



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

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*Book Review and Excerpt*

## ***Beyond the Call of Duty:***

*The Life of  
Colonel Robert Howard,  
America's Most  
Decorated Green Beret*

SFA Chapter 78  
**Valor Luncheon**

Book Review:  
***Tony Poe's CIA War:  
A Secret War Waged by  
His Paramilitary Army  
in Southeast Asia***

**Storied "Spy Girl"**  
**Betty McIntosh**  
Lit Up Morale  
Operations Branch

**The Fall of Saigon  
Remembered**  
April 30, 1975





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FRONT COVER: First Lieutenant (Rank at time of action: Sergeant First Class; Final Rank: Colonel) Robert Howard. COL Howard was a U.S. Army Special Forces officer and recipient of the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Vietnam War. He was wounded 14 times over 54 months of combat, was awarded the Medal of Honor, eight Purple Hearts, a Distinguished Service Cross, a Silver Star, and four Bronze Stars. He was one of the most decorated soldiers in the Vietnam War and was "said to be the most decorated service member in the history of the United States." This issue features an excerpt from Stephen Moore's recently released book *Beyond the Call of Duty: The Life of Colonel Robert Howard, America's Most Decorated Green Beret*. (U.S. Army)

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# From the Editor | April 2025



How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

Welcome to another *Sentinel* filled with interesting history and action.

Our second annual **Valor Luncheon** will be held on 27 April, as we host guest speaker U.S. Marine Corps CW04 Anthony L. Viggiani, Navy Cross recipient, for a charity fundraising event. Last year's event with Green Beret MoH recipient Earl Plumlee was tremendously successful.

We also provide the news of the recent sentencing of a former administrator of the **National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia**, thanks to John Stryker Meyer for forwarding the story and *Stars and Stripes* for allowing us to reprint it. The crime nearly bankrupted the organization. A generous donor saved the league from disbandment, but they are still in need of donations to continue their decades-long mission of supporting POW/MIA families and advocating for the 1,573 Americans still missing and unaccounted-for.

As shown on our cover, we focus on a real hero, Medal of Honor recipient Robert Howard, the most decorated Green Beret from the Vietnam War. First, a review by me of the recent book, ***Beyond the Call of Duty***, by noted author **Steven Moore**. In between a steady stream of action, Steven fills in details of Robert's life before, during, and after his retirement. A story of a man, amazingly cool under fire and always there to help others.

Then treat yourself as Steven shares exciting chapter seven, "**Distinguished Service**," from the book. Be fairly warned, it will leave you wanting more.

**Marc Yablonka**, who knows so much about the "Secret War in Laos" and his extensive work with the Hmong, seems like the perfect person to review a book by **Richard Gough**, ***Tony Poe's Secret War***. Anthony Poshepny, the famous CIA agent known as Tony Poe, whose influence was as large as the Hmong General Vang Pao, was



Members of Chapter 78 gathered for a group photo at last year's MOH Luncheon. To learn about this year's event visit [specialforces78.com](http://specialforces78.com)

in charge of the CIA operation. Richard, who died within weeks of his book's release, according to Marc, "left us with a meticulously researched biography of a complex and controversial figure."

Then a story by **Marc Yablonka** about "**Spy Girl**" **Betty McIntosh**. She, and a long list of subsequently famous people, worked for the OSS in WWII. When she passed at 100 years of age, she was the last survivor of the Morale Operations branch. After the war, she returned to journalism and then worked with the CIA. She even wrote a book about the OSS Deer Team that recruited Ho Chi Minh to help rescue downed flyers.

Our webmaster and much more, **Debra Holm**, gives an update on our ever more popular **YouTube Channel @sfachapter78**.

Lastly, **Debra** reminds us of the fall of Saigon 50 years ago, which was quickly followed by the fall of Cambodia and Laos.

Please feel free to check out our photos of the February Chapter 78 meeting.

As always, please keep sending us your stories. ❖

How Miller  
Sentinel Editor



## SFA

### Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

### April Meeting Cancelled

Please plan to attend the  
Valor Luncheon on April 27th (see page 2)

Next scheduled chapter meeting  
May 17

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

**Courtyard by Marriott**

5865 Katella Ave, Room A  
Cypress, CA 90630

### 2025 Meeting Schedule

June 21 • July 19 • August 16 •  
September 20 • October 18 • November 15  
December (to be announced)



# SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78 SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION VALOR LUNCHEON

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2025 | 11 AM - 2 PM  
ON THE GREENS CONFERENCE CENTER  
5660 ORANGEWOOD AVE, CYPRESS, CA 90630



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**BRONZE SPONSOR: \$1000** — 1 Table of 8, Logo displayed on tables and at auction items tables; special thanks in our newsletter, the Sentinel. Your logo will be included in the intro of the video recording of the event speaker with thanks in the end credits, which will be posted on SFA Chapter 78's YouTube channel.

**STANDARD TABLES: \$600** — 1 Table of 8



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# Former administrator of leading POW/MIA group sentenced for \$250,000 scam

By Matthew M. Burke / *Stars and Stripes* Staff Writer

The following story is being reprinted with the permission of *Stars and Stripes*, which retains all rights. The story was published March 7, 2025 on [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

A [Virginia woman whose embezzlement](#) nearly bankrupted the nation's preeminent advocacy organization for American prisoners of war will serve time behind bars and pay restitution to the group, a federal judge in Virginia has ruled.

Jennifer Giorffino, a former administrator for the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, had pleaded guilty Oct. 31 in federal court in Alexandria, Va., to a single count of wire fraud.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles on Thursday sentenced Giorffino to three years and nine months in prison followed by two years of supervised release, according to court records. Giorffino will also be required to pay about \$257,000 in restitution.

Prosecutors had sought the maximum penalty of four years and three months against the 54-year-old married mother of two. Giles recommended that Giorffino serve out her sentence at the minimum-security Federal Prison Camp Alderson in West Virginia.

Giorffino was hired in 2019 and began siphoning off donations for personal retail purchases in October 2022, the prosecutor's sentencing recommendation stated.

In all, Giorffino took \$257,259 from the nonprofit, which was founded in 1970 and is also known as the National League of POW/MIA Families.

In 1971, the league created the iconic black-and-white POW/MIA flag that flies over government and military institutions.

Giorffino also stole the identity of the organization's chairwoman emeritus and acting CEO, Ann Mills-Griffiths, and fraudulently applied



for at least 30 credit cards and lines of credit for additional spending, the document said.

She made over \$36,000 worth of purchases on one card and paid off the cards every month until April 2024 using League funds.

Mills-Griffiths discovered the scheme after her credit card was declined at a restaurant, court documents said.

In February 2024, Giorffino opened a checking account in the league's name and began diverting checks and online donations into the account, accumulating \$29,746, records said.

The organization's funds were nearly depleted by March 2024, but she forged bank statements and wrote checks she knew would bounce.

Giorffino gave the league's board falsified bank statements at a meeting in April 2024 and stopped working for the organization soon after.

As a result of the embezzlement, the organization nearly ran out of money, records said

It was slated to be dissolved after a Jan. 31, 2023, vote by its board of directors but was saved less than two weeks later by an anonymous donor, league statements said previously.

Mills-Griffiths, who has led the organization since 1978, was in court Thursday. She told *Stars and Stripes* on Friday that everyone initially thought Giorffino "was an honest, kind, good person."

"It was so purposeful and well-planned and greedy, as the court put it. ... I'm just thankful it's over and that justice has prevailed, and we are recovering," Mills-Griffiths said.

As part of her sentence, Giorffino is barred from using existing lines of credit or opening new ones without approval of a probation officer. She must also participate in a mental health treatment program. ❖

## National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia

As of March 13, 2025, the number of Americans Missing and Unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War is 1,573.

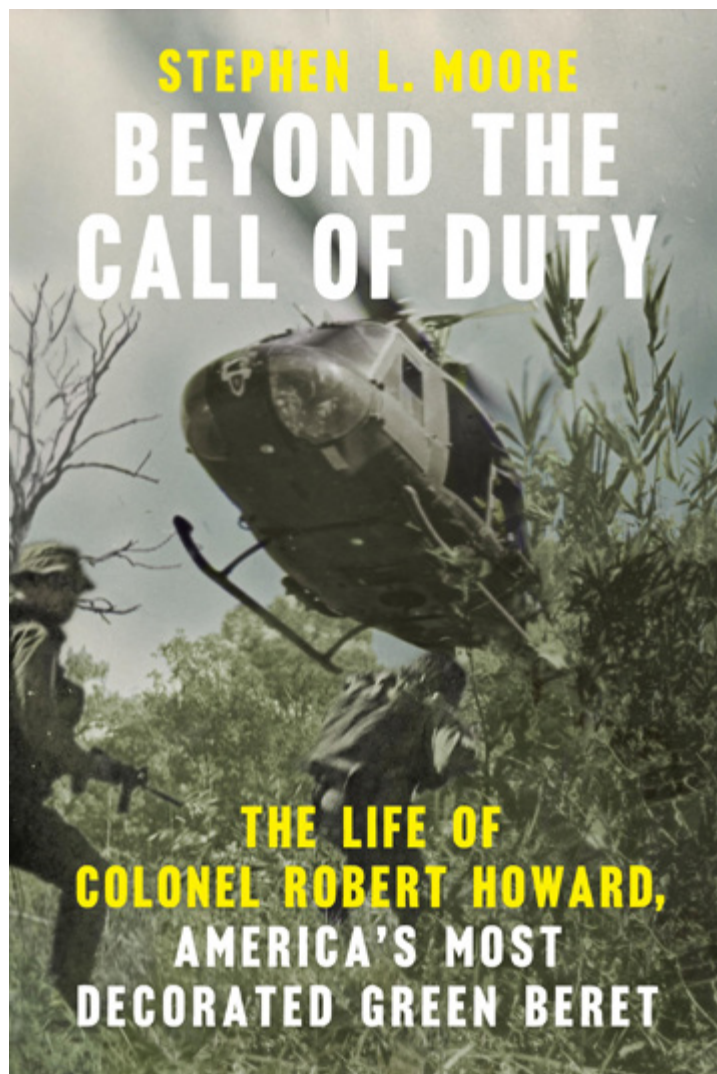
Since 1970, the National League of POW/MIA Families, has represented the many families of those still missing and unaccounted for and to hold the DPAA and U.S. Government accountable to their promises to pursue and expand their efforts globally while primarily focusing on Vietnam War Missing.

**Visit [pow-miafamilies.org](http://pow-miafamilies.org) to learn more, to donate, or to become members.**



## Book Review

# *Beyond the Call of Duty: The Life of Colonel Robert Howard, America's Most Decorated Green Beret* by Stephen L. Moore



[Beyond the Call of Duty: The Life of Colonel Robert Howard, America's Most Decorated Green Beret \(American War Heroes\)](#)

By Stephen L. Moore

Dutton Caliber (December 3, 2024)

304 pages

Available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook

By How Miller

Colonel (R) Robert Howard was the most decorated Green Beret to serve in and around Vietnam. A Medal of Honor recipient, he was awarded dozens of medals in his four tours of duty, largely for his fearless conduct on missions. Half of that was with the super-secret MACV-SOG, running missions “across the fence” into Laos and Cambodia.

In Stephen Moore's excellent book, *Beyond the Call of Duty*, you will find unrelenting, unbelievable exploits, helping keep his vastly outnumbered teammates alive and accomplishing the mission.

There is more captivating action in this book than Hollywood scriptwriters are capable of manufacturing. In between all the intense action, Stephen tells us about important parts of Robert's life and his 36 year Army career and beyond, right up to his burial spot with a view of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier that so moved him.

Having been assigned to the supply room because he had previously demonstrated skills in that area, though it was a very important part of the mission's success, he longed to get out on missions as often as he could. He always had his pack and rifle handy to leave on a moment's notice, and he was frequently given the opportunity because he was so good on missions. Since he was not permanently assigned to a Recon Team, he would always be on the team as a “straphanger”, but there was not another straphanger more respected and sought after than he was.

Something his grandmother taught him, early in life, was to “always face your problems head on.” From taking on school bullies to facing the NVA weapons fire, he seemed to always follow that course. Always more concerned about others than himself, he was steady under fire, and repeatedly did amazing things, fighting through the pains of wounds to quell the enemy and protect his men, both indigenous and American.

At the end of his 3rd tour in Vietnam, Bob was awarded a battlefield commission to First Lieutenant, and after required schools in “the States” he returned to SOG as Recon Company Commander. He did have to accept one disappointment. Since his Medal of Honor recommendation was being processed, he was forbidden from going out on operations.

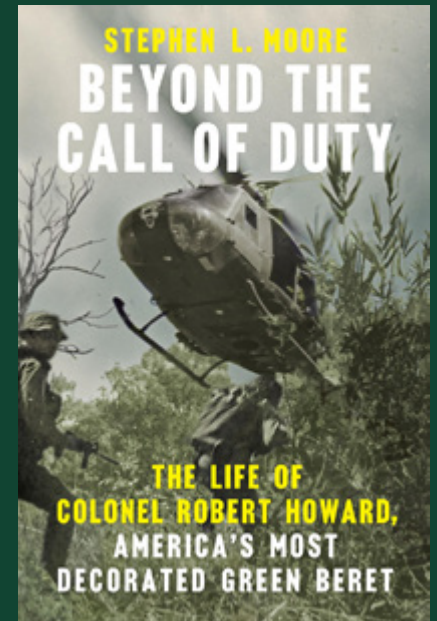
He continued on in many roles throughout his career, including being the commander of SF in Korea. Many of these roles were in training new Green Berets.

After retiring, Bob worked for the VA and for several years was an officer of the Medal of Honor Society.

Steven has included so many tales and incidents in Bob's life that you can feel that you have caught the essence of the man. ❖

# AN EXCERPT FROM BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

## The Life of Colonel Robert Howard, America's Most Decorated Green Beret



By Stephen L. Moore

*Beyond the Call of Duty: The Life of Colonel Robert Howard, America's Most Decorated Green Beret*, published by Dutton Caliber, Chapter Seven, pages 60-80, used with permission.

### ★ SEVEN ★ DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Bob Howard's automatic rifle barked angrily as spent brass casings clattered onto the ground around him. With his chopper flared out over the landing zone, he carefully avoided the recon men swarming toward the extraction ship.

His shots were placed against NVA soldiers racing forward to annihilate the SOG team.

Howard helped pull both Green Berets and indigenous troopers into the slick before returning to his covering fire. Following this late-1967 mission, he would be written up for the Air Medal for heroism. Although generally issued to pilots and aircrewmembers who flew on combat assault missions, the Air Medal was also awarded to SOG Green Berets for heroism in support of ground troops. In such cases, the recon man was normally praised for offering fire support with an automatic rifle, a helicopter machine gun, or a grenade launcher while helping to extract a besieged team.

Howard would eventually be pinned with four Air Medals for service in Vietnam during the period of fall 1967 through December 1968. His first was issued for a late-1967 mission for which Green Beret medic Luke Nance and First Lieutenant Gary Zukav were also issued Air Medals on the same U.S. Army general orders document. Zukav and others had been sent in to offer fire support to extract a SOG team in Laos that had declared a Prairie Fire emergency near the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (Zukav, a Hatchet Force officer who returned from Vietnam in early 1968, was best known decades later as an American spiritual teacher and inspirational author.)



Air support was critical for recon teams, but Howard's first love was being on the ground and across the fence in enemy territory. He had participated in only one mission as a straphanger for Joe Messer. The next man to offer Howard a chance to run recon was Sergeant First Class Robert Sprouse, a buddy of Messer's who had joined FOB-2 at the same time as Messer. Sprouse, whose radio call sign was "Squirrel," had started his recon work at Kontum straphanging with other teams. He was now the one-zero of ST Kentucky. Squirrel was only too happy to let Bob straphang with him, seeing the same desire in Howard's eyes that he himself had felt months prior.

By July 1967, FOB-2 was in a state of change. Soon after Howard arrived, the first commanding officer that he had known, Major Jerry Kilburn, was transferred to Fort Bragg. Major Frank Leach took temporary acting command until July 21, when thirty-six-year-old Major Roxie Ray Hart from Georgia arrived on the scene. Hart would command FOB-2 for the next nine months. At the time of the new CO's arrival, Kontum had a dozen permanently assigned spike teams: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Wyoming. Some teams, like ST Arizona, were just forming and had not run missions. Others had been in service since the first days of the base, and they had been commanded by multiple one-zeros during that time.

The need for straphangers like Howard was constant. Hart's base was still building up to its full complement of sixty Green Berets, which was continually challenged due to personnel losses and injuries. During June and July, there were several casualties, some resulting from a midair collision between two heavily loaded Vietnamese CH-34 helicopters returning from a cross-border mission on the Fourth of July. Six members of ST New York, including two Green Berets, were killed in that crash. Two weeks later, on July 15, the one-zero of ST Florida was killed in an NVA ambush across the fence.<sup>2</sup>

Howard thus found teams regularly in need of a temporary replacement, a fair excuse to leave his supply room duties behind for several days each time. By late summer of 1967, he was getting into the field on a more regular basis, either with a spike team, with one of the temporary Project Omega B-50 teams, or with a Hatchet Force operation. He did not bother keeping notes on each of his missions. The exact dates of some have been lost over time since many MACV-SOG mission records were destroyed after the Vietnam War.

Howard quickly became known as a solid, dependable, and fearless straphanger for anyone in need. Although he was not a regular at the base club during his first year at FOB-2, the Green Berets sharing drinks there heard plenty about his exploits in enemy territory. His first recon mission with Joe Messer might have been void of enemy contact, but Howard found or created plenty of action on many of his subsequent trips into Laos and Cambodia.

One of the teams that Howard volunteered to join was assigned a nineteen-day mission to explore small east-west valleys near the Laos–North Vietnam border to identify potential escape routes for downed American pilots. Howard and his team located little-known mountain passes through which U.S. aviators evading capture in North Vietnam's panhandle could escape safely into Laos. Gathering such intelligence was vital work conducted by SOG recon men, but Howard preferred to deliver devastating blows to NVA forces.<sup>3</sup>

Howard dreamed up one clever strike while working in his supply room. One of his military specialties was demolition, so he concocted a plan while waiting for his next straphanger opportunity. He took an old footlocker and spent hours painting it bright red. Howard's biggest challenge was convincing his Kontum intelligence officers to allow him to rig it up to be a special booby trap. Inside it, he packed about eighty pounds of aging TNT that was beginning to sweat nitro. He dual-primed the deadly locker with a pair of five-minute-time-delay detonators.

As the team was airlifted into Laos the next day, Howard maintained a hand on the bright red locker to keep its contents steady. His Montagnard comrades eyed the strange box with nervous looks but said nothing. At the LZ, the first recon men swarmed out of the chopper as Howard struggled to lift the heavy box. Setting it level in the tall grass, he motioned his final Yards from the bird just before the pilot pulled away. Howard knew that NVA trackers routinely monitored the insert of Green Beret teams, and he had a special surprise in store for them.<sup>4</sup>

The team quickly raced into the jungle, giving the appearance of being in such haste that they had forgotten their supply locker. Howard's team circled back through the foliage and took up station nearby to watch. As expected, several North Vietnamese soldiers soon swarmed the LZ and began prying open the locker, whose time-delay detonator had been set. "That bastard blew a hole in the ground," Howard recalled. "It blew shit for a quarter of a mile. That's how much TNT we had in it."

Howard's reputation grew around the base as stories came back of his exploits across the fence. Also in 1967, his team was assigned to monitor NVA truck traffic at night along Highway 110. Several nights into the assignment, the sound of a rumbling engine soon broke the silence of the dark jungle. Howard crept up alongside the road and lay

in wait. As a loaded troop truck rolled past his position, he sprang into action. He ran alongside the truck, clutching a Claymore detonator in his hand. Howard tossed the mine into the truck full of startled NVA soldiers. At a full sprint, he disappeared back into the jungle as the timefused Claymore exploded seconds later, destroying the vehicle.<sup>5</sup>



Hailing from Arkansas, Staff Sergeant Larry Melton White was about the same age as Howard, and he had arrived at Kontum in early 1967. His first missions were carrying radio for one-zero Johnny Arvai's ST Maine and on other cross-border operations with one-zero Charles Smith of Project Omega's RT Brace. By the fall, White had assumed command of Arvai's team. His code name was "Six Pack," referring to his preference of running a smaller spike team with three Americans and three indigenous members. He soon befriended Bob Howard and allowed him to straphang with his spike team.

"I never saw him show any fear whatsoever," White recalled of Howard. He had never experienced a soldier like this supply sergeant. "He would do anything you wanted him to do. You couldn't ask for a better guy on a team." White found Howard to be subdued in peaceful situations, not one to make a lot of idle small talk around the compound.<sup>6</sup>

In late 1967, Howard accompanied White's team on five missions. On their first, they made no contact at all. They went in as a "pilot team" assigned to flush out local Montagnards and bring some of them back to Kontum. Upon exiting their chopper, the team ran for a nearby wood line to take cover. There White and Howard discovered many eroding wooden caskets lying on top of the ground in the forest. It seemed odd, but they pushed on in search of the NVA-sympathetic Yards reported in the area. "We spent a number of days in there but never saw a living person," White recalled. "We were going to take the entire bunch and bring them back to Kontum. We were going to deny the NVA of their use. But we guessed they had moved them out of the area."

Soon after this luckless mission, Howard accompanied Six Pack White's team on another trip across the fence. Along with three Yards and a junior man carrying radio, they were inserted by a Huey and accompanying gunships from Dak To into Laos. All six men on the team dressed in regular green jungle fatigues with soft boonie hats. "We added black spray paint, which made it an even better-style camouflage," said White. Going into the combat zone as one-zero, he always carried a high-power Browning automatic pistol strapped to his waist for easy access, in the event he was forced to ditch his gear in a running firefight.

In Laos, his team moved quietly through the jungle in search of their enemy. During the day, White insisted that his men keep moving at all times. "We would move from daylight to dark," he said. "I didn't take breaks or sit down for lunch. That's where most of the teams got into trouble. If we really needed a rest, we'd lean up against trees for a while."

Howard and his fellow teammates simply munched on dried sardines and indigenous rations. These little bags of rice, dried peppers, and various proteins required a small amount of water poured in from the soldiers' canteens. "You'd just fill it up to the line, and then you could eat your rice as you went along through the jungle," White recalled.





Bob Howard in the field wearing tiger-stripe camouflage, talking with his one-zero Larry White. (Robert L. Howard collection, courtesy of Melissa Howard Gentsch)

“You could also make a rice ball to eat, or take bites of what we called ‘donkey-dick’ sausage.” Those who were becoming drowsy or did not wish to eat could simply pop an amphetamine tablet to keep them alert and curb their appetite.<sup>7</sup>

White and Howard kept their team moving near the Ho Chi Minh Trail the first two days. Unlike other teams, where the junior man carried the team radio, Six Pack White always insisted he would handle that duty. “The only way you’re going to get pulled out of there is if you have a radio,” he reasoned. “My other stuff was distributed amongst the team.” They moved from daylight to dark. Once sunset approached, the jungle became dark very quickly. At that point, White advanced his team near the trail they were shadowing and then employed a fishhook maneuver to double back a short distance.

Settling down near the trail, he had his team stretch out to rest for the night. “We would lay toe to toe in a circle,” White related. “We didn’t have a guard or any of that stuff. I would get me a stick, because those Montagnards had respiratory problems. They often coughed and hacked and carried on. If someone would act up during the night, I’d hit them or tap them with that stick to get them quiet.”

Shortly before daybreak, the team was on the move again. “You’d move your tail gunner back and start another day,” he said. During their movement, White and Howard became aware that trail watchers had spotted their team. From time to time, they heard signal shots in the distance as a tracker tried to rally other troops.

“When you’re being tracked, you really can’t shake them,” said White. His team simply kept tabs on where signaling sounds were coming from in order to determine which direction they should move next. “We carried silenced .22s, and sometimes we would pop a guy who was following us too close,” White added. “We surprised them instead of them surprising us. You’d just take out a few of them and keep going.”

The trackers began to move too close to their team, so White asked Howard to put out toe poppers to slow them down. Similar to hockey pucks in appearance, M-14 antipersonnel mines were one of many special toys utilized by Special Forces men to stop pursuing opponents. Composed largely of plastic, the small, thick devices required only about thirty pounds of pressure to detonate enough explosives to remove a man’s foot. As the pursuers gained on the team, Howard ripped off his shirt and tossed it across a bush after quickly planting a few toe poppers in front of it. Minutes later, he heard two explosions after his curious followers approached to examine the shirt. White’s team was thereafter free of these trackers.<sup>8</sup>

During their final day across the fence, White’s team finally made heavy contact with a large NVA force. A firefight ensued, and he called his Covey Rider for an extraction. Two Hueys moved in, each with four McGuire rigs hanging below them; the canopy was too thick to

lower extraction ladders. Invented by Special Forces sergeant major Charles T. McGuire, the McGuire rig was a hundred-foot rope with a six-foot loop fitted with a padded canvas seat at the end. Each Huey could drop four weighted rigs, or “strings” in recon jargon, two to each side. As the first bird went into a hover, Howard and White had their indigenous team leader load two of his men and one American into the strings. The first Huey pulled away, leaving White, Howard, and one Yard laying down covering fire as the second bird dropped low. The three slipped into their rope seats and were soon pulled through the heavy canopy, branches slapping at their arms and faces as they were lifted clear.

Although his team had failed to grab a prisoner, as White had hoped, they had at least all been extracted without injury. He appreciated the eagerness of Bob Howard as his volunteer one-one each time they ran together. “He was the only man I’d ever seen whose pulse rate never got up,” White recalled. “He was just calm, cool, and collected.”

On their fifth mission together in Laos, Howard and White used Claymores with time-delay fuses to destroy a vital NVA fuel pipeline.

White would be transferred to another base in early 1968, but it was not the last time he would run recon with Staff Sergeant Howard.



In September 1967, Bob received a new boss in the S-4 division. Thirty-two-year-old Captain Eugene Crouch McCarley Jr., who hailed from Wilmington, North Carolina, became Kontum’s new logistics boss. Like Howard, he was tough as nails and he already had advanced Special Forces training.

Gene McCarley had completed Officer Candidate School in August 1962 at Fort Benning, Georgia. He had commanded a wide variety of SF detachments and graduated from the Army’s Special Warfare

School. Despite his experience, McCarley still arrived at FOB-2 as an FNG without experience running a Prairie Fire or Daniel Boone mission. “Anybody that went to Kontum had to run one mission with a recon team,” McCarley recalled.<sup>9</sup>

Gene’s first trip across the fence was with SFC Don Steele’s ST Florida. His one-zero was wounded during that insert, and Captain McCarley was tapped to take over Florida when the team’s other Green Beret was deemed to be suffering from combat fatigue. Gene had no fear of taking on the toughest assignments. “I always ran with a small team, so it was usually just myself and one American and three or four indig,” he remembered. “I was crazy as hell.”

He found his supply sergeant to be equally bold in any situation. One day, Howard and his new captain checked out a deuce-and-a-half truck to secure supplies from nearby Kontum City. As they crossed a small stream, the makeshift bridge they were using partially collapsed, preventing them from returning. As McCarley and Howard surveyed the situation, potshots rang out from nearby.

A pair of Viet Cong soldiers had advanced and they were firing on the Green Berets with single-shot rifles. It was McCarley and Howard’s first firefight together—but it was never even a contest. Both men were expert shots and they were heavily armed. In less than a minute, they downed both opponents.<sup>10</sup>

After that moment, McCarley occasionally used Howard when he needed a straphanger for ST Florida. Neither man was wounded on their late-1967 missions, and they developed a deep trust in and friendship with each other. “Howard just loved combat,” Gene recalled. “He was tough, and he just loved to fight the enemy. He was one hell of a man.”

Captain McCarley would later, in early 1968, be assigned to take command of Company B of FOB-2’s Hatchet Force, which soon became officially known as the “Exploitation Force.” “Politicians didn’t like the word ‘Hatchet,’” McCarley remembered. “It sounded too sinister. We changed names at the FOB so many times, but the mission never changed.” During his time with the Exploitation Force, McCarley would call on Howard to join his company when he needed an extra man he could depend on. Sergeant First Class Johnnie Gilreath Jr. was another one-zero who was more than happy to let Bob Howard straphang with his team. A youthful-looking twenty-four-year-old Tennessean with dark hair and a thin mustache, Gilreath was fearless in the field. He had arrived in Kontum in April 1967 from the 10th Special Forces Group in Germany, along with Sergeant Larry David Williams. With a year of Vietnam service under his belt already, Gilreath ran a few missions with ST Colorado, one of Kontum’s original teams.

By August 1967, Johnnie had taken over Colorado after his one-zero, SFC Jerry “Pinky” Lee, received new orders. Larry Williams, whose SOG code name was “After Shave,” became Gilreath’s one-one. He carried the PRC-25 radio on at least eight missions that their team ran across the fence, and on in-country patrols. In September 1967, they pulled Bob Howard in to strap for their team for a mission into Laos, where they managed to break contact with an enemy force and be safely extracted.<sup>11</sup>

Howard’s toughest mission with Spike Team Colorado came in November 1967. Johnnie Gilreath’s team had orders to insert into southeast Laos for a wiretap operation to gather intelligence on NVA



Sergeant First Class Bob Howard with Sergeant Larry Williams (right) of Spike Team Colorado. Howard accompanied Williams and ST Colorado as a straphanger on multiple missions in late 1967. (Jason Hardy)

operations. Their target area was H-9, or Hotel 9. SOG command used alphanumeric designations to divide up the maps of Laos and Cambodia into six-kilometer-by-six-kilometer target boxes. Target areas approved by both the White House and SOG headquarters in Saigon were then relayed to the forward operating base’s S-3 (operations) shop. Together with their S-2 (intelligence) officers, the S-3 team would select a team for each mission and prepare briefing materials for the chosen one-zero.<sup>12</sup>

During their early months of running recon, FOB-2 men were always flown into enemy territory in CH-34 Kingbee choppers operated by the Vietnamese Air Force’s 219th Helicopter Squadron. But as ST Colorado reviewed their mission plan on November 18, Gilreath announced that they would be inserted by American pilots this time.

In October, the 57th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) began setting up camp near FOB-2 at the new Kontum Army Airfield. They had two platoons of UH-1H model Huey helicopters and eight UH-1C Huey gunships. The “slicks” were lightly armed, while the more heavily armed gunship division 1C choppers went by the call name “Cougars.” The 57th pilots nicknamed their slicks “Gladiators,” and used radio call signs such as “Gladiator 167.”<sup>13</sup>

On the morning of November 19, Gilreath, Williams, and their Yards were inserted into Hotel 9. Low on water after two days in denied territory, ST Colorado consulted its maps and moved toward a stream located in their area. Gilreath and his men assumed position on a hill while Williams took a Montagnard down the hill to stock up on water. While doing so, Williams noticed massive bags of rice stacked by the



hundreds along with large quantities of ammunition. Upon reporting this find of NVA supplies to Gilreath, the team relayed a message back to base via their circling Covey Rider.

Major Hart ordered a Hatchet Team platoon to be flown into the area immediately to destroy the enemy supply dump. This Exploitation Force would have its hands full with the NVA goods, so Bob Howard volunteered to lead a small recon team in as well. He would guide the Hatchet men to the dump area and then scout for approaching NVA to prevent any loss of men while the supplies were destroyed.<sup>14</sup>

Howard's recon unit and the large Hatchet Force platoon were flown in by 57th AHC slicks. On the ground, one-one Larry Williams helped prepare a large LZ by using a Claymore to blow down a tree. He then took one of his Yards down to inspect the NVA rice cache. Gilreath and the remainder of ST Colorado remained in their hillside position as the Kontum Hueys began settling down on the oversized landing zone.

His rucksack loaded with provisions and weapons, Howard was ready to leap off the chopper. Clutching his M16, he anxiously pressed his boots on the skids, watching the waving grass below as his Huey flared out. A short distance away, Williams tripped an ambush as the Hatchet Force men began pouring out of their UH-1Hs. He and his Yard ran up on an NVA soldier near the stockpile and exchanged fire with him.

The instant Williams and his Montagnard teammate commenced shooting, the calm jungle all around the LZ erupted into violent explosions of small-arms fire and machine guns. "All hell broke loose," recalled Williams. "We had stirred up a hornet's nest!"<sup>15</sup>

Unseen machine-gun nests unleashed volleys of bullets into the choppers. The last of the Hatchet Force men raced for nearby cover. By the time the slicks cleared the LZ, three had been badly shot up by ground fire. Howard and his men now had a hot mission—and they needed to take out enemy resistance. Howard swiftly guided the Kontum platoon around the dangerous ambush zone and made contact with one-zero Gilreath's team. The group had gone in with a new first lieutenant as a straphanger, an officer who had hoped to earn his Combat Infantryman Badge.

Gilreath left this officer in charge of some of his Yards. He pushed forward with Williams, Howard, and the small security element that Howard had brought in. The Hatchet Force Green Berets and their Montagnards quickly set to work, slashing open the hundreds of bags of rice and salt and setting fire to the NVA goods. But this process would take some time, due to the enormous stockpile in front of them. Howard would have to keep the NVA men at bay if the mission was to succeed.

Spike Team Colorado and the Kontum Exploitation Force faced heavier enemy opposition than they had expected. The firefight Williams had triggered during the relief team's insert soon brought plenty more action. Enemy gunners moved in close enough to man machine-gun bunkers

near the bivouac area that the American recon forces were in the process of destroying. Bob Howard, leading a small group of Yards in search of the enemy gun nests, suddenly encountered four North Vietnamese soldiers charging toward him. With a single magazine, Howard gunned down all four NVA with his M16. No sooner had he eliminated this threat than his team faced an even greater challenge. A short distance away, a camouflaged machine-gun bunker roared to life. Howard, Gilreath, Williams, and others hit the deck and tried to take cover. Bullets pierced the ground all around them. Although Williams and others had their jackets ripped by slugs, none of them were directly hit.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, the Hatchet Force men continued to destroy the NVA battalion's food cache. During this work, they uncovered a thousand rounds of recoilless rifle ammunition and seven hundred rounds of AK-47 ammunition. The Kontum men utilized mortars to detonate all



Howard carrying a SLAM POW. Read more about SLAM (search, locate, annihilate, monitor) operations in Chapter 10 of *Beyond the Call of Duty*. (Robert L. Howard collection, courtesy of Melissa Howard Gentsch)

of this ammunition, but the massive volumes of explosions only further riled up the nearby NVA. Enemy soldiers raced forward to man other pill-boxes in the vicinity. Their growing volume of firepower would play hell on Howard and his comrades.

One-zero Gilreath was still learning just how brave Robert Howard was. "He ran toward the enemy at all times," he later related. Machine-gun bullets continued to stitch the ground all about the small team of Green Berets and Montagnards. Oblivious to his own safety, Howard began crawling forward toward the machine-gun bunker. In the process, he became aware of a lone North Vietnamese soldier firing shots at him with a rifle.

Taking careful aim, Howard put a lethal round into the sniper, then resumed his crawling toward the bunker. Steeling his nerve, Bob stood and charged. Racing to point-blank range, he used his automatic weapon to mow down all the gunners within the nest. Before he could retreat, NVA manning another nest nearby opened fire on him.



Howard hit the jungle floor and crawled quickly for cover. Sergeant Williams stood and opened fire on the second pillbox, providing cover for Howard's retreat. His barrage suppressed fire from the nest long enough for Howard to reach safety and pull his men to a covered position. Bob then opened up on the radio, calling to the Covey Rider circling above the action. Air strikes were called in to destroy this bunker.

The NVA machine-gun nest fell silent as the aircraft pulled clear of the area. Howard inched forward to assess the bomb damage. Some of the NVA had either survived or had been quickly replaced by other soldiers. The machine gun came to life again, firing bursts of bullets at Howard. Bullets and frags from explosions began to take a toll on Howard's body. His right clavicle was fractured by shrapnel, and minutes later another fragment or bullet ripped through his right cheek.<sup>17</sup>

Howard cheated death once again when he was hit in the face by a bullet for the second time in three years. Like his 1965 facial wound, this bullet was another ricochet that struck him in the head above his left eye. The bullet failed to penetrate his skull, but the concussion knocked him to the ground, rendering him briefly unconscious.<sup>18</sup>

Howard was in an unenviable position as he regained his senses. He was pinned to the ground as bullets sprayed out just six inches above his head. His shoulder was separated, and blood gushed from his face. But he was far from giving up. He knew his life and those

of others nearby were on the line if the enemy bunker could not be knocked out. Howard removed a fragmentation grenade from his gear, pulled the pin, and tossed the grenade into the aperture of the emplacement.

A brilliant orange burst of flame erupted in the pillbox, and the explosion killed the remaining enemy gunners. With the bunker silenced once more, Howard dashed across the clearing to where his comrades were taking cover. Within minutes, fresh NVA troops manned the machine-gun nest and pinned down the SOG men.

This time Howard grabbed an anti-tank rocket launcher from one of the Yard grenadiers. A withering hail of bullets poured from the nest.

"Cover me!" Howard shouted.

Larry Williams opened fire with his automatic weapon as Howard rose to his feet and moved forward. Machine-gun bullets swept the area, but the NVA gunners were obviously frightened. Their aim was off. Howard carefully put the launcher against his left shoulder and took aim. He fired from close range and winced as the recoil jarred his broken clavicle. The rocket screamed into the bunker and exploded, tossing shrapnel, jungle foliage, and body parts in all directions. Howard's one-man assaults, covered well by Williams and others, had eliminated two machine-gun teams in a matter of minutes.



Howard receiving his Medal of Honor in 1971 from President Richard Nixon. (Robert L. Howard collection, courtesy of Melissa Howard Gentsch)

The SOG force was now able to ease back in. As they moved up a road toward the NVA cache area, more machine-gun nests opened fire on them. Williams fired grenades at the enemy bunker, then stood to charge. He fired his M16 as he ran, wiping out the entire gun crew on his own.

Along with Howard and Gilreath, Williams continued to assault any NVA that threatened their movements. Gilreath soon deemed the area too hot to handle. Ample numbers of North Vietnamese from the battalion remained, and their return fire increased. By this point, the Hatchet Force had succeeded in destroying all of the enemy's ammo pile and a good portion of the food cache.

Gilreath radioed in extraction choppers and began moving the large force back through the jungle hundreds of yards toward their original LZ. One by one, Huey slicks dropped in to begin pulling out the dozens of Montagnards and Americans.

By the time the last chopper lifted free, the entire Kontum force was safely extracted, with only Staff Sergeant Howard wounded. Heavy air strikes were called in to plaster the NVA platoon and any surviving supplies.

Howard's wounds were not life-threatening, and he was quickly patched up by Army medics. Although it was the second time he had been wounded in the Vietnam War, November 21, 1967, would mark the first date on which he was officially written up for a Purple Heart for his injuries. For his heroism in the assault on the NVA platoon, Larry Williams would later be pinned with a Silver Star.

Soon after the FOB-2 men were returned to their base, one-zero Johnnie Gilreath and Howard received a summons. Chief SOG Jack Singlaub had them flown to Saigon on a C-130 Blackbird to brief his boss, General William Westmoreland, who was clearly impressed with the SOG mission. Gilreath and Howard detailed their individual actions and those of their accompanying Hatchet Force. The four-star general paused, then asked if there was anything he could do for them.

"Sir, I'd like to go to flight school and become an aviator," said Gilreath.<sup>19</sup>

Westmoreland promised the ST Colorado team leader a commission and the chance to enter flight training. Gilreath was the second one-zero from FOB-2 to receive a battlefield commission to become an officer. The first had been Dick Meadows, whose recon team had captured a number of enemy prisoners during the early months of Kontum's history. Weeks after the meeting with Westmoreland, Gilreath was sent to Command and Control North (CCN) in Da Nang for a special mission on December 10. Operating with the 1st Cavalry Division in A Shau Valley, Second Lieutenant Gilreath earned a Bronze Star for this mission before returning to FOB-2 to command a Hatchet Force platoon. He would eventually retire as a lieutenant colonel after nearly twenty-eight years of military service.<sup>20</sup>

As for himself, Bob Howard merely asked that he be allowed to continue active combat duty from Kontum. Westmoreland and Singlaub were only too happy to oblige their eager Green Beret. His base commander, Major Hart, had Howard written up for the Medal of Honor for his selfless assaults against the NVA machine-gun nests on November 21. In the end, the paperwork stalled out, and the FOB-2 supply sergeant was instead issued the nation's second-highest award for valor, the Distinguished Service Cross.

Such awards were generally not swift in being processed. In Howard's case, his DSC was not formalized until May 2, 1968, nearly six months after the action. It cited his "extraordinary heroism" while being subjected to "a withering hail of bullets." It further praised his "fearless and determined action in close combat" while allowing his patrol to destroy the enemy cache.<sup>21</sup> Staff Sergeant Howard was little concerned with what medal was eventually pinned to his chest. His tour of duty in Vietnam was far from over, and it would not be the last time his superiors considered him worthy enough to be written up for the Medal of Honor. ❖

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## Endnotes

1. "5th Special Forces Group Decorations"; "Gary Zukav with Fellow Veterans (Part I)," video.
2. Moore, *Uncommon Valor*, 91–94.
3. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 70.
4. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 129.
5. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 204.
6. White, telephone interviews.
7. White, telephone interviews.
8. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 150.
9. McCarley, telephone interview.
10. McCarley, telephone interview.
11. Williams, telephone interview; Gilreath, telephone interviews.
12. Greco, *Running Recon*, 54.
13. "1967 Gladiators– Cougars."
14. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 204.
15. Williams, telephone interview.
16. Williams, telephone interview.
17. Robert L. Howard Collection, Purple Heart citations.
18. Robert L. Howard Collection, medical and military records; "Recon Courage Under Fire."
19. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars*, 205.
20. Gilreath, telephone interviews.
21. Robert L. Howard Collection, Distinguished Service Cross citation.

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## ***Tony Poe's CIA War: A Secret War Waged by His Paramilitary Army in Southeast Asia* by Richard Gough**



[Tony Poe's CIA War: A Secret War Waged by His Paramilitary Army in Southeast Asia](#)

By Richard Gough

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### **A Well-Known Legend of a Secret War**

By Marc Yablonka

Though much is surmised about the often infamously thought of CIA agent Anthony Poshepny, known to most in the US Intel community as Tony Poe, it took British author, the late Richard Gough, to write the book that reads like a play by play of Poe's clandestine operations in Southeast Asia during the Cold War to set Poe's record straight.

Gough does so by laying Poe's ascendance to notoriety against shorter biographies of several of his fellow CIA agents and pilots who flew for Air America in Indochina during the Vietnam War, and the tangential battles fought during what was termed the secret war in Laos.

Gough, himself a veteran of the UK's war in 1950s Malaya as a member of the Gurka Brigade, and later, the Parachute Regiment and Intelligence Corps, passed away mere weeks after his book *Tony Poe's CIA War* (Knox Press, imprint of Permuted Press, New York, pp. 273, paperback \$19.99, Kindle \$9.99) was published. By delving into the extraordinary life of this paramilitary agent, Gough left us with a meticulously researched biography of a complex and controversial figure. Along with Hmong Royal Lao Army General Vang Pao, Poe was one of the key players in the war against communism and its emissaries in Laos, the Pathet Lao.

Controversies surround Poe's life. Perhaps the one that is most often stated erroneously is that Poe was the model for the Colonel Kurtz character played by Marlon Brando in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*. Poe denied this. And Coppola denied it as well, stating instead that his model for the Brando character was US Army Special Forces Gen. Robert Rheault, who was accused of ordering the controversial 1969 murder of Thai Khac Chuyen, a South Vietnamese double agent, because the latter had compromised intelligence operations.

Another controversy, widely thought to be true, is that Poe ordered his Hmong hilltribe Special Guerilla Units during the secret war to bring him the ears of dead Pathet Lao cadres in exchange for monetary reward. It was purported that he horrified his superiors by sending them bags full of the ears. Poe only stopped the practice when he himself was mortified to learn that some Hmong SGUs fell into the practice of cutting off their own children's ears, bringing them to Poe for financial gain.

"One [Air America] pilot, Richard Craft, recalled how Tony had his own system. `When visiting outposts, he would return to the aircraft with a bag with what looked like a string of apricots, and back at base, he emptied the contents into a green canvas bag nailed to the doorframe of his hut,'" Gough revealed.

The ear cutting may have been a tactic Poe picked up as a World War II Marine in the Solomon Islands of the Southwest Pacific with the 2nd Parachute Battalion, which was "carrying out hit and run raids, killing Japanese, and cutting off their ears as souvenirs," according to Gough, who also paints a normal picture of Poe, telling us, "Apart



from his university studies (at what is now San Jose State University in California, where he majored in history), Poe was a boxer, teetotaler, nonsmoker, popular with girls, and a practicing Roman Catholic.”

“His end-of-course evaluation may have described him as quick-thinking, irreverent, and independent—all the right qualities needed for the mission the CIA may have in mind for him,” Gough wrote in *Tony Poe’s CIA War*. “Some colleagues, however, may have thought him loud, bad tempered, and with no respect for authority,” Gough countered.

In 1952, Poe would add the Central Intelligence Agency to his résumé when he joined its Office of Policy Coordination, a covert action branch of the CIA, which did not admit to the branch’s existence until 1982. Nonetheless, Poe fit the OPC’s bill.

Another CIA front organization Poe was assigned to was the Bangkok-based Overseas Southeast Asia Supply, which provided military matériel to Kuomintang forces based in Burma. In 1958, Poe tried unsuccessfully to arrange a military uprising against Indonesian President Sukarno. From 1958 to 1960, he trained different groups while with the company.

According to [Wikipedia.com](#), those included Tibetan Khampas and Hui Muslims for anti-government operations inside China.

Nine years and several clandestine operations in Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia later, Poe found himself in Laos, “The land of a million elephants and the white parasol.”

It’s important to note that within one year after Poe’s arrival in Laos, the 1962 Geneva Accords stipulated that Laos was to be a neutral country in the ongoing fight between Ho Chi Minh’s communist forces of North Vietnam and their Viet Cong “cousins” in South Vietnam, against the American-supported government in Saigon headed by Ngo Dinh Diem.

As Gough recounts for us in *Tony Poe’s CIA War*, “In 1962, fourteen countries signed the Declaration of Neutrality of Laos. The peace agreement required all foreign military personnel to leave Laos in 12 weeks. Nearly 800 US personnel crossed the Mekong River into Thailand while only 40 North Vietnamese soldiers from an estimated 7,000 [NVA] troops in Laos passed through the [International] Control Commission’s border checkpoint into Vietnam.”

It’s really here, in the last half of Gough’s book, that it becomes an engrossing narrative with graphic accounts of covert operations involving the 17,000 Hmong soldiers that Poe commanded from 1961 to 1970. It shows a man conflicted by war, yet addicted to the adrenaline rush of it at the same time.

He was also enveloped by the bizarre nature of the trappings of war.

He and fellow CIA agent Jack Shirley learned that a certain leftist neutralist Royal Lao Army commander paid regular visits to his favorite girl in a local Vientiane brothel. Shirley suggested to Poe that, with the girl’s cooperation, “the colonel could be terminated, with a smile on his face,” according to Gough.

“The girl agreed and told Shirley she would tell him when the colonel was next expected. On the appropriate evening, they saw his

Jeep arrive, and watched as he entered the bar. They spun a coin to see who would gun him down. Following the pair up the stairs, they waited in the corridor for a signal from the girl,” Gough wrote.

“The walls were thin with a gap at the top to allow air to circulate,” Gough continued, “and they could hear whispered pillow talk and heavy breathing. When the colonel was approaching the climax of his visit, they burst through the door. Poe’s weapon jammed and Shirley shot the colonel.”

The reality of the war soon set in.

Almost overnight,” Gough tells readers, “The skies over [CIA base] Long Tieng filled with planes bringing pallets of weapons, bullets, shells, mortars, and equipment. On the ramp, Poe was giving directions to the pilots or hurrying his teams to load choppers awaiting take off to restock the hilltop outposts.”

“When he first arrived in Laos, his role was to seek out new landing strips surrounding the ridgeways of the PDJ [Plain of Jars]. Now, using these airstrips, a very enthusiastic Poe took the war into enemy territory, airlifting his assault teams from hilltop to hilltop, liberating a 50-mile strip in Sam Neua Province to his outposts at Phou Pha Thi and Hong Non.”

Among the weaponry Tony Poe, the CIA, Air America, and the clandestine sheep-dipped US Air Force Ravens had at their disposal in the fight against the Pathet Lao and NVA communists, was the North American T-28 Trojan.

Of Air America’s use of the T-28, Gough wrote, “One morning Joe Hazen was among five Air America pilots called to a briefing to bring them up to date on the enemy threat moving down Route 7. All five had flown the T-28 and were trained in close support roles. When asked to volunteer to fly T-28s to bomb enemy convoys, they all enthusiastically agreed. The successful Tango program was born and the pilots became the A Team (A for American).”

“Early one morning while it was still dark,” Gough continued, “the five T-28s took a 20-minute flight to Wattay Airfield, where they were hooked up with 500 lb. bombs, rockets, and ammunition. In the early dawn they flew across the southwest corner of the PDJ. Seeing them fly over, Tony grabbed the radio mike and growled, ‘Go get em!’”

For all of his vitality, vim, and vigor for the smell of battle, at the end of his life, Tony Poe had become a beaten down man. He succumbed to complications from diabetes on June 27th, 2003 at the age of 78 at the San Francisco Veterans Medical Center.

Author Richard Gough tells us in his fascinating, action-packed biography *Tony Poe’s CIA War* that the evening of his funeral at St. Francis Catholic Church in Sonoma, Calif., 150 family, friends, colleagues, including Hmong, Air America pilots, and former CIA agents, celebrated a man who had put his life on the line for his country in far away places for 40 years. Gough’s book is a must-read that will enlighten anyone remotely attuned to the wars in Indochina, whether they fought there or not. ❖

# STORIED “SPY GIRL” BETTY McINTOSH LIT UP MORALE OPERATIONS BRANCH

By Marc Yablonka

Six months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered dashing General William “Wild Bill” Donovan, who had distinguished himself during the battles of World War I, to head up the Office of Strategic Services, the OSS, which soon enlisted 13,000 brave men and women from an almost eccentric variety of backgrounds. The OSS was the first clandestine unit to serve all branches of the military and was the precursor to the CIA.

Names like Allen Dulles, who would become the first head of the CIA, Walt Rostow, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., later aides to President John F. Kennedy, John Birch, after whom the ultra-conservative society was named, Monsignor Giovanni Battista, later Pope Paul the VI, Arthur Goldberg, who went on to become American Ambassador to the UN and a Supreme Court Justice, all found their way onto the OSS roster.

Even film director John Ford, actor Sterling Hayden, and TV chef Julia Child held membership in this elite intelligence community.

Yet another name on the list was Betty McIntosh.

Not long after her enlistment into the spy corps, she lay sleeping in Mei Yuan Women’s quarters of the OSS compound in Kunming, China. Without notice, a group of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Chinese nationalist troops burst through the door with an unassembled machine gun and ran to the balcony, where they began to fire on the Maoist forces who were strafing the city.

Strangely, that incident was not the most harrowing for the former Scripps-Howard News Agency war correspondent from Leesburg, Virginia. What she termed “a trip over the hump” was. That March 1945 journey—a flight in an ATC (Allergic to Combat, she laughingly calls it), zigzagging up, down, and over the steep mountains of southern China, while the planes seasoned pilots of the CBI (China-Burma-India) Theatre dodged lightning and thunder—was burnt upon her memory.

“You could look down and see other planes which hadn’t made it. They were like crosses in the snow,” she remembered sadly.

In her autobiography *Undercover Girl*, published in 1947, she recalls how, on that very same “milk run,” as the pilots called it, 26 ATCs were downed by Japanese Raiders in one ten-hour period on New Year’s Eve.

McIntosh thought she was destined for death and clutched many a talisman on the flight, including a St. Christopher, five-leaf clover, and a Japanese 1,000-stitch belt.

“The stitches represented prayers from as many Japanese girls for the return of the wearer,” she wrote.



Elizabeth P. McIntosh, then Elizabeth McDonald, in uniform in WWII.  
(Courtesy U.S. Army)

She chuckled, recalling that, while most of the OSS operatives kissed Kunming’s tarmac when the plane touched down, her friend Julia Child, who had been reading a book, seeming completely undisturbed throughout the horrific flight, deplaned first and, noting the typical scenes one associated with China, “the coolies...the curling rooftop of a small temple near the airfield,” turned to disembarking compatriots and said, “Why this looks just like China!”

McIntosh, an operative from 1943 to 1945, was enticed into the service by a Department of Agriculture major, after being somewhat stymied in her journalism career.

“I wanted to go overseas and they were not letting the gal reporters go beyond Honolulu. I wanted to do in the Pacific what I hadn’t been able to do as a war correspondent. I was assured of a great time, though I didn’t have the foggiest idea of what I was getting into,” McIntosh said.

Her knowledge of the Japanese language, which she had picked up while living with a Nisei (second generation) Japanese family in Hawaii, put her in good stead to be assigned to the Black Propaganda Unit of Morale Operations (MO).

With black propaganda, contrary to white (“disinformation, the Office of Military Intelligence, the VOA [Voice of America] ...”), “we practiced being double agents. We were thinking double, producing the dissemination of slanted propaganda,” she said.

While in training, McIntosh described a visit by anthropologist Margaret Meade, who had done research in the Pacific. She taught them how people in the area thought. “We had to get inside the enemy’s head,” McIntosh emphasized.

On one such operation in 1944, she and fellow OSS officer William Magistretti were posted in New Delhi. Their British counterparts had imprisoned an uncooperative Japanese officer whom they captured in Burma.

“It was toward the end of the war and we were trying to get the Japanese to leave Burma by all means possible,” she said. “But they had been taught never to surrender.”

When McIntosh and Magistretti entered his cell, they found him silent, staring out of his window. Incredibly, Magistretti, who spoke fluent Japanese himself, having attended Japanese university before the war, recognized the prisoner as a classmate.

The POW became convinced to write an order, written by what McIntosh termed a “psycho-styling pen on filmy paper,” erroneously approved by the Japanese High Command in Tokyo, which stated that it was okay to surrender, especially if one were badly injured.

Next, OSS Detachment 101-Burma deployed a Cachin hill tribesman to infiltrate out of the jungle, capture a Japanese courier, kill him, and plant the order in his pouch.

“Within two weeks and for the next six months, we began to notice many Japanese voluntarily surrendering,” McIntosh said.

Though she was not in the European Theatre during the war, she knew well another OSS feat, rewriting the famous German song “Lili Marene,” sung by Marlene Dietrich, another OSS enlistee, with lyrics that were “twisted a bit so that some lonely Nazi soldier, reminded of his country, would hear, “Hitler is ruining Germany.”

Such was the world of black propaganda.

After the war, McIntosh went back into journalism. “What happened to me shouldn’t happen to anybody,” she said. “I went to work for *Glamour* magazine.”

And she soon found out that her OSS training was an obstacle to her first career.

“I tried, but I couldn’t write a straight news story after the war. I just kept thinking of devious things like ‘how can I fool these guys?’”

Journalistically restless, by 1949, she found herself back in the undercover world. By then, the OSS had become the CIA, which assigned her to Japan, where she stayed for a year. Her work there remained classified for many years.



Morale Operations artist Sergeant William A. Smith carries Betty McIntosh across flood waters in Kunming China, 1945. Alongside them is Chinese cartoonist Tong Ting. The building is the Morale Operations print shop. (Courtesy U.S. Army)

She then wrote the book *Sisterhood of Spies* about the women of the OSS.

McIntosh’s next project was to interview members of what was code-named the Deer Mission, a handful of OSS operatives who parachuted into North Vietnam during World War II to make contact and befriend Ho Chi Minh. Though communist, during World War II, Ho assisted the allies by rescuing American pilots downed by Japanese artillery.

A faction in the CIA, namely those on the Deer Team, like Archimedes Patti, had recommended to President Truman that the US align itself with our World War II ally.

According to journalist and historian Stanley Karnow, in his book *Vietnam: A History*, Patti’s thought was, “Ho might be a communist, but let’s make him ‘our’ communist,” as was done with Tito in Yugoslavia.

However, to President Truman, the threat of the Soviet Union, the Korean War abroad, and McCarthyism here at home, led history to be recorded otherwise. Truman sided with CIA operatives Edward Lansdale and French-speaking Lucien Conein, whose linguistic ability would get him killed when he spoke French to a band of Viet Minh who had ambushed him on the road.

Patti’s thinking was tossed into what the CIA labeled “File 13,” according to Karnow, and American support was thrown to Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon.





OSS officers watch as Viet Minh practice throwing grenades. (Courtesy National Archives)

Meanwhile, asked if she would do it all over again, McIntosh replied, “Yes, I would, but I would have to believe in the cause, like we did in World War II. We learned skills never taught in school. We believed the OSS’s commander, General Donovan. He was our leading light. Wars like Korea, Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli conflict, we shouldn’t have been involved in any of that,” she said. “They didn’t affect me. Maybe they should have, but they didn’t.”

Betty McIntosh died on June 8, 2015, in Lake Ridge, Virginia after a heart attack. She was 100 years old. She was the last surviving female member assigned to the Morale Operations Branch of the OSS in World War II. ❖

**Author’s note:** This article was updated from a piece I wrote in 1997 for Military Family magazine. (No relation to Military Families magazine).

## 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.



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**Featured Playlist:**

Chapter Meeting Presenters

Frank Sobchak, guest speaker at our November chapter meeting, presents key findings from five years of research, which culminated in his PhD dissertation and his book *Training for Victory*. He examines five case studies—El Salvador, Colombia, the Philippines, Iraq, and Afghanistan—to identify what made certain security force assistance missions successful.



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# The Fall of Saigon Remembered

## 30 April 1975



A member of the CIA helps evacuees up a ladder onto an Air America helicopter on the roof of 22 Gia Long Street, a hotel half a mile from the Embassy, April 29, 1975, shortly before Saigon fell to advancing North Vietnamese troops. Photo by Hubert van Es/Fair Use.



A U.S. Marine provides security as American helicopters land at the Defense Attaché Office compound during Operation Frequent Wind. (Image by Dirck Halstead, U.S. Marines)



South Vietnamese refugees arrive on a U.S. Navy vessel after fleeing their homes during Operation Frequent Wind. (U.S. Navy)

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975—a day etched into the memory for those who served—marked the end of the Vietnam War as North Vietnamese forces captured the South Vietnamese capital. In the weeks leading up to the fall, North Vietnamese forces rapidly advanced southward, overwhelming what remained of the South Vietnamese military. The United States, having already withdrawn its troops by 1973, launched “Operation Frequent Wind,” a large-scale evacuation effort to rescue American personnel and vulnerable South Vietnamese citizens. Helicopters airlifted thousands from the U.S. Embassy and nearby locations in scenes of chaos and desperation. The chaotic evacuation showed the war’s heavy human cost and the uncertainty that remained. ❖



# SFA Chapter 78 February 2025 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Doreen Matsumoto and Debra Holm



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**1** Left, Richard Simonian and Rahjee Hajj, who received his lifetime SFA membership in October 2023, becoming a member of Chapter 78 when he graduated from SF Q-Course. We were all so very pleased to meet him. He is the first of the graduates gifted memberships to attend one of our chapter meetings.

**2** Chapter members filling their plates with a delicious breakfast.

**3** Frank Boyd reviews the latest issue of the Sentinel while enjoying breakfast.

**4** Left to right, Mark Miller, James Carter, and Mike Jameson

**5** Left to right, Ham Salley, Greg Floor, Jim Lockhart, and How Miller

**6** Left to right, Erik Berg, Nimo Aslami, Gary Macnamara, Geri Long, Ramon Rodriguez, and Susan Light.

**7** Doreen Matsumoto and Erik Berg



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6



7

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