new Heckler & Koch 40mm “Grenatpistole” grenade launchers.





Yatama patrol works its way through swamp, headed toward site selected to ambush Sandinista convoy.

warriors made their way to the meeting. Some had to fight their way past Sandinista patrols to reach Rus Rus.

At the meeting, the Indians agreed to unite in a new organization to be known as Yatama. They set up a six-man directorate to head the organization. Rivera, Diego and Faggoth held three of the positions, with Charlie Morales of the Sumo tribe and Walter Ortiz of the Rama tribe filling two of the remaining three spots. The last position still remains unfilled as of this writing. Once the Yatama organization was formed, the Indians were in line for a great deal of U.S. support, a continuation and expansion of the aid the Indians had already received.

I was impressed by the levels of American support and training that I found during my three weeks among the Yatama. I asked constantly about their background and training and nearly three-quarters of them told me that they had been trained either in the United States at Fort Bragg, or by U.S. personnel at Honduras' Swan Island military base. Putting together information from a wide variety of sources, I was convinced that roughly 700-1,000 of the 1,500 active Yatama guerrillas received training in the United States. The evidence of their U.S. background was everywhere, including the country western music cassettes they played on ghetto blasters in some of the villages.

Comandante Chocolat, who served as my interpreter, was fairly typical in both background and training. At 21, he had already been fighting the Sandinistas for seven years. His father, a shrimp fisherman, had left the country after Somoza was overthrown; his mother stayed in Nicaragua a while longer but then left for Costa Rica. Chocolat stayed behind and joined the guerrilla movement, as did seven other men from his immediate family. In 1986 he was sent to Fort Bragg for three months, June through August, as part of a 55-man training group. Later that year, he spent one month on Swan Island being trained in the operation of Red Eye anti-aircraft missiles.

The pages of my notebook are filled with capsule biographies of men whose pictures I have taken:

Comandante Fronseca — head of the special forces unit; age 25, fighting since 1981; Fort Bragg, March 1987; with a sixth-grade education, the most educated of the group . . .

Comandante Buksa — age 23; trained at Swan Island by U.S. Navy SEALs in demolition and ocean navigation; commandante of the Tuara region . . .

Rasta — the group's demolitions expert; a Jimi Hendrix look-alike; age 26, fighting since 1982; three brothers also with the Yatama; 40 days training at Fort Bragg . . .

Perro Bravo — our medic; age 21; fighting since 1982; three brothers in the Yatama; paramedic training at Fort Bragg, November and December 1986 . . .

United States training was also reflected in the men's clothing, which was mostly U.S. combat issue, from boots to

hats. Their armament, however, was more international. The Yamata claim to have a fair number of Red Eye anti-aircraft missiles; I saw two of them hidden at one village. Our 48-man team's arms for our upcoming ambush included two RPG-7 (rocket-propelled grenade) launchers, five M79 grenade launchers, a 60mm mortar, 20 claymore mines, a Soviet RPK machine gun, and standard AKMs carried by all the men.

Still, despite all the American support and training, there were clearly many gaps in the team's equipment. Their jungle combat boots were brand new but were mostly the wrong size — the Yatama had to slit them open at the heels and toes in order to wear them. They had medical training but no medical supplies, not so much as a single aspirin. The men would frequently come to me or DH for medicine. I'd give them what I could; DH, who carried some medicine himself, would hand out M&Ms for medicinal purposes.

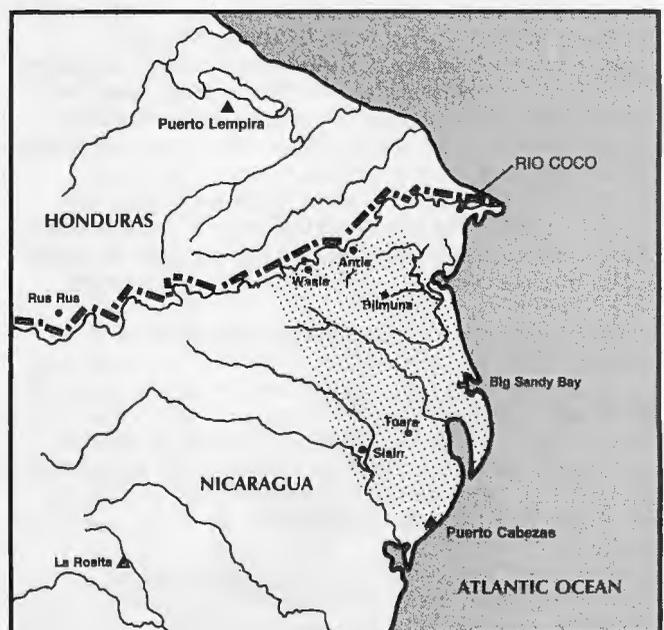
Military discipline and organization among the Yatama often felt a little too relaxed for my comfort. Military training only goes so far in an organization that is basically built on family and tribal ties. There was no formal chain of command. A comandante would order a soldier to do something and, if the soldier refused, the comandante would shrug and look for someone else to get the job done. The job always got done, but it often took several attempts before someone would agree to do it.

Moreover, the Yatama often seemed too casual toward the dangers of being spotted by government troops. Perhaps it was simply the fact that the jungle was their home and they felt comfortable and relaxed there, while for me it was strange and alien territory, but I often found them moving slowly when I felt we were dangerously exposed and ought to be hurrying. They often talked loudly when I thought silence was called for, and several times set fires at night when I welcomed the darkness for concealment. Still, if discipline seemed a little lacking, no one could fault their courage, dedication, or determination.

All of the Yatama's qualities, both good and bad, were to become even more clear to me over the days to come as we moved closer to their planned ambush of a Sandinista convoy.

We left Samba midday on 25 November and walked for an hour to the village of Sandy Bay where we were again well-received by the villagers. This meal included *tortuga* (sea turtle) as well as the usual rice. We spent the rest of the day there, first being told we were about to leave, then that we were

Operational area covered by photographer Paul Larkin during his stay with Yatama resistance fighters.



staying the night, then that we were leaving, then that we were staying. Late in the day, one of the officers, Comandante Zero Uno, left the village with about half the group. Apparently they were off on a separate mission of their own. (Later, I ran into Zero Uno again and he told me his group had blown up a petroleum and oil dump and sunk a small Cuban freighter at Puerto Cabezas.) Our group was now down to about 40 men.

We spent the night in Sandy Bay and the next morning I had breakfast at the house of an Indian man whose son I had met in Kinara. He was eager for news of his boy, whom he hadn't seen in three years. I told him what I could over breakfast and, somewhere along the way, I realized that today was Thanksgiving. No turkey, no cranberry sauce, but at least I was having a home-cooked family meal. Later, DH managed to tune in an American broadcast on National Public Radio from Panama. We listened to Arlo Guthrie sing "Alice's Restaurant," a song that starts with a Thanksgiving dinner and ends with draft dodgers. I listened to the music as I photographed the distribution of phosphorus grenades. It was a strange combination.

After spending the afternoon waiting for a rumored shipment of Red Eye missiles that never came, we marched an hour in the dark to the village of Toma on the banks of a large lagoon. Once again, the walk crossed the endless muddy swamps that lie between all of the villages. Each village occupies a site of dry land, bordering on open water, a lagoon or river, which provides the transportation network throughout the area. Most traffic between villages goes by *cayucu* dugouts, but we usually could not afford the exposure of open-water travel.

Now the tension was starting to build. At Toma we were told that several thousand Sandinista troops were expected to move into the area. We spent a restless night and were awakened at 0400 hours by cries of "*Alerta! Alerta!*" but nothing came of it. We spent the next day in the village and then, as darkness was falling, after waiting an hour for a boat that never arrived, we swam across the lagoon and hiked for nearly five hours through the dark swampland. At one point we came upon an empty multi-shell cannister from a multiple Soviet rocket launcher known as a "Stalin Organ." DH was not happy to see signs of this particular weapon. He had been caught in a Stalin Organ barrage in Afghanistan and wasn't looking forward to repeating that experience.

Late that night we reached the village of Jimbo, where we slept and spent most of the next day. Now we were definitely nearing the ambush site, which was to be just outside the village of Sisin, a Sandinista stronghold in the heart of Miskito territory. That afternoon, we loaded into *cayucus* and paddled across the Jimbo lagoon. At the far shore, the boats steered into a narrow passageway through the mangroves that bordered the water. We were moving through a maze of bayous, heading deeper into the mangrove jungle. It was a strange and beautiful landscape.

Late that night, the boats stopped at an embankment and we walked ashore. Wrapped in our ponchos for protection against swarms of mosquitoes, we slept for an hour, waiting for a second guerrilla team that was supposed to join us. Once it became clear that they weren't coming, we set off on our own and marched the rest of the night, through the swamp, to the village of Nelson. This was to be our last stop before the ambush.

As I recount this sequence of events, I realize that it can't begin to convey the growing intensity of the situation. We knew we were moving closer and closer to serious action and every step took on greater significance. On the one hand, we were working our way through a simple, though not always easy, daily routine — paddling boats, walking through the jungle, sleeping on an embankment — and on the other hand, we were steadily moving very close to a point of no return, beyond which lay extreme danger. Outside Nelson, DH and I seriously considered turning back. But, in the end, we knew we'd come too far for that, so we followed along, putting the tension aside.

We spent the day in the jungle just outside Nelson.



Pulsa, a mere 14 years old, was the only female combatant with the raiding party. This was her second engagement after two years with the Yatama.

Throughout the day, more men joined us. Comandante Buksa arrived with 20 men. By that afternoon, there were nearly 50 in our team. The officers gathered to discuss battle tactics and lay out the ambush, sketching possible mine placements in the dirt. Men began wiring the claymore mines to their detonators. Villagers came and went, bringing food and information. A number of the men apparently lived in the village and their families came out to wish them good luck. Everyone stripped their gear down to the bare essentials and cached the rest in the dense jungle for safekeeping. The Yatama painted their faces for camouflage, mothers kissed their sons goodbye, and we set off for Sisin.

We crossed the river by boat and then hiked for nearly an hour until just before sunset. We stopped in a clearing and the Yatama guerrillas knelt down to pray, 50 men scattered here and there throughout the clearing in the fading light. One of the men read Psalm 121, which begins "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help," and ends, "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." Silently, they rose and we marched on again.

Now, for the first time since we had left the village of Nathe, eight days ago, we were on dry ground. The absence of mud was a pleasure, but the going was still not easy. The ground here was covered by sturdy clumps of grass, too small to step on and too close together to step between. We walked cautiously for hours, trying to avoid a potentially crippling twisted ankle.

We crossed meadows of this grass, broken by occasional lines of trees. As we approached each tree line, tension ran high. We were in government-controlled territory and the trees could easily conceal Sandinista patrols.

At last, we reached the ambush site, a small grove of scrubby

trees at the edge of a dirt road that ran through a sea of thigh-deep grass. Aside from the grass itself, there wasn't much cover. We gathered at one tree, larger than the rest, that stood in the middle of the grove. Instructions were whispered and men fanned out in the moonlight, setting a row of claymore mines along several hundred meters of road, perhaps two meters from the road's edge.

Suddenly, there was the sound of an engine in the distance. There is a curfew on civilian traffic in Nicaragua, so anything moving at that time of night ought to be a military vehicle. Everyone scattered, diving for cover in the grass. But when the vehicle reached our position, it turned out to be a civilian truck defying the curfew. After it passed, the Yatama went back to their work.

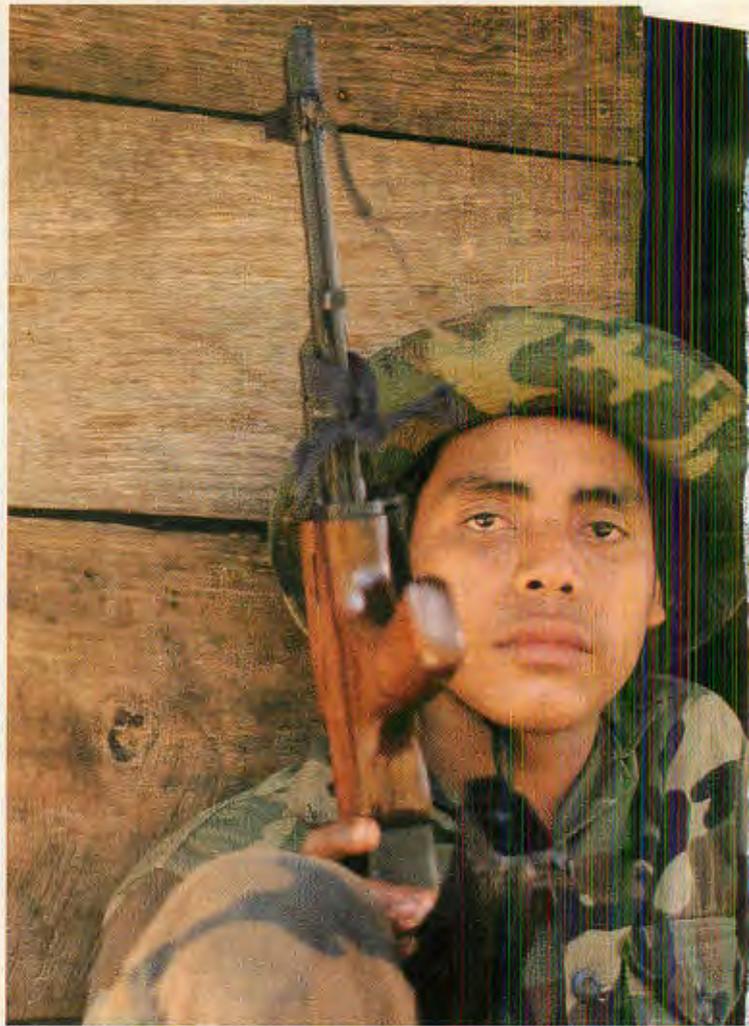
I picked what seemed to be a good position to get pictures of the ambush and lay down. With time to think, I began to consider the fact that I had no idea what the plan was, or what our escape route was. After a while, Comandante Afu — the most solid military man among the Yatama — came over and suggested that I should move to the rear, for safety. I said no, I wanted to be close so I could get photographs. "How close?" he asked. I said, "Ten meters." He shrugged and moved me to a new position, perhaps not 10 meters from the road but certainly no more than 20. It was nearly midnight by then and somehow I managed to fall asleep for an hour or two. Later, Afu woke me again and moved me to a new spot, beside the biggest of the trees, very close to the road. I could see the road, a lighter strip under the moonlight. I stared at it for a while and then slept again, not waking until just before dawn.

When I awoke, there were two men beside me, clutching the detonators for the claymores. We lay there for hours, as the sun rose. It was quiet out on the grassland and whenever a vehicle approached we could hear its engine for an endless 10 minutes before it finally came into view. With each approach, the Yatama flattened themselves in the grass; I clutched my camera and rose slightly on my elbows, keeping my head down and out of sight; one of the men with the detonators would crane his head to peek above the grass and then drop back down. "No," he would say. "Civil." We would all start to breathe again, until the next engine was heard.

Then, at about 0900, we heard a new sound, engines louder than any before. I crawled forward and peered out. Three Sandinista troop carriers, usually holding about 30 men each, were heading our way. I could hear music blasting from one of the trucks — "La Bamba," a song that's a big hit with all sides in the Nicaragua war. I took a picture of the man beside me, his face a blank as he pressed the button on the detonator.

Nothing happened. The music kept playing, the trucks kept rolling. The soldier frowned and pushed the button again . . .

Yatama Fermin takes a break after swimming across yet another bayou. He was responsible for leading us to safety after the ambush of the Sandinista patrol.



During one of the infrequent rest stops, member of the raiding party catches his breath. Most of the Yatama with whom photographer Larkin spoke had been trained either at Fort Bragg or by U.S. personnel at Swan Island, Honduras.

and again. Still nothing. He kept pushing the button even as the trucks rolled out of range of the mines. I hissed, "No! Stop!" If the mines went off now, they'd do no damage to the Sandinistas and there'd be 100 men down on us in an instant. But he kept on hitting that button until he was finally convinced that nothing was going to happen.

The trucks disappeared and we all sat up. It was time to think about what had just happened. For one thing, I began to realize exactly how exposed we were, how close to the enemy and how far from cover. We were less than a kilometer from the Sandinista garrison at Sisin. If the mines had gone off, we would have had to retreat across miles of open country in broad daylight. I wondered whether the Yatama had even considered this part of the operation. Had they attempted a daylight strike out of sheer foolishness and lack of planning, or were they simply so dedicated to their cause that they were willing to pay the price for a successful attack? It all suddenly seemed like madness to me. I realized again how much there was that I didn't know. Life within a guerrilla operation is never clear and organized to an outsider. This was not a standing army with well-laid plans, chains of command, and orders. It was a fluid, shifting mixture of men and events and decisions that I might know well, but could never know completely.

DH, who had been lying a few feet away from me all day, was clearly amazed at the turn of events. He told me he had been on the other side of the same situation not too long before in Cambodia. There, a group he was with had stumbled into a claymore ambush. The detonators had gone off, but the mines



didn't explode. He was shaken by the similarity of the two episodes. "I've had enough," he said. "I don't need to be here any more." Just then, Afu crawled forward to join us. "You want to go?" he asked. A truthful answer would have been "Yes!" but there was the fact that even without setting off the ambush, a retreat across open country in broad daylight would have been too dangerous. We told Afu, "It's your decision," and I thought to myself, "We've checked in; it's not time to check out yet."

A mother kisses her son good-bye as he and other Yatama leave their camp outside a local village.



It turned into one hell of a long day. We lay in the grass, trying not to move too much — it was sparse enough cover as it was, movement would trample it down until there was nowhere to hide. By mid-afternoon, my concentration was starting to ebb, things were getting a little fuzzy. The light had shifted and we were even more exposed than we had been. I had moved a few feet further back from the road.

I don't think I was paying as close attention as I should have been. If I had, perhaps I would have realized that the engines I was hearing this time were deeper, louder than all the civilian vehicles that had passed during the day. As it was, I crawled forward, expecting to hear "Civil." And the guerrilla with the detonator did say "Civil." I started to inch backward and lie down. An instant later, the Indian said, "No! Militar!" I was off balance and out of position. I started to rise and get my camera ready. In one instant I saw a jeep and a semi fuel-tanker and soldiers on a sunlit road and then, in that same instant, they all disappeared in a cloud of smoke, gray at the edges, jet black in the center.

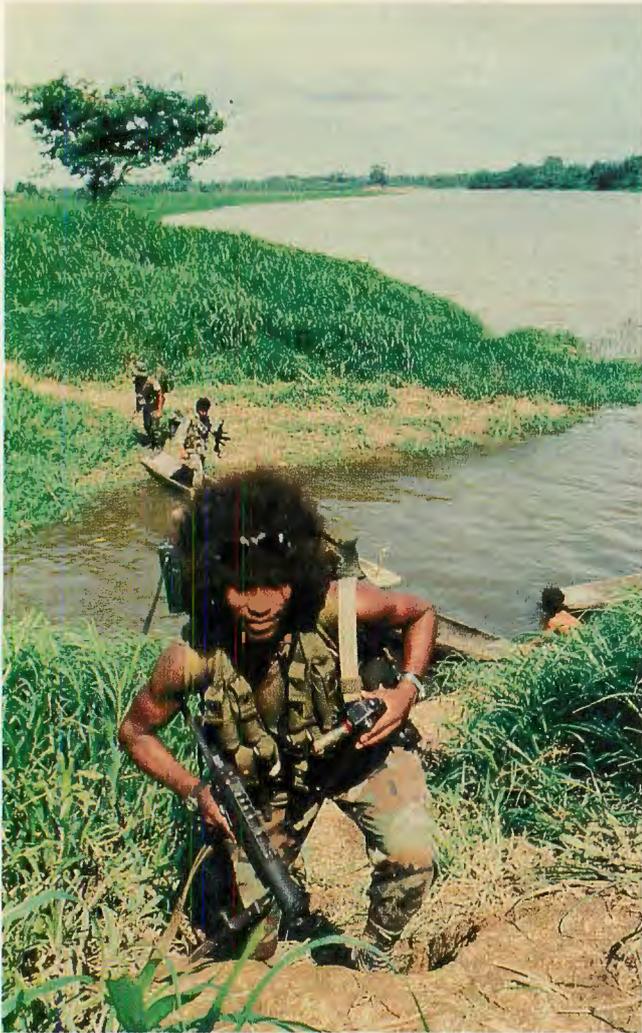
I'd been trying to rise, but the blast caught me and knocked me back to the ground. I got to my knees — I'd missed the shot of the instant of the ambush itself — but now, before I could start cranking film, we were enveloped in a heavy wave of small-arms fire. The fire was so heavy, so fast that for an instant I wondered whether we ourselves had been ambushed, whether the Sandinistas had spotted us and surrounded us over the course of the day.

What had actually happened was that the Yatama mines had hit only half the Sandinista convoy. Behind the jeep and the semi were three troop trucks. One was heavily damaged, two hadn't been hit at all. Some 60 or 70 Sandinista troops had survived the ambush and poured out of the trucks, firing as they took the high ground by the side of the road. It was their almost instantaneous return fire that was sweeping across our position.

I spun around, searching for Fermin, the guerrilla who had been assigned to guide us to safety. He and DH were already 10 meters away, moving fast. Fermin stopped and shouted to other Yatama soldiers to lay down covering fire and shouted at me to run. And right now! I wanted to take the photographs I

Comandante Zero Uno listens to villagers describe the difficulty in obtaining food. He later led a raid on Puerto Cabezas which destroyed several oil dumps and sank a small freighter.





Grenade launcher and shades — fighting an independence war Yatama style. A fierce spirit of independence and courage make up for lax military discipline and organization.

had come for, but I also knew I had to run for my life.

“Run! Run!” Fermin shouted again. I ran toward him. The moment he saw me move, he turned and ran, too. I followed him desperately, he was my guide, my ticket out of there. I ran, cameras banging against my chest. I fell time and time again. I found myself thinking, “Every time I fall, it’s saving my life. I must be falling at exactly the perfect moments.”

Fermin and DH were disappearing ahead of me. I was running, but now — was this some kind of cheap comedy? — one of my shoelaces came untied. Shoe loose, I ran on. The firing was still intense. I ran through a treeline, expecting that it would give some shelter, but on the other side the firing was actually heavier. I passed the Yatama mortar crew, lobbing shells back at the Sandinistas. The return fire was a little lighter now and I felt that it would be safe to stop for a moment, to tie my shoe, to take a picture. But, far ahead of me, Fermin and DH were still running. Fermin knew the way out of there and if he didn’t stop, neither could I.

I caught up to them as they ran down into a shallow stream bed, out of the line of fire. I screamed, “Stop!” They paused and looked back. I felt foolish saying, “I have to tie my shoelace.” We took a moment for a sip of water and I stowed my cameras in my pack. Then we were off, running again.

Comandante Fronseca and Perro Bravo joined up with us. We ran for almost an hour. DH, who counted or timed almost everything that happened, later said that the small-arms fire had continued for 37 minutes after the ambush.

Emerging from the tree line we came out into a large open area, rising up to a road about 400 meters ahead of us. The exposure

felt extreme, but the firing had long since stopped, so we walked as we crossed toward the road. Off to our left another group of soldiers walked out of the trees and began to cross the meadow. After a moment of high tension, we recognized them as Yatama. We converged at the road as more troops came out of the trees and joined us. The soldiers stopped to take muster and the results were impressive: No one there was wounded in any way and almost the entire team was present and accounted for. The only men missing were the mortar crew.

We were several miles from the ambush by now, but we could still look back and see a column of black smoke rising into the sky. We walked for nearly two hours, back to Nelson. It was dark when we reached the village and, far behind us, we could see the glow of burning diesel fuel on the horizon.

The village was out to meet us. They had heard the entire battle and, though they welcomed their men home, I heard fear in their voices, concern that the ambush would bring retribution down on the village. We were given oranges, water, a handful of rice. A woman said she heard trucks coming and we moved quickly out of the village, down an embankment to the river. We stopped there and listened. No one could hear trucks now. It was decided we would rest here, while runners from the village went ahead to make certain boats would be waiting where they were needed to take us back to Jimbo.

As we stood there, I looked around and saw the mortar team. How they got there ahead of us I didn’t know and never learned, but it didn’t matter. They were safe. The ambush had been carried out without a single Yatama casualty.

We rested for a while and then moved out, stopping to pick up the gear we’d all stashed in the jungle the day before. We marched for most of the night, through some of the worst mud and swamp we’d encountered so far. And yet, I was amazed at how strong I felt. I knew the name of the game was covering as much ground as possible as quickly as possible and I felt like I could go all night without a break. When the others stopped to rest, I stayed on my feet, impatient to be off again.

We reached the embankment at the edge of the mangrove bayou late that night. It was the spot where the boats from Jimbo had dropped us off. The boats weren’t there yet, so we wrapped up in our ponchos and slept for an hour or two. When the boats finally did arrive, it was only an hour or so until sunrise and I resigned myself to crossing the open lagoon in full daylight. It was a long way across and I kept urging the Yatama to paddle faster. I felt constantly exposed. I paddled as hard as I could, but the Indians were more given to spurts of paddling, followed by periods of relaxation. Just as we reached the shore at Jimbo, we heard the sound of planes overhead. We ran into the trees for cover. Two planes circled in the distance, dropped a 500-pound bomb into the jungle on the far side of the lagoon and then flew off. We walked on into Jimbo.

We spent the day there and then, in the late afternoon, set off for Toma. It was a four-hour hike through the swamp and, this time, my energy finally ran out. My body kept moving, my mind was dead. I struggled into Toma, strung up my hammock and fell deeply asleep.

We spent the next morning waiting for word on the boat that was to take us north. We passed the time sorting through our gear and giving almost everything away. I gave different men my Swiss Army knife, my compass, the bowl I ate from, my batteries and the last of our medical supplies. These men had taken me beyond the propaganda net, into their war, and, under the extreme pressure of combat, they had treated me well and taken care of me. I wanted to show my appreciation.

Word came by radio that everything was set. We were to leave at 1600 hours to sail across the lagoon to the ocean for the pick-up. Promptly at 1600, DH and I and a small group of Yatama left the village. But when we got to the edge of the lagoon, the sailboat wasn’t there. We waited an hour and finally sent a boy back to the village to find out what was happening. He came back a few minutes later to tell us we were waiting in the wrong place. We walked half an hour around the marsh to where the boat had been waiting ever since 1600. Most of the

rest of the Yatama team was there, all wondering what had happened to us.

We crossed the lagoon, beached the boat and walked across a sandbar to the edge of the ocean. It was a beautiful night with a full moon shimmering. DH and I were actually gathering seashells to bring back as souvenirs, when the whole thing began to fall apart. There was the whine of a plane, diving at us out of the darkness. I scrambled for cover. The plane fired two rockets at the boat that had just taken us across the lagoon. It flew inland and fired six more rockets in the general vicinity of Toma. Then it was quiet again. The rocket had done no damage, except to our feeling of being well on our way to safety.

We waited for a while, but there was no sign of the boat that was to pick us up. "We're supposed to signal the boat with a blue light," said Comandante Fronseca. "Do you have a flashlight?" DH loaned him one. "Do you have a blue filter?" Fronseca asked. I loaned him my blue nylon windbreaker and wondered just exactly how well this pick-up was organized. We waited. The boat didn't come. "Maybe the plane scared him off," suggested Fronseca. "No," said the captain of the sailboat. "We were too late. He comes every night right at seven. We didn't get here until nearly seven-thirty." Fronseca wondered whether we should take the sailboat up the coast to a safe haven. "It's only a 12-hour sail," he said. The captain of the boat declared that only an idiot would try that trip under a full moon and he was no idiot. I stood there and wondered how everything was unraveling so quickly after so long.

Just then, two men paddled up in a *cayucu*, shouting in excitement. They said a major Sandinista assault was coming the next day and all of the Yatama should return to the village of Sandy Bay and get ready to fight. It seemed that our escape was about to become a minor matter. Fronseca said that there was a second pick-up point further up the coast. It would take four or five hours to hike there and the boat would be there the next night. Comandante Afu said he would take us there. Fernando and Fermin said they would accompany us as well — assigned to keep us safe, they were not going to abandon us now. We were also joined by a group of seven young Yatama who had joined our troop after the ambush. They had escaped a Sandinista prison and were working their way north to re-arm and return to combat. So, we headed north, 12 of us in all, with no food, no water and very little gear.

An hour before dawn, after a solid five hours of walking, we finally stopped. Afu said there was a stretch of "brush" ahead and we should sleep and cover that stretch in the morning. We slept until it was light and then moved on. The brush that Afu

Comandante Buksa raises his RPG-7 in triumph after successful ambush of Sandinista convoy.



After marching all night, then paddling for four hours, Yatama patrol returns to village rendezvous site. Within seconds of this photograph being shot, search planes were heard forcing everyone into cover.

had spoken of turned out to be an impossibly thick mangrove forest. We were fighting our way through an almost impenetrable tangle of vines and roots and branches. We battled through it for five hours — I have no idea how far we traveled — until, at last, we broke out onto a river bank. Across the river lay the beach where we were supposed to meet the boat.

We'd been told that a radio team would meet us there to establish communications for the second pick-up. We waited until dusk, but they didn't show. We swam across the mouth of the river. There were small sharks in the water, but somehow they seemed the least of my problems. That night, somewhere off in the dark, we heard a 500-pound bomb explode. Half an hour later, a *cayucu* arrived, carrying Comandante Buksa, the radio man and a civilian. They said the bomb had been meant for them but had missed. And they told us the boat would not be coming for us that night. Maybe, they said, tomorrow.

Everyone was getting demoralized by now. We'd gone a hard day and a half without food or water and we felt trapped on that narrow strip of beach. It was another long night. When the sun finally rose, the beach looked like an outdoor lunatic asylum. Dispirited men wandered aimlessly, slapping themselves vigorously in the face to drive away no-see-ums that had swarmed out of the jungle on the windless morning. At 0700 we received a radio signal. "Don't move," we were told. "The boat will be there at seven o'clock tonight. Stay right where you are." I didn't like the thought of staying in one place for that long, but still, if we could just make it through the day, maybe this time everything would be all right. Twenty minutes later, the helicopters rounded the point, in the light of the morning sun.

And that's where this whole story started . . .

ECONOMY 1/24/88

On 8 December 1987 I sat in Tegucigalpa's Backstreet Bar, hanging on to a bottle of Port Royal beer. I'd been talking for hours and had hopes that one or two more beers would get me to the point where I couldn't talk at all.

The trip from Sandy Bay to the Backstreet hadn't been an easy one. There was a Sandinista bombing raid and, later, an all-night hike through chest-deep water to escape a Yatama camp surrounded by Sandinista troops. There had been more tense moments in the jungle and times when I had wondered how my adrenal glands still had anything left to give. I had gotten so used to having my escape plans fall apart that even after the DC-3 taking me back to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, was safely in the air, I kept expecting an engine to burst into flames.

But now it was all over. I signaled the bartender to pour another shot of tequila. It was my birthday, after all, and I was determined to find out just exactly how drunk I could get. ☒

INTO ANGOLA

SOF Staffer Tracks Terrors With Team Papa Zulu

Text & Photos by John Coleman

WE ran through the South West African bush under a boiling blue-white sky. I could feel the sun cooking my already burnt arms and the heat from the hard-baked ground simmering through my shoes. Up ahead I could see callsign Papa Zulu's Owambo trackers pursuing their unseen quarry with great, easy strides, their R5 rifles ready for action in case the prey suddenly became the hunter.

The *spoor* (track) was good, and when the Owambos have good spoor they like to hunt on the run, leaving Papa Zulu's command contingent scrambling to keep up.

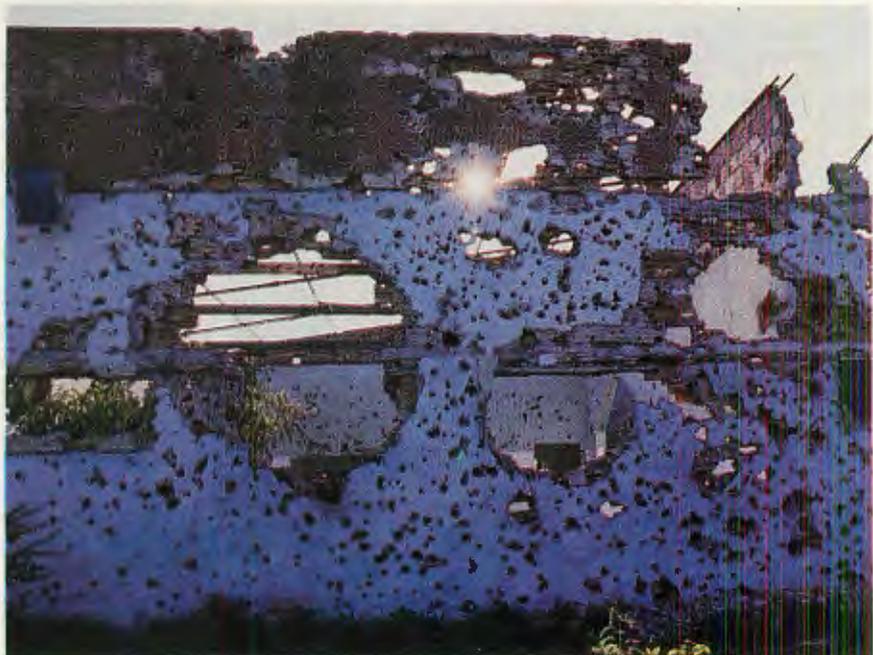
Our four Casspir armored personnel carriers (APCs) with their light and heavy machine guns were strung out to the left and right of us trailing closely behind, their tires kicking up clouds of fine, white dust. Directly ahead lay the Angolan border. We crossed it on the run.

When I left Boulder, Colorado, in January of this year, it was 14 degrees below zero. About 10 days later, along the Angolan border in the South West Africa operational area, it was pushing 100 degrees the other way. I didn't need a thermometer to tell me that fact. Sweat and sunburn, mosquitos and mopani flies, and a definite craving for things cold, were enough to tell me I was in "wintertime" Africa. And scores of bush policemen armed with R5 rifles and 9mm pistols, mounting a variety of .50 cals, 7.62 MAGs and Brownings atop their Casspir APCs, made it clear that I was back in a combat zone.

It was my first trip to South West Africa (Namibia, if you prefer), as well as my first inside Angola. The former was an official visit, the latter — well, that's where my SWA Pol Tin (South West Africa Police Counterinsurgency Unit) team operated during my eight days with them. Before



LEFT: Senior Editor Coleman lines up RPG-7 in Angola.





saying that creates an international incident, let me add that both the SWA Pol Tin leadership and the policemen on the ground make a point of telling you that they don't maintain a permanent presence inside Angola, nor do they make a habit of running sorties inside Angola without just cause.

Their mission, as policemen, is to maintain law and order *inside* South West Africa, and that means stopping PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) terrorists from infiltrating from their bases inside Angola down south to SWA. In real terms, this means that SWA Pol Tin teams conduct hot pursuit or follow-up operations for a limited distance into southern Angola when necessary. They are currently campaigning for an authorization to increase the scope of their external operations.

Why? Because the Marxist Angolan government — such as it is — couldn't stop PLAN cross-border incursions even if it wanted to, which of course it doesn't. The

LEFT: Years of Angolan civil war have left most colonial Portuguese bush towns in shambles. Small arms, machine guns, and heavy-caliber rounds have taken their toll.

Papa Zulu's Owambos try to gather intelligence from a "local pop" concerning recent terrorist movements. If locals assist the security forces, they're usually in for deadly retribution from PLAN forces.

SWA/Angolan border is one of those corners of the world where nobody is entirely in charge (on the Angolan side) and the local nasties like it that way. SWA Pol Tin accounts for something like 70 percent of all the terrorist kills inside SWA; their feeling is that if they can extend their operations northward, to the "safe" zones, the training and basecamp areas used by PLAN forces, then their mission as SWA policemen — which is to preserve the security of their country — can be accomplished much more effectively.

After working with SWA Pol Tin callsign Papa Zulu, I believe it.

Although my itinerary hadn't included a bushtrip with SWA Pol Tin, my interest in their operations jumped accordingly when I learned about their success rate in Owamboland's bush. I did have the offer to work with one of the SWATF (South West Africa Territory Force) military units ready to de-

ploy for some ground-pounding COIN ops, but when Captain Bernie Ley, a longtime SWA Pol Tin vet, asked me, "Would you rather walk or ride for a week?" my infantryman's feet suggested that riding on a Casspir would be the better part of blisters.

With approval from SWA Pol Tin's commanding general (SWA Pol Tin's rank structure generally parallels the military's), I was hooked up with callsign Papa Zulu and readied to deploy with them.

Papa Zulu is one of several dozen operational teams SWA Pol Tin fields along the SWA/Angolan border. Each team consists of four Casspir or Turbo Wolf APCs, a Blesbok resupply vehicle, four or five white SWA or attached South African policemen as the leadership element, and 30-40 black Owambos as the team's trackers/firepower group.

A team's mission during ops is relatively simple: patrol a loosely defined geographical area, make intelligence contacts with the local population ("local pops" as SWA Pol Tin policemen call them), locate terrorist spoor, follow them up and make contact with the enemy.

That's their job, and they do it week in

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and week out. The men of Papa Zulu, both blacks and whites who had worked in the bush together for years, had literally hundreds of successful contacts behind them, including a contact which ended in 38 PLAN kills — one of the highest in SWA's counterinsurgency war to date.

But so far January had been a quiet month for SWA Pol Tin, and throughout the entire operational area in general. Terrorist infiltration usually begins with the rainy season, one reason being that until that time there's almost no water to be found in Owamboland's bush. Terrs may be a hearty breed, but even they need water. The rains were a bit late this year; by the time we deployed in late January, SWA Pol Tin had accounted for zero PLAN kills — compared with last year's total of 87 by the same date — and the teams were itching for contacts.

As we pulled out of SWA Pol Tin's Oshakati headquarters for our border patrol area I found myself assigned to Dave's car (I'll only use Papa Zulu's first names). Language was the primary reason. Although all the whites spoke English, for most of them Afrikaans was both their first language and the lingua franca between them and their Owambos as well. Dave was an Englishman who had served a number of years with the Rhodesian BSAP (British South Africa Police) before joining SWA Pol Tin in the early 1980s, and although he had learned Afrikaans out of necessity, English was his parent language.

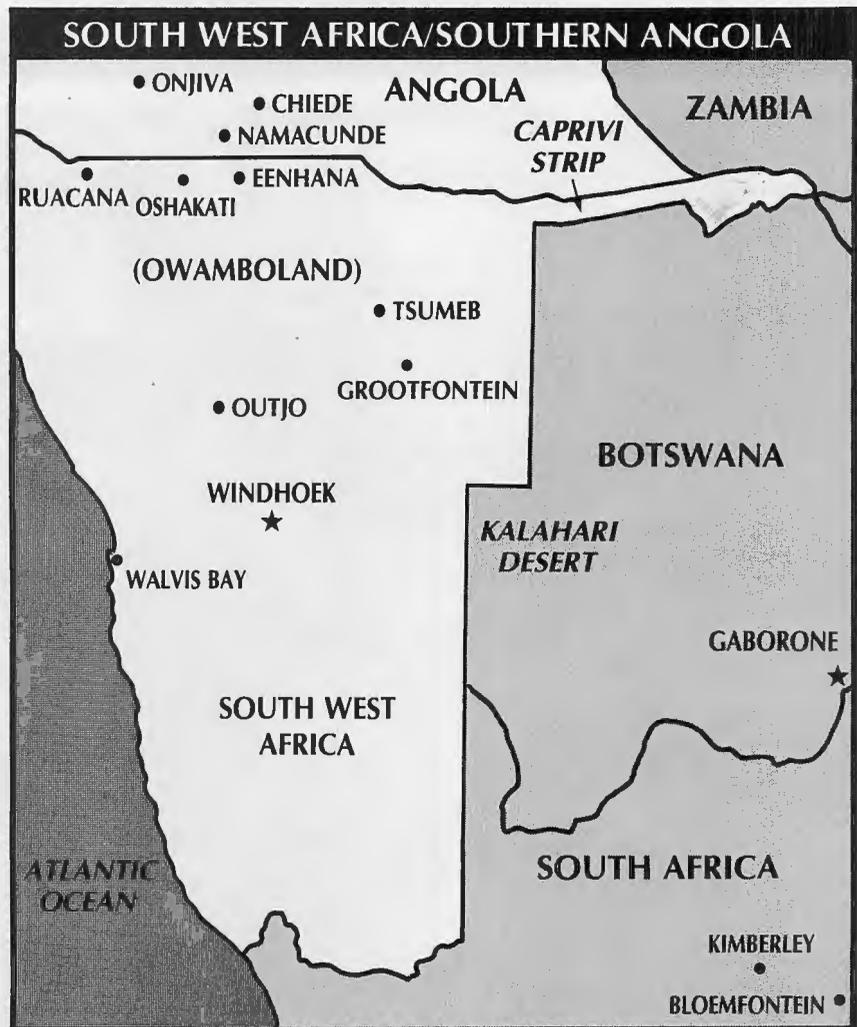
Trouble hit us not more than 20 minutes down the road. Our Blesbok, which carried rations, ammo, fuel, spare parts and personal gear, went down alongside the road with a flat tire and an improperly fitted diesel filter. We finally left it with one Casspir, then continued up toward Eenhana, which would be our first night stop.

Enroute, word came over the radio that the military had picked up spoor of 15 terrorists by the border. The remaining three Casspirs of Papa Zulu, along with a number of other SWA Pol Tin teams in the area, started to converge on the grid of the spoor sighting. Although relations between the military and SWA Pol Tin are strained at times, both sides fully realize that the mounted police teams, with their superb Owambo trackers, are the best thing going when it comes to picking up, and then tracking down, terrorist spoor.

Dave, driving our Casspir and monitoring the radio through a pair of headphones, suddenly burst into laughter. Within a few moments, we had parked under a tree with the other two cars. He climbed out of the driver's seat and gave me the word.

"The army was doing a 360 sweep around their basecamp and walked into their own spoor. Fuck all there."

Oh well. I knew a number of the army



Owamboland, which extends across the South West African/Angolan border, is SWA Pol Tin's prime hunting area for terrorists of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia.

units in the SWA operational area were South African Infantry, many up from Cape Province with only limited bush knowledge. An Owambo, born and bred to tracking, would have known instantly; a young South African National Serviceman, unused to bush life, would decide prudence and a quick radio call the best options. It gave Papa Zulu a chuckle at any rate.

We pushed up the road to Eenhana (the only time we'd run on dirt roads, due to the landmine threat) and based up in a large, empty, open-air concrete building called a *stamkamtoor*, used by the Owamboland administration periodically to pay out pensions or hold public meetings. Our ailing Blesbok and the other Casspir finally joined us; the supply vehicle was still belching diesel and smoke from the engine. Everyone jumped in under the hood to have a look, and the decision was made to send it back to SWA Pol Tin's maintenance depot to have the filter properly refitted. Its absence wouldn't affect our next day's operations, as the Casspirs generally carried enough

water and petrol for at least a few days.

That evening, after dinner and coffee (SWA Pol Tin policemen drink more coffee in the bush than any group of humans I've ever known; if PLAN really wants to win the war, all they have to do is cut off the coffee supply) but before the mosquitos attacked en masse, we chatted about their war, other wars around the world, our backgrounds — generally, all the things one talks about when you're in the bush. I'd done the same in Vietnam and Rhodesia. Coen, Wym, Pete, Chris and Dave — the leadership element of Papa Zulu — were, I found, no different than the people with whom I'd worked in the 5th Infantry Division at Quang Tri, or the Rhodesian Light Infantry in Salisbury. They were professionals, volunteers to a successful, bush-hardened and battle-scarred unit, who didn't consider themselves to be anything special, just policemen doing the job they were supposed to do.

It's an attitude you only find among the pros, people working under tough conditions where the likelihood of catching a bullet or an RPG-7 rocket or a landmine runs high; an attitude which allows you to accept that fact without being unduly worried about it, because you know that you and your people are better trained, equipped and



RPG-7 rocket enroute to target in southern Angola.

motivated than your enemy.

Although I'd only known them for a day, I felt I knew the type, and I went to sleep that night feeling better for it.

Morning comes early for SWA Pol Tin teams in the bush. First light hits, a few bites of meat from last night's *braaivleis* (barbecue), coffee (of course), and we were off. Dave was driving, one of his Owambos was up behind the coaxially mounted .50 cal M2 HB and 7.62mm MAG, while the rest of us sat up top, legs dangling inside the Casspir's open hatchway, heads continually ducking to avoid eating thorns and branches while we headed east into Africa's already blazing rising sun.

Papa Zulu's drill was simple: We had no hard intel to work from, so we had to go and find our own. After pushing east for 10 clicks, we turned north and started *kraal* (village) hopping, one car stopping to talk with the local pops, the rest leaping forward to do the same elsewhere, all the while the Owambos scanning the ground for unusual spoor.

Answers we got from the locals were uniformly the same: We haven't heard or seen a terr for more than a year. We knew they were bullshitting us, and they knew we knew, but there was nothing we could do about it. Hearts and minds may not be a number one priority, but Papa Zulu knew that bashing heads only put the locals offside, and made them harder to deal with in the future.

It was frustrating. At every stop Dave and his Owambos would dismount, separate the villagers, question them for about five minutes, remount, and Dave would say "fuck all." After a while, even Changela, the battle-scarred car boss, would climb back in the Casspir, look at me, shrug his shoulders and say "fuck all" — about the extent of his English.

By 1045 we were on our tenth kraal, yet

another in a series of low, round mud huts topped with brown thatch, surrounded by a bush-wood fence, a few cattle or goats wandering about, with scattered-planting mealie fields wrenched from Owamboland's harsh, sandy/salty topsoil spreading out in all directions.

"Same," Dave said, climbing back into the Casspir. "They said they saw terrs last year."

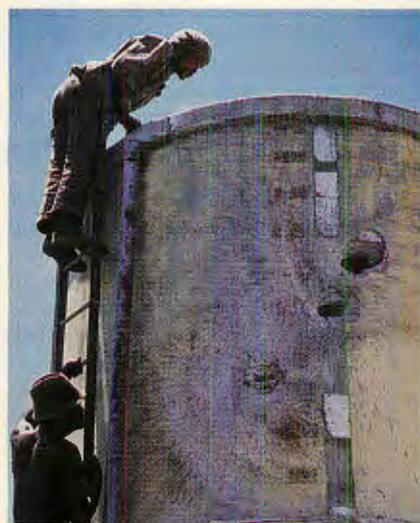
Another Vietnam/Rhodesia parallel. If the civvies help the security forces, the terrs usually find out about it and kill them. If they help the terrs — and admit it — then they're arrested and hauled off. The "I don't know a thing" road is the only one they can see to travel.

We broke for lunch about 1230, the whole team bitching about the lack of action, then hit the bush again about an hour later. I sweated under an intense blue/white sky, the sun sending heat waves shimmering off the bleached, white ground. Our Casspir's metal body was too hot to touch, and swarms of mopani flies, those insidious and maddening little bastards that go for eyes, nose, mouth and ears, kept me unpleasantly occupied.

Then, a shout from another car. One of the Owambos had picked up spoor, heading north. It was only tracks of one, and it was a day old, but it was enough to get everyone on the ground and running — literally. Once an Owambo picks up spoor, you might as well be following a super highway. As Dave said, "In Owamboland, there's no better tracker in the world than an Owambo, bushmen included." It was incredible; the merest imprint on the hard-packed ground, a pebble out of place, a stalk of sun-baked grass pushed aside might as well be six-foot-high signposts saying "This way!" to Papa Zulu's trackers.

With the four Casspirs spread out left and right of the spoor, the rest of us running up the middle, we crossed the Angolan border. There were enough old Casspir tracks crisscrossing the area to tell me that this wasn't

Target!



Three rockets in a tight shot group.

the first time SWA Pol Tin had invited themselves inside Angola.

We stayed on the spoor for another half hour until we came across a kraal where the tracks terminated. After much discussion with the inhabitants, Papa Zulu determined that it had been a local pop — not a terr — that we'd been following. Nonetheless, everyone's spirits were up; local pop or not, it had been a chance to get out of the cars, track, and get a quick mental reacclimatization to the job.

We continued to work our way northward, casting left and right for more spoor, and stopping at every kraal to check out the terr situation. Nothing. Except for a still blistering sun at 1745, and a Casspir that bogged and was quickly recovered from one of the wet pans they call *shonas*, the rest of the afternoon was uneventful.

It was my first night in the bush with Papa Zulu, and I was interested in how they'd set up a night defensive position, especially considering that we were inside a rather

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hostile foreign country. Casual, I suppose, is the right word for it. The Casspirs were parked on the compass points (the region is entirely flat, covered with the same bush, scrub, and trees, so there really aren't any likely avenues of enemy approach) facing outward, but that was pretty much the extent of it. Cook fires were started, and there was no pretense of noise or light security. I asked one of the policemen about it.

"We hope we get hit," he told me over a cup of the ever-present coffee. "That'll give us something to follow up the next day." Probably not a strategy von Clausewitz would espouse, but something I could well imagine J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry or Robert Rogers' Rangers taking to heart.

But after years in Rhodesia, playing cat and mouse with terts who loved to work — and attack — at night, it wasn't a set-up with which I felt entirely comfortable. As I lay in my cot, watching lightning flash in the east and satellites skim overhead north-to-south and east-to-west and listening to the evening birds and insects talk to themselves, I also made a few mental plans in case something wicked came my way.

The most likely candidates were a PG-7 rocket, 82mm mortar bomb, or shot-group full of AK rounds. To the first, I'd low crawl like hell away from the Casspirs; to the second, I'd run like hell and jump inside a Casspir; to the third, I'd low crawl like hell to a Casspir, grab the first available R5 with a 50-round magazine, then fire up the surrounding bushes — all, of course, with a bit of luck.

Except for a rather vicious mosquito attack, however, the night remained quiet.

Next morning, while we were downing coffee, word came from headquarters that terts had blown the power lines south of Oshakati, and that a Casspir had hit a landmine on a dirt road south of Ruacana. "Shows that a few of them are getting through, anyway," was Dave's response, which set off a quick bitch session along the lines of "Why the hell can't they come through this way?"

I couldn't fault Papa Zulu on their enthusiasm.

We pulled out and drifted north toward Chiede, an old Portuguese town long abandoned, but a reference point for terts headed toward South West Africa. We bush-busted the whole way, staying well away from any local roads or pathways, and Casspir tracks from past ops, because of the ever present landmine threat. No one was particularly worried about landmines in the sense that anyone would get hurt (Casspirs are tough chunks of machinery), but the embitterment factor they represented if one blew off a tire was substantial.

Chiede was, in a word, a mess. Years of civil war had destroyed anything useful in what was once a well-constructed, pictur-



esque colonial settlement hacked out of Angola's unforgiving bush. No building was unscathed; all were literally shot to pieces. We did a quick check, popped a few grenades down deep water storage tanks in the event someone who shouldn't have been there was, then pulled out of town, past old Angolan army zigzag trenches surrounding the place, and back into the bush.

Within minutes, we picked up spoor again.

There weren't many locals in the area, and Papa Zulu determined that if it wasn't a terr, he'd be worth talking to anyway. We all hopped out, leaving only the drivers (and Dave's alternate driver) with the Casspirs, while we started running on the spoor, through patches of Makalani and fan palm, mopani scrub, aloes, and platoons of *wagn-bietjie* (pronounced, roughly, *vak-n-bikkie*, meaning "wait-a-little") thorn waiting to ambush unwary bodies rushing past. After 40-odd minutes, we realized we were in for a long haul. Whoever Mr. Footprint was, he knew we were after him because he'd started to run. With his spoor firmly established, we hopped back onto the cars and gave chase.

For three hours we bushwhacked, following his tracks to the north, then east, then south, then angling northward again. We stopped at the few kraals we passed ("Didn't see or hear a thing" — how odd)

Team Papa Zulu on terrorist spoor. Once an Owambo tracker picks up the trail, it's like motoring along a well-signposted superhighway.

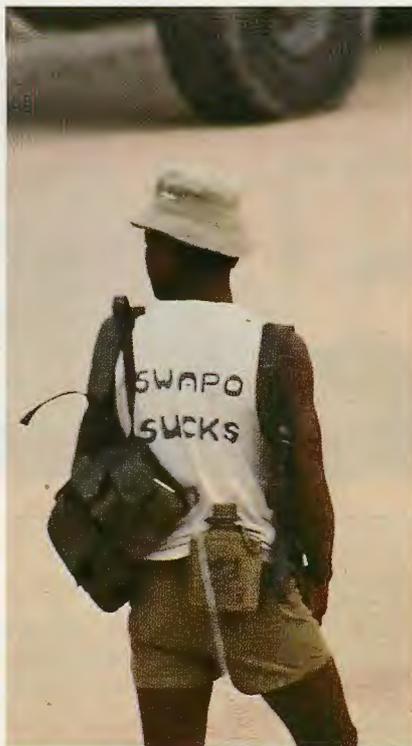
until we finally met with some success. Yes, we were told at one kraal, a fellow did come here a while ago. He rested until he could hear your engines, then he took off running again.

Coen, the solidly built and bushwise team commander, made a quick decision: we'd do a silent follow-up in the hope that our rabbit would think we'd given up the chase. Little did I know then just what "silent follow-up" entailed.

R5s, webbing and chest bandoliers were broken out, a few gulps of water thrown back, and we were off on a footrace, leaving the Casspirs to follow us out of earshot.

It was 1310 when we took off, the sun burning my already burnt arms, the heat baking up through my track shoes. Again, I was truly amazed by the Owambos' ability to track over rock-hard, barren ground. Even when the spoor was pointed out to me, and even though I nearly put my nose on the ground to see it, I couldn't (fortunately for my ego at least, the other whites had a hard time seeing it too).

It was a man-killing pace we kept, at least to a journalist along for the ride, and it never



ABOVE: T-shirt reflects SWA Pol Tin's attitude toward their adversaries, the political element which controls People's Liberation Army of Namibia terrorists.



LEFT: SWA Pol Tin tracker. I was told that no one, including Bushmen, is better at tracking in Owamboland than Owambos — and I believe it.

slackened. When the spoor was good, we ran. When it was fair, we fast-walked. When even the Owambos had to cast around for it, we stood in the shade and sweated. It was, however, much more the former than the latter.

For five hours and 20 minutes, some 30 kilometer's worth, we stalked Mr. Fleet-of-Foot around the Angolan countryside. We knew we had a terr when later in the day he started anti-tracking, making it tough for even the best Owambo tracker to pick him up again. Finally, at 1830, we called it a day. Our quarry, Coen figured, was still

some five clicks in front of us, and there'd be little chance of running him down before dark. Whoever he was, I had to give him points for pure physical stamina. We'd been on his ass for nearly nine hours, three when we were hot-pursuing by vehicle, and he still managed to stay a jump ahead. Whatever secrets he may have had, he was going to keep them — at least this time around.

We called the Casspirs up by radio, then guided them and our now fixed Blesbok in by shooting thousand-footers (Icarus-type parachute flares) up every so often. I half expected everyone to sort of shag out early, but even I perked up after coffee and a meal of hot ration-pack chicken curry served out of a communal bowl. Spirits were high, mostly I think because of the chase. Papa Zulu, and I'm sure the rest of SWA Pol Tin, are hunters at heart, and the thrill of the chase is often more rewarding than what sometimes turns out to be an anticlimactic ending. The Owambos were laughing and talking, we were laughing and talking, and suddenly it felt very good to be in the bush again with people with whom I felt a definite kinship.

That night, watching the evening's array

of satellites crisscross the star-studded, deep black African sky, I wondered if I could pick up on this sort of life again. I felt I'd done OK on the ground follow-ups during the past few days, even for being the oldest fellow in callsign Papa Zulu. I enjoyed Africa's bushveld, I enjoyed the camaraderie, and I enjoyed the hunt as much as anyone there. I fell asleep without finding an answer.

Coffee and Lexington cigarettes kick-started my heart the next morning while I cleaned up my cameras, thick with Owamboland dust. Papa Zulu was, by this time, frustrated as hell that we hadn't made any contacts with PLAN terrorists, partly because they wanted to give me a good action story for the magazine. Well, the trip wasn't over. We still had a few days left before returning to Oshakati, and a lot could still happen.

Our heavy-duty diesels rumbled back to life, their fumes something I'd grown accustomed to over the past days, and we pushed off south, following our jackrabbit's spoor of the day before. We were about 15 kilometers east of Onjiva, a FAPLA (Angolan armed forces)/PLAN stronghold, and there'd been some lighthearted talk the night before about giving it a rev if nothing else panned out. But lighthearted talk was all it was. SWA Pol Tin had strict instructions to give Onjiva a wide berth although that standing order did cause some heartburn down on the ground. Pragmatically though, Papa Zulu knew enough to leave the place alone because it festered with 82mm mortars and 122mm rocket launchers, more than enough to give Papa Zulu a very hard time during a standoff engagement.

(A few weeks after I left, in retaliation for a PLAN car-bomb attack against Oshakati which resulted in the death of 24 black and three white civilians, along with scores of injured, South African Air Force Impalas and Mirages launched a massive aerial attack against Onjiva and other FAPLA/PLAN bases. The raids were termed "successful.")

As sometimes happens in counterinsurgency operations, we struck pay dirt within a half hour of moving out. Local pops at one kraal told us that three soldiers, wearing brand new uniforms and carrying AKs and an RPG, passed by yesterday around 1100, heading for Chiede from the direction of Onjiva.

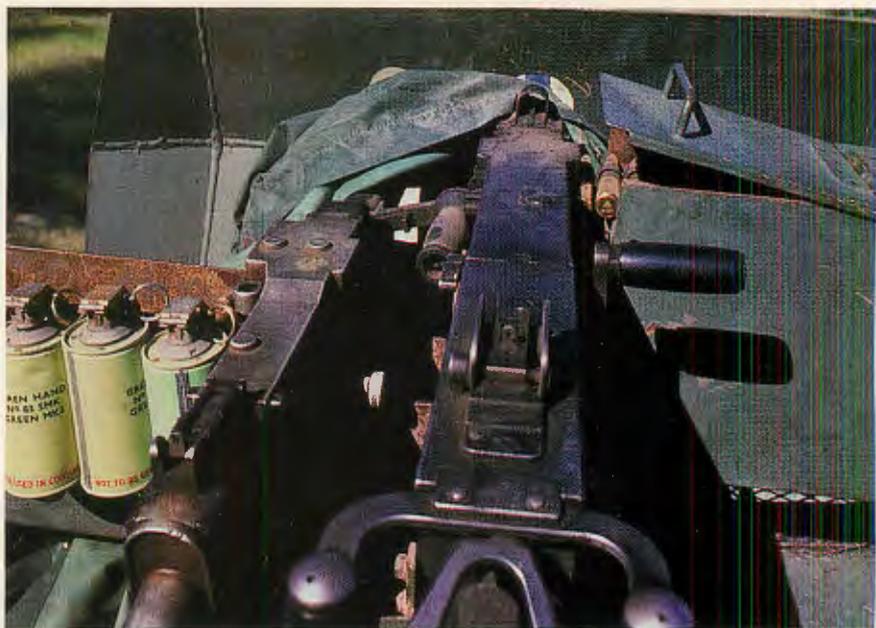
Instantly, Papa Zulu's Owambos were casting out for spoor, and they soon found it. We were almost 21 hours behind them with a lot of catching up to do. With Owambos from another car physically staying on the spoor, the rest of us cast forward, hoping to pick it up again in front. When we did, a new set of trackers would take over, those behind on the spoor would remount their Casspir and catch up, then we'd repeat the

ANGOLA

process.

It was long, tedious work, but it was the bread-and-butter operation of SWA Pol Tin. As it had every other day, the inside of our Casspir was rapidly filling up with branches, leaves and thorn, dumped back through the open top hatch as the car smashed its way through the bush, along with various green, white and brown spiders, crickets, praying mantises, grasshoppers and caterpillars — all of which seemed to have a definite affinity for the open space

A .50-caliber M2 HB and a coaxially mounted 7.62mm MAG 58 formed the firepower for our Casspir APC. SWA Pol Tin's teams carry a variety of different machine gun combinations up in the turret.



TWENTY-TWO YEARS OF WAR

Even the name of this vast (823,145 square kilometer) country in southwestern Africa is unclear. Germany, colonizing back in the 1880s, called it South-West Africa (SWA), and that name's still widely used. Others, including the United Nations, label it Namibia, that name stemming in part from the great Namib coastal desert. Many tack them both together, ending up with a name that gives international telephone operators fits.

From the 1880s until early in World War I, the Imperial German government ruled this mineral-rich area, until physically losing it to troops of the Union of South Africa in 1915. After the war, SWA, along with the rest of Germany's overseas possessions, fell under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations, forerunner to the present-day United Nations. The League's responsibility was to find an appropriate country to administer the territory.

On 17 December 1920, the League conferred a mandate upon His Britannic Majesty, a mandate to be exercised on his behalf by the government of the Union of South Africa. This mandate, a "C" class, meant that the Union of South Africa would have full administrative and legislative authority over SWA, and that SWA would be looked at as an integral part of the Union. However, the Union could not annex SWA and make it its fifth province although there were many who pushed for that option and still, in fact, do today.

Years of convoluted external and internal political wranglings concerning the future of SWA followed. For pur-

poses of understanding the current unpleasantness, the narrative begins on 19 April 1960 when a particularly militant group, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), came into its own.

SWAPO was the successor to a number of earlier ethnic political organizations, and was heavily influenced by the militant African National Congress (ANC), the South African Liberal Party and South African Communist Party, as well as groups immersed in Maoist and Trotskyite ideology. With that sort of political bent, it's a fair assumption that Moscow took more than a bit of interest in SWAPO.

Riding the wave of armed nationalism sweeping Africa around this period, SWAPO in 1962 endorsed the concept of armed struggle for itself, and shortly thereafter opened offices in Europe, Africa, the United States and, of course, Moscow.

During the early to mid-1960s SWAPO immersed itself in revolutionary philosophy, but the organization itself was never banned in SWA as the ANC has been in South Africa. This even in the face of its alignment with the liberation movements fighting the Portuguese in Angola, and its direct ties to Moscow, from which it began to receive increasing amounts of Soviet aid.

SWAPO's first major military engagement on 26 August 1966 was a less than stunning example of insurgent warfare: South African Police hit a SWAPO training and recruiting base in central Owamboland and wiped it out.

Terrorist attacks on the local farming areas dropped dramatically after that, and didn't pick up again until the mid-70s when Portugal pulled out of Angola,

thus providing SWAPO with an external base of operations.

On the political front, however, SWAPO was doing better.

In October 1966, after much lobbying by SWAPO, the United Nations General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate over SWA, and then unilaterally changed its name to Namibia.

And early the next year, in May, the U.N. Council for Namibia was formed by U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2248, its purpose being that of an absentia administrator of SWA. Sitting on this impartial council are such "non-aligned" countries as the USSR, Algeria, Angola, Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Zambia. SWAPO, but no other SWA representatives, sits as an observer.

Finally, in 1976 the U.N. General Assembly recognized SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people."

Interestingly, the United Nations has managed to choose the one organization dedicated to armed insurrection, and whose political program for the future, as stated in the authoritative *Political Who's Who of Namibia*, is to "combat ... colonialism and capitalist and imperialist exploitation and to unite particularly the working class, the peasantry and progressive intellectuals in the aim of building a classless, non-exploitive society based on the ideals and principles of scientific socialism."

As SWAPO's Secretary for Publicity and Information, Hidipo Hamutenya, said in an interview published in *The Namibian* (SWAPO's local newspaper in SWA) on 8 January '88, "The demand for independence has in recent years produced a yearning for radical

between my neck and shirt collar. One either rode inside and put up with the hail-storm of local flora and fauna, or stood up top and got whacked and thrashed by low-hanging branches and thorn scrub. I moved into the driver's compartment with Dave and decided to sweat it out there.

As the day wore on, we started closing the gap. Our quarry had made no effort to anti-track, leading us to believe that they were inexperienced or overly complacent. We'd quit casting forward by this stage; all of us were on the ground, running or fast walking as the spoor dictated. Kilometers slid by under the scorching afternoon sun, sweat poured off us, and we could only slake our thirst from the sedentary and very hot water from the occasional shona we

passed.

But we were closing, and quickly. We started casting forward again, hoping to run the three terrorists to ground. Vehicles began overheating as they crashed through some incredibly thick bush, but the Owambos running on spoor never seemed to tire, or break much more than a mild sweat. Coen had been keeping headquarters advised of our progress, and callsigns Zulu One Mike and Zulu Sierra soon joined us. Apparently, we had the hottest thing going in our AO.

Soon, the team leaders felt we were close enough to the terts to call in an air force chopper team, and within a few minutes, two Alouettes were circling. It was a good melding of air and ground assets. While the

SWA Pol Tin teams stayed on spoor, one of the choppers would advance up the terts' direction of travel, hoping to spot them or run them to ground, while the other bird flew top cover. We heard the crack-crack-crack, then deep-throated whump-whump-whump of 20mm cannon shells firing, then impacting, up ahead of us. One Alouette gunner thought he'd seen movement, but it didn't pan out.

Then the tracks split up, the terts bombshelling and anti-tracking all the way. Apparently, they weren't novices after all. Our three teams split up, one staying on the center spoor while the other two jumped forward, hoping to cut the terts off. No luck;

Continued on page 73

social change, and in modern times, the yearning for social liberation from capitalist exploitation has found its most forceful expression in Marxism."

Needless to say, there has been "brisk" international discussion as to the future of SWA/Namibia as well as major internal political strides; the latter, unfortunately, seem to be for naught. SWAPO's external leader, Sam Nujoma (SWAPO president and member of its Politburo and Central Committee), refuses to have anything to do with the internal political process, as does the United Nations.

In its U.N. Security Council Resolution 435, adopted on 29 September 1978, it "Declares that all unilateral measures taken by the illegal administration in Namibia in relation to the electoral process . . . are NULL and VOID." (Their upper casing, not mine.) In other words, regardless of any progress made by Namibians themselves, the United Nations will refuse to recognize it.

One major problem, as viewed by much of the international community, is the Republic of South Africa. A South African administrator general sits over the current SWA Transitional Government of National Unity, representing South African interests in SWA and acting as the political conduit between the SWA and South African governments. Although South Africa is on record as planning to move SWA toward independence, it still controls key functions such as external defense, foreign affairs, customs and excise, and foreign currency.

In real terms, as one SWA government official told me, "South Africa is heavily involved in politics in South West Africa and pursues controlled

change. But when change comes too quickly, Pretoria makes waves that roll right over us."

One area that harbors the greatest potential for change in SWA is United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, the "implementation of the proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation" based on the Western Settlement Plan of 10 April 1978.

Most parties involved, including South Africa and SWAPO, have agreed to the basics of U.N. 435, which establishes, among other things, a U.N. special representative to oversee free and fair elections in Namibia, ensure the release of all political prisoners and the return of Namibian refugees, monitor the cessation of all hostile acts as well as a phased withdrawal of South African forces, and in general, send Namibia on its way to independence.

A key stumbling block to the implementation of U.N. 435 is Washington's and Pretoria's linkage of it to the withdrawal of the estimated 40,000 Cuban troops from Angola. The Moscow-aligned government in Luanda knows full well that to withdraw Cuban troops now may mean victory for Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces — and a major setback for Soviet policy in southern Africa — and hence it's unlikely that Moscow will allow that to happen. It's a super-power gaming point, and one not likely to be resolved anytime soon.

Nor is PLAN's (SWAPO's military wing) role in Angola likely to change anytime soon, either. Much to its chagrin, PLAN is forced to play a major role in the fighting against Savimbi's UNITA forces by supplying a mechanized brigade of some 2,800 troops, including tanks and artillery, in return for Luanda

allowing PLAN to operate from Angolan territory. Considering that PLAN consists of approximately 8,700 troops in toto (scattered about in administrative, defensive, offensive and training components in Angola, Zambia, Botswana and SWA), that's a heavy price to pay.

PLAN has tried, with very limited success, to infiltrate its insurgent component of 1,200 terrorists through Owamboland in the north-central area of SWA along the Angolan border into the farming areas of Grootfontein, Tsumeb and Outjo. They've run up against SWATF (South West Africa Territory Force) and SWA Pol Tin (South West Africa Police Counterinsurgency Unit) forces who know the local bush as well as, and in most cases better than, PLAN terrorists operating out of Angola. A senior military intelligence officer in Windhoek told me that "50 percent of PLAN's beginning insurgent force gets killed every year." SWATF figures list 918 killed in 1983; 584 in '84; 599 in '85; 645 in '86; and 747 in '87. Not inspiring figures if you're a PLAN recruiting officer trying to drum up business.

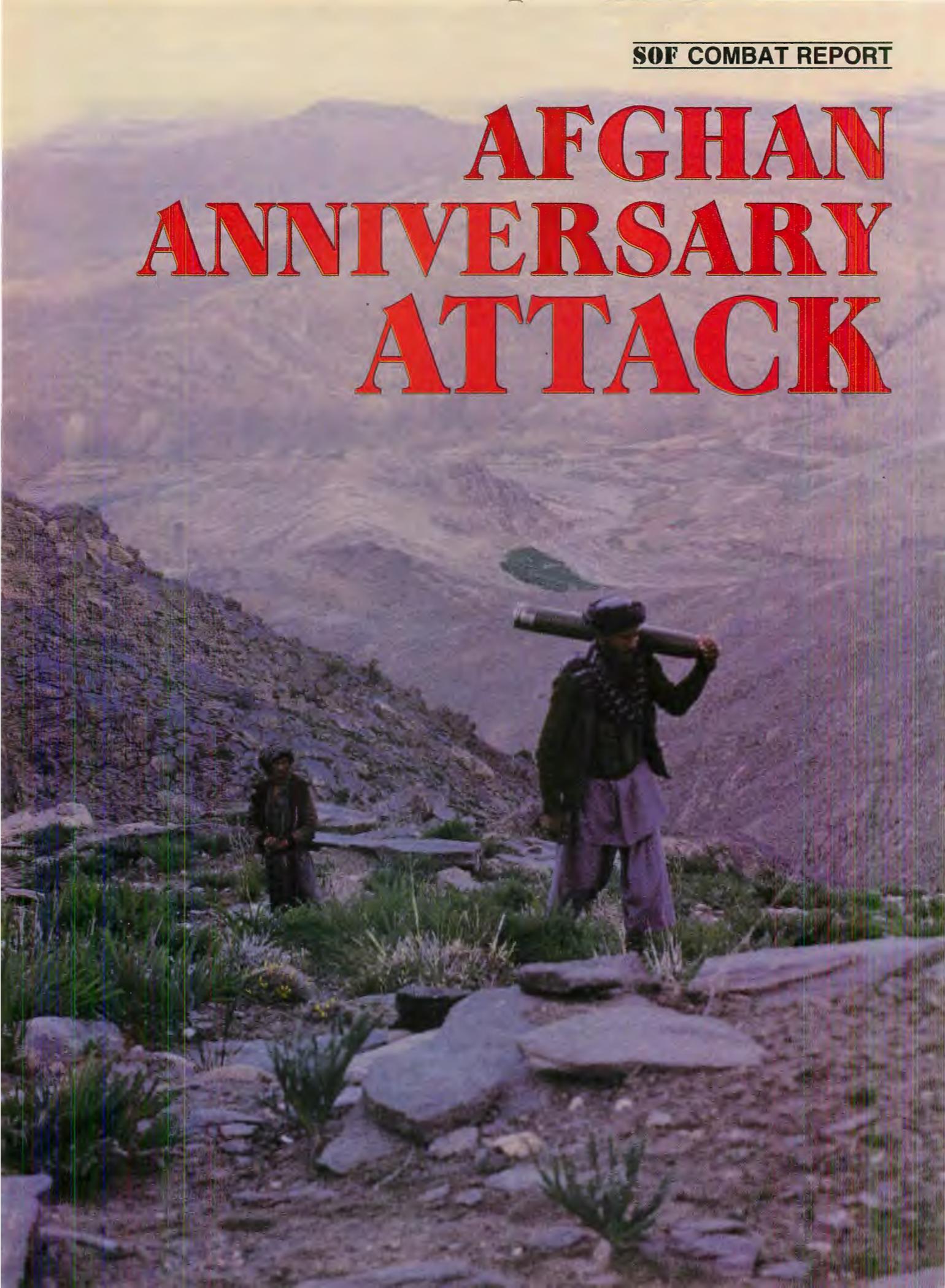
Recruiting is, in fact, a major problem for the guerrillas.

SWATF reckons that PLAN requires at least 1,100 insurgents in SWA to be effective on a yearly basis, and with around 500-plus biting the dust each year, that means 500 more bodies have to be found. According to their intelligence sources, SWATF believes that some 200 recruits, eager or otherwise, signed on during 1987, but that the other 300 or so came from refugee camps in central Angola.

Reports from the Intelligence Society

Continued on page 72

AFGHAN ANNIVERSARY ATTACK



Mujahideen Rocket 'n' Roll the Reds at Shah Kabul

Text & Photos by Hunter Penn



SNEAKING through the night, our column of 12 men and two horses loaded with mortar rounds suddenly halted. Hushed, impassioned voices broke the eerie quiet of our midnight march. Off to the southwest a Soviet post fired two flares. We quickly hit the ground and lay still, hoping to blend in with the irregular shape of the rocks and boulders.

We were in a narrow pass along the small mountains that separate the villages of Baraki Barak from Kolangor and Pul-i-lam near the town of Lowgar. As the flares slowly faded, a few of the men crawled to the

LEFT: Mujahideen hauling Chinese 107mm rocket rounds reach top of hill. Point of departure was valley in center of photo.

BELOW: Author, on Afghan Arabian stallion about 10 miles from Khost, had to learn to speak Afghan horse: *choo* for "go" and *bosh* for "whoa."



Young Afghan girl cries over death of her six-year-old sister in Soviet bombing attack. Bloody sack in the background, in the other room, contains parts of a 16-year-old girl killed in the same attack.

front of the column and sat for a minute, then called me over to see what was delaying us.

Outlined in the glow from a three-quarter moon lay a land mine nearly three feet in diameter. A brief rainfall



COMBAT HUNTER

Hunter Penn went to Afghanistan for *Soldier of Fortune* in March 1987 and traveled nearly 1,000 miles with mujahideen units in Wardak, Paktia and Lowgar Provinces before returning to the United States in May of that year.

During that time he witnessed six "hot contacts" between mujahideen combatants and Soviet and Afghan troops, and came under aerial bombardment on a number of occasions.

Penn served in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne and saw combat in the A Shau Valley. We welcome his insightful contribution to SOF.

Old graybeard with his
AKM.





in the afternoon had helped settle the sand around the mine and our point man saw it just in time.

"For a man, maybe this can be danger, but for the horse with ammunition this is very dangerous," explained Chief Commander Dr. Fazlullah.

The Soviets know that the loss of a horse and its consignment of ammo is a more severe blow to the mujahideen than the loss of a few men, and consequently they adjust the detonation device for a loaded horse.

Even considering the dangerous circumstances of our halt, I was grateful for the rest. We had been marching for

ABOVE LEFT: Dr. Fazlullah, chief commander of *Jamiat-i-Islami* in Lowgar Province, watches MiG jets making a pass over village of Baraki Barak, dropping heat flares to draw off Stingers prior to bombing run on village.

LEFT: Seconds after heat flares drop, Soviet bombs fall on village.



Heat flares from MiG jets fall prior to bombing run.

five hours. The incline was not steep, but my legs were beginning to knot up and my feet were bleeding in several places.

As the men stacked stones around the mine to mark it for others, I considered how nothing is easy in this jihad against the Russians. All arms and ammunition must be brought in

DEATH'S SOVIET WINGS

The screaming hiss of MiG jets shattered the morning quiet of Baraki Barak. This small Afghan village in Lowgar Province, approximately 60 miles from the capital city of Kabul, was being illuminated by heat flares prior to being bombed. This pre-bombing tactic was meant to draw off Stinger missiles, but inadvertently served to warn village people about the devastation which would soon be inflicted on their homes and farms. They had a few short moments in which to prepare.

At the instant the jets approached, Dr. Fazlullah, chief commander of the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, organized a small team of men to set up their only defense against such aircraft: Soviet-made Dashikas, captured months ago. As he worked, Dr. Fazlullah gently scolded children who were tending their sheep, telling them to take cover in the nearby irrigation ditches. There seemed to be an eerie calm about the unfolding scene, but these people have learned to take such incidents in stride.

The bombing runs were systematic. They began in the east and worked their way west, and with each pass, the various Dashikas would erupt in their vain attempt to bring down one of the planes. Dr. Fazlullah and his team were located at the western edge of the village, and knew if the jets didn't stop soon, their compound would be next in line. No sooner had this thought been voiced than a series of flares appeared overhead, followed by a thunderous explosion which broke the glass out of a house some 200 yards away. Bits of shrapnel pelted the thick mud wall which rimmed the rooftop where they were located. The

men hid beneath the three-foot-high wall.

The bombing ceased, but the men resisted the overpowering urge to investigate the damage and help the wounded. From experience, Dr. Fazlullah knew the MiG pilots would wait at high altitude until the village people gathered to help the victims, then would return to inflict their terror upon a more concentrated target. The men waited uneasily for 20 minutes, then ran the 200 yards to help the victims.

The last series of bombs had scored a direct hit on a home. The front of the house was blown away. Several dead calves lay in what had been the courtyard. A short distance away stood the milk cow and donkey, in shock from the concussion and bleeding from scores of places where fragments had penetrated their bodies.

There was a small knot of people huddled inside the only part of the home left standing. In the center lay the body of a six-year-old girl. The concussion of the bomb, along with the fragment lodged in her hip, had killed her instantly. Her 16-year-old sister also died in the explosion, but only pieces of her body were found. Cries of grief piercing the air added to the sense of confusion. It was difficult for the men to discuss what to do next, as the wails of sorrow drowned out all other sounds around the devastation. Within the house, the young girl's body was prepared for the funeral and small groups of men began salvaging what they could.

Life would continue in the village, and things would return to "normal." That is, until the Soviet MiGs came again.



through the mountains from Pakistan by horse and camel. The terrain is extremely treacherous and always exposed to ambush and attack from the air. As in this trip to a neighboring village, all supplies must be moved in secret — by horse under cover of darkness — and cached for the day of their use.

I didn't know the purpose of our trip to Kolangor. Only the chief commander knew. This is the custom of the mujahideen in Afghanistan. Despite the uncommon unity of the people, due to their strong and fervent belief in Islam, there are still traitors — men who secretly work for the *Khad*, the Afghan version of the KGB. It isn't until the hour of an "operation" that the freedom fighters know the exact place and purpose of their mission.

The men accept this readily, as they do the unquestioned leadership of their commander. In Afghanistan, the theory that natural leaders rise to the surface in a guerrilla war is obviously true. Although there is much discussion among all the mujahideen about an operation, the commanders have the final say. When a plan is agreed upon, they follow it to the end.

The warm glow of coal oil lamps looked inviting as we neared the home of the local commander in Kolangor. It was 0200 and we were bone tired, but even at this hour, the wife and mother of the commander got up and fixed us a meal of bread, tea and

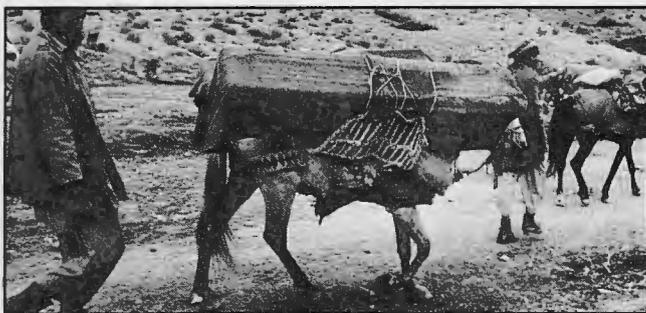


ABOVE LEFT: Young muj hauls up part of BM-12 rocket launcher used in attack on Soviet installation.

LEFT: BM-12 set up and ready to fire as muj wait for darkness. Most Afghan attacks are launched late in the day to avoid Soviet aircraft counterattacks.



AFGHANISTAN



some hamburger balls with rice. Twenty-three men had gathered here to plan what I felt must be a major operation. The room was crowded with men and arms, their Kalashnikovs never more than an arm's length away. When we finished eating most of us eased into a deep sleep.

Next thing I knew I was startled awake at 0900 by three excited men, making an impassioned plea to Dr. Fazlullah. They explained 45 Soviet tanks had been spotted moving toward Kolangor. Their purpose was to provide security for the Kabul-Gardez road, but the mujahideen saw an opportunity for an ambush. I could see the strain on Dr. Fazlullah's face as he weighed the logistics of a hastily

TOP: Author's area of operations took him to Kolangor and Shah Kabul — with a number of contacts with Soviet and Afghan troops in between.

ABOVE: U.S. Stinger missiles headed inside. Muj glowering at the camera is from the *Hezb-i-Islami* fundamentalist group and tried to confiscate author's film. He was dissuaded by a higher ranking *Hezbi*.

BELOW: Mujahid with RPG-7 watches while meeting goes on below him in a courtyard.



planned attack. It was soon decided that 12 men, three RPG rocket launchers with eight rounds, and two machine guns would be sent to hit the tank convoy.

The tanks had come from the Lowgar center, a Russian stronghold which supplies nearly 4,000 troops and their posts on various high points overlooking this high, fertile plain some 60 miles from the capital city of Kabul. Most of the resupply is done by air because of the success of the mujahideen on the ground.

After morning prayers, we moved out of the house, two by two. We traveled slowly so as not to arouse suspicion. The sun was beginning to warm as we traversed irrigated fields of wheat and clover. Children were tending their sheep and goats; their wooden flutes filled the air with music as we passed. Even though this scene was peaceful, these children of war intuitively knew our purpose was a deadly one. I was sweating under my *patou* [blanket worn by Afghans over their shoulders], but I had been given strict orders to hide my equipment, keep my head down and speak to no one. They only had to tell me once. If my presence became known to a *Khad* agent, then many men would suffer on my account.

Our ambush site was a six-foot embankment about 100 yards from the road where the tanks would have to pass. Some of the men began digging small caves into the embankment, then piling up the dirt in front of the openings to deflect shrapnel. A few men took a pair of binoculars to a vantage point from which they could keep an eye on the tanks' progress. The column was moving very slowly. The tanks would advance half a mile, then stop for



Afghan wheelwright in a bazaar.

15-30 minutes.

By now, the mujahideen knew the element of surprise was theirs. They were confident and eager for a fight. As the column drew near, their constant chatter ebbed, and concentration on the enemy and the deadly business at hand began.

The low groan of diesel engines grew louder until the earth shook with a tremendous roar.

The first of eight RPG rounds was fired. It smashed into the second tank. The next round missed, but the third hit an armored personnel carrier, which seconds later burst into flames. Approximately 20 men met a quick death inside the inferno.

The two machine guns clattered out their cones of fire as the mujahideen squeezed off bursts from their Kalashnikovs. Shouts of "*Allah Akhbar*" could just barely be heard as another PG-7 round pierced another tank. Ten minutes passed and the area of the embankment was choking with the smell of burnt gunpowder and dust.

But the excitement of a quick kill was soon dulled by the return fire of the Soviet DashikAs mounted on the tanks.





Dirt kicked up around the embankment and tree limbs nearby began to splinter around us. Our designated commander, Zobat Hazradin, jerked suddenly, then collapsed in a heap. He had taken a Dashika round in the neck and was dead before he hit the ground.

The remaining 11 men kept up a steady stream of fire while the Soviet tanks made no move to reorganize or advance. Then, incredibly, the remaining 43 tanks belched out clouds of diesel smoke and turned to head back to the post. They had gone about 150 yards when the first Soviet BM-14 rounds started to fall near our positions.

The rockets fell harmlessly in the irrigated fields, but those were only marker rounds, and soon the whole area was covered with dust and the air filled with the whistling sound of fragments tearing apart tree limbs and flying in all directions.

In this kind of retaliatory bombardment, the Soviets know they can seldom strike at a selective target, such as the group which stopped the tank column, so they bombard the homes and villages of innocent people instead.

Toward the end of the bombardment we recovered Hazradin's body and headed for Kolangor. We had just jumped an irrigation

Soviet/Kabul regime outpost on Kabul-Kandahar road. To obtain this photo, taken from about 200 yards away, a group of village elders approached the checkpoint in a bus. When the bus halted, the old men got out and sat on the ground to talk. While the bus was turning around, the author, screened by the old men, shot his photos. Vehicle on the bridge appears to be a Soviet GAZ 54 truck with ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft gun mounted on the bed.



Two young Afghan children with toy AKs.

ditch when a round (probably an errant one) exploded at the tail end of our group. One of the mujahideen had taken a piece of shrapnel below his left knee, now we had two to carry back to the home of the local commander. The next day his leg was amputated. The medic used only Novocaine. The mujahid was conscious during the amputation and I asked why he wasn't given a general anesthetic. The medic replied that he needed all the blood pressure he could get.

The final tally from the Soviet bombardment of the previous day was 15 houses destroyed.

It is evident the Soviets are not interested in winning hearts and minds in Afghanistan. They want only the land, and if they can kill or drive out the inhabitants, so much the better. The poisoning of water wells, the burning of crops and indiscriminate bombing and artillery barrages have to date driven half the population from Afghanistan. The refugee population along the Pakistan/Afghanistan border is the single

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SNIPER

U.S. Army Adopts Remington M24 SWS

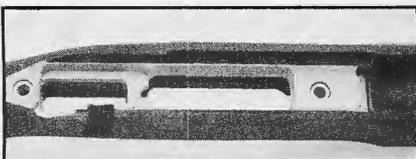
by Peter G. Kokalis

SNIPER rifles occupy a relatively low level of priority in the military services. While they certainly deserve more attention than the adoption of a pistol, the U.S. Army's type classification of a new SWS (Sniper Weapon System), the M24, has been quietly received in comparison to the tempest in a teapot caused by the XM9 pistol trials.

U.S. Army interest in sniper rifles has waxed and waned in an almost tidal fashion ever since the Civil War. Apparently disgruntled with the finicky M21 (a match-grade M14 originally equipped with the Redfield 3-9X ART scope), developed during the Vietnam War, the Army began casting about for a replacement in 1977. Three semiautomatic and four bolt-action rifles, some of which were customized, but most of which were essentially off-the-shelf items, were tested at Aberdeen Proving Ground and Ft. Benning. They were the M21 (control weapon in the tests), French FRF1, AR10, M40A1 (USMC), Winchester Model 70 Match, Parker-Hale 1200TX (Canadian C3) and a heavy-barrel M14 assembled by Rock Island Arsenal. No requirement document was ever drafted and for reasons known only to God, the Army decided the M21 was sufficient.

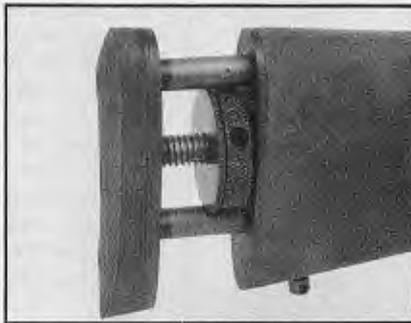
This didn't satisfy the special warfare spooks at Ft. Bragg, who were disenchanted with the M21's inability to maintain zero during airborne operations and, furthermore, wanted to reach out and touch the

M24's unique aluminum bedding block is molded into the stock with a fiberglass-reinforced polyurethane foam and permits 100 percent interchangeability.
Photo: H-S Precision, Inc.



ABOVE: M24 SWS complete with Leupold Ultra M3 10X scope and optional Harris bipod. Photo: Remington Arms Co., Inc.

BELOW: M24's completely-adjustable buttplate assembly is made from high-strength aluminum alloys. Length of pull can be adjusted from 12 to 14 inches. Photo: H-S Precision, Inc.



enemy at 1,000 meters and more. Largely ignored during this time frame, their limited resources inhibited their ability to explore other alternatives. About four years ago, there was a resurgence of interest in special warfare operations and an expansion of their funding permitted them to write their own SWS document and acquire a small quantity of rifles.

Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Army Rangers and the Light Divisions entered the scene and the SWS requirement went from nothing to "we need it now." Four alternatives were presented by the Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC) at Picatinny Arsenal. The first



ABOVE: M24 SWS complete with case which is built to withstand the rigors of airborne operations. Photo: Remington Arms Co., Inc.

possibility was to develop a system in-house and request bids from potential manufacturers. This course of action was quickly eliminated as it would be too time-consuming. Another choice was to adopt the current USMC sniper rifle and have it assembled at Quantico. But, the Marines can barely meet their own needs, let alone the requirement of thousands of rifles for the U.S. Army. An adjunct would have been to take the USMC Technical Data Package (TDP) and put it out to bid. However, the receiver was too short for longer, more powerful cartridges, the stock was not adjustable and more important, the Marines had never drafted a formal TDP as they knew from experience what they wanted and their armorers only build them one or two at a time from scratch. Under pressure to hand the end-users an SWS within a relatively short period of time the NDI (Non-

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SYSTEMS

Brits Field Parker/Hale M85

Text & Photos
by Peter G. Kokalis

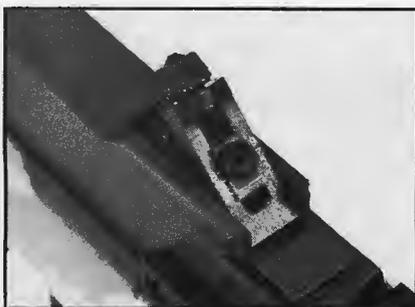
OLD soldiers never die and bolt-action sniper rifles just refuse to fade away. With the recent type-classification of Remington's turn-bolt as the new U.S. Army M24 sniper rifle, attention has once more focused on a mechanism first developed by Johann Nikolaus von Dreyse in 1827.

Seeking replacement of their aging L42A1s (a WWII No.4 Mkl(T) Enfield converted to 7.62x51mm NATO and with a heavy barrel and shortened forearm), the British trials resulted in acceptance of two bolt-action rifles, the Parker-Hale M85 and Malcolm Cooper's Accuracy International entry. The contract was given to Accuracy International, a small firm with limited capacity for series production. Because Accuracy International was unable to deliver on schedule, the SAS is currently fielding the Parker-Hale M85 as an interim-use weapon.

Like so many military sniping rigs, the M85 is a real brute. Overall length varies from 45 to 47 inches, depending upon the number of buttstock spacers employed. With an empty magazine and telescopic sight, this rifle weighs approximately 12.5

RIGHT: Luminosity and resolution of the milspec Swarovski RZFM 10x42mm scope are outstanding. Ranges can be estimated with this scope by the same system employed on the ComBloc Dragunov/RPG-7 optical sights.

BELOW: Resting in a compartment on the receiver bridge, the M85's emergency rear sight has elevation adjustments from 100 to 900 meters.



pounds. Chambering is for the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge.

The M85's receiver is a mill-finished investment casting with an exceptionally long ring to permit accurate and substantial mating with the barrel. With a total length of 24.75 inches, the heavy, target-grade, hammer-forged barrel has four grooves with a right-hand twist of one turn in 12 inches. I would prefer a faster twist of 1:10 inches in a long-range sniping rifle, as .308 projectiles will sometimes start to destabilize and keyhole at 1,000 yards when fired from



1:12-inch barrels.

The bolt is essentially that of the Mauser 98 series with an extra long handle to which has been attached an aluminum knob. The bolt body is a one-piece design with dual opposed locking lugs at the head. These lugs lock into recesses in the receiver ring. A third "safety" lug at the rear fits into a notch in the right side of the receiver bridge. The bolt body has been bored out from the rear to accept the firing pin assembly. There are two gas vents on the bolt body for protection

ABOVE: Whenever possible, sniper rifles should be fired from the prone position. Parker-Hale's M85 comes equipped with a sturdy bipod which is a scaled-down version of the one attached to the famous Bren light machine gun.

against a ruptured primer. A coiled main-spring surrounds the one-piece firing pin.

Dovetailed to a split spring-band inletted into and surrounding the bolt body, the long spring Mauser-type extractor is generally conceded to be the best ever-devised. A flat steel ejector has been attached to the bolt stop latch on the left side of the receiver bridge. When the bolt is retracted the ejector rides through a slot in the left-hand locking lug to strike the base of the cartridge, knocking it out of extractor's grip and over the right side of the receiver. To withdraw the bolt from the receiver, a roller at the rear of the bolt stop latch must be depressed inward.

Adjustable from 2 to 5 pounds, the target-type, override trigger features a military two-stage pull. SOF's test specimen had been adjusted to provide a pull weight of 3.25 pounds. Optional single-stage triggers are also available. The lock time, identical to the Mauser 98 series, is adequate for military and law enforcement applications.

A three-position safety has been installed on the right side of the stock, directly in back of the bolt handle. Push forward to expose the red dot and fire. Pull all the way to the rear to lock both the bolt and trigger. When pushed forward into the midway position, the trigger remains locked, but the

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GUNSMOKE

Continued from page 41

During the two weeks of competition each team is required to execute three different bombing runs, called attack profiles. Points awarded for each profile vary, and the profiles become increasingly difficult.

Profile One is basic bomb delivery — box pattern — and requires each team to fly two four-ship missions. Each aircraft makes two passes in delivery approaches of 10-, 20- and 30-degree dive angles, followed by three strafe passes. Based on delivery accuracy, a maximum of 3,400 points can be earned here. This profile simulates the most basic type of bombing attack and would ideally be performed when a target had no anti-aircraft capability, and where no hostile action of any type is expected.

A typical run during Profile One saw four A10 Thunderbolt IIs from the 51st TFW ("Warthogs" based at Suwon Air Base, South Korea, less than five minutes from the DMZ) firing 30mm cannon shells at the rate of 2,100 rounds per minute into a 25' x 25' white sheet on the desert floor. These sheets serve as targets for the strafing part of the competition. A second A10, close behind, follows the lead pilot and also strafes the target. He's followed by a third and a fourth A10. The four planes then regroup and fly home.

Profile Two is the more common tactical bomb delivery profile. In this scenario, pilots approach the target at low altitude and high speed, upwards of 500 mph, using terrain for cover much as they would in an actual combat situation. Each team flies two four-ship missions, performing bomb deliveries from a pop-up pattern to minimize their exposure time over the target area. Aircraft make two passes at three different approach angles. All pilots are briefed in advance as to the exact location of the target. Maximum score for this profile is 3,000 points.

They save the best, and hardest, for last. Profile Three — navigation/attack — requires each pilot to fly his aircraft 500 feet above the ground for 150 miles to the target. Pilots are not informed ahead of time exactly what their target is, but they're provided with map coordinates outlining designated checkpoints which they must cross. Along the route these checkpoints are marked by large orange panels on the ground. To get the maximum 3,600 points, at least one of the two aircraft must overfly the panels within plus or minus five seconds of their specified time.

Once over the target each pilot must deploy missile-decoy flares before dropping his 500 pounders on the obsolete tank that serves as the target. They're only given one pass to drop their bombs before returning to base. Points are lost for every meter off the target, and every second off the designated time parameters.

Each profile is flown twice with only the highest score recorded. There are numerous

Read 'em and weep. The Gunsmoke scoreboard keeps track of each team's standing in the competition.

fouls that can cost a team points while flying any of the three missions. The worst offense is causing a life-threatening situation — you score zero for the run.

Each plane carries a full load of 20mm or 30mm ammunition for strafing attacks. For bombing, planes are loaded with 25-pound bomb dummy units or 500-pound inert MK82 bombs, armed with a spotting charge. The navigation/attack profile also requires that each aircraft pop the aforementioned flares to draw off heat-seeking SAMs which would likely be deployed near bomb-worthy enemy installations.

After pilots perform their mission they make the 150-mile trip back to the airstrip, where their ground controllers are scored on how well they direct the aircraft during landing. Immediately after landing, the pilots go to a post-mission debriefing where they discuss what went right or wrong during the day's run.

"My system is so good, and I think all of ours are, that you just got to fly to the needle [pointer on the navigation system]. If I'd flown the needle on every one today I'd have gotten it. Instead I only got every other one," Major Charlie Betts, who flies SLUFs (acronym for short, little, ugly fellows, aka A7 Corsair IIs) with the Colorado Air Guard's 140th TFW out of Buckley ANGB, Aurora, Colorado, said during a post-mission debriefing.

"I followed mine dead-ass center and was off seven degrees. I was just to the south; I just couldn't see it until I was right on top of it," Captain Dean "Hollywood" McDavid, also with the 140th TFW, countered.

These critiques cover the full spectrum, all concerning how to most effectively put ordnance on target. In the end team members learn from what others did right, as well as their own mistakes. Once today's mission is sorted out, talk turns to tomorrow's flight and how they're going to approach the target, what they're going to watch for, and how they can improve.

A team which needed very little improve-

GUNSMOKE '87 COMPETITORS

F16 FIGHTING FALCON

Primary Mission: Attack fighter
Maximum Speed: Mach 2 +
Maximum Take-off Weight: 37,500 lbs
Combat Radius: 405 miles
In Service Date: January 1979
How They Fared at Gunsmoke: 1st (388th TFW, Hill AFB, UT), 2nd (419th TFW, Hill AFB, UT), 3rd (401st TFW, Torrejon, Spain), 5th (31TFW, Homestead AFB, FL), 7th (8th TFW, Kunsan AB, S. Korea) and 8th (169th TFG, McEntire ANGB, SC)

A-7 CORSAIR II

Primary Missions: Interdiction, close-air support, search and rescue
Maximum Speed: 695 mph at sea level
Maximum Take-off Weight: 42,000 lbs
Combat Radius: 715 miles
In Service Date: December 1968
How They Fared at Gunsmoke: 4th (121st TFW, Rickenbacker ANGB, OH) and 6th (140th TFW, Buckley ANGB, CO)

A-10 THUNDERBOLT II

Primary Mission: Close-air support

Maximum Speed: 425 mph at sea level
Maximum Take-off Weight: 51,000 lbs
Combat Radius: 620 miles for single deep-strike mission
In Service Date: March 1976
How They Fared at Gunsmoke: 9th (81st TFW, RAF Bentwaters, United Kingdom), 10th (51st TFW, Suwon AB, S. Korea), 11th (103rd TFG, Bradley ANGB, SC), 12th (354th TFW, Myrtle Beach, CN), 13th (926th TFG, NAS New Orleans, LA) and 15th (343rd TFW, Eielson AFB, AK)

F4 PHANTOM II

Primary Mission: All weather fighter/bomber
Maximum Speed: Approx. Mach 2.3
Maximum Take-off Weight: 58,000 lbs
Combat Radius: 730 miles
In Service Date (for F-4E): October 1967
How They Fared at Gunsmoke: 14th (37th TFW, George AFB, CA), 16th (4th TFW, Seymour Johnson AFB, NC), 17th (924th TFG, Bergstrom AFB, TX) and 18th (187th TFG, Montgomery, AL)

ment was the 388th TFW, flying F16s out of Hill AFB, Utah, which jetted home with team top gun honors.

"We won because we didn't have any individuals, we had a team," team leader Lieutenant Colonel Gail Jones said after the competition. "We didn't have any maintenance problems, we didn't have any bomb release problems, we didn't have anybody in the competition who flew a bad sortie.

"Rather than go for perfect scores every day I made guys do different things to build their error analysis skills so they could accept something being wrong and correct for it and still do a good job. And I think it paid off," he added.

Lieutenant Colonel Jones, who's been flying for 19 years, including a tour at Phan Rang AB, Republic of Vietnam, went on to say, "Everybody says that the team that wins is lucky. I don't think that's true. There's not much luck at all involved in this type of competition because everything is very strictly judged and scrutinized.



"We had some extremely poor range times compared to other teams in the competition. Around noon, on the first profile strafe, it was extremely rough. There were a lot of thermals at that time compared to the guys who got to go out in the glass smooth, cool morning. But we still won Profile One. We knew we'd get later range times and trained for that. I think you make your own luck. The way you train, the attitude of your people produce that luck. I don't feel like you can go down to a competition where you have to fly six sorties, where maintenance has to produce six times, where weapons have to do things six times perfectly, and expect luck to pull you through."

A review of the final standings shows that F16s dominated the competition and the venerable old F4s brought up the rear. Pilots flying F16s won both the team and individual top gun honors with the 388th TFW being named the top team and Major Hamilton from the 419th, based at Hill AFB, Utah, being crowned individual top gun. But according to Lt. Col. Jones, "The planes are not the factor. There are a lot of things that come into play. But I think the F16 is the best air-to-ground bombing jet in the world and it proved it at GunSmoke. It just does so many things well and is maintenance reliable."

Regardless of what type of aircraft their team was flying, all the airmen at GunSmoke '87 came out winners. Major General France summed it up best: "This competition is the epitome, short of war itself, of what we in the fighter business are all about." ✎

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22 YEARS OF WAR

Continued from page 59

for Human Rights and the Parents Committee of Namibia document mass incarcerations, torture and killing in SWAPO "refugee" camps in Angola, suggesting that joining PLAN isn't an entirely voluntary act of revolutionary fervor.

In addition to security force actions, SWAPO/PLAN also face a very real threat from the local population: Voluntary reports from local citizens, which have led to the killing/capturing of terrorists and the recovery of their equipment, have jumped from 64 to 1,868 by November 1987. As a result, terrorist incidents inside SWA (which include contacts and ambushes, mine incidents, intimidation of the local population, and sabotage) have steadily dropped from 756 recorded incidents in 1982 to 483 in 1987.

This does not make SWAPO/PLAN's backers—the Soviet Union which ships arms and ammunition directly from the USSR to the Angolan coastal city of Namibe for PLAN's use and supplies

advisers to their training camps; countries such as the Netherlands and Cuba which supply food and other supplies; and groups such as the World Council of Churches which funnel vast amounts of cash to PLAN—happy people.

Hence political denunciations of the "fascist apartheid regime" for killing thousands of innocent, peace and freedom loving "refugees" escalate in direct proportion to PLAN's combat failures.

What they fail to mention, though, is that those same, poor "refugees" managed to lose 761 grenades, 623 rifles, 1,323 rifle grenades, 48 machine guns, 124 82mm mortars and 3,081 mortar bombs, 3 surface-to-air missiles, 79 RPG-7 rocket launchers and 1,010 rockets, 5 limpet mines, and 35 122mm rockets in 1987 to the security forces. And in case there was any doubt as to their intent, they also managed to leave 479 anti-vehicle and 569 anti-personnel mines lying about for some unwary soul to chance upon.

Militarily, as SWATF and SWA Pol Tin sources will tell you, PLAN is getting beat. And when insurgent forces wind up losing in the field, they turn to other methods—in this case sabotage of government installations, television and

radio transmission towers, electricity supply lines, bridges, railroad lines, and since the beginning of 1987, high-profile "soft" targets such as Windhoek and holiday resort areas.

"The Kremlin trains these men," my intel briefer said. "They decide on the strategy and go for this kind of thing." And it is effective in the sense that every time something goes boom in SWA, the international media is quick to pick it up.

It's a well-orchestrated public relations campaign run by Moscow and PLAN's U.N. supporters, and it's highly cost-effective: PLAN need only plant a pound or two of explosives here and there without wasting the lives of its field troops, and they get all the publicity they need.

How long will the low-intensity war in South West Africa/Namibia drag on? Excluding politics, the status quo could run on forever. But it's the politicians who will eventually decide SWA's fate. Unfortunately, the superpowers are too busy playing international chess with each other to really care about what happens to pawns like South West Africa/Namibia, and the people who live there. But that's 20th Century *realpolitik*, and we're all stuck with it.

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INTO ANGOLA

Continued from page 59

no spoor found, and even the tracking team had lost theirs.

It was a disappointed bunch of policemen — not to mentioned one journalist — who sucked down coffee and grazed rat packs that night. Everyone could nearly taste a contact, but the bastards had slipped out of the net. Next morning, Owambos scattered out on the ground for kilometers, trying to pick up at least one of the spoor, but without any luck.

Zulu One Mike and Zulu Sierra took off back to their own AOs, and we started drifting eastward, toward the old Portuguese town of Namacunde, about 10 kilometers north of SWA along a tar road. These old towns made good staging areas and reference points for PLAN terrors headed south, so we thought we'd give it a once-over.

Namacunde, like Chiede, had seen its share of fighting between UNITA, Jonas Savimbi's pro-Western democratic forces, and the Angolan government's FAPLA, as well as a few brief forays by the SADF (South African Defense Force). Namacunde's solid buildings, built a foot or more thick against the torrid African heat, were pockmarked and shot through by thousands of small arms rounds, machine-gun fire,

and heavier caliber weapons. It had undoubtedly been a pretty town — in a former lifetime.

We set up our night position in a field across the tar road, and I took the opportunity to gain a little hands-on experience with the R5 and its 50-round magazine, as well as Chris' Czech CZ 75 pistol, before the sun went down.

We were sitting next to Coen's car, drinking coffee and chatting around 2100, when we heard engine noises coming from the north along the tar road. We knew it wasn't another SWA Pol Tin by the pitch of the engines.

"Ratels, I think," Coen said, referring to the military's APCs, but we weren't 100 percent sure.

"Might be a FAPLA convoy coming down from Onjiva to drop off some terrors," Dave added, and that was the way we played it. The sounds of 30-odd R5s locking and loading, and .50 cal, MAGs, and Brownings charging, made me start to wish I had carried something a bit more lethal than the camera I was now pointing down range.

Six vehicles rumbled into sight under the brilliant full moon, backdropped by the white buildings of Namacunde. From my vantage point they looked South African, but...

Coen shot up a thousand footer which bathed us, and the convoy, in its intense

magnesium light. The convoy slowed. "Send up another," he called to Dave, now over in his car, and Dave sent one airborne. So far, no response from the now crawling convoy. Dave went to fire his second rocket up over the convoy but it malfunctioned, nearly exploding in his hands and shooting the flare out the wrong end down into the ground just behind the Casspir.

"Hey! Are you all right?" I called.

"Yeah...No, I think I've burned my hands."

Just then, the convoy answered our flares with one of its own, and continued to rumble off down south.

Dave's hands were fried, both a puffed-up mass of burned, dead-white skin. Our medic covered them with burn salve and bandages, and gave him antibiotics and painkillers, but we knew he'd have to see a doctor soon.

As it was, our night still wasn't over. Around 0100, I could hear mortars exploding far to the east. Then, near 0400, two Alouettes and a Puma, one of the Alouettes with its searchlight on, came flying low and slow overhead, heading east. Around first light, we got the word. An army company (which I had happened to visit before linking with SWA Pol Tin) had been stonked by 20 82mm mortar bombs and taken some serious casualties. Hence the casevac choppers we had seen.

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We were the closest team, and we wasted no time in revving over to the army's position where we linked up with one of their lieutenants. He told us that the convoy we'd seen last night had been their resupply vehicles, and that they'd had to use flares earlier to guide them onto their position. Once the supplies were dropped off the convoy had departed, but the company had stayed in place.

It was obviously not a tactically sound maneuver, and I could see from the young officer's face that it would haunt him for the rest of his life — the company had three KIA and five wounded.

They had located the 82's baseplate position, and we picked up the spoor from there. Six of them: four headed straight back to Onjiva about 15 clicks away, where we knew they'd already be drinking Cokes and patting themselves on the back, but the other two had headed west toward the abandoned Omupanda Mission Station on the tar road. We set out after them.

It was either a feint, a ruse, or misdirection on their part, because within a few kilometers, their spoor turned northwest — toward off-limits Onjiva. We still stayed with it as long as we thought it safe, then had to break off. There was always the chance we were being led into an ambush the closer we came to Onjiva.

We took a look at Omupanda Mission Station at any rate — again, another nearly destroyed Portuguese town — then headed

south along the tar back toward SWA to refuel and water, and to have Dave's hands checked out. It was basically the end of our week out, so Dave, his crew, and I headed back to SWA Pol Tin HQ at Oshakati.

I saw them all again a few days later when they stood a unit formation prior to stand-down. I was sorry to be leaving. They were a good crew and I would have liked to deploy with them again — especially now that the rains had started and the PLAN infiltration season was beginning in earnest — but my schedule wouldn't allow for it.

We shook hands and I wished them well, hoping then, as I still do now, that they all managed to stay out of harm's way. I don't think that's too much to ask. ✕

AUSSIES IN 'NAM

Continued from page 27

drawing up the ridge in our direction.

Lieutenant Deak was ordered to set up an ambush. He selected a ravine that cut through to the South China Sea like a machete scar, the only logical escape route. But we hadn't gone 20 meters when he had to call it off. The CS gas had so debilitated the platoon that nobody could keep quiet. Sneezing, coughing, eyes blurry, the men were in no condition to ambush anyone except maybe a school for the deaf.

Reluctantly, the recce platoon was told to

bivouac for the night. It was dark by the time we maneuvered into a cliffside harbor some 50 meters up the side of the ravine, too far away to stop anybody, even by rolling boulders down on them. But Charlie wasn't winning the war by being dumb; he never went near the ravine. He climbed straight up the rock face of the mountainside opposite and camped on a secure ledge for the night, well out of sight of the valley.

We figured this out about 0100 hours when the skipper's signalman, Private "Moose" Benham, 20, from Melbourne, pointed at something halfway up the opposite side of the cut. "Hey, there's a cooking fire over there!" he whispered hoarsely.

Sure enough, only 200 meters away on the other side of the gorge was an enemy campfire. Charlie was boiling up a cauldron of rice in plain view of our perch, while we were huddled in a shivering wind drinking the dregs of cold tea.

There was no percentage in engaging him in small-arms fire, we were too exposed. Arty was the only answer. It took the Skipper an hour to pry a section of 81mm mortars loose from battalion HQ, as all the other guns were occupied with fire missions to the east.

Due primarily to the onshore wind, the first rounds landed everywhere but on Charlie's ledge. Nevertheless, at the first explosion, the fire was quickly doused. Then, while Lt. Deak worked the busy frequency to adjust the aiming point, the VC grew

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confident, or hungry, and the fire leapt back into full flame; apparently they had merely shielded it with a poncho. When the next bombs came in, again off target, the fire disappeared once more. This continued for 45 minutes, during which time we grew almost as uncomfortable as Charlie. More than one mortar round drifted across the ravine to explode on our side.

Despite the good-natured pissing and moaning, Lt. Deak persisted, but a direct hit proved impossible and Charlie kept cooking, determined to eat a hot meal.

We developed a certain respect for his perseverance and, at the same time, an even healthier respect for the vagaries of lobbing mortar bombs through a stiff breeze. Finally Corporal Mulby made a welcome suggestion: "Oh, let the little fuckers eat in peace." When the cooking fire disappeared from the view the next time, Deak was technically truthful when he radioed, "Fire extinguished, end of mission."

So we went to sleep, or tried to. All night long a U.S. battery of self-propelled 8-inch guns directed H&I (harassment and interdiction) fire beyond the ridge. The rounds skimmed our position like errant freight trains. Deak radioed down to make sure they knew where we were. The answer came back: "We know, old buddy; go back to sleep."

Our patrol terminated the next day following a fruitless Bird Dog search for Charlie's whereabouts (conducted by Royal Australian

Army Captain John Wright in the standard Aussie observation aircraft, an unmodified Cessna 180 with both doors removed.)

The score for the operation: one Charlie KIA versus six Aussie dead and twelve wounded. As good as they were, the SEA-TO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) troopers were taking it in the ear at about the same discouraging rate as the Yanks, ROKs (Republic of Korea) and ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). And the war had eight years to go. ✕

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

Continued from page 19

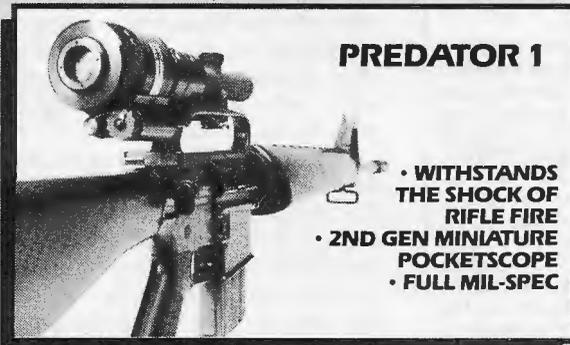
important thing is its simplicity.

First, two (or one or three, whatever the situation dictates) baselines are laid out at 90 degrees to an imaginary reference line connecting the landmark and reference point (in this instance, the road junction and dead tree). Since no compass is used, the reference point must be easily identifiable from the landmark. The baselines may be marked with string or scratches in the dirt, or troops can simply be stationed at each end on the point of intersection with the reference line until layout and recording are completed. These points

may be marked with stakes if necessary, as are the rows in the hasty protective minefield record. Personally, I don't like stakes, as an enemy can move them too easily.

Once the baselines are established and checked for alignment by the officer or NCO in charge, exact positions for the mines are marked, and the perpendicular distance from each mine to its baseline is paced off. To provide a reasonable safety margin in walking the baselines, these "minelines" should be at least four-and-a-half paces long for each 50 paces of baseline. This allows the baseline/reference line angle to be up to five degrees off of perpendicular either way without risking blowing someone away. (A little trigonometry: $TAN 5 = .09$; therefore minimum mineline = 4.5 if baseline = 50). You don't want tripwires to intrude into this "safety fan" either. It's also a good idea to allow for about a 10-percent variation in pace lengths.

Similar spacing should be provided between the reference line and nearest minelines, since it serves as the safety lane for returning patrols, engineers maintaining the mines, etc. Mines close to the reference line should be command detonated. If the tactical situation absolutely requires a tripwire to cross the reference line, each engineer and squad leader should clearly know its



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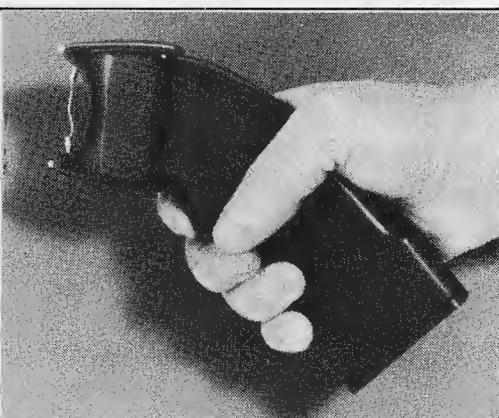
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location, and no one should move down the reference line without command permission and an engineer guide. And no one walks a baseline without bringing an engineer along.

A mark is made on the baseline at the point the mineline crosses it. Distances to each point of intersection of individual minelines and baselines are then paced off from the reference line, and all of this information is marked directly on the form, which is nothing more than a sheet of paper. The first row (Row A, closer to the enemy) is then planted, followed by Row B. Removal is done in reverse order, a point that seems obvious enough but should always be stressed. Information on mine type and actuation is recorded in table form in the standard manner.

I looked up the lieutenant that evening, bought him a beer, and went over my simplified minefield record with him. He liked it. The next morning I conducted a class on the revised recording procedure, and the expression on the faces of the troops told me I was on target. The practical exercise proved it. The lieutenant gave his NCOs some instruction in basic geometry, and they checked for proper right angles using equilateral triangles and survey sticks. None of the baselines were more than a couple of degrees off in the first place, which was within the desired five-degree safety fan. We had the squads recover the mines planted by each other, using the appropriate records. They did fine; every mine was recovered within 30 minutes. I felt a lot better than after the previous day's training.

This approach has some inherent safety advantages over the standard U.S. system. First, since the baselines are located behind the actual mine rows, each mine is removed by moving up on it from behind rather than laterally along the row, a more dangerous movement, especially if tripwires are used. And an entire row of mines can be removed at once, if necessary, rather than one or two at a time, as is the case with the U.S. system. Conversely, once the baselines are established, several soldiers can emplace mines simultaneously if need be, though careful supervision is important in such an operation. It's analogous to rigging several charges at once off a ring main rather than one at a time in series, for you engineers and demo men.

Since just one compass error can throw the entire standard U.S. record off, the positions of the mines have to be recorded — and checked — very carefully, and there just isn't always time for that. Thus there is always the temptation to merely make a rough sketch or, worse yet, to not bother recording the minefield at all.

The dangers of such sloppiness be-



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gin with blowing your own people away, and include having civilians wander into forgotten minefields or having the mines recovered by hostiles for later terrorist actions that can then be blamed on the good guys, since their mines were used. Concerns over the last two scenarios are largely responsible for the increasing difficulty in the U.S. Army of gaining approval to conduct mine warfare training in the Third World, especially anything remotely related to "booby traps." This is a pretty shortsighted policy, since it almost guarantees that mistakes and abuses will occur in LDC forces, but that's another issue. The importance of locating minefields away from areas of civilian activity really needs to be stressed in these operations, and we can't do that if we're prohibited from presenting mine and anti-mine training.

It is certain that mine warfare is going to be a big part of the low intensity-type warfare that will plague the Third World for the foreseeable future. And the U.S. military, particularly its Special Operations Forces, is going to be a part of it unless our nation returns to a head-in-the-sand isolationist foreign policy. And if that's the case we'll still be involved, only a little later and in a bigger way.

In all training of troops in LDCs, we need to make certain that our practices are suited to local conditions when presenting training, as many fledgling democracies don't have our military resources. That means keeping them as simple and tactically sound as possible. I hope the simplified platoon minefield will make a contribution to that goal. ✂

REMINGTON SWS

Continued from page 68

Developmental Item) process was chosen. The requirement document originated at Ft. Bragg, and they remained heavily involved throughout the trials. An essential requirement was the system's ability to maintain accuracy after repeated drops of the type simulating those encountered in airborne operations. In addition, to provide for an eventual 1,000-meter capability, conversion from 7.62x51mm NATO to .300 Winchester Magnum or a similar cartridge must be achievable without changes to the basic receiver length, trigger assembly, sighting systems and their mounts, or the stock-to-receiver bedding interface.

Only two rifles were entered in response to the final RFP (Request For Proposal), the Steyr SSG (with a Leupold M3-10X scope, Harris bipod and carrying case) and a system assembled by Remington Arms Co., Inc. Remington was awarded the contract, and deservedly so as their overall package is excellent.



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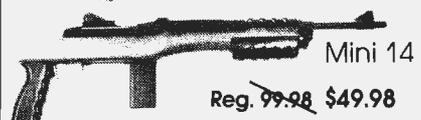
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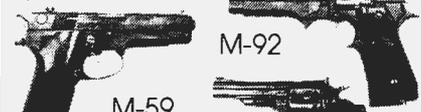
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All of this rests in a truly state-of-the-art stock. The design was a coordinated effort between Remington and H-S Precision, Inc. (Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 512, Prescott, AZ 86302; phone 602-445-0607), and the Pro-Series Sniper stock is the result of more than a year of research and development. Using a unique bedding-block system, the accuracy potential matches that obtained by the laborious epoxy (Bisonite) bedding process. In addition, the Pro-Series Sniper stock offers 100-percent interchangeability. Fabricated from a Kevlar/graphite/fiberglass composite using epoxy-based proprietary resins to enhance its strength, durability and warp-free characteristics, an aluminum (7075-T6) bedding block is molded into this composition with a polyurethane foam reinforced with fiberglass. This foam gives the stock its strong, solid feel. The stock is then finished with an epoxy-based high-temperature coating (in either black, black/gray or olive/black) which is both non-reflective and non-slip. The completely adjustable buttplate assembly is made from high-strength aluminum alloys (anodized according to MilSpec MIL-A-8625 Type D). The length of pull can be adjusted from 12 to 14 inches.

Overall length of the M24 is 43 inches. Weight, empty, with sling but without scope is 12.1 pounds (of which 3.5 represent the Pro-Series Sniper stock).

An important part of the M24 SWS is the superb Leupold Ultra M3-10X scope. Nitrogen-filled and designed especially for those situations where quick ranging of targets-of-opportunity is required, a three-quarter-minute Mil Dot reticle pattern was selected for the M24 SWS. Weighing 1.75 pounds, Leupold's Ultra M3-10X features an elevation dial with one-minute click resolution that permits adjustments in elevation from 100 to 1,000 yards within a single revolution of the dial, and windage adjustment of one-half minute click resolution. A turret-mounted focus adjustment eliminates the need for a separate parallax adjustment.

A .300 Winchester Magnum ranging dial is optional. All lens surfaces, including its large 42mm-diameter objective lens, are multicoated for optimum brightness in poor light environments. The 30mm-diameter scope tube is machined from a single piece of thick-wall aluminum tubing with a black-anodized matte finish and a nominal tenth-inch wall thickness for maximum strength and durability. Leupold's Ultra M3-10X scope was subjected to an astounding 1,600 Gs of impact force (twice the recoil force of a .375 H&H Magnum) to ensure its milspec qualities. The Ultra M3-10X can be removed and re-installed with less than one-half MOA change in zero.

Accuracy specifications for the XM24 trials were an average mean radius of 1.3 inches or less at 200 yards and 1.9 inches at 300 yards, based upon five targets of 10 shots each. Remington's system met or exceeded these requirements.

The Remington M24 SWS includes detachable back-up iron sights, scope case, deployment kit and a case for the entire system built to withstand the rigors of airborne operations. Although the U.S. Army has not finalized inclusion of a bipod, the Harris unit was submitted with the Remington system. While it's more expensive, I hope the Parker-Hale bipod is selected.

Law enforcement agencies and other qualified governmental organizations desiring further information on the M24 SWS should contact Remington Arms Co., Inc. (Dept. SOF, Law Enforcement — Government Sales, Ilion, NY 13357; phone 315-894-9961). ☒

PARKER/HALE M85

Continued from page 69

bolt can be manipulated to unload the rifle.

Somewhat unorthodox emergency iron sights are standard on the M85. A rugged, blade-type front sight with protective ears has been sweated and pinned to the muzzle. More than just reminiscent of the one found on the FN MAG58 GPMG, it can be adjusted for both windage and elevation zero. Resting in a compartment on the receiver bridge, the flip-up, aperture rear sight cannot be adjusted for windage. Elevation adjustments from 100 to 900 meters, in 100-meter increments, are accomplished by means of a large, knurled knob on top of the rear sight assembly. The iron sights cannot be employed with the scope in place. Dovetails for the scope mount are integral with the receiver casting. Their recoil shoulders ensure a positive return to zero when the scope is removed and reinstalled. The mount is not quick-detachable as a screwdriver is required for both removal and installation.

Our test rifle was equipped with the superb Swarovski RXFM 10x42mm fixed-power scope. Luminosity and resolution of this milspec glass are outstanding. Eye relief is three inches.



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The reticle pattern consists of fine cross-hairs superimposed with heavy bars on the right, left and bottom. The bottom bar is pointed. Ranges are estimated by the same system employed on the ComBloc Dragunov/RPG-7 optical sights. At the bottom of the field of view is a baseline below four short steps. The step closest to the baseline is marked "8" for 800 meters, while the farthest to the right is marked "2" for 200 meters. The two steps in between correspond to 600 and 400 meters in ascending order. Align the target's groin with the baseline and match the top of his head with the appropriate step. Dial the correct distance into the range drum on top of the scope (calibrated in 50-meter clicks from 300 to 800 meters and 100-meter increments from 100 to 300 meters for the trajectory of the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge).

The reticle is non-centered. That is, as the range drum is set for longer distances, the crosshairs move toward the bottom of the field of view. Adjustment of the windage drum will move the crosshairs to the right or left. Each calibration of the windage drum changes the point of impact one meter at 100 meters range.

Suggested retail price of the RZFM-10 scope is \$620. A six-power version, more useful for most law enforcement applications, is available for \$560.

A cut-down, 10-round version of the excellent, detachable M14 steel magazine is used in the M85, which will also accept the standard 20-round M14 magazine. A detachable box magazine is an important asset for a military sniping rifle and I wish it could have been incorporated in the U.S. Army's new M24 system.

All of this has been set into a hand-laminated, solid fiberglass stock. Manufactured by the McMillan Stock Co. (Dept. SOF, Suite B, 21421 N. 14th Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85027; phone 602-582-9635), the style is that of a classic stock without cheekpiece (an optional removable cheekpiece is available for use with night vision optics) and a virtually vertical pistol grip. Total weight of the McMillan stock is 2.5 pounds. All of the stock inletting is done with CNC (computer numerical control) equipment. Stippling has been molded into both the forearm and pistol grip. Spacers between the rubber recoil pad and butt permit two inches of adjustment. In addition to a NATO green stock, four camo patterns are available: jungle, desert, arctic and urban. Barrels, receivers and bipods are painted to conform with both the desert and arctic patterns. McMillan's stock was the only one to pass the British arctic tests without problems, and in one form or another is used by the U.S. armed forces, FBI and numerous other law enforcement agencies. These stocks are match-grade and milspec in every respect.

The M85 comes equipped with Parker-Hale's sturdy bipod, a scaled-down version of the one attached to the famous Bren light machine gun. Its adjustable legs extend from 8½ to 10½ inches. The head can be

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swiveled and canted approximately 14 degrees in either direction without altering the leg position. The bipod attaches to a spigot on the front of the stock by means of a heavy-duty quick-release catch. No better bipod has ever been mounted to a sniping rifle.

An adjustable palm stop slides in a channel under the stock's forearm and holds the front sling swivel. This is an unnecessary feature on a military sniping rifle and if issued to me, I would pitch it in the nearest ditch. The rear sling swivel is located under the buttstock to the rear of the pistol grip. Both sling swivels are of the quick-detachable type and are not substantial enough for a rifle of this weight. A 2-inch wide web sling with leather loops is available for \$25.

With its heavy barrel free-floated in the McMillan stock we have all the ingredients here for superb accuracy. Federal's .308M cartridge, which is loaded with the Sierra 168-grain hollowpoint boattail match bullet, was used for our test and evaluation. Diameters on this projectile are held from .3079 to .3080 of an inch. The bore was carefully cleaned with Shooter's Choice after every 15 rounds. With no heat mirage and minimal cross winds, our 100-yard groups were never better than an uninspired 1.1 inches. Others have fired this same rifle and achieved consistent sub-minute-of-angle accuracy, so I must assume an off day on my part. Both of the front two bedding screws must be tightened securely to optimize the M85's accuracy potential. But, the tang (rear trigger guard) screw must be turned only hand-tight, something which should be carefully pointed out to using troops. Firing from the bipod seemed to induce some minor lateral stringing of the shot group, so all accuracy testing was done from the bench with the bipod removed. Due to its weight, perceived recoil was negligible. Whenever possible, heavy sniping rifles like the M85 should be employed from the prone position.

This is, with only minor exceptions, a well-built rifle with all the required attributes for a proper turn-bolt sniper. Imported by Navy Arms Company (Dept. SOF, 689 Bergen Blvd., Ridgefield, NJ 07657; phone 201-945-2500), Parker-Hale's M85 matches its substantial weight in price, with a suggested retail of \$1,895 sans optics. You'll need the scope mount also and that costs \$87.50. Other accessories include a cleaning kit for \$51, spare 10-round magazines at \$46 (surplus 20-round M14 magazines are much cheaper and every bit as good), a soft case for \$119 and a welded aluminum case designed to withstand HALO operations for \$449. ✕

AFGHAN ATTACK

Continued from page 67

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was well underway even before they invaded in force in December 1979.

In my first weeks inside Afghanistan, I interviewed many people who came up with the same story about an attack on Herat. This took place on 15 March 1979, months before the Russian invasion. A few days prior to that date, there had been a disturbance in one of the bazaars of Herat. A few Soviet officers serving as advisers to the puppet regime they had installed in Kabul the year before had been killed, and the Russians felt this was a good time to show the people of Afghanistan their strength. They hoped to break the will of any resistance being formed against them. In the pre-dawn hours of 15 March, the Soviet-controlled Afghan army surrounded the city with hundreds of armored vehicles and thousands of troops. The first warning the population received came when several waves of Backfire bombers unloaded on the town. Dozens of Hind helicopters flew scores of sorties against more selected targets.

The barrage continued throughout the day, with the armored force pouring rounds into the densely populated areas of the city. The slaughter didn't end until nightfall, and more than 24,000 people were killed. It took over a month to extricate all the bodies. The hills outside Herat are now covered with thousands of green flags. Each flag marks the grave of one who died in the attack. Instead of breaking the will of the people of Afghanistan, the siege at Herat only served to awaken them to the depth of barbarism capable by the enemy from the north. March 15th is now a red-letter day on the Afghan calendar — one they hold in great reverence.

After a brief, somber burial of Commander Hazradin on 25 April, the men sat around cross-legged and discussed the next operation. It was decided to carry it out on 27 April, a date the mujahideen hold in infamy. On that date in 1977 the Soviets engineered the coup which put in place the first president totally of their own choosing. His name was Taraki.

The plan agreed upon was to celebrate the 27th by bombarding a Russian post in the province of Wardak, approximately 15 miles from Kabul, a march of about 40 miles. After the grueling night marches we had already made, I wasn't looking forward to another, to say nothing of the return trip. But, one must remember, in Afghanistan, anything is possible.

I was sitting near a small bazaar wondering if my feet could take a 40-mile march. It was dusty, and I was hungry and generally feeling sorry for myself, when a bright yellow taxi stopped at my feet. To my complete surprise, the driver got out and greeted me with the usual three hugs and extended hello.

The taxi was a Russian four-door sedan, probably built in the '50s. The bright yellow paint was not its first. I was squeezed into the back seat between two men I knew. Within a few moments, the car was loaded



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with four men in the front seat, five in the back and one in the trunk. There were four RPG rounds laid on the back seat beneath the rear window. In spite of the crowded conditions, I was awfully glad for the ride. With a brief praise to Allah, we were off in a cloud of dust for the province of Wardak. Ah, Afghanistan!

Our taxi took us about half the distance we needed to go — right to the edge of Wardak Province. We pulled up to a small village well within view of a Soviet outpost high up on a hill. We simply stopped behind one of the buildings and got out. We went into a humble dwelling to plan our next step.

The mujahideen are quite calm when in the view of the Russians. They realize the Soviet troops generally cannot distinguish mujahideen activity from the normal activities of the general population, and as a result they can move quite freely. Often they transport concealed weapons and ammunition within sight of Russian positions.

Inside the house it was decided to bombard the Russian post at Shah Kabul. Over tea and bread most of us enjoyed a light-hearted visit while the commanders left the room for several hours to discuss the details of the attack. Later that afternoon we left the small village and walked several miles to the Kabul-Kandahar road. In doing so, we had to pass within a few hundred feet of a Soviet checkpoint.

As we neared the small bridge patrolled by both Soviet and Afghan troops, the mujahideen hid their Kalashnikovs under their *patous*. The freedom fighters seemed to take this nerve-racking passage with great calm. Inside, my guts wrenched at the thought of what would happen if we were stopped and it was discovered that I was a journalist. I remembered the words of the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan in 1985, when he declared that they would kill any journalist caught traveling with the mujahideen. And this they have done.

Several miles up the road from the checkpoint, we started looking for a vehicle of some kind to hijack. One man was posted alongside the road while the rest of us hid in some ruins. About an hour passed before an ancient gravel truck came into view. It was slowly weaving its way through the countless craters left from hundreds of ambushes. Our man had stopped him, and to our good fortune, the driver was a good Moslem and very happy to let us aboard. He took us the 20 or so miles we needed to go.

One of the difficulties a Westerner has traveling with the freedom fighters is that your perception of time and distance is distorted. In my usual exhaustion, I would inquire as to how far, or how long, it was to our next destination. A typical answer would be, "We are going to that near mountain. It will be a short time." That "near mountain" could be 24 hours away, but in my mind, I would think, "Oh, good, only two or three more hours." I never knew when we would eat or sleep. It was difficult to keep pace with people who have never

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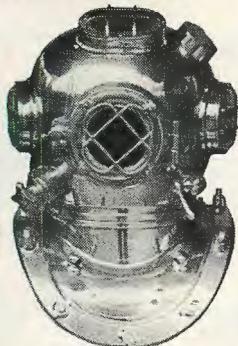
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driven a car and have spent their lives walking everywhere and who don't let their lives be ruled by watches any more than they let them be run by Russians. So when our gravel truck finally stopped, I reluctantly hopped out and headed up the mountains to prepare for our attack on Shah Kabul.

"Arakat, come mista, we go now." These were the first words I heard after our arrival in a mosque. It was 0400, and we had only slept for three hours. As we ate some bread and drank some tea, it was explained to me that we would be going over three mountain passes before we reached our place of attack. As this was 27 April, we had to complete the march in time to set up the ancient BM-12 multiple rocket launcher we were to use in the attack. The way was very steep. Many times we had to balance with one hand against the side of the mountain as we advanced step by step.

We started this heartbreaking march at 0430 and finally scaled our final peak at about 1500 in the afternoon. Somehow while we were marching through the steep terrain, the commanders had arranged for the BM-12 and 60 rockets to be trucked to the bottom of the peak from which we would be firing. When we reached the peak, we rested for 30 minutes, then most of the men started down the mountain to haul up the component parts of the BM-12 and the 60 rounds.

These men were of all ages and nearly exhausted, but showed no reluctance to start down the mountain again. I stayed on top to photograph the leveling of the place for the BM-12. Knowing I probably could not have gone down the mountain and hauled up a rocket, I marveled at the resolve and determination of these brave fighters. Even though their faces showed pain and fatigue, I never once heard an Afghan complain.

The mujahideen are meticulous when it comes to laying a gun, and with the BM-12 it was no different. They checked and rechecked, dug and dug again, until the four legs of the rocket launcher were perfectly level. While one team was leveling, another team was digging a cave and tunnel back from the rocket launcher. If need be, they could fire the launcher with an electric firing device from within the cave. It was dark by the time all was ready. Now we had only to wait another hour until we could "celebrate" 27 April.

"Now we have revelation," said Mira Jon, a 27-year-old commander. I didn't understand at first, but soon realized they were about to fire a marker round. The first round was way short and to the left. "One more revelation," said Mira Jon. This one hit the edge of the post. Four rockets were quickly loaded, a small adjustment made and buttons pushed, sending the rockets off with a deafening swoosh. A moment later there were four bursts of light in the center of the Russian post. As the mujahideen shouted "Allah Akhbar," lights in the post began to disappear, and small fires started to blaze.

The mujahideen were already loading all 12 tubes of the BM-12 for the next barrage.

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Again, the earth shook and trails of light cast a hellish glow as each rocket shot out of its pod. We quickly rushed up to our vantage to see the bombs hit the Soviet post. Each one hit somewhere inside.

As the last set of 12 rockets was loaded, we could hear the ominous "thump" of Russian artillery. It was their turn to offer a marker round.

The first round was laughably off to the south, but with each round they became more accurate. Someone grabbed my shirt and pulled me up at the same time, saying, "This way." No sooner had we gotten five steps when the same set of hands threw me to the dirt. An explosion bounced us off the ground and blew my turban off my head. The Soviets had our position.

We then scrambled down the hill, heading for the cave dug behind the BM-12. The cave was only 2½-feet high, but big enough to hold all 15 of us. As the ground shook and fragments whizzed by, we inched our way into as comfortable a position as possible. This bombardment would take a while.

Three hours went by, and the bombing stopped as quickly as it had started. Our commander began to chatter out orders. It was obvious to me that we needed to get off that mountain, but to my surprise, the men began disassembling the BM-12. They meant to carry this thing down the mountain in the dead of night when they were already exhausted. A rocket launcher is far too valuable a weapon to the mujahideen to be abandoned in the field. I remembered again that anything is possible in Afghanistan.

We took a steeper way down to save time. Some of the parts of the BM-12 take two men to carry them. The way was treacherous. For hours we barked our shins, slid and half-fell off the mountain. There was not one man who wasn't bleeding in some place or another. As we neared the bottom, it began to get light in the east. We hid the parts of the rocket launcher in some ruins. It would be picked up later by the men who had trucked it in before.

We had now been up for the better part of three days, traveling through very difficult terrain. But even in our state of numb exhaustion, there was laughter and joking as we knocked at a door for some tea. Some of these men had been with the group for several operations; others had just joined us for the 27 April attack. As the sun began to rise, the men each said their goodbyes and set off, either for home or with another group on another operation. Some of the men had no homes or families; for them there was only the war.

The Kabul-Kandahar road was the next destination for me and Mira Jon. We came upon a bazaar run by the mujahideen. I sat down in the sun alongside one of the mud buildings, and Mira Jon drifted off into the crowd. Within seconds I was asleep. The next thing I knew Mira Jon was shaking me awake with one hand, and handing me an ice-cold Coke with the other. There was a bus waiting to take us to the next village. Ah, Afghanistan! ✘



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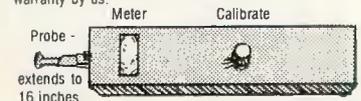
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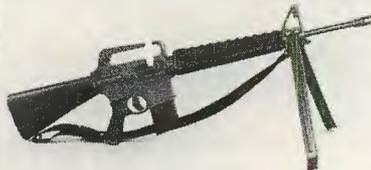
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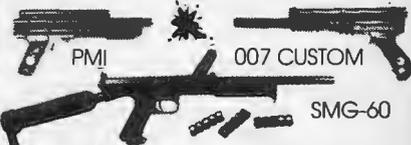
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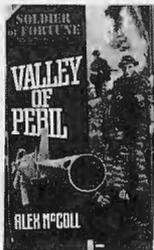
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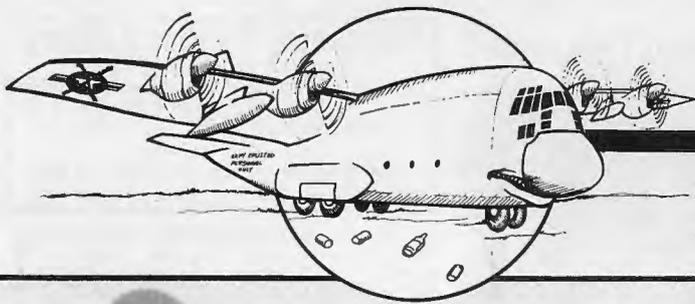


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PARTING SHOT

Air Force: 1, Army: 0

by Tim Guymon

Uncle Sam's Air Force never forgave the Army for its illegitimacy. Nearly everywhere else, the national air force came into being as a beloved child. The British Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe, two well-known examples, are not now and never have been part of their nation's army. But the U.S. Air Force was once known as the Army Air Corps, and when they officially split at the end of World War II the Air Force held a grudge.

I know this because the Air Force takes revenge on Army personnel obligated to spend time in their C-130s and C-141s.

The facts speak for themselves. A typical USAF plane is a swept-wing, shiny-silver, proud-and-standing-tall streamlined bullet with the U.S. insignia proudly emblazoned in bright red, white and blue on every available wing and tail surface. And these very same planes are what soldiers get to ride in as paratroopers or for deployment overseas, right?

Wrong. The airborne trooper is directed around the corner of the hangar to a vintage model C-130. The C-130 is best described as a dull black-green vulture-mobile with wings that hang down like a vampire bat's. Most of the time all the insignia are painted out and the windows are blacked over. Now Army personnel do not go up any sort of gangway/steps to a door just behind the cabin where they're greeted by a smiling stewardess. No, the reluctant Army hero trudges along with all the paraphernalia of an equipment jump to the back of the plane, inhaling kerosene fumes from the turbine engines, and walks up a ramp directly into the guts of the plane.

"Just like marching back into the womb," a jumpmaster once said to me. How reassuring, I thought.

Except even wombs are pretty much sealed, kind of like how the Air Force seals up its control cables, piping and ductwork in the cabin of their 727s and similar aircraft with paneling just like in any commercial airliner. Not so in C-130 or C-141 aircraft.

We're talking basic transportation here. The grunt whose horoscope just told him to avoid air travel gets to sit in one of these beauties watching myriad cables moving back and forth overhead, and listens to a

mechanical symphony of screeching motors, solenoids, pneumatic connections and gear-drives.

On the plus side, though, there is less chance that the Air Force will lose your luggage — such as it is. All duffel bags, ALICE packs, boxes and the like are strapped onto the huge rear door everybody just walked through. Groaning gears crank all that weight up till it shuts. Now the more timid are left wondering how much additional weight it would take for the door to fall open again, sucking everybody out into the sunshine.

If that's not enough to start a pucker-factor count, the gospel truth among Army enlisted men that the following conversation goes on between the pilot and the loadmaster:

"Pilot to loadmaster."

"Loadmaster."

"Hey, Jones, who we got back there?"

"Army enlisted men, sir."

"Really? Good. I had a rough night at the O club."

The commissioned pilot, with his \$20 million Air Force Academy education, then turns on the automatic pilot and goes to sleep.

An automatic pilot, far from being an electronic marvel that flies the plane, is in the case of the C-141 model a dumb thing that notes the position of the tail. I have a sneaking suspicion that it's just a slow-moving gear that periodically changes the tail and rudder positions to make it look like it's doing something intelligent.

As the plane wallows through the air, the tail sinks lower and lower until "Click!", the automatic pilot notes a sunken tail! "Click! Wheeeee! Click!" The elevators automatically drop, pulling the tail up level, then "Click!", they straighten out again after which the automatic pilot leans against the wall and lights up a Salem.

A few moments later, the tail begins to settle down again. "Click! Click! Wheeeeeeeeeee! Click!" The rear end of the plane again floats back up to something like level.

A few moments later, the same thing happens again. "Click! Wheeeee! Click!" And the plane flies through the air like a porpoise jumping through hoops at Sea World. This on a day with no wind.

Five minutes later you dare not look at your buddy. Guys start swallowing Dra-

mamine tablets like Tic Tacs, and inevitably, a few reach for the eternal sign of the paratrooper: a barf-bag.

Clammy-faced and praying to make it to the drop zone, everybody is careful not to look around because it's all over if you happen to be looking at your buddy when he loses it. The Army contingent gets sicker and sicker, the plane dives, climbs and dives again, and the pilot is apparently still examining the inside of his eyelids.

Pretty soon some poor devil loses his lunch, and it doesn't matter where he is — he makes *that sound*, and your stomach immediately gives 30-second notice.

When the jumpmaster finally calls "Get Ready!", every man in line is prepared to pay money for the privilege of jumping out of that plane. The reason someone came up with the idea of a jump order is to stop troops from fighting to get out the door first.

I've heard men state solemnly that they'd jump out of the plane without a parachute just to exit that vomitorium. To have a stick of paratroopers jump early is not uncommon; I've never heard of a stick jumping late.

I don't know what the Army did to the Air Force to cause this feud, but the Army is losing. I'm only hoping that one day I get an Air Force dude in my APC; he's gonna wish he'd never been born. Unfortunately the odds are much better that he's gonna get me in his jump aircraft, and I am going to be considering suicide again.

I think the only way to make the Air Force give us Army guys decent planes is to make the plane's crew jump with the paras.

But then what would happen to the plane?

Why not let the automatic pilot take the SOB back and land it!

As a reminder, SOF readers are invited to submit original manuscripts for Parting Shot, on any topic appropriate to Soldier of Fortune Magazine. Original black & white photos are welcome, too. If you want to take a shot at writing for Parting Shot, submit your 1,300 word manuscript to SOF, ATTN: Editorial/Parting Shot, P.O. Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. Payment will be based upon current rates, and manuscripts accepted are subject to editing and revision as deemed necessary by our editorial staff.

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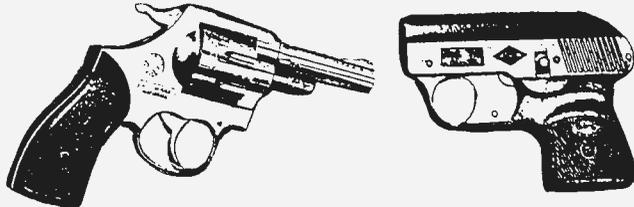
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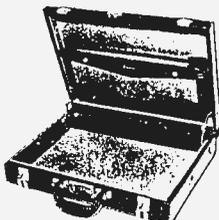
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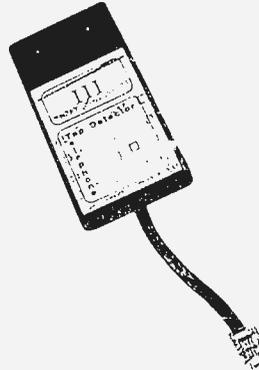


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