



THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1 • JANUARY 2019



10th Anniversary Edition

Roger H. C. Donlon Dedication Service —
SF Top Secrets Behind the Dedication

Coming to America

Part One: In-Country Cherry before SF



SENTINEL

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1 • JANUARY 2019

From the Editor

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COVER: Retired Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon poses next to his life-size bronze bust, draped with a special Medal of Honor presented to the Special Forces officer in 1964. The bust was part of the formal dedication and naming of the 7th Special Forces Grp. (Abn) Headquarters on Eglin Air Force Base, FL, on December 5, 2019, exactly 54 to the day, that President Johnson awarded him the first MOH to a Green Beret during the Vietnam War. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sean Hall)



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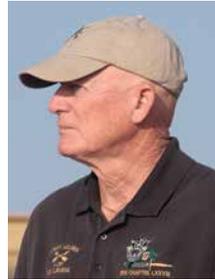
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MISSION STATEMENT: The Sentinel will provide interesting and meaningful information relative to the Special Forces experience — today, yesterday and tomorrow. Articles will be published that were written by knowledgeable authors who will provide objective and accurate accounts of real world experiences.

The Sentinel is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command, the Special Forces Association, or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor, "Sentinel" to dhgraphics@earthlink.net.



Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor

10th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

The January 2019 *Sentinel* is dedicated to **Colonel Roger Donlon**, who was presented the first Medal of Honor in the Vietnam War and who continues to represent America and the Green Berets world wide. The central story of this issue is the dedication of the Colonel Roger Donlon, MOH Bust and naming the Headquarters of the 7th Special

Forces Group written by Chapter 78 President **John S. Meyer**. This story reads like a Special Forces operation and details all the behind the scenes activity that was led by the colonel's wife, Norma.

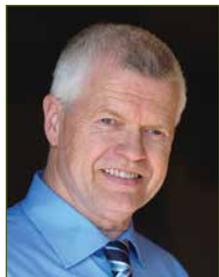
Yes, this is the tenth year of Chapter 78's publication of the *Sentinel* which was started by Chapter member **John Joyce** who continued it for the first two years. Following a two month hiatus I took over as editor and continued the production for the next seven years. The *Sentinel* owes its success to the multitude of writers and contributors from the Special Forces Association, active duty SF, Air Force and other U.S. Military units and members of U.S. Government Agencies. During its tenure the *Sentinel* has garnered a number of national awards and we thank all who made this possible especially the *Sentinel's* Publisher, Chapter 78 member, **Richard Simonian**.

Included in this issue are two classic American success stories. They are stories of the early lives of two American soldiers; the first about the immigration of a fifteen-year-old student from behind the "Communist Iron Curtain" who became an Air Force Colonel who had a significant role in Air Force Special Operations. The second is of a young seventeen-year-old high school dropout who joins the army and lands in Vietnam on his eighteenth birthday, where he sustains combat wounds from a mortar attack only hours into his tour, which ultimately leads to a career as a Green Beret NCO and direct commission to Captain.

Past issues of the *Sentinel* have included first printed stories such as the *MACV-SOG One-Zero School* by Travis Mills, and one of my favorites was the 12 month series of stories on the *Montagnards*; *The Forgotten Warriors*, *Updates on the Montagnards* with stories written by many contributors. There are too many great first time stories written by our guest writers to mention here but I thank them all. In the future, we at the *Sentinel* look forward to continuing to print historical stories from our Green Beret's, military and government agencies. ❖

Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor

The President's Page | January 2019



John Stryker Meyer
President SFA 78

Gentlemen,

Welcome to 2019. Where did 2018 go...so quickly, I might add?

We'll hit the ground running for our January 12 meeting. We return to the Embassy Suites. See meeting details below.

I'm personally excited about our guest speaker in January, Wade Ishimoto, a Distinguished Senior Fellow with the Joint Special Operations University. He is a retired SF officer who served multiple tours of duty in Vietnam with 5th Group, including one with the SIGMA Project, where he wasn't afraid to get his boots dirty. He is a charter member of Delta Force, where he served as its Intelligence Officer. He led the road-block team in the 1980 attempt to rescue 53 American hostages in Iran. His presentation on that mission is riveting. "Ihisi" is president of SFA Chapter 43, a VP with OASIS Group, Past President of the Japanese American Veterans Association, a life member of the National Counterintelligence Corps Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. I've had the honor of working with him as a member of the joint SOA/SFA POW/MIA Committee. He's made valuable contributions to that committee since its formation. Besides this incredible resume, Ishi is a fascinating individual with a quick, biting sense of humor, the classic example of the Quiet Professional, humble and damned good at what he does.

For the February 9 meeting, we'll have an unique guest speaker: Yvette Benavidez Garcia, daughter of SF MOH Recipient Roy Benavidez. Chapter 78 will have a unique sidebar to her presentation: Chapter member **Lee Martin** will attend the meeting to explain how he was present, standing with the doctor who attempted to zip up the body bag containing Sgt. Roy Benavidez, who had been stabbed, bayoneted, shot and covered with blood and mud, the medic couldn't speak. Near death, all he could do was spit. Lee Martin was there. She'll also have some information on a movie being produced on her father. Stand by for more details on that. After *12 Strong* it would be nice to have a movie on Benavidez. The *Sentinel* published a brilliant review on the book *Legend*, which tells Benavidez's story, but failed to capture Lee Martin's unique moment in time with that SF legend.

Our March 9 speaker will be SF officer Mitch Utterback, who served with A/5/19. I met Mitch when he was the official SF liaison with the Bank family after Col. Bank reported for duty in the big LZ in the sky. He recently traveled to Iraq as a reporter/videographer, which provides some remarkable stories and surprising insights into Iraq.

If you plan to attend our January meeting, please e-mail VP **Don Deatherage** at: drdeathca@gmail.com, or me at: idahoonezero@sbcglobal.net, or call me: 619-892-5983. We need an exact

headcount. Chapter 78's Special Executive Assistant to the Treasurer, **Mike Keele**, will pick up fines from anyone who attends without a beret or chapter coin. We will have some unique raffle items. ❖

Meeting details:

Time:

8:30 a.m., January 12, Breakfast will be served.

Location:

Embassy Suites
3100 East Frontera
(The SE Corner of Hwy 91 & Glassell St.)
Anaheim, CA 92807
Phone #:714-618-9020

John Stryker Meyer
President, SFA Chapter 78



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Coming to America



John Gargus

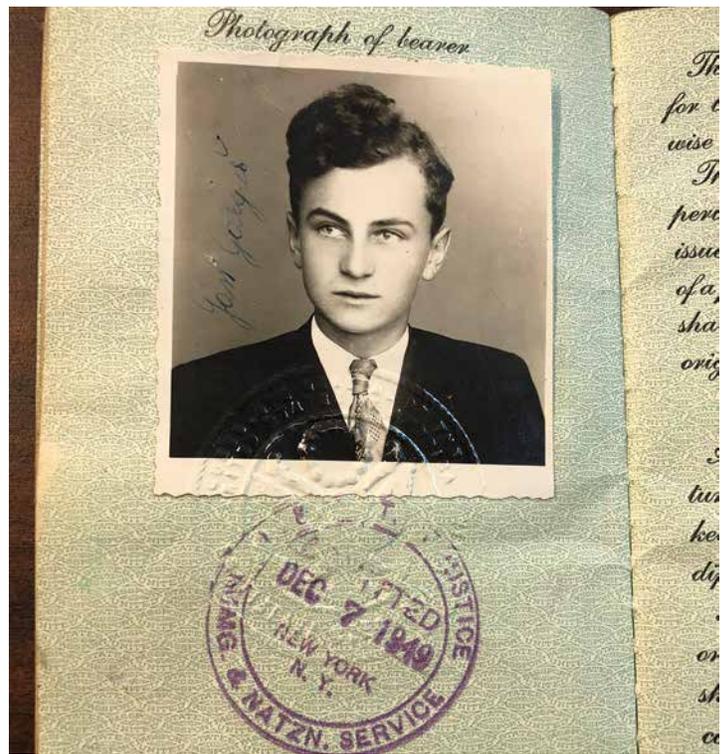
By Colonel John Gargus (USAF, Retired)

Early in 1949 the family started talking seriously about going to the USA. We always had an open invitation from grandmother Julia, but father's position had always been that we would have America in Czechoslovakia during our own lifetimes. However, after the Communist seizure of power, life in the USA became very attractive.

Mother acquired her U.S. citizenship by being born in Pennsylvania and her children inherited a claim to full American citizenship provided they established permanent residence in the USA before their sixteenth birthday. That was in accordance with then existing McCarran Act sponsored by one Nevada Senator. I was already completing my fifteenth year and Milan with Vierka were almost ten years old. After the war it was possible for all of us, including our father, to travel to the USA. As a husband of an American citizen, with citizenship eligible children, he could have immigrated to the USA with his family.

But now, with the new communist regime, father's political past, and the worsening relationship with the USA, our hopes for a departure as a family were gone. We would have to get out of the country illegally and seek political asylum in the West, behind what became known as the Iron Curtain. We learned from listening to broadcasts from exiles in London, Paris, and Munich that West Germany was full of displaced persons camps for people who either escaped to the West or opted not to return to their homes because they came from lands occupied by the Soviet Red Army. Most of them wanted to immigrate to the USA. Many, just like us, had some legal claims to become American citizens. The United States had a problem absorbing all those who wanted to come. Many other countries, Canada, Australia, and places in South America, opened up their gates to ease the demand for passages to the USA. We must keep in mind that commercial trans-Atlantic air travel had not yet been established and passages on ships were fully booked. People had to wait months to get out of West Germany and the number of escapees from the east side of the Iron Curtain kept increasing.

Our parents understood this, so the first decision became to have all three children get U.S. passports and leave together without stopping in a displaced persons camp in Germany. Then, at a later date our parents would find some way out that could include a stay in one of those camps. We went to a photo studio and had a group passport photo made. Parents cautioned us not to say a word to anyone about our plans because we could face certain repercussions if something went wrong. We all understood that. I don't know how father communicated with the U.S. consulate in Bratislava, but he learned that the best course of action would be to send me to the USA first because as the summer passed, I had less than one year to get out before my sixteenth birthday. With that decision, we had a new passport photo made just for

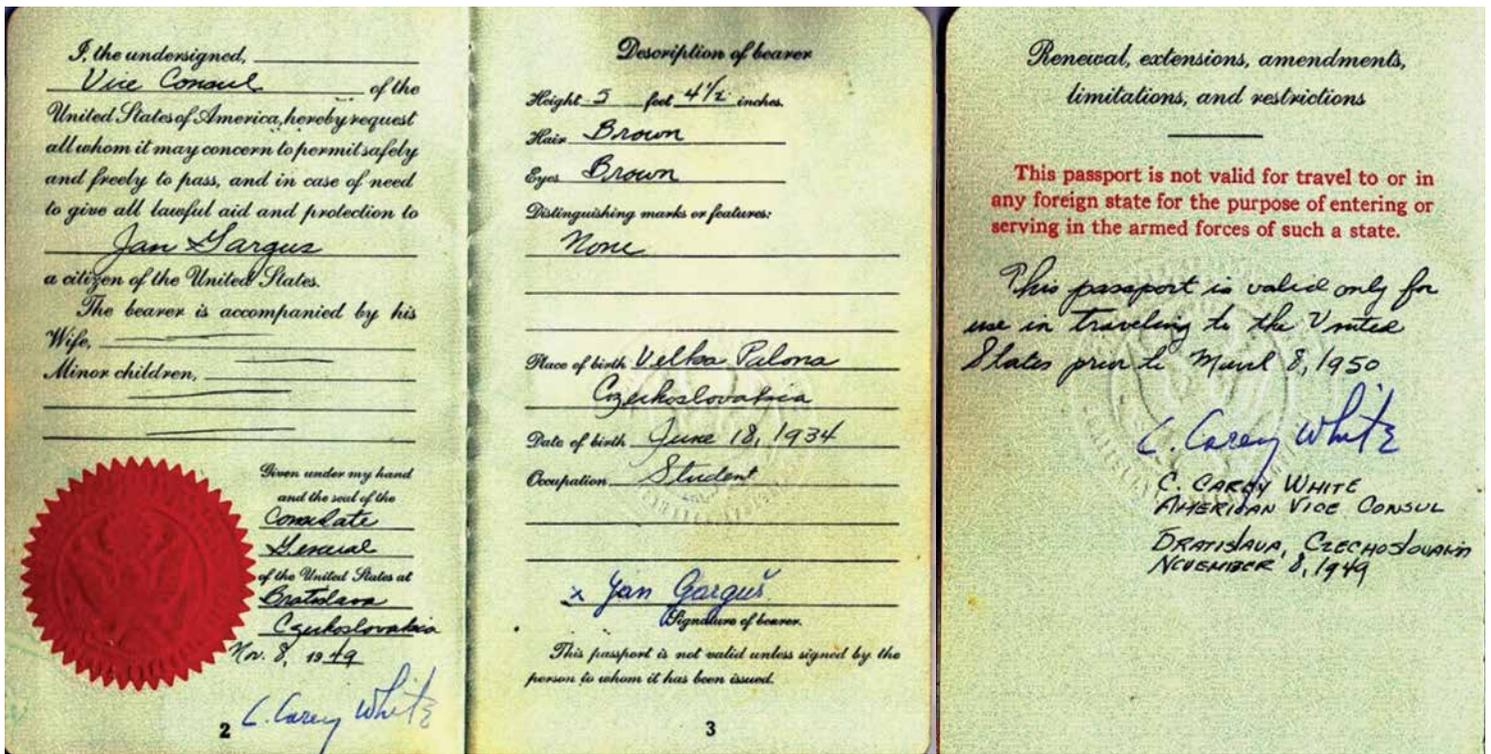


me. Then grandmother Julia, with some financial assistance from grandfather's half-brother Steve Mihok from Lorain, Ohio, prepaid my travel to the USA on any available ship. As I learned later, with that done, the consulate in Bratislava became obligated to issue me a passport valid only for direct travel to the United States.

When the 1949-1950 school year began in September, we already had a firm decision to have me travel alone as soon as my transatlantic passage could be arranged. Father and I went to Bratislava and obtained my passport on November 8, 1949. Father had a long private discussion with the U.S. Consul Mr. Carey White. The thing I remember the most was his cautioning me about not telling anyone that I had an American passport. This was to prevent anyone from creating roadblocks to my departure before my time to get to the USA would expire. My passport was good for only four months. If I didn't make it out in that time, it would have to be renewed, but never past my sixteenth birthday on June 18, 1950.

In Bratislava we stayed with a Poloma native, a former classmate friend of father, who worked in one of the banks. The story father told him was that we came to the American Consulate because grandmother Julia was signing over some of the family property as my inheritance. Obviously he was not trustworthy enough to be told the truth.

On the way home the train had a long lay over at a station in Zvolen. I toured the station alone and ran into two of my professors who were killing time just as I was. I used the same story about the inheritance to explain why I was not at home in school. I learned from them that they were coming back to Rožňava on the same train after getting married in her family's home village. She was my French professor and he taught history and Slovak literature. When I told my father about this encounter, we decided that I would not get a sick excuse for missing two class days and tell my



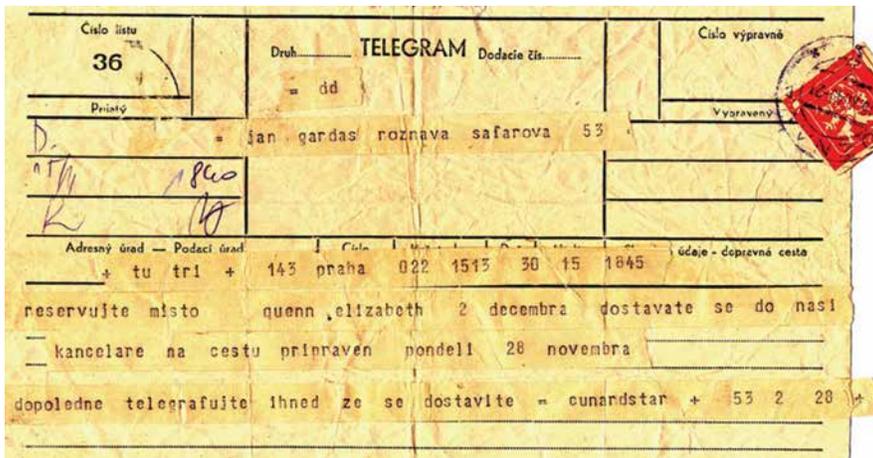
Pages from young John's one-way passport to the USA.

homeroom teacher the same story. As it turned out, it was not necessary. Our first class was with our homeroom professor Gunda, a good friend of the newlyweds, who proclaimed to the whole class that Mr. Gargus was absent for couple of days because he was inheriting an estate from his American grandmother.

After that our life returned to normal. We did not expect an early departure for me. Winter was coming and I was already looking forward to skiing and ice skating with friends after school and especially during the three week Christmas school holiday. But on November 15 we received a telegram instructing my parents to have me come to Prague on November 28 ready to travel to the USA. Wow, all of a sudden I had only 10 days of school left and then I'd be gone.

A couple of interesting things happened in school just before that. Comrade Andrejkovičová came to our class with a short brief-

ing on a new student club that was just forming. It was for young people who showed support for and solidarity with the youth of the Soviet Union. She distributed membership identification cards and showed us how to fill them out. She also began collecting a 2 crown annual membership fee from everyone. Two crowns bought a small stamp that was then pasted into a dated square showing that annual membership fee had been paid. Before that we had several communist front organizations for students and membership in each had been voluntary. She did not ask for volunteers here. I had never joined any group before and I hesitated here. Three classmates borrowed money from me and I had four crowns in change coming back to me. She gave me a stamp and 2 crowns back in change. I took it and joined the crowd for a 100 percent classroom participation. What could be wrong with joining a club that professed friendship for the Russian youth?



My summons for travel to the USA — "Reserved space, Queen Elizabeth, 2 December. Come to our office ready to travel on Monday 28 November before noon. Send a telegram that you will be here."

Next event, on Monday, November 21, was our classroom Russian essay for that month. We expected that its theme would have something to do with the Bolshevik October Revolution, but we got something unexpectedly tougher. Professor Bellavina passed out our essay notebooks and wrote the following topic on the blackboard: "The USSR was victorious in the war for peace and the USSR will be victorious in the fight for freedom." We all cringed and many voiced their surprised displeasure at such a difficult theme that had to be completed in the remaining 40 minutes of class time. But I got a sudden inspiration. Somehow my thoughts focused on the lyrics of the Russian national anthem. That frequently heard song had most of the theme for our assignment. There was also the Communist International with more appropriate lyrics and a few other Russian

Soviet Union's National Anthem

**The unbreakable union of free republics
Great Russia has welded forever;
Created by will of the peoples, long live
The united mighty Soviet Union!**

Refrain:

**Be renowned, our free Fatherland,
Friendship of the people is a reliable stronghold!
Soviet flag, people's flag
Let it lead from victory to victory!**

*Through tempests shined on us the sun of freedom
And the great Lenin lit us the way.
Stalin brought us up – on loyalty to the people,
He inspired us to labor and to heroism!*

Refrain:

**We develop our army in battles,
We will sweep the vile oppressors from the way!
In battles we settle the faith of generations,
We will lead our Fatherland to glory!**

Refrain:

The International

**Arise ye prisoners of starvation
Arise ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation
A better world in birth!
No more tradition's chains shall bind us
Arise, ye slaves, no more in thrall;
The earth shall rise on new foundations
We have been naught we shall be all.**

Refrain:

**'Tis the final conflict
Let each stand in his place
The International Union
Shall be the human race.**

Ode to Stalin

Refrain:

**The people sing a beautiful songs about
Our native, beloved, and wise Stalin.**

These are the two anthems I leaned on in my composition. Bold text shows the lines I used. English translation does not do the words justice. They go together much better in the original Russian.

songs that celebrated Russian victories, and make glowing predictions for a glorious global future from which I could borrow other theme fitting phrases. All I had to do was to pick out the appropriate lyrics and expand them with phrases containing quotes and slogans we were taught to recite in our well received tribute to Lenin. There wasn't much originality in the collage that came to my mind, but I thought that it would be a good satirical joke to regurgitate many of the exhortations to which we had been exposed.

I began by stating that our essay's theme was prophetically immortalized in the lyrics of the USSR's national anthem and I simply wrote down much of its text. I paraphrased the beginning about the unbreakable union of free republics for eternity forged by the vision of the great Russia. Then at the appropriate time I threw in another fitting sentence about the Soviet flag that would lead people from one victory to the next. In between and everywhere, without further identifying the sources, I borrowed from the Communist International about workers arising and righting the wrongs of the past and from several other songs that glorified the accomplishments of the Soviet Union and its fatherly leader Stalin. There was an ode that the people of Russia sang to their wise and beloved leader who would lead other struggling people to freedom in a universal proletarian brotherhood. I also gave some credit to Lenin for inspiring so many to rally to the side of the working class. I concluded that the prophecy of the Soviet Union's anthem would surely come true and that there would be many more victories until all the people of the world would live in absolute freedom from oppression.

I did not consider my essay to be a masterpiece, just a witty collage of everything we were receiving in our indoctrination to Marx-Leninism. How I would love to have an exact copy of what I wrote

that day! My essay received an unexpected praise from professor Bellavina. On the following Thursday, just two days before my departure, she came in with our graded essays and singled me out for writing the best composition ever. She had me read it to the whole class and gave me a big hug. I was embarrassed by all of this, but to my comfort, most of my classmates saw the satire in my literary effort and envied me for coming up with such a clever idea. On the other hand, Bellavina, who thought that my tribute to the Soviet national anthem was a very catchy theme gimmick, must have been gratified by the rest of the easily traceable phraseology of my composition. It clearly showed her that I had learned a lot and that I could recall and use it in an appropriate context. She said that she would have me read it to some of her other classes. I know that she read it to one class on Friday. That was sure the last of it because on the following Monday I was already in Prague ready for my trip to the USA.

All of a sudden I had so much to do and just a few days left to get it done. Mother took care of my clothing, almost all of which had been sent to us by grandmother Julia from America. We were getting regular packages from her every month. My winter topcoat and cap were the only non-U.S. items I wore on the trip. The only personal things I brought with me were my complete Slovak Republic stamp collection, religious books (New Testament, hymnal and couple of prayer books), Slovak-English dictionary, rules for proper Slovak writing and a parting gift from my parents — a book "Chalúpka Strýčka Toma – Uncle Tom's Cabin". Father prepared an inventory of everything mother packed in my mid-size leather-look-alike suitcase made out of cardboard. He had the inventory list notarized. He also took me to the chief of police in Rožňava to obtain a written statement that I was departing my home to live in the USA, giving my future address in Elyria, Ohio. Father knew the police chief well from his association on the County National Committee.

Then I needed to say my farewells to several people. Three evenings preceding my departure were dedicated to that. The first night I went to Vyšná Slaná to say good by to the Sopócy, Petráškos and Emericis. The next night I went with my father to Poloma to see the Zatroch and Garguš-Šimšík families. Then on the night before my departure I had about dozen classmates come to our house. I invited them on the last class period of the day. Most thought that I was joking about going to the USA. I had to reassure them that it was really so at the end of the school. They all showed up. Mother made some open face sandwiches and cookies. Father provided some rosebud vine. Drinking age was not a factor at that time. We all had a glass of it.

The next day, Saturday, 26th of November was my last day in school. I went to my homeroom professor Ladislav Gunda and

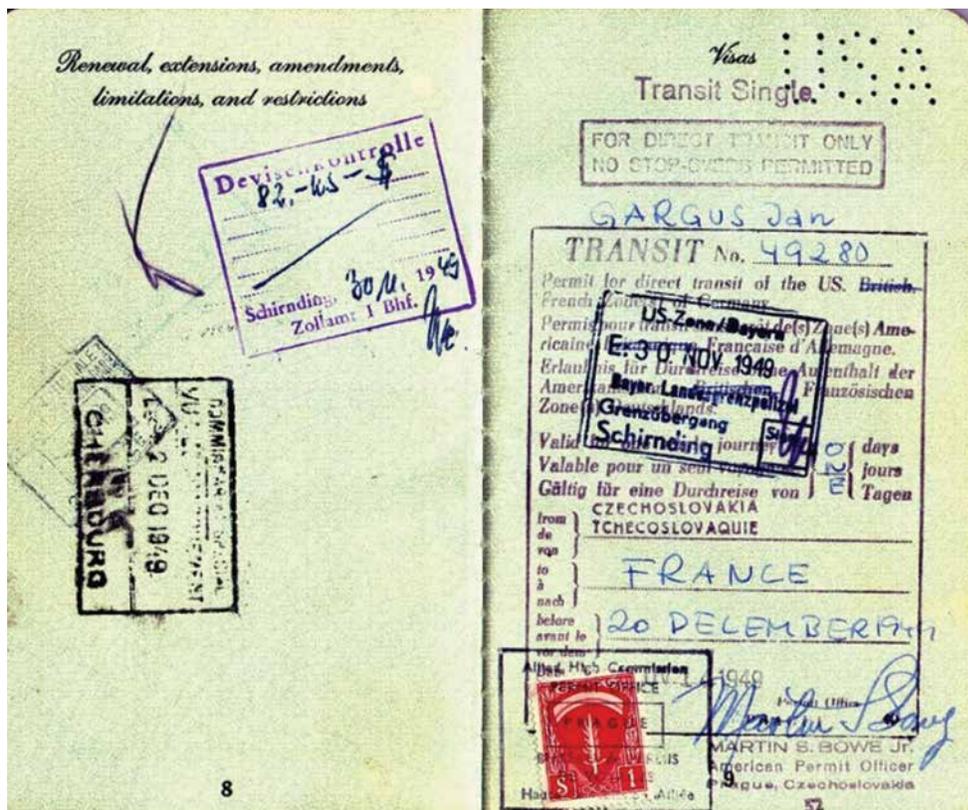
assurances of my parents when I departed from them at the Woodrow Wilson railway station. Leaning out of the window of departing train, I lost the sight of them as the train curved away from them.

There were 26 of us going to the USA that day. Among us were three other boys who were going to join their fathers already living somewhere in the USA. I soon found out that they were not part of our travel group even though they had assigned adult escorts from the members of our group. We were all in one railway car with compartments for eight passengers. I sat on the right hand side by the window and stowed my suitcase in the overhead rack by the door in the opposite corner. That way I had it within my sight all the time. I could not get separated from it. All I had with me was in it. I soon took off my cap and the overcoat and hung it together with the coats of others.

About two hours later we stopped at the border. Immigration agents entered the railroad car and moved methodically from one compartment to the other. Ours was the second compartment. We had our passports ready when they came to us.

The first man was interested in the money we had on us. He was stamping something on a passport page and then scribbling on it. I did not get to deal with him because the man who entered the compartment right after him reached for my suitcase and asked whose it was. I moved over to him and opened it for him. He was immediately impressed by the notarized, detailed inventory list that was on top. Nevertheless, he poked his hands here and there feeling around my books and clothes. He did not make a mess of things, but I had trouble closing my suitcase. He had fluffed it up sufficiently that things had to be tightly compressed again before it would close. All that time I had my ready passport under the uncooperative suitcase. By the time I finished and returned to my window seat, the first man who handled the passports was done with the compartment and moved on.

After a while another immigration agent came in and collected all our passports. He left our compartment with them but did not go far. I could see his back through the side window of our compartment. He was talking to someone. His elbows were bent and it seemed like he was shuffling our passport or showing them to some other agent. That didn't take long and he handed all eight passports to our traveling companion who was standing at the door. He smiled, waved at us and wished us a good trip in Czech. That was it. We sat there for a long time before we heard the sounds of immigration people leaving our car. Then there was another long wait before the train started moving again.



These two pages of my passport show entries made by immigration agents in Germany and in France. Page 8 has an indistinguishable green on green stamp with an initial in a form of letter K. Only the date – 30 November can be made out. This stamp imprint and the mark must have been made by the agents in the hallway outside of our car compartment. Departure from Cherbourg stamp is over the entry into France stamp. Page 9 is devoted to my transit through the occupied zones of Germany.

I don't know exactly when we crossed in to West Germany, but the train didn't travel very far before we stopped again and new immigration agents came to check our passports and visas for entry into the U.S. occupation zone of Germany. They had us count our money and this time the stamp showed that at border crossing in Shirding I had \$82.00 on my person. Agent had no interest in my small crown coins I was carrying with me as souvenirs. There was another long wait before the agents departed from our car and we started moving again.

All that time I became a little bit uncomfortable because my escort, Mr. Ševčík, kept wiping his tears and looking right at me. I thought that he was sad because he'd probably never return for another visit. But his look at me was puzzling. Then, as we were on our way once more, he asked the man next to me to change seats with him. He ended up on my left and began telling me a stunning tale. He called me a very lucky young man. Of course I knew that much. But what followed gave me goose bumps. He told me that the reason I was on this train with this travel group was that his wife had died more than two weeks ago and that I had taken her place on the train and on the Queen Elizabeth. He said that our group's tour list still had his wife's name on it not mine and that I was traveling without an exit visa, that he was to send my father a telegram from the first stop in Germany to a friend's address in Prague if I got stopped at the border. He was thoroughly briefed on my situation at the consulate and agreed with my parents to take the risk.

I was stunned. What he just told me was incredible, but very true. It explained why I had to travel on such a short notice. I don't remember how I replied to him, but I couldn't get over it. Thoughts of this kept me up all night. I don't think I slept a wink the rest of the way to Paris. I realized the great sacrifice my parents made for me and I began to fear the consequences of my departure from them.

I also wondered what would have happened to us after getting to Prague if Mr. Ševčík had not agreed to go along with the family plan. How would have I acted had I known about the potential peril of my crossing the border? Surely, the immigration agents were not diligent enough in examining our passports. They must have thought that we were all Slovak Americans returning from a visit to our families and wanted us to have a pleasant impression of the country. I was dressed in easily identifiable U.S. made clothing. My domestic top coat and cap were hanging on the hook. Obviously I passed as one of the returnees and somehow they did not pay attention to the names in the passports. Was this what my parents and the U.S. officials at the consulate hoped for? Once on the ship, I spoke with the three young boys who were sailing to join up with their fathers. They all told me that the immigration agents questioned them on the train about the reasons why they were leaving the country, where their fathers lived and if they planned to return to Czechoslovakia some day. Mr. Ševčík was right. I was one very lucky guy!

We arrived in Paris at the north railroad station called Gare du Nord on the first of December. One travel representative met our group and had us follow him to a hotel about two blocks away. I had a

small room with Mr. Ševčík. It had only one double bed. After all, it was supposed to be for him and for his wife. We slept together. Even though I was very sleepy and it was cold and drizzly on the street, I was so curious about Paris that I began walking the streets. Walking drove the sleepiness away and I visited various stores, marveled at the variety of merchandise, and used some of my limited French asking basic questions, namely in which direction is the railway station Gare du Nord. Even though I knew that I was getting farther and farther away, I wanted to be sure of the direction I had to go to find the station and the hotel, whose name I did not bother to remember. I stopped in two restaurants to eat and struggled with the unusual script on their menus. I paid with dollars. They were glad to take them off my hands. Finally I made it back to the hotel. Mr. Ševčík was worried about me. It was already getting dark. I was exhausted and I went to sleep very quickly.

We left Paris the next morning and arrived at war-torn Cherbourg early in the afternoon. Damage from the war was still visible at the port and the Queen Elizabeth could not yet come to the piers. She was anchored in deep water about a mile from the shore. We took a ferry to her broad side and filed on board just like in a movie scene, except there was no crowd to wave at us from the pier. Piers, still under repair were at least a mile behind us. It was about 5 p.m. When I made it to the topside from our small four person cabin. It was raining and the land — the European continent — was already out of sight. ❖

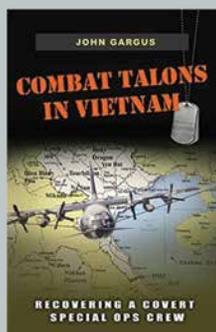
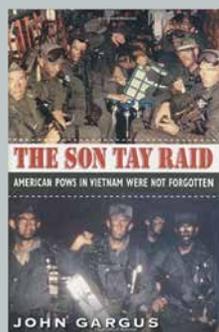
About the Author

John Gargus was born in Czechoslovakia from where he escaped at the age of fifteen when the Communists pulled the country behind the Iron Curtain. He was commissioned through AFROTC in 1956 and made the USAF his career. He served in the Military Airlift Command as a navigator, then as an instructor in AFROTC.

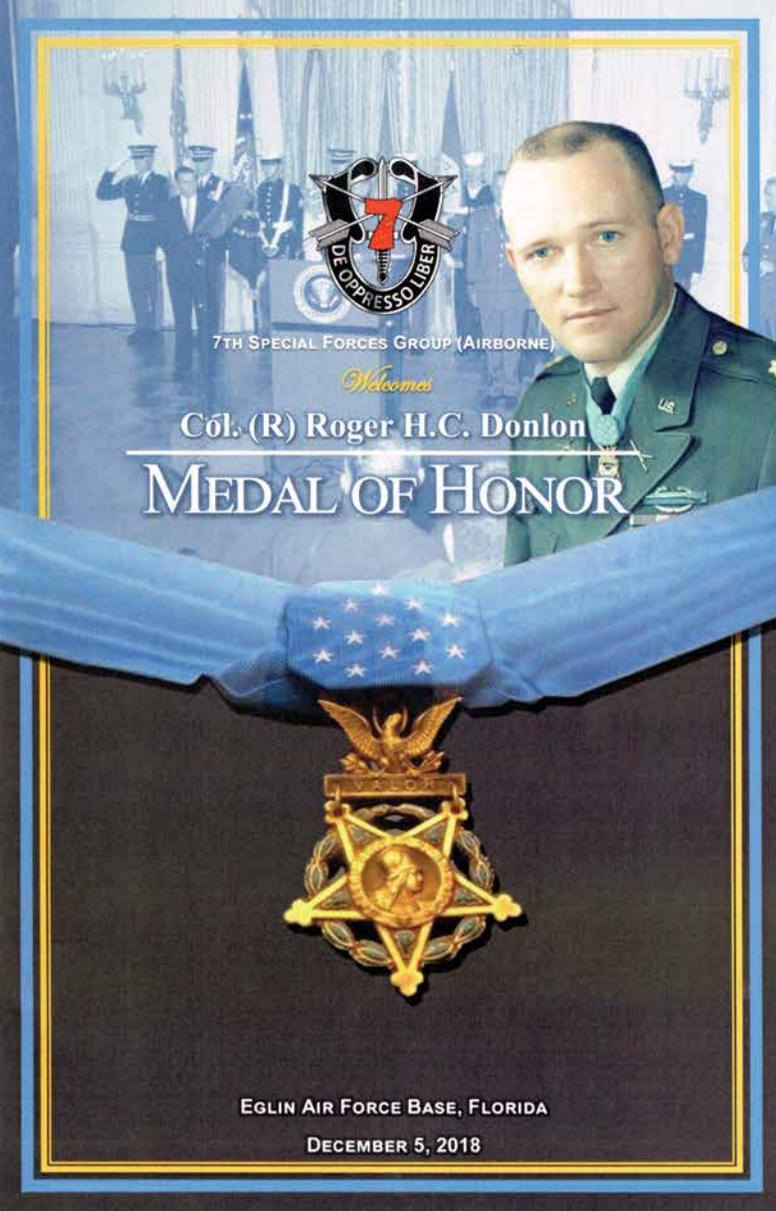
He went to Vietnam as a member of Special Operations and served in that field of operations for seven years in various units at home and in Europe. He participated in the air operations planning for the Son Tay POW rescue and then flew as the lead navigator of one of the MC-130s that led the raiders to Son Tay, for which he was awarded the Silver Star.

His non-flying assignments included Deputy Base Command at Zaragoza Air Base in Spain and at Hurlburt Field in Florida and a tour as Assistant Commandant of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

He retired in 1983 after serving as the Chief of USAF's Mission to Colombia, having accrued more than 6,100 flight hours, including 381 combat hours in Southeast Asia. In 2003 he was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. He has authored two books, *The Son Tay Raid: American POWs in Vietnam Were Not Forgotten*, published in 2007, and *Combat Talons in Vietnam: Recovering a Covert Special Ops Crew*, published in 2017. He has been married to Anita since 1958. The Garguses have one son and three daughters.



Roger H. C. Donlon Dedication Service — SF Top Secrets Behind the Dedication



John Stryker Meyer

By John Stryker Meyer

The December 5th official dedication and naming of the 7th Special Forces Group Headquarters honoring Col. (Ret.) Roger H. C. Donlon, the first Green Beret MOH recipient of the Vietnam War, was a classic Special Forces operation, complete with clandestine missions, top secret planning and fundraising that culminated in a unique event before more than 500 people at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

And, like any good Green Beret story, there is a sweet love story behind the successful event that unfolded on a chilly day in Florida, a love between Col. Donlon and his wife of more than 50 years, Norma.

First, the event and the biggest surprise element of the headquarters dedication: Before Donlon spoke, a life size sculpture of the young team captain of ODA-726 was unveiled — a bust sculpted by Douwe Blumberg, the artist who produced the famous *Horse Soldier* monument at the World Trade Center. “When they unveiled it, I said ‘Oh my God.’ I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t pick up on any of this....I thought there was going to be a little plaque on the headquarters wall, or something. When we walked out with (7th SFG) commanding officer (Col. Patrick T. Colloton) I paid no attention to the veiled object,” said Donlon.

The two Green Berets who unveiled the Donlon sculpture were the commanding officer and team sergeant of today’s ODA-726, said Donlon. “That meant a lot to me, having today’s leaders of A-726 participate in the dedication.” During his brief comments, where he acknowledged the success of his wife’s effort to keep the project secret, “I basically shared with them that I couldn’t believe that my name was on the headquarters building, and I mentioned how in (his hometown) Saugerties, NY, an old Dutch settlement on the banks of the Hudson River, there’s a building with the Donlon name on it, named after my grandfather...I mentioned the 7th Group motto: ‘The family business’, noting that my father, my grandfather, brothers all served our country and how my grand niece is today, one of eight female Navy divers.”

After the dedication, they carried the bronze bust into 7th SFG Headquarters, Donlon Hall. It’ll be displayed in an enclosed case with a “display Medal of Honor” draped around the neck. Donlon ex-



Col. (Ret.) Roger H. C. and Norma Donlon (photo by Lonny Holmes)



Two 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) soldiers guard the bust of retired Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)

plained that the MOH on display was presented to him by General Earle G. Wheeler, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on December 5, 1964, after President Lyndon B. Johnson draped his original MOH around Donlon's neck during the formal presentation at the White House. "That (the Wheeler-presented) Medal of Honor is special...I had served with General Wheeler as his aide. After the presentation in the White House, General Wheeler hosted a dinner, where he presented the second Medal of Honor to me, as a private gesture. Needless to say, I was honored and surprised that night in 1964, as I was surprised by the unveiling at Eglin."

A key element of the unveiling was keeping the secret of having it produced and funds raised to pay talented sculptor Douwe Blumberg, for the bust and for a second, smaller version that will be shipped to the Donlon home in Kansas.

"This all started when 7th Group called, saying they wanted to name the headquarters in honor of Roger," said Norma Donlon. "I didn't miss a beat, I said we should hold this on December 5th, which is the day President Johnson presented the MOH to Roger (in 1964)...then I said I'd like to get a sculpture of Roger for the event. Then the question was who will sculpt it. I had seen the *Horse Soldier* statue, it was magnificent. I called the sculptor. I had seen his name in *The Drop*. Much to my amazement, when I called Mr. Blumberg answered the phone.

"I told him I wanted to commission the sculpture. I told him I wanted it to be a secret. He told me, 'how am I going to sculpt him if I can't see him?' I told him, 'you'll have to do it through pictures....' He asked me if I had any photos of Roger that were warrioresque. Warrioresque! Can you imagine?! I went to (Donlon's first book) *Outpost of Freedom* printed in 1965, where there was a good picture of Roger in it. I remember Roger telling me that when they took that



Colonel Patrick T. Colloton (right), Commander, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), greets retired Army Col. Roger H. C. Donlon and his wife Norma. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)



Retired Army Col. Roger H. C. Donlon (left) shakes hands with Col. Patrick T. Colloton (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)



SFA Chapter 29 Treasurer Roy L. Williams makes remarks during the ceremony. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)



- ❶ A drone shot of John Houston parade field on Eglin Air Force Base, FL, the location of the ceremony. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher Schmielt)
- ❷ Col. (Ret.) Roger H. C. Donlon (right) speaks at the formal dedication and naming of the Roger H.C. Donlon Headquarters. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)

- ❸ The official party stands for the playing of "The Army Song". (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sean Hall)
- ❹ Army Col. Patrick T. Colloton says a few remarks during the ceremony in honor of Army (Ret.) Col. Roger H.C. Donlon, who donated his Display Medal of Honor to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Abraham)

picture the McGraw Hill PR people were bugging him, and he was unhappy at the time, but it worked for Mr. Blumberg."

Then the question was: How to pay for it? "I went to (SFA Chapter 29 Treasurer) Roy Williams," Norma Donlon said. He told me he'd take over and raise funds for it. As we talked about the idea, I asked if we could do a two-for-one deal with the sculptor, so we could have the second bust for our home. I don't know how they did it, but the SF men responded."

"We've been friends a long time," said Roy Williams, "I told her we'd do it...the approach we took was typical SF. I put out the word that this was to be kept a secret from Roger and that we were doing this for Roger Donlon. I didn't ask for money. People responded, like Chapters 75 and 78, to name only a few. We reached an agreement with Douwe Blumberg, we raised the money over six months and we reached our goal, to make enough money to cover the costs of two bronze statues." When Williams learned that MOH recipient CSM (Ret.) Bennie G. Adkins drove to Eglin AFB on his own expense to honor Donlon, Chapter 29 wrote a check for \$250, from the remaining funds from the project, to cover Adkins' expenses for the trip. "We all were honored to have Sgt. Maj. Adkins attend Roger's dedication."

Col. (Ret.) Paul Longgrear represented Chapter 78 at the event. "The most impressive thing to me about the headquarters dedication was the number of (SFA) chapters that gathered to honor the torch bearer for Special Forces, Col. Roger H.C. Donlon. I was pleased with the number of old soldiers that showed to honor one of our finest leaders in SF history." Longgrear was surprised at how today's SF troops responded to a Chapter 78 coin box he presented to 7th Group, which had a Chapter 78 20th Anniversary coin and the Jack Singlaub challenge coin that Chapter 78 designed for Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Singlaub.

Col. Colloton said, "Sir, your inspirational acts of service will continue to encourage generations to come, which you have certainly done here at 7th Group, and through your lifelong volunteer work with the people of Nam Dong."

And, for the love story that played out behind this event — while Norma Donlon was working on the sculpture project, "it was difficult keeping it secret from Roger and our family. There were times Roy would call and Roger was there, so I had to go to the other room, like a woman having an affair or something, so he couldn't hear me," said Norma.

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- 5 Medal of Honor recipient Army Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Bennie Adkins, right, and distinguished visitors stand for the “Ballad of the Green Beret”. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)
- 6 Medal of Honor recipient, retired Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon meets and greets Soldiers assigned to 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) before the ceremony. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sean Hall)
- 7 Retired Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon (middle) introduces fellow Medal of Honor recipient retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie Adkins to Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Maurine Donlon, Donlon's grand niece. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sean Hall)
- 8 Colonel Roger Donlon, MOH, Patty Longgear, and Chapter 78 member Colonel (Ret.) Paul Longgear.
- 9 The special Chapter 78 coin box memento that Chapter member Paul Longgear designed, built and presented to 4/7 at 7th Group. The coin box contains the SFA Chapter 78 20th Anniversary challenge coin and the MG John K. Singlaub challenge coin designed by Chapter 78 member John Joyce.



Part One: In-Country Cherry before SF



Fred Horne

By Fred Horne

What the hell have I've gotten myself into?

Sitting at my computer more than 50 years later, I struggle to remember dates, places and events. Some are vivid, others not so much, and others I'd prefer not to remember at all. This has been a challenge because I'm trying to get the story right. I've done my best to avoid remembering much of my days in Vietnam and other exotic places, let alone

write them down and have lost considerable sleep trying to recollect those experiences. Mostly, because I didn't want to remember and was convinced no one gave a Sh#! But, after reactivating my membership with the Special Forces Association (originally, the Decade Association) I've been encouraged by the fine group of heroes with whom I am associated to giving it a try.

This article is not about me nor a venting of my exploits because I'm no hero. It's about how a youngster, searching for his place in the world came to join the finest military force the nation has to offer. Originally, I did not know about Special Forces. I wanted to be an Airborne Ranger like the distant Uncle I heard stories about from my family as I was growing up. In my formative years, I was told he was with the 101st Airborne Division in WW2 and over the years was built up as a "hero of the family". So, like any other kid, I wanted to be like him.

When I joined the Army, my thoughts were far removed from a military career let alone Special Forces. However, as my career progressed, I came in contact with some extraordinary professionals. But it's been my privilege to have been associated with many legends of the craft; those quiet professionals who gave their all and live vividly in our recollections — no matter how feeble we are in our twilight years.

I arrived at Tan Son-Nhut airbase just outside of Saigon on November 24, 1965. A blast of hot humid air assaulted us when they opened the door to the plane introducing us to a drastically different place. Like all those who arrived before us, we were in for a shocking transition from the relative moderate climate of the States to the heavy hot humidity of South East Asia. Within a short few minutes, our starched khaki uniforms were soaked with sweat.

A few minutes later, our motley group of sweat-stained replacements were clamoring down the airstairs and onto awaiting busses. That was just the beginning. In my immature mind, I was a seasoned paratrooper sporting a skeeter wing on my sleeve with nine whole jumps from a real airplane, just out of the 82nd Airborne



Division and bound for the 101st. Today was my 18th birthday and naively convinced I knew more that I really did. You know the type, we were paratroopers and we knew everything worth knowing. Right? Not so fast!

After being quickly ushered into the waiting busses, we were on our way to the replacement detachment somewhere on the base. It was about 08:30 and before I knew it, I was processed, given a bunk and instructed to be in formation at 5 a.m. for a ride to Phan Rang to join the 101st Airborne Division.

Looking around the GP medium tent, I surveyed the varied shoulder patches and tried to get to know some of the guys I traveled with. I caught a glimpse of a staff sergeant talking to a couple of other sergeants. He was in TWs with the distinctive blue and yellow shoulder patch I recognized from Bragg as Special Forces. While at Bragg, I knew a little bit of the Sneaky Pete's just down the hill from the 82nd because my brother was in training group when I left for Vietnam. Before leaving Bragg, I had asked my brother what it took to get into SF at the time but was told I needed to be an E-5. So I filed that away for the future when and if I ever made Sergeant.

Back then, I didn't know much about SF, so being curious, I struck up a conversation with the Staff Sergeant asking what unit he was bound for. He gave me a somewhat sneaky like smile as he replied; "5 Group," in a smooth southern drawl. I didn't know beans about the difference then between a 7th, 5th or 1st Group flash for that matter. Well, not willing to admit otherwise, I nodded my head in understanding as he reached up and placed that cool looking beret on his head — turned and left the tent. *Who the hell is a "5th group"?* I thought.

Our group milled around the tent for a while venturing out only on occasion to watch the fighter jets and transport planes take off for parts unknown. Around 15:00 I was invited to a poker game. *What the hell,* I thought and soon the time blended into the early evening and I began to feel hungry. So far I was ahead 40 bucks, so when chow call was announced I happily left the game. I had no problem with army chow back then because regular meals were a treat and I thought I was in food heaven compared to the spam and cheese dinners I was used to as a boy. I'll save that subject for another time.

Later, back at the replacement tent, I was going through my duffle bag to find a dry T-shirt when one of the guys I was in the poker

game with caught my shoulder and said, “Hey kid, gonna give us a chance to get our money back?” I thought for a second. \$40 bucks was a lot of money in those days. After all, I was a PFC and had signed up to send all but \$25 home and was just about to pass on the invitation when the other two circled and “politely” encouraged me to reconsider. About an hour later, broke, except the eight dollars I had stashed in my left boot, I was done with the lesson. As I got up with my hands in my pockets, indicating I was broke, they chuckled saying, “Thanks Kid, come on back when you learn the game.”

Now I’m not saying I was cheated, but it sure looked like there were a lot of full houses and straights at that game. I wish all life lessons were as easy.

Around 19:30 I walked out of the tent to watch yet another sortie of fighters taking off. As I stood there something caught my eye and I looked past the fence line to see Vietnamese of all ages hurriedly going about their business — but what really caught my attention were two little girls, I guessed to be about six or seven years old, beckoning me to the fence line. They were dirty and somewhat ragged looking but each had a smile as wide as a barn door; you know that smile any American kid just couldn’t turn down. My thoughts quickly went to the in-briefing where we were sternly warned to steer clear of the homeless kids because they were a pack of thieves and some were VC scouts. Well, you know us bleeding heart American GI’s; I ignored the warning (something I had a habit of doing in those days as the skeeter wing on my sleeve after a year in the Army attested too) and went to the fence. I wasn’t much for following the rules back then.

We pantomimed our way through a nonverbal conversation for about five minutes or so until I figured they just wanted to talk or maybe get a candy bar. You know, the World War 2 movies where the GI’s were always giving away candy as they marched through Germany? Well, the movies don’t tell the true story. I had just gotten relaxed enough, a Snickers bar in hand and was offering it to my new best friends, but didn’t notice I was too close to the fence. Suddenly, I realized something was in my pocket and — like a flash — the two “angels” were scampering down the road; laughing and smiling like Cheshire cats. They absconded with my last eight bucks, which I had retrieved from my boot, as well as the prized Snickers bar that I had brought from the states. I sheepishly slinked back to the tent and didn’t tell anyone. Lesson two!

About 21:00, I lounged on my picturesque upper bunk, flat broke and somewhat dejected that I allowed myself to be conned, twice in one evening. Welcome to Vietnam, I thought, as I tried to go to sleep.

My mind drifted back a year ago to the day after my 17th birthday, where I announced to my family that I enlisted in the Army with the rock-solid assurance of three things. First, that after basic and AIT, I would go to jump school and become a paratrooper; second, I would be allowed to try out for Ranger School; and, third, I would be assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. Now, everybody knows a deal is a deal. That is, until you read the fine print — “subject to the needs of the service” — which I would learn the hard way. But I digress — I was told to be at the recruiting station at 6 a.m. Friday morning; so, I did the appropriate partying that night. The day after Thanksgiving, I found myself on a Greyhound bus traveling up Interstate 5 to the MEPS station in Portland Oregon. Eugene was



Aerial view of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, South Vietnam, in June 1968. (Photo from the United States Air Force [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)

an okay town that I had no regrets leaving but was glad to be off to a new adventure. I had not yet graduated from High School but as it turned out, I left town at precisely the right time.

I won't bore you with the details because every soldier knows what happens at a MEPS, except the shock of standing, stark naked, in front of a lot of people being probed, surveyed and treated like cattle destined for slaughter was a bit overwhelming for a dirt-poor country boy. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, I was handed an envelope with plane tickets, ordered to join a group of about fifteen other recruits and was ushered to the Portland International Airport with orders for basic training.

As I recall there was an outbreak of Spinal Meningitis at Fort Ord in California so we were sent to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri for basic training. We were processed that weekend and joined our basic class the following Monday to fill out the training battalion. Everyone joked about our fast placement; snickering under our breath — there must be a war coming and they needed cannon fodder. Today, those jokes are not funny for some reason.

Basic was routine except for Christmas stand-down and I soon found myself on another bus headed for Fort Benning for AIT which also went very quickly. I did not stand out in either class other than my shooting skills with the M-14; scoring expert with a comment from the drill sergeants that I may want to consider sniper training. I declined because I did not want to miss the next Airborne Class.

After Jump School, three of us were whisked off to Ranger Training. With each progression, the training became tenfold more difficult. Knowing nothing was an advantage as the training in mountaineering, swamp training, fieldcraft, survival, small unit tactics, etc. was not that hard physically; all we needed to do was listen intently, watch the NCOs in the class with us and “never quit”! But now that I look back on it, those lessons at Dahlonga and Elgin were the foundation lessons that later saved my life.

Through my first months in the Army, I was blessed with no down time — that is — up until Florida phase where an encounter with a Cottonmouth snake derailed my Ranger ambitions for the time being and I found myself reporting into the 82nd Airborne Division on April 28, 1965. Yup, you guessed it, just in time for the Dominican Republic.

After returning to Bragg in June, we settled into peace time and I found myself pulling a lot of guard duty and KP — especially during field exercises when the Duty Roster was suspended and my name kept popping up a lot. I was still pouting about being medically dropped from Ranger School so I took my revenge out on, as it turned out, myself; pushing the envelope and becoming much too visible to the senior NCOs and Platoon leader. But, through it all, I was blessed with some very good leaders who took an interest in making sure I experienced all the fine activities the 82nd Airborne Division had to offer. You know, KP, guard duty, extra duty, preparing for IG inspections, running up and down Murchison Road and other exotic activities. I managed to get in four jumps by the end of the year though. And, somehow managed to get a lot of high school credits out of the way in between all the mischief.

Yes, I was a misfit, standing in front of the Company Commander on more than one occasion and spending a lot of time doing my part to beautify the battalion area. Much of that early misbehavior changed, however, because in mid-August I was told to get to the orderly room on the double.

In those days, “on the double” meant double time (run fast to civilians) so when I sprinted up the concrete steps and bursting into the hall, I came face-to-face with a stern looking buck sergeant with one of those funny looking green hats. Oddly, I was preoccupied with the weird-looking crest without a flash and the crossed arrows on his Green Beret when he began yelling — “You little Pri#\$\$%, you ain't gonna trash my name so get your Sh#! together!” He was my brother Don. Over his shoulder I saw my First Sergeant intently interested in what was going to happen next. “Now, get your ass outside — we gonna talk,” Don yelled. In short order, I found myself in the front leaning rest position while I was given the riot act.

After the First Sergeant and the other NCO's returned to the Orderly room, Don leaned over and said, “Show's over ass&^%, lets go.” He kinda grinned as he looked to make sure no one was watching and we were off to discuss my extracurricular activities and such. Over the next weeks we reminisced, tossed back a few and caught up on the latest family gossip. But I began to realize my behavior was getting me nowhere. I'm not saying that Don made me turn around my anti-authority behavior but he did start me to thinking that I needed a new strategy.

My brother started SF training in late August or the first week of September and I went back to the excitement of garrison life. Somewhere in there I was invited by the First Sergeant to volunteer for Vietnam, which I was glad to do because I was on thin ice and a change of venue was most appropriate.

There was a reason the First Shirt wanted me gone. Now, lest we not forget, Fayetteville, North Carolina offered all forms of education for the well-disciplined paratrooper on Hay Street. But for some reason I was not well accepted in most drinking establishments — the drinking age was 21 as I recall and, on a few occasions, I was given a courtesy ride to the Provost Marshals office where my First Sergeant was exceedingly pleased to pick me up. More KP and for some reason, I also enjoyed a lot of extra duty. How nice of the Company Commander. So, the point is, I was no choir boy — as evidence, I was still a PFC when I received orders for Vietnam. What the hell though, I rationalized there were not many promotions handed out in 1965 so I was good to go. But, I was a seasoned paratrooper; had a whole two days of combat under my belt, if you want to call it that, and I was confident in my skills. A year later I could have written a couple of novels about how much I did not know.

All of which led to me on my bunk in Vietnam, where I was having a pretty nice dream; flying in the clouds, doing somersaults and having a good time, oddly thinking it was weird to see Sicily Drop Zone from so low an altitude. *Where's the parachute*, I was thinking right about the time I slammed into the wood floor of the tent. Instantly, I was wide awake wondering what the hell just happened. The smell of putrid smoke filled my nostrils as I choke a breath or two. The

mortar round landed three bunks to my left and there was a gaping hole in the tent. For some stupid reason I was wondering about the odd-looking meteor shower while someone dragged me to the back of the tent by my bloody left arm. “Hey ass-hole,” I yelled, “you’re tearing my f#\$% arm off!” The guy stopped, leaned over, his lips were moving but I heard nothing; just saw the terrified look in his huge eyes telling me something was terribly wrong. Then, a couple of guys picked me up and I found myself laying beside a wall of sandbags staring at the smoldering tent with my life possessions going up in smoke. That second Snickers bar would have been nice right about then.

I guess I laid there for about — forever — when I heard a muffled “Where do you hurt?” Looking to my left, I saw a stunningly beautiful brunette holding a compression bandage against my head. I tried to speak when a sharp pain in my upper lip reminded me to keep my mouth shut. I remember kinda indicating I was okay with a flick of my hand, blinked a couple of times and tried to focus my eyes. The beauty gave me a once over, then she was gone. I don’t recall the rest of the nights flurry of events

The next morning I was sitting on a hospital cot feeling sorry for myself when a spec four pushed a breakfast tray in front of me. He gave me a once over, apparently admiring my bandaged face, and said in a muffled tone, “Eat and drink as much as you can.” I was still having a hard time hearing but understood his gestures.

Surveying the metal food tray, I saw what I assumed to be oatmeal, powdered milk, something that looked like orange juice, and a metal container full of water. My busted lip reminded me that I was still alive, but chewing was a chore. My dinner meal that day would be a slice of turkey with a generous portion of gravy and I think something resembling cranberries. That’s when I realized it was Thanksgiving Day.

I looked around and was surprised to see only two other guys in my ward. One guy had a cast on his right leg and a full bandage keeping his left arm wrapped close to his body. I learned later he lost his hand. The other guy, who I recognized from the flight from the States, seemed to have no injuries. So I asked in a loud voice, “What you here for?” He lifted his medical shirt to reveal a line of stitches across his abdomen and a 4X4 patch just below his belly button. He reached over to the head of bunk and retrieved a bundle, opened it to reveal a piece of metal about two inches long. “Took this out of my gut,” he grinned. “You gonna be okay?” I asked. “Yup,” he replied. “Goin’ home tomorrow. You been in a bar fight?” he asked. I guess he understood my puzzled look at the question so he gestured at the bandage on my head and left ear. I also had some wraps on my left arm.

I curiously looked around for a mirror but saw none so I called to the ward orderly. “What you want?” he grunted. “A mirror,” I replied. He pointed to the door at the end of the room. “In the latrine,” he grunted. I sat up and started to swing my legs over the side of the hospital cot and that’s where I learned the real feeling of pain; seemingly my entire body was in rebellion. I froze, looked sheepishly at the orderly and lay back. He grinned, “You gonna be pretty

sore for a couple days, but you’ll be okay,” he explained. He then proceeded to point out my wounds, which turned out to be minor cuts and a lot of bruises, and one small gash on my left scalp with a couple of stitches where they took out a small fragment of shrapnel — not even big enough to keep as a souvenir, I later learned. All in all, I was relatively unscathed compared to the three guys I was playing poker with a few hours earlier; they earned an early trip home — the mortar round landed directly between them. Try as I might, I still can’t remember their faces.

Sometime later, I finally grunted through the pain and made it to the latrine where I surveyed my new face; I didn’t know the person starring back at me. My upper lip was cracked, the entire left side was black and blue and my forehead was bandaged like those stupid head dresses you see in the movies. The bandage covered my left ear — I started laughing when the image of the Pillsbury Doughboy with chocolate caramel popped into my mind. I hobbled back to my bunk.

Later that day a doctor came whisking through the Ward, pronounced me well enough to be discharged, and the next day I prepared to return to the replacement detachment. But, before I left the hospital, a Major came trooping through with a group of white coat doctors and nurses, shook my hand, pinned a Purple Heart to my gown and scurried off to the next victim. As it turned out that kind of award ceremony was way too common. After that comedy, the orderly sent me to the supply room where I was issued some ill-fitting jungle fatigues and size 10 boots. I was a size 9.

Standing at the wood frame door of what was once a new GP medium tent, my eyes surveyed the empty triangle — they had not yet replaced the tent so I was trying to visualize the empty spot where my previous accommodations were. It was kinda weird, like a confused mess in my mind. All that was left was a bare spot between two identical looking tents; both had holes in the sides and a few patches. The wooden floor was gone and a slight indentation in the dirt where the mortar round hit but nothing else — just a flat piece of ground where three young Americans lost their lives less than 24 hours in country. All my stuff was gone — including my prized Corcoran Jump Boots. I was pissed and grumbled about them for a couple of weeks not fully appreciating the magnitude of the loss of the other three GI’s!

As I stood fixated on the empty spot, a staff sergeant called my name. He gestured for me to come over to his tent. When I got there, he asked, “Moving kinda slow, youngster? Hurts like a bitch don’t it?” I nodded yes as he turned, reached back and pulled a new set of jungle fatigues off a shelf and flipped them on the counter. “What’s left of your duffle bag is in the corner,” he gestured. I looked over to see a half-burned duffle bag on the floor with half my name still visible. I tried a smile but the pain in my lip reminded me not to as I slinked over to what was left of my gear. “Check it out and tell me what you need,” the sergeant said. “I got most of what you will need till you get to your unit,” he went on to say.

I pulled what was left of my possessions out and quickly found I needed just about everything. Of course, my form-fit Corcoran’s

looked like someone laid them on a bar-b-que pit. “Trash bins out the door on the left,” said the Sergeant. After I disposed of everything but my soap dish, the Sergeant issued me a second pair of fatigues, two pairs of properly fitting jungle boots, and some toiletries. “You’ll get the rest reissued when you get to the 101st.” He finished by saying, “You gonna be okay kid, you’re goin’ to the best damn unit in the army.” As he turned to walk away, I saw the Screaming Eagle patch on his right shoulder.

I went back to the tent where I was told by a runner to go to the orderly room. I went into the admin office where I was given my amended orders, an envelope with some other papers and instructed to be ready at 04:00 for a flight that would take me to Phan Rang. I didn’t sleep well that night; the previous events churned over and over in my mind. *A soap dish*, I thought. *Why the f!@# didn’t they burn that rather than my Corcoran’s? Happy birthday and welcome to Vietnam*, I thought.

I woke to someone shaking my shoulder while shining a flashlight in my eyes who asked, “You Horne?” “Yes,” I answered. “You got thirty minutes to be in front of the orderly room,” he said and dashed off. I rose, stretched as much as my aching body would allow, brushed my teeth, dressed and lumbered to a small formation in front of the orderly room. We were instructed to get in the cattle-cars and were soon on our way to the Air Force marshaling area. Our plane was running late so we were given a box of C-Rations and left to our devices. Around 11:00 we were finally loaded into a C-130 and then sat there for what seemed hours with the engines blasting in our ears until finally, almost mercifully, they allowed us to take off. Keep in mind, there was no air-conditioning on the ground. The load master told us in flight that the delay was because of the fighter/bomber jets scrambling for a big mission.

The C-130 lurched left and right in the heavy humid turbulence of the Southeast Asian clouds. My senses were razor sharp as my eyes were glued to the thick humid vapor coming out of the ventilation tubes. All I could think was — *smoke!* That, combined with the speed bumps, heavy chains straining against the quarter ton jeep in the back of the plane, and the huge palate of some sort of supplies seemingly coming apart. I was convinced we were

about to crash until I saw the load master’s eyes riveted on me — his telepathic mind knew exactly what I was thinking as he began to chuckle; his grin said a lot. I looked around the plane to see the only ones alarmed were us — in-country Cherries. I started to relax and my eyes caught a Master Sergeant already dozing in his seat, his feet propped on a rucksack as if he had not a care in the world.

After about twenty minutes, the Master Sergeant stirred and I caught a glimpse of his shoulder patch. He too was with Special Forces so I took a chance and asked, “Hi Top, you Special Forces?” His mocking stare told me — *Dumb-ass, wrong question!* as he grunted — “Do I look like I spin on my head youngster?” *Okay, stupid question*, I thought as I quickly replied, “No sergeant, I’m just curious about how to join that unit.” His eyes surveyed my bandages, then to my slick sleeve and back riveting on my eyes like he saw right through me, grinned, turning his head as if mocking and replied, “Give us a call in about 10 years.” That was the end of the conversation. I sheepishly turned my attention to the back of the plane, squirming in my seat knowing I had just been put in my place. Apparently, I dozed off.

I woke to the most god-awful screeching I had ever heard and I thought we were once again in crash mode as the C-130 screamed to a slow taxi on the Perforated Steel Planking (PSP) runway at Phan-Rang. I looked wide eyed at the load master who was mulling around going about his business and grinning as us replacements began searching for answers. The Master Sergeant was lazily loosening his seatbelt and glanced around and past me as if I was not there. He reached down and secured his rucksack that had rolled on the aluminum deck on landing. I noticed the OD Special Forces patch crowned with a Ranger and an Airborne Tab. He glanced at me and managed a small grin as he stood up just as the plane came to a stop. Something about this seasoned veteran piqued my curiosity but I knew to keep my mouth shut; better to be thought an idiot than to open my mouth again and remove all doubt. This guy glowed with confidence. I was beginning to realize that I was NOT the seasoned paratrooper I thought I was; nowhere near it! The plane engines were still running when the load master gestured for us to depart. The Master Sergeant disappeared out the back of the plane.



C-130 Hercules transport plane



Aerial photograph of Phan Rang Air Base, South Vietnam in June 1968. (Photo by USAF - United States Air Force Historical Research Agency - Maxwell AFB, Alabama, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32335351>)

My group, lumbered down the ramp heavily laden with half put together web gear and duffle bags. I, on the other hand, had only a few items in my duffle bag so flopped it over my arm. I've often thought if I only had a picture of this green mob and my pathetic little mostly empty duffle bag it would be priceless today.

We stepped onto the PSP that served as a landing runway and parking ramp — the source of the terrifying screech on landing I learned later. We were met by a deuce-and-a-half truck that took us to the Brigade replacement unit and dropped us off in front of what appeared to be a half wood barracks with a large tent draped over it.

A group of 101st paratroopers ushered us through processing. They kinda gave me that weird look as if to say, *that's all we need, a dud, obviously in a fight, a trouble maker*. A Staff Sergeant took my orders and zipped the green form into his typewriter and asked, "Got your orders?" I tried to sift through the papers in the envelope, but he snatched it away, flipped a couple of pages, found what he was looking for and began banging on the old Smith Corona typewriter. Funny how I remember that after all these years but can't remember what I had for dinner last night. Fifty-three years is a long time.

Within a few minutes, he handed the envelope back to me — minus most of its contents and said, "See the Supply Sergeant to get your gear." "What about all my stuff I lost in Saigon?" I asked. He looked at me, puzzled. He glanced at my bandages. "Get rolled in Saigon?" "No Sergeant," I replied, "a mortar round destroyed all my stuff."

The Staff Sergeant turned and thumbed through the stack of

papers he'd taken from me, turned and asked, "What's this hospital report?" I explained what happened as he sat impatiently listening. He then turned and jotted down my account. "Need anything else private?" he asked. It seemed his entire attitude towards me changed. Apparently, I was not the bar hopping misfit he tagged me with when I first met him. Of course, I didn't say anything to sway his opinion. Back to the typewriter went the green form and within seconds I was handed a form to sign.

Within a short hour, we were processed into First Brigade, 101st Airborne Division – Separate. At the end of the ordeal, we heard a short briefing by a Captain who warned us about all the evils of the local village and to steer clear save you come down with the clap or some other god-awful diseases I'd never heard of. At the end of his speech, he grinned saying "Welcome to the Phan Rang, home of First Brigade, 101st. Airborne Division".

We were sent to another tent and told to wait to be called. Sometime later, a PFC came to our tent, called my name and told me I had to go the Dispensary. He escorted me to where I needed to go and shortly I was sitting in front of a Captain that appeared to badly need a shave. He gestured for my records and the envelope in my hands, took out my last folder which turned out to be my medical records, thumbed through them and then put me through an interesting exam. *Curious*, I thought. He asked no questions, like, how do you feel? etc. After he was satisfied I could see, breath, walk and bend my arms and legs, he said, "You're going to be fine; got any questions?" I kinda stared at him trying to formulate a question.

Finally, I asked, “Can you take these stitches out?” He glanced at my head, instantaneously retrieved a pair of scissors and satisfied my request. “Won’t even leave a scar,” he announced as he turned for the door saying, “You didn’t need those stitches anyway.”

I found myself back in the tent where the other Cherries were lounging on their bunks, except three of my mates who had been transported to parts unknown. The rest of the day was uneventful. With nothing to do, I dozed off.

Later that day, I wondered around the camp looking for something to do or someone to talk to. I wandered over to the fence separating the compound from the airfield and peered across the parking apron to see a large group of what I thought to be Vietnamese soldiers. I could make out a few Americans who sported Green Beret’s but most had boonie hats. The indigenous troops all carried strange rifles that I later learned were M-1 Carbines. All the Green Berets carried M-16s. I was struck by the discipline of the Indig troops — all but a few had boonie hats, a camouflage scarf around their necks with some kind of patch, U.S. load bearing equipment with grenades hanging off and laden with heavy rucksacks. An impressive sight as I remember. A couple of the Indig troops stared at me. I saw one gesturing at his head as he said something unintelligible to his buddies. But I got the gist of it — he was talking about me and my handsome head ornament.

I explained about the mortar attack to the Sergeant who translated to the indig troops. They all smiled politely and then kinda drifted back to their friends seemingly unimpressed. I went back to the tent and tried to break the boredom.

The following day, the rest of the replacements were shipped out. I was told I could not deploy until I healed a couple more days so I had the pleasure of guard duty on the perimeter for the next two nights.

My first night on the wall was *interesting!* Every bush, shadow and rice paddy dike had an enemy behind it. Shadows moved across the moonlit fields, shrubs danced to the rhythm of the wind, and the sounds of insects and monsters of the jungle joined forces, taunting my creative mind. The rising sun was a welcome relief as my aching body conspired with the elements to create a non-existent battle between sanity and reason. Over the years I’ve often wondered; was I the only 18-year-old kid to encounter the fears of my first nights in a true war zone? Or, did the mortar attack in a supposed safe area conspire with my internal daemons to intensify my senses. My eyes darted like lasers at everything that moved. I realized later that I felt no pain, my mind was so fixed on survival against the ghost army before me that I forgot I was still hurting. It was my first week in country, I had already been welcomed by the unseen Viet Cong, and I was in a war zone. *Welcome to Vietnam*, I thought. *What the hell did I get myself into?*

Early the next day, my thoughts turned to those men with the Berets. There was something about them. I recall seeing some SF troops at Bragg and my older brother was somewhere in Training Group. But these guys moved and acted a lot differently than those garrison troops. More like they knew exactly who they were and what they were doing — of course, they did; they carried

themselves with confidence, with not a care in the world. They appeared not to be arrogant but prideful, as if they knew something we conventional soldiers did not; they piqued my curiosity. *Could I be one of those guys one day?* It would be over a year before I got my answer and as it turned out, everywhere we went, there were those SF guys. Two days later, I was in Tuy-Hoa.

When I finally got to my first permanent assignment, I promptly asked the First Sergeant if I could transfer to Special Forces. A Company, 1st Battalion 327th Infantry was very pleased to get fresh replacements; that is up until I shot my mouth off. Now, when I think back on that very dumb question, I chuckle at my naivety. “Who the F@#% do you think you are?” he demanded! “You got balls asking to be transferred the first five minutes in the unit — Private!!” The remaining year would be an education. I instantly knew I was now on his S-list. My first combat assignment — burn the sh#! barrels at the latrine! ❖

About the Author

Fred Horne was born November 24, 1946 in Shawnee Oklahoma. He volunteered for the Army Airborne November 26, 1964 at Portland Oregon. After training he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division. In November 1965 he was assigned to the 1st Bde, 101st Airborne Division – Separate. He extended his tour of duty to join the 5th Special Forces Group, Vietnam. After various assignments, he returned to the U.S. in September 1968 and went through Special Forces selection course, returning to Vietnam in late 1969 where he was assigned to Detachment A-502. After converting the camp to Vietnamese control in late 1969, he volunteered for I Corps in Dha-Nang attached to FOB-2 until its deactivation in June, then liaison with MACVSOG FOB4. He returned to Ft. Bragg, NC in late 1970 and was assigned to Training Group. In early 1976 he was encouraged to take a tour of conventional unit duty with the Second Infantry Division in Korea. After returning to Ft. Bragg, he was again assigned to USAIMA. In 1979, he completed his Bachelors of Arts degree and received a Direct Commission to Captain USAR Reserve, Dual Component. In 1981 he returned to Ft. Bragg for special duty assignments with the 7th Special Forces Group. After his third parachute malfunction in 1983, he left Special Forces for the last time serving at Ft. Sheridan, Illinois until his retirement in April 1985.

Fred received a Masters of Arts Degree in Computer Systems in 1985, retiring at the rank of First Sergeant E-8 and reassigned to U.S. Army reserves as a Capitan, O-3. He went on to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a Network Systems manager accepting a position with IBM Advantis in 1989. In 1997 he was offered a senior position with Motorola, working in the Network Systems Division until he retired in 2001. He now lives in Las Vegas, Nevada where he and his wonderful wife Leticia are enjoying a quiet retirement.

COPS CORNER



Brad Welker

By Brad Welker

Imagine that you are a veteran law enforcement officer working as a training officer with an inexperienced recruit riding with you. You are working in the PM watch and have just taken a burglary report wherein a local family has had their television set and several other items stolen while the parents were at work and the children in school. The mother told you how devastating it was to lose a television set that was the sole diversion for

the children in the evening. She explains that her youngsters could not play outside due to the ongoing street crime and gang activity in their low-income neighborhood.

You know from experience that the most likely suspects for that crime were young adult males, who often lived within a short distance to the victim family. Gang activity is so rampant in your station's area that burglars seldom stray into other neighborhoods to commit crimes lest they themselves become targets of their rivals.

Gang-related crimes often involved the all too frequent "drive-by shooting". During your tenure at the station, you have either been the primary or secondary unit responding to such crimes. You have interviewed many witnesses and victims of drive-bys and have expertise in how gang members plan and perpetuate them. You also know that many totally innocent bystanders are killed or injured because gang members are often indiscriminate even though the intended victim is a rival gang member.

You vividly remember the eleven-year-old boy who was wounded in the femoral artery and tried to run home to his family a few houses away from the scene of the shooting. You remember hearing the screams of the mother who found him dead at the end of 200-hundred-foot run wherein he literally lost all the blood in his body. Homicide investigators ultimately learned that a fifteen-year-old gang member wildly fired shots that killed the youngster while unsuccessfully attempting to shoot a rival.

You are patrolling and notice two vehicles driving in front of you. One is a pickup truck being driven by a middle-aged man, the other is a sedan that has four young males in it. You note that the pickup has a

brake light that does not illuminate, which is a violation of the vehicle code. You would be perfectly justified in writing a fix-it ticket, an activity that would be approved by your management as an effective action.

You note that the four young males are wearing the same color bandannas. Colors that are known throughout the area as being symbolic that the wearer is a member of a local street gang. That specific bandanna is used to demonstrate to others that the wearer was a gangster. Much the same as motorcycle gangs wearing distinctive "colors" to project their image as dangerous individuals.

As you pull abreast of the vehicle containing the four gangsters and they become aware of your presence in a marked patrol car, then react by rapidly making movements consistent with placing items under the seats of their car. They also will not look in your direction, an action that you have noted in the past often signifies that they are attempting to avoid giving any "tells" as to their intended activity.

Your dilemma is that you must make a decision on which vehicle to pull over. If you pull over the pickup truck you are virtually certain that you will write a citation that your supervisor will approve and that will demonstrate that you are actively working. What impact does this have on the people you serve, the residents who live in your district? Residents that seldom leave their homes at night as they fear the rampant crime. Residents that often have spent money to have burglar bars affixed to their windows for protection from those who would prey on them. (Note you can often get an insight into a residential area by the number of homes that have burglar bars on them). Many people have perished in residential fires as they were unable to exit through windows blocked by such bars.

Your experience and training have given you a unique amount of knowledge concerning the area you are working. Many law enforcement officers believe that your observations are probable cause to stop and talk to those inside the vehicle. You know that many times firearms have been found during such traffic stops that have precluded drive-bys and other crimes. Frequently such stops serve to remind young gang members that proactive police action may disrupt their intended activity.

You know that stopping the gang members may result in a complaint of harassment, even though you feel you have valid reasons for taking that action. A complaint that will be noted in your performance record and may negatively affect your promotability or ability to transfer to another assignment. You remember the mother who lost her child in a senseless act of violence, one that you do not care to ever experience again. You are also motivated to make the stop, fearing that these individuals may continue on an actually commit some violent act, an outcome that will burden your conscience through your failure to act.

Probable cause and profiling are in many cases synonymous. Cops think probable cause is an essential part of proactive policing. Defense attorneys think it is profiling.

People who live in areas that require frequent law enforcement response are often afraid to voice any positive opinion regarding police activity out of fear. The resident/victims really do not

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Roger H. C. Donlon Dedication Service — SF Top Secrets Behind the Dedication continued

She didn't realize during those early months of 2018 that Roger was quietly assisting the Special Forces Charitable Trust (SFCT) to honor Norma at its annual Martha Raye Award Ceremony held in Washington D.C. during the Green Beret Family Reception in October. Roger was able to keep his clandestine efforts from her, so that when SFCT invited them to attend, "I thought it was just another case where Roger was going to speak," Norma said. The SFCT event brought Special Forces families, veterans, civilians together to celebrate SF families and to recognize women who support SF. (At the 2017 SFCT event Lena Elyscio, the hard-working wife of Chapter 78 Member Hank Elyscio, received a Martha Raye award for her decades of service to SF and Army troops.)

"I was surprised, real surprised and honored when they called my name," said Norma. Roger added, "This year SFCT presented 12 awards to well-deserving Special Forces wives for 25 years of service to SF. Then they presented one to Norma for 50 years. I thought I had pulled that one off good, real good. It was nice to see her honored...I didn't realize at that time that all the while, she was working behind the scenes on the sculptures!...I have to say, that based on that effort Norma pulled off a SOG mission."

Thus concludes another chapter in the lives of a remarkable husband and wife team, each working in true SF fashion to surprise and honor each other in 2018. Of course, when they left Florida, they didn't return immediately to Kansas. Roger received a phone call asking for assistance in placing 10,000 Christmas wreaths at Normandy, France gravesites from the Wreaths Across America project. "That 10,000 was part of 1.7 million placed on veterans graves this year by the Wreaths Across America program," Roger said. He called retired Maj. Gen. Ken Bowra to assist in the France project, "and everything worked out," he said. Eventually, they arrived on Long Island to oversee the placement of 80,000 wreaths on two national cemeteries that covered 365 acres. "I had the honor of placing wreaths on five MOH recipients gravesites, for veterans that went all the way back to the Spanish American War."



Retired Army Col. Roger H. C. Donlon (right) kisses his wife at the conclusion of the 7th SFG Headquarters naming ceremony on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., December 5, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Vargas)

At the end of the Donlon interview, both Roger and Norma wanted to thank the nine members of SFA Chapter 75 — the Roger H. C. Donlon Chapter who attended the event, and Paul Longgear representing Chapter 78, and the "many other Green Beret veterans and friends," who traveled to honor Donlon. They and Roy Williams also gave a special tip of the beret to retired 7th SFG MSG Charles Pendergrass, a former 7th Group team sergeant and the Facility Operations Specialist who worked behind the scenes to bring together the December 5th event.

Roger said he ended his remarks at the dedication by quoting the inscription inside his wedding band, which Norma gave him: "What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God." ❖

Cops Corner continued

have a voice in this argument. They must live in an environment fraught with fear. Cops are all too often aware of the inability to solve crimes witnessed by many residents as they are compelled by fear of retribution to remain silent despite their knowledge of the suspect's identity.

Now you make the decision?

Do you take the easy route and write a fix it ticket? Or do you take proactive action and stop the potential threat to the neighborhood?

(Author's note: I taught Criminal Justice at a community college in Southern California for several years that had a high percentage of students raised in communities that had a significant amount of

street crime. I would ask them if they could readily identify gang members. They always agreed they could and said that they could sense when gangsters were threatening. Essentially they were profiling themselves, based on their experiences) ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brad Welker served in Nha Trang, Vietnam as a Special Forces Intelligence Sergeant assigned as 'cadre' in the MACV-Recondo School. Following his military service he was a Los Angeles County Sheriff.

Three Generations U.S. Army — Joseph M. Sincere Promoted to LTC



Joseph M. Sincere, grandson of Maj. (Ret.) Clyde J. Sincere Jr., was promoted to LTC on December 3, 2018 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Joe is an Instructor at the Army's Command and General Staff College (C&GSC). Clyde Sincere is an original member of the 10th SFGA and Special Forces. He received the nation's second highest valor award, the Distinguished Service Cross in Vietnam.

Top left, Colonel Tom Bolen, Combined Arms Center (CAC) Chief of Staff (CoS), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas administering the Oath of Office to LTC Joseph M. Sincere. Col. Bolen is Joe's boss too.

Top right, from left to right: Major (Ret.) Clyde J. Sincere, Jr., LTC Joseph M. Sincere, and Joe's father, LTC (Ret.) Clyde J. Sincere, III

Bottom left, Major (Ret.) Clyde J. Sincere, Jr., and LTC (Ret.) Clyde J. Sincere, III, grandfather and father respectively of LTC Joseph M. Sincere, place LTC shoulder boards on Joe's uniform. The shoulder boards are Joe's father's. He saved them for his son in anticipation of the day that his son would be promoted to LTC.



Col. (R) Roger H. C. Donlon Donates His Display Medal of Honor to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

On the fifty-fourth anniversary of receiving the first Medal of Honor of the Viet Nam War and the first of many to be awarded to Special Forces Soldiers, retired U.S. Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon donated his Display Medal of Honor to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in a ceremony held in front of the 7th Group Headquarters building bearing his name. (Photo by Lonny Holmes)