

A Team Effort:

Special Forces in Vietnam June–December 1964

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

THE typical image of Special Forces in the Vietnam War is one of a huge 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) (5th SFG) running specialized covert operations country-wide and cross border operations into Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. That did not happen until post-1965 when the 5th SFG took over operations in Vietnam. The Special Forces commitment to Vietnam had a more humble start centered around twelve-man “A” teams. It began in 1957 with a ten-man SF detachment sent to train Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers in Ranger tactics and techniques. Special Forces A teams rotated in and out of Vietnam on mission-specific mobile training teams until 1960. Then A teams from the 1st and 7th SFGs rotated as units for six-month temporary duty (TDY) tours to “train, advise, and lead Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Montagnard (sometimes Nung, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) irregular soldiers against the Viet Cong in the Central highlands of South Vietnam.” This article centers on the experiences of Team A-312, 1st SFG in 1964, and will explain the early role of SF in the CIDG program in Vietnam prior to the arrival of the 5th SFG.¹

The early Special Forces presence in Vietnam was primarily “A-Teams” (today’s operational detachment alpha or ODA) that rotated in for six-month tours to train the CIDG forces throughout Vietnam. Teams from the 7th SFG at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the 1st SFG on Okinawa, Japan, deployed to meet the requirement. After 1964, Special Forces soldiers rotated in and out of Vietnam on one-year tours as individual replacements to SF teams throughout the country rather than deploying as a unit.²

One of the early teams supporting the Vietnam mission was Team A-312 from C Company, 1st SFG on Okinawa. The team, commanded by Captain Vernon Gillespie, was a mix of veterans and two newcomers. Ten mem-

bers of Gillespie’s team (including himself) had already been to Vietnam and had had multiple deployments throughout Asia. For the two newcomers, this was their first of several combat tours in Vietnam. Specialist Fourth Class Earl Bleacher and Sergeant Lowell Stevens had both just completed the Special Forces Qualification Course (commonly called the Q-course).³

Specialist Fourth Class (SP4) Earl Bleacher was new to Special Forces but not to the Army. Bleacher had enlisted in the Army in 1950, and served nine years in the 11th Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, reaching the rank of staff sergeant. Seeking another challenge, he left the Army in 1959 to attend Millersville State Teachers’ College.⁴ Missing the Army, Bleacher reenlisted in 1962 for an airborne assignment. He was sent through basic infantry training again before reporting to the 504th Airborne Battle Group, 82nd Airborne Division as a pri-

“Vietnam” is actually spelled as two words in the Vietnamese language, i.e., “Viet Nam” (pronounced “vee-it” and “nom,” rhymes with “Tom”).



vate E-2. Starting over again, the senior parachutist and non-commissioned officer academy graduate wanted more than the daily grind in the 82nd Airborne Division. After some resistance from his chain of command, "I hand carried my request for Special Forces through the bureaucracy. I knew a few shortcuts," said Bleacher. He was soon headed down Ardennes Street to Smoke Bomb Hill and the Special Forces Qualification Course. Bleacher trained as a weapons sergeant and graduated from the "Q-course" in May 1963 with an assignment to the 1st SFG in Okinawa.⁵ Several other new graduates (including Lowell Stevens) joined him in Okinawa.

West Virginian Lowell Wesley Stevens began his Army career when he enlisted in 1959. After basic infantry training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, he was assigned as a mortar man (today's MOS 11C) in C Company, 502nd Airborne Battle Group, 101st Airborne Division. In the late 1950s through the early 1960s, many soldiers assigned to the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions attended airborne training at their respective posts (Forts Bragg or Campbell). After completing jump school, the soldiers usually stayed in their units for their entire enlistment. In three and a half years, Stevens worked his way up from a private E-2 M-274 "Mule" driver to mortar section sergeant, a staff sergeant position.⁶

Anticipating a promotion to staff sergeant because he had been filling that position for almost a year, Sergeant Stevens asked the personnel clerk about his promotion chances. He was shocked when the clerk said "Never. A staff sergeant on the division pistol team officially held the mortar section leader position." "The only way to get promoted was for someone to retire, get busted, or die," said Stevens.⁷ Having just reenlisted for six years, Stevens had to find another way to make rank.

So mad "he couldn't see straight," SGT Stevens went back to his company. As he stormed down the hallway, his company commander, Captain David Ranger [his real name], stopped him. CPT Ranger said, "What's the matter?" As Stevens proceeded to explain, Ranger ushered him into his office and shut the door. For a few seconds, Stevens thought that he was in big trouble. It was rare that a sergeant entered the company commander's office except for punishment. Based on Stevens' experience, training, and personality, CPT Ranger thought that he would do well in Special Forces and suggested that he try out. It just so happened that an SF recruiting team was at Fort Campbell. CPT Ranger told Stevens that if he qualified, he would endorse his transfer to attend Special Forces training, even if it meant getting "heat" from the battle group and division. Many in the chain of command highly discouraged soldiers from applying for Special Forces, whether based on the needs of the unit, or simply because they disliked specialty units. That day, Stevens took a battery of tests for Special Forces. "The prospect of slow promotions turned me towards Special Forces, even though in 1963, Special Forces were the two most hated words in the Regular Army," said Stevens.⁸ That started his eighteen-year adventure.⁹

When SGT Stevens and SP4 Bleacher attended the Special Forces Qualification Course in 1963, there were three phases—Methods of Instruction, military occupational specialty (MOS) training, and "Branch" training. The first phase, "Methods of Instruction" (MOI) trained the soldier to be an instructor, the primary role of Special Forces. Students had to organize, develop, and present three classes, complete with training aids. The topics ranged from basic rifle marksmanship to field hygiene. "As the final test, you had to prepare three subjects [classes]. Then, the cadre member would pick the class you taught for a grade. If you didn't get through MOI, then you were gone, back to your unit," said Bleacher.¹⁰

The second phase was devoted to the soldier's specialty (MOS). In the 1960s, Special Forces soldiers were trained in five specialties: weapons, engineer (demolitions), communications, medical, and operations and intelligence (O&I). Weapons men (today's 18B, Special Forces weapons sergeant) were split into heavy and light specialties as a primary MOS and then cross-trained. Today's 18C, Special Forces engineer, was called a "demo man" in the 1960s, but trained to build as well as to blow up things. The "commo men" (18E, Special Forces communications sergeants), trained initially at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, or Fort Gordon, Georgia, on conventional Army radios before being schooled on SF-specific communications equipment at Fort Bragg. The medics (18D, Special Forces medical sergeant) received the majority of their thirty-eight weeks of training at Brooke Army Hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, additional advanced training at the Special Warfare Center, and some with their unit surgeons.¹¹ The final specialty was operations and intelligence (O&I), today's 18F Special Forces operations and intelligence sergeant, taught at Fort Bragg.¹²

The last phase of training, called "Branch," was centered on unconventional warfare (UW) training. It not only stressed UW, but direct action missions such as raids, ambushes, and reconnaissance. Branch phase culminated in a final field training exercise. For Stevens' class it was called Cherokee Trail I—the predecessor of the current Robin Sage Exercise. While it supposedly was centered on UW, it seemed to Stevens to stress more direct action missions, not unconventional warfare.¹³

Throughout the Special Forces "Q" course, the one thing that struck Lowell Stevens as odd, was that some instructors would say, "*Pay Attention, you might find yourself down south and may need*



Private Lowell Stevens prior to his first jump January 1960 at the 101st Jump School.

SF Setup and Growth

SPECIAL Forces began as a fraction of the U.S. Army's total strength when the 10th Special Forces Group was activated in June 1952 at Fort Bragg under the legendary Colonel Aaron Bank. In 1953, the 10th SFG deployed to the Flint Kaserne at Bad Toelz, Bavaria, West Germany. Before the 10th SFG shipped out to Germany, it was divided in half to create the 77th SFG in September 1953. The 77th would be reflagged as the 7th Special Forces Group in 1961. In 1957, the 1st SFG was established in Japan as a third Special Forces group in the Army. No new SF groups would be established until President John F. Kennedy was elected in 1960.

On 2 April 1956, the Army activated the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment (Area) (Airborne) at Fort Bragg under the cover of the 8251st Army Unit.¹ This sixteen-man detachment had the overwhelming mission of organizing and training Asian resistance forces against any Chinese or Soviet thrust into Southeast Asia (Indochina, Malaya, South Korea, etc.). Three similar SF detachments were activated in Japan under the cover of the 8231st Army Unit and tasked with a similar mission. These covered SF units came under the operational control (OPCON) of the 1st SFG (Airborne), activated on 24 June 1957 at Camp Drake, Japan (near Tokyo). The 1st SFG relocated to Okinawa in July 1957.² The 1st SFG immediately organized mobile training teams to teach U.S. unconventional warfare tactics to training cadres in the armed forces of South Korea, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Taiwan, and Thailand.³ By 1957, 1st and 7th SFG teams were also conducting Ranger courses for the South Vietnamese army. On 21 October 1957, Captain Harry G. Cramer (assigned to the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment), was killed in a Viet Cong mortar attack near Nha Trang. He became the first SF soldier to die in Vietnam.⁴

Special Forces and SF missions began to grow in size and scope after John F. Kennedy became president. The three Special Forces groups (1st, 7th, and 10th) had a combined strength of less than 2,500. The 5th SFG was formed at Fort Bragg on 21 September 1961 and deployed to Vietnam in late 1964 to assume command and control of Special Forces throughout the country.⁵ As the Cold War intensified, worldwide American Special Forces were expanded in the U.S. Army. By the end of 1963, three additional Special Forces groups had been activated in quick succession—the 8th SFG at Fort Gulick, the Panama Canal Zone on 1 April 1963; the 6th SFG, at Fort Bragg on 1 May 1963; and the 3rd SFG at Fort Bragg on 5 December 1963.⁶

As Special Forces was growing, the demand for soldiers increased. The new Special Forces soldiers needed training, but not all went through the Special Forces Qualifi-

cation Course (SFQC) at Fort Bragg. As the 1st SFG stood up, some soldiers transferred from the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team to fill up the new unit. Soldiers from units throughout Germany volunteered for the 10th SFG, especially those with language abilities. Those soldiers underwent extensive "On the Job Training," which included cross-training in military occupational specialties for team, company, and group assignments. Every new recruit cross-trained in two other specialties. MOS-qualified infantryman learned medical or demolitions skills while medics and communicators cross-trained on weapons. Units ran language classes with either soldiers or contracted instructors to give the soldiers language basics. The soldier then had to pass proficiency tests in his primary MOS as well as two others, and serve on an A Team for an indeterminate period. Until training was accomplished, they wore a "candy stripe" bar (with the SFG colors) on their green beret. The soldier was then eligible to be awarded the "3" additional skill identifier ("ASI," later this would be changed to the "S" suffix for SF-qualified soldiers) by the chain of command, and wore the group SF flash on their green beret rather than the second-class "candy stripe."⁷

In the 1960s all soldiers assigned to Special Forces groups wore the green beret. However, SF qualified wore the full group flash. Non-SF-qualified soldiers wore a "candy stripe" in lieu of a full flash on the green beret to distinguish themselves (the full 1st SFG flash is shown to the right). The unit crest was worn above the "candy stripe."



- 1 Chalmers Archer Jr., *Green Berets in the Vanguard; Inside Special Forces, 1953–1963* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 27–28; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 1; Cherilyn A. Walley and Charles H. Briscoe, "SF Detachment 39: SFLE in Korea," *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006, 39–40; Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets, The First Thirty Years* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 50.
- 2 Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 5.
- 3 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 5.
- 4 Archer, *Green Berets in the Vanguard*, 72–77; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 54.
- 5 Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 5.
- 6 Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971*, 5.
- 7 Vernon W. Gillespie Jr. and Shirley Gillespie, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 23 February 2006, Locust Grove, Virginia, digital recording, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Lowell W. Stevens Sr., interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 27 October 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

this," if something was particularly important. In 1963, Vietnam was not mentioned in training, though many instructors had been there. When one of the instructors slipped and said *Vietnam*, "I went to the post library to look up *Vietnam* in an Atlas. I couldn't find it, because the Atlas was so old that it listed the region as *French Indo China*," said Stevens.¹⁴ Little did he know then, that *Vietnam* would become a household word in the United States in less than five years.¹⁵

SGT Stevens and SP4 Bleacher arrived in Okinawa just after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963. The two were assigned to C Company, 1st SFG, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Elmer Monger. As he entered the company headquarters, SGT Stevens saw eleven memorial plaques on the wall. Each plaque had a green beret and the name of a 1st SFG soldier and the date he was killed in Vietnam. These were some of the first U.S. casualties in Southeast Asia. "That was really an 'attention getter,' because at Fort Bragg the word *Vietnam* was rarely, if ever, spoken and no reference was made to combat there," said Stevens. However, this would soon change for Bleacher and Stevens.¹⁶

In an overseas SF group, the company sergeant majors had enormous power. With their assignment to C Company, Stevens and Bleacher entered the domain of Sergeant Major Robert DePuy. DePuy wore a 101st Airborne Division combat patch, a Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB), and two gold stars on his master parachutist wings signifying World War II combat jumps (D-Day and Operation MARKET GARDEN). SGM DePuy had one priority—taking care of soldiers so they could accomplish the mission. "But, it was abundantly clear that if you got on his bad side you had a major problem," remembered Stevens.¹⁷

A sergeant major in the early 1960s had the power to change MOSs to fill vacancies in the unit as well as to support promotions. Though Specialist Bleacher was a light weapons man, SGM DePuy discovered that he was married. His wife and children were still in Fayetteville, because to bring a family overseas a soldier had to be at least a sergeant. DePuy put him into a demolitions position with a proficiency pay ("pro" pay equaled \$55 a month). An E-4 in 1963 received about \$150 a month, plus \$55 for jump pay. "The 'pro' pay was not a gift, I had to earn it," remembered Bleacher, "I had just a short time to train and pass a test to qualify as a Special Forces engineer."¹⁸ In short, a sergeant major's word was law in a unit, but especially so overseas. Since the sergeant major also made all enlisted assignments in the company, Stevens and Bleacher were assigned to Team A-312.¹⁹



The 1st SFG beret flash from its creation until the assassination of President Kennedy. In 1964, the "mourning strip" was added.



Memorial plaques in the hallway at C Company, 1st SFG, in 1964. Each represents a C Company SF soldier killed in Vietnam.

In the spring of 1964, several teams received TDY orders for Vietnam. It was 1st SFG's turn in the Vietnam rotation. Team A-312 would replace a 7th SFG team for six months at the Plei Do Lim (Pley-do-lim) CIDG camp southeast of Pleiku. It had been established by Captain Herbert Hardy's A-334 in December 1963. Hardy was killed there on 4 March 1964. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously for leading a three-man counterattack when the Viet Cong ambushed his company three weeks earlier (19 February 1964).²⁰

In the 1st SFG, officers were assigned to specific A teams for deployments [missions] only. Team sergeants throughout the Group vied for candidates to fill their elements, especially when scheduled to deploy. They wanted the best soldiers available. The team sergeants built their teams with the advice of the company sergeant major. The senior team NCOs and the company sergeant major selected the team leader and got the approval of the company commander. Once the team leader was selected, he and the NCOs would select an executive officer from the available first lieutenants in the Group.²¹

SGM DePuy and the NCOs of A-312 selected Captain Vernon W. Gillespie Jr., an Oklahoma native and Infantry Officer Candidate School



Captain Herbert Francis Hardy Jr., the commander of A-334, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), was killed in action on 4 March 1964 on a patrol near Plei Do Lim, the Republic of Vietnam. CPT Hardy was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously for actions against the Viet Cong on 19 February 1964.

(OCS) graduate who was one of the more experienced captains in 1st SFG. As an infantry officer, he had served at Fort Benning, Georgia; at Fort Meyer, Virginia; and in Iceland. Gillespie later was awarded a Regular Army commission in the Field Artillery. Since Regular Army commissions were extremely competitive and hard to obtain, Gillespie accepted the branch transfer and was assigned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, “the Home of the Artillery.” A secondary benefit was that it was close to both his and his wife Shirley’s families.²²

As a student of military history, Gillespie’s interest in irregular warfare drew him to Special Forces. In 1960, he attended a guerilla warfare course at Fort Benning. After completing the Field Artillery officers career course in October 1962, Gillespie volunteered for Special Forces. In 1962, SF was critically short officers because of its expansion. Gillespie attended a two-month long counter guerilla operations course at the Special Warfare Center. The combination of his two guerilla warfare courses was sufficient to waive the “Q” course requirement because of the shortage of team leaders. After two months of French language training, “I was able to finagle an assignment to 1st SFG, because I wanted to take an A Team to Vietnam.”²³

CPT Vernon Gillespie arrived on Okinawa in December 1962, and was immediately assigned to command Team A-124. Foreshadowing the next few years in SF, Shirley Gillespie with their two young sons, Richard, age six, and Stewart, age three, arrived on Okinawa a few weeks later, just days before Vernon deployed to Vietnam. In February 1963, Gillespie’s Team A-124 deployed to Khe Sanh (kay saw). They transformed a Montagnard Bru tribe into a CIDG unit and used it to track North Vietnamese Army units that were infiltrating into Vietnam from Laos. The Bru lived near the border of North Vietnam in the I Corps sector. He also had another deployment in Asia and some staff time at the Group headquarters. After being selected to command A-312, Gillespie and his NCOs had four months to prepare for their six-month TDY in Vietnam.²⁴

One of the first things that CPT Gillespie did was to articulate his “Rules for Deployment.” First, the primary mission of the team was to gain the trust and respect of the Montagnards. Second, disrespectful treatment of a Montagnard was grounds for return to Okinawa for courts-martial. Finally, sexual relations with a Montagnard woman was grounds for return to Okinawa for courts-martial. Since ten of the team members had previously served in Vietnam, a few with several deployments under their belts, Gillespie’s rules were accepted and perfectly understood.²⁵

Team A-312’s soldiers underwent extensive preparations before their deployment to Vietnam. Initial mission preparation included an extensive area study of Vietnam, with a special emphasis on the Central Highlands in the II Corps area. They received French classes three hours each day when not in the field. Heavy weapons training was done at Camp Hardy in the northern training area of Okinawa.²⁶ Team members cross-trained in various spe-



Captain Vernon Gillespie (on the right), the commander of A-312, on patrol with some of the Montagnard CIDG. Sergeant Lowell Stevens is on the left holding a captured Viet Cong flag.

cialties and attended medical and communications classes conducted by the 1st SFG staff. SGT Stevens attended a three-week medical class. When he arrived, it turned out to be a specialty class for medics. “I learned more about childbirth than I really cared to know, although the knowledge would later be helpful with the Montagnards,” said Stevens.²⁷ While Special Forces deployment training today is similar—cross-training in weapons, medical, and communications—one aspect was unique to 1st SFG.²⁸

A standard part of pre-deployment training was called “compatibility week.” Conducted in the northern training area of Okinawa, the entire team spent a week playing pinochle. Twice a day, the communications sergeants made a radio check with company headquarters. The purpose of the exercise was to find out whether all twelve men could live in an isolated environment as a team without killing each other. “If at the end of the week there was anyone who couldn’t work together, they would be gone. I wanted a fully capable team ready for Vietnam,” remembered Gillespie.²⁹ Everyone survived. Team A-312 was compatible and ready for Vietnam.

Since they would be at a remote location, each team member received a special per diem allowance of \$9. With the advance pay, all soldiers chipped in \$200 each for the team food fund (this was roughly the equivalent of a month’s pay). The team sergeant bought canned and packaged food in Okinawa for shipment to Vietnam. Additional supplies could be purchased at the Navy commissary in Saigon. A cook and kitchen helpers were hired locally, normally the same ones used by the previous team.³⁰

Two unexpected attachments to A-312 were a pair of Malayan Sun Bear cubs. They had been brought from Vietnam by another team, A-124. Importation of Sun Bears was illegal under U.S. and Okinawan law. The compromise with the authorities was that the next SF team going to Vietnam would take the bears off the island. That team was A-312.

Montagnard Tribes

THE story of Special Forces in Vietnam is entwined with the “Montagnards.” The term “Montagnard” is French, simply meaning “mountain people.” The Montagnards are the aboriginal people (ethnically from Mon-Khmer or Malayo-Polynesian groups) who, centuries earlier, had been driven into the mountain highlands by the Vietnamese.¹ The lowland ethnic Vietnamese used the pejorative term “moi,” meaning “savage” and treated them with contempt.



The Montagnard longhouse was the home for several generations of a family. The woman at the front is shelling rice, to her rear are chickens.

U.S. Special Forces simply called them “Yards,” a term of endearment. From 1962 on, Special Forces in the Republic of Vietnam were increasingly deployed in the highlands to work with the “Montagnards.”

Vietnam contained between 600,000 to 1,000,000 Montagnards comprising twenty-nine tribal groups, most of whom hated the lowland Vietnamese and the Republic of Vietnam (south) almost as much as they despised the Communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north.² The two largest tribes were the Rhade and Jarai. After the 1955

Geneva Accords partition of Vietnam into north and south, tension grew between the Montagnards and the RVN government when refugees from North Vietnam were resettled in the highland areas, often on Montag-



Montagnard refugees fleeing the VC outside the gate at Buon Brieng. They were temporarily housed in tents until a new village site could be arranged and built.



nard lands. This resettlement was organized and sanctioned by the government in Saigon.

The Montagnards were primarily a matriarchal society. Women owned all property and generally controlled most village activities. The extended family was the basis of Montagnard society, with several family groups forming a village. The village adults elected the village leaders, including the headman or chief. Shamans (sorcerers or witches) had enormous power within the village.

The basic Montagnard dwelling was the longhouse. Built on stilts, it was constructed of bamboo, logs, straw (thatch), and palm fronds. Montagnard villages had between five and thirty longhouses, with a population ranging from 200 to 800 people. The terrain and subsistence environment determined the size of the village. Most Montagnards practiced “slash and burn” agriculture, and grew rice, corn and vegetables. Meat came from hunting and raising pigs, chickens, and ducks.³

1 Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets, The First Thirty Years* (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 100; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 38–39.

2 Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 20.

3 Ronald A. Shackleton, *Village Defense: Initial Special Forces Operations in Vietnam* (Arvada, CO: Phoenix Press, 1975), 5; U.S. Army Special Warfare School, *Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of South Viet-Nam* (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, July 1964).

The night before leaving for Vietnam, Sergeant Ronald Wingo, Specialist 4 George Underwood, and SGT Lowell Stevens thought that it was a shame that the bears had not seen much of Okinawa. In a moment of inspiration, they decided to take the male bear into Naminoue to the Sunflower Bar, one of their favorite watering holes. While Underwood distracted the Okinawan taxi driver, Wingo and Stevens pulled the bear into the cab, pushing



The Malaysian Sun Bears A-312 had to bring back to Vietnam. The bears are not cubs, they are fully-grown.



Once discovered, the bears were out of the footlockers.

ing it down on the floor behind the front seat. The plan was working until the bear broke free, stood up, and placed both paws on the back of the front seat. When the driver turned his head, the bear was only inches from him. Panic stricken, the driver slammed on the brakes and jumped from the taxi, screaming "Kuma," the Japanese word for "bear." It took all three soldiers and some extra money to finally convince him to take them all downtown. In the bar, the bear was a big hit with the girls, but caused problems with the other patrons. The Okinawan police and MPs were called. Using a "Keystone Cops" trick one soldier ran out of the bar just as the police arrived and pointed down the street, shouted, "They went that way!" The police and MPs were running away down the street when the three soldiers and the bear escaped in the opposite direction, hailed a taxi, and headed back to the base.³¹

When they returned to the barracks, CPT Gillespie, who was not amused, met the three culprits. The three knew that they were in big trouble. "A team commander had a lot of power. We could have lost a stripe or even been kicked out of the unit, especially since it was the night before a deployment," said Stevens. After a brief lecture about responsibility, Gillespie decided that the "bar hoppers" would load all of the team's equipment on the C-124 by themselves. Whether the bear helped cannot be

remembered.³²

Another problem still had to be resolved: how to get the bear cubs on the aircraft without the loadmaster and pilot finding out. "Then someone remembered that if you rubbed the bear's stomach, they fell into an almost catatonic sleep for a few hours," said Gillespie.³³ The bears were tucked away in footlockers and, with their bellies rubbed, drifted off to sleep. Quickly and carefully, the footlockers were loaded. Once the plane reached cruising altitude, everyone fell asleep. While the "good paratroopers" slept, the bears woke up and began clawing the insides of the footlockers trying to get out. The loud scratching startled the unsuspecting Air Force crew chief. "Suddenly I was awakened by the crew chief shaking me and I was ordered to the cockpit," remembered Gillespie. "The pilot told me in no uncertain terms that he would declare an emergency and return to Okinawa if the bears did anything that might jeopardize the aircraft."³⁴ CPT Gillespie convinced the pilot that the team would keep the bears under control and out of trouble. For the rest of the flight, one of the soldiers kept the bears quiet with food and belly rubs.³⁵

When A-312 arrived at Nha Trang, headquarters of the U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam (Provisional), the mission had changed. Instead of going to Plei Do Lim, the team would work at Buon Brieng (B-won Bring), a camp established by A-321 from the 7th SFG. After a C-47 flight to Ban Me Thout, A-312 flew in UH-1B helicopters for a short flight to Buon Brieng.³⁶

In 1964, Buon Brieng was one of the largest CIDG camps in II Corps. It had been built around a Montagnard village. CPT Gillespie's A-312 joined a Vietnamese Special Forces team to work with a battalion-sized Montagnard strike force. Five CIDG companies (about 750 men) made up the force. Each company was organized as a light infantry company with a headquarters section and four platoons of thirty Montagnards armed with World War II surplus weapons—primarily M1 and M2 carbines, M3 submachine guns ("Grease Guns"), Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), and M1919A6 .30 caliber light machineguns. The camp had two M79 grenade launchers that were rotated among elements going out on patrol.³⁷

The SF supplied and paid the CIDG strike force soldiers. Monthly pay ranged between 500 to 1,000 Vietnamese piasters per month (in 1964 the exchange rate was about seventy-three piasters to one dollar, so a striker was paid between \$6.85 to \$13.70 a month), depending on his duties. The pay was more than a soldier in the Vietnamese Army would make and three times more a month than the average Montagnard. For food, every Montagnard CIDG striker was issued a cup of uncooked rice and a can of fish daily in camp. On patrols, they were issued two cups of uncooked rice and two cans of fish a day. Truck convoys from Ban Me Thout brought in most supplies, but some arrived in U.S. Army planes and helicopters at the small airstrip adjacent to the camp.³⁸

Officially, the American SF just advised the Montag-

The CIDG Program

IN the early 1960s, most SF missions in Vietnam concentrated on the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) program. Originally begun by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the CIDG program initiated training and equipping indigenous forces to fight the Viet Cong. It was designed to combat VC recruitment and break their control in rural areas. This was especially critical in remote areas like the Central Highlands of the II Corps area (sometimes called the II Corps Tactical Zone). In many of these remote areas, the Viet Cong ruled because the Army of Vietnam (ARVN, pronounced ar-vin) did not venture into those areas.

Rather than simply cede the remote areas to the Viet Cong, a joint CIA–Special Forces team developed the CIDG program. The CIA identified the Montagnards as potential anti-communist allies. The CIDG program would organize and train companies of primarily Montagnard tribesmen to protect their villages and combat the Viet Cong. The French had good success with the Montagnards as irregular troops. The CIDG forces were not a part of the

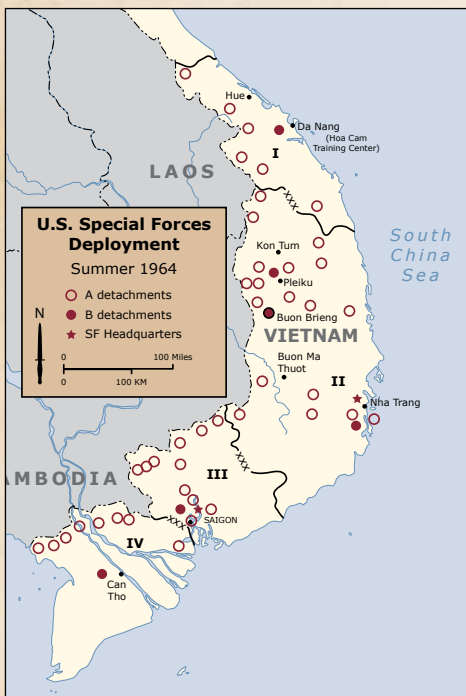
ARVN. They were funded and directed by the United States primarily through the Special Forces A Teams that trained and advised them. However, actual command of the CIDG had been relegated to the Vietnamese Special Forces, the Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt (LLDB).¹

The SF-supported pilot project for the CIDG program in Vietnam began in the Darlac Province village of Buon Enao (pronounced Boon-ee-now).² The camp was located in the heart of Rhade (pronounced Rah-Dey) territory. The Rhade were one of the two largest Montagnard tribes. Special Forces Team A-113 (a seven-man 1st SFG element), led by Captain Ronald Shackleton, and a counterpart team of ten Vietnamese Special Forces arrived in Buon Enao in February 1962 to train a full-time strike force and village self-defense force. The composition of the Vietnamese Special Forces team at Buon Enao fluctuated, but an effort was made to ensure that it was at least 50 percent Montagnard (Rhade and Jarai). A-113 also trained village medics and supervised local civic action projects.³

From November 1961 to November 1962, the Central Intelligence Agency controlled the CIDG program. The responsibility changed between September 1962 and July 1963, when control was gradually shifted to the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) and U.S. Army Special Forces–Vietnam (Provisional). The transition was codenamed Operation SWITCHBACK. After Captain Shackleton and A-113 established the first CIDG camp in 1962, the program was rapidly expanded to outlying villages. By the end of 1963, there were thirty CIDG camps. A year later, there were forty camps. Then it was expanded to cover all of Vietnam.⁴ From July 1963 to the spring of 1965, when major Army and Marine Corps conventional units were sent to Vietnam, MACV administered the CIDG program. When the 5th SFG arrived, the MACV administered the program through them.⁵

As the CIDG program expanded, other minority groups were enrolled. During the course of the war, Special Forces soldiers advised and led strike forces of Montagnards, Kampucheas (ethnic Cambodians), and Nungs (ethnic Chinese). The CIDG program also included the Vietnamese Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects (two anti-communist groups). By 1965, CIDG units and camps existed in each of the four Corps areas.

The Viet Cong or “VC” were the common names for the National Liberation Front. The term is derived from the Vietnamese name Viet Nam Cong San, translated into English it is simply “Vietnamese Communist.”



- 1 Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets, The First Thirty Years* (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 102.
- 2 Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 12–14.
- 3 In some reports and articles Shackleton's team, A-113 is misidentified as A-35. Ronald A. Shackleton, *Village Defense: Initial Special Forces Operations in Vietnam* (Arvada, CO: Phoenix Press, 1975), v; Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971*, 26.
- 4 Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 113; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 41–43.
- 5 Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971*, 15.



CIDG “strikers” with Lowell Stevens and Burhl Cunningham on patrol.

nards, but in reality, they commanded the CIDG Montagnard units. The Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt (LLDB), Vietnamese Special Forces, were in charge of the CIDG, but they rarely left camp. They were content with the SF arrangement. During patrols, two Americans would “officially” advise; however, they were the command and control element for the Montagnards. Every camp had an assigned area of responsibility. In theory, as more camps were established and patrols expanded, the Viet Cong would be driven out of the area.³⁹

The first priority of work for A-312 was security. Although the camp’s defenses were robust, they were constantly being improved. A-312 added more M-18 claymore mines to those already in place, raising the number to more than 500 around the perimeter. Between the outer concertina barbed wire and the inner perimeter bunkers was 100 yards of “tangle foot,” barbed wire to slow an attacker that penetrated the outer concertina wire. The weapons and demo sergeants supervised the improvement of the camp defenses. Machineguns were emplaced in bunkers around the perimeter. “Every night, either myself or Burhl [Cunningham, the other weapons sergeant] would go around the camp and check the headspace and timing of the machineguns before test firing every one,” said Stevens.⁴⁰ If the VC attacked, they met fierce resistance.⁴¹

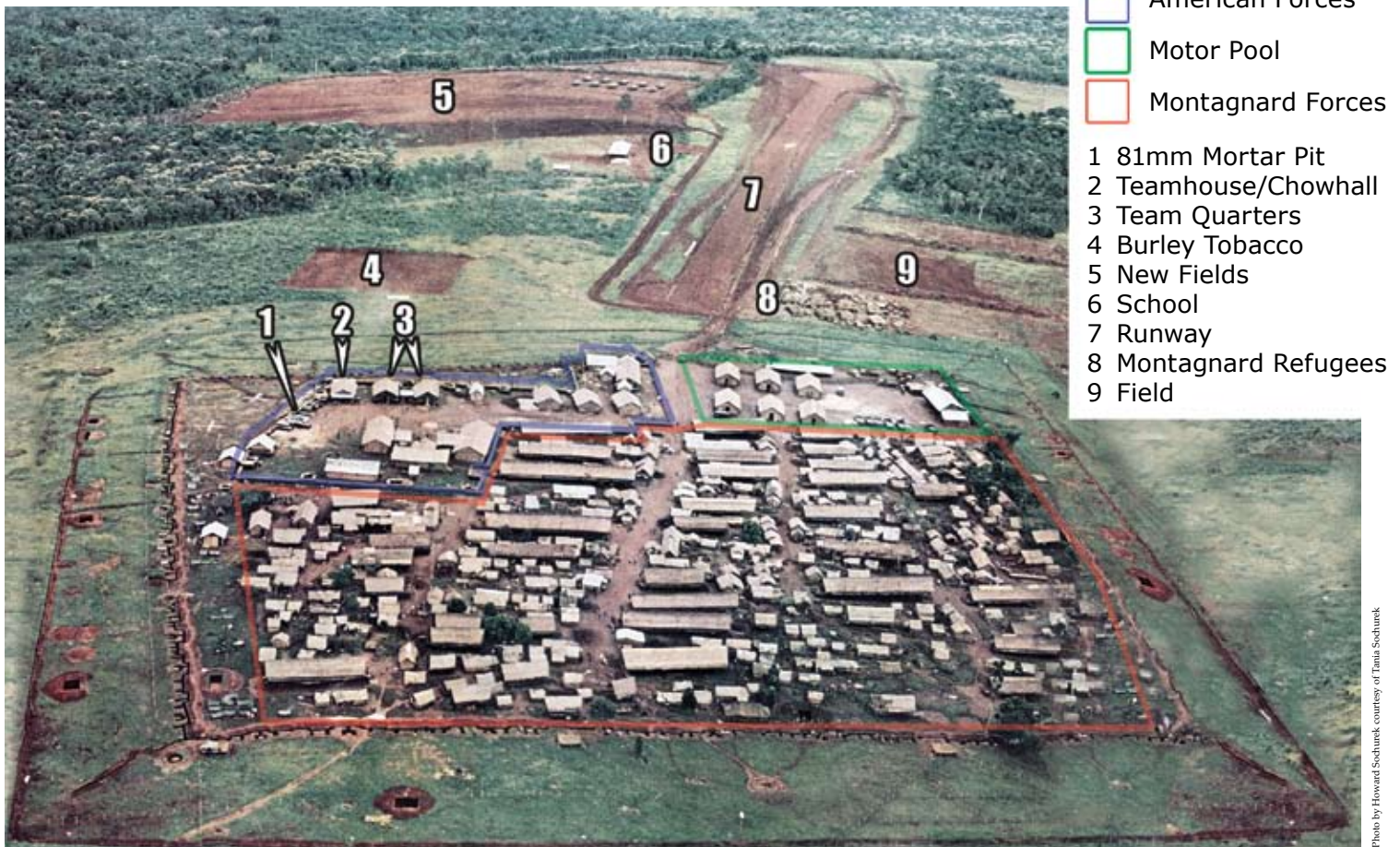
One of SGT Stevens’ primary concerns were the camp’s mortars. If a VC attack hit the camp, its main fire support would come from the single 81mm and four 60mm mortars. Key to defense against VC attack was accurate tar-

get reference points (TRPs). To establish their accuracy, Stevens would fire 81mm and 60mm rounds with the safety pins in place. SF team members would park a 2½ ton truck at the designated target reference point. From underneath, they called in adjustments. This was the most accurate way to adjust the fire. The mortars had to function properly at all times because it was the primary fire support. Other fire support, namely close air, might come later, but the team knew they could trust Stevens to put accurate and deadly fire on any attacker.⁴²

The CIDG strike force companies at Buon Brieng rotated duty much like American units. One company would conduct a long-range patrol to attack the VC supply routes. A second company manned the camp’s perimeter, improved positions, and conducted combat patrols around the camp (up to five kilometers) to thwart staging attacks. The third company would train locally and provide security for the camp at night. The fourth company “stood down,” but they were subject to recall to reinforce if anyone needed assistance. The final company conducted civil military operations primarily with displaced Montagnard refugees.⁴³

Training Montagnards was a new experience for SGT Stevens and SP4 Bleacher. Though both had experience training U.S. soldiers, the Montagnards were different. The highly intelligent Montagnards could not understand abstract concepts of training. If the skill being taught did not affect one of their five senses, it was hard to convince the indigenous fighters that it was necessary or dangerous. The best example was the proper use of

Camp Buon Brieng





The camp's 81mm mortar, Sergeant Lowell Stevens place of duty when not on patrol. The 81mm with the 60mm mortars were the camp's fire support.

hand grenades. After throwing the grenade, American soldiers dropped to a prone position. The Montagnards stood and clapped when it exploded. Stevens tried in vain to explain that the exploding grenade threw deadly fragments about. The "Yards" (the SF nickname for the Montagnards) reasoned that only the black explosion cloud was dangerous. Since they could not see the shrapnel in the air, it simply was not there. No matter how hard Stevens tried to explain the danger, they simply did not believe. Finally, quite frustrated he began throwing the grenades shorter and shorter distances. Eventually, a piece of shrapnel struck one of the standing Montagnard platoon leaders in the neck. The Strikers gathered around their stricken leader while a medic applied first aid. Teaching point made, Stevens got them to pay attention to the physics of a grenade explosion. The platoon leader survived with a small scar, and the "Yards" accepted the dangers of a hand grenade in later combat operations.⁴⁴

There were two enemies in the Central Highlands (the II Corps area), the Viet Cong (VC) and what were called the Viet Montagnard Cong (VMC). The VC were ethnic Vietnamese who traced their lineage to the Viet Minh, the communist-supported movement that fought against the Japanese and then the French for independence in Indochina. The VMC worked with the VC units in Montagnard areas. Many had been pressed into service by the Viet Cong as guerillas to control local populations and to guard "way stations" in the vast supply network. Special Forces soldiers recognized firefights with VMC units because there were rarely any casualties on either side. There was a lot of shooting and then contact was broken. It ended there, without pursuit or calls for artillery or close air support. The Montagnards on both sides shot six to eight feet high. They had no wish to hurt their brothers or the Americans. On the other hand, if the Montagnard CIDG made contact with a VC element, the fighting was tough and almost ruthless.⁴⁵

The VC and North Vietnamese moved supplies through the area from Laos and Cambodia. Montagnards were forced into service as porters ("coolies"), to man pack the supplies to "way stations" or rest areas



Viet Cong supply "way station" located a day's march along the VC supply network

along the route. These were one day's march apart. Three to four VC guards escorted the supply column to make sure the Montagnards did not escape. The CIDG at Buon Brieng routinely sent out patrols to attack the supply route "way stations." The supplies and buildings were burned. The CIDG brought the VC prisoners and any Montagnard porters back to Buon Brieng. The Montagnards could return to their villages or remain in the camp. As the CIDG patrols became more successful, the VC altered supply routes.⁴⁶

On patrol with the CIDG, the Americans quickly adapted to the Montagnard nomadic routines. The Army did not have a field ration for indigenous troops. Since the SF were paid per diem, they were not authorized C-Rations. The Americans "lived like the natives." The patrol would stop once a day, around noon, to cook their rice. "Picture this scene," said SGT Stevens. "As we walked through the jungle, practically every Montagnard carried a medium-size cook pot, blackened on the outside from wood cooking fires, hanging on the rear of his rucksack, secured with pieces of rope or, in most cases, jungle vines. As we neared the noon hour, the troops would begin pulling and cutting edible plants from the jungle as we walked. They would place the vegetation on the top of the rucksack, or on top of the cook pot carried by the man in front of them. It didn't take long before essentially every Montagnard looked like he was carry-



The patrol burns the VC "way station."



Patrol in a Montagnard village. In the center of the photo is a VC prisoner (dressed in shorts and a "boonie cap" with his hands tied in front). The striker on the right is leaning on the village communal latrine.



On patrol cooking with a "Hongo." Left to right: Ron Wingo, Burhl Cunningham, and Team Sergeant Marv Compton.

ing a bale of freshly cut greens.⁴⁷

At noon, the patrol would set up a security perimeter and begin lunch. The Americans used an Okinawan "Hongo" rice cooker, a kidney shaped pot with a tight fitting lid and a wire carrying handle that was used to suspend it over a fire. Inside the Hongo were two recessed lines showing the required level for the dry rice and the correct water level required to cook the rice. "One could say it was idiot proof. We learned early on that a standard issue brown cushion soled sock, preferably a clean one, when filled with dry rice to the point that only enough of the top was left to tie a knot in the material, was the precise amount of rice to last seven days," remembered Stevens.⁴⁸ The patrol would cook a pot of rice, and then empty it, usually on top of a makeshift table/plate made of banana leaves. The patrol then repeated the process, setting the pots aside to cool since that was the evening meal's rice. The Americans carried luxuries like dehydrated chicken soup, onions, and C-Ration peanut butter to round out their meals. "Growing wild throughout the jungle were the smallest hot peppers I have ever seen. The peppers were only ¼ to ¾ of an inch long, but they

are by far the hottest peppers I have ever eaten. I have always prided myself on my ability to eat hot spicy food, but these were beyond belief," Stevens recalled.⁴⁹ While not on patrol, the team's efforts centered on camp defense.

As the American-led CIDG patrols became more aggressive, the VC looked to retaliate. With the camp well-situated tactically and strongly defended, an outright attack would result in heavy VC casualties and might end in their defeat.

Another option was to ambush a patrol, but all went out heavily armed. On 23 July 1964, a VC battalion on the QL-14 road from Ban Me Thout to Pleiku ambushed a four-truck convoy lead by Specialist Fourth Class George Underwood, the A-312 junior medic. Underwood and thirty-nine Montagnards were killed in "...a well laid out ambush with dug-in positions."⁵⁰ A few women and children and some CIDG survived, because First Lieutenant John Horn, the team executive officer, and Specialist Fifth Class Vincent Skeebea, the team operations and intelligence sergeant, led the camp reaction force on a rescue operation. A nearby patrol hurried to the "sound of the guns" to reinforce the reaction force. Skeebea and Horn were later awarded Silver Stars for their effort. Underwood became the forty-fifth SF soldier to die in Vietnam (the thirty-third killed in action). His plaque was added to the wall at the 1st SFG.⁵¹

After the ambush, the camp leaders approached CPT Gillespie about a problem. The Montagnards believed the ambush had brought "evil spirits" to the camp and they would continue to plague the unit unless a proper sacrifice was made.⁵² The ceremony included a water buffalo sacrifice and imbibing in a Montagnard rice wine called "Nhom Pae." "Montagnard women would chew the rice for a while and spit the mixture of rice and saliva into large ceramic jugs," said Stevens. "The saliva was a fermenting agent for the wine."⁵³ As the Americans drank the Nhom Pae through long reeds, the Montagnard shaman chanted and daubed their feet with the blood of the sacrificed buffalo to drive the evil spirits away. Meanwhile "Montagnard girls danced in a tribal manner to a tune on brass gongs."⁵⁴ At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Montagnards placed copper bracelets on the Americans as a sign of the friendship. The spirits satisfied the camp went back to work.

The SF team missions in Buon Brieng were not limited to combat operations. Integrated into the overall mission was a robust program of Civil Military Operations



Destroyed 2½ ton truck that SP4 George Underwood was traveling in when ambushed..

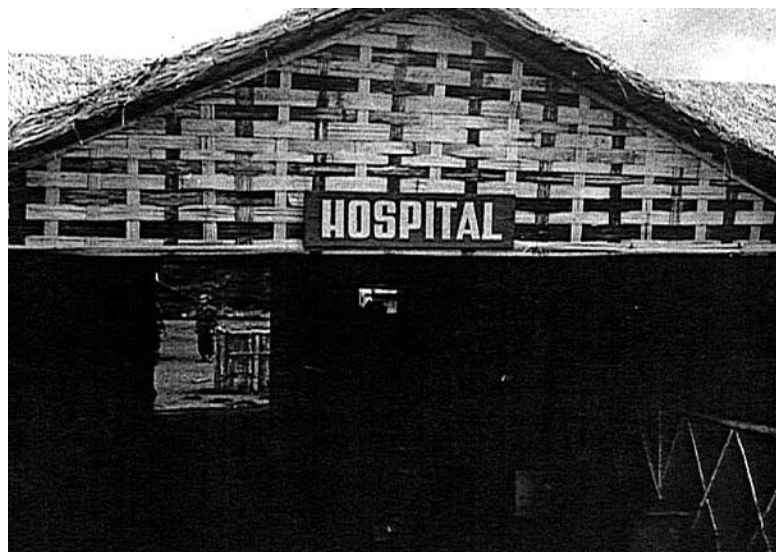


Specialist Fifth Class Vincent Skeebea behind a .30 caliber machinegun mounted on a ¾-ton truck. To his rear are part of the reaction force that fought to the ambush site.

(CMO). As Montagnard refugees fled VC-controlled areas, they flocked to Buon Brieng and other CIDG camps for safety. Not all of the refugees were housed inside the camp perimeter, nor did Special Forces want them there for security (force protection) reasons. Consequently, small villages sprang up around the camp, like the suburbs of a city. The Special Forces and CIDG assisted in the construction of the new villages. The Montagnards planted gardens to grow their own food. When the population grew to more than 5,000

Montagnards in and around the Buon Brieng CIDG camp, A-312 hired a teacher for the children. Montagnards were treated as third-class citizens by the Vietnamese government. The Americans realized that education could bring them into the twentieth century and increase their socioeconomic power.⁵⁵

Typical of all Special Forces "A-Camps," the medics operated an aid station, which became the *de facto* hospital for the area. The medics ("Bac Si," in Vietnamese) treated the Montagnard CIDG strike force and their families. The Buon Brieng "hospital" was the only medical facility for Montagnards in the area. The nearest Vietnamese government clinic was in Ban Me Thout. Often Montagnards walked several days to bring their sick to camp for medical care. Sometimes the medics went to outlying villages. The medics could go to villages unmolested because many people treated were VMC family members. Refugees had to be medically screened and treated



The Buon Brieng "hospital" run by the team's medics was the only medical care facility for many miles. The medics cared for the strike force, their families, and pretty much everyone else in the area.

to prevent disease from spreading to the SF camp. The humanitarian services enabled the SF to "keep the pulse" on enemy activities in the area. The medics dealt with a variety of health issues, from tuberculosis to childbirth. The SF medics also trained some Montagnards to serve as medics for the strike force. Humanitarian civic action went beyond people.⁵⁶

Introduction of better agricultural techniques and heartier livestock was designed to improve Montagnard food production. Yorkshire pigs from the United States were brought to crossbreed with native Vietnamese pigs to grow bigger animals and provide more nutritious food for the Montagnards. The A-312 team sergeant, Master Sergeant Marvin Compton, wanted to improve the quality of the locally grown Montagnard tobacco. Friends in Kentucky sent him Burley tobacco seeds. Compton supervised the planting by the Montagnards and enjoyed some of the crop.⁵⁷ The first half of A-312's tour in Buon Brieng was typical for Special Forces A Teams serving in the Republic of Vietnam between 1961



The Montagnard ceremony to drive out the "evil spirits" after the ambush included copious amounts of "Nhom Pae," rice wine sucked through long reeds. Left to right: Earl Bleacher, Burhl Cunningham, Gene Bell, and Lowell Stevens.



Master Sergeant Marvin Compton's contribution to the Montagnards of Buon Brieng, Kentucky Burley tobacco.

and 1964.

CIDG base camps were established and Montagnards organized into CIDG strike forces. Many camps were built from scratch. Strike Force soldiers were recruited and trained while veterans received sustainment training. The Special Forces soldiers from 1st and 7th SFGs quickly adjusted to the six-month TDYs in Vietnam. The second half of A-312's tour took a surprising turn when they became entangled in a major Montagnard revolt organized against the ARVN, now referred to as the Montagnard Uprising of September 1964.⁵⁸ ♣

The Montagnard Uprising will be the subject of an article in Veritas 3:2, scheduled for release in Spring 2007.

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Robert W. Jones Jr. is a historian assigned to the USASOC History Office and is a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. A graduate of the University of Washington, he earned his MA from Duke University and his MS from Troy State University. Current research interests include Special Forces in Vietnam 1960–1966, military government and civil affairs, special operations in World War II, Operation JUST CAUSE, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

Endnotes

- 1 Most readers are more familiar with the current operational detachment alpha (ODA), however from the late 1950s until the late 1970s, the term usually used by the Special Forces soldiers to describe the basic element was "A Teams;" Brigadier General James Lawton Collins Jr., *Vietnam Studies, The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army 1950–1972* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1991), 38; By the beginning of 1965, the U.S. Army Special Forces Group Vietnam (Provisional) had a strength of less than 1,300 assigned and attached, to a high of 3,725 by 1968 assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group, Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 5.
- 2 Earl Bleacher, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 18 November 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Lowell W. Stevens Sr., interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 27 October 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Stevens interview, 13 October 2005; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 4 Today Millersville State Teachers College is Millersville University and is located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 5 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 6 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005; The M274 Mule was a small 4x4 wheeled vehicle with a 4-cylinder 14 horsepower gasoline engine that was meant to carry mortars, 106mm recoilless rifles, and other equipment for light infantry and airborne units.
- 7 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 8 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 9 Stevens interview, 13 October 2005.
- 10 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 11 Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets, The First Thirty Years* (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), xiii.
- 12 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October

- 2005; Ronald Wingo, e-mail to Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 27 November 2005, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Ian D.W. Sutherland, *Special Forces of the United States Army 1952–1982* (San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 1990), 142–44.
- 13 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 14 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 15 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 16 Colonel Monger was a two time Combat Infantryman's Badge recipient and later became the commander of the 3rd SFG until it was inactivated on 1 December 1969 at Fort Bragg; Stevens interview 27 October 2005.
- 17 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 18 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 19 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 20 Vernon W. Gillespie Jr. and Shirley Gillespie, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 23 February 2006, Locust Grove, Virginia, digital recording, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 78.
- 21 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 22 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 23 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 24 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 25 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 26 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 78; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 27 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 28 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 29 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 30 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 31 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 32 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 33 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 34 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
- 35 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 36 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 37 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 38 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 39 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 40 Stevens interview, 13 October 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 41 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
- 42 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 43 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 44 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 45 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 46 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 47 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005, and Stevens e-mail.
- 48 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005, and Stevens e-mail.
- 49 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005, and Stevens e-mail.
- 50 Vincent J. Skeebea, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 13 February 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 51 Stevens interview, 13 October 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005; Skeebea interview.
- 52 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 53 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 54 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 55 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
- 56 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 57 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 58 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.