



THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SENTINEL

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2019



POW/MIA Update — SUBJECT: Trip Report, 2019
National League of POW/MIA Families Annual Meeting

With Delta in the A Shau

Then the Hood Went to Hell



SENTINEL

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2019

From the Editor

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COVER: This is the "Bushmaster" team that caught a VC battalion in the open, as described by Col. John B. Alexander in his story *"Then the Hood Went to Hell"* in this issue. Americans standing from left to right are Col. John B Alexander, then-Major Curt Herrick (Phantom 2) and SFC Joe Bucca. Kneeling is SFC Ed Friel.



Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor

Colonel John Alexander began his South East Asian service as a Green Beret Captain in Company D, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Detachment A-424 with company mission training beginning in July 1966. Upon deployment the team's initial mission in North East Thailand was to build a base, Camp Nong Takoo.

His Team Sergeant, MSG Al Friend who served in the Korean War subsequently participated on many SF projects in South East Asia. Captain Alexander's Demolition Sergeant, SSG Donald Davidson and I were old friends from the 3rd SFGA at Fort Bragg. SF was and is a small world!

After a year tour in Thailand, Captain Alexander following a short assignment in CONUS deployed to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in South Viet Nam where he led the augmented A-421 at Ba Xoai. At that time it was a rare privilege for a Captain to lead SF A-Teams on back to back foreign assignments for such an extended period. An early sign of a rising star in the Army? In this issue of the *Sentinel* the Colonel pen's a story on the operations and fate of his A-Team in Viet Nam which provides us with a look into combat operations in Viet Nam's 4th Corps.

Following retirement from the Army John Alexander has remained very busy as he alludes to in his biography. What he did not mention was his world travels and his numerous interviews on T.V. and radio. He also remains active with the Special Forces Association Chapter 51 in Las Vegas, NV.

Lonny Holmes
Sentinel Editor

Please visit us at specialforces78.com and sfa78cup.com

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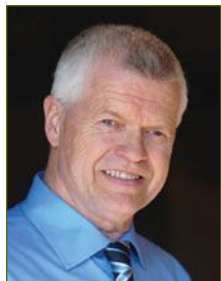
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MISSION STATEMENT: The Sentinel will provide interesting and meaningful information relative to the Special Forces experience — today, yesterday and tomorrow. Articles will be published that were written by knowledgeable authors who will provide objective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



Officer Kim Holmes, above, was awarded two Medals for Lifesaving by the Fountain Valley Police Department. Read about this event in Cops Corner on page 5.



John Stryker Meyer
President SFA 78

Chapter Members,

I want to thank Chapter 78 Gold Star/Honorary Member **Jim Suber** for carrying the chapter colors to the 50th National League of POW/MIA Families annual meeting in Arlington June 19-22 where he met with prior guest speakers Mike Taylor, Wade Ishimoto and Cliff Newman — members of the joint SOA/SFA POW/MIA Committee. Jim filed a short report that can be found

further inside our award-winning *Sentinel*. I have a special place in my heart for Jim and his family. I returned to CCN at the end of October 1969. On November 3, RT Maryland went MIA, with three Green Berets presumed KIA. Ten days later Jim's brother Randy, and Ron Ray on RT Rattler went MIA in Laos, presumed KIA based off of testimony from the team's soul survivor. It was a dark period of time at CCN. The RT Maryland men have been buried at Arlington. We're still praying for the return of Randy Suber and Ron Ray. Anna and I had an emergency that precluded us from attending the event. Thank you Jim.

When the Fourth of July rolls around, the Southeast Asia MIA count will be 1,588. The slow recovery pace is both frustrating and painful because at this period in time, the governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have offered unprecedented levels of cooperation, including increasing the number of recovery missions/dig sites in their respective countries. Yes, some of this cooperation stems from the 800-pound communist threat in China, looming over them. But, in the months ahead, I hope to bring more accurate details about the disappointing efforts by DPAA mid-management to adequately adjust to this new level of cooperation. I want to be clear: The DPAA teams in the field in SEA, are outstanding, dedi-

cated and driven to find US remains. They are the best. The problems stem from DPAA management.

On a positive note, National League of POW/MIA Families CEO and Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths and her family had personal closure on June 24, with all SOA/SFA members present at Arlington National Cemetery. A week earlier, the remains of her brother, Navy aviator CDR James B Mills, were returned to the U.S. at Reagan International Airport. On June 24, Mills — who went missing in action in September 1966 as the back seater in an F-4 Phantom jet, was buried with full military honors, including a Navy flyover, at Arlington National Cemetery. As I have said earlier no American has been more dedicated to this sacred mission over 50 years than Ann.

For those planning to attend our July 13 meeting, please e-mail VP **Don Deatherage** at: drdeathca@gmail.com, no later than Wednesday July 10 midnight. We need an exact headcount.

Last, but not least, my 18-month reign of terror as SFA Chapter 78 president is behind us, with six months remaining. At the end of the year, chapter elections will be held. We're looking for someone to run for president. Please think about it. I shall stay deeply involved and support anyone elected. Thank you. ❖

Meeting details:

Time: 8:30 a.m., June 8, Breakfast will be served.

Location: Embassy Suites

3100 East Frontera, Anaheim, CA 92807

(The SE Corner of Hwy 91 & Glassell St.)

John Stryker Meyer
President, SFA Chapter 78



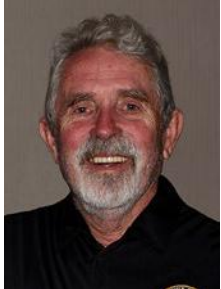
Chapter 78 at the Annual Anaheim Flag Day Celebration

Chapter 78 led by past-president SGM Bruce Long, Chapter members marched in the 24th Annual Anaheim Flag Day Celebration on June 9th, 2019.

Pictured at left, at the front left to right, Bruce D. Long, Bill Darnell (SFA Chapter 23). Center, LTC John Bleigh Commander, U.S. Army Recruiting Battalion Southern CA. Rear, left to right, Mark Miller and Don Gonneville. The 1942 Military Packard — owned and driven by Chapter member Robert Crebbs.

POW/MIA Update

SUBJECT: Trip Report, 2019 National League of POW/MIA Families Annual Meeting



Michael E. Taylor

**By Michael E. Taylor
Chairman,
SOA/SFA POW/MIA Committee**

1. The National League of POW/MIA Families of the Vietnam (VN) War (the League) held their 50th annual meeting in Crystal City, VA, June 19-22, 2019. The meeting celebrated the 50th anniversary of the League's sustained efforts to prompt and support US Government (USG) activities to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing and unaccounted personnel from the Vietnam War.

On Monday, June 24th, the remains of CDR James Mills, USNR, were laid to rest with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). CDR Mills was the brother of Ann Mills Griffiths (AMG), long-time Chairman of the Board and CEO of the League. Accordingly, many members of the League, the Director and staff of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and hundreds of concerned citizens remained after the annual meeting and attended the funeral. The Special Operations Association (SOA), Special Forces Association (SFA) and our joint POW/MIA Committee (the committee) were represented by:

- Rick Estes, President, SOA, and his wife Bekkee
 - Cliff Newman, Executive Director, SFA, and his wife Karen
 - Mike Taylor, VP, SOA, and Chairman of the committee and his wife Laura
 - Wade Ishimoto, President, SFA Chapter 43 and member of the committee
 - SOA and SFA members Mike Eiland and Doug Godshall attended several events — Mike the banquet and funeral and Doug the funeral and reception.
 - David Guernsey, Special Forces Charitable Trust (SFCT - principal annual benefactor of the committee) attended the funeral. It was my first chance to meet David after years of SFCT support to the committee.
2. The annual meeting was, as usual, an attempt to “put ten pounds of material into a five pound container”. AMG is a master at trying to move the agenda along; but, with speaker after speaker exceeding their time allotment, it is truly “Mission Impossible.” Many of the presentations are annual staples providing updates of ongoing themes, with the occasional new topic.



3. This year's meeting featured a unique high-level panel of self-styled “grey beards” who provided a compelling account of the birth of the USG accounting effort during the early, difficult years, during which the humanitarian accounting mission led the way to normalization of diplomatic relations between former combatants. An introductory narrative was presented by COL (US Army, retired) Richard Childress, League Senior Policy Advisor and Director of Asian Affairs on the National Security Council from 1981-1989. He led or participated in every US delegation to VN and Laos from 1982-1989. Other panelists included:
- Ambassador Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State; Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs; and Ambassador directing assistance to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Rich is a graduate of the US Naval Academy who served three combat tours in the VN War. (I worked with him often when I was in Egypt.)
 - Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz, former Deputy Secretary of Defense; Ambassador to Indonesia; and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. (I worked with him often when he was in Indonesia.)
 - Ambassador Charles Salmon, former Ambassador to Laos; Foreign Policy Advisor to CINCPAC. (Laura worked with him at the Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies in Hawai'i.)
 - Ambassador Charles Twining, former Ambassador to Cambodia, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea; several State Department posts in South VN and Thailand (Indochina watcher).
 - Ambassador David Lambertson, former Ambassador to Thailand; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia (SEA).
 - Mr. Rudy de Leon, former Deputy Secretary of Defense; Staff Director for US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee.
 - Mr. Matthew Daley, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs; Deputy Chief of Mission at US Embassies in Thailand and India.

4. Updates regarding DPAA activities in what is now called the IndoPac region were presented by DPAA Director Kelly McKeague, Deputy Director for Operations RADM Jon Kreitz, and Deputy Director for Outreach and Communications Johnie Webb (who will speak at SOAR this year). Two really significant new items of information were revealed by RADM Kreitz: an increase in operational limits in VN (which will be covered in more detail in the remarks of the new Commander, DPAA Detachment Two, Hanoi, VN) and an increase from one Joint Field Activity (JFA) per year being allowed in Cambodia to two JFAs annually.
5. SOA/SFA representative Mike Taylor was one of six speakers during the presentation *“Key Supporters - Veteran Service Organizations.”* Other organizations represented were VFW, American Legion, DAV, Vietnam Veterans of America and Jewish War Veterans of the US.
6. *“Impressions from Hanoi, Vientiane and Phnom Penh”* featured remarks from:
 - His Excellency Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc, Socialist Republic of VN
 - His Excellency Ambassador Khamphan Anlavan, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic
 - His Excellency Ambassador Chum Sounry, Kingdom of Cambodia

All pledged continuing support to the accounting mission. Ambassador Ha was particularly engaging and impressive.
7. The US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA Affairs reported on recent Technical Talks in Washington and the ongoing problematic issue of declassifying Russian archives from the VN War and US access to them. This process is not moving quickly nor smoothly.
8. The 50th Annual Dinner and Candlelight Ceremony was highlighted by a rousing keynote address by General Mark Milley, Chief of Staff of the Army and nominee to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. GEN Milley had the attendees, mostly MIA family members, in the palm of his hand and ready to rush out to enlist in the armed forces. He and his Aide de Camp, MAJ(P) Egan O’Reilly (remember that name, this officer seems destined for a meteoric rise) wore the Army’s new version of WWII “pinks and greens” — 99% of attendees, to include all SOA/SFA members, loved the uniforms. GEN Milley told Mike Eiland and Mike Taylor how much he owed SOG veterans for his training and development as a young Special Forces lieutenant and captain. AMG and GEN Milley both acknowledged us as we were seated at a single table at the banquet.
9. *“Defense Intelligence Agency’s Record and Role in Filling Gaps”* was the title of an outstanding speech by Lieutenant General Robert Ashley, Jr., Director, DIA. He, of course, pledged continued total support to the families and the accounting mission. One nugget I liked from LTG Ashley, who is always an outstanding speaker, was, “It doesn’t matter what you are doing or how you are doing it; you must always begin with WHY you are doing it.” Related presentations by DIA Stony Beach Director Brad Taylor and collectors Eric Phillips, Dustin Roses and David White addressed the ongoing effort (spearheaded by AMG) to more fully integrate the capabilities and efforts of Stony Beach and DPAA.
10. The Honorable John C. Rood, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP), DPAA’s boss, pledged continuing support for DPAA.
11. The League Archival Research Committee (ARC) introduced Mr. Glenn Hines, an Australian veteran who got involved in the study that was the topic of his talk while researching the stories of the five Australian winners of the Victorian Cross during the VN War. One VC winner, Keith Paine, was serving with the II Corps Mike Force. During a battle near Ben Het, US Special Forces SFC Anastacio Montez was killed and his body left behind. Mr. Hines enlisted the assistance of the Medic who was treating “Monty” when he died, Mr. Gerard Dellwo, to help him search for Monty’s remains. They have been back to the site seven times and found the location, but no sign of remains as yet. Hines and Dellwo presented Monty’s family a US flag and some soil from the scene of the battle to Monty’s family members in the most moving moment of the annual meeting. (Gerry and I were in different battalions of the II Corps Mike Force at the same time and endured numerous simultaneous deployments to the Siege of Ben Het, but never met until this meeting!)
12. The most interesting nugget of new information, at least for me, was contained in the remarks of Lieutenant Colonel (US Army) Adam J. Points, new Commander, DPAA Detachment Two, Hanoi, VN, when he expanded on earlier remarks by RADM Kreitz. The Vietnamese Government has approved an increase in DPAA personnel who may participate in JFAs from 100 to 150 and an increase in the length of JFAs to 45 days in-country. Both increases should add significantly to DPAA operational capabilities; but, presumably will come at an increased operational cost in both financial and personnel requirements. LTC Points was a very personable officer who really reached out to SOA/SFA and hopes we can develop some real synergies between us. My initial impression of LTC Points was entirely positive.
13. Two very informative sessions concluded the meeting.
 - a. *“Underwater Survey/Recovery Operations”* highlighted advances in unmanned underwater survey technologies and capabilities which are paying big dividends in searching for offshore aircraft losses. Not really very applicable to searching for our MIAs, unless they floated down river to the sea.
 - b. Dr. Tim McMahon, Director, DoD DNA Registry and Armed Forces DNA Laboratory, performed his annual magic in making the esoteric world of DNA understandable to the audience. I learn the same thing year after year — I just wish I could remember it once I leave the venue!

Continued on page 9

With Delta in the A Shau



Maj. (R) Jim Morris

By Jim Morris

I knew the Dumbo Drop story was probably the biggest I would cover as IO of the 5th SFGA, but then Major Chuck Allen, the Project Delta Commander was an old friend, and when he asked me to go to Phu Bai to do a piece on Delta, which he thought would be a morale booster for his guys, I sent 1LT Frank Orians, my assistant IO to cover the delivery of the elephants and flew off to Phu Bai.

It was a great trip. I got to fly with Chuck in his C&C ship and watch McGuire rig extractions from above, and I got to go into the A Shau with a company from the Nha Trang Mike Force, which Delta had borrowed. On that first excursion I saw a chopper from the 281st AHC inch its way down through two canopies of teak and mahogany to extract a KIA. We found some enemy wire and a recon team from CCN was sent in to tap it, and I got to watch those guys work in the jungle, even though they were surrounded by a company when they did it. The Americans on that team were solid NCOs, but the Indige were crazy people.

I got pix of some NVA trucks that a previous Delta foray had knocked out. The Delta S-2 was along, but he forgot to take his lens cap off, so my IO pix were what they had for intel.

Walking to the extraction LZ we moved on a split column down a two lane dirt road. I could hear NVA conversation in the jungle to our left.

A couple of days later we went back in again on the same LZ with a company of the ARVN 81st Ranger Bn, attached to Delta. Only



Jim Morris, 1963

we lost half our lift capability at the last minute, so the second half of our company came in that afternoon, after lunch. Surprise! The enemy had us under observation, and before long we had forty percent casualties, and six choppers down on the LZ. It was a very expensive day. I saw 1LT Tom Humphus get shot in the chest. He pulled his shirt open and said, "In and out pec", like it was a mosquito bite. Talk about grace under pressure.

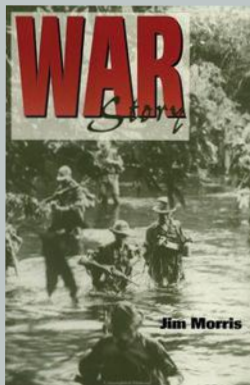
I got shot in the arm trying to cover some guys escaping from a bomb crater in the middle of the LZ. All of them got through but two. I was trying to pull one, John Link, up over a dirt bank when I got hit. He died and his buddy, Merriman, was in the hospital for nine months. So was I, and medically retired.

We had to walk out to another LZ. Chuck scrounged lift from all over I Corps to get us out.

Meanwhile Frank Orians escorted every major international news organization, seventeen in all, to cover the delivery of the elephants. It was the same week Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated and nobody ran it. ❖

About the Author

Jim Morris was born just outside of Ava, MO in 1937, raised mostly in Oklahoma. He joined 1st SFGA in 1962 for a thirty-month tour, which included two TDY trips to Vietnam, during which he received his first combat wounds, one of which has become somewhat legendary. During a two year break in active service he was S3 of a B team in Oklahoma City. Bored stiff with civilian life he went back on active duty for a PCS tour with 5th SFGA, six months as the B Co S-5, and then, being the only member of 5th SFGA with a journalism degree, he was conscripted to serve as the Group's Public Information Officer (PIO). While with B-52 Project Delta on an operation in the A Shau Valley, he suffered another serious wound while trying to pull a Delta trooper to safety, and as a result of that wound he was medically retired. As a civilian war correspondent he covered various wars in Latin America, the Middle East, and again in Southeast Asia, and eventually settled down to writing and editing, primarily but not exclusively about military affairs. He is the author of many books, including the classic memoir *WAR STORY*. Jim is a member of SFA Chapter 78.



Jim Morris flying out of Cheo Reo on 5 June 1964, leaving Vietnam for the first time.

COPS CORNER



Lonny Holmes

By Lonny Holmes

The Fountain Valley Police Department held their 2019 Special Awards Ceremony at the Center at Founders Village, Fountain Valley, CA, on Wednesday, June 19, 2019. Chief of Police Kevin L. Childe presided. Police Officer Kim Holmes, daughter of the *Sentinel* Editor was one of nine members of the department who was awarded the Medal for Lifesaving. Surprisingly she was

awarded two medals for two separate saving of human lives. (The only recipient of two medals)



Left to right, Chief of Police Kevin L. Childe, Officer Kim Holmes, and Officer Shaun MacKay

Officer Holmes responded to an emergency call from a private residence and was the first to arrive and the parents handed her a six month old child; the baby was cool, blue and had no palpable heart rate and absent respiration. Kim instantly began mouth to mouth respiration and chest compression as she ran to her police car. Arriving curbside a second officer arrived and drove her and the infant to the nearest hospital for further treatment.

A local hospital provided Fountain Valley Police Department with new medical equipment to include Automated External Defibrillators (AED) and Kim Holmes provided the department police officers with professional instruction in their use. She and another officer responded on the first call of an adult with cardiac arrest which required the use of the AED and resulted in the reestablishment of his cardiac rhythm thus saving his life. Kim Holmes was awarded a second Medal for Lifesaving, her third in four years.

Chapter 78 members Brad Welker, Mike Keele and Gary Macnamara provided Kim with letters of recommendation when she applied to the police academy. Then when Kim graduated and began looking for a position as Police Officer, all three chapter members again wrote letters recommending her. Kim recently passed all qualifications and interviews to become a department detective which she will begin after further training this fall. Thank you all for the support of my daughter in her career.

By the way, after the awards ceremony I presented a "Green Beret" Challenge Coin to Chief Childe. ❖



Lonny Holmes and his daughter Officer Kim Holmes

Then the Hood Went to Hell



Col. (R) John B. Alexander

By Col. (R) John B Alexander

Inconsistency is a hallmark of war stories regarding Vietnam. Time and location are critical as the circumstances often changed dramatically based on either factor. This is the tale of one such camp, Ba Xoai, which was operated by A-421. The article undoubtedly is biased as I was the SF team leader there from January through mid-December 1968. This is an exposition

that encompasses the shortfalls of complacency, temporary successes, corruption, betrayal, and the effects of the changing nature of the adversary as the area dominance of the Vietcong (VC) gave way to the more professional, better equipped and well-trained, North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

The Seven Mountains (or Seven Sisters) area span the border with Cambodia and have a dark and foreboding past. Rising majestically out of the sprawling Mekong Delta they dominate the terrain for as far as the eye can see. The Delta, with about 39,000 square kilometers, was home to numerous Special Forces camps, under the control of IV Corps and to D Company of 5th SFGA. These camps in the Delta were primarily located adjacent to political headquarters including district and province capitals. The mission was considered critical as the meandering Mekong, with its myriad of tributaries, was where a majority of the population lived. Annually the area flooded providing rice to feed a hungry nation. Specialized units of both Special Forces and the U.S. Navy there included armed airboats, riverine craft and air-cushioned platforms that would glide easily over the often-submerged land. The importance of population density was not lost of the Vietcong and they became the principle concern for both sides.

Ba Xoai was different. The adjacent village was tiny compared to the rest of those in Tien Bien and Tri Ton Districts. Further, the perimeter circumscribed a small hill and even incorporated a Buddhist temple on the east side. Facing west the camp had a formidable defensive orientation with berms, wire and interlocking .50 caliber machine gun fields of fire. A 106 recoilless rifle and additional machine guns were located on top of Hill 58, again primarily oriented toward the Cambodian border. Always of most concern to me was the southeast flank which was exposed to intrusion from nearby Nui Cam Mountain. Covered by a company with trenches, that protection was inadequate, as would later be proven true.

During 1966 the decision was made to move numerous SF units into the Delta in general, and Chou Duc province in particular. Several camps were created, only to either be abandoned or turned over to the Vietnamese Regional Force/Popular forces known colloquially as Ruff-Puffs. Those included camps to the north at Tien Bien (then A-429) and to the west at Ba Chúc, later a sub-element of Ba Xoai. During the time from 1966 to 1967 there were several SF KIAs in that area as Ba Chúc was right at the base of Nui Gai, and an area we never controlled. It was at Ba Chúc in late 1967 that one of the NCOs was killed in a mortar attack (I believe this was SFC Ferdinand Quatrone). Though wearing a flack vest, a single piece of shrapnel fatally penetrated a side seam. Thereafter the company of Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) forces stayed at Le Hoac, an old French triangular fort about three kilometers west of Ba Xoai.

1968 was a relatively halcyon time in our area of operations. There were unwritten rules that both sides played by. We owned the open area and the mountain tops of Nui Cam and Nui Gai. Rising from the rice paddy floor, most the sides of those mountains belonged to Charlie. Delineation was clear enough that we knew if we walked on one side of the paddy it would be OK; step across and the fight was on — but mostly harassing small arms fire. Once in a while they would lob a couple of mortar rounds at the main camp or place boobytraps in close proximity. With the exception of the infamous Tet that year, when Charlie initiated contact, whatever happened would dissipate before daylight as many often transitioned back to their farming jobs.

The ethnic make-up was an important factor. When cartographers drew the lines delineating French Indochina, they didn't care about who lived there. Much of the Seven Mountains area was populated by Khmer Kampuchea Krom (KKK) who ethnically are Cambodian. Ba Xoai's CIDG were about half KKKs and half ethnic Vietnamese. It was clear that the neither the Vietnamese military or the KKKs trusted each other. My first operation was enlightening. Basically a walk in the sun, and I accompanied a Cambodian company with SSG Larry Schmidt. It was a simple pincer maneuver against a small ridge to the north. Getting to the objective first, the KKK troops asked, "OK Dai uy (captain), we can ambush the other company?" It was comprised of Vietnamese, from our camp. That was a warning of the complexity we endured and this was going to be a long year.

Ba Xoai had a rather large CIDG force. There were six companies plus two recon platoons and we were paying over 800 mercenaries monthly. In addition, we had operation control of four more companies of RF/PF. That meant that combined we had control of well over a thousand troops. When I arrived at the camp one company was dug in and stationed on top of Nui Gai and another on top of Nui Cam. The companies were rotated monthly and with a routine that proved fateful. Routine and complacency do kill. The date of transition was rarely hidden. The CIDG who were going up knew the dates as did their families, many of whom lived in the camp.

The Tet offensive in our AO of the Delta was unlike many other areas of the country; an intelligence failure. On 29 January, having administration that need attending to, I chose to catch a hop back to the C-Team at Can Tho. Hot bunking, as was the style, we went to bed with little warning of impending disaster. Then, a few hours later, I was jolted awake with green tracers zipping by the hooch. That meant only one thing, the VC were already inside the perimeter. The three leg-unit guards at the south end of the airstrip had been caught asleep and their throats slits. Fortunately, a lieutenant going to check on them stumbled into the invaders and was able to sound the alarm. It was the Mike Force that saved the day at Can Tho airfield. The city was another story. Previously the rules were that come daylight, the VC fade away. This was different. They stayed and fought. Ferociously. As the sun rose and the airfield secured, we began to listen to the reports coming in from across the country. American units had been alerted, but not the rest of us. Frankly, my thoughts went to the Chinese intervention crossing the Yalu River in 1950. I could not understand how so many cities could be under attack simultaneously without outside intervention. The answer I would learn many years later when it became clear that General Westmoreland made the decision to not warn everyone of the impending attacks.

Surprisingly to me, Ba Xoai was unscathed. Every other camp in the Delta was hit. In Chou Duc, only the B-42 compound had not fallen to the VC that night. The city with numerous Americans living downtown was engulfed. The B-team commander dictated that all of the forces would stay in the compound. It was then-SSG Drew Dix, who worked for Project Phoenix, who left and at great peril rescued American nurses leading to his award of the Medal of Honor. Facing such large VC forces, I ordered the company from Nui Cam to evacuate their positions and reinforce the main camp and prepare to assist other American advisors who were in deep trouble. Those in Tien Bien and Tri Ton districts were in dire straits. Suddenly, despite their successful attacks, the VC withdrew. It was later that we learned that against their wishes, Hanoi leaders had ordered them to attack at all costs. Their problem was they never planned for success and thus simply withdrew back to the mountains or across the border into Cambodia.

Shortly after Tet, on 23 February, it was time to rotate the unit on Nui Gai. The routine was that the companies would secure a middle area and then pass through. There were three Americans on the mountain when the day began. All would be wounded. The VC had mined the changeover point and were lying in wait. Receiving relatively minor wounds were SFC Jerry York and SGT Jeff Giles.

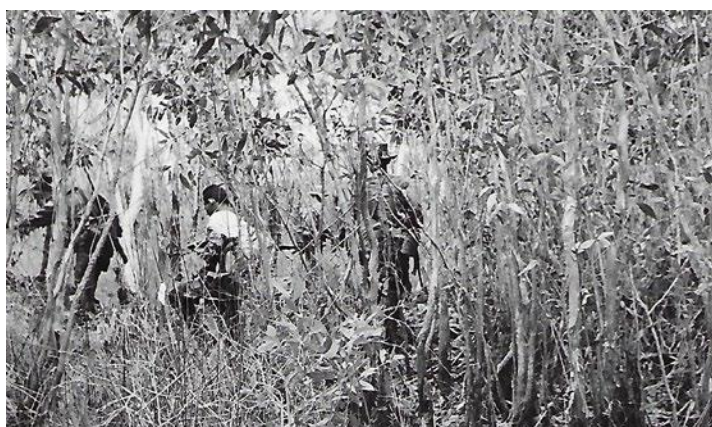
The Ba Xoai motto came from a sign I had installed over the gate. It was from a poem: *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries*, by A.E. Housman



These in the day that heaven was falling
The hour when Earth's foundations fled,
Followed their mercenary calling,
And took their wages, and are dead.
Their shoulders held the sky suspended:
They stood and Earth's foundation stay:
What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.



This is Ba Xoai in 1968 from the air looking to the east.



The Tram forest



SFC Jack Bowles in Tram Forest

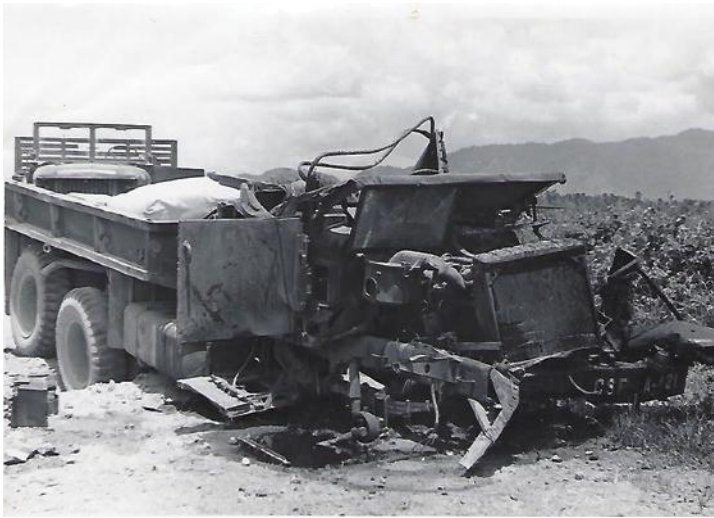
The worst hit was SSG Larry Schmidt. A mine had been placed on a stick and detonated immediately adjacent to his calf. It was comms sergeant York who alerted us to the ambush and that they were wounded and under fire. Fortunately, there was a helicopter at Chou Duc. They swung by and picked me up. Major Bill Henrich, B-42 S-3 and I flew to the area and repelled in only to find out that area was boob-trapped as well and landing not possible. Those booby traps came with compliments of the USAF. Their unexploded CBU's that were liberally dispersed across the area were easily converted to what are now called IEDs. Giles, fearing he might be missed, threw a smoke grenade that set the tall grass on fire. I went to get Schmidt and carried him to the hovering Huey. Instantly, I knew it was bad as Larry's calf was completely shredded. His lower leg was later amputated. It was not until recently that I learned the extent of our danger. A VC .57 recoilless rifle was targeting the rescue bird and succeeded in damaging it. As soon as we got all the wounded on board they pulled out and limped back to Chou Duc while I continued with the new company back to the bunkers on top of the hill. Routine and complacency cost us dearly that day.

We operated over a wide area that extended well beyond our assigned AO. With the demise of B-42 in July, A-421 became an independent A-team. There was no other Americans to our west on the mainland. Periodically we would get helicopter support, usually from the 307th Combat Aviation Battalion known as the Phantoms. They came with loaches, slicks, and guns. Given our max fire support was a single 4.2-inch mortar, we thought a pair of snakes was all the firepower in the world. On occasion Spooky would show up and was known to proclaim "Sleep well, God is

near." Just loved that burping sound accompanying the red stream that flowed forth but died out long before the rounds hit the ground. Charlie also understood the exact limits of our range of fire. About 50 meters beyond max range of the 4.2 was a heavily beaten trail that was used by the VC to move supplies to their strongholds on Nui Gai and the infamous Nui Coto a bit further south.

Running about a klick parallel to the Cambodian border, the Vinh Te Canal runs from Chou Duc to Ha Tien and the Gulf of Siam. It was here I learned another lesson. On a June evening, accompanied by SFC Joe Bucca and SFC Ed Friel, we took seven KKKs for a night infiltration. While that may have been standard in some sectors, the Phantom pilot who inserted us had never practiced such an operation. Crossing the canal in darkness, we ran to the northeast skimming the rice paddies and touching down briefly to drop us in. Then, to our dismay, he turned on his lights and lifted out clearly marking our location for anyone within miles. That position being untenable, we continued on foot until we came to a slight depression where water would runoff into the Vinh Te. That afforded some defensible terrain and we deployed our Claymores and waited.

About two hours later we alerted to movement from the northeast. Having the only night-vision device in the camp, an AN/PVS2 Starlight Scope, I watched as two VC were coming straight down the canal bank. That, we thought, would be an excellent prisoner snatch. Immediately, I radioed back to Phantom 2, Major Curt Herrick, who was waiting with birds at Chi Lang. Then we found there was a squad-sized element behind the first two. Not bad, we



Driver SFC Jack Bowles was medevaced from this deuce and a half blown up in Nha Bang Pass by a Chicom mine.



Hurt Locker Vietnam style. This is a second command detonated Chicom mine I dug up after the first took out the deuce and a half

should be easily able to take them out. I advised Phantom 2 to get cranking as we were about to initiate contact. The situation quickly degenerated. Behind the squad came a platoon, and behind them several companies. We were watching a battalion in the open. The real problem was that if they continued on their current course, they would likely come so close they would be between us and our claymores. Briefly we considered dropping into the canal and swimming across. The banks were steep. Worse, we then learned our KKKs couldn't swim. Leaving them was not an option so word went out to remain absolutely motionless and hope they would miss us.

Suddenly, about 150 meters north of our position, the column made an abrupt right turn and headed straight west toward the sanctuary of Cambodia. Although moving in a military formation, the VC, sans flank security, seemed unconcerned about traversing the open terrain. Doubtlessly they had done on many previous nights. By now the Cobras were en route. With the Starlight Scope I watched the battalion as it marched toward the border. Then, just as the sound of the helicopters became clearly audible, long before they were close, the VC stopped and laid down in place.

I was about to get another lesson; one of trust. With a shielded strobe light, I marked our position and directed the Cobras to where the VC lay quietly. When I told the gunship leader to strafe the low shrub line, he balked and stated, "I'm not going to shoot up an empty field." My response was, "We are looking at them right now." Reluctantly the snake gave a quick burst with his minigun. To his amazement the ground lit up with return fire. "My God," he radioed, "They're all over the place." "I know," I said, "I told you we are watching them." My shock was that the American pilots would not take our word that we had eyes on target. Of immediate concern was which way the VC might run to get away. Fortunately, as our M-60 laid down a base of fire to dissuade encroachment, most headed toward Cambodia. As the Cobras left to rearm, our four-deuce mortar began dropping flares and HE. Then too, the ARVN 155 howitzers from Chi Lang began supporting fires. Unexpectedly another thing happened. Located just across the border was a Cambodian



One of many VC caches we captured this one with Mobile Strike Force. Left to right SFC William Knuuttila, Major Curt Herrick, me, and SGT Robert Richardson

The local disdain for fighting in the mountains is summarized in this ditty (to tune of *Clementine*)

I'm a Ruff-Puff
 I'm a Ruff-Puff
 Be a Ruff-Puff till I die
 But I'd rather be a Ruff-Puff
 Then go up on Nui Gai

outpost. As our heavy artillery crept closer to them, the Cambodian Army began to fire at the VC. Normally the VC would have passed through their terrain without a thought. With no resistance, the morning sweep was simply picking up bodies and weapons — lots of weapons. Later we learned the operational concept had been dubbed "Bushmaster" by The Blue Max, Ludwig Faistenhammer.



Ba Xoai after the January 1970 attack. This is the heavy inner wall by American SF area that has been destroyed. Outer walls already breached. A four-deuce and 105 Howitzer were destroyed

Corruption and betrayal played significant roles that year. Officially, and LLDB officer, Major Ball, was the camp commander. We just paid, and equipped everyone and ran almost all operations. With one exception, he never left the compound on a combat operation. He was busy selling CIDG positions. Having a CIDG ID card was valuable and a way to keep young men out of the ARVN's conscription. How many ghost soldiers he had we'll never know. While Ball got rich off the scheme, it led to tragedy. The second-in-command was Lt. Quan, a pretty straight-shooter by all accounts. What happened still has no clear explanation. All camps had some infiltrators and had what are called insider attacks in Afghanistan. We guesstimated that at any given time about ten percent of our CIDG were probably VC. We also thought most of them were in the Vietnamese ranks rather than the KKKs. After hearing some tragic stories from other Delta camps, I formed a special squad comprised of KKKs and equipped them with M-16s, vice the carbines most CIDG carried. On every mission, two of them were assigned to go with each SF soldier. Their job was not to fight, but to cover the American's rear. With very few exceptions, no CIDG we ever allowed inside the American portion of Ba Xoai. Such was the situation. As we did not want word to get out how effectively we could see at night, no CIDG was ever allowed to look through the Starlight Scope.

As indicated, we had a unit stationed in the Le Hoac outpost. Normally, about half the company would stay inside the fort, while the other half would set up ambush sites outside the perimeter. Intelligence indicated the VC recently had completed a training cycle on the back of Nui Gai. LT Quan was responsible for the fort and running operations there. Reports indicated there was now about a battalion of VC in the area. Without further warning, Le Hoac came under fierce attack which seemed to last most of the night. Almost immediately radio contact was lost with those inside the fort. We scrambled to launch a counterattack. Notifying Can Tho, they quickly sent additional Mike Force units. As mentioned, Maj Ball went on only one operation, and this was it. There was no further resistance as we moved across the open fields. But what we found was stunning. Contrary to a fierce fight with walls breached, we found only the wood and wire gate had been moved aside. Inside the fort, everyone was dead. Mike, my interpreter, informed me the LLDB frantically were discussing the situation. They learned that Lt. Quan, the day before had brought in a number of "recruits." When the attack began our CIDG had gone to their fighting positions. In the old French style forts, each position was compartmentalized so soldiers do not know what is happening in the next location. They had all been executed by Quan's "recruits." Quan then simply let the attacking unit inside to loot the base and



The only identifiable remnant of Ba Xoai in 2006. Lower portion of SE 50-Cal bunker. The rest was like it the camp never existed

retreat. Overrunning Le Hoac had been a graduation exercise for the VC training battalion. The only survivors were those teams who had been outside the camp and were able to evade.

That was probably the saddest day of my entire military career. Seeing all those soldiers who had been shot in the back as they faced the external enemy left an indelible memory. Attempting to suppress tears, I admit I had to find a place to be alone. Lt. Quan, we later learned, had gone over to the VC sometime earlier. Indications were that he objected to the corruption of Major Ball. We also found out he was about to be promoted and given command of Ba Xoai. Wondering about his motives, I sent word that I wanted to meet him again. Le Hoac aside, I still trusted Lt. Quan more than Maj. Ball. A few months later we heard Quan had been killed in an airstrike.

Outside our technical AO, was the sprawling Tram forest. The land was flat and usually inundated. Trees grew through the water which ran in depth from a few inches to a couple of feet. With great ingenuity, the VC were able to build shelters in the trees and keep supplies on platforms above the water. Whenever we had access to helicopters we would go hunting. With the OH-6A's we would skim the trees looking for the telltale signs on habitation. We were quite successful on several occasion and took away many of the

enemy's toys. Sometimes we were assisted by the Mike Force. Before leaving 1968 there is one more experience to share. This too did not end well and leaves a critical message. There were periodic attacks on Nui Coto. In fact, combat jumps had been made in the area. SSG Francis Logan had been at Ba Xoai and was operating on a sweep of the mountain. It was always owned by Charlie and if you got close, there was a fight. This particular night Logan called on Ba Xoai's frequency and I answered. He was settling in for the night and wanted to send the coordinates. The critical error was he used a makeshift code. It may have been BIG NUTS JOE. Before even beginning to decode the message, I could determine the coordinates. Somebody else was listening and new English very well. That was Logan's last night on Earth.

Throughout 1968 we did not have a hint of NVA in the area. Our cross-border intel operations kept us reasonable apprised of the VC logistical enterprise that was very comprehensive. Most of the weapons were headed for the mountains or to support their units operations in the Tram forest. Heaviest among them was .51 Cal machine guns and 82 mm mortar rounds. Also, after the withdrawal of the company on Nui Cam following Tet, we found we could move on the mountain with more freedom. Before that, the area was heavily booby trapped, as did continue on Nui Gai.

The enemy situation in the area degraded significantly in 1969. Then the NVA were infiltrating the area in earnest and the nature of the fight changed. In March the CA/PO, 1LT Jamie Rosado, was seriously wounded when he was stitched in an ambush on the side of Nui Cam. Since Tet of 68 we had been able to move relatively freely through that area. The Hood was changing and going downhill fast. Soon the mortar rounds started falling. For months it was three rounds a day. The team also noted that accuracy periodically increased followed by a short break in without incoming. The working assumption was that they were training mortar squads on Nui Cam. Throughout the year the NVA kept increasing the pressure. The mountain became home to an estimated division and their firepower increased accordingly. The once safe landing pad where helicopters would rest wait for hours became nearly untenable. Now, any bird landing would offload and be airborne as quickly as possible. While we took periodic casualties on operations in the field in 1968, it was reported in Green Beret Magazine that the camp was having to medevac as many as ten a day, mostly from mortars.

Then came ground attacks and the camp was penetrated on several occasions. Attacking from Nui Cam, on 14 January, 1970 Ba Xoai was hit with a devastating frontal assault preceded by a barrage of over 400 mortar rounds. In addition to the 82-mm rounds, the NVA had upgraded to 122-mm mortars which did more damage. They also brought Chicom Bangalore torpedoes for breaching the wire and satchel charges. They were so confident of the effectiveness of their barrage, it is claimed the infantry approached in morning daylight, "walking in formation with weapons at port arms." Cobras quickly responded and the NVA suffered significant losses. But the camp was also severely damaged. Both the four-deuce and a 105 howitzer SFC Walter Gouveia had scrounged

for us were destroyed. The American team-house and the TOC were targeted and nearly leveled. As can be seen in the photo, the heavy stone inner walls were breached as well.

Late in March the NVA came calling again. Hitting on the least protected side, they created gaping holes in the protective wire and managed to penetrate to the Buddhist temple on the east. In that attack five monks were killed, but the CIDG fought back and recaptured it. Thus, it went until Ba Xoai was turned over to the Vietnamese. But before then, the Hood had really gone to Hell.

Post Script

In 2006 I returned to Ba Xoai as part of a making a movie with a German film-maker. No, we were not reenacting battles (ala Kerry) but documenting the location. The most amazing thing was that not only was the camp gone, it was like it had never existed. The jungle has just swallowed everything. As seen in the photo, the only thing we found was the lower portion of the .50 Cal MG bunker on the south end of what would have been the west berm. The Vietnamese have installed a new camp a couple hundred meters to the north in a flat area. We did get taken into custody while filming, but that's a long story.

There has been ethnic cleansing in the area and we could not find any of the KKKs. In a later Internet search found it was not the Vietnamese that had removed them, but rather the Khmer Rouge who had crossed over the border. History has it that from 18 through 30 April, 1978 the Ba Chuc Massacre occurred. In that incident, they executed 3,157 civilians. Only one woman survived. She had been shot through her neck and suffered a machete wound to her head. ❖

About the Author

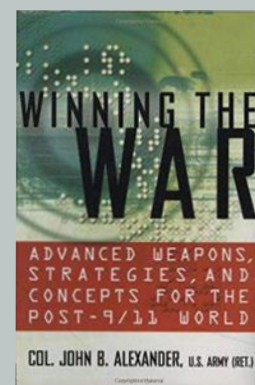
John Alexander entered the US Army as a private in 1956 and rose through the ranks to SFC, attended OCS, and was a colonel of Infantry in 1988 when he retired. During his varied career, he held key positions in special operations, intelligence, and research and development. From 1966 through early 1969 he commanded Special Forces "A" Teams in Vietnam and Thailand. His last military assignment was as Director, Advanced Systems Concepts Office, US Army Laboratory Command. After retiring from the Army, Dr. Alexander joined Los Alamos National Laboratory where he was instrumental in developing the concepts of Non-Lethal Warfare (NLW).

Dr. Alexander organized and chaired six major conferences on NLW and served as a US delegate to four NATO studies on the topic. As a member of the Council on Foreign Relations NLW study, he was instrumental in influencing the report that caused the DoD to create the Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate in July 1996. He was a member of the National Research Council Committee for Assessment of Non-Lethal Weapons Science and Technology, later served with the Army Science Board. An advisor

to USSOCOM and CIA, in 2003 he served as a mentor to top MOD officials in Kabul, Afghanistan then he became a Senior Fellow of Joint Special Operations University.

In addition to many military awards for valor and service, *Aviation Week & Space Technology* selected him as a 1993 as an Aerospace Laureate and in 1997 inducted him into the Hall of Fame at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington. In 1994 he received a Department of Energy Award of Excellence for the Nuclear Weapons Program and is listed in *Who's Who in Science and Engineering*, *American Men and Women of Science*, and in 2001 was named to the OCS Hall of Fame at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

His nonfiction books include, *The Warrior's Edge* (Wm. Morrow), *Future War* with foreword by Tom Clancy (St. Martin's Press), the sequel, *Winning the War* and most recently *Reality Denied*.



Special Operations Association SOAR XLIII Scheduled for October 21-25, 2019

It's time to register for the upcoming SOAR XLIII which will be held at The Orleans Hotel in Las Vegas, NV. Visit <https://www.specialoperations.org/soa/soar/> to register online or call (800) 675-3267 and use the SOAR group code "A9SAC10".

The photos on this page, submitted by Chapter 78 member Brad Welker, were taken at the 2010 SOAR.



Chapter 78 members Lonny Holmes, Ed Barrett, Brad Welker and Mark Miller with Lt. Gen. John Mulholland (second from the left), who was the 5th Group CO during the Horse Soldier operation in 2001 (visit www.specialforces78.com to read Alex Quades's article *Horse Soldiers of 9/11* in the *Sentinel*, January 2018).



Chapter 78 members Mark Miller, Lonny Holmes, Ed Barrett and Brad Welker and with the late General Eldon Bargewell (third from the right wearing the red tie).



Chapter 78 members Lonny Holmes, Mark Miller, Ed Barrett and living legend MG John K. Singlaub. MG Singlaub is holding a Chapter 78 Challenge Coin.

POW/MIA Update — SUBJECT: Trip Report, 2019 National League of POW/MIA Families Annual Meeting continued

14. General remarks:

- Coordination with the leadership of DPAA and the League causes me to believe the best way we can support their efforts is to continue to advocate for adequate funding for DPAA operations. I intend to draft correspondence for SOA/SFA Presidents to DoD and Congress advocating for:
 - A baseline annual budget for DPAA of \$160M.
 - A two-year budget cycle to preclude budget and operational disruptions caused by Fiscal Year rollovers, weather delays, etc.

- Exemptions for DPAA, such as that already enjoyed by the VA, from sequestration and continuing resolutions. Our main selling point is that our missing and unaccounted for personnel are veterans, just as are VAs population being served. The purpose of the exemption would be to avoid disruptions in operational planning and execution due to political stalemates in the budget process.
- SOA/SFA's robust support of the 50th anniversary was noted and appreciated.
- SOA/SFA attendance and participation at this annual meeting every year continues our effort to establish "the gold standard" among VSOs. AMG personally, the League, the individual family members and DPAA repeatedly express their appreciation for our support. The expenditure of resources is fully justified. ❖

SFA Chapter 78 June 2019 Meeting (Photos by How Miller)



❶ Jack Murphy, author of *Murphy's Law: My Journey from Army Ranger and Green Beret to Investigative Journalist* and Chapter meeting speaker, with Chapter 78 President and fellow author John Stryker Meyer

❷ Chapter member Don Gonneville briefed us on the trip to the border.

❸ Alice Murphy, age 8, attended the meeting with her father Jack Murphy. In the foreground is Chapter member Tom Turney.

❹ Left to right, Chapter members Kenn Miller, Bruce Long and Mark Miller

❺ Center, Chapter Treasurer Richard Simonian addressing the speaker.

❻ Susan Weeks, an honorary Chapter member, spoke about recent weapons training with Mossad in Israel.

❼ Bruce Long and John Meyer presenting the banner to be carried at the 24th Annual Anaheim Flag Day Celebration parade on June 9th.