

Frank E. Allen

by Charles H. Briscoe

RETIRED Sergeant First Class Frank E. Allen is the son of a career Army soldier and veteran of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. After graduating from high school in Reno, Nevada, Allen enlisted in 1984 to “wear his Dad’s boots.” Allen “enjoyed eight years of the close camaraderie associated with a four-man tank crew” in the M60A3 and M1 at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in Korea, and at Fort Polk, Louisiana. “After out-shooting the Master Gunner, the brigade commander selected me to be his tank gunner,” said Allen. While serving in the tanks his airbrush watercolor of an M1 Abrams tank “Balance of Power” won the 3rd Prize in a Department of Army Art Contest. Shortly afterwards, Sergeant Allen decided that the time had come to make a career change.

Following eight weeks of training at Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado, he was sent as a 25M graphics illustrator to the 4th PSYOP Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 1992. Their state-of-the-art computer graphic systems served to give Allen’s natural artistic talents a major “kick start.” Following airborne school he began his “most robust and productive” period as an illustrator. Chal-



OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

lenges ranged from a USASOC executive calendar for Lieutenant General James T. Scott to several 4th Group posters (hardest with theme “Peacetime Contributor-Combat Multiplier”) to designing the distinctive unit insignia for 3rd PSYOP Battalion (“Power to Influence”) to a Special Forces sniper print to a Special Forces wall mural for Major General Harley C. Davis, U.S. Army Special



4th PSYOP Group print



“Balance of Power”



Special Forces Sniper print



Special Forces wall mural in original USASFC headquarters.

Forces Command, to a Golden Knights poster. The work earned him five AAMs (one from the U.S. Army Parachute Team), and an MSM before leaving the PSYOP Group for a second tour in Korea.

In March 1995, Sergeant Allen joined the 751st Military Intelligence Battalion at Camp Humphreys, Korea, and was promoted to Staff Sergeant. In the Military Intelligence battalion, the graphic illustrator worked in the Secure Compartmented Intelligence Facility doing more traditional work—briefings—although he did draw a 751st print. More interesting was the expansion of his artwork to designing Army aviation unit patches and t-shirt and jacket logos. “The Korean embroiderers were always looking for new military designs. That opened up a whole new enterprise,” remembered Allen. After Korea, he got the assignment of his dreams.

When Staff Sergeant Allen reported in to the Headquarters Company of the 5th Special Forces Group, he saw what had been done by his predecessor and was determined to show the group what a top-notch illustrator could do. “That weekend I painted over all the “murals” in HHC and 5th SFG headquarters areas. I thought that the first sergeant was going to have a coronary on Monday morning. But when I was done, he was impressed.” Many of Allen’s murals can still be seen on the walls of the 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Having seen his Special Forces prints, Brigadier General Frank Toney had him design a Special Operations Command Central coin and print. In June 2000, Allen graduated from the Jumpmaster course and was promoted to Sergeant First Class in November. Two



Aviation unit patches



events expanded his artistic talents—a new 5th Special Forces Group commander in the summer of 2001 and 11 September.

It was the combination of Colonel John Mulholland and America’s Global War on Terrorism that “lit a fire under my butt as an illustrator,” related Allen. Mulholland started by having him draw an “Evolution of Special Forces” print as a farewell gift for the outgoing commanding general of U.S. Army Special Forces Command, Brigadier General Frank Toney. But, when the Twin Towers went down on 11 September 2001, Allen thought: “Now, we were going to war. It was going to be the ‘real deal’ not a deployment for a ‘real world mission.’ I knew that I was in the fast-paced environment of Army special operations. It was either produce or get out of the way . . . and I loved tough deadlines.”

At their base in Karshi Kanabad (K2), Uzbekistan, Colonel Mulholland told Allen that he wanted a distinctive logo for Task Force Dagger, and turned to walk away. When Sergeant First Class Allen asked for guidance, Colonel Mulholland spun around and retorted, “I’m not the illustrator, you are. Design something,” and went into the command tent. And Allen did. The Task Force Dagger logo became the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–North coin and was airbrushed along with all unit insignias on thirty MC-130 Spectre gunship 105mm artillery shells that been fired on combat missions as official gifts for President George W. Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and other dignitaries. The Fifth Legion soldiers were quite impressed and began to provide him action photographs from Afghanistan.

Sergeant First Class Frank Allen was “the heat” to the 5th Special Forces soldiers. In response, Allen threw back a Billy the Kid phrase from the movie *Young Guns*, “I’ll make you famous, just give me your photos from the field.” And, they did. Between airbrushing 105mm artillery shell casings with Task Force Dagger logos and painting friends’ Harley Davidson motorcycles, Allen produced a Task Force Dagger in Afghanistan print of sketches made from 5th Special Forces Group soldiers’ photographs.

Frank Allen has chosen to draw only from photographs because accuracy is more important to him than artistic interpretation. “People/artists can interpret things any way they want but photographs do not lie,” said Allen. To commemorate Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, the 5th Special Forces Group illustrator produced a Task Force Dag-



Task Force Dagger logo



Task Force Legion logo

ger in Iraq print. If the reader has seen that poster, some of those sketches appear in *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*.

Allen is a self-trained artist. He was in his second semester of art during his senior year in high school when he won the Sierra Nevada Printing Association commercial art contest sponsored by Harrahs Casino in Reno. It was ten years later that Allen became an Army graphic illustrator. But it was his tour with the 5th Special Forces Group in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM that gave him the opportunity to “give something back to fellow Army special ops soldiers.”

Having adopted the commercial advertisement art standard of 3.5 seconds to grab someone’s attention, Allen has shown that he can take someone’s vision—whether it is a photograph or the commander or a commissioner’s guidance—and graphically illustrate that view. His working philosophy is: “Tell me what you want; Give me creative license to produce; I don’t whine or complain about changes; Take constructive criticism well; When you have suggestions to make it better, demonstrate your ability to improve it.”

The USASOC History Office was fortunate to have this 5th Group veteran of ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM and the 4th PSYOP Group provide the chapter Army special operations forces sketches as well as design the cover for *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: Army Special Operations in Iraq*—in less than two weeks. As Frank said afterwards, “I hooked up a Mountain Dew IV for you guys to meet your short deadline. I like the thrill of doing an impossible mission.”

This combat veteran and Army brat retired after twenty years service. He lives in New Albany, Indiana,



Allen painting shells

with his two children Makenzi and Landon. USASOC thanks Frank Allen for doing the Army special operations community a real service. We look forward to your next print, “Army Special Operations in Iraq,” that will contain the sketches from *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*. ♠

This article was based on a telephone interview (Mr. Frank E. Allen, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 18 October 2005, New Albany, IN, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC) and a *The Leaf-Chronicle* (New Albany, IN) newspaper article by Stacy Smith Segovia. Copies of artwork shown were provided by Mr. Frank Allen.



CJSOTF-AP logo



Glass etching



President George W. Bush and Colonel John Mulholland with Allen's shell.

