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On the Cover

British Parachute Regiment (and other U.K. forces) have prevented the collapse of the pathetic U.N. peacekeeping effort — in addition to pulling-off an heroic SpecOps rescue of Brit hostages. See page 54.

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1903 Springfield by Clint Smith

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FOREVER FIGHTING IN THE PHILIPPINES

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by Col. Mike Peck (Ret.)

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by John J. Culbertson

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COMMAND GUIDANCE

by David H. Hackworth

Know-It-Alls Never Learn

There's a striking and alarming parallel between the *U.S.S. Cole* catastrophe — which took 17 sailors' lives and zeroed out a billion-dollar warship — and one that occurred seven years ago to our force in Somalia, where 18 American soldiers died. No one at the top seems to have learned much from Somalia, which happened at the beginning of President Clinton's term. Now, days before the election, he and his gang of national security know-it-alls have made the same mistakes again in Yemen.

In both instances, at the highest level — the White House, State Department, Pentagon, Intelligence Community and Central Command — the civilian and uniformed bureaucrats screwed-up big-time.

Simply stated, the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing, basic security measures were ignored, and people died. No one played from the same sheet of music, and the final tune — "Taps" — was not a happy sound to the loved ones of the fallen or to many concerned citizens.

In Somalia, while State was into getting out of that war-ravaged land, the Pentagon jumped in with all guns blazing. Sheriff Wyatt Clinton had impulsively changed the mission from feeding to fighting by ordering the Rangers to nail a two-bit gang leader.

When Army Gen. Thomas Montgomery asked for tanks to protect his forces in Mogadishu, his request was denied — since we supposedly were on our way out. General Montgomery went-along-to-get-along; then-Ranger task-force leader Gen. William Garrison set so clear a pattern for his opponent while conducting seven identical raids that he might as well have had the Rangers flashing "here we come" in neon. So once the rebel trap slammed shut, there was no U.S. armor waiting in the wings.

Like our Rangers in Somalia, our sailors on the *Cole* were fed into the fire like a gas-soaked log — even though Intelligence had warned of an attack on a U.S. warship and State had closed its embassies in the region because of a danger alert just days before the *Cole* arrived.

Central Command not only ignored these reports — never upgrading its threat level (re: the Port of Aden) from green to red as it shot up the thermostat — it failed to conduct basic security checks of harbor workers in Aden.

Had the *Cole's* skipper known the risk, surely he'd have taken security precautions to identify and destroy any terrorist craft before it closed within a thousand yards of his ship!

Now Navy brass and their spinners are making more story revisions concerning the *Cole* than the Oval Office defenders made during the Siege of Monica.

First they said the attack occurred at 12:20 p.m.; a week later this was revised to 11:18 a.m. Next they said the *Cole* was mooring when attacked. Now word is the ship was tied-up at the refueling dock for more than two hours. Right after the incident, the party line was that the suicide craft was part of the harbor-boat operation and that the terrorists had used the mooring as a ruse to mask their attack. Why the sudden switch in stories? Was the *Cole's* security detail asleep at the switch?

Navy boss Adm. Vern Clark initially said the ship went to Aden to be refueled. Now the Navy's admitting the *Cole* had 240,000 gallons of fuel aboard when it arrived at Aden, enough to make it to low-risk Oman — one of the world's biggest gas stations — with at least a quarter-tank to spare.

Why would the Navy take such a high risk in such a dangerous port only to top-off and pick up some fresh vegetables, an exercise that included notifying every vendor — and all their terrorist cousins and brothers — of the ship's arrival?

Navy insiders say with bitterness that the *Cole* sailed into Aden to win the hearts and minds of the Yemeni brass because the State Department sees it as a strategic asset. But the folks at State were hunkered down, bunker-safe at the very time our sailors were being blown to kingdom come.

The new administration must give learning from the past maximum priority. ☒

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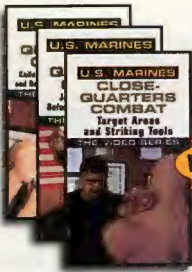
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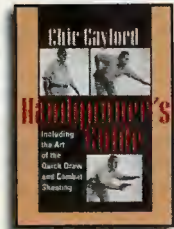
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with **MSgt. Ronald Donvito (Ret.)**

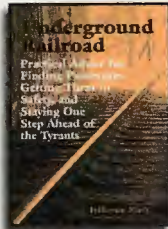
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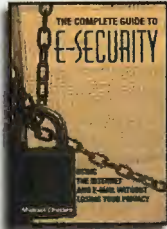
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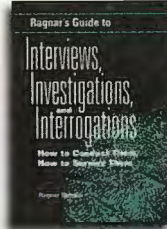
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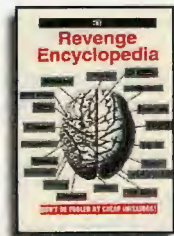
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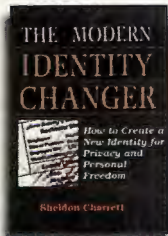
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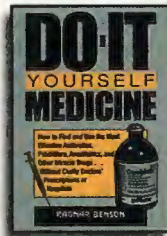
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firearms they possess or own; it might even impose a \$50 tax and your fingerprints. Couched as an amendment to the Internal Revenue Act of 1986, SB-2099 could be passed by the Senate Finance Committee without a full vote of the Senate. Although they are not on the Finance Committee, the bill is cosponsored by two of the usual suspects, Lautenberg and Schumer.

Check this one out! Log on to the U.S. Senate homepage: <http://www.senate.gov/>. and find the bill by searching for the Bill number (SB-2099). Read the whole thing, and once you've overcome your outrage sufficiently to write a reasoned and polite letter, write every one of your elected representatives (that would be two senators and one representative) and express your outrage at this cowardly attempt to disarm the American people without having the honor to at least put the proposal before your elected representatives.

Perusing the bill, you will no doubt note that the sponsors want

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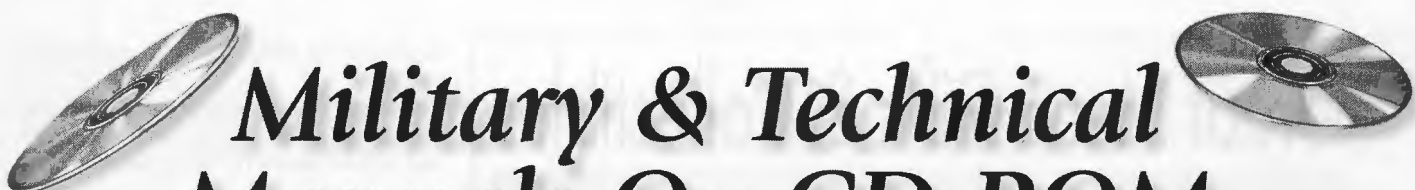
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to identify all those "likely to commit gun crimes."

And, of course, in the eyes of those who sponsor this bill, "those likely to commit gun crimes" are every citizen who has a gun.

Chase A Blow-Hard

In the event you can still stand some wind after this last election, here's a line on some excitement for those who think they'd like to chase tornadoes, but never knew who to ask: Storm Chasing Adventure Tours, Inc., guided by Todd Thom, is now signing up people for its storm-chasing expeditions in Tornado Alley for Spring 2001.

There are slots open for 12 guests, who will start out either in Denver or Oklahoma City and travel through the Tornado Alley states of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, the Dakotas, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. A skilled team educates and guides the guest adrenaline junkies on a 12-day hands-on trek using state-of-the art technology to pursue twisters. For further info check out their web site at <http://www.stormchasing.com>; or phone: 303-888-8629.

Springfield Armory Boosts NRA

Springfield Armory, "the oldest name in American firearms," has announced a new program wherein with every purchase of a Springfield Armory M1A .308 rifle, they will provide a one-year membership in the NRA. The membership may be used by the purchaser, or if he is already a member, given to a friend or relative. Noted Dennis Reese, Springfield Armory co-chairman, "the important thing is to give someone who is not already an NRA member the opportunity to become involved in the organization doing the most to protect our Second Amendment rights."

In the past year, NRA membership has soared to a record 4-million-plus members. For more information on the M1A/NRA promotion and the complete line of Springfield products, contact your local Springfield dealer or Springfield, Inc., 420 W. Main St., Geneseo, IL 61254; phone: 309-944-5631; or visit their website: springfieldarmory.com.

Spice Islands Getting Hot

Thousands of people have died in fighting in the Spice Islands, far east of Jakarta, Indonesia, since the first of 1999, and Australian papers quote officials as saying that thousands of Islamic *jihād* fighters are pouring into the island of Ambon from east Java and other parts of Indonesia.

Members of the radical Ahlus-Sunnah Wa Jama'ah Forum have been boarding commercial transport to the area, unfettered by police as they are not at that point armed. Ambon's regional military chief Brigadier

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General Tamaela told his troops were powerless to act unless the fighters caused trouble. "We could not prevent their arrival, but if they behave negatively they will have to deal with security officials," he said. Earlier, when they left Surabaya, police stood by as the men boarded ferry boats, saying they could not stop them because the men were not armed. A police spokesman there told Reuters that, "we know that they will get weapons at Makassar port [Sulawesi], where they will continue the trip by traditional boats."

there is no clear-cut national policy, nor interest, which makes their loss a sacrifice without purpose.

Meanwhile, Internet newshawk Matt Drudge released portions of a U.S. State Department memo to Voice of America's Office of Policy, disapproving an editorial broadcast titled "Terrorism Will Fail," condemning the attack on the *U.S.S. Cole*. The State memo told VOA that, "the 17 or so dead sailors does not compare to the 100+ Palestinians who have died in recent weeks where we have remained silent." The memo was signed by Swadia Sarkis, Interagency Coordinator at the Department of State.

— Richard Rongstad

Knife Control Is Next

Toronto Detective Sergeant Ken Doyle said evidence and witness comments indicate that the knife attacks on classmates by a 15-year-old Toronto high-schooler were linked to the anniversary of the 20 April 1999 Columbine killings in Colorado. The stabbings occurred during lunch break. Five students received puncture wounds, and were released from the hospital the same day.

Sensitive Over Casualties? Not The State Department ...

According to Raphael Perl, an international affairs specialist for the Congressional Research Service, U.S. squeamishness about military casualties may be weakening the U.S. ability to be a leader in international affairs. Speaking before a congressional hearing, Perl noted that the country has learned to live with 40,000 traffic deaths and 17,000 murders a year, but that "in other instances even a small number of casualties have major policy consequences. For example when 18 U.S. Army Rangers in Somalia were killed, we pulled out, creating what some critics see as a poor precedent and a damaging image for U.S. foreign policy."

To which we would note that our troops are prepared every day to lay it on the line for their country, but the enthusiasm wanes when

Rating The Commander In Chief

An ongoing poll at About.com (<http://usmilitary.about.com/>) is giving Bill Clinton a resounding "F" grade after eight years as Commander-in-Chief. The "F" grade was "Failed completely as Commander-in-Chief" in response to the query, "How Would You Grade President Clinton on his Performance as Commander-in-Chief?"

Can't Buy Love

With a long history of neutrality, the Swedes aren't saying much, but reports have surfaced that Slick Willie's last desperate attempts at fabricating a legacy other than as a liar, lecher and all-around outlaw included the engagement of a Stockholm law firm to lobby for his nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Little "Green" Pills

The U.S. Army Operations Support Command has awarded Alliant Techsystems (ATK) a \$13.5 million contract to produce

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In various branches of the Specops community and within deployed NATO troops.

CAN THE PUBLIC ACCESS SCARS?

Yes, it was declassified in part and exposed to the public in 1993, under the name Hostile Control for non-lethal use. It was later combined with more lethal information under the name of SCARS IQS.

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“Drag A \$20 Bill Through The Lincoln Bedroom”

So why is “birds of a feather” news? The Senate Campaign of Rep. Rick Lazio claims that one of the White House guests was the former owner of a Chicago strip joint, The Doll House. According to reports, Jim Levin donated \$5K to Hillary’s New York Senate campaign committee last New Year’s Eve, when he was a guest at the White House party to celebrate the new Millennium. According to the *Chicago Sun Times*, Levin has been an overnigher in the Lincoln bedroom and now serves as finance director for Hillary Clinton’s senate campaign, as well as a board member of Bill Clinton’s proposed [adult] library in Little Rock. Asked Lazio spokesperson Mollie Fullington, “We’re curious as to whether Jim Levin’s contribution came in the form of folded dollar bills?”

Rising Sun

Article 9 of Japan’s present constitution decrees that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes,” but public opinion is wavering since the end of the Cold War. Faced with oil embargoes, blockades and missile threats from North Korea and China, public attitudes in resource-poor Japan are changing and there is talk of a constitutional amendment to remove the constraints of Article 9. Japan’s flag and national anthem are now being considered for legal protection more than tradition, because of perceived indifference and lack of respect as the Japanese seek to halt a drift in national identity. One Tokyo professor is calling for a “More Asian Asia,” recalling Japan’s expansionist policy of the “Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” to justify World War II conquests.

— Richard Rongstad

lead-free 5.56mm training ammo as part of the Army’s initiative to change to “green ammunition” in the 21st century. With cores made of tungsten-tin or tungsten-nylon, the rounds, developed by Picatinny Arsenal, are said to reduce “the environmental effects of firing-range operations.” The contract is expected to generate \$1 billion in sales over 10 years and initial production will be at the Lake City Army Ammunition plant in Independence, Missouri. Average annual production of 5.56mm, 7.62mm, .30 caliber and .50 caliber ammunition at the plant is expected to average more than 450 million rounds. ATK has been an Army supplier for more than 60 years, and approximately one-third of its annual sales were to the Army. In addition to small and large-caliber ammo, ATK produces OICW, anti-tank and anti-personnel barrier systems, plus mortar and artillery fuses.

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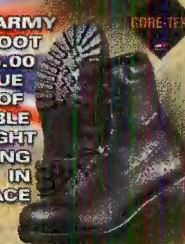
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Austria Reconsiders Neutrality

Officially a neutral state for more than 50 years, Austria is revising its military doctrine, with a view toward ending its neutrality and moving closer to the European Union's developing military policy — and including a possible application to join NATO in four years. Said Peter Moser, Austrian ambassador to the United States, "This is a historic opportunity. The reality is that neutrality is no longer possible and Austrian isolationism no longer acceptable."

Although NATO membership would require reversal of Austria's 45-year-old Federal Constitutional Law on the Neutrality of Austria, popular support appears to be heading in that direction. It would require a two-thirds majority in parliament to repeal the neutrality statutes, but this is more and more being perceived as inevitable by the Austrian defense and foreign policy wonks. Noted Austrian Foreign Minister Bennito Ferro-Werner as keynote speaker at a European defense and foreign policy conference in Germany, "the reasons for Austria's neutrality have always been to serve Austrian interest and security ... Today, those needs will be best served by full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic security structures."

Coffee Grower Seeks Private Army

An Aussie coffee grower with a plantation in the Papua New Guinea highlands has proposed an elite airmobile brigade to crush tribal fighting and criminal gangs. Mr. Rich Hagan, chairman of the Coffee Plantations and Processors Association, Inc., made the proposal in a full-page ad in the *Port-Courier* newspaper.

Hagan called on growers, private enterprise and aid donors such as Australia to help fund a 300-man armed strike force and a squadron of seven "surplus" Hueys. Tribal fights with modern weapons and criminal gangs specializing in highway robbery are endemic in many parts of the highlands.

Hagan noted that "the almost total collapse of the plantation and block-holder sector throughout the highlands is almost complete" as anarchy reigns. He went on to say that coffee and tea plantations were closing down as profits "were swallowed up in security costs, police camping allowances, legal fees and stolen crop losses."

"Increasingly, in the committing of crime, the fear of arrest or paying the price of justice has almost disappeared ... in the eyes of the majority, Western laws and its court system are now regarded as almost irrelevant. The under-funded, over-loaded law enforcement agencies have resulted in such a time lag between crime commitment and uncertainty of punishment as to make the law of little effect ..."

In addition to private funding of the reserve police forces to active status, the Association proposed the creation of a "highly selected, elite force of about 300 men whose small size can only be effective as a highly mobile helicopter-borne strike force ... This initiative could only be funded through aid donor sources."

Emphasizing he was not proposing more "Sandline mercenaries like Bougainville and dropping people into the sea [sic]," he noted that "almost all other countries have such hit squads as an essential police back-up and for national security reasons."

Speaking Of Hueys ...

War Story, Jim Morris' classic Vietnam memoir (three chapters of which ran in *SOF*) is coming out again in paperback by St. Martin's Press, and should be on bookshelves when you read this. In its 1986 review, *SOF* called it a "gut slammer." Former SOG commander, retired Major General Jack Singlaub said, "If you want to know how it really was in the Special Forces in Vietnam, this is the book to read."

"Reads like the best fiction, and yet every word of it is true," noted Jim Pollack of Mission MIA fame. "No other book gives the feel of what it was like to be a Green Beret in Vietnam like *War Story* does," says *SOF*'s Colonel Bob Brown. The book will retail for \$6.99, \$8.99 in Canada. Ask for it at bookstores everywhere. ✕

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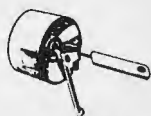
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Cold Steel's Recon Scout

Here's a rock-solid, flat-ground 7-1/2" carbon steel blade with the heft for chopping and the radiused belly suitable for dressing game: All-around field knives don't come any better. It also features a sharpenable false edge, thick and strong hilt, textured "live" Kraton grip over a solid tang for nearly absolute control, a generous brass-grommeted lanyard hole, and a genuine leather sheath: Anything else on a tactical knife just might get in the way. In short, Cold Steel's Recon Scout is pure function — everything you want on a knife and nothing you don't. The continuously flat-ground blade is 5/16" at the top, giving the tool the weight for serious chopping and follow-through on slashing strokes.

This American-made knife comes with a baked-on epoxy powder coating, to protect the Carbon V blade from rust. As a classic knife is the simplest of tools, we can't imagine one in use that would get rusted to the point this would influence function, but the black coating is tough as nails, and its non-reflective properties are appropriate for a tactical knife. The sharpened edge comes with a light coating of grease to prevent rust. We have found water-pump grease (as used on the old piston-type water pumps), or beeswax to serve best to keep carbon steel tools from rusting in wet environs.

This is a serious knife of classic simplicity and great strength that will not let you down over a lifetime of service — and like all Cold Steel cutlery, it represents excellent value for the money. In fact, it could sell for a lot more and still be a very good value, as you will never be sorry you bought quality.

For information on the dealer nearest you, contact Cold Steel, Dept. SOF, 3036A Seaborg Ave., Ventura, CA 93003; phone: 800-255-4716; fax: 805-642-9727.

For Want Of ... Nothing!

Your daddy probably told you the story of the horseshoe nail: For want of the nail the shoe was lost, for want of the shoe the horse was lost, for want of the horse the rider was lost, for want of the rider the battle was lost, etc. Well, there are some new guys on the block getting in some licks at the devil who is in the details.

Best Made Designs is filling a long-needed niche: They design and make accessories that make all that excellent gear out there work perfectly. Their stuff is developed in response to requests from the field, and from what we've seen of it, their gear responds directly to

the problem — this is not bells-and-whistles stuff; it's straightforward gear that efficiently takes care of a specific hindrance. Some of it is mission-specific. Some of it is so universally useful you have to feel guilty for not inventing it yourself. We will be reviewing several of their developments over the next few issues.

Dry-Cell On Board: The handiest things since pockets are the BDU side pockets. Unless they are supposed to be starched and empty for the parade field, they hold a pile of miscellanea. And that's the shortcoming: stuff your mission-essential gear in there and it's in

a pile, or a tangled wad — and wet the first time you hit the prone. So Best Made Designs took care of that problem (it's what they do, you understand) with their Dry-Cell On Board Pocket BDU Cargo Pocket Organizer with waterproof storage. The unit fits neatly into the BDU side pocket, and it is also ALICE clip compatible, or mounts to conventional duty belts. Inside, it has two Splash Caddy super-tough waterproof bags, a mesh divider, and a mini-lanyard with clip for keys or gear. Outside, it has a three-compartment mesh divider and a "snatch-it" handle to quickly remove the whole unit from the BDU pocket. Since the Best Made dudes are detail men, this seemingly simple device has been thought out to the last detail, such as all internal edges are seamed with tape so no ravel jams the zipper; the zipper itself has a jingle-free tab pull. They are made from Dupont Cordura, and available in black and olive.

Emergency and detail gear is only useful if you can put your



Continued on page 21

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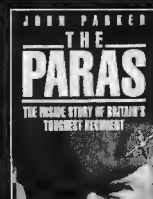
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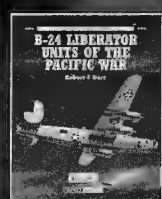
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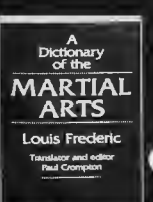
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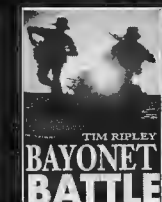
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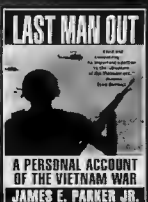
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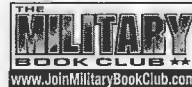
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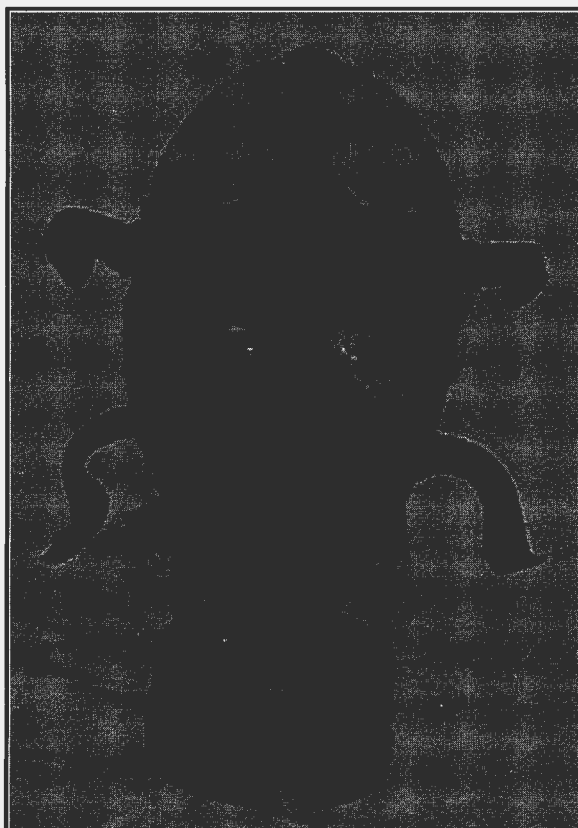
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I Was There

by Ray Pezzoli, Jr.

My Last Interrupted Meal

Crack! The explosion of a bullet fired directly at me from the knot of trees 1,000 yards in front of my location.

Whomp. A fraction of a second later the bullet planted itself into the damp, jelly-like clay under my foot, making it quiver. Vibes dart through my nervous system like a tuning fork.

"I was almost shot that time," my mind screamed as I fell backward from the 3-foot anthill I was leaning against, throwing my C-Ration meal over my head.

It's rude to interrupt a person's meal — "Gimme an airstrike!"

In February 1966 I was accompanying a 1st Infantry Division patrol, about to be deposited at the edge of the "Iron Triangle" next to the Cambodian border. The choppers swung into the landing zone at the beginning of a large field of elephant grass, 17 miles long and 2 miles wide. Goose bumps popped out all over my arms when I noticed our LZ was bordered by the jungles of Cambodia, saturated with North Vietnamese infiltrators waiting inside for us. They had been monitoring our radio transmissions so our patrol received their orders through the chopper pilot's frequency. "Clear this field, spend the night on the opposite end for two days with ambush sites established."

The temperature in this field was hotter than normal because the sun's intensity was amplified by its light reflecting off the pale grass — fortunately, there was a pleasant breeze. This elephant grass was manageable, waist-high but not thick enough to impede movement. We patrolled near the center of the field. If the enemy wanted to attack us from either side, he wouldn't have the protection of the jungle over a mile away.

When you are in the open, in the middle of a field as we were, you get a most conspicuous feeling, like standing naked while the whole world is watching you. We felt lucky, though, this field was punctuated with many medium-sized anthills which provided ideal protection in a gun fight.

By mid-day we hadn't made contact and were preparing to stop for a lunch break. I was third from the point and noticed the man next to me run up to the point. Both stopped, aimed their rifles, then ran forward again. I saw two Vietnamese 500 feet in front of them and realized whom they were chasing. I didn't notice any weapons on them and assumed that is why our men didn't fire. These two Vietnamese disappeared behind clumps of bushes a quarter-mile away.

"Don't have them go chasing those people," the platoon leader called, "they could be setting us up for an ambush."

The two men didn't pursue any

farther and returned to our patrol line.

"This is as good a place as any for our chow. Take an hour. Some of you men get on both sides. Also, keep your eyes open for those two we just saw, they might be VC."

An hour for lunch — what a break. I could take my time preparing something special from the otherwise mundane C-Rations. The closer I could make my life in the boonies compatible with life at home, the better my probability to return sane.

An anthill next to me would be ideal for a table — 3 feet in diameter and flat on top. And, equally important, not many ants.

Canned ham and eggs only tastes marginal if eaten cold in their can. Heated with chopped onions and Tabasco Sauce was a delight. Preparing a C-Ration meal with this attention was a phenomenal treat for me during a patrol. I opened the lid of the can three-quarters of the way, peeled it back, and bent the edges down to form a handle.

I took the crackers and Cheez Whiz out of their can and punctured holes along the bottom edge, creating ventilation for this stove of heat tablets I just created. The ham and eggs were simmering nicely on top of my table while I began preparing the rest of the lunch. Cheez Whiz on crackers soon melts in 130-degree sun, creating imitation pizzas. When we ate on patrol, our sleeves usually sufficed as napkins. Today we had sufficient time, so I dined first class, using C-Ration toilet paper as a napkin.

My canteen water was still refreshingly cool from the night.

There was a grove of trees a thousand yards from me near the middle of the field, with a growth of dense, lush vegetation, like an ocean in the middle of a sea of tan-colored straw.

"How magnificent," I remarked, scanning the area. I held the heated can of ham and eggs next to my nose and sniffed it before taking the first bite. Birds played on top of the anthill next to me, making a few passes overhead, seemingly interested in my meal.

I rested my butt on the edge of this anthill, my right foot cocked against it for side stability, the first spoonful was on the way to my mouth.



A shower before dinner. Two of the author's buddies spruce-up prior to C-Ration cuisine.

Crack! I was shocked by the sound of a bullet fired directly at me from the grove of trees in front.

Whomp, a fraction of a second later the bullet splattered in the damp, jelly-like clay under my foot, causing it to quiver.

"Yelloww!" I bellowed as I fell backward, tossing both hands and the lunch over my head. My feet lifted up, continuing over my head, causing me to reverse somersault off the anthill.

I fruitlessly fired a whole magazine at the spot in the trees I had heard the bullet fired from, realizing my bullets would be accurate only half of that distance.

Regardless, this display of firepower made me feel better.

"Pezzoli," the RTO called, "the company CO heard the shooting and wants to know what it's all about."

"Give me that thing!"

"What am I doing? I'm shooting! Someone tried to kill me and upset my meal, that's what I'm doing."

"We've got a gunship in the air, do you want an airstrike?"

"Of course I want an airstrike!"

"Flick on that frequency, RTO!"

I identified myself — the chopper was aware of our location "Duchess 3, will be there in five."

"Roger, your target is at the southeast corner of that clump of trees — we're a thousand meters East."

Woomp, woomp, woomp, clack, clack, clack, I could almost immediately hear the tell-tale sounds of the blades. Then I saw it, a black speck in the bright blue sky, barely visible above this vast brown field of weaving grass. At first it appeared to be suspended in the sky like a mobile. When it neared me, the shape became distinctive and I could discern its movement along the sky.

This chopper was a Cobra with two rocket pods, each housing 12 rockets with a 7.62mm Gatling gun on each side, capable of firing five rounds a second.

I radioed the chopper, advising the pilot of his proximity to the target.

The crew maneuvered around the back side of this grove to spoil the VC's opportunity for a lucky shot. By the time they aligned with the target, they were 3,000 yards away, completely outside of rifle range.

"This is Duchess 3, you have the right altitude. Over left more, another hundred East," said while Jockeying the chopper like a little boy playing a video war game.

"How's this, Duchess?"

"Looks pretty good. Try one!"

One rocket was fired — the contrail marked its path, exploding above the mark. I could still see the exact spot in the grove from where that bullet was fired at me.

"Down a hundred, left two hundred."

The next rocket was fired, exactly a hundred down and two left of the first.

"Bingo, you've got it, fire for effect!"

The remaining 22 rockets and many hundreds of 7.62mm rounds were fired. After the smoke cleared I noticed all the vegetation in that spot was completely dissolved; every single thing completely obliterated. The only thing added was a big black hole in the vegetation.

"Good shooting, guys! I guarantee you got them. I'm so sure of this I'm not even going out there to confirm it. Go back to your base and clean that magnificent piece of equipment, I might need to use it again. Incidentally, have a couple of cool ones, on me."

"Thank you, soldier, glad we could help."

I pulled another can of rations out of my pack and began to rapidly prepare it before we moved out.

"OK, saddle-up!"

"Damn."

Whenever people disturb me when I am eating now, I become agitated and remind them that the last time a person disturbed my meal, I had them dissolved by an airstrike in Vietnam.

Ray Pezzoli, Jr. resides in California. ✕

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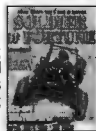
#246 APRIL 98

AFRICA: American black ops; **WEAPONS:** happy 50th birthday to the AK; Kimber's neoclassic 45; **MIDDLE EAST:** Hebron's Apache platoon; "Balkanization" of Lebanon; **TACTICS:** sniping in the year 2000

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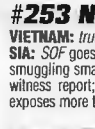
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FLAK

Vietnam War Unwinnable?



I've worked with John Plaster and respect his views, but I have to comment on his contention that "The Vietnam War, even Hanoi's strategists know, could have been won by the United States."

How, exactly, does one define "winning" that war? In military terms, winning generally means destroying the enemy's means and will to resist — neither objective achieved by the United States from our first tentative steps in 1950 until the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

Leaving aside 2,000 years of Vietnamese resistance to Chinese invaders, many Vietnamese fought against French colonialism since 1885; under Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese Communist Party followed in succession by the Indochinese Communist Party and Viet Minh, they fought against the French during the 1930s, the Vichyite French colonial government during World War II, Japanese invaders, and the returning French army from 1946-1954. If the answer was so simple as to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail, how did the Vietnamese defeat the French who ostensibly controlled not only Vietnam, but Laos and Cambodia as well? If Westmoreland's plan was to create an "impassable DMZ" by driving into Laos, how long would it have taken Giap to find an alternative route? For that matter, just how long did Westmoreland plan to leave his divisions sitting in Laos? Given Westy's strategy, isn't it likely they would have started offensive operations, thus extending lines of supply, communication, and control and therefore extending the theater of operations?

To my understanding, the object of the exercise was to create a free and democratic South Vietnam, nation-building as Eisenhower and Dulles termed it. That demanded a concerted hearts-and-minds campaign in the South as envisioned by John Paul Vann and many others, one which Diem and his revolving-door successors never clearly understood much less implemented. Recently Oliver North told me that the Vietnam War was a civil war, one in which we should not have fought. In his "Sound Off" column in the same August issue, David Hackworth wrote that Vietnam was a "war we had no business fighting."

I believe I understand why five U.S. presidents committed us to Vietnam, but I

cannot understand how, as John [Plaster] wrote, the war "could have been won by the United States." I don't believe we could have defeated Vietnamese patriotism and nationalism through force of arms; we were, after all, just another in a long series of foreign invaders that few Vietnamese, northern or southern, welcomed. Regardless of how one views historical counterfactuals, I cannot perceive a scenario wherein the United States could feasibly destroy the enemy's means and will to resist. At best case, a "successful" invasion of North Vietnam resulting in capitulation, who would enforce the ensuing "peace"? At what point would the U.S. Army of Occupation — and that's what it would have become — decide the daily body count from snipers, ambushes, mines, and boobytraps was simply not worth the price of occupation? And how long would the Vietnamese people, the international community, the United States government, and the American public countenance a permanent U.S. "peacekeeping" force in Southeast Asia?

I know it's extremely difficult for those of us who fought in Vietnam to face up to the unpleasant reality of that war: we could not win it, at least in the military sense, which makes the 58,000+ deaths of our friends and comrades a memory almost too painful to bear. Twenty-five years later we can look back and say we could have or should have done this or that, but I contend that Harry Truman should have at least responded to Ho Chi Minh's numerous overtures of friendship sent in 1945 and 1946. Yes, Ho was a communist, but first and foremost he was a Vietnamese patriot. Cold War considerations prompted Truman to support the French, and what we got was George Herring's America's Longest War instead of a nonaligned communist country reminiscent of Tito's Yugoslavia. We bore Kennedy's burden and paid the price, and I don't think it was worth it.

John Coleman
University of California, Santa Barbara

Former SOF Managing Editor John Coleman was awarded (among others) the Bronze Star and Purple Heart for service in Vietnam, and was awarded various honors and a good number of 7.62mm bullet holes in Rhodesia: In both instances he had risked his own neck to save a wounded comrade, so loyalty is not an issue here. He subsequently came down with cancer associated with

exposure to Agent Orange, and at no time during the extensive chemotherapy did we ever hear him snivel or express regret for having volunteered to serve his country. So agree or not, you can take Coleman's reasoned comments as straight from the heart. He is now pursuing doctoral work on U.S. involvement in Vietnam since 1943, and has assisted teaching the Vietnam Wars course at UC Santa Barbara for the past three years.

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Is SOF available in the UK? Oh, and by the way I congratulate you on your principles. If only you could do something to help the pitiful gun laws in the UK.

Martin, via E-mail

Yes, SOF is available in the UK from various news agents. You also can save some money with a yearly subscription, which costs \$29.95, plus \$21 international postage. You can order by credit card by calling 1-815-734-4151, or by mail to Soldier Of Fortune, P.O. Box 348, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-9817, USA. We sympathize with the plight of law-abiding British gun owners, but it's not our place to meddle in our cousin's politics (as long as they don't meddle in ours).

The Karen Fight On

In your magazine you have reported about the Karen National Liberation Army for years, and you had very interesting reports, but in the last years you quit reporting about this issue that is very interesting to your readers. I'm asking you to report about the KNLA, the KNU and the

“Fighting vicious Chicago mobsters was nothing compared to dealing with certain members of Congress!”

—David P. Schippers, former Chief Counsel, House Judiciary Committee



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Karen God's Army, and even to send a permanent reporter to Mae Sot, Thailand, that will send new reports every month. Rob Krott was great with his report. You should launch a campaign in help and support of the Karens, to cause the U.S. Government to support the Karens and the KNLA because big clashes and genocide is going on over there. Thank you.

Joe W.
via E-mail

Please note an article by Doug Bandow in *American Spectator* (July/August) about the plight of the Karen in Burma. You brought them to my eyes in the 1980s. Thought you might like to know. They are still there. General Bo Mya is still in charge.

David Shoup
via E-mail

season in a long time, lots of homes and property were destroyed nationwide due to multiples of conditions. I work in Fire, for the Gov., and prior military. I had the opportunity to work with the Burn Boss that was in charge of the Prescribed Burn, they did a similar burn last year in the same area and took extra steps on the burn this year, more man power, and more fire equipment. He did everything he was supposed to do and more, but like a lot of things, shit happens, nobody could have predicted a wind change like they got, and let me tell you wind and fire do whatever in the hell they want to do, and when they want to. A lot of good people, Gov. and Civ., got the shit end of the stick on this one, and you don't know what the hell you are talking about on this one, you don't know those people and you don't care either. I know them and I know fire and I care, take some advice, stick to the gun issues, you're much better there. Thank you.

Bubba
via E-mail

Bubba, 'fraid we're going to have to disagree with you on this one. As we write this, there is an out-of-control forest fire burning within sight of the office — one of several this year within sight — so we are well aware this has been a bad year for fires — and an especially poor year for "prescribed" burns (what we used to call controlled burns, before the goatspeak got more officious). I came from a

Forest Service family, and assuming you're somewhere in your 40s, this writer was on a suppression crew dry-mopping fires with a hazel hoe and shovel in the deep woods before you were born, and in this instance we do know what we're talking about. "Nobody could have predicted a wind change," you say? The operative word in "controlled burn" is controlled: You don't try to "predict" what will happen, you assume the worst case scenario and damn well prepare for it — you don't just call it "prescribed" as if some Divinely inspired body had ordered it then proceed in the face of reason. And if those who set this fire were just dedicated civil servants who did "everything he was supposed to do," then we submit that the SOP needs to be rewritten by someone with a little more common sense and a lot more caution. "Shit end of the stick" you say? Those who got the wrong end of the stick were those who lost their homes through human error not their own. Those who defy common sense and caution — and Mother Nature — secure in the idea they have done "everything they are supposed to do" will be the death of this country. Following "the book" is like "following orders." When it's reckless, it's reckless. When it's wrong, it's wrong. And, like Waco, where the men on the ground were sure they had done everything they were supposed to, it's usually the innocents who suffer. Your loyalty is admirable, but when a friend of mine screws up, he's still my friend — but he still screwed up.

Either "Controlled" Or Not



For the most part, keep up the good work. I would like to tell you that you did some injustice in the Sept. 2000 issue, Bulletin Board, "Los Alamos Official Resigns" article. As I hope you noticed this has been the worst fire

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1975-2000, Lebanese Christians Remember



Twenty-five years is a long period in a world of struggle against tyranny and oppression. You accomplished a lot, and this is obvious (but not for the blind, of course). Your magazine is, by itself, a monthly relief for some people and an endless nightmare for a lot of others, who by the way, may not deserve to be among the living mankind.

By pure chance, or maybe good luck, our last struggle, through history, began in 1975, the year of your birth. Unfortunately, our situation is worsening since 1990, when all weapons were gathered from "all factions and fighters," but was effectively drawn from only the free side of this war — [those opposed to] Syrians, leftists, communists, fanatic Muslims and terrorist groups; the people who never let go of their freedom in all its sides and views, despite the wrongs that were committed during those days.

One thing you should remember, my friends, the Lebanese Forces are still present through our whole community and in each of our hearts and minds. Our leader, Samir Geagea, finished his sixth year in a cell two stories underground, under the Ministry of

Defense in Yarze, on 14 April 2000.

We, the Free Christians of Lebanon, also say: "In God We Trust," you'd better remember that.

Thank you (For the Old Days)
(name withheld)
Beirut, Lebanon

The Warrior's Journal

There is absolutely no question in my mind that *SOF* is the premier warrior's journal. Each month you seem to have new bits of information from hotspots which the mainstream media have long since disregarded. If other news agencies were half as diligent in their reporting practice as *SOF*, there would be a very different public opinion of the world picture.

SOF is my only reliable source of news abroad, and domestically, as there are many informative articles on U.S. law enforcement and domestic policy. The LE articles are of particular interest to me as I am a policeman in a large eastern metro area. I would love to see articles dealing with patrol, and the increased role that we are being expected to play in first response to critical incidents. Your reporting on the Columbine incident was a great piece, as was your report on the LA shootout featured in 1997.

I have always respected the brutally honest, no BS journalism in *SOF* from when I

was a junior high kid, through my eight years in the Army, to now as a cop. I had the opportunity to meet LTC Brown as a snot-nosed 13-year old at your Boulder office — he gave me an autographed 10th Anniversary poster, a CATT t-shirt, and the *SOF* book, which had just been published. Still have them.

W.R.F.
Northern Virginia

Genuine Phony



I was late buying *SOF* this month, but got a call last night from a friend saying "someone" had written about a phony SF person in our unit. When I purchased the 25th Anniversary Issue, there was my letter in its entirety. Just an update: He was found guilty (or whatever they call it) and was reduced one grade to SFC and his resignation was accepted.... Should I head on down to the PX and buy my green beret now? OK, maybe just some CPT rank. He even showed up in BDUs wearing SFC rank, to pick up his shit — a week after his discharge! What a Clinton-like disgrace. Job well done. Thank you!

Anonymous
via E-mail ✉

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WORLD SITREP

1 UNITED STATES

Another Terrorist Attack Claims American lives: *U.S.S. Cole* is rocked by terrorist explosion while anchored in industrial harbor in Aden, Yemen, killing 17 U.S. Navy personnel and wounding 39. Investigators allegedly locate bomb-making equipment in a house 20 miles away. Blast is cordoned-off by FBI agents. Estimated 1,000 pounds of explosives used in attack. Some question why *U.S.S. Cole* was approved for port visit in Aden in the first place. Djibouti, a completely safe harbor, is only 150 miles away. Port Threat Assessments (it's uncertain whether any threats were received) are under jurisdiction of Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). • **The More The Merrier:** Currently, U.S. Army has 30,900 soldiers deployed in 83 nations. Also, additional 124,618 troops are forward-stationed in 106 countries. • **Additive Found:** Traces of squalene, additive used to foster longer protective reaction, have been found in anthrax vaccine used by U.S. military. Thus far undiagnosed disorders might be related to the antibodies linked to squalene. • **Colombian Oil:** V.P. Al Gore reportedly was lobbied by Occidental Petroleum, holder of Colombia's second-largest field, for \$1.6 billion to protect its oil pipeline, the target of guerrillas. • **All Among Friends:** *The Washington Times* reports that senior Chinese military officials were shown sensitive data pertaining to joint war-fighting operations. • **Whitewater Dammed:** Independent Counsel Robert Ray fails to find credible evidence to charge Clintons with illegalities. • **Taxpayer Schmucks:** Charles Smith in *WorldNetDaily* reports, "Oil ministers from OPEC nations have quietly told national security advisors on Capitol Hill that the oil production cutbacks — and resulting price increases — are being implemented at the request of the Clinton administration on behalf of Russia, Indonesia, Mexico and Iran. Russia, Mexico and Indonesia are reported to be directing their increased oil profits toward paying back overdue Western loans."

4

CHINA

Naval Expansion: Ambitious "blue-water" naval plan on drawing board which could deploy Chinese troops as far as Philippines, Australia and U.S. by 2040. *NewsMax.com* reports that Taiwanese National Defense University lecturer, Colonel Jen Yi-ming, states, "China's intensive military buildup in recent years is certainly not targeted only at Taiwan. China's real target is the U.S." • **A Bitter Dish Of Karma:** General Ji Sheng-de, former military intelligence director and a player in 1996 Clinton-Gore campaign finance scandal, might receive death sentence for his participation in high-level internal corruption. • **Nepalese Incursions:** Instability reigns along China-India border as Maoists continue assaults on Nepalese police stations, actions which are thrusting Nepal closer to India.

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ENGLAND

Target Of Targets: A "small missile" hits eighth floor of M16 headquarters in Vauxhall Cross. No casualties were initially reported. Dissident IRA groups not ruled out as possible perpetrators.

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ISRAEL

Region West Bank Erupts In Violence: After several Israelis (whom some say were members of an elite military unit) are killed by mob, Israel retaliates with gunships. Rioting ensues and casualties on both sides rise. • **Buyer's Market:** Requests purchase of 35 UH-60L Black Hawk choppers and other equipment from U.S., sale totaling nearly \$525 million. Israel already has a number of Black Hawks in its inventory.

12

INDONESIA

Good Job, Bill: Tycoon James Riady has invited former President Clinton to join board of Lippo Group, Jakarta conglomerate accused of illegally funneling hundreds of thousands of dollars in financial contributions to Clinton-Gore campaigns in 1992 and 1996. Lippo allegedly is substantially under control of Chinese communists.

11

RWANDA

Thanks A Lot: Former UN Secretary General and former Egyptian Foreign Affairs Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in the book authored by Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, admits to approving \$5.8 million arms deal in 1990 — which resulted in Egypt supplying arms to Rwandan Hutu regime until 1992. Thousands of Tutsi were massacred during and after this time frame.

2

COLOMBIA

Windfall Time: At press time, initial installment of the \$1.3 billion in military aid is ready to flow. The 36-year-old war might flood over into neighboring countries and result in a bloody regional conflict. In short, U.S. is taking giant gamble. We bet drug lords will remain after sustaining losses. Civilians, however, will pay dearly as deaths and displacement will take a heavy toll.

3

ECUADOR

FARC Threats: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) threaten this nation due to allowing of U.S. anti-drug flights to launch from Manta, a Pacific coastal town.

6

YUGOSLAVIA

Clinton Sentenced: Belgrade's District Court sentences President Bill Clinton, Sec. of State Albright and 13 other NATO and Western leaders to a maximum of 20 years in prison for last year's use of weapons against civilians during the air campaign.

7

FRANCE

Taliban May Be Ok'd: With eyes on economic fruits of Afghanistan, French government invites Taliban leaders to Paris for diplomatic talks which may lead to official recognition.

8

SYRIA

A Rock And A Hard Place: President Bashar Al-Assad is pressured by U.S. and others to reign in Hezbollah, over which he exerts some influence. • **Economic Reforms:** His reform attempts on economy by attracting Western investment are being rebuffed by hardline Muslims and others who might lose their livelihoods.

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RUSSIA

Chinese Aboard? Reports say that several Chinese naval officers were aboard the *Kursk*, as observers, when explosion ripped through Russian vessel.

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PERU

New Elections: Outgoing President Alberto Fujimori announces new general elections and dissolving of National Intelligence Service (SIN) headed by his associate, Vladimiro Montesinos, now suspected of dispensing bribes to opposition congressmen and involvement in arms scandal entangling the U.S. and its drug war allies.

14

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Drug War? Large numbers of automatic weapons, including M16s and AK-47s, are being smuggled in from Australia and Indonesia. In return, many smugglers are receiving high-quality marijuana. The illegal trade in weapons further intensifies already burning tribal and political feuds.

World Sitrep is compiled by the SOF staff with information from various media and correspondents.

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

by Clint Smith

The Straight Scoop



photos: SOF Archives

Directing and teaching nearly 1,000 students each year for the last several years, you make lots of contact with relatively new gun owners. These new folks are under a barrage of information. From the time they first confide to someone else that they may even think about purchasing a firearm, the advice never stops. The clerk at the counter in the gun store is hoping our new guy buys something when he hits the door. Gun magazines require advertisers to make their magazine function. Even if a magazine declares itself to be “free” of advertisers and that you will get the “straight scoop” from them, it doesn’t always turn out that way.

Firearms training and instructors themselves sometimes seem to go the same way. It isn’t always what it seems to be. There seems to be a requirement to make some magic or marketing voodoo. (So there is no misunderstanding, yes, I have a shooting school, but I am not the *actual* school. The staff, those people who fill the holes in the office and on the ranges when I am not able to hold up my end ... *they are the school.*)

The same thing can happen with actual shooting and teaching techniques. It seems some instructors are looking for magic. Almost every competent firearms instructor I have met knows there isn’t any magic — but some feel they need their own angle. This is the funny part.

Instinctive shooting? We can’t shoot instinctively — we were not born with a pistol in our hands. Human nature generally dictates

Is competition good? Absolutely! But don’t let ego and winning matches take your mind off the goal of winning a gunfight. Can anyone teach you everything you need to know in five days? In all honesty, it is doubtful. This gun-fighting stuff is not tough, then again it isn’t a gift either. It is, however, hard work. Hard, boring, hot, dirty work. Can you get the message?

that people will take the easiest path. To most this means technology: lights, lasers, special grips and special ammunition, the list is never-ending. But you cannot buy competency.

How about the goofy stuff like “unconscious competency.” This boils down to “I’m so good I unconsciously see the threat, qualify that it’s armed and that I am in fear of my life, draw, shoot and knock ‘em dead.” Let’s see, I’m before the grand jury and I declare, “I use a technique called ‘unconscious competency.’” *Webster’s*: “Unconscious: not knowing or perceiving, free from self awareness, not possessing consciousness, not marked by conscious thought, having lost consciousness.”

Good luck.

We can carry the "unconscious" further. We start in on the "way of the warrior." Next we look to the *kenshi* (the sword saint) Miyamoto Musashi — the greatest swordsman who ever fought. After he fought everyone in Japan who was willing, he retired as a painter, sculptor and writer. Musashi's *Book Of The Five Rings* is used as a guide for many students of tactics and swordsmanship.

Depending on how you manipulate it, "unconscious competency" or the ability to respond without conscious thought (other than selecting which opponent comes first, second or so on) could be used. The only problem is: You, we and I are not going to master it in five days, months or years. It may take a lifetime.

There is another subtle tactical nuance that is sometimes forgotten in the mist or fog of conflict. Never forget that *will* wins wars — and personal conflicts.

Zen, swords and such sometimes easily impress us as Americans, so consider this: Japanese Rear Admiral Keiji Shibasaki, the officer in charge at Betio on the Tarawa Atoll, boasted "a million men could not take Betio if they had a hundred years." In November of 1943, 5,600 U.S. Marines landed on the beaches of Betio and in three days killed all but 17 of the 4,836 Japanese holding the island. These Marines were not all warriors; they came from your hometown, your farms, your cities, your state and your country.

We Americans took every island in the Pacific from the Japanese. We took their country and we defeated their army, navy and air force. When it was over, we gave their country back to them ... period. (So no one gets their feelings hurt, I am not being prideful or bashing anyone with these statements. But it is the truth.)

The point is that *will* wins wars, *magic* does not.

Lets get back to our new student who just bought the pistol last week. If he is lucky, he might take five days' instruction and then go back home to his regular routine. Consider this: Six months later at three in the morning without his corrective lenses and in the presence of his family he needs to recall all of this past training. Suffice it to say it may not surface to the degree required.

How we get good at these techniques is through repetition and practice. Bill Jordan and Elmer Keith were remarkable shots, and they also practiced with some degree of regularity, say like day after day, year after year — for decades.

Acquired competency, delivering the drawstroke without thinking through each of the five count steps of the draw; knowing the front from the rear of the magazine or the top from the bottom without looking, you bet. Acquired in five days? Doubtful.

Can anyone teach you everything you need to know in five days? In all honesty, it is doubtful.

This gun-fighting stuff is not tough, then again it isn't a gift either. It is, however, hard work. Hard, boring, hot, dirty work.

Continued on page 74



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1903 Springfield

How Good Were They?

Text & Photos by Clint Smith

There was a unique time in American history, that if an individual had enlisted for military service he might have been exposed to a broad spectrum of rifles. Joining up in 1890 with service continuing until 1918 our troop could have carried a .45-70 caliber Trapdoor Springfield at Wounded Knee, a .30-40 Krag in Cuba, and finished his combat career in France with the Model of 1903 Springfield caliber .30-06.

Of all of these rifles the Springfield Model of 1903 was considered by many to be the best with the people who used it in competition and combat.

The 03 Springfield was produced from 1903 until 1944 and served a myriad of purposes. It fulfilled roles as a main battle rifle, match competition rifle, sniper rifle, and line-throwing gun, as well as other special purpose roles. It was used in World War I, World War II, Korea (as a sniper rifle) and in all of America's "police actions" in between the big ones. The "03" was not the most prolific rifle used by Americans in World War I. That honor would go to the Enfield model of 1917 caliber .30-06. That is another story.

Even with the advent of the M1 Garand in the late 1930s the popularity as well as the plain fact that there were a lot of them around dictated that the "03" would be used in great numbers in World War II from the opening day. There are documented photos of riflemen armed with 03s shooting at Japanese aircraft during their attack on Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941.

United States Marines carrying 03 Springfield rifles effected America's first ground action in the Pacific theater with the invasion of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on 7 August 1942. They continued to be used in some form until the end of the war.

Production History

The Springfield Armory and Rock Island Arsenal produced 03 rifles from 1903 until the 1930s off and on in some form. The demand for rifles in World War II led to the manufacture of rifles by Remington Arms and L.C. Smith and Corona. Remington Arms modified existing rifles in 1941-1942. In this format the reworking of older 1903s led to the model known as 1903 Springfield

(Modified) these modified rifles fell between the Model of 1903 and the new Model 1903A3.

The Model 1903A3 was equipped with a rear receiver mounted sight and stamped parts that replaced many formerly milled parts. These changes allowed for expedited production. They are not necessarily pretty rifles but they are functional. The Smith Corona versions are considered by some to be the more accurate rifle made because of their good barrels. In personal observations and test firings the Remington Arms and Smith Corona versions are solid dependable and reasonably accurate rifles.

Sniper Versions

The first sniper rifles were the 1903 Model equipped with the 1908 Warner Swasey Musket sight. A second model was introduced on the Model 1903 equipped with the updated 1913 Warner Swasey Musket sight. Both versions were probably used in World War I.

There are other variations such as the Winchester A5 and the USMC Unertl scope versions as well as the Remington 1903A4 with Weaver and Redfield scopes. These later models were used in World War II, and in some cases Korea. Because of the past availability of all the "parts" many fake or "made up" rifles can be pawned off as the real thing if you were considering acquiring one for personal use. I have fired what I believe was a correct USMC Unertl 03. It shot a solid minute of angle. It is of interest to note that on this model the operator must "reset" the scope or pun it back into battery after each shot fired. So in a fight I have to shoot, run the bolt and reset the scope for each shot.

The Springfield "experts" I have talked with seem to like the Remington 1903A4 models, and the Remington version seems to be hard to fake because of serial number placement on the receiver. To give you an idea about availability, a friend of mine, Rob Rathbun, from Denver, recently won the CMP lottery for a 03A4, found the bases and scope for \$60.00 from an "old guy" at the local range and

the correct rings from a source in New Jersey for \$40.00. Yes, Martha, there is a Santa Claus!

Match Rifles

Some really great shooting 1903 rifles can be found that were manufactured in the 1920s and 30s. At a time when the U.S. government supported shooting programs for the military, as well as the private sector, these rifles were used, rebuilt and reused at many matches to include the famous Camp Perry, Ohio, matches. Many of the rifles have been reworked and that of course would be appropriate for rifles well over 60 years old.

It is an important note that in this time frame, United States government employees working in a U.S. government arsenal made rifles and sold them to civilians! This rifle was the NRA Sporter. Funny how in one generation we went from a government which sold us guns to one that would take them all away from us if it could.

There are many versions and models, and if the match rifle area is of interest to you I would strongly recommend you acquire a copy of *The Springfield 1903 Rifles*, by Lt. Col. William S. Brophy. This book may not be the definitive book but it's as close as we'll get for a while. In this book there are many explanations and details of the different models and versions of the 1903 rifle.

Another high quality book dealing with the combat use of these rifles that cuts to the chase on this subject is Bruce N. Canfield's *Collector's Guide to the '03 Springfield*.

Stock Variations

There are several stock variations that one might encounter. The early rifles had a straight pistol grip and forward finger grooves on the forearm. In 1929 a downward curved pistol grip called a "C" stock (my personal favorite) was introduced. Arsenal reworks of inventories of surplus stocks around the time of World War II produced an ugly stock called a "scant" version. The NRA model and other models made available created stocks with names like style "B", NBA, Special Target, National Match Special and so on. The 1903 stock issue can turn into a science and study of it's own. If you wish to wander in this area arm yourself well with books and research.

Cut 'Em Off At The Magazine

One of my personal favorite things about the 1903 is the magazine cut-off capability. On the left rear of the receiver is a lever marked OFF when in the "down" mode and ON when in the "up"

mode. In the OFF mode the bolt is restricted in movement and only reciprocates rearward far enough to extract and eject while not allowing enough rearward movement to strip/load a cartridge from the internal magazine well. This allows the operator to single load cartridges while saving the cartridges in the magazine for times of duress or multiple targets.

The concept could reduce ammunition expenditure and promote ammunition conservation. When required, the lever is moved to the upward position or in the ON mode and the reciprocation of the bolt clears the chamber of the spent casing and loads a fresh cartridge from the internal magazine well. The whole concept is sort of the early 1900's version of burst control ammunition management. As a point of interest the middle position or halfway between the "off" and "on," is the position that allows the bolt to be removed for cleaning.

Pieces And Parts

As I did the research and testing on the 1903 rifles I found there is a wide variety of pieces and parts that make up the history of these rifles. An interesting example is the sight protector that shields the front sight blade while in transit. The United States Marine Corps version has a larger opening on the top area to allow for protection, yet the larger sight hood provides a wider field of view around the front sight for actual use in the field.

Sight micrometers made by P.J. O'Hare assist in the precision adjustment of the staff/slide type rear sight and are a valuable aid for match or competition work when setting up the normally course adjusting rear sight slide. O'Hare also produced rear sight covers which are pretty nifty little additions to the pieces one might collect for the 03 rifle.

The more exotic pieces and parts can be the .22 caliber conversions units and way out in left field is the Pedersen device, which was a .30 caliber pistol-size cartridge adaptation developed late in World War I to turn the 1903 bolt-action rifle into a semiautomatic rifle. Pedersen devices if found for sale can go into the "thousands of dollars" range to purchase.

If you take pleasure in "cold steel" there are many bayonet versions to consider and collect for the 1903 rifles.

Springfields To Avoid?

There is a bold controversy over the shooting of Model 1903

Continued on page 72



(left) Circa 1929, 1903 National Match with 1907 Sling, Lyman 41 rear sight and #17 front sight. (below) The rifles top to bottom: 1932 NRA Sporter, Springfield Armory 1929 National Match, Springfield Armory 1935 C stock version, Springfield Armory 1944 Remington "scant" stock, 1943 Smith Corona 1903A3.

Forever Fighting



SOF Treks The Ho Chi Mindanao Trail

Text & Photos
by Mike Winchester

You have to love the Philippines: They sold me the ticket at the airline's downtown Manila office complete with flight number, departure time and warm smiles. Only at the airport check-in the next morning did I get the news that Cotabato Airport was closed by insurgent attacks and there had been no flights for the last three days. Maybe try back in a week?

But with Mindanao lurching toward open war, a week of in-house movies in a second-rate Manila hotel was not an option. And there was a flight later that morning to General Santos City. "Gensan," as the locals call it, is also on Mindanao, four hours drive from Cotabato City. The good news was that this would take me a lot closer to the conflict than a TV in Manila. The bad news was that the road between Gensan and Cotabato traverses some of the main strongholds of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). As the war escalated with guerrilla attacks on army camps and urban bombings, the road had been either closed or subject to ambush, kidnap-for-ransom, and other traditional pastimes of the Philippines' Deep South.

I was airborne within one hour on a flight that turned out to be almost entirely empty. A major port and export center, General Santos had also been hit two days running by bomb blasts, and the business crowd, Manila-based and foreign, was headed in the opposite direct fast. Always a good omen.

From Gensan airport, I took a cab to the a bus stand where mini-vans normally left for Cotabato. And my luck held. After eight

Although seconded to the Army for operational control, Philippine Marines are heavily involved in the current fighting.

IN THE *Philippines*

days' hostilities the MILF had declared a unilateral 48-hour ceasefire starting at 0600 that morning so that both sides could retrieve their dead. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) were pointedly ignoring the gesture and continuing offensive ops, but some vehicles had run the gauntlet from Cotabato and were waiting to return.

I hired a van with a driver called Bong at a price which both of us had some difficulty believing. He was Christian which was not as good as it could have been should we meet the MILF. But he was no mean driver. At first there was plenty of traffic along the wide two-lane highway. But an hour into the ride it was thinning out and Bong was spending as much time checking out the sides of the road as the road ahead. Some places the country was flat, with emerald-green paddy fields stretching away to distant hills.

Elsewhere, lush vegetation came right down to the roadside. We were cutting across the provinces of South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and then into Magunidanao, and these are all long-time MILF guerrilla

zones where many of the villages are insurgent-dominated. Muslim farmers by day switch to guerrillas by night. And that's not counting MILF full-time guerrilla units.

The atmosphere was a curious blend of surface normality and latent tension. At points along the highway were scattered units of the Cotabato-based 6th Division. Most were from an Philippine Marine Corps brigade under 6 Div's operational control, (Opcon) and their locally made Simba armored cars and Humvees were parked by the roadsides, guns pointed into the jungle. Some troops were busy digging slit trenches along the roadside preparing for a night's stay. At known trouble spots where ambushes or hold-ups had already occurred, traffic was being halted to form up in convoys which then moved forward with military escorts at front and rear. Whether this "protection" was more likely to deter MILF attacks or attract them is a matter of opinion.

Eye Of The Storm

In the mid-afternoon, we finally made

Cotabato, a small, mostly Muslim city of a few hundred thousands wedged between two broad rivers and the Celebes Sea. This was the eye of a storm that had been waiting to break for a full three years. Back in 1996 when then-President Fidel Ramos signed a peace pact with the mainstream Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Manila had hoped it had broken the back of its perennial "Muslim problem."

The MNLF had been in on-off revolt against Manila since 1972 and the days of Ferdinand Marcos' martial law regime. Getting its chairman, Nur Misuari, finally to ink a peace pact and bring the MNLF in from the jungle to take over administration of the so-called Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was a major

Philippine Marine Corps artillery firebase, Parang, provides support for road-clearing operation north of town on the Narcisco Ramos National Highway. Insurgents use poor-boy artillery: lots of mortars and locally made RPG-2s.





Marine motorized patrol (above) near Cotabato City makes use of Humvee and locally produced "Simba" armored car. (below) AFP MG-520 choppers, two of which were based at Cotabato Airport, rearm for ground support mission on Ramos National Highway. MG-520s operate together with OV-10 Broncos, in support role.

achievement of the Ramos years.

The snag was that the 1996 deal did not include the harder-line, religiously oriented MILF. Its chief, Salamat Hashim, had parted ways with Misuari in the 70s, ultimately to found the MILF in 1984. And in 1996 he had continued to hold out for an independent Islamic state in the south. For Manila — as usual out of touch with grass-roots Muslim sentiment — that did not seem like a major problem. For one thing, the MILF was seen as a splinter group, far smaller

than the MNLF. For another, there seemed no reason why a strategy of slow, steady peace talks couldn't bring the MILF around as well. After that, southern Muslims would live happily ever after.

Or so it was hoped. In January 1997, the first peace talks were held between Manila and the MILF and in July that year a "Cessation of Hostilities Agreement" was signed. But the ongoing rounds of talks that then began, focused on technical issues — not least the status of MILF base camps —

and never tackled the fundamental issue of reconciling the MILF demand for independence, with Manila's insistence that Filipino national sovereignty was non-negotiable. Ominously, they were also punctuated by repeated military clashes between the AFP and the MILF's armed wing, the Bangamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF).

The MILF, meanwhile, made no secret of the fact it was pressing ahead with its own long-term program — widening its political support base and beefing up military capabilities. And in both arenas it proved notably successful.

The Branch That Grew

Far from a minor splinter of the MNLF, the MILF gradually emerged as a major political force on Mindanao and a threat to the AFP. The MILF heartland was the Maguindanaon- and Maranaon-speaking provinces of south-central Mindanao; but it also extended its activities into northern and eastern parts of the island and onto the Zamboanga Peninsula and Basilan. It promoted a grass-roots message of social and religious reform that in the dirt-poor villages of the Muslim south found an increasingly favorable audience among both the Islamic *ulema* (clergy) and the youth. It also gained politically and militarily from the fact the MNLF's venture into civil government was turning into a disaster. Had this been adequately funded and supported by Manila, the ARMM might have proved to be a vehicle for autonomy that could have undercut the demand for independence. But short-



changed by the central government, the ARMM drifted into political irrelevance. As the fortunes of Misuari and the MNLF sank, the MILF rose as champion of Muslim rights. Not a few disenchanted MNLF fighters jumped ship to join the MILF.

The MILF was also building up its camps and pushing ahead with a recruitment and training program. By this year it had some 46 camps across the south, 13 of which were defined as major. These are less simple military camps than guerrilla base areas — with civilian populations, farm land and a social and religious system run according to MILF prescriptions for a future Islamic state. Militarily, the Front's military arm, BIAF, was expanding. Estimated at some 9,000 troops in 1997, by early this year the BIAF numbered some 13,000, of which an estimated 11,500 were under arms.

Not surprisingly, AFP commanders both in the south and in Manila were getting restless. Many were convinced the MILF was playing a cynical game, using the ongoing peace talks as a breathing space to build up military and political strength. When in 1998 Joseph "Eráp" Estrada — former movie tough-guy and one-time crime-buster — took over as president, AFP fears began to find a ready ear in the Malacanang Palace.

Early this year the simmering pot began to boil over. As hard-liners elbowed their way to the fore on both sides, major armed clashes increased, both sides typically blaming the other for triggering them.

Alliances Of Oissent

In January, MILF guerrillas overran the town of Talayan in Maguindanao. In February, the AFP launched an assault on Camp Omar, one of the MILF's biggest bases. In March, the MILF overran and occupied the town of Kauswagan, in northern Mindanao. And then in April came the announcement of a strengthened alliance between the MILF and the communist New People's Army (NPA) which also has a lingering presence in eastern Mindanao.

Against this backdrop, a broadly unconnected crisis erupted in the smaller island provinces of Basilan and Sulu. In March, Muslim separatist guerrillas of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) kidnapped a large group of local school kids and teachers, triggering a protracted hostage crisis. Then in April, another ASG gang seized a group of 21 western and Malaysian tourists from a diving resort and brought them back to Jolo Island, setting off a parallel hostage drama — this time with sweeping international coverage and no little embarrassment for the Manila government whose handling of the negotiations was much less than adroit.

The ASG is a small group with a hard core of maybe 350, within a broader support group of up to 1,000. Based in the Tausog-speaking provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Taw-Tawi, its membership is young, radical and terroristic. And they can comfortably straddle the divide between the ostensibly political goal of a separate Islamic state and unIslamic criminal proclivities — in partic-

ular kidnapping for ransom, and extortion.

Geographically and ideologically, it has little or nothing in common with the MILF. But in the context of the current war, it has suited Manila to lump the two together in an "unholy alliance" of "Islamic terrorism."

This may sell well in the Christian north and in the West but it obscures realities on the ground.

In any case it seems likely that Manila made its decision to go to war with the MILF before the main ASG hostage crisis erupted in late April. By then, Marine battalions had already been redeployed from Sulu to the area immediately around the MILF's biggest base and de facto HQ, Camp Abu Bakr, in a not-so-subtle show of force.



MILF Vice-chairman for Military Affairs, Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim. MILF's Chairman and overall leader is Salamat Hashim; Subordinate to him are three vice-chairmen, for military, political and internal affairs.

The pretext for war was a stretch of the Narsico Ramos National Highway that runs north from Cotabato and links south-central Mindanao with the north of the island. Since the highway was built in 1996, the MILF has maintained posts along it where it passes close to Abu Bakr. In April, Manila abruptly demanded the removal of these posts alleging the extortion of travelers by MILF gunmen — an accusation denied both by the MILF and local villagers. The government hung tough and despite apparently successful attempts to defuse the new crisis, the AFP launched a major highway clearing operation of 28 April, effectively on the MILF's main door-step. The Front resisted fiercely.

Two days later MILF military chief Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim announced the suspension of peace talks and on 2 May the MILF launched a sweeping guerrilla counter-offensive across Mindanao. Bomb blasts hit urban areas, roads were cut and army units — including the 6 Div HQ — were attacked. The southern Philippines was back to 1972 and all-out war.

Checking Out The AFP

Having checked into a local hotel I headed out to Camp Siongco, the 6 Div HQ out-

side the city. The AFP has three divisions based on Mindanao — 6 Div, 1 Div, and 4 Div — with a plenty of other Marine and Army brigades and battalions coming under their operational control. In fact, by mid-year more than 100,000 of the AFP's 130,000 troops, airmen and sailors were operating in the south. Responsible as it is for the hot MILF provinces of Maguindanao, North & South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani, it was 6 Div that faced the brunt of this war.

A friendly major in G-2 arranged for me to see the divisional commander. Maj. Gen. Gregorio Camiling, a dour professional who doesn't believe in wasting words. But he made it clear he too believed the MILF had been playing for time, building up its strength. Now, the highway was going to be cleared and to hell with MILF ceasefire proposals. Two task forces were involved in the operation, both spearheaded by Marine battalions. One, under the Cagayan de Oro-based 4 Div, was advancing south along the highway from Lanao del Sur province to the north of Abu Bakr. The 6 Div task force was moving the south to north through the municipality of Matanog, to link up.

But brutally slowly. In fact, on the southern front the operation was in danger of stalling as Marine battalions found themselves up against fierce MILF resistance based on sophisticated network a of bunkers and tunnels, some converted from concrete irrigation channels. The MILF was convinced that the AFP assault was not just about posts along the highway but was the prelude for an assault on Abu Bakr and a wider war — and were reacting accordingly. "You've got to fight for literally every inch," Camiling conceded. Most AFP casualties — and they were mounting fast — were the result of MILF mortars and RPGs. That came as no surprise: I'd visited Abu Bakr in '98 and locally manufactured versions of the RPG-2 had been everywhere.

The next morning I drove north from Cotabato to Parang, a coastal town just south of the contested 15-km. stretch of highway. The town itself was crowded with refugees flooding in from areas around Abu Bakr. As elsewhere in Mindanao, schools had been converted to temporary evacuation centers and were overflowing. More than 100,000 people had already been displaced by the war across Mindanao and that number was to rise to more than 230,000 in the weeks to come.

And the war was already close. Every few seconds the streets reverberated to the crack of artillery pumping out 105mm ordnance from a hill above the town. The fire-base was situated in a Philippine National Police (PNP) camp, but the gunners were Marines. It commanded a magnificent panorama of the coast north of the town, and to the northeast the sweep of jungled hills rising to the mountains of central Mindanao. Ten 105s had been hauled up there, some shorter-barreled howitzers with a range out to 11 clicks; others, upgraded with longer barrels taking them out to 22 clicks.

They were getting a good workout trying to soften up the MILF bunkers blocking the advance along the highway. If these two AFP task forces backed by air and artillery support were having trouble getting into Abu Bakr through the front door, I figured the back door offered a better chance. From what Camiling had told me, rough terrain and limited AFP manpower meant that Abu Bakr — which covers a huge area — was not surrounded. MILF reinforcements were still slipping in over the mountains. Getting in the same way meant re-establishing contact with the MILF. And conveniently there was no better place to do that than the coffee-shop of the hotel where I was staying.

Contacting The Other Side

Cotabato is the Casablanca of the Philippines. Minus, it must be said, Ingrid Bergman and the nightlife. But everyone who is anyone in the southern political drama is in town keeping a damn close eye on everyone else — the military, the PNP, the MNLF — whose secretary-general is city mayor — and not least the MILF underground. The hotel coffee shop is Cotabato in microcosm. It was invariably thick with cigarette smoke, TV permanently showing either a karaoke channel or a news channel with the latest twists in the hostage saga. The owner, Tony, an affable Filipino-Chinese businessman, moved easily from table to table.

Outside in the lobby the bodyguards hung out, toying with their CAR15s or chatting up the girls at reception.

Meeting the right MILF contact was a matter of hours. And through him I established indirect mobile phone contact with MILF military chief Murad, still somewhere inside Abu Bakr. It was then another couple of days hammering home the message that I wanted in and was actually capable of walking.

I left town early one morning with Rashid, my MILF guide, and several local Muslim students heading to the front, all crammed into the back of a clapped-out



(above) Simbas of the AFP hold open the main highway, south-central Mindanao. (left) At the BIAF (Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces) Camp Abu Bakr, author interviewed staff officers of the MILF's armed wing. (below) Philippine National Police (PNP) cops: The plan had been for the PNP to take over internal security/COIN duties from the AFP — but renewal of separatist insurgency in Mindanao and revival of the New People's Army has put that idea on hold. For the foreseeable future, the AFP's primary mission will be COIN ops.

jeep. The driver was a cousin of Rashid. Predictably, the tank was empty and there are no prizes for guessing who ended up paying for the gas. A revolutionary contribution? At the gas station in typical Cotabato-style, the MILF jeep tanked up next to a Marine armored car also topping up before heading north to the other side of the lines — Casablanca all over again.

An hour later we were back in Parang. The idea was to sneak into Abu Bakr by a side road that led from Parang to the neighboring municipality of Barira.

But nothing was going to be simple and I spent four hours keeping my head low in a MILF safehouse owned by another of Rashid's ubiquitous cousins while Rashid himself conducted a recce of Marine checkpoints on the road to Barira. Efforts to sleep were interrupted by the 105s still at work on the hill and the *wup-wup* of low-flying Hueys headed south — presumably with AFP dead and wounded.

Mid-afternoon, Rashid reappeared and announced the marines were still checking all vehicles and turning back — or pulling in — men of fighting age. But there was "another way." Without needing to ask I knew for sure it was going to be further and harder on the feet.

We piled back into the jeep and drove to another town somewhere south of Abu Bakr. Another wait and another meal of rice and fish in another safehouse. Then a drive of maybe 10 klicks down a village track through fields and palm groves that brought us to a village beside a broad river.

Judging from the young men sitting around in the hootches drinking coffee and nursing rifles we were already on MILF turf.



Ho Chi Mindanao Trail

As the sun was setting, our group — eight in all — waded out to a sandbar, boarded motorized canoes and crossed the river into the jungle and the darkness on the further bank. From there began a long trek back into the mountains behind Cotabato along a sort of Islamic Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Groups of fighters, armed and unarmed, were moving through the night in both directions, towards Abu Bakr and back to other guerrilla fronts across central Mindanao. We rested up in villages where locals supplied us with water, or coconuts. The humidity was like a blanket and I was continually drenched in sweat. No matter how much fluid I consumed, I was thirsty again within minutes.

We walked until after midnight across open hills and jungle, and through coconut plantations. Artillery fire echoed like distant thunder. Finally we came back to arable land and a large village where we slept for a few hours on the concrete forecourt of an abandoned school. The moon was mainly hidden by clouds but in the half-light I could make out, around the school and along the tracks, hundreds of troops sleeping by the weapons. The MILF was not going to give up Abu Bakr without a fight.

After dawn prayers we moved on, along jungled tracks and across newly cleared farmland. By 0800 the drone of government OV-10 Bronco ground attack aircraft was audible as they circled the embattled highway above, looking for their prey before

diving to release 500-pound bombs. A five-hour hike into the full heat of mid-day brought us to a major village within the perimeter of Abu Bakr. This was clearly a major staging point for units moving up to the front — a battalion sized unit was formed up ready to rotate up to the front.

These were evidently BIAF second-line regulars drawn in from “divisions” across central Mindanao. Most had had some military training and when it came to weaponry they weren't short. The BIAF standard personal weapon is the M14 or M16 with a sprinkling of M1 Garands. At section level, the BIAF uses the M60 GPMG. But there was also a fair number of M79 grenade launchers and locally made RPG-2s. Most of this arsenal dates from the MNLF wars of the 1970s when large quantities of weaponry entered Mindanao and the other islands of the Muslim south from East Malaysia. But MILF sources make no secret of the fact that much has also been purchased from corrupt AFP and PNP elements, along with ongoing supplies of ammunition.

Reports of the MILF benefiting from external assistance are few and far between. According to intel sources, one shipment of hardware including RPG's was smuggled in from the coast in 1995. Where it came from it less clear. More recently, Manila has been claiming the MILF has been buying from North Korea with several million dollars

donated by Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden. That's a neat line bringing together two of the sources best calculated to stir fear and loathing in the West. Evidence that there's any truth in it is something else.

Indeed, the MILF's greatest liability as a guerrilla army is precisely its lack of external aid to fuel a protracted war. Unlike Asia's leading guerrilla professionals, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the Moros of the Philippines have not managed to establish an effective international arms procurement and shipping network.

Meeting With Murad

Next morning I was driven on a motorbike to meet Murad in a temporary jungle camp several clicks distant, its approaches protected by a deep ravine and its perimeter ringed by bodyguards. Last time we'd met it had been in an office on the other side of Abu Bakr, complete with computer and internet connection. That facility had already been flattened by OV-10s and today we sat cross-legged on a plastic sheeting in a palm thatched hut. For a man facing the full might of the Philippine state, Murad, a stocky, goateed, guerrilla veteran in his late forties, was surprisingly collected.

He made no secret of MILF fears that the operation to clear the road was the beginning of a far wider war. “If they continue attacking our camps,” he vowed, “we will counter-attack. And that will mean all-out war across Mindanao.” But the Front, he

Continued on page 71



(left & above) BIAF guerrillas had the demeanor of guerrillas everywhere — but were well-armed and obviously had received training. (right) BIAF sentry in MILF-dominated area enforces evening curfew.





ROLLING

Fighting Shotguns At Thunder Ranch





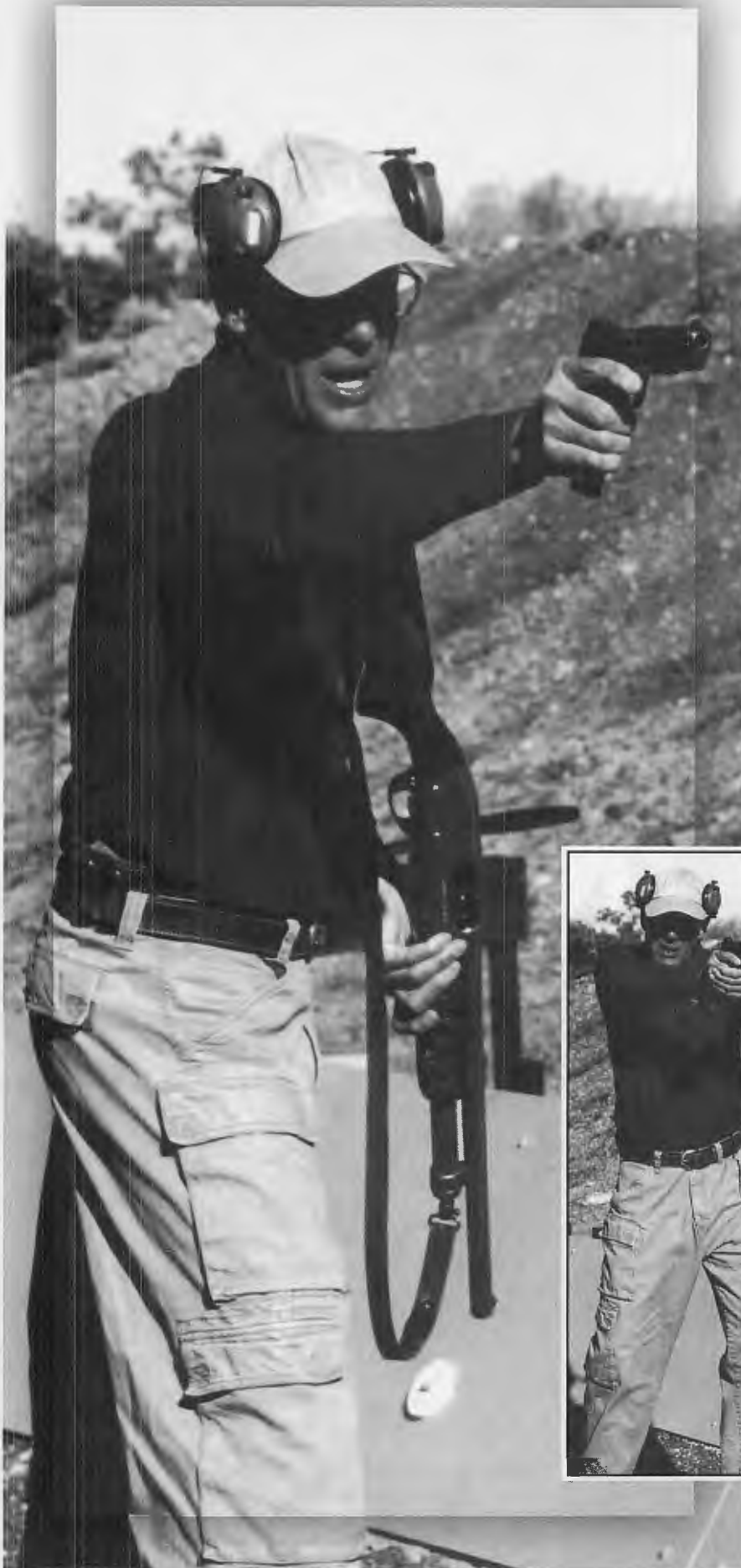
THUNDER

by Peter G. Kokalis
Photos by Chris Mayer

THE late Elmer Keith once referred to the shotgun as, “the best alley cleaner of all.” Those who anticipate that they may eventually face a deadly confrontation have an almost bewildering array of weaponry to select from prior to sending projectiles down range. Handguns, rifles or carbines, submachine guns or shotguns can all deliver deadly messages to your opponent. Handguns are an emphatic *last* choice, predicated only by their ability to be concealed when the more effective alternatives would be socially unacceptable. When employed in non-military, urban environments, rifle cartridges will often penetrate block and sheet rock to endanger family members and other innocents. While they have reached public acceptance when fielded by Ninja-clad SWAT teams, submachine guns remain politically incorrect for street cops and civilians defending their domiciles.

The fact is that shotguns, although they can produce incredibly devastating wounds, remain politically correct in the public’s mind and often even in the eye of the generally antigun mainstream media. Furthermore, when employed within the framework of their limitations and maximizing their salient characteristics, the combat shotgun provides short-range lethality matched by no other firearm. They are especially effective when employed as entry weapons by law enforcement Special Response Teams operating in urban environments.

The fighting shotgun is not an easy weapon to master. The required manipulative skills must be heavily and correctly programmed into the operator to avoid “short cycling” and other serious stoppages. (inset) Student fires with Clint Smith observing closely.



And, fighting shotguns have always been an important ingredient in the military's small arms mix. In the United States, use of a shotgun for fighting purposes was a common practice even in colonial America. By the middle of the 17th century, the multiple-projectile blunderbuss came into widespread use in Europe. In 1781, British General Sir John Burgoyne formed a Light Dragoon Regiment armed with the blunderbuss. By the 19th century, the double-barrel shotgun had gained a substantial reputation as a fighting weapon. It was employed with success during the Indian wars from 1866 to 1891. The greatest impetus to modern fighting shotgun design was the British small arms studies conducted during the 1950s Malayan guerrilla insurgencies. These studies demonstrated that the shotgun was superior to all other types of small arms as a jungle weapon.

However, don't feel you're invincible just because you're toting a 12-gauge scattergun. In his book, *Gunshot Wounds* (copyright 1985, Elsevier Science Publishing Co. Inc., New York, NY 10017), Dr. Vincent J.M. DiMaio reports an incident in which a man, whose heart was literally shredded by No. 7 1/2 pellets fired from a 12-gauge shotgun at a distance of only 3 to 4 feet, was able to run 65 feet before collapsing.

The fighting shotgun is not an easy weapon to master. With ammunition intended for gunfights it kicks like hell — although modern low recoil impulse shotshells have mitigated this to a substantial extent. In addition, the required manipulative skills must be heavily and correctly programmed into the operator to avoid "short cycling" and other serious stoppages. Learning to reload under the stress encountered during a fight is another essential technique. None of these procedures can be learned from a book. And, as Clint Smith says, "A fight won't be what you want it to be, it'll be something else."

Martial Mecca

The superb Thunder Ranch Training Facility (Dept. SOF, HCR 1, Box 53, Mountain Home, TX 78058; phone: 830-640-3138; fax: 830-640-3183; web site: www.thunderranchinc.com), schedules one three-day defensive shotgun course per year. It's always filled well in advance. *Soldier Of Fortune* staff photographer, Chris Mayer, and I recently attended this course together with 18 other students. I left Thunder Ranch with a great deal of confidence in my ability to fight with a shotgun and a slightly black and blue right



Clint Smith demonstrates the correct form for a transition to the handgun both with and without the sling.



(above) Thunder Ranch student fires his left-hand, Scattergun Technologies version of the dominant Remington Model 870 pump. (below) Pluckiest student by far was this young lady, who asked and gave no quarter, and hammered away with her 12-gauge M870 at a pace every bit the equal of everyone else in the class. (below, right) A gunfight invariably involves movement, preferably back to cover. Students must learn to fire effectively while moving in any direction.



shoulder. Anyone attending this course will need approximately 525 rounds: 350 birdshot, 150 buckshot and 25 slugs.

The 20 students in this class represented the usual cross-section of individuals that attend courses to hone their gunfighting skills. Four of the students were police officers. The rest were men and women who realize that purchasing a firearm is only the smallest part of the self-defense equation. One of them was a cattle rancher, another a retired petroleum engineer, one a Hollywood movie executive, and another a very real rocket scientist.

The mix of shotguns used by the students in this course was, as usual, revealing. There were 11 Remington Model 870 slide-actions, six Mossberg Model 590 slide-actions, one Remington Model 11-87 semiauto and two Benelli semiautos. Very few armed professionals will dispute the combat shotgun's superiority at ranges under 35 yards with buckshot. The argument has always been between proponents of the slide-action or "pump" shotgun and those who advocate semiautomatic shotguns. The U.S. Armed Forces and many law enforcement agencies have clung to the slide-action shotgun, although in a high-anxiety environment, operator-induced error can produce a disastrous stoppage. If slide-action



shotguns are not jacked smartly and completely to the rear and then all the way forward with the same degree of force, they will short-cycle. If this occurs the operator has no alternative but to immediately transition to his sidearm (providing he has one). However, up to and including the Vietnam War, semiauto shotguns never provided the level of reliability demanded by the U.S. Armed Forces.

There is, in my opinion, no more appropriate place to acquire the programming required to accomplish the essential skills required to master the fighting shotgun than Thunder Ranch. Thunder Ranch's highly respected, and well-known honcho, Clint Smith, is a Marine Corps veteran with two infantry tours in Vietnam. His experience includes seven years in law enforcement, during which time he served as head of his department's FTU (Firearms Training Unit), as well as the senior countersniper on the SWAT unit. He was Operations Officer for Jeff Cooper's API and both started and served as director of Heckler & Koch's



training services division. Together with his wife, Heidi, he runs the Thunder Ranch Training Facility with its busy 34-course schedule and still finds time for off-site training through International Training Consultants, Inc., a highly regarded mobile training program.

Thunder Ranch has a guest staff of about three dozen instructors. There were four instructors for our shotgun course. In addition to Clint and Heidi there was my good friend, Bill McLennan. Bill retired from the San Antonio Police Department after more than 30 years of service, the last six and a half of which were spent as OIC of firearms training.

McLennan's unflappable demeanor, dry Texas wit and encyclopedic knowledge of gunfighting tactics are tremendous assets in any course he instructs. He is, in my opinion, one of the very best firearms instructors in the country. He was more than ably matched up with Harry Fleming, who has been on the Kerrville, Texas, Police Department for 16 years and with Thunder

The Vang Comp Shotgun Barrel

Whether you are a law enforcement officer or a civilian defending his home and family, you must account for every projectile you send downrange. Any that miss the target may impact into an innocent bystander or a member of your family. Shotguns usually spew out multiple projectiles. As the distance to the target increases, the pattern these pellets make on the target increases in size until some of them miss completely. That is one of the shotgun's idiosyncrasies and it must be recognized by those selecting a scattergun for a gunfight.

The pattern a shotgun barrel produces is first of all dependent upon its choke, which is the amount of constriction inside the barrel toward the muzzle end. There are different degrees of choke. Most fighting shotguns are choked cylinder bore. Theoretically, this means no choke at all. However, most manufacturers supposedly add 0.002-inch or 0.003-inch of constriction at the muzzle to even out the spread of shot and prevent donut-shaped patterns. The pattern produced by various chokes is usually given as a percentage based upon the number of pellets falling within a 30-inch circle around the densest part of the pattern, when fired from a distance of 40 yards. In theory, a cylinder bore choke should place 35-45% of the pellets within the 30-inch circle. Cylinder bore chokes have been traditionally selected for combat shotguns to avoid distortion of slug rounds.

Any number of devices and procedures have been used to tighten the spread of pellets fired through the barrels of combat shotguns. Most were gimmicks that did little or had unacceptable trade-offs. Hans Vang (Vang Comp Systems, Dept. SOF, 234 Orange Avenue, Goleta, CA 93117; phone: 805-964-7956; fax: 805-964-6467) has developed a system that dramatically decreases the pattern without any undesirable side effects.

The heart of the Vang Comp System consists of "extending" the *forcing cone*. That is the forward part of a shotgun barrel's chamber, where the chamber is reduced to bore diameter. The designed intention of the forcing cone is to assist the passage of shot into the barrel. However, on factory barrels the angle between the forcing cone and bore usually remains too sharp. This batters the pellets, distorting their sphericity and enlarging the pattern. When Vang is finished altering a barrel, there is in essence no forcing cone; just a smooth, tapered transition from the chamber to the bore. This permits the crimped shotshell to

open smoothly and inhibits deformation of the pellets.

The second part of the Vang Comp System consists of "back boring". This procedure involves reaming the bore from the chamber end to enlarge the bore all the way up to approximately 1.5 inches in back of the muzzle. This produces a 0.017-inch to 0.020-inch constriction at the muzzle. I have also found that it also requires the use of a 10-gauge bore brush for cleaning.

Finally, the complete Vang Comp System includes a series of ports near the muzzle: 28 holes in three rows of nine, ten and nine on each side of the barrel and three holes aft of these on each side in the shape of a "V." This purpose of these ports is to reduce muzzle jump and provide faster recovery and target reacquisition. As the force vector prescribed by gas escaping from these ports is normal (perpendicular) to the bore's axis, they have little, if any, effect on perceived recoil. A second, undesigned benefit is a noticeable reduction in the flash signature with most loads.

The results of all this will obviously vary from barrel to barrel. With the Vang Comp System installed on the Remington Model 870 I used at Thunder Ranch, Federal 00 Buck Tactical Loads will place all nine pellets into a 2.5-inch-diameter group at 7 yards. At 15 yards, all nine pellets will impact within a 6.5-inch-diameter circle. At 25 yards, the pattern opens up to only a 7.5-inch-diameter circle containing all nine pellets. That is a demonstrably significant improvement, as a Remington Model 870 with a cylinder bore barrel fired for control produced an 18-inch-diameter pattern at 25 yards. It has been my observation with other shotguns that Federal's 00 Buck Tactical Loads seem to benefit most from the Vang Comp System. All of my many fighting shotguns have now been modified with the Vang Comp System.

Fighting with a scattergun can be divided into three zones. In the "A" zone, due to the proximity of the target, the shot act as a single projectile and you must aim carefully. The so-called "B" zone is the range of distances in which the shotgun is most effective with buckshot. Here we get the full benefit of the shot pattern, although the pattern should still be centered using the sights. The so-called "C" zone represents the distance at which the pattern can no longer be expected to provide acceptable stopping power. At this distance a slug should be selected. The Vang Comp System will extend zones "A" and "B" by at least 10 yards, respectively.

— P.G.K.

Ranch since it opened in 1993.

The Yellow Range, with its steel plates, is where most shotgun work takes place at Thunder Ranch. The first order of business on the afternoon of day one was to pattern our shotguns with both birdshot and buckshot at 3, 5, 7, 10, 20, 30 and 40 yards. Each and every shotgun barrel will exhibit different patterns, even those made consecutively on the same day at the same factory. Different brands and lots of shotshells will also produce different patterns. Always pattern your fighting shotgun with the same ammunition you intend to carry in harm's way.

Mastering the slide-action shotgun requires intensive programming. For example, every time you fire a round with a pump-action, you should cycle the action completely and smartly, even with an empty chamber. When loading, the first round is loaded through the ejection port with the support hand from around the bottom. Subsequent rounds should be loaded into the magazine using the support hand from underneath the loading gate.

The following procedure for the "administrative" unloading the ubiquitous Remington Model 870 is an example of the kinds of fighting shotgun techniques that must be repeated over and over again until they become second nature for the operator. 1) Use the action release to permit sliding the action to the rear. 2) Roll the shotgun to the right and let the shotshell withdrawn from the chamber fall into the support hand. 3) Then, remove the shotshell on the lifter in the same manner. 4) Remove any shells in the magazine tube by reaching inside the receiver through the magazine loading port and depressing the right shell latch, which will cause the shells to be reloaded one by one from the magazine tube.

Throughout the course, students were instructed to reload with shells from their pockets, just as they would rolling out of bed at 0300 in the morning. No one sleeps with a shotshell bandoleer wrapped over his chest. Simulating reality is a paramount attribute of training at Thunder Ranch. You will with absolute certainty fight the way you train.

The easiest technique to program is keeping the thumb of the firing hand straight and alongside the right side of the shotgun's receiver. Wrapping your thumb around the top of the stock of a 12-gauge shotgun in the conventional manner will invariably result in an unpleasant contact between your thumb and nose. The learning curve in this instance is incredibly short. Just do it two or three times and it won't happen again, unless you're from the bottom of the gene pool. It's sort of like touching a hot machine gun barrel. That usually happens only once.

Fire And Maneuver

After patterning our shotguns we began fire-with-movement drills during which we would shoot one, load one, shoot two or three, then load two or three. Throughout the three days, all loading and administra-

tive unloading was from the ready position with the shotgun mounted to the shoulder. Because of its recoil impulse, it's especially important that the shotgun butt be held firmly in the shoulder's "pocket," formed when the shooting arm is held up and parallel to the ground. The support arm should be down, somewhat under the gun and almost perpendicular to the ground.

On the morning of the second day we commenced by shooting at "lollipops" (circular steel knock-down plates), first one partner, then the other, then combined with movement to the right and left together with shooting at steel silhouettes — first with birdshot, then with buck.

Obtaining verbal compliance is an important aspect of training at Thunder Ranch and is stressed continually. This is, without doubt, a consequence of the law enforcement background of most of the staff.

While students often devise clever things to say, it's important to think ahead to possible court testimony and thus never use profanity and don't verbally identify your assailant's weapon ("You mean, sir, you shot and killed this poor individual and yet you knew he was *only* carrying a knife?") Furthermore, there are probably only three things you should say to the police after a deadly encounter. 1) "The guy had a weapon." 2) "I was in fear of my life." 3) "I want to speak to a lawyer."

After shooting steel with movement, we practiced sitting, prone and three kneeling positions using birdshot. Zeroing with slugs at 25, 50 and 100 yards followed this. Clint then presented a discussion of the various sling positions as he feels "A sling for a long gun is what a holster is for a handgun." Subsequently we walked downrange toward the targets with our guns slung in various positions and fired on command.

We ended before the lunch break with a drill referred to as "Rolling Thunder:" five steel plates and five shooters with five loaded rounds. They fire in sequence, first at one plate only, then two and finally all five. It's each shooter's responsibility to top off his magazine as the others are shooting. This is excellent practice in reloading under the simulated stress of a gunfight.

After lunch we warmed up with birdshot and began to work with barricades, which represent protective cover and/or concealment. Clint has said many times that, "The one thing to remember about gunfights is that the shit flies in both directions." That simply means it's a pretty good idea to move back to cover — while pouring lead at your opponent all the way — as quickly as possible. Students are instructed at Thunder Ranch never to project the muzzles of their weapons beyond the barricade, which represents a known area, into the unknown. We

also practiced switching positions with our partners behind the barricades without exposing ourselves to incoming fire. One-handed loading and shooting from behind the barricades followed this. As it is next to impossible to drive the butt properly into the shoulder pocket using only one hand and crouched behind the barricade, most of us earned our purple hearts at this point in the course.

Shooting Slugs

We spent an appropriate amount of time with malfunction drills that included an empty chamber, stovepipe, and double-feed. The very busy second day ended with another "Rolling Thunder" drill.

The third and final day of the course started with shooting five slugs from the position of our choice at 40 yards. When time permits, I prefer the sitting position, as it is more stable than kneeling. It's also Jeff Cooper's favorite

hunting position. While it is the most stable of all, high grass often prevents use of the prone position in the game field.

One of the most informative drills in this course was a hostage scenario that involves headshots using 00 buckshot without any pellets striking the hostage. This proved to be most effective at distances from 5 yards, up to but not exceeding 8 yards. Clint includes this drill because it demonstrates both what you can do and what you shouldn't do.

Using 00 buckshot we practiced transition drills, both with and without slings. Any shoulder-mounted weapon — shotgun, rifle or submachine gun, can go down at any time during a gunfight. Clearing stoppages is an important element in the training cycle at Thunder Ranch. However, if you are carrying an auxiliary sidearm it's almost always substantially quicker to deploy with it than attempt to clear a stoppage, especially something as bad as a double-feed in a slide-action shotgun.

We finished at the Yellow Range before the lunch break with "battlefield pickup" drills; mounting and firing from the slung position; loading two, then firing three with movement to the right, left or rear; and a Rolling Thunder exercise.

After lunch we moved over to the Terminator. Using buckshot, Clint walked each student through a "Jungle Run" on the road nearby that consisted of steel, motor-driven "upchuck" targets made by Larue Products that reset themselves about every 20 seconds. Meanwhile, the rest practiced tactical movement with dry runs through the Terminator.

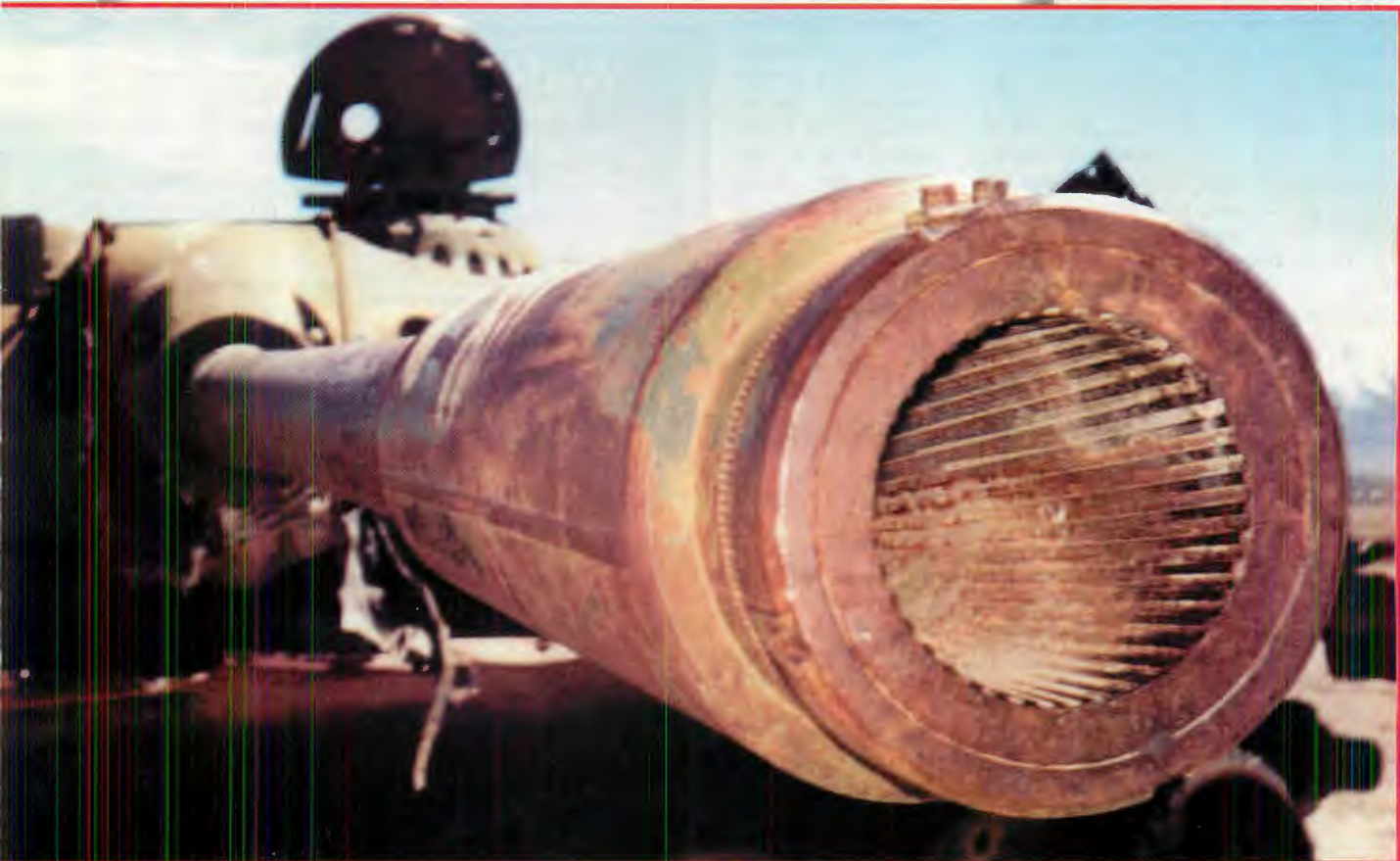
I have been fortunate enough to have participated in combat shotgun courses on three other occasions. Thunder Ranch's was — by far — the best. Best instruction, best facility, simply no contest. ❧



I woke to the sound of the *mullahs* calling people to the morning prayer and I inwardly groaned. It was going to be a long day. I'd calculated it's 225 kilometers from Torkham to Kabul over mostly rutted dirt road the whole way. The trip through the Khyber Pass was scenic but would pale in comparison to the Kabul Gorge that lies ahead. Normally, I'd hitch a ride by myself, but today we actually had to rent a minivan to get us all to the border. We had eight people in our group: A driver; his coachman; a Khyber Rifles escort; Bob Woodward and Jay Anania from ABC News; "Baba," our Pakistani guide already whacked out on hash; Robert Pelton, a frequent *SOF* Convention-goer; and myself, Rob Krott, man of action and intrepid foreign correspondent.

We stopped at the Michni checkpoint to say our goodbyes. From here on in it was just Pelton and I on the long overland route, something definitely not recommended by all the expats we'd talked to in Peshawar. A Pathan dressed in native *kurta* and *shalwar* — an immaculate *pugri* atop his head and a leather bandoleer gleaming with .303 Lee-Enfield cartridges slung across his chest — bummed a smoke from me. His Lee-Enfield rifle — dating to WWII — was at least

Text & Photos
by Rob Krott



The streets of Kabul, well holed from war, thread through a rubble city — whose rubble hides mines, booby traps and UXO. (inset) Knocked-out T-54, victim of AT mines lavishly used by all parties in Afghan war, stands as mute warning what the UXO littering this most-mined country also does to unwary civilians: a dozen deaths a day.

50 years old. We left Michni and started down the hill to the border post at Torkham. As we got closer to the border, the road became clogged with people on foot, donkeys pulling carts, and every manner of decrepit smoke-belching vehicle crowding the road. There was a shooting here just a week ago when we last crossed into Afghanistan. The plan was to get through the border quickly as we were "detained" here a few days previously after re-entering Pakistan from Afghanistan. Something about taking photos next to the sign that said "Photography Prohibited." I hoped none of the Paki officials noticed my "single entry" visa with the two entrance stamps next to it. I'll worry even more on the way back.

The Road To Kabul

I had a visa from the Northern Alliance in London issued personally by Wali Massoud, the brother of Shah Ahmad Massoud, "Lion of the Panjsher" and the hated enemy of the *Taliban*. Massoud contributed greatly to the defeat of the Soviets and now leads a well-trained, 6,000-man Tajik army against the *Taliban*. A visa issued by his brother is not exactly the best document to use in Taliban-held Afghanistan.

Strangely, the Taliban government honors it. Standing by a dirty rope across the road and

Kabul

MINE GAMES

Where Angels Fear To Tread





Inset photo: Robert Young Pelton

manning the border post were several Talib. They were armed with Kalashnikovs and held whips to smack the urchins smuggling scrap metal. Rosy-cheeked with acne, the wispy-bearded Talib are but youths of 15 or 16. As we presented our documents while wearing 100-watt smiles one Talib began idly whipping people. Neither of the Talib speaks a word of English and we speak no Dari, but no matter, they will act official. Wrapped in musty blankets, they both scratched themselves, and peered at our documents incomprehensibly. Hoping to avoid the smell and the lice I tried not to get too close. All eyes were upon us. They don't get very many Westerners on foot here. If any. Pelton is a good 6'5" and my blonde hair sticks out here. I hope I don't look too much like a Russian.

With our backpacks on our shoulders we walked down the road. We had no plan except to try and get a lift on a vehicle, rent a car or ox cart, anything to get us to Jalalabad and hopefully Kabul before dark. Sporadic gunfire erupts in the distance, but nobody seems to notice. We let two boys with wheelbarrows carry our rucksacks down the road to a "taxi." I became a millionaire when I stopped and made a deal with one of the roadside currency exchangers ... swapping 2,000 rupees for 1.47 million Afghanis. The Taliban tried to make us hire a gunman and car from them for the whopping sum of \$200 U.S. — a small fortune in Afghanistan. We begged off and walked down the road looking for another way to Kabul.

We were in luck. Abdul Haq, an Afghan we bumped into at the border crossing, had negotiated a ride to Kabul in an old Toyota Corolla four door, the only available vehicle for hire, for 800,000 Afghanis (\$22). He was going to Jalalabad so we offered him a free ride. I am no longer a millionaire.

The driver thinks he's at the Grand Prix and we hurtle down the rutted road at high speed and in imminent danger of collisions with buses and trucks. I looked out the window and tried not to contemplate our

impending death in a car accident in Afghanistan. It was a nice day and as on our previous journey to Jalalabad I admired the white-topped mountains, lush blue-green plains, and dusty hills. It is late spring and the fields are in bloom — a riotous mixture of bright green grass, red and white poppies, pink wild flowers, and light green wheat. Abdul points out the poppies which he describes as "making the smoking powder that is worth much money." Camel caravans of Kuchi nomads dressed in a rainbow of colors move in the distance while alongside the road small boys fly kites. At several checkpoints curious Taliban, intent on confiscating forbidden music tapes and hassling foreigners, stared at us through the windows like we were rare zoo exhibits. We made Jalalabad in 1 hour 15 minutes and stopped for lunch in a hotel once owned by Haji Abdul Khalil, the former governor now

Author discusses EOD with Afghan demo team. In foreground is UXO being staged for demolition.

in the Panjshir with Massoud. The empty hotel's dining room has beautiful carpets and ornate chairs. It was very nice by Afghan standards although all the windows were blown out by artillery. We had a nice meal of goat kebab, *palau*, radishes, and red beans which Abdul insisted on paying for. We drove through Sorobi passing the reservoir northwest of the dam and its idyllic scenery: The placid water, children playing ball on the "beach," and the green, stone terraced hills. We reached Kabul just as darkness fell — lucky for us, as there is a curfew. After a comedy of errors we finally found the UNICA Staff House. Because we were researching the demining effort we could arrange lodgings. As we checked in



Where it can be used, HALO uses heavy equipment. Where it can't (inset) — they use brave men.

Pelton made a very unfunny joke and asked if we could have President Najibullah's old room. He'd supposedly stayed here at one time. Najibullah was dragged out of another UN compound, despite being under "UN protection" and killed. They hung him from a lamppost. We're told if it's found that we're "journalists" the Taliban will come and get us. How nice.

The Hard Rocket Café

The local expat watering hole is the bar of the staff house aka The Tali-bar. It was packed and boisterous. A very nice pub with a fire going, it cleared out shortly after we arrived: All the expats had to be back in their own compounds before the 2100 curfew. The bar used to be called the Hard

18 and retired as a warrant officer. A quiet man whose oft-repeated line is "Ah doo wut ahh doo," he's the expert at making Kabul a safer place.

In the morning we went to the MDC office and met with Tahsin Disbudak, an ex-Turkish Army engineer. Tahsin is the regional manager of UNOCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance) demining office. Tahsin quoted chapter and verse on the policy towards journalists (literally reading from the document). Fortunately, we were able to skip all the red tape and an enforced stay in the Inter-Continental Hotel at \$150 per day.

We first visited Save the Children. Save the Children tries to diagnose and treat children and provide basic healthcare education.

during the fighting for Kabul's western approaches and the area is replete with the usual: bombed-out buildings, burnt cars, shell holes, and piles of rubble. Dotting the urban wasteland were abandoned BTR-60s (they appeared to be the victims of RPG-7s) and all manner of military garbage. A briefing was given by Zemarry Atti, the team leader of MCPA Team #1. He has only one leg. That's the norm for the team — they're all land mine victims. The team joke is: "We're the only 8-man, 8-leg mine survey team in the world." The surveyors must all be experienced deminers. The experience shows. Zemarry went back to work despite losing his right leg. "It is God's will if I should be killed," he told me. As a good Muslim this is what he believes. *Inshallah*.

A mine-awareness class taught by OMAR (Organization for Mine clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation) — hopes to keep Afghan kids from becoming victims. (inset) Worth it? Kids on the road to Kabul, growing up in a country still at war, and the most-mined on earth.



Rocket Café before things eased up here. It's the only place in Kabul for a foreigner to get a drink. The sparse selection of booze is what's left of the last shipment in 1991. The only beer left is a few hoarded cans of Dortmund, which comes out only for special occasions. Everyone is suspicious of us, even though our stay was arranged by contacts in the demining program. I soon found out there were about a half-dozen demining consultants, all ex-military of course, working in Kabul. I immediately got a ration of attitude from a demining consultant, Andrew McAndrew, a 30-year veteran of the British Army's Royal Corps of Engineers. From Aberdeen and busy holding up one end of the bar he wanted to buy me a scotch but I refused repeatedly. An argument ensued until I explained I don't drink the cheap Pakistani scotch. In a heavy Scots burr he asked, "Well, whut whiskey wud ya drink, then?" When I answer "Cardhu" he has the barman pull out his private stock. It's Cardhu. Fortunately, thanks to nightly scotch appreciation sessions, we would end up on better terms. Andrew, 55, is an EOD expert and had been in Kabul for three years. He went into the British army at

They're somewhat hindered by the Taliban *fatwas* against women teaching and girls learning. We were told that children make up a large percentage of those hurt by land mines and UXO (unexploded ordnance). About 55% of land mine victims are children, while nearly 85% of the UXO victims are children. Land Mine Awareness Education is part of Save the Children's mission in Kabul. They're aided by some of the deminers as well. The education program includes three subject areas for children: what land mines are, how to avoid them, and lessons on staying away from scrap metal, mines and other tempting items. Many children actively hunt scrap metal and, unfortunately, pickup UXO, landmines, and the occasional booby-trapped object.

One-Legged Deminers

The next day it's off to Afshar-e-Silo in Kabul's Ward #5. Hosted by the Mine Clearance and Planning Agency (MCPA) Team #1 we got a quick dog and pony show in a bombed-out residential area near a Police HQ training area. Survey operations began here just two days previously. This was the front line of the urban battlefield

The area has been surveyed for UXOs (unexploded ordnance) of which there is a plethora. Kabul's chief concern is UXO. While mines are frequently found (they were used widely during the various battles for control of Kabul) the numbers of UXO littering the city greatly outnumber the mines here. Kabul once averaged five UXO "incidents" a day.

Zemarry explains that they use 1:100,000 maps for denoting location of sites and make free hand sketches during the actual demining survey. People are waiting nearby to receive a document declaring their intended home cleared. With this they can then go to the UNCHS (UN Center for Human Settlement aka Habitat) office. There they can get materials and funds to rebuild. But first they must comply with the benevolent bureaucracy which is necessary to keep people from rebuilding in mined areas and old battlefields littered with UXO. Sometimes (in the past during the fighting) these areas were cleared, mined again, surveyed again, cleared again, *ad nauseum*. Later that afternoon the survey team ran a mine awareness program using wood training aids for the local people.

I wandered up the hillside along the remains of narrow streets and photographed several UXO. At the top of the neighborhood was a very good view of Kabul. Here a dog and his handler found a PMN. It was blown in place. Next stop on the Kabul Land Mine



UXO training aids: Most of lost ordnance in Afghanistan is of Soviet/Combloc origin.

Tour was a battlefield clearance operation run by the deminers of Afghan Technical Consultants (ACT). It was in Qalacha, what was once a heavily populated residential area bordering Hashmat Khan Lake. From the lakeshore we heard gunfire from the opposite hillside. Massoud's forces were still relatively close to Kabul. The team had already cleared one AP mine and seventy-one pieces of UXO. The 30-man unit breaks down as: one team leader, one assistant team leader, four section leaders, and six men per each section. The team conducts operations per SOP — 1) search phase; a) search area, b) mark visually searched area [a red cross denotes UXO], c) complete search, and 2) collection phase: a) blow dangerous ordnance in place, b) "safer" (such as unfused UXO) ordnance moved to central collection point destruction by EOD team. I was examining a large pile of RPG rounds piled in an alleyway when a doorway opened and a small boy of about six raced out, nearly clambering over the pile and thus underscoring the need to get all this stuff cleared quickly.

I watched a shell blown with a kilo of plastique and five wraps of det cord. According to the Bomb Register about 500 bombs over 100 kilograms had been cleared from Kabul. One of the deminers remarked, "I think you were educated in this? You are very knowledgeable ..." Busted. I'd been trying to explain secondary explosions to a female "fact-finder" who'd nearly stepped on a well-marked PMN earlier that day.

The Taliban's Kabul

I was able to wander around Kabul. While it wasn't the most hospitable place, it was fairly safe if you kept to the main streets and the markets — although I was hit with a rock one day in the market. Another day I was just a few blocks from the UN staff house when I was forced into a Toyota Hilux pickup full of Taliban. Things looked very bad for a moment but they were just curious and wanted to practice their English. The whole incident could have been avoided if I'd taken a taxi instead of walking. Taxis were readily available and cheap. And the drivers a good source of information.

I also had many interesting conversations with people I met on the streets of

Kabul. Unfortunately, there wasn't much left of Kabul. Whole sections of the city were rubble. The people were usually subdued and somber. Kabul's official population is about 1.2 million people. Best estimates say it's only half that. Anyone with education or money has left. There is very little infrastructure remaining. Factories were looted or destroyed. Barely enough buildings remained to house Kabul's people. Many government buildings and cultural sites such as the Dar-ul-Aman Palace were in ruins. The city market is a collection of cast off western clothing, cheap 30-year-old Russian appliances, and scrap.

Collecting scrap seems to be the major occupation in Kabul. Destroyed tanks and armored personnel carriers are cut-up with torches after they've been stripped. Everything is salvageable in Kabul. I walked down the street from the staff house, peered in a boarded up building and saw a shop full of confiscated television sets — easily a hundred televisions and at least that many stereos. The Taliban have outlawed TV and the only music allowed is Islamic



Free enterprise, Afghan-style: After UXO is exploded, Afghan kids pour into the pit in search of scrap metal — shell fragments, scraps of copper or brass — which they can sell.

religious music. The Taliban control most of Afghanistan, but Massoud and the Northern Alliance hold on. Because of the Taliban's draconian rule, Massoud has many silent supporters throughout Afghanistan. The Taliban are known for their ultraconservative interpretation of *sharia*, or Islamic law. Their *sharia* is dictated by the *Ulema* (holy men) of the Darul Uloom Deoband, a theological seminary in Deoband, India, about 600 miles southeast of Afghanistan. However, even the Ulema have criticized the Taliban's recent fatwas (religious injunctions). The Taliban have issued over 60 fatwas including banning women from working or going to school, prohibition of photographs of people, and mandatory beards for men. Some of the stranger ones include prohibiting women from wearing white socks and a ban on kite flying. The Taliban have come under heavy criticism by human rights groups and feminists for their treatment of women. This is a sore point for the Taliban officials I spoke with. Many of the people in Kabul seem to have accepted Taliban rule in the interim until the infrastructure is rebuilt, but expect, or hope for, a more lenient rule.

Tali-Bad Demining

Tahsin had a letter typed up for us and we went over to the Taliban press office ensconced in an old British colonial — Raj-era government office building. The building, like all those in use by the Taliban government, hadn't seen a janitor in years. But I was surprised at some of the furnishings: Edwardian chairs, two marble-topped tables which I admired, and Victorian oil paintings in heavy gilt frames, all relatively untouched by the war. One of the oil paintings was of a country cottage. A gilt plate read: "In the country near Sheffield." It looked like it was done by a bored English housewife who missed Blighty. Proof that truly bad art need not fear looting. After an initial interrogation and introductions we were passed on to another office where they were busy wrapping Korans in green paper and tying up beautiful Kunduz rugs with white ribbon. Gifts for some visiting delegation we were told. But after much questioning by the press people it is ascertained that since they don't think we're technically journalists we don't need to register with the press office, therefore we must first be pre-approved as journalists by the Minister of Protocol. Typical Taliban run-around which we were prepared for. We went to still another office where we met the deputy assistant chief of protocol and made arrangements to get passes to the front lines.

The next day I sat in on an interview with the Deputy Minister of Information. A beady-eyed little guy with bad teeth and no education (which is a fair description of most Taliban), he was just one of the many ex-goatherds turned Taliban functionaries which I visited in a dirty office. I almost laughed out loud when he said; "We can reduce the cost of demining by a full 90%, if we, the Taliban, were only consulted by

Robert Young Pelton



the demining agencies." When pressed to enlighten us further he declared, "Well, I'm not an expert, others will have to work out the technical details." Yeah, right. This is a good example of what the NGOs have to deal with. These are people given to a lot of arrogant pronouncements, few of which are ever based on fact. And as for doing things themselves, the Taliban won't even mop their office floors. That's women's work, only they won't let their women out of the house. You figure it out.

The following day Pelton and I traveled east of Kabul to Policharkhi Harbi Pohontoon, the former Afghan Army's Military Academy and training area/gunnery range within sight of the Panjsher Valley. Andrew McAndrew was using it for an EOD point. It only took him three months to get approval to use the deserted ranges. I was introduced to Mohammad Zahir, a former colonel in the Afghan Army and head of the disposal unit. He knows first-hand the problem with incoming rockets. He had a rocket land 500 yards from his back yard two weeks ago. There was a nice line-up of 500-kilogram bombs and various UXO. The pit where they blow duds was already filled with RPG-7 warheads, fuses, AT mines, 105mm rounds, 100 kilogram aerial bombs, 122mm Grad BM-21 MRLS rockets, shells from 23mm to 105mm, and a 132mm BM-14 rocket. A Bm-27 Uragan (Hurricane) 220mm rocket had been cut open by some idiot with a hammer and chisel, exposing the cluster of nine anti-tank mines inside. It was all fused for demolition and wrapped with det cord. Using a method known as deflagration they explode a ballistic disk into the side of bomb, actually burning off the bomb faster than an explosion. With Andrew acting as safety officer we got below ground in a bunker and waited for the big bang. He blew off two charges and after the debris settled the all clear was sounded. It looked like the California Gold Rush as nearly a hundred people, previously held behind the safety line, rushed to the pit to scavenge for brass and copper scrap. The going rate was about 75 cents for 16 pounds of copper. A fight broke out in the pit and one teenager began hitting another with a shovel. As I wandered around the top of the pit some coward beamed me with a rock. It wouldn't be the last time. Welcome to Kabul.

(above) UXO is like gold, it's where you find it — but in Kabul, it's everywhere. (below) Zemarry Atti, team leader of MCPA (Mine Clearance and Planning Agency) Team #1: Motivation? All the men on his team are victims of land mines.



Crime And Punishment

The following day, a Friday, we cruised by the Kabul Stadium, scene of weekly public executions. There was a *shura* of about forty Talib taking place on the soccer field. It didn't look like much was going on, but I learned later that there had been two hand-choppings and a throat-slitting. In Kabul they call this "entertainment." There were rumors that the Taliban were going to toss a miscreant off the roof of the 29-story Telecom building; the last high-rise left standing in the city. The guilty party had butchered over 50 dogs and sold them as meat.

At 1520 hours, a Uragan 220mm HE-fragmentation rocket hit Kabul. There would be more. Though several blocks away the large boom of the 280-kilogram projectile is unmistakable and I swear I could feel a tremor through the ground. A large offensive by Massoud's Northern Alliance was pending. Days later I will lay awake in my dusty room at the Inter-Continental Hotel listening to rockets and

artillery slamming into a nearby hillside.

That weekend I went out into the field again, this time with Alex Grinling of the HALO Trust (Hazardous Area Life Support Organization). Grinling, 28, a Sandhurst graduate and ex-Grenadier Guards infantry officer had been the British Army liaison to the Spanish UNPROFOR in Bosnia. As we chatted about Mostar and Jablanica and other Balkan garden spots he suddenly asked, "What the fuck were you doing in Bosnia?" I just smiled and said, "Tourist." After leaving the British Army in 1995 Alex went to work for the HALO Trust and had served in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Angola before his posting to Afghanistan. He has more time in minefields than most soldiers have in the chow line. One of the truly good guys, Grinling's leadership style was of the quiet reserved type. Everyone respected him. A lot. Out at Silo his Afghan deminers were using front-end loaders with locally fabricated baskets or catchers to remove large quantities of UXO and graders to spread out debris. Cranes were being used to scoop up large buckets of earth from yards and the inside of rubble houses. Then spread out by the graders. In areas the machines couldn't reach Grinling's deminers worked painstakingly with trowel and entrenching tool.

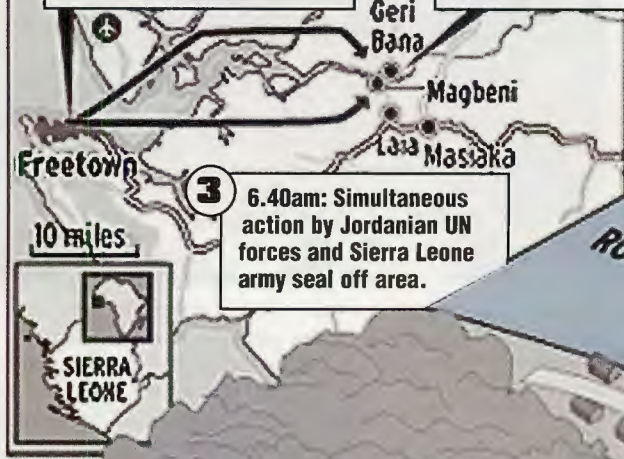
Out Of Afghanistan

After we'd finished making the rounds of the demining activities we were finally forced to give up our lodgings at the UN Staff House and register at the Inter-Continental Hotel. I won't waste time describing what a decrepit place it was. Next on the agenda was a trip to the front lines to see the fighting. That was set up without too much trouble and was very interesting. Getting shot at is always interesting. (see "Taliban: Afghanistan's Apaches"; *SOF*, July 2000) The night was spent listening to artillery fire and rockets. Kabul was within the 35-kilometer range of the Northern Alliance forces' multiple rocket launchers and no one was safe. I spent a sleepless night while Pelton slept on the balcony to escape the dust in the room. In the morning I packed my rucksack. I checked my watch as I opened the balcony door. It's April 1st — April Fool's Day. We've spent the better part

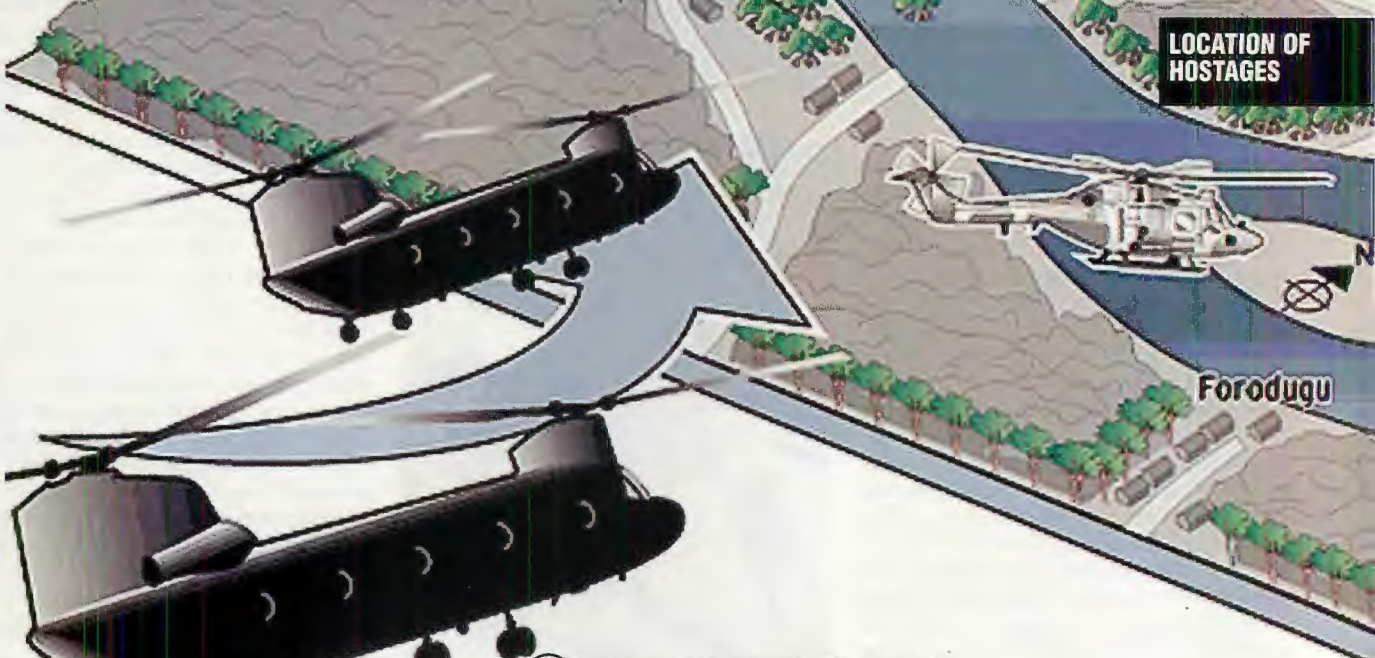
Continued on page 72

- 1** 6.16am: SAS and Paras in three Chinooks, supported by two Lynx helicopters, take off from Freetown.
- 2** 6.40am: Chinooks land at Magbeni and Geri Bana.

Lynx helicopters provide covering fire throughout operation.



- 3** 6.40am: Simultaneous action by Jordanian UN forces and Sierra Leone army seal off area.

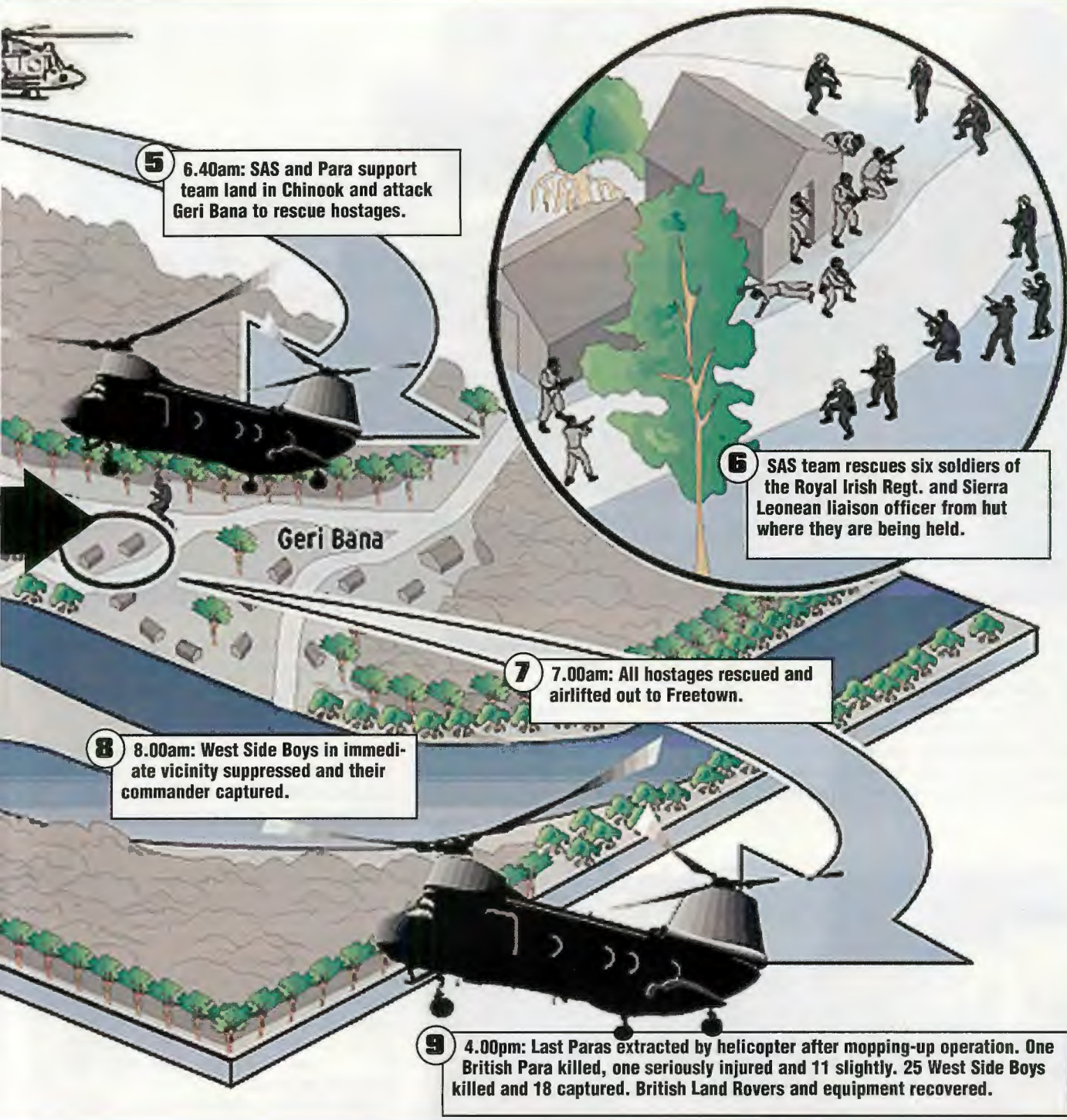


LOCATION OF HOSTAGES

- 4** 6.40am: Two Chinooks land Paras in jungle to south of Magbeni where rebels are dug in with captured British Land Rovers and a heavy machine gun.

BRITISH BRAVERY, UN BUMBLING

Sierra Leone: Disreputable Debacle



5 6.40am: SAS and Para support team land in Chinook and attack Geri Bana to rescue hostages.

6 SAS team rescues six soldiers of the Royal Irish Regt. and Sierra Leonean liaison officer from hut where they are being held.

7 7.00am: All hostages rescued and airlifted out to Freetown.

8 8.00am: West Side Boys in immediate vicinity suppressed and their commander captured.

9 4.00pm: Last Paras extracted by helicopter after mopping-up operation. One British Para killed, one seriously injured and 11 slightly. 25 West Side Boys killed and 18 captured. British Land Rovers and equipment recovered.

by Al J. Venter,
reporting from Freetown

Things can go seriously wrong when a 13,000-strong UN force in Sierra Leone is either unwilling or incapable of rescuing 11 of its own, who were taken prisoner by a rag-tag bunch of drunken malcontents. After weeks of haggling with the rebel group calling itself "The West Side Boys," London, in exasperation, finally took matters in hand. A strike force of 150 Paras and Special Forces troopers were flown to West

Africa, and in a short, sharp operation last September the hostages were rescued, then airlifted out of the rebel jungle base. It took the rescue force just 20 minutes to complete the job.

The attack, codenamed Operation Barras, on the rebel West Side Boys' (WSB) camp at the head of Rokel Creek was a master stroke in planning and execution. Britain's *Sunday Times* said afterwards that it was "extremely complex" and "a textbook operation, worthy of study for years to come." According to General Sir Charles Guthrie,

Chief of Britain's Defense Staff and a former SAS trooper himself, "it was one of the most complicated operations in which I have ever been involved."

Three RAF CH-47s (Chinooks), with machine guns mounted to port, starboard and on their retractable rear ramps, were deployed, as well as two Lynx choppers. Also providing close air support was the Mi-24 gunship of the Sierra Leone Air Wing, with South African contract pilot Neall Ellis and his motley crew at the controls (see the September & October 2000 issues of *SOF*). Together, they laid down curtains of covering fire for the attackers, some of whom had



to wade in chest-deep swamp water for 600 yards to reach their objectives.

The Chinooks ferried 120 Paras into the target area in an unusually well-coordinated two-pronged, dawn assault. One group was tasked to eliminate rebel positions on the south bank of a heavily vegetated creek, while the mission of the other was to pull the

hostages out of Gberi Bana camp immediately to the north. Dozens of men from D Squadron, 22 SAS, as well as a unit from the Royal Marines' Special Boat Service (SBS) had already infiltrated into the area. Some of these troops had gone in clandestinely several days before, a number of them in scuba gear. The prime SAS role was to supply the

attacking force with intelligence, then to form a succession of blocking positions to prevent the "Boys" from escaping. Initially, they had a rough time of it.

Working largely in pairs and dressed in ghillie suits — as they had done often enough in Northern Ireland in the past — they lay in shallow hollows and improvised trenches that were usually half-full of water. Most of the time they used nature's natural foliage for camouflage.

Early reports spoke of them subsisting on specially packed rations and urinating into bottles during the day, when they were immobile. Their real work started after dark, when they used night-vision goggles and special radios to provide the headquarters in Britain with intelligence. This eventually became so detailed that London was able to construct a replica of the West Side Boys' camp, which was then used for preparing the attack.

The terrain — rendered extremely difficult by a mix of tropical forest, swamps and thick triple-canopy jungle — definitely favored the rebels. Large numbers of scorpions and snakes, as well as the occasional crocodile, added immensely to the problems the British faced. They also needed to be discreet, so as not to alarm the occasional monkey troop that became inquisitive, or disturb the flocks of birds, which included thousands of parrots that had colonized the jungle over their heads. If either had sounded the alarm, the rebels would have come out to investigate.

Once the basics had been worked out, the



(top) British Para mobile patrol in central Freetown. (left) British Marines on mobile patrol in Sierra Leone using Land Rovers loaned to them by Paras.

rescue plan was presented to Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister. He gave his approval four days before the operation was launched. An interesting aside were the words of Brigadier Andrew Stewart. He declared rather pointedly that "You cannot resolve a situation like this with a laser bomb from 30,000 ft." Stewart and his planning staff monitored the minute-by-minute progress of the raid from the headquarters of Britain's Permanent Joint Headquarters, at Northwood, located just outside of London — roughly 2,700 miles from where it was taking place.

The United States took more than a passing interest in the operation, since the U.S. Army now has several large contingents of Green Berets in the area, busily providing Special Forces training to battalion-size units in Nigeria (five), Ghana (one), and the Republic of Guinea (one).

Bad Intel

What triggered all this activity was the capture a few weeks before of 11 British soldiers out on patrol, all of whom were attached to the Royal Irish Regiment, commanded by Major Alan Marshall. They had been returning to their base at Benguema north of Freetown in three Land Rovers when, inexplicably, the major ordered them to turn off the main road. Their path led them down a narrow dirt track to Magbeni, where, unknown to Major Marshall, a large force of WSBs was congregated. They were surrounded by squads of renegade West Side Boys who initially used a group of child soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs as bait. In a subsequent debriefing, the Major disclosed that he had been told that there were "only a few" WSB's in the village. Bad intel.

Once they were surrounded, the rebels pulled a truck up alongside which had a twin-barreled 14.5mm heavy machine gun mounted on its cab. Unwilling to kill "children armed with AKs," the squad reluctantly surrendered. They were then stripped of their weapons and uniforms, after which the rebel leader, "Brigadier" Foday Kallay, threatened to execute anyone who tried to escape. Kallay proved to be an evil-eyed little man who was in a permanent rage as a result of his liberal use of cocaine, *ganja* (pot) and a potent local brew that resembles gin. In fact, several times he staged mock executions of his hapless captives. When Major Marshall protested or tried to reason with Kallay, he was bullied and brutalized. The British soldiers realized he wasn't joking, however, since Kallay summarily executed 27 of his own men who foolishly asked his permission to turn themselves in to the UN.

Not averse to a little bartering, he arranged a meeting with British officials some days later. He and his bodyguards arrived — much to the chagrin of the Brits — in one of the Land Rovers that his group had confiscated. After a long discussion that went nowhere, he finally traded six of his British hostages for a consignment of clothes, food and (surprise, surprise) a satellite phone.

That, ultimately, was his undoing. Wherever Kallay went, the instrument was



British soldier atop control tower at Lungi, a rebel target from the beginning.

nearby. He slept with the phone under his pillow, oblivious to the fact that British electronics experts, in true James Bond-style, had installed a miniature radio transmitter in the set; it broadcast a DF beam — even when it was switched off. The British force eventually used it to zero in his headquarters to a detachment of avenging Paras.

The size of the rescue effort was predicated on the level of resistance that London felt would be offered by the rebels. The six soldiers already released had been extensively debriefed, so that London knew precisely what it had to do. Northwood was aware, for instance, that the hostages had been taken by open boat from Magbeni to a cluster of mud huts in a former palm oil plantation at Geri Bana, on the north bank of the Rokel. They also knew how many guards there were, when and where they slept, and that there were about 60 well-equipped rebels on each of the two riverbanks with mortars, LMGs and heavy weapons. One of the three British Land Rovers, with its pedestal-mounted .50 caliber Browning, was dug in to provide flanking fire. The defensive perimeter appeared to be centered about Kallay's hut, and in the British plan his capture was one of the primary aims, second only to the rescue of the hostages.

Brutal Assault

The assault, in the words of the *London Times*, "was brutal." A British press report said afterwards that "about 25 of the West Side Boys were killed." However, other knowledgeable insiders stated that you could probably multiply that figure by between five and six. Although the hostages were airlifted out within 20 minutes, the Paras and Special Forces elements stayed behind until nightfall. Asked what they had been doing, one of them answered, "cleaning up."

The only British soldier killed was SAS Bombardier Brad Tinnion, who took a hit in the back on exiting from one of the choppers, although 11 more of the attackers were wounded, one of them seriously. Seven were hit in a single enemy mortar blast that would have caused more serious injuries,

had the explosive effect not been dampened by the round burrowing into the mud before it exploded.

"Superlative Sierra Leone" they called the country not long ago. At independence in 1961 its people were among the best educated in West Africa, as well as the friendliest on the Continent. Also, the country had diamonds and gold in abundance, and Britain had left it with a balanced budget. From the sublime to the barbaric, how dramatically things have changed. Tragically, that's the story of much of Africa today.

At the start of the Millennium, almost nothing of the old order remains. In sheer terms of atrocities, Sierra Leone's decade-old war is the world's worst; its government is among the most corrupt; and its excesses, tabulated daily by organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross, are rated the most macabre. Apart from lopping off the hands and feet of children, the rebels are now charged with cannibalism, and there is a level of mindless brutality that includes the ritual execution of innocent noncombatants. It is a total mess, like Pol Pot all over again, but minus the twisted ideology. Certainly, in the year 2000, it would be difficult to match this horrific combination of anarchy and violence anywhere else on the globe.

The UN Cometh

Enter the United Nations. This organization was supposed to put a stop to it all. Instead, the UN has compounded most of the problems. UNAMSIL (the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) is not only the world's largest single multinational "peacekeeping" operation, involving personnel from more than 20 countries, it is also the most incompetent. It has an army that won't fight (unless there are British elements involved), harnessed to a command structure that cannot make even the most fundamental decisions. Prior to the departure of its former commander, Indian Army Major General Vijay Jetley, the command hierarchy was comprised primarily of

Indians and Nigerians, but now that India has completely withdrawn its military contingent, the entire UN effort in Sierra Leone appears to be unraveling. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is trying to recruit more countries to send in military forces, but there are simply no takers.

With perhaps the single exception of East Timor, the UN is conducting in Sierra Leone what could possibly be the most inefficient peacekeeping effort attempted by that organization in recent times. Apart from its numerous military contingents, there are God-knows-how-many civilian employees in Freetown, as well. Upon arrival, most of them are handed a set of keys to their own

brand-new vehicles.

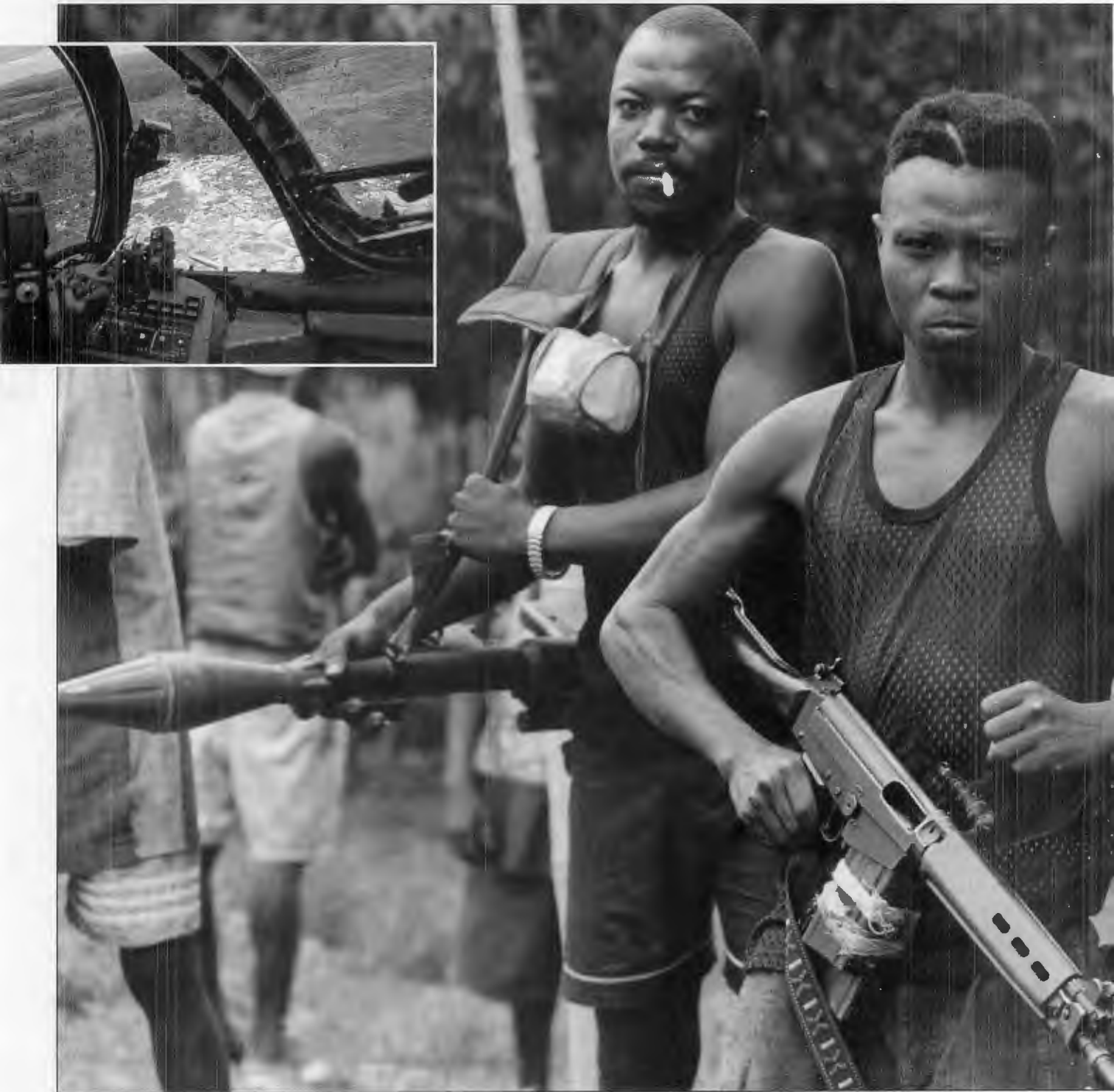
One result of this little extravagance is that there are now more vehicles in Sierra Leone (usually top-of-the-line Toyota Land Cruisers) than had entered this West African state in the previous quarter century, all of them flown into the country within the first six months of UNAMSIL's existence. Since nobody can go beyond the city limits or venture into the countryside without massive armored escort, smaller sedans (at one third the cost of the 4x4s) would have done just as well for the streets of Freetown!

On Sundays, a day off for *everybody*, the beach along the Aberdeen sea front looks like a used car lot for white Japanese SUVs.

The prospect of "scoring" — as the trade quaintly puts it — has caused prostitutes from just about every state in Africa to gravitate to Sierra Leone like bedbugs to a smelly blanket.

The logistics that made all this possible has created a hole in the UN's finances. Much of this cash, in any event, comes from the likes of you and me: the American taxpayers. And it's a lot! On any day of the week, giant Antonov 124 super transports (bigger than 747s) zoom into Lungi Airport with more UN resources. The waste of money is criminally negligent, but then that seems to be the UN style.

Sierra Leone's UN operation is not only



cumbersome, but the organization is also pseudo-secretive about its actual purpose there. Everybody — from shoeshine boys in Freetown on up — is aware that there is a fairly extensive ground war being fought in the interior, but, as one of the media guys warned soon after I got there, don't ask any UN official what they intend to do about it. I did, during the one and only press briefing that I attended, and was told that I was being provocative.

Although UNAMSIL is one of the largest active military forces in Africa, its leadership, in addition to being woefully indecisive, does not seem to understand the nature and extent of the threat. Direct ques-

tions about the role of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) are fudged, or, in my case, fobbed off with inconsequential facts and trivialities. As one of the British correspondents suggested, we were given the sort of answers that one expects from a small town political meeting — most of the replies were evasive, others were elusive, and some were patently dishonest.

For example: *Apropos* absolutely nothing, UNAMSIL's Deputy Force Commander, Nigerian General Mohammed A. Garba made the statement in early September that Foday Sankoh's rebels had "never once during the past year initiated any attack on a government position." Simply put, that was preposterous, and one can only speculate what motivated his comment. As Neall Ellis, Sierra Leone's freelance helicopter combat pilot (see September & October 2000 *SOF*), said afterwards, "You begin to wonder in whose pay he's in and whether the promise of diamonds didn't have something to do with it ... hasn't he heard of Lunsar?" Lunsar was the scene of a succession of back and forth battles between the rebels and the government over an extended period.

The orders issued from the UN's luxurious headquarters at the Mammy Yoko Hotel, where only UN personnel (and the occasional hack) are allowed to stay, are primarily for show. As one of the Scandinavian naval officers explained, nobody bothers about those orders because no one enforces them. He was of the opinion that the UN effort in Sierra Leone had started to seriously deteriorate, though London was obviously working hard at salvaging the situation.

The attitudes and efficiency of some of the Third World units that were part of the peacekeeping process while I was there were appalling. The Jordanians were among the worst. It was their camp that Major Marshall had visited before being taken hostage. We would often hear reports

The problem: Young men of the West Side Gang pictured with RPG7 and British SLR and dope. (inset, left) What it's all about: The Sierra Leone diamond fields. (inset, below) Members of the Jordanian Special Forces serving with the Jordanian Battalion on UN duty in Sierra Leone.

from the front that the Jordanians were fraternizing with the West Side Boys. Sometimes, we were told, they had let armed rebels pass through the checkpoints that were supposed to be under their control. Rarely would they take the action required to enforce UN directives, probably because the area had experienced a lot of bloodshed in the months and years before (and was also where some of our colleagues had been killed). The consensus was quite simply that the Jordanians were all terrified of the jungle. While they might have been brilliant soldiers in the desert sands of Arabia, all the green and spleen of West Africa somehow got to them.

Jordanian Impotence ... Or Collaboration?

Chris McGreal of London's *Guardian* wrote an article that was critical of the Jordanians when he was assigned to cover the West Coast. When the BBC asked him about it, he replied that a relationship of convenience existed between the Jordanians and the West Side Boys — to keep the peace and to make sure that both sides stayed safe. He added that the Arab troops would probably be vulnerable to an attack by the West Side Boys if they failed to get along with them. "It's a means of buying them off, so to speak," he said, adding that Sierra Leone military officials had first-hand knowledge of the arrangement. "The UN cannot say that it's not informed about this situation," McGreal said. Unfortunately, this arrangement did not include the civilian populace.

Then there was "Operation Thunderbolt," declared by the UN Command to have been a "most effective" raid; in reality it was simply a comic-opera microcosm of their overall effort. It was supposed to entail an attack on the Occra Hills area, in a bid "to stop the excesses and the abuses of the WSB's." According to Neill Ellis, there was a lot of noise, radio traffic, helicopters flying around and UN movement on the road leading north. Unfortunately, the "boys" had been tipped off and made themselves scarce until it was over. Jordanian officers, privy to the details of the upcoming operation, had apparently told some of the rebels in their areas to warn their commanders of what was coming. This was confirmed afterwards by some of the WSB's who came in under the amnesty program.

Uncharacteristically, a UN official admitted to McGreal: "I don't think collaboration is too strong a word to describe what is happening ... the Jordanians are feeding those guys and socializing with them without thinking that these are same ones who are killing people and raping girls." Sources at Cockerill Barracks, headquarters of the Sierra Leone Army, also corroborated this.

The Jordanians would routinely shift their checkpoints at Masiaka and Port Loko as the spirit moved them, and would rarely advise the UN Command back in Freetown of what they had done. On the night that Ellis and I were stopped at a checkpoint, an entire



Andrew Chittock/Defence Picture Library



Andrew Chittock/Defence Picture Library

Continued on page 73

The Mayaguez REVISITED

AS a molten sun rose in the east, Major Howard Corson swung his heavily loaded HH-53C helicopter, call sign *Knife-31*, into a right turn, rolling toward Tang Island's eastern beach. To Corson and the other 26 servicemen on board, the landing was expected to be routine. The intelligence estimate indicated only twenty irregulars defended the entire 7-mile-long island against the incoming 242 Marines aboard eleven helicopters. Corson slowed to a hover. From one of the other helicopters, he heard a call that would change everything.

"Hot LZ, hot LZ!"

The entire beachfront lit up with muzzle blasts. In seconds, *Knife-31* was on fire as heavy machine-gun rounds tore through the fuselage. Corson tried vainly to reverse course. As the chopper swung away, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Richard Vandeger fired an M16 out his side window. Then the instrument panel exploded from a direct hit by a Rocket Propelled Grenade. Dazed and wounded,

with nothing left in front of him, Corson rode the aircraft into the surf. He remained frozen in his seat until crewmember Staff Sergeant Jon D. Harston brought him to his senses. A Marine tried to free Lt. Vandeger, who slumped critically wounded in his seat, but flames burned the Marine's hands so badly he gave up and withdrew as enemy rounds kicked up water all around. Three Marines charged the beach and were immediately cut down by machine-gun fire. Ten men never got out of *Knife-31*. The 14 survivors swam seaward, shedding equipment as they dodged tracers.

Thus, on 15 May 1975, the last official battle of the Vietnam War began on an obscure island 30 miles off the coast of Cambodia. The battle lasted 14 hours. When the Marines withdrew, three wrecked helicopters were abandoned along with 15 dead servicemen and

East Beach in the BG. Cambodian MI-6 helicopter about to land in the clearing.



Ghosts Of The Past Resurrected In Cambodia

Text & Photos
by Will Cadence

three live members of a machine-gun team. The fate of those left behind have been the subjects of investigation ever since.

In November 1995, I joined the *U.S.S. Brunswick* off Cambodia, the first U.S. warship to enter those waters since the end of the war. The *Brunswick* had dropped anchor off Tang Island, 30 miles from the coastal town of Kompong Som. Their mission: Assist members of the U.S. Government Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) from Hawaii in looking for remains of U.S. servicemen missing-in-action from the 1975 *Mayaguez Incident*. During the November operation, as reported in the May 1996 issue of *Soldier Of Fortune*, 161 human bones were recovered from the wrecks of the three downed American helicopters. That article revealed the possibility that three members of a machine-gun crew had been left behind alive in 1975. The revelation spurring renewed efforts to resolve the fate of the fire team, including personal interest on the part of the United States Ambassador to Cambodia, Kenneth R. Quinn. Quinn had been a White House staffer during the 1975 crisis and, upon assignment to Cambodia 22 years later, established a memorial to the fallen servicemen after reading the *SOF* article.

In 1998, I returned to meet and interview a former Khmer Rouge medic who accompanied our group to the island and related first-hand information about the battle and captured Marines, whose description closely matched the fire team.

Then, in March 1999, a team from JTF-FA returned to the island and the costal area at Kompong Som, to interview additional Khmer Rouge veterans, dive in the shallow waters off the eastern beach, and conduct archaeology "digs" at numerous sites. The temperature was 104 degrees in the shade, 126 in the sun — and most of the



Inside the heavily loaded, steam room of Mi-6 helicopter. L to R: Army Sgt. John P. Ringquist (linguist), Sgt. Albert Vincent (Mortuary Affairs Specialist), USN Chief Petty Officer Kevin P. McAfee (EOD Technician). (left) Author handling minigun unearthed on Koh Tang. Weapon was from ill-fated *Knife-31* which was downed nearby. This weapon was fired in anger during the 1975 battle. (below) USN Chief Petty Officer Kevin McAfee (EOD Technician) clearing search area for unexploded ordnance.





(clockwise from above) JTF-FA team members troweling excavation site. Army Sgt. Albert L. Vincent with Army Sgt. 1st Class Mason Fail (team medic) at right. A 105mm shell buried near an excavation site. Bucket brigade: Cambodian laborers and JTF-FA members load sand into buckets and haul them to screening tables. Sand is then sifted through screens in hopes of finding bone fragments. Live small arms ammunition found at the site of the MG position. The M60 team had two M16s and a .45 cal. pistol. USMC GYSGT Vincent P. Owsley (EOD Technician) displaying some of the ordnance found including 105mm shell (left) and a mortar round (right).



work was in the sun. The team had two encounters with deadly snakes and one with a green-striped variety whose lethality remains undetermined. The area is not only "hot" in terms of temperature and vipers, but unexploded ordnance is scattered throughout the island.

While snorkeling off the eastern beach, I found a Kevlar panel from the vest of one of the Marines who had been aboard *Knife-31*. Over on the west side, USAF Major Joe Davis, Public Affairs Officer from JTF-FA, used a platoon sergeant's notebook to locate the site of the machine-gun pit defended by the three missing Marines. Buried at that location was live M16 ammunition that the men had apparently abandoned once they realized they were stranded on the island. The M60 fire team had two M16s and a .45 pistol. Evidence of the heavy fighting that had occurred there was plentiful, including .50 cal. machine-gun rounds that had imbedded in the sand berm the men had built around their position.

Em Son, a one-legged former commander of a 45-man detachment, Khmer Rouge 450th Battalion, gave details regarding the battle. The 450th was a special sapper battalion responsible for defending the western beach. Em Son recalled the day of the battle, "We were driven south at about noon, to the southern part of the island." That would equate with the arrival of a second wave of Marines which hit the beach at that time. Near sunset, the Americans seemed intent on withdrawing, so Em Son pushed his unit forward. "We tried to turn the southern flank, but it was too dangerous. We were driven back," he remembered. "We continued to fire mortars into the area, but could not advance." At dawn, his unit began another mortar attack, moving forward after each barrage until the west beach was safely reached. "The Americans were gone," the commander said, "except for one body, wrapped in a poncho." That would have been the body of LCP Ashton Loney, which had been abandoned under heavy fire during the night helicopter evacuation.

Later, that same Cambodian witness reported the fate of at least two Marines whose descriptions closely matched members of the three-man machine-gun team. The witness stated that, "Three to four days after the battle, during two consecutive nights, food was stolen from the kitchen area in the center of the island." On the third night, his unit set a trap to snare the thief, and two Americans were caught attempting to steal food. The capture was reported to 3rd Division Headquarters in Kompong Som by radio, and the division ordered the Americans be brought to Kompong Som in the morning. The men were taken to Ti Nean Pagoda which had been converted to a prison on the mainland. They were held there until their fate was determined in Phnom Penh. A week later, word arrived. Orders were to execute the Marines and dispose of the bodies.

A mainland burial site was identified by Em Son. Team Anthropologist Dr. John E. Byrd discovered a single burial pit in the excavation floor which corresponded nearly exactly in terms of size, shape and orientation to the witness description of the burial pit he dug in 1975. Because a bulldozer had leveled the area some years before, only small fragments, including what is thought to be a human fibula, a lower leg bone, were unearthed along with an ominous looking set of hand manacles. "The fibula is a uniquely human bone of the size we

found here," noted Dr. Byrd. At a nearby site on the seashore, a bone similar to a section of humerus (upper arm) was found by Army photographer Specialist Scott Richardson and Army Major Ronald Stafford, Team Leader of the March '99 mission. Neither remnant was large nor dense enough to provide a DNA sample. As a result, another mission to the Kompong Som sites is scheduled for 2000, but from the interviews and recovery operations thus far completed, The Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CIL-HI) has resolved the fate of nine other servicemen who were aboard *Knife-31* that fateful day in May.

Mitochondria DNA (mtDNA) science has been used to identify these last casualties of the Vietnam War. The technique has found notoriety lately, the most notable mtDNA success story being that of the investigation done on remains disinterred from the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, in Washington, D.C. The Unknown Soldier's bones from the Vietnam War were positively identified as those of First Lieutenant Michael Blassie, an Air Force pilot shot down in 1972. The identification process requires analysis of hardy mitochondria DNA from deep within recovered bones, then matching it with blood, saliva, or even skin samples of DNA taken from maternal relatives of the missing.

At this point, the Department of Defense has split the case into those involving the 13 men missing from *Knife 31*, downed off the eastern shore, and the other five MIAs lost on the western side of the island.

The process of case closure in each instance is painstakingly slow. In fact, maternal relatives of four of the missing servicemen were not even located until June '98. Within a few months of that development, nine mtDNA matches were obtained. Still, the families were not immediately notified. The casualty office for each service is concerned that a family might be told too soon that their son's remains had been recovered and were being sent to them for interment. The family might go through the ordeal of revisiting the memories of their son's loss, a funeral, and burial. Then say, six months later the government calls again and relates that they have found a few more bones. The family is once again traumatized. As a result, case closure is a carefully controlled process starting with the recovery teams from the JTF-FA and CIL-HI. Their finds are sent to DNA specialists at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab in Maryland (AFDIL). The results are sent for review by civilian, board-certified consultants. This is done, according to Public Affairs specialist at CIL-HI, Army Staff Sgt. Earl Bushong, "So that independent, nonmilitary confirmation of our findings are made." If the civilian review validates the AFDIL findings, the separate services Casualty Offices are notified, then each individual family, and finally a military review board authorizes public release of the names.

For the nine mtDNA matches so far obtained, the civilian review board is completing its approval. Next-of-kin notifications will follow shortly as will public announcements. All nine servicemen were aboard *Knife-31*. That none of the ID's include any of the missing three-man machine-gun team continues to support the possibility that indeed these men survived the battle. The search continues.

Over the years, Will Cadence has been a frequent contributor to SOF. ✎

The Last Battle

The *S.S. Mayaguez*, a merchant ship carrying 274 35-foot containers, was plying the seas in international waters off Cambodia on Monday afternoon, 12 May 1975, when it was hijacked by Khmer Rouge naval forces. For four days, the *Mayaguez* and the plight of its crew of 40 merchant-seamen captured the attention of the world. Thus began three days of intense negotiations between Washington and Phnom Penh. When diplomacy failed, President Ford ordered a military rescue operation.

A ship-seizure team from the *U.S.S. Harold E. Holt*, a destroyer escort, assaulted the *Mayaguez*. They found it abandoned and took control. Simultaneously, a helicopter assault on Koh Tang's two northern beaches was launched to free the crew, thought to be held there. The assault met fierce resistance. Three HH-53 helicopters were shot down in the first 10 minutes.

At the same time, Cambodian authorities pulled a major surprise. They released the crew from yet another island where they had remained overnight. Ironically, as the Marines were battling their way onto Koh Tang, the 40 hostages boarded a fishing trawler and began making for the *Mayaguez*. They were quickly spotted, and the guided-missile destroyer *U.S.S. Henry B. Wilson* moved to recover them. Then began the arduous task of withdrawing U.S. ground forces from the heavily defended island at Koh Tang.

— W.C.

Tanzim: Arafat's Secret Army?

In the current Palestinian-Israeli imbroglio, notwithstanding the lip-service paid on both sides to non-violence and support for the peace process, there is much maneuvering and manipulation being conducted behind the scenes. Although a case can be made that the Israeli hawks, personified by Likud leader Ariel Sharon, are not anxious for this round of the peace process to succeed, and have done much to hinder any attempt at negotiation which they deem unfavorable to Israel, there are factions within the Palestinian leadership that have also fueled the current round of violence and bloodshed. Because of their desire to maintain a favorable world image, the actions of the latter somewhat resemble a political work of Penelope — unraveling at night, so to speak, what they do during the day. To maintain a degree of plausible deniability, they must deplore the carnage, while controlling it either directly or indirectly to enhance their bargaining position or to emphatically punctuate their demands.

SOF Unveils The Man Behind The Curtain

by Col. Mike Peck [Ret.]

In the ongoing crisis the faction most responsible for the mayhem is the *Tanzim* (meaning the “organization” in Arabic), which is the action wing, or militia, of *Fatah*, the largest group within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). It was this group that orchestrated the street demonstrations against the Allied bombing of Iraq, as well as the riots prior to Clinton's recent visit, and it is they who are now organizing and facilitating the current outbreak

of protests. Notwithstanding the level of violence and the mounting casualties, Yasir Arafat seems powerless (or unwilling) to stop it. Although Arafat wears many hats, including that of the head of the erstwhile terrorist organization — the PLO, he is also the leader or president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is the legitimate

A Palestinian member of the *Tanzim*, the military wing of the *Fatah* organization, trains two Palestinian boys how to shoot automatic weapons in the Balata refugee camp near the West Bank city of Nablus.



Reuters/Abed Omar Qusini/Archive Photos



AFP



Reuters

Palestinian political entity. Because of the prestige afforded by his office, Arafat can claim (and has) with little challenge, that he cannot completely control the actions of Tanzim out on the street.

The reason for this is that the head of Tanzim, Marwan Barghouti, is a charismatic and popular leader, who is aggressive, outspoken, and uncompromising. He spent seven years in an Israeli prison before being deported in 1987. In 1989 he was elected to the Fatah Revolutionary Council, and is its youngest member. He returned to the West Bank in 1994 and was elected to the Palestinian Legislature as the Representative from Ramallah in 1996. He is currently the Secretary General of Fatah in the West Bank. Because of Barghouti's popular appeal, and the fact that he is in closer touch with the younger Palestinians than the aging and ailing Arafat, he operates with seeming impunity within the PLO — and often ventures outside the control of the PA, as well. Any mischief perpetrated by his "organization" shields Yasir Arafat's 40,000 plus PA militia and police force/army from censure. Notwithstanding its advocacy of violence and provocation, the Tanzim is more controllable and more philosophically mainstream than Hamas, the radical Islamist group, thereby providing the Palestinian leadership with an action-oriented arm that is considered effective, but which does not carry with it the terrorist-label and unfavorable international image of Hamas. Needless to say, what often appears as a love-hate relationship between Arafat and Barghouti represents an extremely complicated affiliation, and is difficult to read. Because of the increasing involvement of the Tanzim in the present wave of violence, Barghouti's stock has increased immensely in the eyes of mainstream Palestinians, granting him a great degree of prestige, and with it a concomitant level of autonomy. Since the disturbances began, he has become a plausible contender to succeed the longtime PLO Chairman as head of the PA. On the surface, it would appear that Arafat has only a tenuous control over him — if any at all. Little in the Middle East is as it appears, though, and Matthew Kalman of *USA Today*, surmises that Barghouti "might well be playing bad cop to Arafat's good cop, or he might be taking advantage of swirling events to jockey for position for the next round of confrontation or negotiation."

Even though it has emerged as a major player in the on-going "peace process" the Tanzim still remains somewhat of an enigma, and even its size cannot be estimated with great precision. David Schenker, a Middle Eastern Analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, states that, "estimates vary from several hundred to a few thousand." Although no firm statistics are available regarding the type and quantity of weapons possessed by the organization, Mr. Schenker says that its members are thought to be well-armed, and recent images circulating the Internet suggest that the Tanzim

(left) An Israeli soldier fires rubber-coated bullets at Palestinian stone-throwers in the West Bank city of Hebron. Clashes were sparked by the visit of Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem, a site held sacred to both Jews and Muslims. (above) Palestinian police drive with an anti-aircraft gun near the headquarters of Palestinian President Yassar Arafat after Israeli helicopters attacked and destroyed Palestinian targets nearby.

has an ample supply of AKMs, Galil assault rifles, and even anti-tank missiles. In addition, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) officials maintain that the militia has been acquiring large amounts of German MP-5 submachine guns from a variety of sources. Interestingly enough, it would appear that a number of Tanzim weapons are purchased with funds from its 2.4 million dollar budget — allegedly allocated to the group by Arafat himself.

Most Tanzim members are young, usually in their 20s and 30s; they are generally idealistic and view themselves as morally superior to the PA, whom they feel are corrupt and often use the continuing plight of the Palestinians for personal gain of one form or another. During their teens many of them received paramilitary training of two and three weeks duration in summer camps located throughout areas under Palestinian control. These camps were originally established to instill discipline and physical fitness, as well as to conduct courses in political and historical indoctrination. In recent times, however, some of the more mundane or traditional activities have been replaced by what must certainly be more entertaining lessons, such as weapons training with AK assault rifles and courses in tactics and techniques for the practical terrorist. Since their summer camp experiences, most, if not all, have received subsequent training, but the location and curriculum of such advanced instruction is not highly advertised and remains nebulous. Tanzim operatives have been identified as the driving force behind the current street riots, and are usually interspersed among the crowd, carrying open or concealed weapons, which they use to maintain or escalate the level of violence. The IDF maintains that most of the Palestinian casualties of this recent tragedy have been Tanzim members who were observed to be armed, and were subsequently taken under fire by Israeli sharpshooters.

One would have to conclude that Chairman Arafat and his advisors have been closely studying their history books, dwelling particularly on the British experience in Palestine in 1948, and noting that the same thing happened to the French in Indochina, as well as to the Americans in Vietnam. In this historical model, heavily armed and

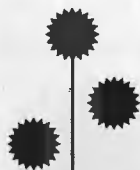
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**DON'T BE
LEFT
HANGING...**

**READ
SOLDIER
OF
FORTUNE**

**SUBSCRIBE
TODAY
AND
SAVE
50%**



Day broke over the tin-roofed hootches of An Hoa. 3rd platoon was saddled up in the company street with haversacks stuffed with C-Ration meals and extra cartridges for our new rifles. Matarazzi looked over our squad and smiled in his easy manner. This patrol was no big deal to John Matarazzi, because he still shouldered the big M60 machine gun that had made him a deadly threat to the Viet Cong every time he and Jessmore took the field. We were relieved Mat and Juice were along with their gun. If we had problems with the new M16, we knew we could count on the heavy-hitting M60 to bail our butts out of trouble. I looked along the formation at the hard faces of Hotel's veteran Marines. John Lafley was not in sight. Peering

through the screen mesh windows of our hootch, I saw no sign of the Montana cowboy. Lafley certainly would be on this patrol as the lead point scout. I always backed him up and took over the point in the afternoon when Lafley needed a break from the intense pressure of looking for bobby traps, mines, and the ever-present Viet Cong.

Lieutenant Pindel strode down the column and eyed the men. Pindel was meticulously concerned with every detail of any patrol under his command. That was one of Pindel's strong points. No Marine would ever jeopardize a patrol by failing to hump the required gear including C-Ration meals and ammunition. Too many horror stories abounded of Marine units that got trapped by the enemy and cut off from reinforce-

Doomed Patrol

First Blood With The M16

by John J. Culbertson



Hotel 2/5 NCOs Corporal Smaltz (right) and a buddy pick up their newly issued M16s. Note that Smaltz has his "black rifle" slung like a toy.

"Look what I brung along with me, Culbertson. Bet you wish you still had yours!" I stared at the shiny barrel and roughed-up stock of the rifle Lafley lovingly cradled in his arms. Jesus! Lafley still had his M14!

ments and supplies. When a unit got trapped, it must have the ability to sustain itself until help comes or die from failure to provision itself. Lieutenant Pindel checked all the loose ends. If the Viet Cong were going to kill his people, by God, they'd have to fight to the end to do it. In the Marine Corps the troops will fight to the bloody end, but the officers have the responsibility to see that they are properly armed and supplied. In many ways Pindel's pickiness about our equipment and rations was a blessing. 3rd platoon never got into a scrape in the Arizona Territory that we couldn't handle ourselves, and we had Pindel to thank for his attention to detail.

Hotel had gained a reputation with the Viet Cong troops in the Arizona Territory and among the Communist sympathizers along the river in the villages of La Bac 1 and 2, Cu Ban 4, and Thon Bon 1 and 2. The NVA led R20th Main Force Battalion had escaped from the artillery barrages in La Bac 1 and 2 on 26 January 1967 during Operation Tuscaloosa. The surviving NVA and VC had taken over 50 dead and wounded soldiers toward Le Nam 3 through the jungle-clad hills along the Song Thu Bon. The battalion staff of the 2nd battalion, 5th Marine regiment had overestimated their success. The Commanding General of the 1st Marine division had visited the battle area after Operation Tuscaloosa was secured and declared the total destruction of the R20th Main Force. Now, intelligence and rumor placed elements of the R20th as refitted and returned to the river valley to continue their struggle to disrupt the South Vietnamese government and control the countryside. Only one impediment remained to the success of a total Communist takeover in the Arizona Territory. That problem was the 2nd battalion of the fighting 5th Marines.

We stepped out and wound down the company street and across the airstrip. The perforated steel plates of the runway burnt into the soles of our jungle boots. In addition to 3rd squad we had a fire team

from 1st squad and guns and rockets from the weapons platoon along for the hunt. The Marine Corps is always offense-minded and only takes defensive postures when forced to do so by an overwhelming enemy attack.

Hunter Killers

This patrol was a hunter/killer patrol designed to recon in force and push any Viet Cong or NVA along the river into a fight. Help would be sent from An Hoa in the form of a sparrow hawk platoon to reinforce us in the event we bit off more than we could chew. However, with a dozen grunts and five weapons personnel plus our lieutenant and platoon sergeant we could chew off a hell of a lot. Unlike the Marine Corps' reconnaissance arms which ran five-man teams in 1st Division's force recon companies to the heavier teams of 1st Recon Battalion which could number 13 men and leaders, Hotel's patrols walked *over* the enemy — not around him.

If there was an enemy unit in the Arizona we made ourselves available for an afternoon of fun and games each time we entered the river valley. Force Recon and Battalion Recon made a living by going way out on patrol and running or sneaking back home when they ran into the shit. Hotel's grunts were armed to the teeth and ordered to find the shit and jump into the middle of it with both boots. We didn't run from nothin' and nothin' scared us. Just going out in the bush and counting gooks didn't mean shit to us. We went out and killed the bastards, then we counted 'em!

Captain Doherty, Hotel's bravest commander had once gone out to the Thu Bon River in a monsoon to bring Golf company in from the far side of the swollen river. Two Golf Marines had chosen a ford and had stepped off over their heads and drowned. Considering all the gear the troopers of 2/5 carried on patrol no one wanted to negotiate any unknown streams any time of year. The Golf company commander radioed the 2/5 battalion commander that he'd lost two troopers and needed reinforcements. Colonel Airheart told him to find his men first and not to come home without them. Airheart said he didn't give a damn if Golf company searched the river for the rest of the war, they, by God, better not return to An Hoa without those drowned troopers. The Marine Corps had always been hard like that, and when you were given a job to do you did it. No exceptions allowed and no excuses accepted.

We snaked through the wire defenses of the bunkers along the airstrip, and cleared the old French mine field that surrounded the escarpment of An Hoa. Marines can out-hump any army in the world, and we made time in long strides toward Phu Loc 6. Reaching the firebase on An Hoa's northern exposure, the platoon cut a trail to the northeast and rendezvoused with the Thu Bon's villages in their dismal clusters along the southern bank of the river. Lieutenant Pindel radioed Phu Loc 6 and gave the security platoon commander our check points advising Phu Loc's section of 4.2-inch mortars to be on call in the event we stepped into trouble. Phu Loc 6 had no heavy artillery, and if Lt. Pindel requested big guns the batteries of 105s, 155s, and 8-inch Howitzers at An Hoa would answer the call. Lieutenant Pindel was very careful not to patrol outside the battalion's artillery fan. If 3rd Platoon crossed the river into Antenna Valley, then only the 8-inch self-propelled guns and air support could cover us. It always took time to get air support, and when Charlie slammed the door on one of his "L"- or "U"-shaped ambushes there was no time left.

Suddenly, Lafley joined me at the point. I looked him over like he was a ghost. Lafley just smiled back and lifted his rifle from a low carry under his arm. He held his weapon at high port arms for me to feast my eyeballs on.

"Look what I brung along with me, Culbertson. Bet you wish you still had yours!" Lafley rolled his eyes at me and, nodding at the



Hotel 2/5 Marines happy to be alive. Over 32 Marines were KIA in rice paddy ambush when M16s jammed due to muddy and wet conditions. In 1967, the M16 wasn't much of a combat rifle, and the grunts detested it.



rifle, began laughing so hard that tears ran down his cheeks. I stared at the shiny barrel and roughed-up stock of the rifle Lafley lovingly cradled in his arms. Jesus! Lafley still had his M14!

"This M14 Eats Gooks For Breakfast"

"You crazy bastard! Pindel will have you court-martialed when he sees that gun. You are not for real, my brother." I couldn't believe Lafley had the brass to hold on to his M14 and hide in our hootch, while the rest of the platoon surveyed our weapons in the armorer's shack. One thing I had to give John Lafley credit for was a big set of balls, or maybe he had just gone crazy. Either way, when Pindel found out Lafley had disobeyed a company order to turn in his weapon, the shit was bound to come down around my partner's ears.

Lafley kept up the silly grin adding, "Don't sweat the small shit, man. When we run into the gooks up ahead in them villages, all hands will thank the Cowboy for having the sense to bring a gun that'll work. That silly-looking piece of junk you got ain't reliable. The Gunny said so hisself. I'll stick with this "bad boy" right here. This M14 eats gooks for breakfast!"

I knew Lafley had a point about reliability. A rifle that wouldn't take to the dirt, rice paddy filth, and general abuse was no rifle at all. The M16 looked flimsy and felt like a damn toy gun. We hit the main road and traveled east to La Bac 1. Lafley and I looked sharp along the edge of the huts as more of the village came into view. The peasants were busy tending the rice fields. Huge black buffalo lazily plodded through the muck in the half full paddies bristling with young sheaves of rice. Apprehensive glances shot our way and the overall mood of the village was somber and foreboding. We stopped the column and broke formation to fill our canteens and have a quick moment to adjust our gear and check our rifles for dirt or other obstructions. Lafley watched the villagers with interest. I knew he never trusted the fate of the platoon to chance if he felt the Viet Cong had set up an ambush on the trail leading out of a village. The peasants usually watched the Marines closely and would send a young boy or girl ahead to tell the Communists our whereabouts and

Summer 1967: Hotel Point Scout Marvin Redeye rappels off backside of Nong Son firebase. Private First Class Redeye was a full-blood Cheyenne and an excellent scout.

the number in our column.

A group of kids ran through the afternoon sunshine kicking up small puffs of dust. Their smiling faces and laughter was unsettling. None of us pretended for a minute that this village was friendly to the Marines. La Bac 1 and 2, like Cu Ban 4, was hostile and had always been regarded as "Indian Country" by the Marines of 2/5. Nonetheless, we threw gum and cigarettes to the children as we formed up and marched through the village proper heading for the main road to La Bac 2.

Lafley motioned with both arms held out parallel to the deck for the patrol to split and form a staggered column along both sides of the trail. Marines formed a zig-zag file with 10 meters or more between troopers and kept their attention outboard letting the man on the opposite side of the trail watch his own flank. The jungle grew thicker as the column neared the river a klick south of La Bac 1. Finally, La Bac 2 came into view and Lafley stopped the march and knelt down to give the platoon commander time to size-up the situation and alter the approach march if he saw fit. Lieutenant Pindel ordered Lafley and I to approach the village with Woodruff and Bums backing our advance. The rest of the patrol sought what cover they could find and took aim on the huts to our front.

Freeze-Up Time

Lafley and I stalked slowly ahead. We kept in the shadows of a deep treeline that ran behind the village. We kept our weapons low to the deck, and moved in twos together in short 10-meter intervals. As we broke out of the treeline the front huts erupted in incoming rifle and machine-gun fire. Lafley and I went to ground like one Marine with Woody and Bums close on our heels. The first prolonged burst of enemy fire cut the small limbs off the trees shading our position. A cascade of leaves and twigs fell over our helmets

**"Marine, where in hell did you get that rifle?
You are to be armed with the M16 rifle on this patrol.
Did that rifle drop from the sky into your thieving hands?
Be careful - this is a court-martial offense!"**

**Several Marines dragged their rifles in the dirt
or used them like walking sticks holding them by the muzzle.
In the Marine Corps your rifle is your life, and it had never
been clearer to me that this was true.**

obscuring the enemy position. Figuring the firing was coming from straight ahead in the village 75 meters up the trail, Lafley and I shouldered our weapons and fired low, grazing shots into the village. I had my rifle set on full-automatic while Lafley hammered away with his M14. Burns and Woodruff had crawled up to our position and were pouring full-auto fire from their M16s into the village. We shot our first magazines dry and reloaded and fired another burst into the flimsy huts. Suddenly, everything froze up. My M16 jammed first with a spent round half-seated in the chamber. The extractor had torn the lip off the brass cartridge and the bolt had continued to the rear of the receiver and stood open. Bums' rifle seized-up about the same time as Woody yelled out a profanity and slammed his rifle down at his side digging for cover. Lafley's M14 kept slamming the heavy, .308 bullets into the village, as John threw in a magazine and went back to work. Behind the point position a half-dozen Marines had risen to fire their M16s over our heads, as we lay scrambling out of the Viet Cong's sporadic fire that cut into the trees over our heads and kicked up the earth around our buddies in the rear.

John Matarazzi had thrown his M60 machine gun off his shoulder when the Viet Cong opened fire. Matarazzi and Jessmore ran toward the point fire team's flank and threw their weapon down behind a clump of trees and ran a belt into the receiver. John Matarazzi listened as John Jessmore identified the incoming fire and pointed out the angle for Mat to aim down. The gun jerked as the spent, hot brass tumbled out the injection port and the muzzle blast flared out the sides of the flash suppressor. A stream of tracers splashed into the enemy earthworks alongside their concealed parapets. Clouds of earth and rock lifted into the air with each deadly burst. Matarazzi was a master as his weapon swept along the Viet Cong bunkers and back again allowing Woodruff and Burns to crawl to the rear under a clutch of trees for safety. I was stuck like glue to Lafley who yelled as he fired round after round into the VC position.

"Come on you puny bastards! I still got my rifle and you don't like that much, do you? Jesus, Culbertson, I wish I had an M16." Lafley seemed crazed and fired fearlessly ahead as enemy bullets continued to tear into the trees and brush surrounding the Cowboy. I felt naked without a rifle that would function. Remembering my bad luck with my malfunctioning M14 on the sandbar on Operation Tuscaloosa, I thought twice in this lifetime is too damn much. I never wanted to see another M16. Matarazzi's machine-gun fire finally coned in on the Viet Cong ringing them in a deadly furious beaten zone. The Viet Cong incoming fire slackened — then quit. Sweat was running off my face. Staring to my rear I saw a Marine stand up and wrap his M16 around a tree collapsing the barrel where it threaded into the receiver.

After a moment, Lafley and I got to our feet and walked back into the thick grove of trees and joined the others. In our relief and joy to be alive, both Lafley and I forgot about his still-smoking M14 rifle. When Lieutenant Pindel saw the gun he threw his arms into the air and yelled at Lafley.

Miracle M14

"Marine, where in hell did you get that rifle? You are to be armed with the M16 rifle on this patrol. Did that rifle drop from the sky into your thieving hands? Be careful — this is a court-martial offense!"

Lafley smiled at Pindel and swung the M14 up to port arms bran-

dishing it like a prize fish before the bewildered eyes of the platoon. "Sir, I know about the M16 that was issued this week. But, as point scout I felt I better be sure my rifle worked, Sir. That new piece of shit, er, excuse me, Sir. That new weapon is obviously unreliable and since this firefight was not a drill I am sure you will agree that the M14 came in handy, Sir!" Lafley had a magical way with words. Everyone started laughing and cursing the sorry performance of their M16s. The Black Rifle!

Lieutenant Pindel was practical enough to listen to Lafley, and he had to agree it was nice to have a weapon that functioned. "I suppose if those Viet Cong had been NVA, we might well be dead by this time. Lafley, I will entertain your formal excuse for having that rifle when we return to An Hoa. For now, good shooting! You might be a combat hero, Mr. Lafley, if you weren't such a shitbird. Bums, that goes for you and Woodruff, too. Start imitating this routine, Culbertson, and I'll slap your butt on tail-end Charlie. Lafley, let's form up and move 'em out to An Hoa. I do not relish spending another second out here with these weapons." Lieutenant Pindel turned on his heel and took up his command slot in the center of the column.

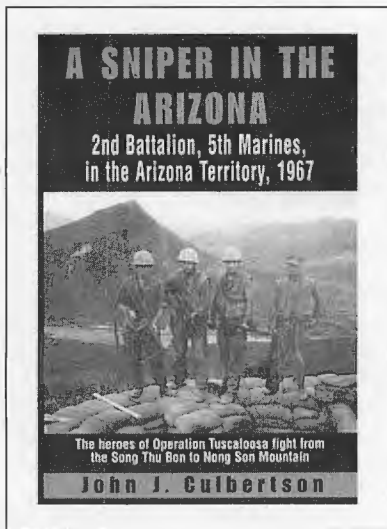
Lafley ran to the point and I followed close behind. The rest of the column tucked inside the roadway and picked up the quick-time march for An Hoa.

Several Marines dragged their rifles in the dirt or used them like walking sticks holding them by the muzzle. In the Marine Corps your rifle is your life, and it had never been clearer to me that this was true. It was an insult to give veteran infantrymen a rifle that would not fire in combat. All the grunts prided themselves on their expert shooting credentials. I had been one of the top marksmen in the 1st Marine Division Sniper School, in Da Nang, in March of 1967. Sniper school picked the top 18 shooters out of some 20,000 in the 1st Marine Division and I figure I shot in the top half of that group. However, in the intense danger and fear of actual combat there was no finer shots than Lafley, Woodruff, and, of course, Hamilton, who had picked off a Viet Cong sniper on Tuscaloosa as he stood 300 yards away on the opposite banks of the Song Thu Bon. John Matarazzi was legendary for his fearless shooting and steady, disciplined fire with his M60. Hotel didn't have any grunts who couldn't shoot, except Pfc. Ivey, who was hell on the M72 LAWS rocket.

Lieutenant Pindel radioed Phu Loc 6 for fire support on our hasty return. Pindel explained we only had one serviceable rifle, one M60 machine gun, and three .45 caliber pistols. Hardly enough firepower to hunt turtles in the Song Thu Bon, much less Victor Charlie. Lafley and I stepped on the gas on point and by sundown we had reached Phu Loc 6, where Hotel company had dispatched another squad-sized patrol to lead our weaponless asses back to An Hoa.

(Excerpted and abridged from Operation Tuscaloosa: 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, at An Hoa; 1967 by John J. Culbertson; Ivy Books; 1997.)

John J. Culbertson served with 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines in Vietnam's I Corps in 1967. He operated as a scout-sniper and was WIA, earning three Purple Hearts. He is the author of OPERATION TUSCALOOSA and A SNIPER IN THE ARIZONA, both Military Book Club bestsellers. ☒



Philippines Fighting

Continued from page 41

stressed, was ready to go back to the negotiating table and while independence for a Islamic state on some part of Mindanao was the MILF "ideal solution," it was not ruling out alternatives. "We are not closing off a compromise acceptable to the Bangsa Moro people and the government."

Then came the proviso: The MILF — and plenty of southern Muslims want real autonomy not an expansion of the failed ARMM experiment. "We need to be sure," insisted Murad, "that any accord reached will really solve the problem. We've had agreements in the past that haven't worked. [MNLF chairman Nur Misuari] signed one in 1996 which did not solve the problem. Lately we've put forward informally to the government the idea of a referendum among the Muslim people. We feel the only way is to ask the Bangsa Moro people themselves. Anything that is acceptable to them is automatically acceptable to the MILF."

But for the foreseeable future there'll be no referendum in the Philippine South. As Murad — and many others — suspected, the operation on the highway was the beginning of an AFP campaign aimed at hitting all MILF camps and militarily crippling the organization. In two months continuous operations between 28 April — 28 June, government forces overran 26 MILF bases and killed hundreds of fighters. The AFP conceded over 200 of their own KIA and hundreds more WIA. At the time of this writing, Abu Bakr — undoubtedly the toughest nut — was being left to last. The MILF has hit back with guerrilla strikes and a rash of urban bombings.

Continued war on Mindanao raises two real dangers for Manila: The first is the threat of a possible accord between an embittered MNLF and a weakened MILF in pursuit of "real autonomy" or outright independence.

Such a Muslim "united front" would pose a serious diplomatic and political challenge. The second danger is that sustained military and political pressure on the MILF could trigger its radicalization or even fragmentation.

That could mean a proliferation of small Abu Sayyaf-style terrorist groups across Mindanao.

In short, hopes that a short, sharp war can encourage a return to the negotiating table and an accelerated political solution on Manila terms, may be badly misplaced. Current hostilities are undoubtedly weakening the MILF and restoring a sense of pride in AFP ranks. But security planners in Manila need now to confront the possibility that the old threat they came to know and love is giving way for forces less predictable — and possibly far more dangerous.

A frequent SOF contributor and long-time observer of Asian wars, photojournalist Mike Winchester is based in the Far East. ✂

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Kabul Mine Games

Continued from page 53

of a month in Afghanistan and much of it in Kabul. I was standing at the entrance to the balcony when I heard the whoosh of the rockets and watched the vapor trails of over a dozen rockets streak north. The Taliban were sending Massoud his morning wake-up call. At least 14 rockets went whistling over the mountains to his positions in the north. Pelton, asleep on the balcony, woke up. It's time to leave Kabul. We've arranged a flight out through the ICRC.

The Red Cross flight to Peshawar takes only 30 minutes compared to the nearly 12 hours it took us overland. The Kabul Airport terminal was serviceable, but there was a 40-foot bomb crater in front of the departure lounge. Outside on the tarmac the Taliban were busy fueling and loading what I think was a MiG-27 "Flogger" fighter-bomber with two anti-tank missiles and a 500-kg. bomb. There were several other military aircraft parked on the runway. I started wondering about incoming rounds on this obvious target. Would be just my luck.

While we were waiting for our plane out, a 32-seat turboprop UN aircraft landed. There was a large gathering of functionaries waiting along with two shiny Mercedes sedans. We were expecting to see the Secretary-General or maybe a visiting head of state. Instead, the plane disgorged the middle-aged female head of UNICEF and the two middle-aged female journalists accompanying her — fresh in from New York or Geneva no doubt and traveling in the lap of luxury. They looked quite trendy in their Benazir Bhutto-style silk scarves and designer sunglasses. I could only imagine the umpteenth rehash of the "Taliban Discriminate Against Women" headlines to come out of this. UNICEF is supposed to be a nonprofit charity for children and I'm thinking of all those kids maimed from hunting scrap amongst piles of duds. They'll do an air-conditioned tour around Kabul in the Mercedes, "tsk, tsk" at the sights, and probably interview some Afghan women for all of 20 minutes. Then they'll have a nice lunch at an NGO compound and then maybe stop and buy some rugs before it's time to get back on their plane. As I'm computing the cost of this little junket and what those funds could mean in the hands of a demining organization, an Afghan with the Red Cross turns to us and says, "How can she learn anything of our problems driving around Kabul in a Mercedes?" Embarrassed by the whole scene, we just shrugged. As we stood and watched, the entire entourage walked around the refueling MiG without blinking an eye and then passed us without even a nod. I wanted to tell them all about Kabul and the heroic demining efforts of the men I'd met. But I knew they weren't interested in that.

Rob Krott has reported from the world's war zones since 1990. ✉

Omega Proving Ground

Continued from page 35

Springfields with serial numbers below 800,000. This seems to evolve around the casehardening of receivers and the fact that there have been cases of receiver failures. One of the best logical explanations I have seen is a study done by Dr. J.L. Lyons of Salt Lake City, Utah. His opinions and summary can be found at www.oldguns.net for you computer folks.

How Good Are They?

This segment of the research was the easy and fun part! Listed below are the four rifles I fired for this article and the results of the range exercises. I used the same ammo loaded with 47 grains of 4064 and a 168 grain Sierra boat tail hollow-point for all rifles. The testing was done with the original iron sights from a bench rest. Five-shot groups were fired at 100, 200, 300 yards.

Rifle #1: 1932 NRA Sporter

Range	100	200	300
Group size	1½"	3 1/2"	4"

Rifle #2: 1929 National Match

Range	100	200	300
Group size	1"	1½"	3"

Rifle #3: 1935 "C" stock standard service rifle made by Springfield Armory 03

Range	100	200	300
Group size	3/4"	3" *	4"

Rifle #4: 1943 Smith Corona 1903A3

Range	100	200	300
Group size	1½"	2"	5"

*I leaned on one shot that opened the group

The variations of the 1903 rifle in my opinion are still very viable tools for personal defense or just fun shooting. As you can see from the field-testing they can meet or exceed the standards of commercially produced contemporary rifles. Because of their age it may be hard or expensive to find truly "original rifles" as in retrospect these rifles have been around and used for well over 60-to-80 years. If you are collecting go well-armed and educated with money in hand. If you just want a shooter then a reasonable amount of searching should produce a quality rifle you can apply your cheek weld to.

Have fun, I did!

As a note of interest, Thunder Ranch, Inc. will host its first Old Rifle Course (O.R.C.) 30 April — 4 May 2001. This course is designed for rifles made from 1870 to 1950. No scopes, lasers or phasers are allowed on the range decks, and support equipment and load-bearing equipment should be as close to period-correct to the rifle being used by the operator as possible. Call Thunder Ranch, Inc. for details at 830-640-3138. ✉

British Bravery

Continued from page 59

Jordanian Battalion passed us on their way into town. They simply abandoned their positions on probably the most strategic road in the country without telling anybody. As we waited to be searched, we watched them roll past, hunkered down in their Land Rovers with the .50 caliber Brownings on the back. This was one nervous bunch of Sunnis, and even the Nigerians knew better than to try and stop them. The next day the issue was hushed up, but, because nothing remains secret in Freetown for long, the media found out about it almost immediately. There was a lot of mention about their "withdrawal" in the press at the time.

When the UN Secretary General finally gave the order for UNAMSIL to take the initiative and enforce peace rather than try to keep it, the commanders of the contingents of several countries objected. Heading that list were the Jordanians, though troops from Guinea, Kenya and several other countries told the UNAMSIL Commander that they hadn't come to Sierra Leone to fight. As usual, MG Jetley did little more than shrug.

British Brigadier David Richards possibly had it right when he told *Jane's Defence Weekly* that the Indian Major General was a prisoner to his own captives that were (then) being held by the rebels. But even when they were eventually released, nothing changed. Jetley simply never had anything critical to say about the Jordanian lapses, which was incredible. In any other military force, such overt dereliction of duty would have resulted in court martial proceedings for the offenders.

Naturally, all this was duly reported and made quite a stir, but since the rebels read the same newspapers that we did, such reporting told them exactly which detachments might be susceptible to intimidation. The West Side Boys ruthlessly exploited Jordanian impotence, since they had sized them up from the very start.

Thus, while Ellis insisted that his role in heading the Air Wing was to destroy rebels, the UN continued to move its assets about like pieces on a chessboard, usually for want of anything better to do.

Jetley's annual budget in the first six months ran to something in excess of \$250 million — or almost \$1.5m a day — never mind the billion dollars that it took to set it all up. At no point was there even a glimmer of hope that it might lead to success. In fact, by the middle of the year things looked even more dismal than when I arrived. At least then UNAMSIL was hitting at rebel targets several times a day.

The event that shook the UN all the way back to New York took place in mid-September. In an unprecedented leak, Jetley accused his senior Nigerian civil and military deputies of nepotism, corruption, collusion with the enemy and being more interested in getting their hands on Sierra Leone's diamonds than tackling the problem

at hand. It was quite a bomb shell, although everybody in Freetown knew exactly what the Nigerians were doing all along. It was speculated that they did not really want the war to end, and would like nothing better than to take over the peacekeeping role *in toto*, to have a freer hand in taking care of business. True to form, however, when questioned by the BBC about his accusations a few days later, while he was on leave in New Delhi, Jetley stated that he couldn't remember making them! Since then, the Indian government has pulled its army elements out of Africa, and you probably won't see Indian troops in any peacekeeping operation in that region for at least another generation.

Compare all of this to Executive Outcomes' mercenary operation in Sierra Leone when the entire country was successfully cleared of RUF rebels. By way of comparison, the EO force that set out from Freetown in August 1995 to take the Kono diamond fields, was comprised of only 185 men. About a dozen were white South Africans and the rest were black, all of them veterans of the Angolan and Namibian wars. As for sophisticated equipment, the mercs had two Mi-17 gunship/troop carriers to provide lift and close air support. For a little muscle on the ground there were two antiquated BMP-2s that offered a minimal fire-support capability. I was onboard one of them when an EO team hit a rebel base in the Koidu area and it was a textbook operation — a true collector's piece.

EO took little more than a year to do what it said it would, and the campaign ended with Sankoh demanding peace. Throughout, Executive Outcomes never had more than 250 men in the country at any one time, and they completed the task while taking minimal casualties. Unofficial estimates of the cost range from 35 to 62 million dollars, a drop in the piss pot compared to what the UN is spending today. Later, when Executive Outcomes gained too much notoriety in various capitals around the world, it was dissolved and "replaced" by Sandline, which offered to solve the current problem in Sierra Leone for about double the amount charged by EO, because the problem had grown much larger.

Perhaps William Shawcross encapsulated it best in his book *Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords and a World of Endless Conflict*. Published at about the time the UN first deployed to West Africa, it might have almost been a blueprint for the UNAMSIL debacle. As David Isenberg said in his review for *Stars and Stripes*, "after reading this book, nobody will ever again be able to contemplate a call to deploy United Nations peace keepers without gagging."

That pretty much sums up the UN's adventures in Sierra Leone.

Al J. Venter lives in Washington state, and has been SOF's contributing editor for Africa for some two decades. He has seen governments and borders change, but the conflicts remain the same. ☒



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Arafat's Secret Army

Continued from page 65

highly sophisticated powers were ground down slowly (though often spectacularly) by continuing personnel losses in lengthy conflicts that lacked popular support. In each case they were obliged to capitulate to forces vastly inferior to their own, when their citizens grew tired and world opinion eventually turned against them. The Palestinians, no doubt, draw parallels, as well as conclusions, from the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon — after years of relentless pressure from *Hezbollah* terrorists and their paramilitary forces. Also, the Tanzim *de facto* victory in the aftermath of its confrontation with the IDF at the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus further reinforces this model, since the Israelis withdrew from the area after sustaining minimal casualties. The lesson is, that if “rock-throwing” crowds continue to inflict casualties on the well-armed IDF, while being “martyred” by the latter’s sophisticated weapons, both the Israeli populace and world opinion will eventually pressure Barak (or his successor) to grant concessions. Although they learned a grim lesson in the 1996 riots, and are better prepared today, the Israeli military establishment is still somewhat similar to the U.S. forces in Vietnam, and is better prepared and equipped to fight a conventional war, with tanks and heavy weapons, than to confront a lightly-armed, determined, and elusive foe.

It seems the Palestinian leadership has learned valuable lessons in the art of negotiation, as well. They have, once again, adopted the model employed by the communists in Korea against the UN (U.S.) in the early 1950s and the North Vietnamese against the Americans at the Paris Peace Talks 20 years later. In both instances, the weaker countries mired the major powers in endless negotiations, clinging stubbornly to their intractable positions, while continuing to extract casualties from their adversaries by further fighting — often to achieve meaningless objectives. The futility of losing young men, simply for the sake of keeping the war going, had the effect of eroding public support in 1953 and 1973, leading to an uneasy draw in Korea and out-and-out defeat in Vietnam (against Third World countries). In the current situation, it is apparent that the Palestinians are holding an olive branch in one hand, but in the other are clutching a Kalishnikov behind their backs. Because of this, Mr. Arafat needs a wizard’s screen and some sleight-of-hand alchemy, along with some imaginative sound effects, to conceal the fact that he continues to pull the levers and instill fear. The Tanzim may simply be the illusory head that Dorothy, Toto, and everyone else sees on his screen.

Col. Mike Peck, a highly decorated Vietnam veteran, was previously director of DIA's POW/MIA office in Washington, D. C. Presently, he is an international security consultant. ✕

Combat Weaponcraft

Continued from page 33

Can you get the message?

Please consider going away from the flame of magic and go toward the light of hard work.

Get good gear, in duplicate. Clear your house now before the threat is inside. Get good training at the school of your choice. There are many good choices. Try to avoid the charlatans or the instant combat masters. Remember, there have been a lot of overnight wonders, like Ms. Monica. She’s famous, but I don’t think I would date her. (By the way, where is she now?)

Stop looking for shortcuts and grasp that this work you are considering doing is for your own benefit and for the benefit of your family or partners. When you participate in training, ask yourself if what you are getting in this training is logical.

I get a great number of students who come to the ranch and use some strange techniques. They shoot the pistol until its empty. They bring the pistol off-target, bend their arms so the pistol obstructs the view of the threat, or lower their eyes and look at the magazine as they load. This action is done in the name of speed.

Lets see, I shot the pistol until it was empty. If I shot that much, everything downrange should be dead, down or leery. Why would I take my eyes off a known threat? Incoming fire — if they are shooting at you, no problem, lean back and use cover. When I bend my arms I take the muzzle *out of or off of* the threat. You should already know how to load (unconscious competency?) without looking at it.

Speed is *not* the issue; however, maintaining visual contact with the threat may be. I have never seen a timer at, or near, a fight. Have I ever won anything? Like the steel plate match or the *SOF* Three Gun Match? More importantly, do I care?

What about competition? Ask yourself, why am I training? To win a match or to stay alive in a fight? Winning matches is great; it’s even better now because you can win some money and be famous. But other than the guy who won, can you tell me who won the IPSC Nationals in 1980, 1985 or 1990?

Is competition good? Absolutely! But don’t let ego and winning matches take your mind off the goal of winning a gun fight. When I was still a police officer our local police range was open to civilians to shoot in competition alongside officers from my department. Officers simply would not participate because they oftentimes lost and the civilians shot better. It was an ego thing.

Nobody likes to lose, but they forgot why they were there to shoot. Was it to win, or to acquire unconscious competency?

You have got your work cut out for yourself if you plan to train to save your own life.

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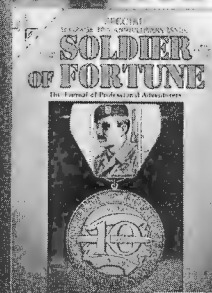
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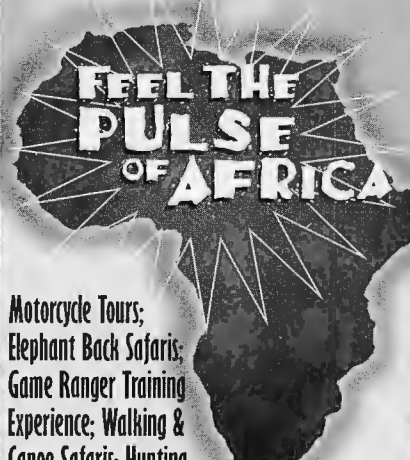
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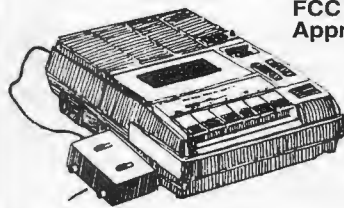


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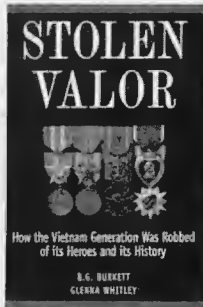
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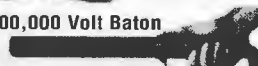
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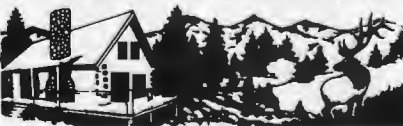
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by Col. David H. Hackworth (Ret.)

War-Fighters Or Waiters?

Hang on for breaking news: An Army report has concluded that American paratroopers are overly aggressive.

Tell this to former enemy soldiers from Germany, Japan, North Korea, North Vietnam and Iraq. They'll say "old news" and show you their scars.

Having led paratroopers in combat, I can assure you the baddest and most aggressive warriors that ever slogged through the Valley of Death are soldiers who drop from the sky.

Famed paratroop leader James Gavin said if a man will jump out of an airplane, he'll fight. And fight they will. The renowned paratrooper aggressiveness is a combination of the nature of the beast, unit spirit and a lot of hard training.

Now this same trait has gotten one of the proudest parachute units in our Army — the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment — in a world of pain because members of that outfit "beat and manhandled" ethnic Albanians while in Kosovo.

Of course, what's not reported is that these warriors from the outfit the Germans called "the devils in baggy pants" were shot at, booby-trapped, grenaded, stoned and manhandled by the ethnic Albanians before our troopers finally did an eye-for-an-eye on their attackers.

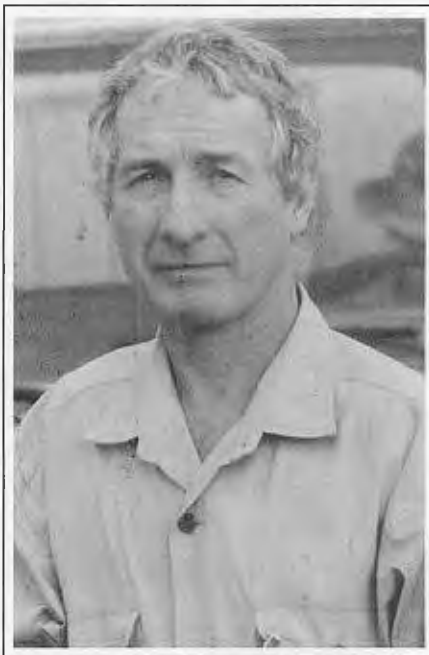
Nor does the average American know that a few months before the 504th deployed to Kosovo as peacekeepers, they'd been preparing to assault into that foul swamp to get up close and nasty with the Serbian army. Along with the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division, the 504th trained for that mission following the time-honored axiom of American paratroopers: "Take no quarter. Give no quarter!"

As luck would have it, instead of fighting their way into Kosovo, they were sent over there — with almost no special training — as warm-and-fuzzy peacekeepers.

But just because there was a change in mission, their warrior ethic and fighting skills didn't suddenly get left behind at Fort Bragg, N.C.

And this underscores the problem the U.S. military has these days as its forces RoboCop their way around the globe: how to switch fighters into peacekeepers overnight. How to go from kill-or-be-killed to directing traffic in snake pits like Bosnia and Kosovo and doing "Meals On Wheels" around the rest of the world.

Warrior training is ingrained; it's like a correct parachute-landing fall. You hit the ground on the right points of contact without thinking. You operate on total automatic. You must in order to avoid the bone doctor or a bodybag.



Col. David Hackworth (Ret.) also writes a syndicated weekly column titled "Defending America." "Hack" doesn't pull any punches and many liberal rags won't carry his writing. If your local paper falls into that category, call the editor and let him know you'd like to see "Defending America" on the Op-Ed page. It's syndicated by King Features, 235 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017.

How many World War II and Korean vets still take cover when a car backfires? How many Vietnam vets automatically scan for tripwires and mines when hiking in the woods?

You can't make a Rottweiler into a golden retriever in two or three lessons. Nor can a few weeks of peace training convert battle-prepared warriors into cherubic choirboys.

There just isn't enough time in the annual training cycle to have it both ways.

In fact, there's barely enough time to turn untested soldiers into combat warriors.

When the 504th Parachute Regiment deployed to the Gulf in August of 1990 as the tip of the spear that was eventually stuck into Saddam Hussein's vaunted Republican Guard, it was nowhere near good-to-go when it hit the ground in Saudi. It took five months of tough desert training to get up for the lethal game.

Here was a unit that in 1989 had 365 days to get it together for war at Fort Bragg, yet it still wasn't ready when the whistle blew. In 2000, there's even less time for combat training because of the President Clinton-mandated and Gen. Hugh Shelton-approved sensitivity and Consideration-of-Others training.

When the Canadian Airborne Regiment ran into 504th-type troubles in Somalia, its government resolved the issue by deactivating one of the finest units in the Canadian Armed Forces.

That shouldn't happen here, even though Lt. Gen. Dan McNeill, who commanded the division when these incidents occurred, certainly won't take the heat for his boys or resign in the now totally politically correct Army. But he should at least tell the yo-yos running the Pentagon that race horses shouldn't pull plows and war-fighters can't be Brownies.

I'll bet my old jump boots that if General Gavin still commanded the 82nd, he'd tell the Pentagon where to put its investigation that will further reduce the seriously endangered warrior ethic. Or — for sure — he would've walked.

<http://www.hackworth.com> is the address of David Hackworth's home page.

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