



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 10 • OCTOBER 2024

**Global Gathering  
of Green Berets  
SFA CON 2024  
Special Edition**

**Edmunds &  
Stonesifer**

**The GWOT's 1st Sacrifices**



***SOG Codename  
DYNAMITE:***  
**Book Review and Excerpt**

**Legacies of War  
Strives for a  
Legacy of Peace**

**Supporting Green Berets  
Through Every Transition—  
The Green Beret Foundation's  
Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program**



# SENTINEL

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 10 • OCTOBER 2024

## From the Editor



US ARMY SPECIAL OPS COMMAND



US ARMY JFK SWCS



1ST SF COMMAND



1ST SF GROUP



3RD SF GROUP



5TH SF GROUP



7TH SF GROUP



10TH SF GROUP



19TH SF GROUP



20TH SF GROUP



8TH SF GROUP



11TH SF GROUP



12TH SF GROUP

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FRONT COVER: U.S. Army Soldiers of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment conduct a helicopter rappel exercise from an MH-60M Black Hawk. Edmunds and Stonesifer took their final flight on this type of helicopter. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Hussein Enaya)



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How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

Our President's message details the wonderful presentation at our meeting by SOG veteran and *SOG Codename Dynamite* author Henry "Dick" Thompson.

Retired Green Beret Chris Sorensen, a Task Force Dagger commander, in "Edmunds and Stonesifer," tells the real story of two Rangers, the first two casualties of America's response to the Osama bin Laden-led strike on the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001. Though they died in Pakistan in direct support of Operation Rhino, the Ranger combat jump into Kandahar, they were the first American casualties of the war, now called the Global War on Terror.

Retired Green Beret Scott Mann of *Last Out, Operation Pineapple Express*, and founder of Rooftop Leadership, and much more, has a new book coming out on 1 October 2024. Entitled *Nobody is Coming to Save You: A Green Beret's Guide to Getting Big S\*\*t Done*, it is a self-help guide that uses the author's experience as a Green Beret to help readers overcome challenges and achieve goals. Mann's book draws on military training and personal anecdotes to teach readers about self-reliance, adaptability, and responsibility.

Marc Yablonka reviews *The Ultimate Protest*, by Ray E. Boomhower. A Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, self-immolated to protest the marginalization of Buddhists by the Catholic President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, and his government. Malcolm W. Brown's photograph of the monk's sacrifice brought the war to the front pages, where it never left.

I review the amazing pair of books titled *SOG Codename Dynamite* by Henry "Dick" Thompson, followed by an excerpt from book 1.

The excerpt from the riveting *SOG Codename Dynamite* shows a bit of the SOG mission and how Recon Team Leader (one-zero) Dick Thompson made his teams so successful. It is actually one of the tamer missions, but is an example of how he describes each mission. These books will be considered reference material for future recon leaders.

A few words about a video interview with GB Gary Macnamara and a goodbye to Rick Carter, Sentinel photographer.

In "Legacies of War," frequent contributor Marc Yablonka discusses the non-profit organization that continues to advocate for clearing Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam of unexploded ordinance (UXO), which have killed in excess of 50,000 civilians. Sera Koulabdra is now at the helm of the organization and is getting both results and funding.

Our focus this month is on the Green Beret Foundation, the wonderful work they do for SF year-round, and how they help GBs transition. Described in this issue are new programs and how you can help.

Feel free to check out our chapter meeting pics, and, as always, please share with us your interesting stories at [sfachapter78@gmail.com](mailto:sfachapter78@gmail.com). ❖

How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

# From the President | October 2024



Aaron Brandenburg  
President SFA Ch. 78

We had a great meeting in August. I have received multiple emails praising our guest speaker, Henry “Dick” Thompson. Dick delivered a presentation on MACV-SOG that was rich with firsthand experiences. Coupled with his method of delivery, he created a captivating experience that left a lasting impact on everyone in attendance. Dick’s firsthand accounts and detailed insights into the covert operations of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Studies and Observations

Group (MACV-SOG) were both enlightening and gripping. His deep knowledge and personal anecdotes provided a rare glimpse into the complexities and challenges faced by those involved in such high-stakes missions during the Vietnam War.

Dick managed to convey the intricacies of MACV-SOG’s operations with clarity and passion, making the historical details come alive. The stories he shared about the bravery, ingenuity, and resilience of those involved in these covert missions were both inspiring and humbling. As a former soldier from the GWOT generation I have always looked up to the Vietnam generation, particularly MACVSOG; Dick’s presentation

reconfirmed why I keep them on such a high pedestal. It was evident that his experiences and reflections were not just historical recounts but deeply personal accounts that highlighted the sacrifices and heroism of those who served in one of the war’s most clandestine units.

Throughout the presentation Dick fielded questions and discussed his experiences adding an extra layer of depth to the presentation. His willingness to share and elaborate on various aspects of MACV-SOG’s operations promoted a rich discussion among chapter member’s, who left with a greater appreciation for the strategic and human elements of MACVSOG and the Vietnam War as a whole.

Overall, having Henry “Dick” Thompson as a guest speaker was a highlight for our chapter, offering a profound understanding of MACV-SOG’s legacy and the broader context of the Vietnam War.

If interested, you will find on page 12 information to order Dick’s books. We will also have some of his books available for members that attend the next meeting, free of cost. I look forward to seeing you in September.

DOL

Aaron Brandenburg,  
President Special Forces Association Chapter 78



Chapter 78 President Aaron Brandenburg, Vice President James McLanahan, guest speaker Dick Thompson, and John Stryker Meyer at the August Chapter meeting. (Photo by Rick Carter)



Dick Thompson pointing out a detail while fielding questions during his presentation at the August Chapter 78 meeting. (Photo by Rick Carter)



## SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

October 19, 2024

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

Courtyard by Marriott

5865 Katella Ave, Room A, Cypress, CA 90630

### 2024 Meeting Schedule

November 16

December (to be announced)



**SPC Jonn J. Edmunds**  
19 October 2001, Pakistan  
Ranger

**SPC Kristofor T. Stonesifer**  
19 October 2001, Pakistan  
Ranger

# Edmunds & Stonesifer

## The GWOT's 1st Sacrifices

By Colonel Nils C. 'Chris' Sorenson  
United States Army Retired

### INTRODUCTION

On October 19, 2001, United States Army Rangers, Specialists Jonn Joseph Edmunds, and Kristofor Tif Stonesifer, became the first two combat casualties of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). They tragically died on a remote airfield in Pakistan, directly supporting America's initial ground combat operation into Afghanistan following 9/11. Their ultimate sacrifice would not be the last in what has become an endless effort to prevent another attack on the United States.

Edmunds and Stonesifer were killed in a rollover crash of their MH-60 Blackhawk helicopter as it was landing at a remote mission support site (MSS) near Dalbandin in southern Pakistan. Their duty that night was to serve as an airmobile reserve for America's first boots-on-the-ground direct action in Afghanistan. This Presidentially-directed effort required a daring airborne assault to seize a remote airfield as part of a high-risk strategic raid directly into the Taliban's spiritual center of gravity in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

These actions would not be without precedent; as Edmunds, Stonesifer, and the entire force would closely share the conditions faced by those on Operation Eagle Claw's Desert One landing site some 21 years before. The joint force would occupy the same intermediate staging base (ISB) on Masirah Island off the east coast of mainland Oman, while the heliborne assets would launch from an aircraft carrier. The targets and support sites would be dark, arid, and dusty—similar circumstances for disaster. However, building on Eagle Claw's failures, this task force had the benefit of two decades of Congressionally mandated special operations force development. Also during this interim period, the Edmunds family of Cheyenne, Wyoming and the Stonesifer family of Doylestown, Pennsylvania were hard at work building two future special operations Soldiers. Unbeknownst to them at the time, their young sons would grow up to have a critical role in what has since evolved into America's longest war.

Jonn Edmunds was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado on January 3, 1981; his family moved soon afterwards to Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was a bright student, participating in both the highly competitive American Legion and Future Business Leaders of America programs in high school. In 1999, he graduated from Cheyenne East High School as an honors student and joined the Army at the age of 17; following in the footsteps of his grandfather, who fought in World War II, and his father, who served three tours in Vietnam. Jonn volunteered for the 75th Ranger Regiment and proved himself early on. He worked hard and successfully completed the Army's prestigious Ranger course. His mom stated that Jonn once proclaimed, "I will be contributing to myself as well as for the defense of this country and for the betterment of the world."



SPC Jonn J. Edmunds

Kristofor 'Kris' Stonesifer, the son of a naval flight officer, was born in Key West, Florida on August 20, 1973. He was raised in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. After graduating from Central Bucks West High School, Kris initially attended the University of Delaware. Passionate about the outdoors, Kris took courses at the renowned Tom Brown Tracking School in New Jersey. Then he moved to Montana, putting his skills to work while exploring the state's parks and



SPC Kristofor T. Stonesifer

wildernesses. He enrolled at the University of Montana and joined the Senior Army ROTC program. His military science professor said Kris was “older and wiser” than his best cadets, confident that Kris would become a decisive, strong leader. However, Kris desired action and left UoM during his junior year in 2000 to join the Army, just before his 27th birthday. Soon afterwards, he too would be selected for the Rangers.

## 9/11 – A NATION RESPONDS

Both Edmunds and Stonesifer were on duty as part of the Ranger Ready Force when 9/11 occurred. They were in the right place at the right time, and it was finally their opportunity to be a part of something far bigger than themselves. Soon after 9/11, their unit began planning to provide the President with a range of response options. Afterwards, in early October 2001, they deployed to the Middle East and prepared to take part in America’s spearhead assault for the GWOT.

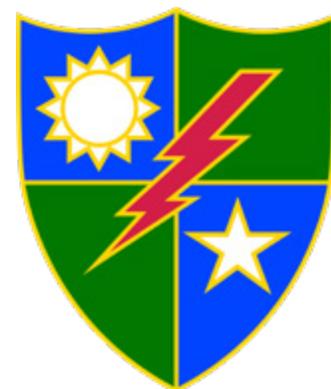
Extreme distances and environmental conditions in the area would soon push man and machine to the limit. As this was the first operation following 9/11, the air bridge to move personnel and material to the region was not yet fully set. Large cargo jets required multiple in-flight refuelings, including a rest and replenishment stop for the crews and passengers at an unprepared air base in Spain where food and bed down capacity were scarce. While the ISB on Masirah Island was well inside U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility, it was still 750-850 miles away from the actual targets. Modern special operations and strong inter-service cooperation would be critical for success.

Thus, in early October, the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk CV-63 sortied from its homeport in Japan to serve as an afloat staging base closer to the main target, for special operations helicopters and personnel. Additionally, specialized MC-130 Talon aircraft from the ISB would provide air drop and exfiltration for the supporting target.

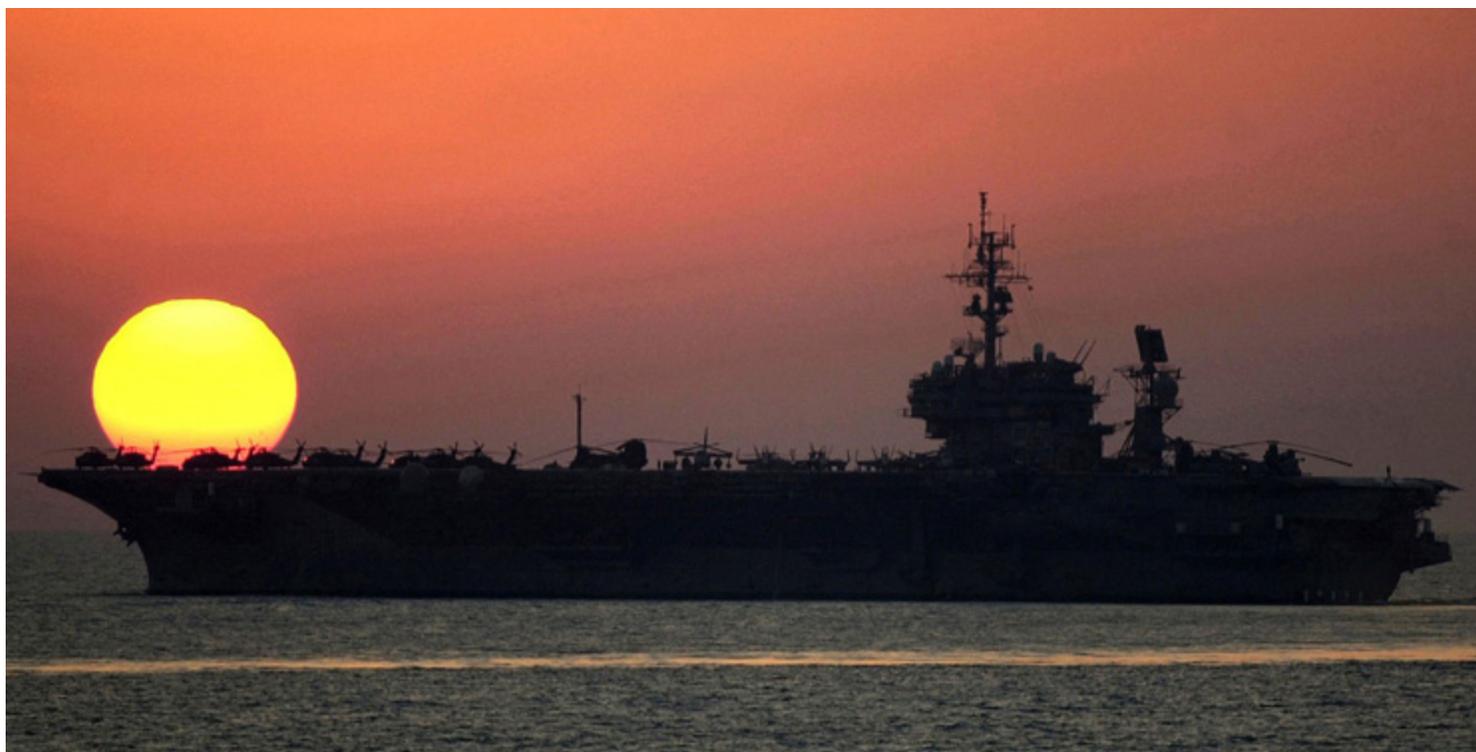
In-theater close air support and refueling capabilities would struggle to meet operational needs, and there was not a sizeable reserve in case of catastrophic failure. To help mitigate risks, an additional flex force consisting of Rangers and helicopters was designated the ‘mobility reserve’ and included Edmunds and Stonesifer. It had to be positioned within range of the targets without tipping the operation.

The mobility reserve’s MSS would be located south of the Afghanistan border in southwest Pakistan’s Baluchistan province, close to the ingress and egress routes for the heliborne assault force. This remote airstrip lay in an east-west valley surrounded by mountains and the Chagai desert, close to the town of Dalbandin, an ancient trading hub connecting Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. The Pakistanis granted the United States access to this site as a show of support; however, the force was not confident in their true loyalties or intentions.

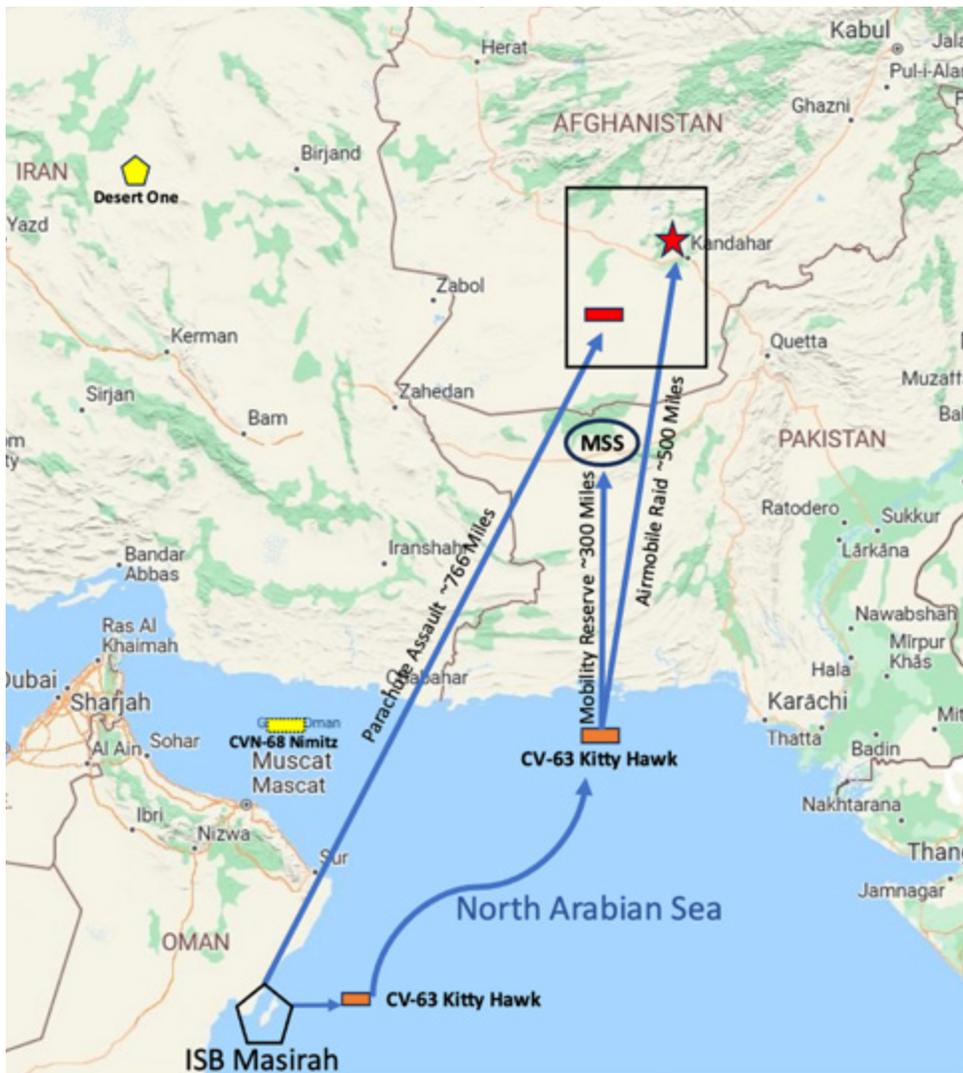
The force knew very little about this airstrip, or if the locals would welcome Americans occupying it. The mission’s timing would also coincide with the seasonal Wind of 120 Days known for wicked sandstorms across Baluchistan, giving the province the name ‘Powderistan.’ Without eyes on the ground to report conditions, safety of flight information would be a rough guess based off historical data and few black and white satellite images—it would be hairy to say the least; combat procedures would be required.



The 75th Ranger Regiment Distinctive Unit Insignia is worn by all members of the Regiment. This source describes its symbols and historical significance: [22jan\\_75th\\_ranger\\_dui.pdf](#) (arsof-history.org)



USS Kitty Hawk CV-63 with embarked helicopter assault force somewhere in the North Arabian Sea, ca mid-Oct 2001 (Department of Defense photo)



Author's concept of the operation sketch; locations, distances and routing are approximate. 1980's Operation Eagle Claw's Desert One landing zone and the location of the USS Nimitz are shown as reference.

## SURGING INTO ACTION

Prior to boarding the Kitty Hawk, Edmunds and Stonesifer conducted final mission rehearsals at the ISB with their fellow Rangers, who would soon earn their combat jump wings at a remote airfield in the Helmand desert. Once on the ship, they prepared fervently with the main force that would go 'downtown.' They conducted flying rehearsals and became acquainted with their elite Night Stalker crews, who were among the Army's best aviators. In that time, the force became acutely aware of several serious mission risks: robust estimated enemy armor, artillery, and air defense capabilities; lack of sufficient theater reinforcements; and unknown environmental conditions. The mission also faced the possibility of compromise and ambush, due to the uncertainty as to Pakistan's reliability and a Department of Defense news release announcing Kitty Hawk's presence with its embarked helicopters and special forces.

Just prior to sunset on October 19th, 2001, Edmunds and Stonesifer boarded their helicopters and eagerly awaited the signal to launch. Accompanying them on the deck was the larger heliborne assault force that they would be supporting. Meanwhile, several hundred miles southwest at the ISB, their fellow Rangers were rigging for a combat jump in preparation to board their MC-130s for the deep-penetration route to

their drop zone. At this point, Edmunds and Stonesifer knew the risks they faced and could not have been better prepared to support the breadth of potential action.

Launching just after sunset, the mobility reserve with Edmunds and Stonesifer rose from the ship's deck and flew north. By the time they cleared the Pakistan coastline, the night sky dazzled with starlight spanning the mountainous horizon. After nearly three hours of hazardous flying over the water and through the mountains—with an aerial refueling evolution thrown in—the adept pilots found the valley and located the remote airstrip among the arid terrain. As planned, they turned onto final approach south of the Afghanistan border. No trustworthy assets were on the ground to secure the field, so the crew opened the doors and prepared for a combat insertion. On cue, a minute prior to landing, Rangers Edmunds and Stonesifer 'sat in the door' and readied their weapons.

Suddenly, just seconds from touchdown, the Blackhawk was enveloped in what could only be described as fine 'primordial' dust that obliterated the crew's vision. They were caught in a vicious brownout never before seen by these well-trained crews, eerily reminiscent of what occurred at Eagle Claw's Desert One landing strip over two decades prior. Consequently, the aircraft drifted slightly off course and hit a low sand dune with enough force to roll over. Edmunds and Stonesifer were tragically ejected into its path

and pinned under its weight. The accident also injured three crew members, who eventually returned to duty. The overall operation successfully completed all assigned missions and achieved its strategic purpose, but at the unfortunate cost of two young Soldiers' lives.

## HONORING THEIR SACRIFICE

Edmunds' and Stonesifer's war ended just as it was beginning. Shortly after the operation, the task force held a memorial on the Kitty Hawk. Stateside, the Army presented each family with their son's Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart. Stonesifer was posthumously promoted to Specialist. Large hometown memorial services for both Soldiers were also held. Jonn Edmunds was eventually laid to rest at the Memorial Gardens cemetery in his hometown of Cheyenne, Wyoming (section: Veterans Garden, Lot: 36A, Space 1). Kris Stonesifer was cremated, and his ashes were scattered near Upper Holland Lake in his adopted state of Montana; a headstone was also placed at Arlington National Cemetery (section MH, site 300). Among the services' attendees were each Soldier's support network of friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, and clergy, who had stuck by Edmunds' and Stonesifer's sides from the beginning.



US Army MH-60 Blackhawk of the type Edmunds and Stonesifer took their final flight on. (DoD Photo by USASOC PAO Walter Sokalski; source: 160th SOAR—MH-60 Black Hawk ([americanspecialops.com](http://americanspecialops.com)) ARSOAC Airframes Page ([soc.mil](http://soc.mil)))



Jonn's marker is at the Cheyenne Memorial Gardens cemetery in Cheyenne, Wyoming; Section: Veterans Garden, Lot: 36A, Space 1; (source: Photos of CPL Jonn Joseph Edmunds — [Find a Grave Memorial](#))



Kris' marker is in Arlington National Cemetery's section MH, site 300; source: Kristofor T. Stonesifer — Specialist, United States Army ([arlingtoncemetery.net](http://arlingtoncemetery.net))

Following their battalion's redeployment in early 2002, the 75th Ranger Regiment held a large service for both Soldiers at Fort Benning, Georgia, engraving their names onto their battalion's memorial stone. The United States Army Special Operations Command also placed their names on the memorial wall at the command's headquarters on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Every Memorial Day, these commands solemnly call the names of Jonn Joseph Edmunds and Kristofor Tif Stonesifer, letting the memories of their sacrifice ring throughout the silence.

## IMPACT & LEGACY

What these etchings and utterances do not capture is the strategic significance of their sacrifice in Pakistan that fateful night. They died serving as part of a high-risk combat operation that severely degraded Al-Qaeda's and their Taliban hosts' capabilities. Their efforts demonstrated America's resolve and bolstered citizens' confidence at home. The mission proclaimed to enemies that the United States would go to great lengths to avenge and prevent an attack on its homeland. More subtly, this strategic operation's success redeemed Eagle Claw's failures and served to validate United States special operations capabilities—laying a strong foundation for the twenty plus years of conflict that have followed.

The quiet nature of Edmunds' and Stonesifer's work meant their final stories were left untold, and with the passage of time come faded memories buried under the weight of fresh sacrifices. Let this nation strive to remember two fine American Soldiers, Jonn Joseph Edmunds and Kristofor Tif Stonesifer, who perished for a cause larger than themselves. They courageously gave their all when America called, and their impact will continue to be felt for years to come.

The Department of Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review Cleared this Article for Open Publication, case #24-P-0216.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. government.

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## Notes:

1. Stonesifer was a Private First Class (PFC) during the mission and was later promoted posthumously to Specialist (SPC); his final rank is used throughout this article.
  2. Casualty clarifications: The first death as part of Operation Enduring Freedom was Air Force Master Sergeant Evander Earl Andrews who died on October 10, 2001, as the result of a forklift accident in Qatar. The first combat-related deaths were Edmunds and Stonesifer in Pakistan, while directly supporting the first direct action into Afghanistan on October 19, 2001. The first American killed in action in Afghanistan was CIA Paramilitary Officer Johnny Micheal Spann on November 25, 2001, at the Qali-Jangi fortress near Mazar-e-Sharif.
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## Sources:

“Remembering The 2 Army Rangers Who Were The First Combat-Related Deaths Of The Afghan War,” *Task & Purpose* (<https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-rangers-oef-first-casualties/>). Author Paul Szoldra provides a brief overview of Edmunds and Stonesifer’s unit and their mission. However, his key source (Leigh Neville’s *Special Forces in the War on Terror*, p. 36) is understandably not informed.

“Wyoming troop deaths 20 years apart bookend Afghanistan war” *Military Times* (<https://rb.gy/ajr4xz>). This article interviews Jonn Edmunds father and describes that the first and last casualties of the war came from Wyoming.

CPL Jonn Joseph Edmunds (1981-2001) (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/5898173/jonn-joseph-edmunds>) — Find a Grave Memorial. This site provides a brief synopsis of Jonn Edmunds life and contains entries from his family, friends and just everyday Americans who honor his service.

Kristofor Stonesifer (<http://rstonesifer.com/kris/index.htm>) This family run website contains a wealth of information on Kris to include his personal writings, eulogies, photos, and early videos.

Kristofor T. Stonesifer — Specialist, United States Army (<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ktstonesifer.htm>)

Evander Earl Andrews — Master Sergeant, United States Air Force (<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/eandrews.htm>). This website page describes Andrews and his family. At the time of his death, he was preparing an air base in Quatar that was key to establishing the air bridge for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Johnny Micheal Spann — CIA (<https://www.cia.gov/legacy/honoring-heroes/heroes/johnny-micheal-spann/>). This site briefly speaks to Spann’s early life, time at CIA and his final mission.

CNN.com — Official: Kitty Hawk fully loaded for combat - October 17, 2001 (<https://www.cnn.com/2001/US/10/17/ret.kitty.hawk/index.html>). Two days prior to the mission, the Department of Defense announced the presence of the Kitty Hawk and its embarked special operations forces. This release compromised the operation as the enemy could easily deduce potential target sets and respective infiltration routes.

Home | United States Army Rangers — The United States Army (<https://www.army.mil/ranger/>). This website provides the reader with a modern overview of the Rangers.

Operation Eagle Claw — Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Eagle\\_Claw](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Eagle_Claw)). On April 24, 1980, the United States military launched Operation Eagle Claw to rescue American hostages being held in Tehran, Iran. Following mission abort, a helicopter experienced a brownout at desert landing strip known as Desert One and drifted into a C-130 aircraft, exploding on impact, and killing eight servicemen. This disaster led to the creation of the United States Special Operations Command.

Wind of 120 days — Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind\\_of\\_120\\_days](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind_of_120_days)). This site briefly describes the annual four-month long sandstorm phenomenon. The strength and duration of these storms move the sands of the desert, creating dunes and leaving behind extremely fine dust, the source of dangerous brownout conditions.

Kaplan, Robert D., *Soldiers of God, with Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Vintage Partners, 2001. This pre-9/11 non-fiction provides a thorough survey of the stark terrain that the task force faced. On page 204, mujahid Mohammed Akbar joked, “This is Baluchistan, but we call it Powderistan.” ❖

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

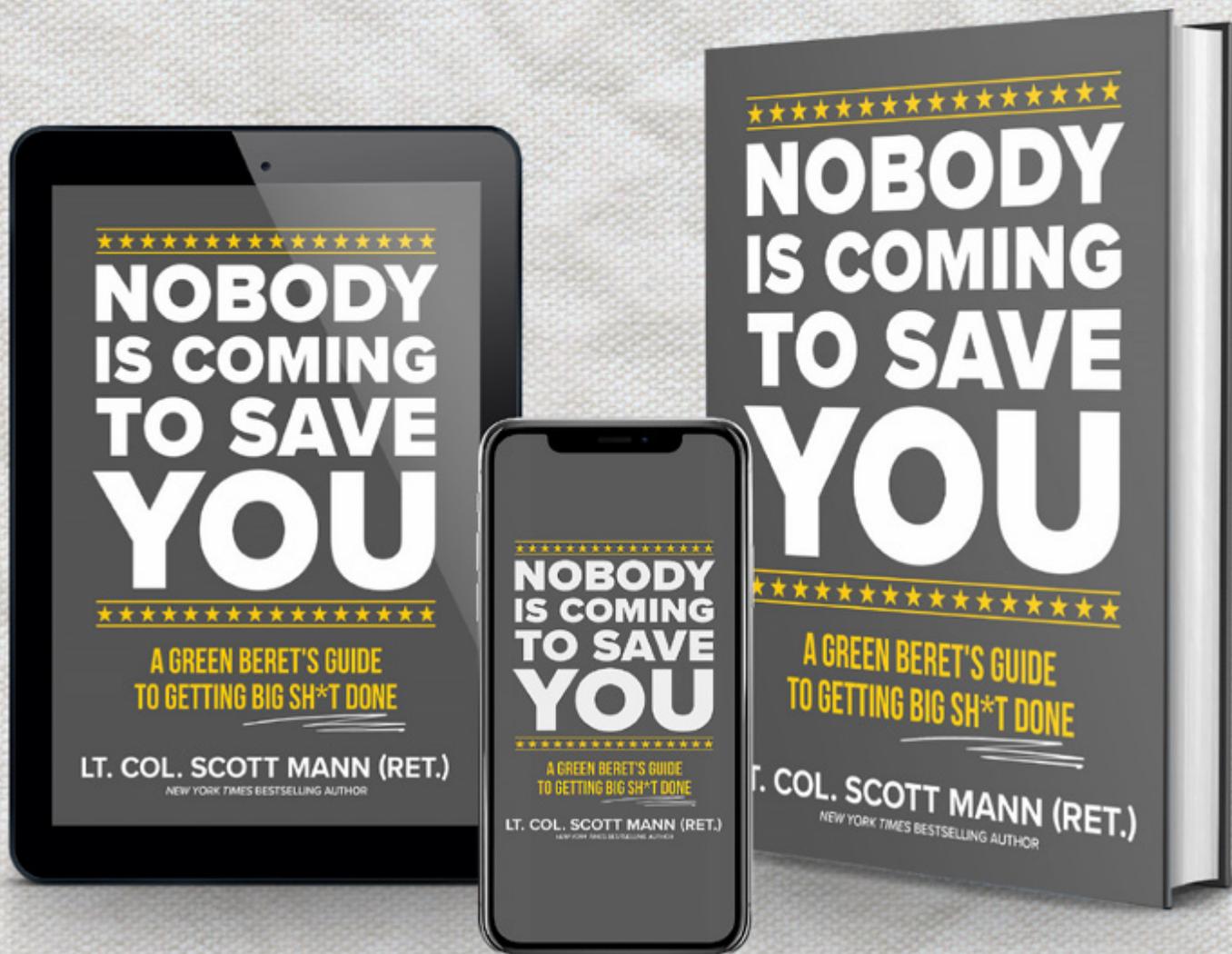
Chris Sorenson was a Special Operations Soldier who has first-hand knowledge of Edmunds’ and Stonesifer’s mission. He served in the 75th Ranger Regiment, 1st Special Forces Group, United States Army Special Operations Command, and other career assignments. Chris is a member of the Special Forces Association (Chapter 28) and lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado.



The author would like to thank his daughter Sara A. Sorenson for her editing assistance in making Edmunds and Stonesifer’s story more suitable for non-military readers.

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## Book Review

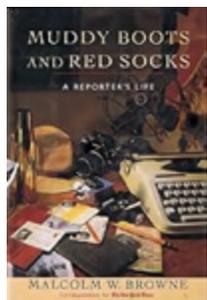
# THE ULTIMATE PROTEST: Malcolm W. Browne, Thich Quang Duc, and the News Photograph That Stunned the World by Ray E. Boomhower

By Marc Phillip Yablonka

When one thinks of the most iconic photos to come out of the American experience in Vietnam, three Pulitzer Prize-winning images shot by Associated Press photographers come to mind: Eddie Adams' photo of Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting handcuffed Viet Cong cadre Nguyen Van Lem in the head at point blank range in Cho Lon, the Chinese quarter in Saigon; Nick Ut's photo of nine-year Phan Thi Kim Phuc, running naked down the road after her Cao Dai village of Trang Bang had been napalmed by a South Vietnamese Air Force pilot; and Malcolm Browne's photo of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, immolating himself with a can of gasoline in the streets of Saigon as a protest to President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime's favoritism towards Catholics.

Now, the history of the latter photo, how it came about, the impact it had on the Vietnam War, and the world which viewed it, is thoroughly and superbly chronicled by Ray E. Boomhower, Indiana Historical Society Press editor, in his book *Ultimate Protest: Malcolm W. Browne, Thich Quang Duc, and the News Photograph That Stunned the World*.

How the Pulitzer Prize-winning image came to be is as intriguing as it is fascinating.



"The Buddhist monks had been conducting anti-government demonstrations for about a month and a half prior to this incident, demanding certain changes in what they regarded as kind of a pro-Catholic bias on the part of the government which made it difficult for Buddhists to hold high-ranking jobs and all that sort of thing. It was essentially a political protest movement rather than religious," Browne told C-SPAN host Brian Lamb, who interviewed him

regarding his autobiographical book *Red Socks and Muddy Boots: A Reporter's Life* in 1993.

It is known that Buddhist monks reached out to the Saigon press corps, informing them that they were planning a spectacularly shocking event. A tactic they had employed before but without result. They telephoned foreign correspondents to warn them of it. However, their previous attempts at this type of PR before had rather rolled off the media's collective back when it failed to materialize. The correspondents were bored by the tactic and paid it no mind. All except one: AP bureau chief Malcolm Browne. He was the only Western journalist that covered the fatal occurrence.

About that day, author Ray Boomhower writes, "Using an inexpensive Japanese brand Petri 35mm camera, he captured on film the self-immolation of a senior Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, while the monk sat calmly on a cushion in the traditional lotus position in the intersection of two busy streets in downtown Saigon."

"I think it was one of the worst things I've ever seen," Boomhower tells us Browne said after the horrifying incident.

"I don't know exactly when he died because you couldn't tell from his features or voice or anything. He never yelled out in pain. His face seemed to remain fairly calm until it was so blackened by the flames that you couldn't make it out anymore. Finally, the monks decided he was dead and they brought up a coffin, an improvised wooden coffin," Browne told *Time* magazine's Patrick Witty in 2011 shortly before Browne's own death in 2012 of complications from Parkinson's Disease.

The image appeared on the front pages of newspapers all over the US and beyond.

"That picture put the Vietnam War on the front page more than anything else that happened before. That's where the story stayed for the next 10 years or more," Hal Buell, AP deputy photo editor in New York, told the author.

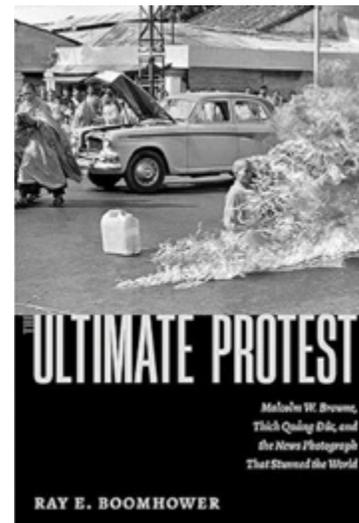
There were some news organizations that refused to run with the photo because they thought it was too awful an image. Among them, interestingly, was the *New York Times*.

"They never ran it," Browne told C-SPAN's Lamb.

The widespread media coverage of the photo of Thich Quang Duc made it impossible for it not to land on the Oval Office desk of President John F. Kennedy. Boomhower tells us that when President Kennedy called upon Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. to replace Frederick Nolting as the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, there was a copy of the photo on his desk.

"According to Browne, Lodge also informed him that when he met with Kennedy, the president had informed his new ambassador, 'We're going to have to do something about that [Diem] regime,'" Boomhower wrote.

And do something Kennedy did. In a CIA-orchestrated plot, which he allegedly sanctioned, on Nov. 2nd, 1963, both President Ngo Dinh Diem and his infamous brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were assassinated in Cho Lon after being caught attempting to evade their assassins. JFK himself was assassinated 20 days later in Dallas.



*Ultimate Protest: Malcolm W. Browne, Thich Quang Duc, and the News Photograph That Stunned the World*

by Ray E. Boomhower

High Road Books; Albuquerque  
318 pages

Available in Hardcover & Kindle

It has been argued that Browne's photo weighed heavy enough on the president's mind that, in the very least, he looked the other way when the subject of a coup d'etat against Diem was broached in official quarters.

It has also been argued by many who served in Vietnam that photos like those of Browne, Adams, and Ut were what caused the US to, as is commonly thought, lose the war in Vietnam.

"At the time and for years later, Boomhower writes, "the Saigon correspondents were hounded by critics who blamed them for Diem's downfall and America's ultimate defeat and humiliation in Vietnam."

Browne's response to that charge was swift and pointed.

"This is just silly, of course," Boomhower tells us Browne said. "To the extent that American newsmen 'took sides' in Vietnam or the Persian Gulf [which Browne also covered], it was on the side of the United States."

And he added, "That did not mean that the journalists backed either the governments of South Vietnam or Saudi Arabia."

Of Vietnam, he also admitted, "As American involvement in Vietnam wound down, it no longer seemed possible to believe in the goodness or rightness of our cause."

And though he dismissed the notion that images such as his were responsible for the end result of the Vietnam War, according to Boomhower, Browne did admit, "Journalists inadvertently influence events they cover, and although the events are sometimes for the good, they can also be tragic."

"Such tragedies, however, should make all journalists think twice about writing something that may leave blood on their hands," Browne warned.

*Ultimate Protest: Malcolm W. Browne, Thich Quang Duc, and the News Photograph That Stunned the World*, is actually about much more than just the image. In the book, Ray Boomhower informs us of Browne's own career in the US Army during the Korean War as a reporter for the US Military's *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, and how that helped shape his years in Vietnam, a country whose culture he married into. It quotes extensively from Browne's friends and colleagues who also covered the war. *New York Times* reporter David Halberstam, United Press International's Neil Shehan, and the AP's (and later CNN's) Peter Arnett, come immediately to mind. It is a book worthy of taking an esteemed place on the shelves of every soldier who fought in the Vietnam War, every professor who teaches the war, and every student who studies it. ❖

## Book Review

### *SOG Codename Dynamite: A MACV-SOG 1-0's Personal Journal* by Henry L. (Dick) Thompson

By How Miller

Let there be no doubt, *SOG Codename Dynamite: A MACV-SOG 1-0's Personal Journal*, Books 1 and Book 2, are a great pair of books.

Henry "Dick" Thompson has written a non-fiction thriller, while creating a manual on how to do deep recon, all from his personal experience. He shares the importance of each facet of small-team, deep recon preparation, operations and After-Action Reviews. Though his teams spent most of their ground time in the jungles of Southeast Asia, the principles can be used anywhere.

The authenticity of the book had been thoroughly verified by a host of operatives, from SOG veterans MG (Retired) Ken Bowra to John Stryker "Tilt" Meyer.

"*Dynamite*" shows with gripping action sequences the steps he took to succeed in one of the highest stress environments in the world. Small SOG teams were inserted inside large units of hard core enemy and often had to fight their way out.

He shows a variety of mission types and what they entailed. From recon missions where they would observe and direct Allied firepower on large formations of enemy, to physically blowing up infrastructure such as bridges, to attempts to capture enemy POWs, and subterfuge missions where they would plant enemy munitions which would blow up when used. Following this review is a sample of the latter.

The importance of After-Action Reviews (AAR): leads to lessons learned, allows each team member to say what bothered him about the situation, the leadership, or individual hardship— an invaluable tool for leaders to gauge team member's state of mind and to self-reflect on his

own leadership. Review what worked, what didn't, and what needs improving. Usually, the sooner this is done the better, often doing the AARs on the extraction helicopters flying back to base. Each team member's contribution can be recognized and his self-worth can grow into better team play. This also helps to relieve stress, as does staying meaningfully busy between missions.



*SOG Codename Dynamite: A MACV-SOG Personal Journal*

by Henry L. (Dick) Thompson

Independently published, Book 1—July 5, 2023 and Book 2— March 30, 2024

[Click here for purchasing information on page 12](#)

Dick began to seriously hone his skills in dealing with stress while a SOG 1-0, across the fence, utilizing breathing techniques and even anticipating what the enemy would typically do. He adopted viewpoints such as the higher the stress the lower the quality of your decisions; the best stressful decisions are made beforehand; and practice, practice, practice. He used and continued to build on those skills in the rest of his military career and in his civilian career, developing an approach to teamwork where lessons about how people tend to behave can be anticipated and used to mutual benefit.

Please read the excerpt from *SOG Codename Dynamite Book 1*, beginning on page 10, about one of the less hairy missions. ❖



# AN EXCERPT FROM

# SOG CODENAME DYNAMITE

## A MACV-SOG 1-0'S PERSONAL JOURNAL

### BOOK 1

By Henry L. (Dick) Thompson  
Excerpt from *SOG Codename Dynamite Book 1*, Independently Published, Copyright 2023, pages 101-108

### RT Alabama Mission 3: Eldest Son & Gas SOG #3 (18 DEC 68)

#### Mission 3 Team Roster

Deck.....	1-0
Thompson.....	1-1
Jones.....	1-2
Cowboy.....	Interpreter
Hoa.....	Pointman
Du.....	M-79
Quan.....	Alternate point

#### Team Mission

After a day of rest, we were assigned another mission with a short prep time. Our mission was to locate and contaminate an NVA ammunition cache near a major supply route in the eastern part of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between South Vietnam and North Vietnam using Eldest Son—also called exploding ammunition, Italian Green and Pole Bean. Eldest Son was one of SOG's insidious black PsyOps programs. It was designed to invoke a deep psychological fear in the enemy. The plan called for a quick, clandestine mission to the ammunition cache while conducting a diversionary airstrike on a nearby bridge using F-4s. RT Alabama started preparing immediately for an 18 DEC 1968 insertion. We were getting into the "darker" missions of SOG right away.

#### Training

This mission would involve not only 7.62mm rounds, but also 12.7mm rounds and 82mm mortar rounds. Proper placement of this ammunition would be difficult and critical. We were scheduled to meet with a CIA operative for some specific Eldest Son training the next day. Unknown to him and us, he would also share information that would leave us, especially me, stunned!

Normally, Eldest Son insertions were accomplished using a special all-American SOG team that followed closely behind B-52 strikes, constructed hastily prepared bunkers/fighting positions, then "salted" them with the faulty ammunition. Unfortunately, two weeks prior, on 30 NOV 1968, an Eldest Son team's helicopter was hit with 37mm anti-aircraft fire and fell like a rock to the jungle canopy 3,000 feet below, exploded and burned. The air crew and seven SOG team members died that day. A Bright Light mission (mission to recover a missing team or team members) was not attempted because of the location and number of NVA in the area.

I was shocked when he shared this information. I realized that I had inventoried the personal effects of these SOG heroes, including my friend Ray Stacks, on my second day at FOB-1. This small piece of SOG had come full circle. In a week I would be inserted as part of a team to complete their mission. (See the KIAs listed at the beginning of Chapter 4. Their remains would not be repatriated until 20 years later.)

This mission would be a clandestine operation on an ammunition storage area where we would infiltrate the storage area and appear to leave it untouched. In reality, we would leave some deadly, black psychological ops surprises for the future users of this ammunition cache. The last thing I remembered as I was falling asleep that night was the image of Dick Fitts' two-year-old son, Rich, in my mind.

#### Travel

We left FOB-1 right after lunch on 18 DEC 68 and arrived at the Quang Tri launch site at 1330. We were scheduled for a 1600 launch. In addition to the standard Mission Package, we would have a flight of four F-4s flying Combat Air Patrol to intercept any NVA MiGs that might try to attack us. The weather was great, not a cloud in the sky, with a 5–10 MPH wind out of the northeast. That was also the orientation (direction) of the ridge on which our LZ was located. It should be a smooth landing.

We were traveling relatively light. We would go in late in the day concurrently with an airstrike on a bridge approximately 3,000 meters northwest of our LZ, designed to focus attention away from our insertion.

Once on the ground we would move quickly to the storage area and attempt to recon the site before dark. Once it was dark, we would go in, make our deposits and head back to the LZ for a night pickup (very unusual). The Air Force would pound the bridge area again with F-4s to cover our extraction. Simple plan. In and out.

## Final Mission Brief

RT Alabama would be inserted with a UH-1D helicopter with a chase UH-1D, two Cobra gunships escorting the team UH-1D, two more Cobras on station, two A-1s on station, two F-4s flying Combat Air Patrol to keep the North Vietnamese MiGs away, a FAC/Covey directing the airstrike and two F-4s delivering the strike on the bridge. All missions in the DMZ and North Vietnam required F-4 Air Cover to fend off North Vietnamese MiGs.

## Insertion

After the Final Mission Briefing, Deck conducted a final team briefing and moved to the aircraft. The takeoff was smooth, and there was no anti-aircraft fire on the way to the target. The reports coming from the AO seemed to be good. I was excited about this mission. Go in. Do it. Get out. I'd done a lot of night extractions in Special Forces and Ranger training, so I wasn't concerned about this part of the mission.

As we turned on short-final I could see the F-4s pounding the bridge and surrounding area. I didn't see any activity around our LZ. Our approach was smooth and fast. Deck gave the signal to get on the skids. The plan was for the chopper to do a touch and go. We had to get off the skids fast because it was not going to stop. We jumped off, the chopper lifted off quickly, and then it hit us—CS gas! The NVA were gassing the LZ—and we didn't bring our masks! My eyes burned and watered, and it was difficult to breathe. That light breeze mentioned in the final mission brief brought a cloud of CS gas down the long axis of the LZ. Then to make it more exciting, the NVA opened fire on us.

I called Covey and told him what was going on and that we needed to be extracted. When he came back to me, he said the air crew did not have masks either. They could not come in to get us until the CS gas had dissipated. Covey turned the Cobras loose on the wood line at the northwest end of the LZ. The CS gas had started to dissipate quickly. It appeared to be a small force of about ten NVA at the LZ. Deck made the decision to go after them. It was like chasing rabbits. It only took about 15 minutes with the help of Covey and the Cobras to terminate them. They did not seem to fight like normal NVA.

Now we had a decision to make. It was going to be dark in about 45 minutes. Our entry had been compromised. Did we continue the mission even though they knew we were there, or did we abort? I recommended that we continue the mission. If we moved fast, we could get to the storage area before dark, see what it looked like and be ready to go in by 2200. By 2400 we could be on our way back to the LZ. If we ran into any problems, we would withdraw and bomb the storage site. We could still leave our packages there. Deck agreed. He told Covey our decision and briefed the team. We moved toward the storage area at a fast pace.

We arrived at the southeast side of the storage area about 15 minutes before dark and transmitted the "onsite" code word. We did not see any security or activity inside the area. It did not have a fence

around it. I heard a couple short dog barks indicating they probably had security dogs. Our plan was to take them out with our .22 caliber pistols with integrated silencers if they came after us. I also had CS powder (with black pepper mixed in) with me. If they tried to use the dogs to track us, I could really mess up their nostrils.

Cowboy and I looked around and located the areas where we needed to plant the packages. Deck agreed to let Cowboy and me go into the area as a team and insert the Eldest Sons while he kept the team ready to provide overwatch support if we got into trouble and needed extracting. We had a plan. I encoded the plan and sent it to Covey, who had returned to an orbit near the AO to be available to provide support. Cowboy got what we needed, and we all rested until 2130. I sent the "starting insertion" code word to Covey.

It was pretty quiet at that point. Cowboy and I moved into the storage area and planted the mortar rounds first. They were big and heavy. We were glad to get rid of them. Next were the 12.7mm rounds then the 7.62mm.

I thought I heard something when we were finishing with the 7.62mm plant. I turned to see a dog in the attack position about three feet from me. He launched as I was bringing my .22 pistol up, and I managed to shoot him three times in the chest. He cried out, hit the ground at my feet and grabbed my ankle! I put two more in the side of his head and it was over, but I was sure we had attracted attention. I grabbed the dog's hind feet and dragged him into the bushes. Cowboy and I moved quickly toward the perimeter, but not directly toward Alabama. We made a right turn at the perimeter and moved quickly toward the team. As we got close, I used the running password, frog hair.

I sent the "insertion complete" code word to Covey that we had completed the plant and were moving toward the LZ. The team moved quickly to the southwest, staying in the valley for 300 meters, then curved around another 300 meters to the east and up the ridge 100 meters to the LZ. Covey told me the extraction team was ten mikes (minutes) out. We arranged the LZ marking team in a T formation, with the top of the T into the mild wind in the grass with flashlights with red filters on them. The extraction chopper approached with all lights off and identified the LZ marking as Tango. I gave Covey a "Roger that" and the chopper came in. The team boarded quickly and we were off. No shots fired! I saw Deck turn his head toward my side, and I quickly gave him a thumbs up and smile. He laughed.

We were debriefed when we got back to the launch site and flew back to FOB-1 the next morning. We got our new mission that afternoon.

## Lessons Learned

- CS gas was one of those things that we didn't plan for. It was such a rarity for the NVA to use it; we just didn't do it on this mission. Sometimes we would carry CS grenades and CS rounds for the M79 (40 mm grenades). If we carried CS, then we carried the masks too. If you used CS gas, you had better have a mask or you were going to be as bad off as the NVA, because without fail, the winds would change and it was going to come right back on you. Then you'd be in trouble.
- The new RT Alabama SOP—carry M-17 protective masks. I carried the rule to my future teams.

- Always plan for the unexpected.
- Train for night movement. RTs rarely move at night unless they are trying to escape. We need more training.
- We can execute a night raid.
- We can execute a night extraction.
- The dog at the ammunition cache was an adrenaline rush.
- Animals are the enemy too.
- A dog can take several hits from a .22 unless the bullets hit the right place—so can an NVA.
- This was a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) operational area which meant that the rules were a little different. NVA MiGs were a possibility. The DMZ itself was considered a much more sensitive target politically.
- After this mission I started carrying an Eldest Son AK-47 magazine with me on most missions (unless we were using AK-47s). I was required to keep detailed notes on where and how I deployed it as an Easter egg for the NVA to find—and maintain its security to prevent US and SOG members from accidentally using it.

- The first group of NVA ran from us! We were very aggressive, hunted them down and terminated them. They were guards. They were not the normal NVA warriors we fought.

### Post-Mission Training

- Continue fitness training. For the most part, the team did not like it or want to do it. I began to camouflage it into mission pre-training by having the team carry their loadout weight for most of our training. I found them to be very strong for their size. They had been carrying a similar weight for a long time.
- We continued working on all IADs and standard operating procedures.
- The team members were not happy about the eating and hydration procedures but did it anyway.
- We did IAD practice on the range, expanded medical training, and focused more on hydration and dealing with dogs.
- We began to spend more time on situational awareness and natural night vision training.
- We spent time talking about and training to be more aggressive.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., is President and CEO of High Performing Systems, Inc. — Providing Leadership Solutions for the 21st Century. He is a senior executive, and psychologist, with over 50 years of leadership experience from the battlefield to the boardroom. An internationally recognized consultant, scientist, educator and speaker who helps leaders and organizations move into the High Performance Zone.

LTC (Ret.) Henry (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., enlisted into the Army in 1967 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the US Army Infantry in January 1968. After commissioning, Dick's first assignment was as an Instructor, US Army Special Warfare School, 3rd Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, NC, in February of 1968. In September of 1968 he was selected to be a team leader with MACV- SOG, 5th Special Forces Group, in the Republic of Vietnam. In January 1970, after finishing his combat tour (which included 20 recon missions with RTs Alabama, Michigan and Virginia), he was assigned as an instructor in the US Army Infantry School Ranger Department and stationed at Camp Frank D. Merrill, Dahlonga, GA. Dick served in several command (2nd Infantry Div, XVIII Abn Corps) and instructional and research (CGSC) roles until being assigned as the Professor of Military Science at the University of Georgia Army ROTC department in June 1986. He retired from the US Army in January of 1988 after 21 years of military service.

Learn more about Dick Thompson at [http://www.hpsys.com/About\\_DrThompson.htm](http://www.hpsys.com/About_DrThompson.htm) ❖

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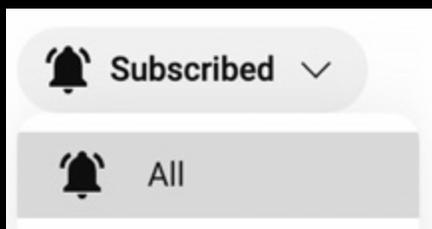
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## Rick Carter: A Farewell to Our Chapter Photographer

Chapter 78 bid farewell to Rick Carter, our beloved photographer, at our August meeting. His presence behind the camera has been a constant at our events for several years, capturing countless memories that we will cherish forever.

To express our gratitude for his invaluable contributions, the chapter presented Rick with a commemorative plaque crafted by James McLanahan. Additionally, Art Dolick and his wife Lani generously provided two beautifully decorated cakes that were enjoyed by all. These tokens of appreciation were a small way to acknowledge the impact Rick has had on our chapter.

We will miss Rick's talent, his friendship, and his unwavering commitment to our community. As he embarks on this new chapter of his life, we wish him all the best. ❖



Rick sampling the delicious tripical flavored cake, at left, and, at right he particularly appreciated the lovingly decorated, and also delicious, chocolate cake provided by Art Dolick and his wife Lani. (Photos by Doreen Matsumoto)

Chapter Vice President James McLanahan presented a plaque to Rick which included along with a certificate of appreciation a photo of the chapter members. (Photos by How Miller)

# LEGACIES OF WAR STRIVES FOR A LEGACY OF PEACE

By Marc Phillip Yablonka

As a young child in Champassak Province, southern Laos, after coming home from school one day, Sera Koulabdara heard loud banging and shouting at her family's door. Villagers were calling for her father, a doctor.

"He rushed out and when I was able to catch up to him, what I heard and witnessed, still haunts me to this day," Koulabdara said.

Sera's classmate, Lah, was screaming in pain and her mother was wailing in anguish, begging her father not to let her daughter die.

"I couldn't take my eyes off of my father's white lab coat, now drenched in blood. Everything was red," Koulabdara recalled.

Sera's father amputated five-year-old Lah's leg in order to save her life. She had picked up a "bombie," the Lao word for unexploded ordnance (UXO), and played with it like a ball.

But this did not happen during what has come to be known as the secret war in Laos, a tangent to the Vietnam War. It happened in 1989, almost 15 years after the end of the war in 1975.

Americans who had worked for the likes of the CIA, USAID, Air America, other clandestine airlines, and US Air Force personnel, abandoned the Lao and Hmong people, giving way to communist Pathet Lao forces in 1975, and decades of killing, maiming, and forced communist re-education in what the Pathet Lao government dubbed the "Seminar."

"The presence of UXO was so normal in my childhood. Once I started going to school, I was taught to walk on well-worn paths to avoid being harmed," Koulabdara told the *Hmong Daily News*.

The fear of injury, or death from UXO, forced Koulabdara's family to flee war-torn Laos in 1990.

"I was six years old when we arrived in Washington, D.C. We drove past the Pentagon, the White House, countless monuments and gigantic buildings. I was in awe of the magnificence of my new home, but clueless of its deep connections to my birth country and its neighbors."

Koulabdara's family's fears had been well-founded.

"From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped more than 2.5 million tons of ordnance on Laos during 580,000 bombing sorties—equal to a planeload of bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day for nine years—making Laos the most heavily bombed country per capita in history," according to the Legacies of War organization.

"With over 270 million cluster bombies dropped on Laos, approximately 30 percent, about 80 million, did not explode on impact and are still in the ground," the group's website states.

"Roughly 30 percent of Laos is contaminated with UXO. Less than 10 percent has been cleared since the last bomb was dropped in 1973," the website adds.



Sera Koulabdara in front of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy of Legacies of War)



Heather Atherton and Sera Koulabdara at the Lao Embassy in Washington, D.C. this year. (Photo courtesy Heather Atherton)

And according to demining group Mines Advisory Group, as of 2023, more than 50,000 people have been killed by unexploded bombs in Laos, 20,000 of those since the Vietnam War ended in 1975.

With those statistics in mind, it is no wonder that the Legacies of War organization would open its doors to Koulabdara.

Laos was declared a neutral country by the Geneva Accords of 1962. However, a study of the secret war in Laos clearly shows that the North Vietnamese Army violated those accords by uniting in Laos with the communist Pathet Lao in order to move troops and war matériel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam to do battle with American forces.

In response, the CIA and US Air Force personnel entered Laos “sheep-dipped,” the military’s term for plain-clothed.

Regarding that American response, one former Air America pilot, speaking on condition of anonymity stated, “If the North Vietnamese had not violated the ‘62 Accords, those bombs would never have been dropped on Laos.”

He adds, “North Vietnam was responsible for the situation in Laos as they invaded a neutral country to kill American and South Vietnamese soldiers in South Vietnam. They also bear responsibility. So, why do people hold America solely accountable?”

So affected was Koulabdara by her childhood memory of those bombs, and the constant fear of UXO that, in 2015, she volunteered for the now 20-year-old Washington, D.C.-based Legacies of War organization and joined its board of directors. By 2019, she had become the Executive Director, and in 2021, its CEO.

Legacies of War, with Koulabdara now at its helm, strives to raise awareness about the history of the American bombings on Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, provides space for healing the wounds of war, and creates greater hope for a future of peace.

In addition to spear-heading several educational programs, Sera Koulabdara has turned Legacies of War’s mission into prolific action.

Under her leadership, US funding for UXO clearance in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam reached \$73 million - the highest level in history, and the Legacies of War Recognition and UXO Removal Act, a vital bill that would authorize \$100 million for five years for humanitarian demining, was introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS).



Sera Koulabdara in a bomb crater in Laos. (Photo courtesy Legacies of War)



Sera Koulabdara with a UXO in Laos (Photo courtesy Legacies of War)

Legacies of War also received the inaugural Humanitarian Award of 2022 given by the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic for its successful advocacy efforts in securing funds for bomb removal and victims’ assistance.

Another person who knocked on Legacies of War’s door was Heather Atherton, a Sacramento, California-based journalist and publicist. She came to the organization in a manner which often occurs to people drawn to Southeast Asia and its history.



Sera Koulabdara with UXO in Pakse, Laos. (Photo courtesy Legacies of War)



Sera Koulabdara looking at a pile of shrapnel in Sam Nuea, Laos. (Photo courtesy Legacies of War)

She was searching for information about a clandestine US Air Force flight, code name Baron 52, which was shot down by communist forces in Laos in 1973, in between the signing of the Paris Peace Accords by Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho, and the release of the American POWs from Hanoi's infamous Hanoi Hilton and other prisons.

No trace of the crew of Baron 52 was ever found. Most eerily to Atherton, her own father was scheduled to be on that flight, but by the Grace of God, was on leave. A fact that haunted her father to his dying day and caused him survivor's guilt and PTSD. And his daughter Heather as well. Her father passed away in 2017 after a long battle with Agent Orange-induced kidney failure.

"I came across Jessica Pearce Rotondi's book *What We Inherit*, about her journey to understanding her family's decades long fight to find answers on the fate of her uncle's mission in Laos, when he was shot down, something she learned about after her mother had passed away. It was a journey to find answers



Sera Koulabdara on the Plain of Jars, Laos. (Photo courtesy Legacies of War)

to her own mother's lifelong trauma from the war and make sense of it while traveling to Laos to find the location in the jungle where they were shot down," Atherton said.

"I admired her story and the synergy of our missions and reached out to her. She recommended I connect with Legacies' mission, as she had as a trustee. I immediately began volunteering and then joined the board as a trustee in 2023 to help further their mission to remove the bombs that these missions helped to target," she told the Hmong Daily News

"I started as a volunteer in 2020 assisting with communications strategy, advocacy to Congressional members. I was invited to join the board in late 2022 and served for a year, during the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Paris Peace Accords," she said.

"In that time I continued to support communications strategy and develop op-eds to promote their mission of both education and removal of the mines still present in the soil in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, but primarily in Laos," she added.

Atherton continues to support Legacies of War four years later.

"I believe wholeheartedly in the Legacies of War mission. In my six years of research on this [Baron 52] incident I have schooled myself on this period of history to understand the full context of the political environment this incident happened in," she added.

In addition to aiding the Legacies of War organization, Atherton continues to research Baron 52 and recently wrote an article about the war in Laos and UXO for USA Today.

In that article, she stressed, "Though Laos was a neutral country during the Vietnam War, the United States dropped more than 2.5 million tons of bombs there in an attempt to slow the movement of supplies and people into neighboring Vietnam."

Atherton is correct. Per the Geneva Accords of 1962, Laos was a neutral country. However, according to multiple sources and Wikipedia.com., its neutrality was violated by a welcomed force of 30 to 40,000

communist North Vietnamese troops, the people she referenced in her article, who were headed to South Vietnam, with war matériel, to join Viet Cong cadres in their fight against US forces.

"The solution is simple," emphasizes Koulabdara. "We must find and destroy these UXO before it claims another child's life. Legacies of War's answer is to ensure that funding to solve this problem remains a priority for the USG," she says.

"These are American bombs, war trash littering Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. We must hold our country accountable for the clean-up, victims' assistance and preventive explosive ordnance risk education work. It's been over 50 years, let's get the job done!" she stresses.

The Air America pilot, however, countered, "The liberal media pushes Laos as an American Catastrophe and American taxpayers should pay for it. I say let Vietnam pay for it. They caused it."

More information can be found at the Legacies of War website: <https://www.legaciesofwar.org> ❖



## 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.

# SUPPORTING GREEN BERETS THROUGH EVERY TRANSITION

## The Green Beret Foundation's Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program



### **THE GREEN BERET FOUNDATION**

(GBF) continues to serve as a stalwart source of support for the Green Beret community, dedicating its resources and efforts to assist Green Berets and their families. The foundation's mission is to provide US Army Special Forces soldiers and their families with emergency and ongoing support, honoring and supporting those who have bravely served, and are currently serving. This

dedication is evident through GBF's wide array of programs and initiatives.

As part of its unwavering commitment, GBF proudly announced the Next Ridgeline 2.0, a program aimed at providing comprehensive support to Green Berets transitioning from military service to civilian life. The limited market release in May of 2024, marked the initial phase of the program that offers tailored

support and resources to empower Green Berets towards meaningful post-service opportunities, while promoting strength in mind, body and spirit.

### **THE NEXT RIDGELINE 2.0 PROGRAM: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TRANSITION**

The Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program epitomizes GBF's dedication to supporting Green Berets and their families through life's significant transitions. The program addresses crucial areas such as the VA claims process, health and wellness, family support, financial readiness, and guidance on planning for their next phase of life. By offering personalized assistance, GBF ensures that participants receive the essential tools for success, with an emphasis on the holistic well-being of the mind, body, and spirit.

#### **Family Support**

Recognizing the vital role families play in the transition process, the Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program extends its support beyond the Green Berets themselves. The program provides valuable resources for spouses and children, acknowledging the unique challenges they face during this significant period. GBF is committed to fostering a strong family support system, ensuring that every family member is equipped to navigate the transition with confidence and resilience.

#### **Stress-Less Fridays**

A unique feature of the Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program is "Stress-Less Fridays." This weekly event offers cohort members the opportunity to come together for meaningful conversations around the topics reviewed throughout the week. It provides a supportive environment for participants to ask questions, dive deeper into subjects, and express themselves openly with trusted members of the community. Stress-Less Fridays foster a sense of camaraderie and understanding, helping participants build stronger connections and gain valuable insights.

## **PROGRAM IMPACT**

*"I'm blown away. The Next Ridgeline has significantly increased my confidence for me and my family's future after retiring from the U.S. Army after 2 years of service. This immersive program set itself apart by hyper-focusing on the mind, body, and spirit of transitioning Green Berets to make them thrive after service. Transitioning from the military can be an extremely ambiguous period in life – it has been for me. GBF clearly understands this and provided the time, resources, and support that were tailored uniquely to our small cohort of transitioning GBs. I was truly amazed at the number of world-class presenters from such a wide spectrum of institutions who shared their time providing us with extensive insights into not only career fields, and opportunities, but the techniques and tools to be successful in any endeavor. Most importantly to me, I felt that this program truly cared and that I wasn't alone. Our family is forever grateful – thank you!"*

#### **JASON CHRISTIANSON**

*Active-duty Green Beret, who is currently transitioning from military service*



# EXPANDING SUPPORT



## The Green Beret Foundation Enhances Scholarship Offerings for the Entire Family

### The Special Forces Scholarship Fund

In 2024, the Green Beret Foundation expanded its portfolio of offerings with the Special Forces Scholarship Fund, serving as a tribute to the dedication and sacrifices made by Green Berets and their families. This scholarship fund provides merit-based, post-secondary education scholarships to the families of active-duty and veteran U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers. By leveraging a dedicated team of volunteers, generous donors, former Special Forces Scholars, and academic institutions worldwide, GBF supports Special Forces families in pursuing their educational goals, upholding the proud legacy of the Green Berets.

### Bennie Adkins Scholarship

The programmatic addition of the Bennie Adkins Foundation aligns with GBF's commitment to expanding opportunities for the brave soldiers who have served in the U.S. Army Special Forces. Bennie Adkins, a Medal of Honor recipient and distinguished Green Beret, dedicated his life to service and sacrifice. The Bennie Adkins Foundation was established to honor his legacy by providing educational scholarships to support Special Forces soldiers in their pursuit of academic and vocational excellence. By joining forces

with the Bennie Adkins Foundation, the Green Beret Foundation aims to amplify these efforts and ensure a seamless transition for our nation's elite warriors.

### The Athena Scholarship and Grant: Supporting Spouses' Educational and Professional Aspirations

The Green Beret Foundation also recognizes the importance of supporting the spouses of Green Berets in their educational and professional pursuits. The Athena Scholarship is awarded to spouses of Green Berets pursuing their undergraduate or graduate degrees, intended to be used solely for tuition. Applicants must be the spouse of a current or former U.S. Army Special Forces soldier. The Athena Scholarship opens in April of every year, closing at the beginning of May.

In addition to the scholarship, GBF offers the Athena Grant, available year-round, to support spouses with diverse career aspirations. Recognizing that not all paths require a college degree, the Athena Grant covers expenses for vocational programs and professional development, ensuring every spouse has the opportunity to pursue their dreams.



EXPLORE OUR  
PROGRAMS & SERVICES



## **A COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG SUPPORT**

The Green Beret Foundation's programs extend far beyond the Next Ridgeline 2.0. GBF remains dedicated to serving all generations of Green Berets and their families through a variety of programs aimed at addressing diverse needs. The Foundation's support is built upon five pillars: Casualty Support, Health & Wellness Support, Family Support, Gold Star & Surviving Families Support, and Transition Support. These pillars ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing the unique challenges faced by the Special Forces community.

In addition to the Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program, GBF has a dedicated team of Veterans Services Officers offering the community a thorough understanding of Veterans Affairs processes and systems to ensure fair and thorough evaluations pertaining to disability claims. This includes pre-transition briefings

about Veterans Affairs benefits and processes for Green Berets and their loved ones; preparation, presentation, and prosecution of an original or updated VA Disability Claim; expert support to review current Military/Personnel Service Medical Records or Post-service VA Treatment records; and locating any missing or archived documents as evidence to submit when filing VA disability claims. Furthermore, GBF provides vocational rehabilitation support and opportunities, assessing previous service documentation for conditions or injuries that could have potentially led to a service-connection.

As the Next Ridgeline 2.0 Program begins its mission, the Green Beret Foundation reaffirms its commitment to providing unwavering support to the Special Forces community. Through programs that honor their sacrifices and empower their futures, GBF stands as a testament to the enduring strength and resilience of Green Berets and their families.

## **WAYS TO SUPPORT THE GREEN BERET FOUNDATION**

The 1952 Society, named after the year the first U.S. Army Special Forces unit was formed, represents the legacy and future of the Green Berets. Joining the 1952 Society is a unique opportunity for donors to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Through a tiered donation system, donors can choose a level that reflects their generosity and receive exclusive benefits and recognition in return.

In partnership with LifeLegacy, The Giving Suite provides access to estate planning tools at no cost, making it the most affordable and convenient option available. The suite includes essential tools such as the Last Will & Testament, Gift Intention Tool, Qualified Charitable Distribution Tool, and more. These tools are designed to simplify the estate planning process, ensuring that your legacy continues to benefit the people and causes you care about, including our mission at the Green Beret Foundation.

By supporting the Green Beret Foundation through these avenues, you contribute to a legacy of service, honor, and commitment to those who have given so much for our country.



**MAKE A DONATION**



## SFA Chapter 78 August 2024 Chapter Meeting

Photos by Rick Carter

## Guest Speaker, Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D. AKA SOG Codename "Dynamite"

**1 2 3** Guest speaker Dick Thompson spoke about his experience as a member of the MACV-SOG. As he told his amazing stories, he tied in lessons he learned from those situations to insights about making decisions while under high stress. He presented the best practices of ARSENEL, which is a program he developed to help individuals, teams, and organizations manage stress, which leads to more effective decision-making. Learn more about this at <https://www.hpsys.com/ARSENEL.htm>. He also spoke about his 60+ Pushup/Day to raise veteran suicide awareness. He used this personal challenge to increase awareness of and use of the National Suicide Crisis Line number for veterans having suicidal ideation (dial 988 and then select "1" if you are a veteran). To learn more about Dick, visit his website, [www.hpsys.com](http://www.hpsys.com).

**4** John Stryker Meyer, AKA Tilt, signs a pile of his books prior to the start of the meeting, which were to be donated to veteran owned and operated Ex Umbris Designs for a fundraiser.

**5** John still had time to enjoy the current issue of the *Sentinel*!

**6** Dr. Bob Reed updates the group on the progress made on the MG Singlaub memorial in Independence, CA

**7** AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Rick Carter.

**8 9 10 11** Chapter meeting visitors: left to right, Greg Floor, Frank Boyd, Pete Turner, and Charles Graham

**12** Len Fein

**13** AVAG member Doug Zimmer

**14** Aaron Brandenburg, and Donna Griggs, ESGR Military Outreach Director, Army Guard

**15** Left to right, Richard Simonian, Dick Thompson, John Meyer, and How Miller

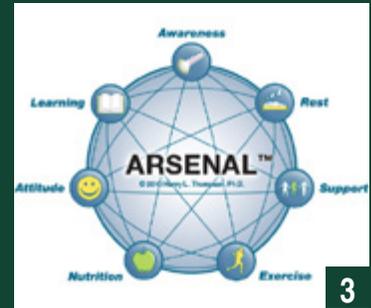
**16** Chapter 78 members and guests



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