



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 12 • DECEMBER 2024

## GREEN BERETS REUNITE SFACON & SOAR AAR Issue

**Parachuting Into Laos  
From 400 Ft Altitude**

**No Reserve 'Chute—No Helmet**

**A Factual Account of a Special Warfare Mission**

**IVS Strove to Better Laos  
While War Raged**

***The Contractor Medic*  
Book Review and Excerpt**



# SENTINEL

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 12 • DECEMBER 2024

## From the Editor



How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

We begin this *Sentinel* with a heartfelt description of the meaning of the **Global Gathering of Green Beret: SFACON 2024** cruise by Chapter 78 President Aaron Brandenburg. Our cover photo shows the central atrium of the Carnival Paradise cruise ship. This is followed by pictures from Aaron and Dennis DeRosia, a fellow chapter member, of happy events during the Bahamas Cruise from Tampa. A good time was had by all.

*Sentinel* reader Bob Ramsey, from Chapter 22, contributed “**Parachuting Into Laos From 400 Ft. Altitude No Reserve ‘Chute—No Helmet’**,” his story about a secret high-risk SOG mission into North-east Laos in 1970, when the NVA were getting so proficient at denying entry to SOG teams, or hunting them down quickly after insertion, that the four-man team risked a moonless night jump from **400 feet** with no reserve chutes or helmets. Of course, they landed right in the middle of the enemy and needed to try to make a quick escape.

Meanwhile, on the ground in different parts of Laos, the International Voluntary Services, an offshoot of USAID, continued to help the Laotians, armed only with a wide range of construction, farming, and teaching experience. This occurred from 1959 until the fall of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in 1975. In “**IVS Strove to Better Laos While War Raged**,” frequent *Sentinel* contributor Marc Yablonka tells us about their efforts.

*Sentinel* reader Victor Hundahl wrote a book entitled **The Contract Medic** about his years as a contractor medic in Southeast Asia and other places. I reviewed his interesting book, and Victor shares an excerpt from the book, which includes some of the tense situations he found himself in.

Finally, we turn it over to another frequent *Sentinel* contributor, Greg Walker, who tells us about the **Special Operations Association Reunion (SOAR)** in Las Vegas. Included in this recap is the keynote speech by SOG veteran MG (Ret.) Ken Bowra.

There was no October chapter meeting, leaving space for more SFACON and SOAR pictures. Our November meeting promises to be very interesting, featuring guest speaker COL (Ret.) Frank K. Sobchak, PhD, author of the soon-to-be released *Training for Victory: U.S. Special Forces Advisory Operations from El Salvador to Afghanistan*.

Please enjoy and keep sending us your stories of your SF experiences. ❖

How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

### IN THIS ISSUE:

From the President .....	1
SFA Con 2024 .....	2
Parachuting Into Laos From 400 Ft. Altitude No Reserve ‘Chute— No Helmet’ .....	8
IVS Strove to Better Laos While War Raged .....	10
<i>The Contractor Medic</i> by Victor A. Hundahl — Book Review and Excerpt.....	14
SOAR 2024 .....	17
SFA Chapter 78 2025 Meeting Schedule .....	22

FRONT COVER: The cruise ship Carnival Paradise midship atrium with the regimental flag and group flashes. The site of SFACON 2024, the Carnival Paradise departed from Port Tampa Bay just days following the port resuming operations after Hurricane Milton. (Photo by Aaron Brandenburg)

Please visit [specialforces78.com](https://specialforces78.com)

Follow us:



### CHAPTER OFFICERS:

<b>President</b> Aaron Brandenburg	<b>Chaplain</b> Si Rangel
<b>Vice President</b> James McLanahan	<b>Corporate Ambassadors At Large</b> Jim Cragg Len Fein
<b>Secretary</b> Gary Macnamara	<b>Sentinel Editor</b> How Miller
<b>Treasurer</b> Richard Simonian	<b>Immediate Past President</b> Greg Horton
<b>Sergeant At Arms/ Quartermaster</b> Mark Miller	<b>Project Officer</b> Don Gonneville
<b>Coordinator of ROTC Program</b> Gary Macnamara (Temporary)	

Funding for the SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel is provided by

### VETERANS AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM

A program of American Veterans Assistance Group

888-923-VETS (8387) • [VeteransAffordableHousing.org](https://VeteransAffordableHousing.org)

The *Sentinel* is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California — *art direction and design by Debra Holm, Dinwiddie Holm Graphics*. 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 at [sfachapter78@gmail.com](mailto:sfachapter78@gmail.com).



# From the President | December 2024



Aaron Brandenburg  
President SFA Ch. 78

The Brotherhood of the Green Berets is more than just a slogan; it is a living legacy, woven through generations of Special Forces soldiers and their families. This bond, forged in the fires of intense training, deployments, and shared sacrifice, transcends time and individual experiences. It is a community built on the values of duty, honor, and commitment to one another, a bond that extends far beyond the battlefield. The wives of the Green Berets, often the unsung heroes, share in this journey in profound and meaningful

ways. For them, it's not just about supporting their husbands in their missions; it's about raising families, sharing in life's milestones, and forging deep friendships with other "team wives" who understand the unique challenges of life in the Special Forces.

Our wives often find ourselves living in a parallel world. The rhythm of life is punctuated by long deployments, uncertain homecomings, and the constant ebb and flow of military assignments. These challenges are not easily understood by those outside of the community, but within it, there is a sense of camaraderie and understanding that binds us together. Our wives raised our children side by side, not just as neighbors but as sisters in arms. They supported one another through births, birthdays, graduations, and sometimes grief. In those moments, they were more than just spouses—They were a community, a family. The challenges that they faced only made their bonds stronger, and the shared experiences of raising children in this environment fostered a unique sense of solidarity and trust. They understood each other's fears and joys in a way that only fellow military spouses can.

As GB's, we live lives filled with challenges that are hard for most people to imagine. Special Forces soldiers are trained to do things most will never have to do—working in the most hostile environments, engaging in high-risk missions, and enduring physical and emotional hardships that most of the world will never fully understand. But behind every Green Beret is a support system, a partner who carries the weight of the family's stability in their absence, who provides strength and resilience when their soldiers are away. Our wives knew that their role was as essential to the success of the mission as was our roles in combat. It's a bond that was not always visible but always present—one that helped us go into dangerous situations with confidence, knowing that our families were being cared for and supported.

When we come together, especially in a setting like the Global Gathering of Green Berets, that sense of camaraderie and shared experiences becomes even more profound. This gathering, hosted aboard the Carnival ship Paradise, was an extraordinary event that allowed us to connect not just as individuals, but as a collective family. It was an opportunity to come together, celebrate our shared history, and honor the sacrifices that have been made by so many over the years. For both young and seasoned families, it was a chance to create lasting memories and reaffirm the bonds that tie us all together.

The Global Gathering was not just an event; it was a celebration of what it means to be part of this incredible community. As we gathered on the ship, there was a profound sense of joy and excitement. For the newer generations of GB's, it was an opportunity to learn from those who had walked this path before them, to hear stories of sacrifice, resilience, and perseverance. For those of us who had been part of this community for many years, it was a chance to reconnect with old friends and forge new relationships with others who shared our experiences.

One of the most powerful aspects of this gathering was the way it brought together people from all walks of life and from all corners of the Special Forces community. The Global Gathering of Green Berets served as a powerful bridge between generations, bringing together both young families and weathered veterans to share experiences, wisdom, and camaraderie. By uniting soldiers and their families across different eras, the event fostered a sense of continuity and solidarity, ensuring that the legacy of the Green Berets remains strong for years to come. May it have been watching a comedy show or sitting on the Lido deck with old friends, we were all part of something bigger than ourselves. The event was a reminder that the Special Forces family extends far beyond the soldiers who wear the Green Beret. It includes our wives, children, and all those who support and sustain us.

A heartfelt thank you is due to the organizations and individuals who made this unique experience possible, namely Kevin Harry, Pete Tingstrom, Bonnie and Carlie, SFA and SFLI and lastly, a heartfelt thank you to the Carnival Cruise line and the staff. Of course, this event would not have been possible without the efforts of the countless volunteers and organizers who worked behind the scenes. Their tireless dedication to ensuring that every detail was perfect helped make the Global Gathering of Green Berets an unforgettable experience for all involved. From coordinating travel and accommodations to organizing activities and events, the team behind the gathering showed an extraordinary level of care and attention to detail.

The Global Gathering of Green Berets was more than just a convention; it was a celebration of our shared experiences, our shared values, and the unbreakable bonds that connect us. It was a reminder that the Special Forces community is not just a military unit affiliation—it is a family, and this family spans generations. It is a brotherhood that continues to thrive and grow, and an enduring testament to the strength, resilience, and dedication of those who serve, and those who support them.

In the end, the SFCO 2024 Gathering of the Green Berets was an enormous success and has raised the bar for future conventions to come. ❖

DOL

Aaron Brandenburg,

President Special Forces Association Chapter 78

# SFACON 2024

October 19-24, 2024

Tampa, FL • Carnival Paradise

Photos by Aaron Brandenburg and Dennis DeRosia



## Embarkation Day



Aaron and Kathy Brandenburg—pre-departure on a balcony with a view of the cruise ships.



Gary Sinise and other members of the Lt. Dan Band provided entertainment.



Onboard departure cake cutting, left to right, Carnival Paradise Captain Fulvio Persico, Gary Sinise, Kevin Harry, President of the SFA Legacy Initiatives, and Christine Duffy, Carnival Cruise Lines President.

# Day 2: At Sea



For Aaron, third from the left in the back row, along with Chris Bell, second from right, the convention offered the opportunity to spend time having catching up and having fun with old teammates.



“Sister Liv,” performed on multiple occasions throughout the cruise.



# Day 3: Freeport, The Bahamas



10th SFG convention attendees met on the Sun Deck for a group photo.



Aaron enjoyed a beach day in Freeport.



SF Distillers and Vintners night. At right, Greg and Lindsay Chatham, owners of Tributum Wine, serve up several of their vintages.



MSG (Ret.) Chris Bell, above left, helped serve up several of the special libations donated for the attendees enjoyment.



RJ Casey, co-owner of Four Branches Bourbon, shares the company's history and product with attendees.

# Day 4: Nassau, The Bahamas



At left, Tom Meissgeier of Chapter 88, center, Chip Bunner (7th & 20th SFG), the owner of The Bearded Clam, and at right, Dennis DeRosia of Chapter 78.



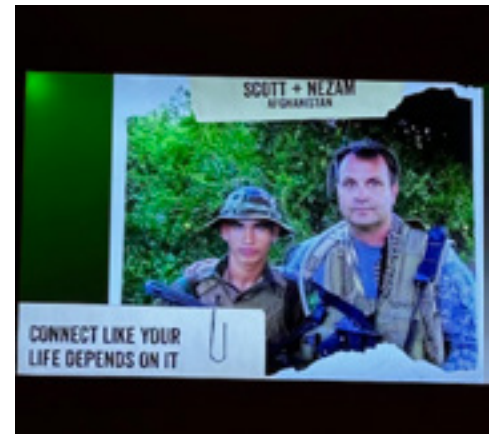
Left, Chapter 78's Jim Cragg, complete with parrot, and Aaron Brandenburg look like a pair of old salts on Pirate Theme Dress Night. Center, Kathy Brandenburg joined in on the fun.

# Day 5: At Sea

## SFA General Membership meeting



Left, new SFA President, CW4 Chris Wilkerson, presents priorities for the coming year, including recruiting younger members, The Drop magazine, and many more. Center, Mike Hurst, SFA Treasurer, gave a financial update assuring the Association it is financially strong and currently about to go through an audit. Right, Director of Communication, Doug Livermore, outlined his initiatives to better present the value added benefit of SFA membership.



Above left, Lt. Col. Scott Mann provided a riveting recounting of how the Pineapple Express was initiated and examples of those they were able to get out.

Above center, "What if Oct 7 was just a dress rehearsal for the real show?" Scott Mann spoke of an alarming possibility to be aware of.

Above right, Scott and Nezam, an Afghan commando he was able to get out of Afghanistan.

Below left, a scene from the movie "Last Out", Scott Mann's very moving play/movie which he both wrote and played a starring roll.





Chapter 78's Rob Pugh, Aaron Brandenburg, and Dennis DeRosia ready to attend the Convention Banquet.



Carli Hurst, for her outstanding job in handling of all the conventions travel arrangements, was welcomed as a new Honorary member of the Regiment.



Pete Tingstom, SFA Vice President, acted as MC at multiple functions and did an awesome job of keeping the conference on schedule.



The St. Neri (Gold) medal was awarded to Eric Hyde, and was accepted posthumously by family members.



SFA Convention Banquet guest speaker Chris North.

## Upcoming SFA Conventions

2025 – Las Vegas, NV (in conjunction with SOAR) • 2026 – Destin, FL  
2027 – Fort Bragg (Liberty) for 75th Anniversary of SF

# PARACHUTING INTO LAOS FROM 400 FT. ALTITUDE

## No Reserve ‘Chute— No Helmet



## A Factual Account of a Special Warfare Mission

By Bob Ramsey, MACV-SOG, Da Nang. 1970  
As told to Jon Wang, MACV-SOG, Da Nang. 1971

---

September 9th, 1970. It is 4 AM. There is no moon. The sky is black. There will be zero visibility for at least another hour.

The military “cargo” plane, a C-130, is painted black, has no markings, and no lights. It is invisible in this sky—black on black.

It is entering airspace over N.E. Laos, flying very low at 400 feet—and slowing air speed down to 100 knots.

From the tail ramp of this Blackbird, a parachutist pushes into the black void. He is rapidly followed by three more jumpers. The “T-10” parachutes are dark in color and are invisible in the ink of this pre-dawn sky.

Each jumper is plunging into the blackness with no reserve parachute and wearing no helmet. Exiting aircraft at 400 feet, parachute canopies will not be fully deployed until they are less than 300 feet above ground. If there is any canopy malfunction, and with no reserve ‘chute, the predictable result will be D.O.A.—Dead On Arrival in the Laotian dirt.

More bizarre details—The aircraft is from United States Air Force Special Operations Squadron, but the jumpers are wearing North Vietnamese Army uniforms, armed with AK-47 rifles (Russian), and two of the men are North Vietnamese.

First man out is Captain Garry Robb, U.S. Army Special Forces. The fourth man is Sergeant First Class Bob Ramsey, also a combat-experienced Green Beret. Number 2 and 3 are Chieu Hoi—North Vietnamese Army defectors who have escaped to South Vietnam and have been running reconnaissance missions with Green Berets against their former comrades. But no man carries any form of identification. This is a highly classified (Top Secret) covert military mission.

What is this strange combination of men, uniforms, equipment, circumstances, and very unorthodox military activity?

This is a reconnaissance (recon) mission to determine whether the multiple radio signals arising from N.E. Laos adjacent to the South Vietnamese border represent North Vietnamese Army (NVA) preparing for a major attack on South Vietnam, or are they electronic decoys to lure B-52 bombers into wasting payloads where there is no enemy.

And why the secrecy? Because neither NVA troops or American soldiers are supposed to be in Laos—according to international agreements created after the dissolution of French Indochina. North and South Vietnam were to be in process of deciding if and how to become united. Laos and Cambodia, which had also been colonies within French Indochina, were to remain neutral and not be involved in the conflicts of the two Vietnams.

North Vietnam soon violated the accords by building a network of roads and sanctuaries into Laos and Cambodia that had become known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This was used by NVA to support the insurgency (Viet Cong) in South Vietnam and to make cross-border assaults followed by rapid retreat to “neutral” sanctuaries.

A Counterinsurgency and Special Activities section in the Department of Defense, with White House approval in 1964, created a Top Secret multi-service military task force as a countermeasure to the rogue activity by the North Vietnamese. This project was named MACV-SOG: Military Assistance Command Vietnam—Studies and Observations Group.

Above photo: 1970—left to right, Garry Robb, Chieu Hoi #1 and #2, Bob Ramsey

Beginning in 1965, U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) conducted covert missions into Laos and Cambodia to gather intelligence and disrupt activity by conducting raids and ambushes on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Usually, these recon teams consisted of 10 men and were inserted by helicopter.

In the situation necessitating the 1970 mission here described, visual reconnaissance by a low-flying single-engine prop plane Forward Air Controller (FAC) revealed nothing in the area where radio activity in N.E. Laos was being detected. Thus, it became necessary to put “eyes” on the ground. But attempts to insert by helicopters had failed because potential helicopter landing zones (LZ) were being guarded by small teams of NVA.

Thus, a uniquely different tactic was required. An airborne operation is proposed—dropping soldiers in by parachute. Captain Robb, out of MACV-SOG in Da Nang, volunteers to develop an operational plan. For his team, he selects Sergeant Ramsey and two Chieu Hoi, with whom he has prior experience running recon missions cross-border.

A moonless night is a priority. They have 30 days to prepare. The team goes south to Long Thanh, a Special Forces training facility, about one hour southeast of Saigon. The critical element in airborne insertions is the ability of troops to link up once on the ground. An aircraft flying low and slow allows for the best possible grouping of jumpers upon landing. U.S. Army training jumps are from 1250 feet and at no time, ever, from less than 800 feet. The team plans to exit aircraft at 400 feet to minimize dispersal and to minimize time in air during which they may be seen. But even at Long Thanh, a Special Warfare training camp, they are not allowed to jump from less than 800 feet. Here is no record of any parachute jump from 400 feet—with or without survivors.

Because this insert will be in total darkness and linkup must be in absolute silence, the team practices with a small electronic transponder that emits a beam that can be silently detected by a portable AM radio tuned to a specific frequency.

In addition to making multiple night jumps from 800 feet and silently linking up by electronics, they also practice reaction drills in the event of contact with the enemy.

This plan does put the team into hostile territory by static-line parachute jump from dangerously low altitude on this moonless night in September 1970. No reserve ‘chutes and no helmets.

All land safely. Robb and both Chieu Hoi (CH-1 and CH-2) are on an east-facing slope just below a ridgeline. Ramsey is just west of the ridge. Rob buses the transponder. Ramsey and CH-1 silently link up with him on the east side of the ridge. But CH-2 damaged his AM-radio receiver when landing and cannot locate the transponder beam. So, he uses his small URC-10 (pilots’ emergency rescue) radio to contact the C-130 electronic monitor flying overhead—at very high altitude and out of sight. Although he is speaking softly, the other three men hear his voice and quickly find him.

There is as yet no light—visibility is zero. The team sits down in a defensive circle, each man facing outward observing a 90-degree section. They are 45 feet east of the ridgeline, which they now know is a foot trail. They are hidden in 10-foot elephant grass.

As light very gradually begins to slip quietly into the sky, multiple voices and metallic noises (probably cooking equipment) are heard coming from the double canopy area immediately adjacent to the team on their N.E. side. About the same time, they begin to see legs walking southward on the foot trail so close to them. They count at least 100 pairs of legs. Now there is more light, and voices are coming nearer. NVA are beginning to search the area. Perhaps a parachute has been discovered. Robb radios the high-flying C-130, reporting that the team may soon be compromised. The C-130 acknowledges.

Very soon a FAC is on station overhead. The team has seen enough and heard enough to estimate that a battalion-size NVA unit is their next-door neighbor, and it is now prudent to make a hasty departure. FAC advises the team that they are surrounded on 3 sides but that 150 feet to their south and east there is a depression in the topographic contour where they could hide and where a helicopter could come in for an emergency extraction.

NVA begin firing random shots in an attempt to lure the intruders into firing back and revealing their position. The team is now running but not shooting. They are racing to reach the depression before NVA might see them.

Surprisingly soon, the UH-1H helicopter arrives. NVA are now firing at the team and at the helicopter. The bird takes multiple hits. Right here, we have a sight for the history books—4 men in NVA uniforms scrambling into a U.S. Army helicopter bearing insignia of the 101st Airborne Aviation Unit!

Once on board, our NVA uniforms fire back at the NVA pursuers. Doorgunner is also firing. As quickly as all are on board, the pilot abruptly lifts off and sharply angles away, heading south and east while rapidly gaining altitude.

No bullets have hit our team. And in spite of multiple bullet holes, the helicopter is flying perfectly and moving out of range of the NVA on the ground.

And now coming into view is a flight of U.S. Air Force gun platforms, F-4 fighter-bombers, and A-1E Skyraider Attack aircraft. They will soon be in assault mode on the NVA stronghold in this denied real estate of Laos.

---

### ***EPILOGUE:***

In addition to all of the unconventional features of this mission, it is also an unqualified success: accurate intelligence has been obtained, no personnel were injured or killed, no assets were lost, and the target was successfully attacked. ❖

### ***EDITORIAL COMMENT:***

The details and execution of this daring and successful mission make it unique in the history of airborne operations in Vietnam. It is also a distinguished accomplishment in the annals of unconventional warfare.

# IVS Strove to Better Laos While War Raged



Jack Williamson (USAID), local leader Lao Chu (blue shirt), and paramilitary soldiers in front of a Continental PC-6 Pilatus Porter, Lima Site. (All photos courtesy of Frederic "Fritz" Benson via the University of Wisconsin – Madison Library.)

By Marc Yablonka

Hmong Daily News, Friday, September 13, 2024

<https://hmongdailynews.com/ivs-strove-to-better-laos-while-war-raged-p739-154.htm>, used with permission

Between 1956 and 1975, during the secret war, 384 soldiers of a different kind landed in Laos. Their holsters held no guns. They brought hammers, ploughs and textbooks. Their pockets were not filled with bullets, but with wide-ranging construction, farming, and teaching experience. They pledged at least two years, though some stayed far longer, to the International Voluntary Services, an offshoot of USAID, the United States Agency for International Development.

IVS, as it was commonly known, was a private voluntary organization "founded in 1953 to provide volunteers for international relief and development programs. Over its 50-year existence, this public-private partnership provided volunteers for 1419 assignments in 39 countries," in a book co-edited by former IVS volunteers Frederic "Fritz" Benson, Gary Alex and Mike Chilton called *A Legacy of America's Global Volunteerism - International Voluntary Services (1953-2002)*.

In Laos, "the primary goal was training. All IVSers would teach themselves out of a job and turn responsibilities over to the Lao," the book states.

The salary for doing so was \$125 a month, according to Benson.

"The first volunteers arrived in 1956. This began a 19-year program [1956-1975] that included 384 volunteers. It was clear that IVS was engaging in a country with a serious conflict underway, and volunteers seemed committed to helping the effort to counter the communist insurgency," the book adds.

That conflict spread to Laos from neighboring North Vietnam after 1962, when the Geneva Accords of that year declared Laos a neutral country. Soon, upwards of 30 to 40,000 North Vietnamese Army regulars were welcomed across the border into Laos by the Communist Pathet Lao cadres who had themselves been engaged in a struggle for power with royalists and neutralists in Laos.

The aim of the now united NVA and Pathet Lao was to move men and matériel through Laos down what came to be called the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam, where their aim was to assist in the battle against US Forces.

The US was left with no choice but to deploy US Air Force personnel, sheep-dipped (the military term for plain-clothed), in a conflict that was orchestrated by the CIA with the assistance of Hmong hill tribes known as SGU (Special Guerilla Units), and airlines like Air America, CASI (Continental Air Services, Inc.), Southern Air, and Arizona Helicopters, who would mix missions of ferrying SGU fighters to and from battles against the PL, along with flying in rice and other staples supporting IVS, and USAID employees in their missions to bolster the lives of the people of Laos.

"Still, it is unlikely that any foresaw the scale of the conflict that was to develop and the destruction and loss of life that would ravage the country and engulf IVS in its own crises and controversies. Despite these developments, many volunteers served there and left with a feeling of accomplishment and with life-long friendships and attachments to the country," the book informs readers.

Fritz Benson was one of them. He arrived in 1968, and IVS would be his employer for the next two years while the secret war in Laos raged on. He came for adventure and adventure is certainly what he got.

"I learned about IVS when I paid a brief visit to Laos in 1966 when I spent a semester at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok," he told the Hmong Daily News.

While each IVS volunteer had a unique experience, Benson says, "What I did was representative of the wide-ranging and innovative activities engaged in by most IVS/Laos people in response to the local needs in the villages that welcomed them.

"For one year I was in Ban Thalut in rural Vientiane Province engaged in socio-economic research to identify what could be done to enhance the well-being of area villages. In my second year, I was assigned by IVS to do country-wide field work with USAID in refugee reporting," Benson said.

Like all IVS personnel, Benson underwent six weeks of training in the Lao language. He also had one month of training in social-economic survey methodology in rural Sayaboury Province.

Others taught English to lowland Lao and Hmong hill tribespeople. Still others performed agricultural work with a mind toward teaching the Lao and minority ethnic groups in the cities and villages throughout Laos from Vientiane in the south to Luang Prabang in the north, and hill tribes in the villages in between, how to be self-sufficient.



Air America C-130 evacuating Tai Phuan refugees and their belongings from Lat Sen on the Plain of Jars to the Vientiane Plain from Lima Site 276 in January 1970.



Frederic "Fritz" Benson, USAID Refugee Operations Officer at the time this photo was taken, at Ban Houei Sai at the Mekong River across from Thailand.

Beginning in the late 1960s, "The role of IVS changed based on needs and circumstances after completing urgent refugee resettlement. IVS then moved to longer term development objectives involving research and extension for important cash and food crops. Later, volunteer assignments diversified and became more urban-focused as conditions changed and rural areas became less secure," according to *A Legacy of America's Global Volunteerism*.

In 1960, early on in IVS's tenure in Laos, during a coup d'état staged by Royal Lao Army General Kong Le, to protect them from harm, IVS volunteers were evacuated to Bangkok. Six months later, Gen. Le was ousted from power and volunteers resumed their work in Laos.

By 1962, IVS teams were positioned in major Lao provincial capitals including Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Ban Houei Sai, and Pakse, according to the book, before being reassigned to rural areas.

IVS volunteer W. Wendell Rolston, a retired Indiana farmer recalled, "When I came to Laos, I hoped to better the educational, health, and agricultural programs, as well as to improve the living standards of Laos. We hoped to do this through a teaching and demonstration program, emphasizing the self-help process," he told editors Alex, Chilton, and Benson.

But the burgeoning "secret war," as it came to be known, often got in the way of what IVS personnel were sent to Laos to accomplish and endeavored to do.

James Malia, who served with IVS between 1967 and 1971, whose mission was to train Royal Lao Government forestry personnel in forestry inventory methods, told author Thierry J. Sagnier for his book *The Fortunate Few: IVS Volunteers*, "Significant change for IVS was precipitated when volunteers began to be killed—four Americans and two Lao assistants in a two-and-a-half-year period. Despite all intentions to the contrary, IVS was identified with one side in a civil war."

"To those on the other side, we were part of the enemy and clearly marked by our white skin and round eyes. When shots were fired, IVSers were fair game. And since we were in the rural areas where the war was being contested, we were highly vulnerable," he told Sagnier.

Reflecting on the dangers IVSers faced in Laos, Fritz Benson recalled, "I was transferred out of Ban Thalot for security reasons in July 1969."

Still, IVSers did not lose sight of why they were in Laos. That was true for Malia as well.

"I had volunteered to do good works, to see some of the world, and to learn what I could," he added.

Like several of the males who volunteered for the IVS, Malia was a pacifist.

"As a practical matter, I also was completing my alternative service as a conscientious objector. I went to Laos excited and optimistic about what I would be doing. In retrospect, I also was naïve," Sagnier tells readers Malia said.



Hmong girl at Nam Hia village wearing ethnic clothes with headdress and silver necklaces.



Hmong family in Muong Phieng wearing traditional clothing.



Distribution of USAID/Ministry of Social Welfare supplies to Akha refugees at the paramilitary Team 5 village base, Chommok. Lima Site 345.

IVS, like every organization that had supported the Royal Lao Government, left Laos in May of 1975, when, just as had happened one month earlier in neighboring Vietnam, Laos fell to the Communist forces.

Reflecting on her time with IVS, English teacher Merritt Stevens wondered whether she had done the right thing by volunteering for IVS.

"I have to admit I am truly not sure what I accomplished. Since Laos was taken over by the Communists in the mid-1970s and hearing that Lao people were being sent to [re] 'education' camps, tortured

or killed, I feared the worst. What had I done? By teaching English, I may have put my students in harm's way. It was a burden I felt for nearly 40 years," Sagnier wrote Stevens told him in *The Fortunate Few*.

What allayed her fears for her students was put to rest when, while visiting Portland, Oregon years later, she was able to contact one of her former students.

"I learned that most of them not only survived the Communist take-over but are leading very successful lives all over the world," Sagnier wrote she informed him.

Though Fritz Benson's tenure with IVS was over in 1970, rather than leave Laos he was engaged by USAID's Office of Refugee Affairs to do regional work until 1972, whereupon he was transferred to USAID's Refugee Operations Office in Luang Prabang, where he worked until 1974.

With all those years in-country and exposure to the war in Laos, needless to say, when he heard the news that Laos had fallen, he told the Hmong Daily News, "I was disappointed but not surprised. At least the war came to an end although it led to the flow of refugees out of Laos to escape from the emerging Communist regime."



Lao soldiers after an early morning attack on Ban Thalat by the Pathet Lao on 24 July 1969.

"Did IVS make any significant contributions in the long-term development of Laos?" asked James Malia. "It is hard to say. Our primary contribution was at the human level. We worked to impart knowledge, skills, and awareness of alternatives. How many of those we assisted were still alive at the end of the war, how many chose to stay in Laos, and how many were able to work with the new government, is unknown. Hopefully, there were some. IVS did what it could."

---

*During the years following the closure of IVS's operations in Laos in 1975 a number of former volunteers returned to Laos and traveled throughout the country to visit cities and villages where they used to work. Almost invariably their experiences were positive, meeting people they used to know and seeing the outcomes of projects they initiated. There were also a few IVS volunteers who returned to Laos in different capacities to support development programs. One of the former IVS education volunteers, Wendy J. Chamberlain, returned to Laos as the US Ambassador from 1996-1999. ❖*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Phillip Yablonka is a military journalist and author. His work has appeared in the U.S. Military's *Stars and Stripes*, *Army Times*, *Air Force Times*, *American Veteran*, *Vietnam* magazine, *Airways*, *Military Heritage*, *Soldier of Fortune* and many other publications. He is the author of *Distant War: Recollections of Vietnam*, *Laos and Cambodia*, *Tears Across the Mekong*, *Vietnam Bao Chi: Warriors of Word and Film*, and *Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network*.

Marc from 2001-2008 served as a Public Affairs Officer, CWO-2, with the 40th Infantry Division Support Brigade and Installation Support Group, California State Military Reserve, Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, California, where he wrote articles and took photographs in support of Soldiers who were mobilizing for and demobilizing from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

His work was published in *Soldiers*, official magazine of the United States Army, *Grizzly*, magazine of the California National Guard, the *Blade*, magazine of the 63rd Regional Readiness Command-U.S. Army Reserves, *Hawaii Army Weekly*, and *Army Magazine*, magazine of the Association of the U.S. Army.

Marc's decorations include the California National Guard Medal of Merit, California National Guard Service Ribbon, and California National Guard Commendation Medal w/Oak Leaf. He also served two tours of duty with the Sar El Unit of the Israeli Defense Forces and holds the Master's of Professional Writing degree earned from the University of Southern California.

# THE CONTRACTOR MEDIC

By Victor A. Hundahl

From *Sentinel* editor How Miller:

*Sentinel* reader Victor Hundahl, after his four-year stint with the Marines, and medical training with his Montana SFNG unit, went to Vietnam as a civilian contract medic for a construction company for seven years. A lot of the time he lived with only the Vietnamese workers, even more immersed in the indigenous culture than A camp medics, because he did not have the company of any other Americans.

He was able to treat a wide variety of wounds and illnesses, from infections to parasite infestations, and even the bubonic plague, along with getting himself into various pickles.

He has written a short book on his varied situations, that sound a lot like we experienced. It is called *The Contractor Medic*, and consists of brief stories of each incident, including subsequent work at Johnston Atoll and Africa.

The book shows a contrast in his situation with ours and shows a side of the war that is seldom seen. It is enjoyable, is available in soft cover and Kindle, with Kindle being the better deal in this case.

Victor shares with us a sample of the book, next.



[The Contractor Medic](#)

By Victor A. Hundahl

The Book Publishing Pros (May 15, 2024)

93 pages

Available in hardcover, paperback & Kindle

## An Excerpt from *The Contractor Medic*

by Victor A. Hundahl, pages 1-7

As a civilian medic serving during the war in Vietnam from 1965 to 1972, I had my share of close calls. I found myself in plenty of hairy experiences, often alongside G.I.s who displayed remarkable acts of courage and compassion but who typically remained nameless to me. After serving four years in the United States Marine Corps and becoming a medic with the Montana National Guard Special Forces unit in Kalispell, I went to Vietnam in 1965 as a civilian field medic for the American RMK-BRJ Construction company. I diagnosed and treated diseases, administered emergency care for war wounds and industrial accidents, and performed minor surgeries such as suturing minor lacerations. We acted as primary care physicians to the company employees and others in need in areas where doctors and clinics were unavailable. I was the sole medic treating patients in my clinic. Since I was in a war zone, the most frightening and bizarre events sometimes punctured my relatively routine days.

In early 1969, I received an emergency call at my Chu Lai dispensary, which sat a few hundred yards from the perimeter of the military compound. The highway was rebuilt and resurfaced with asphalt by our construction company and an accident near the construction site.



Left: Nhan, Center: Vic Hundahl, Right: Quang, Chu Lai, 1968-1970

My interpreter, Nhan, and I immediately left in our white ambulance with its red cross markings. Earlier in the morning, the Army had cleared the road of mines and booby traps, enabling us to speed along in the hot, bright sun. We arrived at the accident scene on the road next to a small Vietnamese hamlet with small thatched huts. As was my habit, from inside the ambulance, I quickly scanned the area, checking out the gathering Vietnamese. I saw five U.S. Army soldiers on a jeep with a mounted machine gun. It appeared to be a tense but orderly situation. Based on experience, however, we knew to be on guard, pulling the ambulance over to the side of the road, I jumped out, medical bag in hand. A small, handsome boy, about eleven years old and clad only in black shorts, was lying next



to the massive wheels of an earth mover trailer. The boy appeared dead from the enormous abdomen and pelvic crushtype trauma. With a stethoscope, I examined the boy by auscultation, listening for heart sounds, but found none. His pupils were fixed and non-reactive to light or finger touch. I was careful not to rush my movements to demonstrate care and respect for the boy, particularly given the gathering crowd of villagers.

Nhan and I placed the boy in a green body bag. As I started to zip up the bag, a young girl ran up to put something in the bag. She shoved body parts before my face as I partially unzipped the bag. I realized what they were when she opened her hands to drop them into the bag. It was the boy's testicles. Somehow, I managed to maintain my composure and zipped up the bag. Nhan and I placed the boy in the ambulance until the village chief could determine what to do with him.

I walked to the hamlet and found a clearing between the thatched huts and the jungle where I could gather my thoughts. Then I saw a frail old man dressed in black pajamas and a grayish, stringy "Ho Chi Mein" beard slowly walking from the cluster of huts toward me into the clearing. He was in tears and howling uncontrollably. I later learned that he was the boy's grandfather. Suddenly, one of the five American soldiers screamed, "GRENADE!" Now I saw clearly that the old man, arms stretched above his head, had a hand grenade clutched between his hands, his fingers grasping the pull ring. Two of the soldiers ran up and grabbed the old man. As one soldier wrapped his hands around the older man's hands and the grenade, the other pinned the older man's arms. A third soldier ran up, an extra safety pin ready to insert into the grenade. In the meantime, I looked around the area for any other hostile action, but the older man appeared to be acting alone. One of the soldiers yelled. "Doc. we need you!" I was already reaching into my medical bag and was preparing a syringe with a sedative. The older man was so small and frail that I prepared half the usual adult dose. I raced to the tightly joined group and swabbed the older man's arm. I looked up, and in front of our terrified, sweating faces was this grenade, with Vietnamese and American hands wrapped tightly around it. Looking away from the grenade in front of my face, I realized the grass and sky were never so bright with green and blue. A lovely day to die, I thought.

In that instant, it reminded me of the famous picture taken of the Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima, only this was not a flag but a live grenade. Another odd thought struck me as I swabbed the older man's arm. Here I am, by habit and with due diligence, disinfecting the arm of a man who wants to kill me. I injected the sedative into his upper arm, and the older man slowly relaxed as I supported his lower body. The G.I.s then very carefully eased their fingers under the old man's and squeezed the grenade handle as another replaced the safety pin and yelled, "Grenade secure!" finally, the old man fell into my arms. Then, led by a small girl, I carried him to a thatched hut and laid him down on a simple bamboo mat. After the village chief

took possession of the dead boy and waited an hour to ensure the situation was calm, Nhan and I returned to the Chu Lai dispensary.

I will always remember those G.I.s. Even though I never knew their names, I will always remember their faces. They were so young, in their twenties, but they demonstrated maturity, compassion, and discipline in the face of likely death. I would do almost anything for these G.I.s, and I was confident they would do the same if I were in a jam.

The freezing winter wind stung my face as I left the Cessna 180; it was my last free fall skydiving parachute jump at the Big Fork junction in Montana on November 8th. 1965. The frozen ground hit me hard as I did the parachute landing fall. I tried to shake off the shivering cold, gathered my parachute, and walked to the highway to wait for my ride back to Kalispell.

Three weeks later, on November 28, 1965, I stepped off the Pan Am passenger jet at the Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam Airport, and felt suddenly smothered with the sweltering heat and high humidity, which took my breath away. The climate was at the extreme opposite edge of the cold Montana weather. After customs procedures, an R.M.K. construction company representative took my passport and other documents. Then, I was transported with a few other civilian company workers to a field in the middle of the airport. A company representative told me to pick a tent and cot and stay put while being processed by Vietnamese and U.S. Government agencies. Luckily, the holding area lasted only three days and two nights. Other personnel had been there for over a week and were still waiting in the sweltering heat. It started a nearly seven-year Vietnam career with the RMK-BRJ construction company, which ended in June 1972.

I never dreamed the Vietnam War would involve my Father and two brothers. My Father would arrive a month or so later to work for RMK-BRJ. Two brothers would follow me, Jess, a Marine, and Peter in the U.S. Army; both would serve a tour of duty in Vietnam. A third brother, Gary, served in the U.S. Army and was assigned to Germany during the Vietnam War. My family would serve ten years of combined Vietnam field service.



Left: Vic Hundahl, Right: my brother Jess  
Chu Lai, 1968



Left: Loi, my driver, Center: Vic Hundahl,  
Right: my brother Peter

## Cam Ranh Bay

The silver Second World War C-47 landed at Cam Ranh Bay, and then I was Jeeped to our company work site on the beach about a mile south of the U.S. Air Force base. It consisted of tents for Americans and other third-country workers and large tents for a mess hall and dispensary. Our shower was a large 50-gallon drum supported by a wood platform with ocean water pumped to it. Due to the two-week monsoon, the ground was sloppy and muddy; our tents and bedding were soaked wet. It takes weeks for things to dry out.

I spent two years at Cam Ranh Bay from November 1965 through January 1968, where I was the sole medic responsible for caring for 4,000 Vietnamese RMK-BRJ workers. I lived and worked in the Vietnamese camp 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the only American to do so. I lived with them and ate what they ate. I trusted my safety with them, and they knew I would give them my best care. The Vietnamese called me “Bacsi Vic” in English, Doctor Vic.

Unlike the American military and political establishments, living in the work camp allowed me to learn about their culture, history, and aspirations. The Vietnamese had conducted jungle warfare for one thousand years against the Chinese occupation until the Chinese withdrew. Using the same hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, they defeated the French at Dien Bein Phu in May of 1954, and now it was the Americans and its ally’s tum to be sucked into the swamp, fighting a competent and determined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army.

Vietnam existed since 2879 BC and was ravaged by civil wars and repeatedly attacked by China, Mongols, Chams, Dutch, French, and now fighting the Americans. In my mind, the American planners never studied the military history of Vietnam or tried to understand it, nor did they know the South Vietnamese and less the North Vietnamese. Or we were so arrogant that we failed to recognize the motivating factor of the North Vietnamese desire to the South and North Vietnamese again as one nation and one people, against the corrupt Southern Vietnamese government.

A young man about 25 came into my small shack bearing a laceration over his right eye. Chinh Coa Minh spoke good English, and I needed an interpreter and someone that I could teach to help me. As I sutured up his wound, we talked about the risks and job duties; I quickly evaluated whether he was a good fit to work with me day and night within the confines of the Vietnamese work camp. He readily proved to be a quick learner, assisting me in suturing wounds and wound care and helping to dispense medications. Never having ever driven a vehicle and eager to learn, I took him out to a field and taught him how to drive the ambulance. Now, I could attend to trauma victims in the back of the ambulance while he drove to a military hospital. Chinh was loyal and worked with me side by side, caring for trauma patients and, at times, the dead—many times under hazardous warlike conditions, for nearly two years while stationed at Cam Ranh Bay.

From time to time, the Vietnamese Army and U.S. Army would raid the Vietnamese camp, arresting V.C. suspects and draft dodgers and recovering weapons and demolitions. I never feared for my safety. During rioting between Vietnamese and third-country nationals, I would be suturing up knife lacerations on arms and hands while mutual combatants sat across from each other, watching me work



Left: Chinh, Right: Vic Hundahl, Cam Ranh Bay, 1965-1967



Vic Hundahl and Chinh, Cam Ranh Bay 1965-1967, Vietnamese Work Camp first dispensary.

while waiting their tum. All the while, yelling and fighting were around my wood shack dispensary. After suturing the same Philippine worker on three different occasions during the one day of rioting, I strongly urged him to return to his tent and take a break.

Fortunately for me, all employees accepted that my dispensary was a haven. I became very experienced in diagnosing and treating tropical diseases such as dengue, Q fever, rat bite fever, and malaria. I worked through three plague epidemics with up to 12 Vietnamese patients in my dispensary. I learned to accept the Vietnamese custom of families moving to the patient’s bedside. I let them become involved in their care, cooking, and feeding the patient. ❖



# SOAR 2024

By Greg Walker (Ret.)  
USA Special Forces

## ABOUT SOAR

The Special Operation Association's General Membership Meeting is held the third week in October keeping the membership informed on the activities of the Board of Director's during the year.

SOAR, the SOA's reunion, is held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting, fostering an environment for camaraderie and fellowship to strengthen those friendships forged in battle and the opportunity to make new ones. Seminars, meetings and interactive workshops are offered keeping the membership up to date on programs, services, current events and other topics important to the membership. The 4-day event culminates with the annual banquet celebrating our members and honoring our fallen.

## SOAR 2024 – 60th Anniversary of MACV-SOG

This year's SOAR reunion celebrated the 60th anniversary of the activation of MACV-SOG. Guest speaker at the Thursday evening banquet was Major General (ret) Kenneth R. Bowra, who served with Combat and Control North (CCN) as a recon team leader (1-0). Over the course of the week there were numerous well planned and attended events all culminating with Thursday evening's well attended banquet. A vibrant event which saw roughly 400 SOA members, family, and friends gather together.

General Bowra's remarks set the tone for the evening—

## Special Operations Association Reunion 2024 17 October 2024

### Major General Ken Bowra Remarks

"Thank you for inviting me here to speak with you tonight and special thanks to all who worked so hard to make this reunion so very special as we remember the 60th Anniversary of MACV-SOG and of those who served and supported our operations. Can all who served in SOG and supported our operations please stand to be recognized?"



Ken Bowra and Greg Walker (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)

Please join me in saying thank you. "I would also like to recognize our active-duty Special Forces and SOF members who continue to build on to the legacy of SOG. Please stand to be recognized. Thank you.

"For me, when I'm asked what I did as a soldier, I say that I served with great soldiers. Throughout my service there were several who touched my life in a very special way.

"On October 23rd, 1964 we received our copy of the Saturday Evening Post, with Captain Roger Donlon on the cover, and his story and that of ODA-726 and their defense of their camp at Nam Dong on July 6th, 1964. Little did I know that Roger would become a special friend until his passing earlier this year. He set my vision on Special Forces. In High School at Baldwin Senior High School, in Baldwin, N.Y., our Varsity football team had several great players, and to me the very

best was a senior who took time to work with and assist others. He was the epitome of a team player. After graduation he enlisted in the Army and went on to Special Forces and SOG. His name was John Kedenburg, who many of you know. John was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on June 13, 1968. I'd like to remember John with you, and read his Medal of Honor citation:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sp5c. Kedenburg, U.S. Army, Command and Control Detachment North, Forward Operating Base 2, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), distinguished himself while serving as adviser to a long-range reconnaissance team of South Vietnamese irregular troops. The team's mission was to conduct counter guerrilla operations deep within enemy-held territory. Prior to reaching the day's objective, the team was attacked and encircled by a battalion-size North Vietnamese Army force. Sp5c. Kedenburg assumed immediate command of the team which succeeded, after a fierce fight, in breaking out of the encirclement. As the team moved through thick jungle to a position from which it could be extracted by helicopter, Sp5c. Kedenburg conducted a gallant rear guard fight against the pursuing enemy and called for tactical air support and rescue helicopters. His withering fire against the enemy permitted the team to reach a preselected landing zone with the loss of only one man, who was unaccounted for. Once in the landing zone, Sp5c. Kedenburg deployed the team into a perimeter defense against the numerically superior enemy force. When tactical air support arrived, he skillfully directed air strikes against the enemy, suppressing their fire so that helicopters could hover over the area and drop slings to be used in the extraction of the team. After half of the team was extracted by helicopter, Sp5c. Kedenburg and the remaining three

members of the team harnessed themselves to the sling on a second hovering helicopter. Just as the helicopter was to lift them out of the area, the South Vietnamese team member who had been unaccounted for after the initial encounter with the enemy appeared in the landing zone. Sp5c. Kedenburg unhesitatingly gave up his place in the sling to the man and directed the helicopter pilot to leave the area. He then continued to engage the enemy who were swarming into the landing zone, killing six enemy soldiers before he was overpowered. Sp5c. Kedenburg's inspiring leadership, consummate courage, and willing self-sacrifice permitted his small team to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy and escape almost certain annihilation. His actions reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

"When I was assigned to SOG and C.C.N., there were truly legends in Recon Company. The Recon Company Commander was Larry Manes and First Sergeant Billy Waugh and later J.D. Bath. A fellow One Zero and lifelong friend, Eldon Bargewell, who took time to help me out, and even lent me his cut down RPD for a mission, but Eldon said I had to bring back the links! They were in short supply.

"Others include my special friend, Frank Pulley, who I owe so much to, Andre B. Smith, Mel Wick, Ray Frovarp from RT Louisiana and North Carolina, Don Murphy, Pappy Wells, Pappy Jones, Dave Sparling, Tony Dodge and many more as shown in these photos. Special friend Doug Miller, who I met at Long Than, remained a close friend, until his passing. Tonight, we have his daughter, Danielle with us. At One Zero School in Long Than my instructor was Staff Sergeant Hoot Gipson, from CCN. He guided me to learn the tips of the trade as a One Zero. A great soldier and mentor who was killed in action near Kontum Airfield later in 1972 during the Easter Offensive.



SOAR 2024 – Remembering and Honoring the Fallen. (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)



Dan, Hoa Pham, and Bihn Mai are all SVN SF—they are seated far left as you look at the picture. The others are support personnel. (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)

“There are also the air crews who supported us. Covey and the brave pilots from the 20 th TASS, the slicks and Cobras and fixed wing. Then there is a Cobra pilot I never met, and after expending all ordnance departed that cold rainy day in the Southern A Shau, only to return later with no ammo, low on fuel and calling me on the radio to see if we were still there, saying he was going to make solo dry runs to push the NVA back and buy us some time. A real hero. Ask Xuan. But, to all of us, most special were our indigenous team members.

“From RT Idaho:

- Do Ti Quang—a legend who served with Tilt and continued serving. Quang was the epitome of the best and most effective recon fighter.
- Pham Cao Son
- Trinh Viet Hoa
- Hoang Van Son
- Hoa
- Tran Viet Lien
- Nguyen Van Vo
- An
- Thurng
- And especially Vu Van Xuan, who is with us tonight, along with his wife.

“From RT Sidewinder:

- Tao
- Bong—my friend, who I will always remember.
- La Hai
- Coc
- Amang
- Nem
- Man Loi
- Ngau
- Anh
- Thang Hoi

“I owe my life forever to our indigenous team members, who never left Vietnam as we all did. I was only in Vietnam for 1 year and 2 months-14 months, and later in Cambodia for a year, but our indigenous team members stayed on. They were loyal to us and the United States, despite the odds against them after we withdrew and the North Vietnamese overran the South.

“Tonight, I am honored to introduce my last surviving team member and brother, from RT Idaho, Vu Van Xuan, who is accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Dang Thi Xuan. Please welcome them. Xuan reached out and found me last year, and thanks to the support of Doug and the SOA board and members, and especially Mike and Chan Eiland, their visas were approved by the Consulate office in Ho Chi Minh City, with the support of Mike’s friend, the American Ambassador to Vietnam, Ambassador Marc Knapper and my new contact in Vietnam, the Defense Attache Colonel Thomas Bouchillon. Mike and Chan also made sure funds from the SOA were transferred safely for Xuan and his wife. I’d now like to ask Xuan to join me and say a few remarks, along with Chan’s assistance.

“Our indigenous troops were the heart and soul of MACVSOG—and always will be.

“MACVSOG’s history and legacy is being preserved by those who write and tell our history. Special thanks to John Plaster, Jason Hardy, Tilt Meyer, Dick Thompson, Dan Thompson, Steve Sherman and others here. Also, honorary SOA member, Rob Graham and his team from Savage Games, who continue to preserve the legacy and history through their interviews, gaming and generous donations to SOA.

“If all of our authors and Rob and his team could please stand. Please join me in thanking them.

“Winston Churchill once said, “...There comes a time in every man’s life when he is called upon to do something for which he, and only he has the necessary skills, and has the necessary training. What a pity if that moment finds the man unprepared.”

“Well, those who served and supported SOG were prepared for those moments, just as our Special Forces is today. To those serving today, continue to make your legacy, adding to our history.

“In closing, I have a faded document that I have kept framed in my office since 1975 and often reflect upon it as I supported various operations and contingencies and as a reminder of those events, sacrifices and lessons learned. Let me share this with you now:

'Date Time Group 291215Z APR 75  
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON  
TO SECSTATE  
SAIGON 00000 PLAN TO CLOSE SAIGON APPROXIMATELY  
0430  
SAIGON TIME DEPENDANT ON PERFORMANCE OF MILITARY  
EVACUATION CHANNELS. DUE TO NECESSITY TO DESTROY  
COMMO  
GEAR, THIS IS LAST SAIGON MESSAGE TO SECSTATE.'

A longtime friend often wears a hat that says, “Vietnam, we weren’t losing when I was there!” I believe that says it best for all who served.

We never were defeated on the battlefield and all served with honor, dedication, and selfless service. Our nation won the Vietnam battle in the Cold War victory.

“God bless you, your families, and all of our brothers who paid the ultimate sacrifice, and God bless America.

“Thank you” ❖



Ms. Marian Bargewell attended SOAR 2024 and was honored during MG Bowra’s remarks. Her husband, Major General Eldon Bargewell, passed away of a stroke in 2019. GEN Bargewell is a SOG legend in his own right and among his other post VN assignments was a former commander of the DELTA counter-terrorism unit. (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)



On Tuesday, SOG and Special Forces authors read excerpts from their published Work. (Photo Credit: Greg Walker)

Lonny Holmes, a former Sentinel editor and president of Chapter 78, shared these photos from the recent SOAR convention. Along with Lonny, John Joyce and Brad Welker are all currently members of SFA Chapter 51, but were formerly members of Chapter 78. He and the others had opportunities to catch up with their old Chapter 78 comrades, and Lonny was especially happy for the chance to visit with his old friend Mike Rose.

- 1** Left to right, John Joyce, Brad Welker, Lonny Holmes, SGM (ret.) Scott La Morte and Fred Horne.
- 2** Ramon Rodriguez, MG Ken Bowra, and SGM Scott La Morte
- 3** COL (ret.) John Gargus and wife Anita. John's third book will be out in January.
- 4** John Stryker Meyer, AKA Tilt, Mike Rose MOH, and Lonny Holmes at the Las Vegas airport.
- 5** Mike Rose's MOH challenge coin
- 6** Cliff Newman, former SFA president and the first soldier in Army history to complete a HALO combat jump, and SGM (ret.) Scott La Morte.
- 7** Ed Barrett and Mike Rose MOH



1



2



3



4



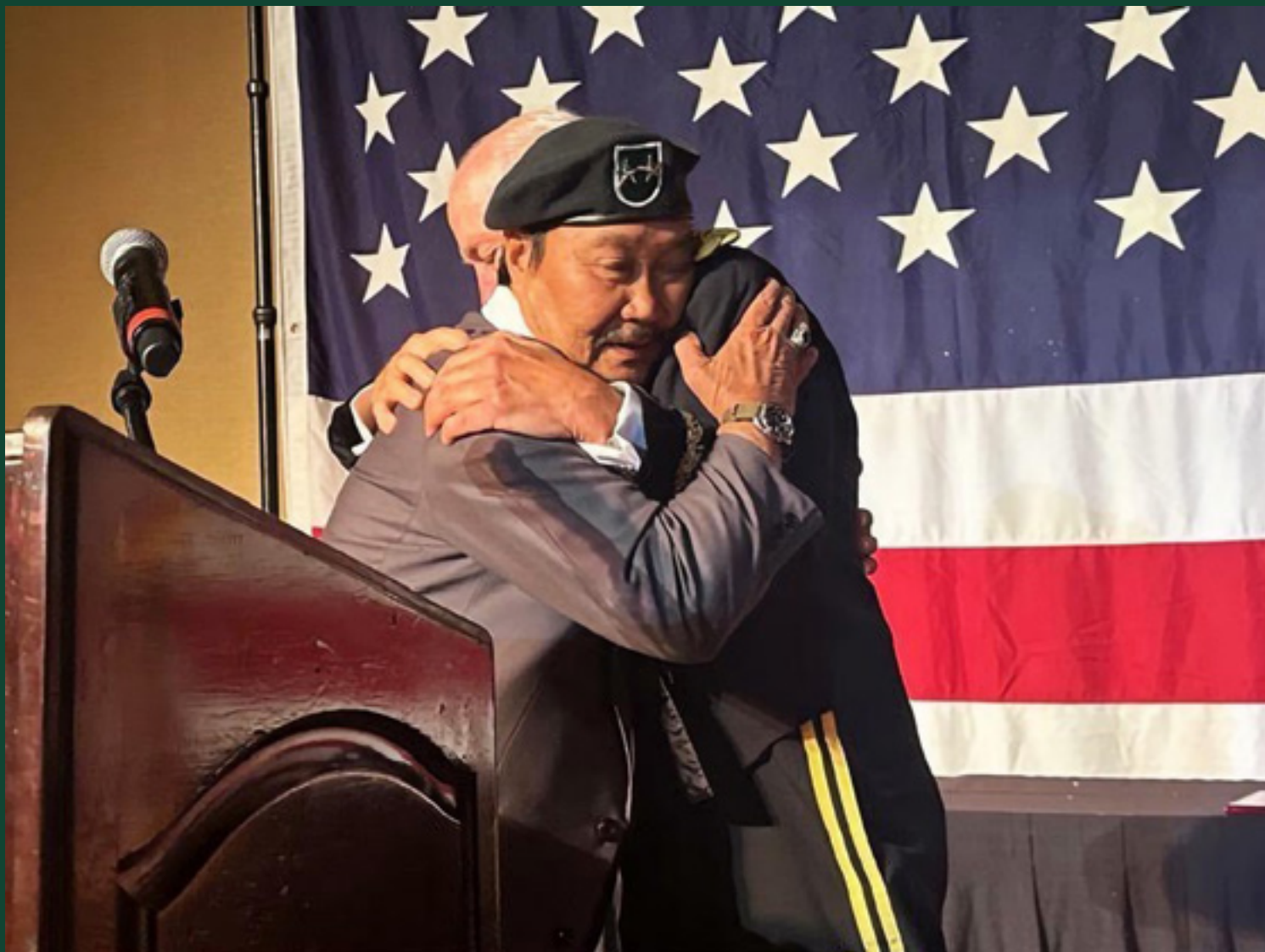
5



6



7



From Greg Walker, about the Keynote presentation by MG (ret) Ken Bowra at the recent 2024 Special Operations Association Reunion (SOAR) Banquet: "At the conclusion of his remarks General Bowra introduced his interpreter, Xuan, who the SOA arranged to attend SOAR from his home in Vietnam. Gifting him his 2-star beret, Bowra reinforced the sacred relationship between Special Forces and our indigenous Brothers regardless of conflict or generation." (Photo Credit: MG Ken Bowra.)

Read more about the 2024 SOAR in this issue starting on [page 17](#).



## SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meetings

Chapter 78 meets on the third Saturday of the month

**Time:** Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

**Location:** Courtyard by Marriott

5865 Katella Ave, Room A, Cypress, CA 90630

## 2025 Meeting Schedule

January 18 • February 15 • March 15 • April 19 • May 17 • June 21  
July 19 • August 16 • September 20 • October 18 • November 15  
December (to be announced)

**Connect  
with SFA Chapter 78!**

Scan this code



or visit  
[specialforces78.com/links/](https://specialforces78.com/links/)