



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 11 • NOVEMBER 2024

**Vietnam War 'Dustoff'
helicopter crews to
receive Congressional
Gold Medal**

**REQUIEM
for a LION**

**MAJ (Ret.)
Anthony W. Oliver**



**The Attack on the
United Nations
in Baghdad**

**Operation Ugly Baby and
10th Special Forces**

NVA GUNSHIP TRAP



SENTINEL

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From the Editor



US ARMY SPECIAL OPS COMMAND



US ARMY JFK SWCS



1ST SF COMMAND



1ST SF GROUP



3RD SF GROUP



5TH SF GROUP



7TH SF GROUP



10TH SF GROUP



19TH SF GROUP



20TH SF GROUP



8TH SF GROUP



11TH SF GROUP



12TH SF GROUP

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FRONT COVER: A UH-1D Medevac helicopter takes off to pick up an injured member of the 101st Airborne Division, near the demilitarized zone, 10/16/1969. Vietnam War medevac "AKA Dustoff" helicopter crews will be the latest military group to receive the Congressional Gold Medal . (U.S. Army photo by SP4 LT Gault, National Archives Identifier #530627)



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How Miller
Sentinel Editor

Hopefully this action-packed issue of the *Sentinel* will give you a moment of sanity from this election craziness, but please remember to vote.

Aaron Brandenburg starts us off with an uplifting message in his **"From the President"** column.

The Vietnam War **"Dustoff"** crews in Vietnam are to receive a more than well-deserved Congressional Gold Medal. They risked all to bring us to higher medical help, far too often under fire.

"Black Ops Vietnam," an enlightening and accurate explanation of the birth and life of SOG by Robert Gillespie, is reviewed by Chapter 78 Gold Star Member Steve Bric. Robert gives us the big picture along with the finer details.

In **"Requiem for a Lion,"** about his recently passed friend, Tony Oliver, Greg Walker cites Tony's highly successful "lead from the front" attitude. Tony immersed himself in the culture of both Kosovo and Afghanistan, and he consistently chose the hard right over the easy wrong.

Sentinel reader Bob Adolph wrote an eye-opening book, ***Surviving the UN***, about his long and storied career with SF, the UN, and more. He shares with us the detailed and very personal story of how he and his wife survived the 2003 attack on the Baghdad UN Headquarters and the aftermath.

"Operation Ugly Baby," by Spec Steven Alger of 10th SFG(A) is about the backup plan to open a second front in the north of Iraq for the 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom in the wake of Turkey's last-minute denial of use of their airspace for initiating the northern assault. It included the longest low-level infiltration via aircraft since the Second World War.

"NVA Gunship Trap" by Randy Bender and *Sentinel* reader, and former contributor, Gordon Denniston, both of MACV-SOG, clearly explained with their tense account of a sophisticated trap that was set up to shoot down a pair of MACV-SOG aircraft, anticipating the typical search patterns our gunships used.

Many thanks to John Meyer for passing along the photos and information regarding the **\$30k donation from SOA and fellow MACV-SOG Green Berets** towards the Green Beret Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which was presented to SFA Chapter 38, who are spearheading the effort.

Finally, please visit our September Chapter 78 meeting and hear about recruiting efforts for our sister SFNG company C/1/19th, including Chapter 78 video interviews.

As always, we hope you enjoy the *Sentinel* and keep sending us your stories, which is how we got most of the content of this month's issue. ❖

How Miller
Sentinel Editor

From the President | November 2024



Aaron Brandenburg
President SFA Ch. 78

This month I want to give some compliments to the SFA National Board of Officers (NBO) and all of those involved in the Hurricane Helene and Milton recovery planning. First and foremost, I want to extend our deepest sympathies to those affected by the recent hurricanes. As I sit here, in Sacramento, CA, I am glued to the television watching the destruction unfold. I am inspired by the collaboration between the SFA and the Special Forces Charitable Trust (SFCT) in this time of destruction and turmoil in the Southeast.

Chris Wilkerson, the President of the Special Forces Association (SFA), has proven to be an outstanding leader during the recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene. His dedication to the community has been evident through the swift and effective actions taken by his team to address the immediate needs of those affected by the disaster. At the forefront of the collaborative efforts between the SFA and the SF Charitable Trust is Chris's ability to mobilize resources and inspire volunteers. Chris has not only aided in the recovery process but has also fostered a sense of unity and resilience among those effected. His vision for a supportive and collaborative approach has laid a solid foundation for long-term recovery while making a positive impact within the SF community.

With the Search and Rescue (SAR), emergency resupply and recovery process in full stride, Chris and team began parallel planning and synchronizing help before Hurricane Milton made landfall last night, 9 October 2024. Chris and his teams strategic planning and organizational skills have been central to the relief initiatives, ensuring that support reaches the most vulnerable communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and Milton.

While SFA Vice President Pete Tingstrom has also played a pivotal role in the Hurricane relief, he has brought his expertise and operational acumen to the forefront in relation to the SFCON 2024 Cruise.

Pete has played an instrumental role in organizing the SFCON 2024 cruise, exemplifying his commitment to promoting community engagement and teamwork. His visionary leadership transformed the event into a unique opportunity for attendees to connect, network, and share invaluable insights in a dynamic and relaxing environment. Pete's attention to detail ensures that every aspect of the cruise not only delivers a memorable experience but also fosters meaningful connections among participants.

While the Tampa area begins its recovery process this morning (10 OCT 24), Pete's approach to the SFCON 24's uncertainty created by hurricane Milton is a supportive and an inclusive atmosphere that truly shines. His optimism and realistic style of leadership is void of "smoke and mirrors," in turn reassuring attendees that the flow of information is truthful and current. SFCON 2024 is a highlight on the calendar for members and supporters alike, as we come together to celebrate achievements and discuss the future of the organization.

Together, Chris and Pete exemplify the power of teamwork in overcoming challenges, as they leverage the strengths to provide far-reaching assistance. Their partnership not only symbolizes hope for those affected but also highlights the importance of collaboration in disaster recovery efforts, reinforcing the commitment to the SFA and enhancing the community's resilience. Well done Chris, Pete, NBO, and wholehearted thank you to the volunteers helping those in need.

DOL

Aaron Brandenburg,
President Special Forces Association Chapter 78

SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

November 16, 2024

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

Courtyard by Marriott

5865 Katella Ave, Room A, Cypress, CA 90630

Chapter 78

Christmas Party

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club

1601 Bayside Dr, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625

1400 Cocktail Hour • Program Start Time 1500

With guest speaker to be announced

Libations • Raffle • DJ and Dancing

COST

\$40.00 per person, same for guests

Special Note: Members of C/1/19 \$10 per person.

Please mail your check payable to SFA 78 **to arrive no later than 12/6/24** to:

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DRESS

Men: SFA Green Blazers, White Shirt with Regimental Tie,

Dark or Gray Slacks, or Sport Coat with Tie

Ladies: Cocktail Attire

If you haven't sent your check in before December 3rd, please email me your name and guest name so we can have an accurate head count. Please make sure your check arrives on or before the 6th.

QUESTIONS??? Feel free to call or text Aaron Brandenburg (719) 963-3948

or send an email to abrandenburg443@gmail.com

Vietnam War ‘Dustoff’ helicopter crews to receive Congressional Gold Medal

By Gary Warner, Stars and Stripes staff writer

Editor’s Note: The following story is being reprinted with the permission of Stars and Stripes, which retains all rights. The story was written by Gary Warner, Stars and Stripes staff writer, and originally ran on Sept. 20, 2024, on www.stripes.com.

Vietnam War medevac helicopter crews will be the latest military group to receive the highest award Congress can bestow.

The Dustoff Crews of the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act won final approval this week. It honors the estimated 3,000 pilots, medics, and crew who flew between combat zones and field hospitals during the war.

The flights were nicknamed “Dustoff” because of the dirt and debris churned up by their helicopter rotors as they landed to pick up wounded. The crew of a helicopter early in the war took the name as their call-sign, according to the Army.

The Dustoffs extracted 900,000 wounded U.S., Vietnamese, and allied soldiers from May 1962 to March 1973. The Army said the medevac crews had a one-in-three chance of becoming casualties themselves.

“They were some of the very best, and their heroism deserves to be recognized, which we finally did [Thursday] by sending this legislation to President [Joe] Biden’s desk to become law,” said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., a co-sponsor of the legislation.

Congressional testimony included the record of the 54th Medical Detachment, a Dustoff unit of about 30 soldiers with three UH-1 Huey helicopters. During one 10-month stretch of heavy fighting, they extracted 21,435 casualties to safety. The 8,644 evacuation and rescue missions required 4,832 hours in the air. Unit members received 78 valor awards.

Patrick Henry Brady of Seattle was an Army major flying missions with the 54th Medical Detachment from Chu Lai, about 340 miles northeast of Saigon on the coast of the South China Sea. In January 1968, calls came in from groups of wounded soldiers who were trapped behind enemy lines, including one group in a mine field. Despite heavy fog and smoke, Brady extracted soldiers from a site where two early rescue helicopters had been shot down. Returning several times to pull more soldiers out of the jungle, Brady had one helicopter shredded by machine gun fire and a second damaged at the mine field by an explosion. At the end of the day, Brady and his crew had lost three helicopters and saved 51 wounded American and South Vietnamese soldiers.



U.S. Army soldiers carrying a Vietnamese man on a stretcher run toward a helicopter during an attack at Special Forces Camp Dak Seang in Vietnam, 1970. (U.S. Army photo)

Brady received the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest award for valor in combat.

“A Dustoff was usually vulnerable,” he said. “Of course, the most dangerous time was landing on the battlefield during the battle. The chopper was big and visible -- no armor protection.”

Brady said despite the red cross painted on the Dustoffs to show they weren’t combat helicopters, they nonetheless always drew enemy fire.

“We knew it and we were never surprised,” he said. “We did all we could to avoid it. That meant finding the safest way in, taking the shortest time on the ground possible and getting the patient to the hospital as soon as we could.”

Vietnam Dustoff Association President Steve Vermillion said the Congressional Gold Medal recognized the history of what were often teenagers involved in a life and death mission all day, nearly every day.

“[It’s] the story of 18- and 19-year-old men flying unarmed helicopters into battle, at night, in the rain, and multiple times a day, to rescue our wounded and fly them back to medical facilities,” he said.

The Congressional Gold Medal requires two-thirds of each chamber to support the bill. In the Democratic-controlled Senate, 71 of 100 senators signed on as co-sponsors. In the Republican-controlled House, 330 of the 435 members endorsed the legislation. The final votes this week sent the legislation to Biden. The White House said Thursday that he planned to sign the bill into law.



BGEN Patrick H. Brady, USA (uncovered) Medal of Honor Recipient (Photo by Russell Roederer, Department of Defense, Department of the Navy.)

The Congressional Gold Medal was first awarded in 1776 to Gen. George Washington for his service in the early days of the American Revolution. In the 248 years since, it has gone to more than 300 individuals and organizations, such as the American Red Cross.

Top American generals, from Horatio Gates in the Revolutionary War to Norman Schwarzkopf in Operation Desert Storm, have received the medal.

In the past two decades, Congress has honored various groups such as the Native American code talkers from World War II who translated secret orders and other messages into their native language, which Japanese troops in the Pacific could not understand. Other medal recipients included the Montford Point Marines, the first Black troops to serve in the branch, the “Monuments Men,” experts recruited by the Army to find art stolen by the Nazis, and Merrill’s Marauders, World War II Army commandos who fought behind enemy lines in Burma.

The Congressional Gold Medal has also gone to artists, explorers, astronauts, politicians, and business leaders. Recipients have included the Wright Brothers, Bob Hope, Joe Louis, Robert Frost, Frank Sinatra, and Mother Teresa.

Each medal is created with a unique design from the U.S. Mint honoring the recipient. In the case of groups such as the Dustoff crews, only one gold medal is produced. The one medal for groups is usually displayed at the Smithsonian Institution or other public display space. The law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth, which assisted the effort to obtain the medal for the Dustoff crews, said the veterans had chosen the U.S. Army Medical Department Museum in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to display the medal. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Warner covers the Pacific Northwest for Stars and Stripes. He’s reported from East Germany, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Britain, France and across the U.S. He has a master’s degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York.

Book Review

BLACK OPS VIETNAM: The Operational History of MACVSOG By Robert M. Gillespie

By Steve Bric

This incredible and historically accurate history of the concept, the creation, the growth, and month-by-month events from the early 1960’s through the final days of MACVSOG would seem impossible. Robert Gillespie somehow achieved that with a passion that would take digging through archives and 80 years of witness descriptions and Top Secret documents. His source of information could never be matched. You can feel his determination and desire to answer questions not yet asked.

He shows how events around the world (seen and unseen) by allies and enemies alike were extremely complex and played a role in the USA intervention. His analysis chapter after chapter of “How” and “Why” we ended up exiting Saigon at the end is worth having on the shelf of any High School or College. He never criticizes commanders or troops but does heap praise on the heroes and units who went in Harm’s Way and performed the impossible time after time.

It is said that history teaches us to learn and avoid our mistakes in the future. His book helps us do that as Robert Gillespie shows no bias, and he offers us the chance to truly find a way to bring out something positive from this conflict. ❖

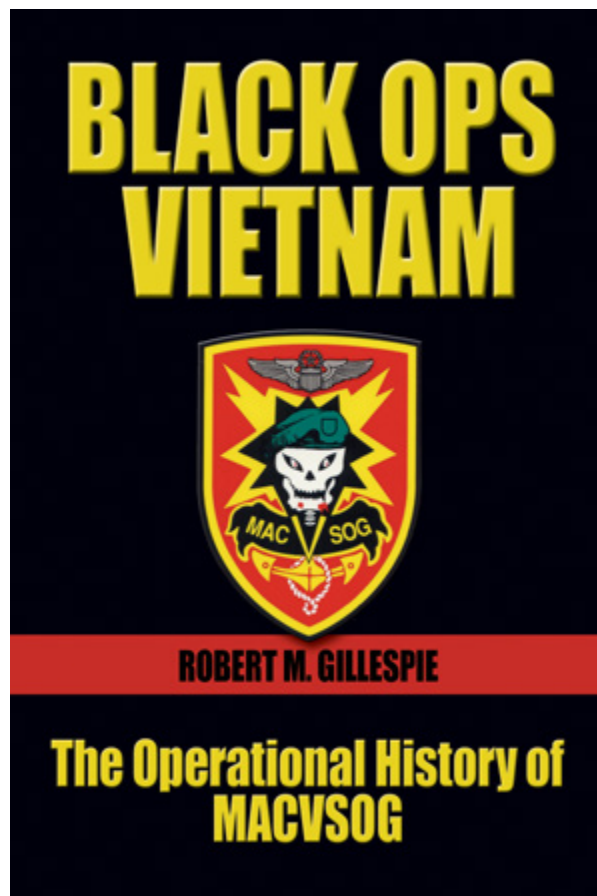
Black Ops Vietnam: The Operational History of MACVSOG

By Robert M. Gillespie

Naval Institute Press; First Edition (September 15, 2011)

320 pages

Available for purchase online from all major booksellers. It is can be purchased in hardcover, paperback, ebook & audiobook (Audible through Amazon)





REQUIEM for a LION

Major Anthony Wayne Oliver – *“He was never happier than being in the field with his troops.”*

By Greg Walker (Ret.)
USA Special Forces

Major (Ret.) Anthony Wayne Oliver (August 1959–October 2024) passed away on October 1, 2024, from an aggressive form of cancer and additional service-connected medical complications.

During his career Tony served in over forty countries with five tours in Afghanistan alone. As a combat leader he sought out missions that made a difference where a leader’s actions directly affected ongoing operations. In this role his character, compassion, and “lead from the front” attitude left a lasting impression and the highest respect of all of those who served with him.

In Afghanistan, Major Oliver was tasked to recruit, train, and lead an Afghan border security unit which provided interdiction of Taliban/AQ forces in southern Afghanistan and “ground truth” intelligence products for U.S. and Coalition Forces. He regularly participated in long mobile patrols along the 900-kilometer border with Iran, working in concert with U.S. Special Forces teams and the British Special Air Service to accomplish a wide variety of missions.

As the U.S. SOF Chief in Kosovo, Major Oliver reported directly to BG Steven P. Schook and KFOR Chief (J2) Colonel Peter B. Swack. Oliver directed the activities of the J2 Special Operations to include the current and future J2 OPS cells. He supervised and coordinated all aspects of ongoing INTEL OPs. Tony was instrumental in serving as the J2 liaison with J3 CONOPS, the Joint Intelligence Coordination Center, and related Coalition and U.S. Intelligence Services as in-country assets.

Per BG Schook, “His efforts in the extensive autumn 2003 KPC investigation were particularly noteworthy while his superb operational and regional knowledge was instrumental in the planning and organization of many of KFOR’s highly successful missions to apprehend a score of Kosovo’s principal criminals, Islamic clan leaders, and extremists, missions many said could not be done... Give him the toughest sensitive operational jobs in the Army that bisect with intelligence—he will excel. A must to promote to Lieutenant Colonel, send to advanced schooling and retain at all costs.”

Another close friend, Major General (ret) Kenneth R. Bowra, with extensive knowledge and experience in the Balkans and upon learning of Major Oliver’s passing, shares this about a fellow Ranger and SOF veteran. “Tony fought the good fight.



Major Oliver (center) and then Colonel Peter Zwack (second from left, standing) became close friends in Kosovo and later linked up in Afghanistan. *“Tony was gruff but respectful. I came to trust him with my life.”*

He was a dedicated soldier and American. We all are better for God having loaned Tony to us. RLTW!”

Brigadier General Peter B. Zwack enlisted in the US Army in 1980 and received his commission via Officer Candidate School (OCS). He subsequently served 34 years as a Military Intelligence and Eurasian Foreign Area Officer serving in diverse and challenging duty locations including West Germany, South Korea, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Russia.

General Zwack recalls Tony Oliver well as he worked with him in both Kosovo and Afghanistan. “When Tony spoke people listened,” remembers Zwack today. “He was an instinctual man and knew more about what was actually taking place on the ground than most other Americans.”

Zwack came to trust Major Oliver with his life. “I went out into the field with him in Kosovo, often places a J2 should not have been. But I knew Tony had my back and I trusted him without reservation.”

In Afghanistan, General Zwack again joined Major Oliver. This time it was in the southernmost hinterlands of the country. “He [Tony] possessed gruff wisdom. He was very respectful but he told you how it was, not necessarily what you wanted to hear. He had an amazing gift—he immersed himself in the culture whether in Kosovo or Afghanistan. Tony drew people to him; he came to know everyone and was trusted. The intelligence he developed and then shared was invaluable.”

“He was a warrior,” says Zwack. “But one with a heart of gold. And he was a field soldier. Tony led from the front. His Afghan soldiers were his soldiers. We became good friends and I came to think of him as my brother. It is devastating to learn of his passing.”



Major Oliver's Afghan border unit interdicted more illegal opium and heroin than other larger units in Afghanistan.

The author recalls—I knew Tony for over 40 years and visited with him at home the day before he went home to be with his Lord and God. He had the heart of a lion and was a pure SOF intelligence operator and war fighter. He was also one of the most gentle, giving, and loyal men I have ever known. His behind-the-scenes help, guidance, direction, and wry sense of humor were an inspiration to me and many other war-wounded veterans. No better friend and no better Warrior-Brother to serve alongside of.

Tony and Beth shared their cabin on the Oregon coast with my wife and me. Carol and I spent countless hours there beachcombing, hunting for agates, watching movies at night by the massive fireplace his grandfather had hand-built over one hundred years ago. The cabin was Tony's safe place. A semi-remote hidden treasure with no Wi-Fi, no hardline phone, no Internet. He hunted the area for years, a passion of his, and loved sitting on the back deck looking out over the ocean and sharing stories from his football days to when he frantically tried to dig two badly injured Afghan soldiers out of their overturned truck during a night movement on the Ring Road.

Oliver always did the hard right over the easy wrong. In 1995, when four Ranger students died from exposure in the Florida swamps, it was Tony—who had been the company commander at the Florida Ranger Camp (Camp Rudder) prior to the deaths of four young men in the swamps—who blew the whistle on what had gone wrong and why. He came to me with the story and his evidence and asked if I would write an article? I did. That story became the genesis of a larger piece that fully exposed who removed the safety criteria that led to the incident, safety measures Major Oliver himself had put in place and documented during his time at Camp Rudder. When the Ranger Department commander tried to blame the non-commissioned



As his injuries and then cancer began to take their toll on him, Tony and I would visit his beach cabin and tell war stories, watch movies, and enjoy the pleasure of each other's company.



An accomplished and proud Army Ranger officer, Major Oliver chose to do the hard right over the easy wrong when four Ranger students perished in the Florida swamps in 1995. His doing so cost him continued promotion despite superb OERs and recommendations from his commanders afterward.

officers for the deaths, it was Tony Oliver who stood up and proved it was the commander himself who was directly responsible. That officer, then on the promotion list to Brigadier General, was removed from the list as a result.

And Oliver, in a form of petty retaliation by the Army, became a permanent major until his retirement.

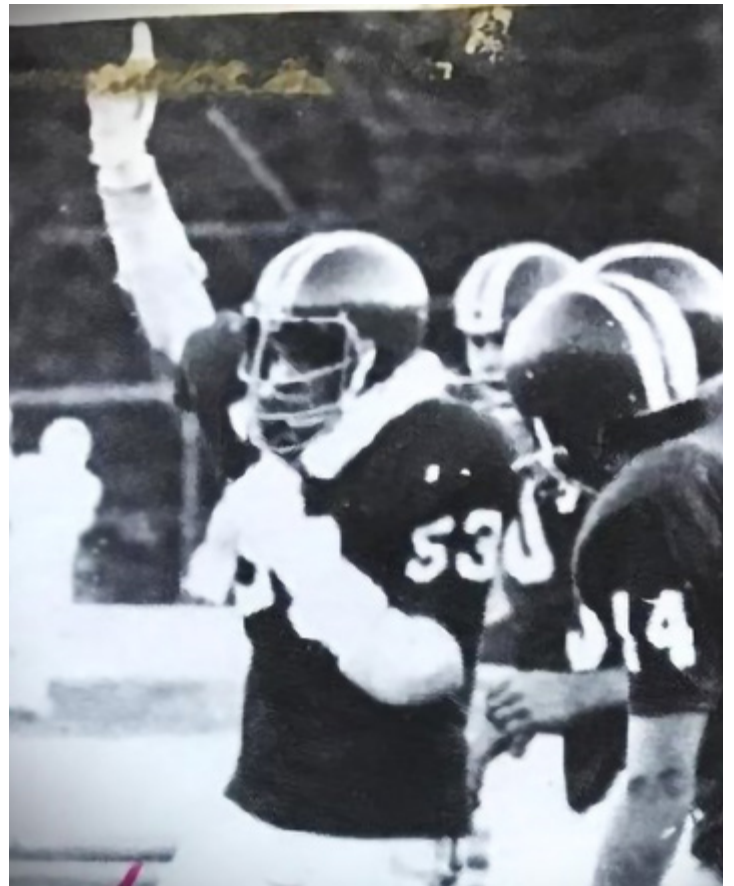
In true form Tony's only response was "It could be worse."

Major Oliver leaves behind his wife, Beth, and son—also a veteran—Jeb Oliver. Gone but never forgotten. His ashes are to be lovingly placed at his 100-year-old family cabin, built by his grandfather upon his return from WW1, on the Oregon coast.

I will see you again, Old Friend. ❖



Tony was immensely proud of his son, Jeb, who today is a licensed clinical social worker and therapist working with Oregon's veteran population in eastern Oregon.



Tony Oliver, #53, loved the game of football and played with ferocious abandon "Football taught me teamwork, to humble myself, and how sweet victory is when you and your teammates win," he once told me.

Major Oliver took those lessons with him into the Army. His leadership, commitment to the mission at hand, and respect for his peers and his troops made him the Ranger officer he was. (Credit: Tony Oliver)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Walker served with the 2nd Ranger Battalion and later as a section leader at Camp Rudder, Florida Ranger Camp. From 1980 until his retirement in 2005, Greg served in Special Forces seeing wartime campaigns in El Salvador and Iraq. A wounded warrior himself Mr. Walker went on to work for the U.S. Special Operations Command's Warrior Care Program as a DoD trained case manager and advocate for our most seriously injured, wounded, or made ill. He thanks the Warrior Care Program for their continuing support of Major Oliver's wife and family during this sad time. "RLTW / DOL!"



A partial view of the exterior of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad that was destroyed by a truck bomb on August 19, 2003. (Unique Identifier UN7315527, NICA ID 22818, Credit: UN Photo/Timothy Sopp)

The Attack on the United Nations in Baghdad (19 August 2003)

By Robert Bruce Adolph
Former UN Chief of Security for Iraq (2003-04)
Lieutenant Colonel, Special Forces (ret.)

"I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe, if I cannot satisfy one, I will indulge the other." —Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Extracted, shortened, and revised from the book *Surviving the United Nations: The Unexpected Challenge*, published by New Academia of Washington DC. This narrative was peer-reviewed for accuracy.

The sound was an indescribably low-pitched yet outrageously loud multi-tiered rumbling. I have never or since heard anything quite like it. I could not tell initially what it was, only that it seemed to last for several seconds. I felt the air move inside my lungs and then all around me. For the briefest of moments, there was no air to breathe. My next conscious sensations were both visual and physical. I saw and felt the building shake violently. Simultaneously, the chair vibrated hard beneath me. Then

the windows of my office seemed to explode inwards. I did not clearly see—but it could only have been—flying glass and bits of mortar from around the windowsill blowing by me at speeds so great I could only just make out what it was, or perhaps more correctly, what it had to be.

The transparent glass divider between my inner and outer offices disappeared in an instant. I glanced to my right. The door to my office was no longer where it belonged. It was now partially knocked off its hinges and laid half-out and half-in the outer office, where my administrative and security assistants normally worked. It was perhaps at this moment that I realized what had happened. My initial confusion stemmed from the fact that there was no sharp report, which was common in a single-explosive detonation. It was a bomb—a very big bomb—and we were the intended target. There was nothing in the immediate vicinity capable of creating a blast so large unless it was intentional. We had been hit.

These few thoughts went through my mind in virtual nanoseconds. I had one very immediate concern. Naima, my fiancé, was in the outer office, only a few yards away. She had been using a spare computer

terminal to accomplish preparatory work for a consultancy in support of the UN's World Food Program in Irbil. The work schedule called for her to depart for the northern Iraqi city the following day. I yelled out to her as I got to my feet, unconsciously grabbing my handheld radio from the desktop charger out of long habit and placing it on my belt while in motion. There was no response to my call. My heart sank. I remember conducting a cursory visual self-examination as I stood. It appeared that I was unharmed. I observed no blood leakage. I was aware that some wounds, even when serious, are not initially felt. As chance would have it, there was a wooden cabinet between me and the window that blocked the shards of flying glass.

There was debris everywhere on the floor. Dozens of ceiling tiles had been blown off their mountings and were now littering my office floor. I walked quickly toward the door. I stumbled through and found her near the far wall lying on the ground face upward and bleeding profusely from a nasty gash over her right eye. She looked terrible. Her condition frightened me. My stomach immediately tied itself into a knot. Not surprisingly, she appeared dazed. The large glass divider between the outer office and mine had produced added shattered glass that covered the floor and desktops. I leaned over, grabbed Naima by her arms, and pulled her gently erect, while asking if she was all right in a no doubt unsteady voice. The concern must have been all too evident in my tone.

I conducted a quick survey of her condition, while lightly brushing her long dark hair behind her head and away from the wound above her eye, so that I could get a better look. Her outward appearance, and the blood flow, made it look bad. Surprisingly, she managed a weak smile and assured me that she was okay. My stomach unknotted a bit. But that feeling of relief was not long-lived. I observed with rising alarm that a glass shard had pierced her left eye. The shard's jagged edge could be seen easily. Thankfully, she seemed totally unaware of it. And I was not going to tell her. If she thought she was OK, I knew it was best medical policy to reinforce that opinion. The gash over her right eye bled, but I knew that head wounds often do so without being life-threatening. She was clearly conscious, and with my assistance, I meant to get her the hell out of there.

It was very tough going. The ground was covered everywhere with debris in the hall and on the stairs, which often tripped us up. The mere fifty yards that we had to traverse felt much greater. We both fell more than once. Naima hung on to me like a bull terrier. The fingernails of her right hand dug unknowingly into my flesh. At that moment, all we had was one another. We were hanging on as much for emotional support as practicality. I placed my right hand on the wall and followed it toward what I hoped would be safety. The rising dust that was created by the explosion was that thick. I was by no means sure that there would be only one bomb but did not share that thought with her. She had enough to worry about already.

We could hear others around us beginning to move—the disembodied moans, sobbing, and occasional muted screams of people in our vicinity, but we could not see anyone. The bright afternoon light from outside barely penetrated the gloom. Naima leaned heavily into me, trusting that I could find my way out. Once we were beyond the recreation area and through the no-longer-existing glass doors that marked the entrance to that area, I managed to barely discern

some diffused sunlight in the direction of what must have been the front entrance. My vision was further worsened by the fact that my eyeglasses were no doubt covered in that thick dust. I sensed more than I knew that we were almost there.

The late afternoon heat had not yet begun to wane. It was over one hundred-ten degrees Fahrenheit. Still, the air was cleaner as we stepped outside and into bright sunlight—it tasted good. We were apparently two of the first to make it out of the main entrance. Only a very few people were immediately in evidence outside. They looked dazed and unbelieving and were uniformly covered with the thick gray-white dust that was still settling everywhere. Many were bleeding, although I could not see it clearly. The dust covered everything... even the crimson of blood. I locked eyes with some of the people outside. I knew them. Their eyes reflected no recognition in return - shock. We were moving better now. There was less debris outside. I brought us to a halt and took another look at Naima in daylight. The glass shard clearly pierced her left eye to some depth impossible to discern. Still, she remained blissfully unaware of the damage. The gash over her right eye had bled copiously. I was concerned, but less so than before. In the full light, the wound did not appear as bad. Her blood had spread over the left sleeve of my shirt, but it was slowing. The thick dust in the building might have served to staunch the flow. I was heartened by the fact that there was no apparent arterial bleeding. I had checked for this when I first picked her up off the floor of my outer office. Had a shard of glass severed a major artery... we were lucky. Somehow both my Iraqi security and administrative assistants, Mazzin and Fatin, found us.

I was immediately grateful that both were unharmed, and by my side. Fatin noticed the glass shard protruding from Naima's eye. Unfortunately, lacking medical training, she pointed this fact out to her. Naima's face contorted, and she promptly collapsed in my arms. Together, the three of us moved her to the nearby grassy area adjacent to the Security Information and Operations Building at the front gate, and laid her down, while elevating her feet. She recovered consciousness quickly, but now was very concerned about the possibility of losing her eye, and understandably so.

But I had another pressing problem that nagged at me. I was about to do something that I desperately did not wish to do, and yet felt the necessity. I remember telling Naima that I had to leave her now, and in the care of my two assistants. The words had a bitter taste. I was torn. I did not want to abandon her, but there was no choice. Critical duties beckoned that would not wait. At that moment, I hated myself. I stood, turned, and left, going immediately to task. I did not turn back for a look. I could not. I might have lost my already tenuous resolve. Leaving Naima at that moment was the hardest thing I have ever had to do.

My first chore was to determine the condition of our communications. I walked quickly to the Security Information and Operations Center in the small elliptically shaped building at the front gate of our compound. Every pane of glass was shattered. What about the condition of those inside? This was the only building within the compound that was my direct responsibility. The structure also served as a guard shed and security offices for some of my staff.

I entered the side door, and despite the debris, took the stairs two at a time to the second floor, where we had placed the radio room. I opened the door to find that the radio operators were alive and unharmed, and their radios were still functional. The reason for this fortunate circumstance was immediately clear. The large steel-plate blast shields that I had approved some weeks earlier and had been paid for from the out-of-pocket donations of the Security Cell, had been installed over the interior windowsills. Although these shields had been knocked off their wall mountings, they had blocked the worst of the concussion wave, flying glass and shrapnel. A representative of the World Food Program gave us money to sandbag the ground floor offices too. These two precautions, the steel-plate blast shields and sandbags saved the lives of many in the UN security community that day.

I instructed the radio operators to direct all security personnel to immediately report to me near the grassy area where I had just left Naima. I also instructed them to contact all UN agencies in Baghdad, and to direct them not to come to the headquarters. I knew that bombs could be used as lures: that extremists could set off a bomb, wait for help to arrive, and then set off a second bomb—killing even more. I hoped to avoid that scenario, if it was indeed the tactic of choice. Finally, I directed the radio operators to inform all staff that the grassy area, where I had just left Naima, was designated as the triage point, where all wounded were to be brought.

I then made the call to UN Headquarters in New York using the cell phone on my right hip. I punched the speed dial. Moments later, the desk officer responsible for monitoring Iraq answered. I informed him that we had been attacked with a large bomb. I tried, and no doubt failed, to keep my voice calm and even. I informed him that we likely had many dead and wounded, but it would take time to determine who and how many. He was clearly taking notes as I spoke. He would report to his boss who would then report to the UN Secretary General. I excused myself from that call, telling him that I would be back in touch when we discovered more concerning our circumstances. I hit the

red button and replaced the phone on my belt. Perhaps ten minutes had elapsed since the blast. It is difficult to quantify accurately. Time possesses an elastic quality at times like these.

Back outside, I noticed that security personnel were congregating. A couple of these had sustained what appeared to be minor wounds, but in that moment, all seemed anxious for a job to do. I gathered them together and created three search teams, assigning one team per floor. I told them to check every room thoroughly. We could not afford to miss anyone. Essentially, I told the officers that I wanted a very careful search for the wounded. “The dead,” I said, “can wait.” It was about this time that I saw the first US Army ambulances arriving through the front gate. I knew that they would be coming. I did not know how they arrived so quickly. The medics took charge of the triage point upon their arrival. I knew that our injured staff were in good hands. Naima would be well cared for.

I took a moment to think another matter through. I knew that families would soon be deluging UN Headquarters in New York with desperate queries concerning the status of their loved ones in Baghdad. I also knew that the task of providing an accurate tally of the dead and wounded would fall to the UN’s head of security in Iraq, me. I considered taking an officer from a search team to start the tracking process of the wounded that would soon be medically evacuated. I did not think long, dispensing with the idea. At that moment, I was surveying the triage point. Blood and exposed flesh were everywhere evident. If I had assigned an officer to track the wounded, the medical personnel would probably respect my authority and slow the process to accommodate the requirement. But I could permit nothing to impede their evacuation. Too many lives were at risk. Seconds mattered. Families at home would have to wait for word. Better they wait than the alternative. My decision would be questioned by many senior UN officials in the months that followed. I never doubted the call, then or now.

I later saw someone being carried out of the front building entrance on a stretcher. Incredibly, a portion of aluminum windowsill almost two feet long was protruding from the side of his face.

I took a second look to ensure I was seeing correctly. Apparently, that portion of sill had been blown off its mountings with sufficient force that it had been turned into a kind of javelin. That unlikely spear had lodged itself in his jaw. The loose end was being held gently by one of the officers. I also remember seeing the organization’s operations officer. His shirt and trousers were covered nearly completely with fresh blood that was clearly not his own, almost like he had bathed in it. From a distance, I observed someone else that I thought I knew. I went to him. His head was dripping blood at multiple points. Nearly half of his face was exposed flesh. Much surface area had been carved away by what I assumed to be flying glass. A flap of skin held a portion of his nose dangling almost to his upper lip. He gazed straight ahead even as I grasped his arm gently. His eyes were fixed on some faraway point. I speculated that moving his



A partial view of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad that was destroyed by a truck bomb on 19 August 2003. (Unique Identifier UN7779253, NICA ID 31937, Credit: UN Photo/Timothy Sopp)

neck might have been painful. “How are you doing?” I asked stupidly. His response would have been funny at any other time. “Bob,” he said slowly and deliberately in his upper-crust British accent, “I have had better days.”

A short while later, my local security assistant, Mazzin, reported to me that Naima was one of the first of the wounded to be evacuated. I tried not to think of her, or I would not be able to function. Still, it was two days before I saw her again. She had been ultimately transferred to Saddam Hussein’s family medical clinic, now occupied by a US Army surgical unit located in what later became known as the Green Zone.

I re-entered the building. The thick fog of dust had begun to clear. From the entrance, I could see through to daylight on the opposite side of the building, perhaps forty yards away. This meant that the bomb had detonated on that side of the building, but I did not yet know the extent of the damage. I moved straight ahead toward daylight. Off to my left, I noticed a body. I angled in that direction. He was face-up and spread-eagle over a pile of shattered concrete. I leaned forward at the waist and checked for a pulse at his neck with the extended index and middle fingers of my right hand while peeling an eyelid back with my left. His body was still warm... not surprising in this heat. There was no pulse and no pupil response. His right arm was severed below the shoulder. Flies were already circling with the intention of laying their eggs that would lead to the inevitable maggots. My stomach somersaulted, and my heart raced. This easily could have been Naima. The arm had been torn from his body, leaving an extraordinarily jagged wound. The severed limb was nowhere in evidence. Apparently, he had bled out before any assistance could get to him. To this day, I do not know who the man was. Because of the gray-white dust now covering everyone and everything, everybody looked much the same.

I heard the first of many US Army CASEVAC helicopters in-bound. By the sound, the Black Hawk helicopter landed on the Canal Road, usually a very busy thoroughfare. Coalition Forces must have shut down public access, I speculated. By now I was outside again, where the explosion had taken place. I turned toward what was left of that corner of the Canal Hotel and surveyed the whole nightmarish panorama. The still-incomplete perimeter wall that was being constructed on my recommendation had been all but vaporized by the explosion for approximately twenty-five yards in both directions from the point of detonation. Later FBI estimates suggested that as much as 2,000



A partial view of the offices inside the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, that was destroyed by a truck bomb on August 19, 2003. (Unique Identifier UN7779250, NICA ID 32161, Credit: UN Photo/Timothy Sopp)



A partial view of the offices inside the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, that was destroyed by a truck bomb on August 19, 2003. (Unique Identifier UN7779254, NICA ID 32162, Credit: UN Photo/Timothy Sopp)

pounds of explosive material had been used in the attack. As a potential matter of historical significance, it is my belief that this was the first suicide bombing of the war in Iraq—directed not against armed and ready US Armed Forces, but against unarmed noncombatant staff members of the UN. It was also apparent that the bomb was initiated on the side road leading behind the UN compound. This was the roadway that I had twice recommended be closed on security grounds. In other words, this was an entirely preventable horror show.

On my way back to the triage point, I was met by a US Marine colonel. He was, he told me, then serving in the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority and working for Ambassador Paul Bremer. We

had never met. He introduced himself, although I have regrettably forgotten his name. He informed me that he was under orders to assist me by any means at his disposal. I was not surprised to see him. I knew that my fellow Americans would focus their considerable assets on assisting the UN. His eyes were alert and caring. From my perspective, his arrival was more than timely. I thought rapidly, what did we need? The colonel was awaiting an answer. I began, “We need engineer support ASAP. We have people trapped under the rubble. We also need standard life support. We need food and water for the survivors. Halal Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) should do. Your people are already doing an excellent job with our wounded. We need cell phones with international access for the survivors. We also require immediate communications connectivity between my office and the Coalition.” The colonel was taking notes on a small notepad he had taken from his uniform pocket. He finished and then looked up. “Anything else,” he said with concern in his voice. “Yes,” I replied, “three things. If you approve, we can place one of your communications vans inside of our perimeter to enhance our ability to communicate with you and track the wounded. We also need additional armed security on our perimeter. Finally, we require help with the handling of the dead. We have no mortuary services unit.” The Marine officer was as good as his word. All my requests were fulfilled within hours.

I drove the search teams hard, sending them back into the hotel's interior time and again. We had no idea how many people were in the building at the time of the attack. My single greatest fear was that we might miss someone in the debris that might just be still clinging to life. To their credit, nobody complained. All returned to the grisly work with resolute dedication. The alternate operations center that I had earlier directed to be established was shaping up in Tent City (over-flow UN sleeping accommodations). I held a quick meeting with all security personnel, assigning various tasks. Few of which I can now remember.

The remainder of my day and night is a jumble of disjointed memories. Someone came to me for a decision, on average, every few minutes. My cell phone rang often, demanding attention. Calls came in from various UN headquarters in New York, Rome, Vienna, and Geneva. Many of these calls were personal in nature. Most wanted to know whether loved ones, friends, or colleagues were still alive. Luckily, I was in the habit of carrying an extra cell phone battery in my pocket. In one rare free moment, I called my dad's number in Melbourne, Florida. Nobody was home. I left the message on his answering machine, hoping that he would find out that I was alive and unharmed before seeing the news. He was old and frail. He did not need anything else to worry about. Much later I discovered that my brother Mark, in Houston, called multiple UN phone numbers until he finally reached my offices in New York. They informed him that I was unharmed. Mark, in turn, notified the rest of our family that I had survived.

A captain from the 82nd Airborne Division reported to me shortly after dark. He was the commander of a reinforced parachute rifle company and informed me that he had been tasked to secure our perimeter. I was grateful. I knew the 82nd from my many years at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, now re-named Fort Liberty. We were in good hands. Although I was nowhere in the captain's chain of command, he appeared willing to take some guidance from me. I made my suggestions, and the captain went to work to establish his

perimeter. I also introduced him to the security officer I had assigned responsibility for the inner perimeter. The two of them had instructions to see me later that evening with a status report.

The final tally was twenty-two dead and over one-hundred and fifty wounded, some of whom I knew. The morning after the attack, I recommended that the UN evacuate Iraq. At that time, we simply had no way to protect ourselves from vehicular suicide bombers. Like so many of my previous recommendations, it was not accepted for implementation. It took a second bombing - killing two more - roughly a month later, to finally convince senior UN management in New York to take our threat assessment to heart. Thankfully, all my security staff survived the attack. The secretary general later fired me on the front page of the New York Times. It seems that I had been selected as one of the designated scapegoats for his negligence. Following a subsequent exhausting seven-month legal battle, I was exonerated and reinstated to my former rank. Literally, there was a mountain of hard evidence proving my innocence. The secretary general classified the formal UN internal report of the bombing, where much of that hard evidence existed.

Sadly, several months following the bombing, my security assistant Mazzin was murdered in Mafia fashion by what came to be known as former regime elements. By this time, he was working for American forces. It was for this crime that he was killed. My fiancé, now my wife, made a complete recovery, clearly choosing to forgive me for deserting her at the triage point. For that, I will always be grateful. I served another decade in international service, retiring in 2014 in Jakarta, Indonesia. But not a day goes by when I do not think of that sad and terrible day in August. The report that might shed some light on why so many died has not seen the light of day for over two decades. One could reasonably ask why? ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Bruce Adolph is a retired US Army Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel and UN Chief Security Advisor. Today, he is a successful international speaker, author, and commentator. His many written works have appeared in multiple civil and military publications. Most recently, Adolph has been a frequent guest columnist for Florida's *Tampa Bay Times*, Holland's *Atlantic Perspectives Magazine*, and the US *Military Times*. He has been interviewed by BBC news and radio, UN Today Magazine, Italian National Public Radio, World Affairs Conference, and the Netherlands Atlantic Council. In 2022, he served as mission leader for a multi-national team in support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in war-torn Ukraine. More recently, he completed service as a consultant UN security advisor regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh War in Azerbaijan. His new book due out early next year focuses on the themes of leadership, war, politics, and society.” Learn more at robertbruceadolph.com.

Operation Ugly Baby and 10th Special Forces (Iraq 2003)

Editors Note: This story by Spc. Steven Alger of the 10th Special Forces Group was first published on March 30, 2023, by the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service. DVIDS content is in the public domain. SOF News first re-published this in March 2023 and has since republished it on March 22, 2024 (<https://sof.news/iraq/ugly-baby/>).

By Spc. Steven Alger
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)
Defense Visual Information Distribution Service

Departing early 2003, planning between the United States and coalition partners was underway to eliminate Saddam Hussein and his influence throughout Iraq. This operation would later be known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). This initial operation was divided into multiple missions, one of which was named "Ugly Baby," aiming to open a second front in enemy territory.

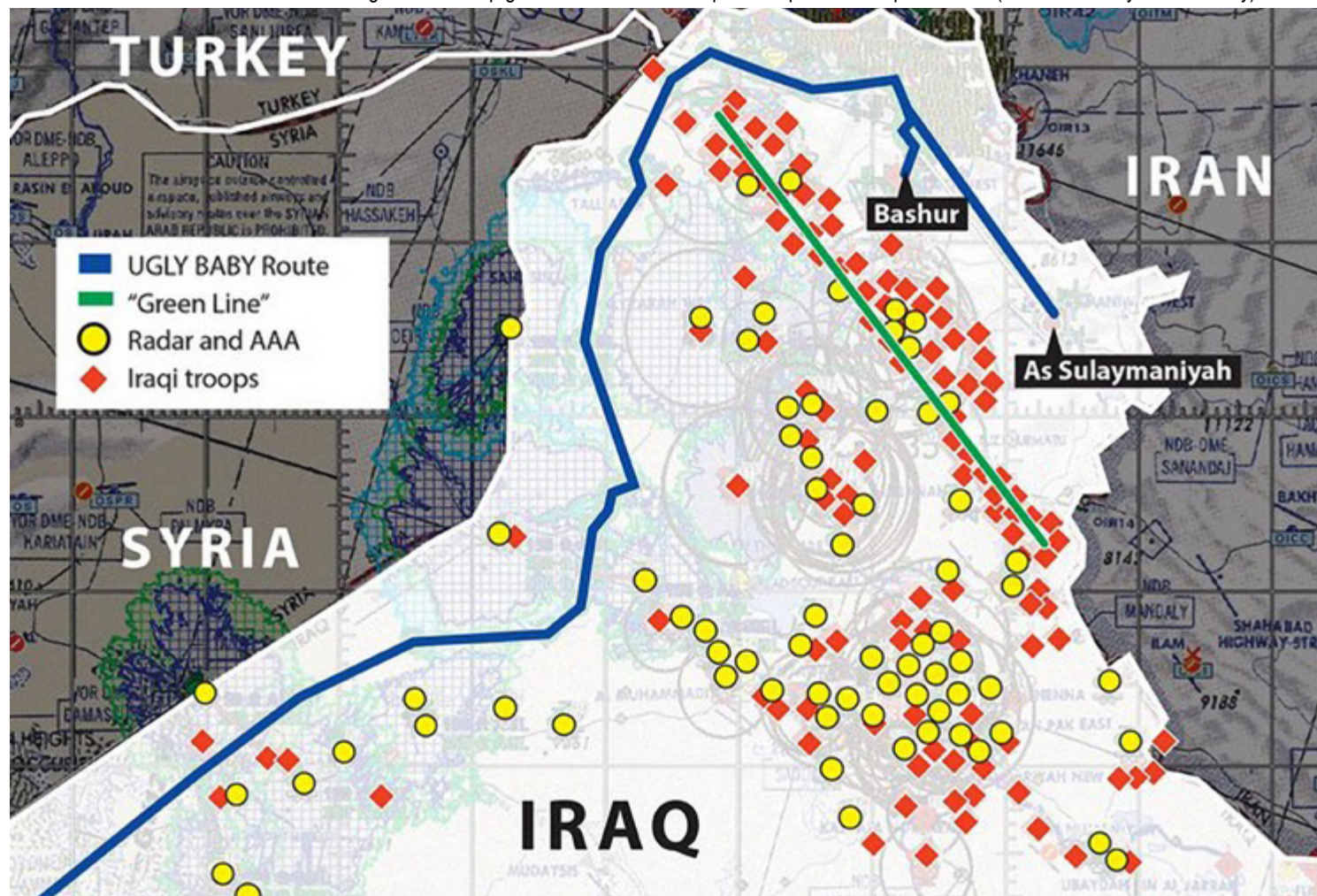
The goal was to insert the majority of two 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) battalions into the country. The mission was to cross through Turkey's airspace under cover of darkness to establish a foothold on the northern border of Iraq. Though a reliable NATO ally,

Turkey feared that OIF might ultimately reinvigorate Kurdish plans for an independent Kurdistan. However, on March 1, 2003, their military was still against the United States utilizing their airspace due to the internal political situation.

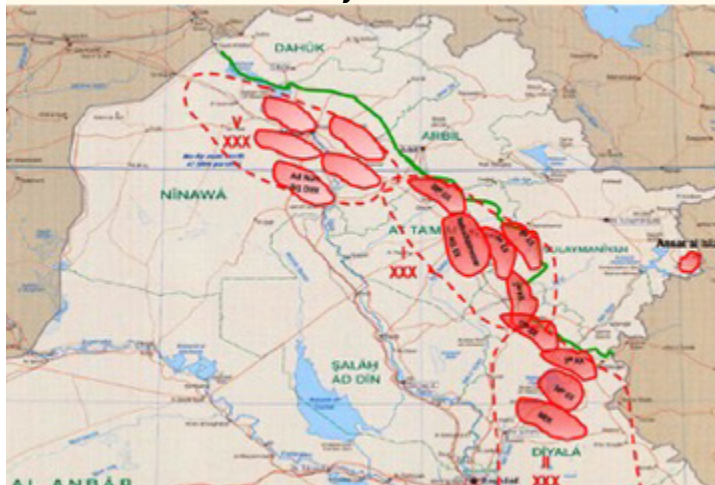
As a result, the Joint Special Operations Aviation Detachment-North (JSOAN-N) and the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N), which included members from the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), started looking for an alternate route into the north. With the help of the United States European Command, Romania offered the U.S. the use of Mihail Kogălniceanu (M.K.) Air Base near Constanta.

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jefferey Elwell, then an Operation Detachment Alpha (ODA) team sergeant with the 10th Special Forces Group at the time, shared his experience during the initial operation. "It was about

The map below shows the route flown north along the western border of Iraq during the mission Ugly Baby on March 22, 2003. The mission intent was to insert ODA teams into two different landing zones to help gain a northern front as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. (Photo Courtesy of U.S. Army)



Enemy Forces



Map of Northern Iraq, March 2003. Red denotes Iraqi positions. The green line is the extent of Peshmerga lines. (Image courtesy of Mark Grdovic, DVIDS)

three days of us trying to get into northern Iraq by flying over Turkish airspace, and each time they would deny our flight," said Elwell, now the Command Chief Warrant Officer for 10th SFG(A). "We had been planning this for months, and we were anxious to get in and get to work."

Planning was underway to establish a new route that would jump from M.K. Air Base, but that added hours of flight time and required more fuel on the already heavily loaded MC-130Hs.

This new route was also a heavily defended airspace which required that operations be conducted at lower elevations to avoid anti-air bombardment. Regardless, it was deemed the only direct route available. What initially had started as three MC-130Hs turned into six, dispersing as much weight as possible for necessary equipment. Members of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army Green Berets would take off in intervals throughout the night to either Bashur Landing Zone (LZ) or Sulaymaniyah LZ, located on the northern border of Iraq.

Jim Donovan, an ODA team sergeant assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG(A), said, "When we flew north on the western border of Iraq, that's when all the Ugly Baby portion really started."

The planes taking off were staggered, which allowed the Iraqis to adjust fire as each plane flew the route to Bashur and Sulaymaniyah L.Z.s. The last few planes received the most contact from anti-air. Most of the flight had been an average ride until the aircrew started to receive enemy fire. At that point, the airplane initiated evasive maneuvers to avoid taking too much damage. During the rollercoaster of a ride, the pilots had to change elevation throughout the flurry of rounds, sometimes reaching nearly 200 ft off the ground and at near top speeds with as many as 60 Green Berets on board.

"You could see tracers and hear all the rounds outside, but we had all the confidence in the Air Force to get us through," Donovan stated.

Donovan also said that at the time, he thought about what they would do if they had to make an emergency landing. He hoped it was in a flat enough area for convenience because everyone on the plane was surrounded by necessary equipment while wearing all the necessary gear they would need.



Green Berets assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) sat in the back of an MC-130H fly along the western border of Iraq during the mission Ugly Baby. The flight was composed of six MC-130Hs loaded with all the necessary equipment and gear they were taking. (Photo by Spc. Steven Alger, Courtesy of U.S. Army)

Contact would come in waves as they passed through embedded anti-air. The sound of rounds impacting the aircraft's fuselage could be heard throughout the flight, and a few stray rounds hit one of the engines, causing fuel and oil to leak. As another engine was struck, the pilots would come on the radio declaring an inflight emergency. Unfortunately, the damaged engine would have the MC-130H land sooner than anticipated. Given the circumstances, the closest and safest place would be to cross the border into Turkey.

"We passed over a small convoy, and they started firing everything from shoulder-fired Surface to Air Missile Systems to pistols and everything in between," said Elwell as he recounted moments from his experience. "The lights came on, and the pilots declared an inflight emergency which would have them divert landing into Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. As the ramp came down, everyone started running as they realized aviation fluid was spilling over the tarmac."

During the night of March 22, 2003, the JSOAD-N would successfully insert 19 U.S. Army Special Forces teams along with 4 Company Headquarters elements between Bashur and Sulaymaniyah L.Z.s. No casualties or injuries were sustained throughout the high-risk flight, which ultimately caused Turkey to rethink its decision to allow the U.S. to utilize its airspace to send much-needed supplies to the northern border.

Ugly Baby was remembered as the longest low-level infiltration via aircraft since the Second World War.

"That next day, we proceeded to load up and continue through the mountains to later coordinate close air support down on Iraqi positions across the green line alongside peshmerga fighters," Elwell said. "They were excellent and very brave, and many had sacrificed their lives alongside us to liberate Iraq." ❖

NVA GUNSHIP TRAP

By Randy Bender and Gordon Denniston

MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observation Group)

The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) was unable to successfully invade across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam so they created a supply line through Laos and Cambodia. They violated the treaty they had signed and perpetrated a genocide that continues even today. The communist murdered millions of innocent people in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia but the historians and news reporters hide vital facts about that war.

The United States supported the South Vietnamese to repulse that invasion. One important group that was created to attack the North Vietnamese and Chinese was MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observation Group). This was a secret clandestine group operating behind enemy lines in Laos and Cambodia. These teams were inserted in the middle of concentrations of thousands of NVA soldiers. The NVA soldiers were moving men, weapons, ammunitions, and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and later through Cambodia into South Vietnam. These small SOG teams were inserted by helicopter to interdict the communist who were using the Ho Chi Minh Trail. MACV-SOG used all means available to disrupt and kill the communist. The NVA received arms, supplies, and ammunition produced by communist countries around the world. This was the Cold War and Special Forces men were fighting the spread of communism all around the world.

Helicopters were essential to the MACV-SOG mission. Helicopter crews provided transport for teams in and out of enemy territory. Helicopters also provided aerial reconnaissance and gunship support. The U.S.A.F. provided tactical air support and strategic bombing with B-52's. When a SOG team found themselves surrounded and receiving heavy enemy fire they called for help. They always seemed to get in trouble and the helicopter gunships were usually the first to arrive and provide strafing and rocket fire on the NVA.

MACV-SOG soldiers faced the greatest danger of any group during the Vietnam War while they inflicted massive damage to the North Vietnamese war effort. There were two types of teams: 1. Reconnaissance or 2. Hatchet Force. The majority of men on these teams were native to the Central Highlands of South Vietnam and these men were called Montagnards. The photo in the heading of this page shows a Special Forces sergeant with his Montagnard team members.

The map at right on this page shows the area where this mission took place on 10 April 1967. There were additional areas in Laos and Cambodia not shown on this map where MACV-SOG also operated.

Most historians, news reporters, college professors, and documentary creators have been promoting communist propaganda and lies about the Vietnam War for over fifty years. They teach the opposite of truth



MACV-SOG FOB Team (Photo by Lloyd Adams)



10 April 1967 mission map

and hide the most vital facts about the Vietnam War. The truth is that the communists in North Vietnam created a Soviet styled dictatorship that operated using murder and terror to invaded Laos and South Vietnam.

Note: Communists consistently use treaties as a tool to advantage their position and then ignore the treaties they signed to force an innocent population to submit to communism. We rarely hear the historians, and others explain that there were substantial treaty violations by the communist that started the Vietnam War: [“Indochina - Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indo-China, July 21, 1954.”](#)

“FINAL DECLARATION, dated the 21st of July 1954, of the Geneva Conference on the problem of restoring peace in Indo-China, in which the representatives of Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, France, Laos, the People’s Republic of China, the State of Viet-Nam, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America took part.”

“[The International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos](#) is an international agreement signed in Geneva on July 23, 1962, between 14 states and Laos. It was a result of the International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question which lasted from May 16, 1961, to July 23, 1962.”

As these treaties were negotiated and signed, the communists were already actively violating every element of these treaties. Communist China, the Soviet Union and North Vietnam were moving massive numbers of men, weapons, ammunition, and supplies from North Vietnam into Laos and then into South Vietnam. MACV-SOG men were collecting evidence of these communist violations and taking actions against that communist invasion.

During the Vietnam War the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) feared the American gunship helicopters that delivered lethal fire power on the NVA enemy troops. One example of this gunship devastation occurred on 10 April 1967, but these gunships found themselves caught in a deadly NVA trap. The only thing that could save the Americans was their tactics, religious providence, and quick responses. The gunships were overloaded and their maximum speed was about 120 knots while flying straight and level. Each gunship had two miniguns. Combined these two miniguns were capable of firing 4,800 rounds per minute. Each aircraft carried fourteen 2.75 inch folding fin rockets with high explosive warheads. The two door gunners each had an M-60 machine gun that could fire 500 rounds per minute. This small package of firepower was vulnerable to enemy ground fire and the larger anti-aircraft guns could easily blow these helicopters out of the sky. These helicopters had no armor plates to protect the engine or transmission. Operating these aircraft in the middle of thousands of enemy troops could easily be shot down forty-five miles away from any friendly installations. The aircraft were out in the middle of enemy territory. If these aircraft were shot down the crews would have been brutally tortured and painfully executed on the spot.

These two Army gunships were usually engaged in close air support of MACV-SOG teams fighting in Laos. MACV-SOG were secret teams fighting the NVA by going into Laos and Cambodia. MACV-SOG men had a dangerous mission where they were inserted into the Ho Chi Minh Trail area to interrupt the communist flow of weapons, men, supplies, and ammunition going into South Vietnam. The mission on this day was challenging but provided us with the freedom to independently search and destroy the NVA. Find the enemy and kill them. This was a difficult objective since the communists were operating under a dense canopy jungle and they were skilled in the use of camouflage. Our instruction were to fly into Laos and connect with a Forward Air Controller (FAC) by radio. On this day, the FAC thought he had observed indications that the NVA had established their storage and depot of supplies and weapons in this area. The FAC could not confirm that the enemy was concentrated in his target area so we were requested

to go down for closer observations. These areas could be deceiving where it just looks like undisturbed thick jungle. There were few open areas covered with smaller trees and elephant grass.

The FAC identified the suspicious area that was within of a long wide valley surrounded by mountains on each side. The valley was not completely surrounded by mountains. There were two openings at each end of the valley that gave a break between the mountain ranges. This mission should have been fairly easy to complete and we could have avoided any potential enemy ground fire if we remained at an incredibly low altitude and kept flying at maximum speed. When the enemy is hiding in the jungle it is extremely difficult to see them because our view at that speed of the ground was a blur. If we do not see smoke or someone standing in the open it is unlikely that we could spot them. If they had built structures or left a vehicle in view then the enemy could have been spotted. Our UH-1C gunships were under-powered but equipped with effective weapons to kill the enemy. We would be vastly outnumbered and the enemy had hundreds of weapons but we had amazing firepower.



In the photo above, minigun sight that remotely controlled the guns. The lower handle had the trigger on the top and below was a trigger that activated the movement of the gun to point at the target.



In the photo at left, the rocket sight in the down position.



The business end of a mini-gun
by Gordon Denniston



119th Assault Helicopter Company—Crocodile Gunship



UH-1C Gunship weapon

Photo above: the complete weapon delivery system. Shows both 2.75 in. rocket tubes and minigun with feeder chute for 7.62 mm ammunition.



UH-1C Gunship Rocket Sight

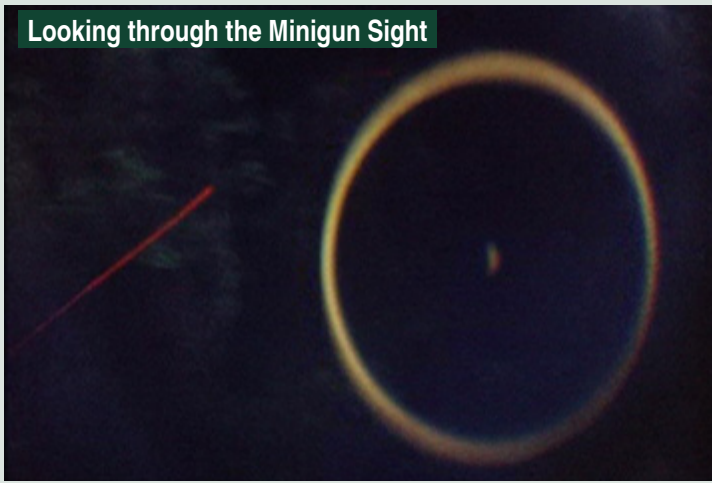


Minigun Tracers and Sight

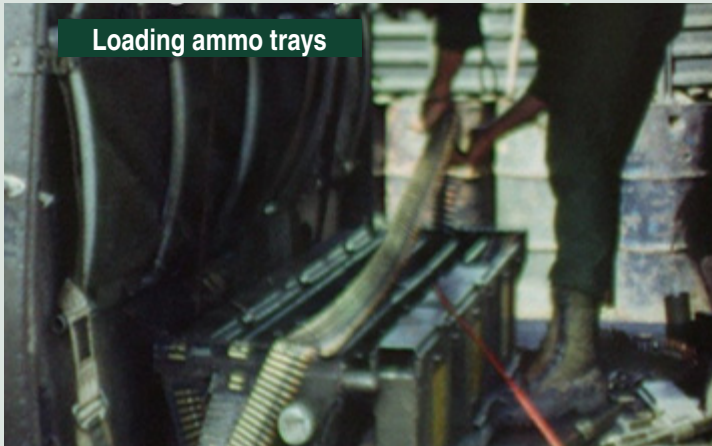


Minigun 2,400 Rounds per Minute

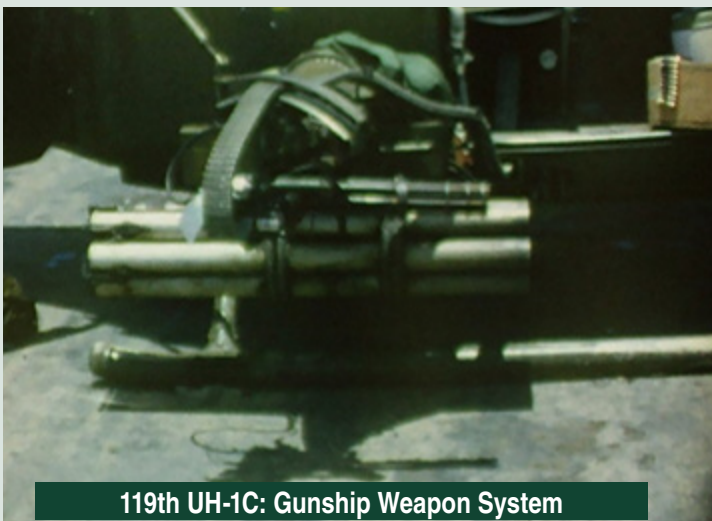
We used our Minigun Sight to point the guns in the general target area but quickly used the tracers to move the fire toward the intended target.



Looking through the Minigun Sight



Loading ammo trays



119th UH-1C: Gunship Weapon System



2.75" rockets with High Explosive Quick Fuse

We were constantly reloading since it only took minutes to fire all of our ammunition and rockets. After we had unloaded our ammunition, we must hurry back to reload and refuel.

To get a better view of the area we could have slowed down or climbed up to 200 feet. That temptation would have provided great visibility but that is the best way to get yourself killed.

If you want to live you must get down extremely close to the ground (about 3 or 4 feet above ground) or fly between the trees and keep up maximum speed. These are basic gunship rules of survival.

Photo below is beautiful valley of jungle. Nothing to see here.



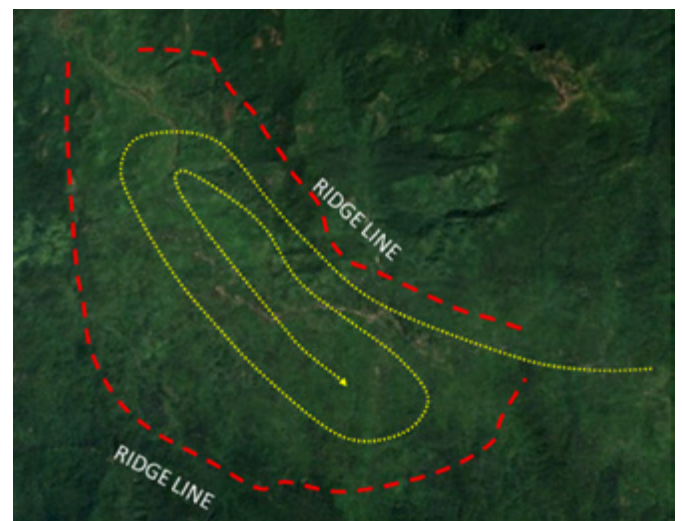
Beautiful green jungle with nobody home. But are they?

We started our high speed dive into the area to look for communists.

Our Forward Air Controller had ask us to go down and look for NVA activity. The ridge line shown in the red dashed lines surrounded the valley of interest.

The dotted yellow line shows our path of flight to searching for any NVA concentration of troops or equipment. We flew around the valley at low level four or five times looking for communist. After three or four circles around the valley, we did not see any indications of enemy presence.

The FAC asked us to take one more look at the area.





Capt. Kevin O'Sullivan



CW-2 George P. Garrett

Gunship Team Leader was **Crocodile "6"**: Capt. Kevin O'Sullivan –Aircraft Commander, CW2 George Garrett – Co-Pilot, Pete Forchini – Crew Chief, and Dwight Strahan – Door Gunner.

The wingman aircraft (SN: 0588) **Crocodile "3"**: CW2 Gordon Denniston – Aircraft Commander, CW2 Don Gaude – Copilot, Randy Bender – Crew Chief, and Russel Reed – Door Gunner.

Pete Markisich was our usual Door Gunner but he was on vacation that day. The Forward Air Controller had a pair of A-1E's and more F-4 Phantoms circling high above the area waiting to see if we found a large concentration of NVA or their supply depot. The plan was, when we found the enemy, the Tactical Air would drop down and bomb the communists.

Our tactics made the difference between living and dying.

We had gunship rules:

Never fly in the "Dead Man Zone", Never fly in trail formations (180°)—always be off set from the lead aircraft, do not fly parallel with terrain features like ridge lines, rivers or roads, never overfly the same area on the ground, do not go back to see what you hit or to resee something, and only engage the enemy 90° to the line of fire between the enemy and friendly troops if any friendly troops are in the area. In Laos we were going up against massive numbers of troops with full-automatic AK-47's and countless NVA big anti-aircraft guns. This could get dangerous.



Vietnam, 1967—left to right, Pete Markisich, Lyman "Don" Gaude, Randy Bender, and Gordon Denniston

The NVA had powerful anti-aircraft guns and they knew how to use them. The photo, below left at the bottom of the page, is a Quad 14.5mm, and in the one below at top right is a group of 12.7mm guns.

The photo at the bottom right of this page is a Russian 37mm gun.

In addition to the larger anti-aircraft guns the hundreds of NVA troops had AK-47's capable of full-automatic with 30 round magazines.



The 37-mm AA gun—AAA shells had red or green tracers and gave off a sonic "pop" or "whoomph" as they passed near aircraft.



(Over-Loaded) UH-1C—Running Takeoff

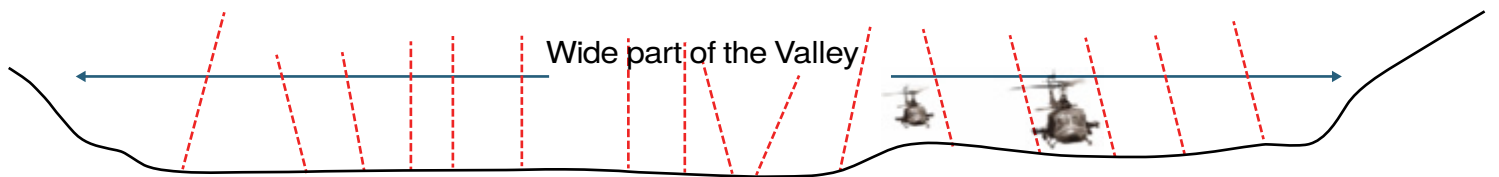


Sliding down the runway—overloaded.

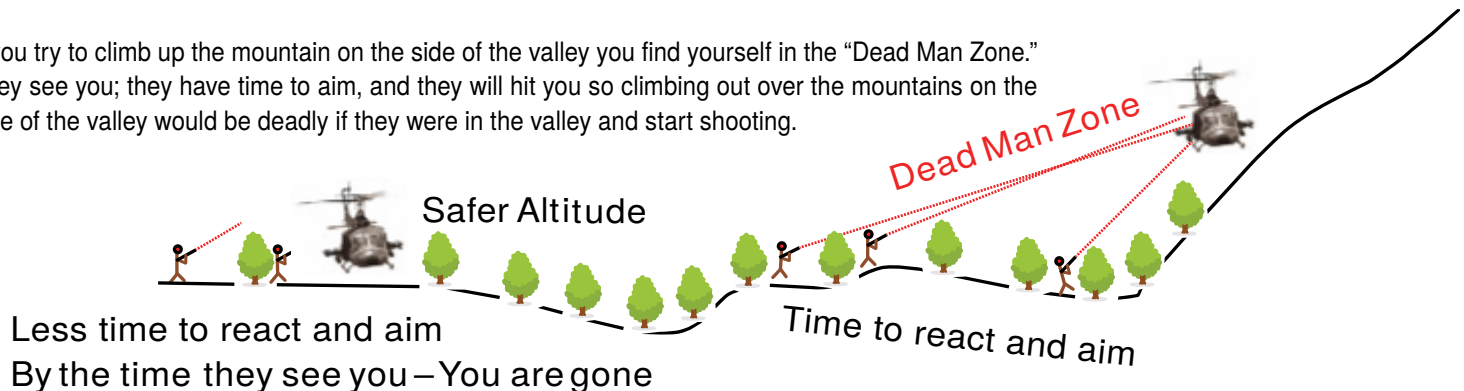
We were going into an area with thousands of enemy troops and we only had two over loaded helicopter gunships and eight men.

You can see in the photos above that taking off with 500 lbs. overloaded above the max gross weight designed for our aircraft was a challenge and our helicopter could not even hover. That required that we make running takeoffs sliding down the runway to gain enough speed to pass through translational lift. It was difficult to stay up in the air until we burned off fuel to reduce weight.

The danger of flying over the Ho Chi Minh Trail cannot be overstated. On one of my missions two gunships in front of me were both shot down in a ball of fire. Laos was a dangerous place for all of us. I was thankful that I was in a helicopter and not going in on the ground. Our tactics were essential to our survival. As air crews we must consider every angle the enemy could use and the terrain could either help us or get us killed. We were going down in a valley flying at a low level that would make it difficult for the enemy to hit us. When you are incredibly low the enemy has less time to know where you are coming from and they only have seconds to prepare, aim, and shoot. When they do shoot, they often miss. If you climb up, they have a good chance to hit you.



If you try to climb up the mountain on the side of the valley you find yourself in the “Dead Man Zone.” They see you; they have time to aim, and they will hit you so climbing out over the mountains on the side of the valley would be deadly if they were in the valley and start shooting.



After flying around looking for the enemy with no luck, Captain O’Sullivan decided on a bright idea. He called me on the radio and said I should shift off to the side behind him because he was going to throw out a hand grenade and “rattle their cage.” I never carried hand grenades on my aircraft because someone may accidentally set them off. What we did not know was there was a division of NVA down there hiding and hoping we did not see them. They saw us and they all got ready to shoot us down if we started shooting at them. The NVA all had orders not to fire on us unless we shot at them. The NVA were all down there waiting for the chance to shoot down a pair of helicopters.

That hand grenade was magic. When it exploded hundreds of NVA opened up on us with their AK-47’s. They were everywhere down there and they all started shooting at our helicopters. I can assure you that when AK-47’s are shooting at you from close range you can definitely hear them and see the muzzle flashes. The NVA came out from concealment so they were standing at remarkably close range (25 feet) pointing at us as they fired. We could now clearly see them since they came out in the open. They had plenty of ammunition and they let it fly. We were receiving automatic fire from every direction.

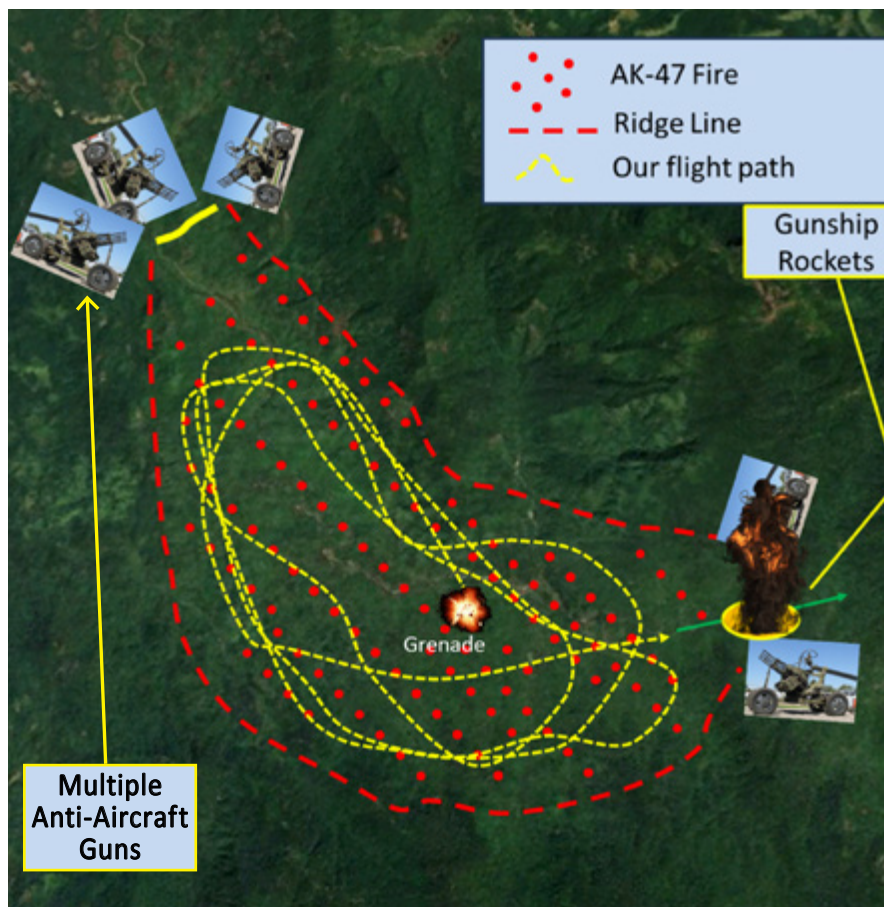
Sir Winston Churchill: *"There is nothing so exhilarating as to be shot at and missed."* Churchill may call it exhilarating but I would call it terrifying. It was like we had gone to a shooting gallery at the state fair and we were dressed up as the targets.

We were flying around at close range and our miniguns were killing NVA in large numbers. Our 2.75in. rockets were killing groups of communists. Our door gunners were knocking down the enemy at close range. Our door gunners had become highly skilled in shooting from the air into enemy on the ground. It was a relief to me when my door gunner took out an NVA soldier who had pointed his AK-47 at me while firing full-automatic from 25 yards. Then we received a radio call from the FAC telling us that we were getting shot at because he could see hundreds of muzzle flashes down in the valley. I doubt that we even answered his call. We were busy flying around in circles and shooting the enemy when we quickly ran out of minigun ammo and Capt. O'Sullivan was completely out of rockets so it was time to leave. Our door gunners had shot up all of their ammo and they were using our M-16's and pistols as a last resort. It was past time to quickly depart the area so Croc -6 headed to one of the open areas at the mouth of the valley because we did not dare to fly over the mountains that surrounded the valley. The only way out available were the two opening at each end of the valley.

Panic started to set in and things turned serious when Croc-6 approached the opening at the end of the valley because the NVA had a plan. They had set up a bank of anti-aircraft guns and they were shooting straight up in the air creating a fan of solid bullets for us to fly through. We could clearly see the wall of solid tracers straight in front of us. Flying through that wall of fire would have been instant death. Both

aircraft made an immediate "U" turn and headed to the other end of the valley only to discover that they had that exit blocked with another wall of fire. As we flew around looking for a way out of the valley the NVA troops in the valley continued firing at us from every direction. There we were flying around the valley getting shot at by hundreds of NVA and we had nothing to shoot back. Now we were just targets.

I always like to save a few rockets so I had two that I had not fired. As we flew around the valley getting shot at, I called "Croc "6" on the radio to let him know that I had two rockets and he could fall in behind me because I planned to head into the wall of fire. I told him to fall in close behind me and I would try to put a hole in the wall of fire. We headed straight toward the end of the valley and the NVA started firing their anti-aircraft guns. Their tracers gave me a clear view of their location and I closed in on their guns. I was closing in fast and so close that I could clearly see the men operating the guns and I watched as they fired straight up into the air waiting for me to fly into their wall of fire. When rockets fire, they are not armed until they reach a certain distance out from my aircraft. The fuse senses the G-forces for a number of seconds then it is armed. I can fire close but if I am too close the rocket will not explode. I needed to be close enough to definitely hit their guns—quick enough so they cannot react to my attack but far enough away so my rockets are armed. When my rockets exploded, they hit perfectly. They destroyed the men and guns in an instance and blew debris, dirt, trees, and the enemy into the air. As I flew through the hole in the wall of fire the dirt and debris had been blown high in the air - so high that it was coming down as I passed through it. "Croc "6" was close behind me so we both made it out without taking any hits.



[Click to watch Gordon Denniston's video "119th AHC in support of SOG Crocodile UH1-C Gunship CROC 3 \(Gordon Denniston\)" on YouTube Channel @sfachapter78.](#)

This video covers a period of time in 1967 when the 119th AHC provided support for MACV-SOG at FOB2 in Kontum for top secret operations out of Dak To into Laos. The footage was mostly filmed by Denniston, call sign CROC 3, but also includes shots from crew members Raleigh Hewitt, Don Gaude, Randy Bender, and Pete Markisich.

Read Gordon Denniston's article about the contributions and organization of the air assets of MACV-SOG from the April 2015 *Sentinel* at <https://shorturl.at/1llcC>.

As soon as we escaped, we headed straight back to Dak To because we were empty and low on fuel. The Forward Air Controller directed the A-1Es and F-4s to roll in on the area to destroy everything in that valley. We had a successful day.

With the massive amount of enemy anti-aircraft fire that day it was a miracle that both aircraft survived. If you crashed the best outcome would be for you to die instantly. If you survived you would have been captured, tortured, and murdered after experiencing a horrible death. The NVA soldiers were not interested in torturing you for information they took joy in your torture and treated it as their entertainment. You rarely hear historians explain this reality.

THE VIETNAM POW VETERAN: IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CAPTIVITY by Edna J. Hunter, Ph.D.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA063647.pdf>

The number of POWs returned from the war in Southeast Asia (766) was very small indeed when compared with the numbers held captive in Korea (7,140) or during World War II (130,201). The men returned from Southeast Asia (as of 31 December 1976) were a highly select group compared with the POWs of earlier conflicts. The majority were officers, and as a group they were older and more highly educated.

Of those men captured in the North, all but one were air crew members. Five hundred ninety-one Americans, including 25 civilians, were repatriated in early Spring, 1973. An additional 84 men, held prisoner anywhere from 36 hours to five and one-half years, escaped or were released prior to 1973. The military group who returned in 1973 included 325 Air Force, 77 Army, 26 Marine Corps, and 138 Navy POWs. [They murdered all the other POWs]. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Denniston served with the 119th in 1966 and 1967. He returned to Vietnam for a second tour in 1969 and was assigned as General Stillwell's command pilot. Upon DEROS and ETS, he finished his education at the University of Alabama graduating in 1973.

In 1975 he became an instructor, pilot, and test pilot for Bell Helicopter under contract to the Shah's Monarchy of Iran. Escaping Iran (under "extreme" circumstances) after the Ayatollah's revolution, he returned to the U.S. where he became Director of Quality Control for Fairchild Republic, on the build of the A-10 in New York.

From 1984–1993 Gordon was Director of Quality Control for Avco/Textron in Nashville charged with building the wings for the B-1 and C-5. Since 1993, he has run his own company providing project management services in technology and hospital revenue cycle operations for a number of large hospital corporations.



Special Operations Association and MACV-SOG Recon Green Berets present 30k to SFA Chapter 38 for Green Beret Vietnam Veterans Memorial

On Saturday, September 21, 2024, at the 5th Special Forces Group Hall of Heroes on Ft. Campbell, on behalf of the Special Operations Association and fellow MACV-SOG Recon Green Berets, Marcus Whitt, pictured above at left, George "The Troll" Sternberg, center, and John Stryker "Tilt" Meyer, had the honor of presenting a \$30,000 check to Special Forces Chapter 38's for their campaign to raise \$350,000 to build a Green Beret Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This memorial will honor the more than 750 Green Berets killed in action during the Vietnam War, and over 90 Green Berets are still listed as Missing In Action. The memorial will also honor more than 50 SF SOG veterans who disappeared in Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam.

SFA Chapter 38 is running point on this fundraising campaign that is near and dear to every Special Forces soldier who served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and the subsequent soldiers who followed after us.

Please consider donating to this honorable cause at:
<https://www.sfa38.org/products/gabriel-field-project-donation>.



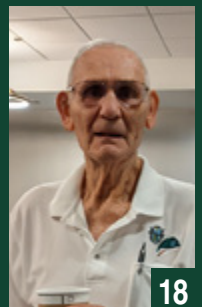
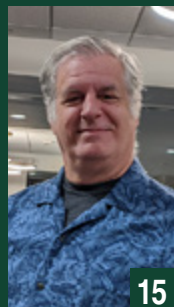
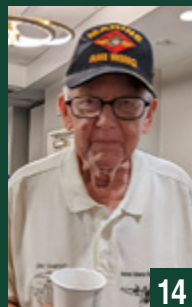
Left to right, 5th SF Group Commanding Officer Col. Gabriel Szody, SFA Chapter 38 President Joel Pruiitt, and SOA President Doug Godshall, at the 5th SF Group Hall of Heroes on Ft. Campbell. In the background are displays and artifacts from the 5th Special Forces Group history of its time in Vietnam, including a display on MACV-SOG.

SFA Chapter 78 September 2024 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Debra Holm, Doreen Matsumoto, and Mary Cruz


Guest Speaker, SFC Christopher Wood US Army National Guard, CAARNG

1 Guest speaker SFC Christopher Wood, Team Sergeant for C Company, 1st Bn, 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), who is also deeply involved with Cal Guard SF recruiting, spoke to the group about his efforts to obtain former C-Company members willing to share about their experience in a video interview. The purpose of the video would be to educate candidates and to help them get a sense of the lineage of C-Co and SF in general. SF Original Richard Simonian was the first volunteer. SFC Wood also shared about the challenges and successes of SF recruiting efforts and updated the group about current C-Co issues. **2 3** SGT Ricardo DaCosta of C-Company set up an interview station and was on hand to film. **4** Chapter president Aaron Brandenburg led the meeting. **5** AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto let the group in the opening invocation. **6** Chapter vice president James McLanahan checked in before leaving to represent the chapter at American Legion Post 283's Spirit Walk. **7** Jim Lockhart and Robert Casillas catch up. **8** Chapter secretary Gary Macnamara hard at work. **9** Mike Jameson and James Carter with signed copies of SOG Dynamite. **10** Jim Duffy **11** Bob Crebbs **12** Steve Bric **13** AVAG member Mary Cruz **14 15** Meeting guests, Dave Sharbutt, long-time friend of Art Dolick with whom he went through SF Reserves training during the time of COL Bernardi, and Will Shaber, a Navy veteran, friend of Erik Berg **16** Frank Boyd **17** Ramon Rodriguez **18** Erik Berg



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