War Stories of the

REEN BERETS

ISBN 0-87938-955-9

9 780879 389550 90000

rbooks International
Publishers & Wholesalers

Printed in USA

War Stories of the GREEN BERETS

Halberstadt

War Stories of the GREEN BERETS

The Viet Nam Experience

Hans Halberstadt

War Stories of the
GREEN BERETS

ISBN 0-87938-955-9
90000
9 780879 389550
Printed in USA

War Stories of the GREEN BERETS

Halberstadt

War Stories of the GREEN BERETS

The Viet Nam Experience

Hans Halberstadt

War Stories of the GREEN BERETS

The Viet Nam Experience

Hans Halberstadt

Motorbooks International
Publishers & Wholesalers

To: Martha ("Colonel Maggie") Raye—
Special Forces' own, well-loved, hard-core, hard-drinking Maggie!
A woman with more of the kind of character and integrity that men call "balls" than just about anybody of any rank in Southeast Asia.

To: The late, great Walt Shumate,
who went off to join the "advance party" on March 1, 1993,
and left a lot of loving friends behind.

To: My numerous friends and co-conspirators at 3d Battalion,
12th Special Forces Group (Airborne), for their trust,
generosity, and tolerance.

First published in 1994 by Motorbooks International Publishers & Wholesalers,
PO Box 2, 729 Prospect Avenue, Osceola, WI 54020 USA

Library of Congress Publication Data
Halberstadt, Hans.
War stories of the Green Berets / Hans Halberstadt.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-87938-955-9
1. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961–1975—Regimental histories—United States. 2. United States. Army. Special Forces—History. I. Title.
DS558.4.H34 1994
959.704'3373—dc20 94-28804

On the front cover: Green Beret Ben Baker designed the tiger stripe camouflage pattern that serves as a background here for Special Forces memorabilia. Among the items are MAC V (left) and Special Forces patches; photos from Don Green's collection; Ben Baker's Montagnard tribal bracelets; and an anti-personnel grenade. *Hans Halberstadt*

On the back cover: A captured and now-inert enemy grenade sits amid a safe-conduct pass and combat zone patches from the collections of Ben Baker and Clay Scott.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Table of Contents

To: Martha ("Colonel Maggie") Raye—
Special Forces' own, well-loved, hard-core, hard-drinking Maggie!
A woman with more of the kind of character and integrity that men call "balls" than just about anybody of any rank in Southeast Asia.

To: The late, great Walt Shumate,
who went off to join the "advance party" on March 1, 1993,
and left a lot of loving friends behind.

To: My numerous friends and co-conspirators at 3d Battalion,
12th Special Forces Group (Airborne), for their trust,
generosity, and tolerance.

First published in 1994 by Motorbooks International Publishers & Wholesalers,
PO Box 2, 729 Prospect Avenue, Osceola, WI 54020 USA

Library of Congress Publication Data
Halberstadt, Hans.
War stories of the Green Berets / Hans Halberstadt.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-87938-955-9
1. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961–1975—Regimental histories—United States. 2. United States. Army. Special Forces—History. I. Title.
DS558.4.H34 1994
959.704'3373—dc20
94-28804

Printed and bound in the United States of America

On the front cover: Green Beret Ben Baker designed the tiger stripe camouflage pattern that serves as a background here for Special Forces memorabilia. Among the items are MACV (left) and Special Forces patches; photos from Don Green's collection; Ben Baker's Montagnard tribal bracelets; and an anti-personnel grenade. *Hans Halberstadt*

On the back cover: A captured and now-inert enemy grenade sits amid a safe-conduct pass and combat zone patches from the collections of Ben Baker and Clay Scott.

Table of Contents

led right out of there. He

when he saw a body part
iku, he was still slumped
id he get hit?"
alked away.

of 5th Group and was in
te afternoon in 1965, he
ien Hoa, and one of his

ht, but Avio wasn't about
wee hours of the morn-
rned truck with his gun

w up that ammo?"
ouldn't have gotten my

Last, I have lived by this
my wallet since I was a

JON CAVIANI

Jon Caviani spent twenty-three months and eleven days as a POW in North Vietnam. He received the Medal of Honor on his return to the United States for his actions at Hickory on June 4 and 5, 1971. He stayed in the Army and served as sergeant major of the operational squadron of Delta (the US Army counterterrorist unit). He retired from the Army in 1990 and now lives on a ranch in California.

SF Veterinarian

When I first went to Vietnam, I had visions of going off to an A-team. But they noticed I was a medic, and a farm boy, and they told me, "You are now a veterinarian." And that's what I did for about six months. I don't know who was more terrified, the water buffalo or me! After a while it became like anything else: You just smacked them, shoved in the needle, and gave them their shot.

The war pretty much passed me by during that first six months. I liked it. I lived in the villages, did my medcaps during the day, and took my rifle out into the woods at night. The VC pretty much left me alone, and I treated VC water buffalo and NVA sympathizers along with the rest.

Where's the Beef?

One of my jobs was to take a high-quality bull around to the different camps for breeding, trying to improve the quality of the herd. We hauled this bull around from camp to camp; it had cost us about sixty-five thousand dollars. We flew the bull around in a C-123 and dropped him off at an A-camp; then two weeks later, we came back and picked him up and took him to another camp.

I dropped this bull at one camp (it might have been Gia Vuc) and then went back to my unit to work on my chicken and pig project. When two weeks had passed, it was time to go back and pick up the bull. I flew back to the camp—and I didn't see the bull anywhere. I asked the Yards, "Where's the bull?"

They said, "Well, we had this real big celebration. . . ."

Since the bull was the biggest and the baddest, they figured that if they sacrificed him they would have the most good luck possible, so they ate him! And I had to go back and tell the "old man" about it; I thought I was going to be a private! God, he was mad!

Ruff-Puff to the Rescue

Another sergeant and I had gone out of the camp at Ba To, across the river. We were talking to the Bru village chief when we noticed some beautiful urns up on the hillside. We asked the chief if we could take them, and he said, "Sure, take them."

So the two of us went up the side of this hill in our jeep. It was a gentle slope, with a nice view of the Ruff-Puff company down below. We got out of the vehicle, and like damn fools, we left our rifles in the jeep. We were checking these things out, and the other sergeant had one of the jars up on his shoulder, when a bullet went right through it! The jar shattered, and we hit the dirt. There was a little depression in the ground, and we dove into it. A few more rounds popped our direction; we knew we weren't going to make it back to the jeep!

JON CAVIANI

Jon Caviani spent twenty-three months and eleven days as a POW in North Vietnam. He received the Medal of Honor on his return to the United States for his actions at Hickory on June 4 and 5, 1971. He stayed in the Army and served as sergeant major of the operational squadron of Delta (the US Army counterterrorist unit). He retired from the Army in 1990 and now lives on a ranch in California.

SF Veterinarian

When I first went to Vietnam, I had visions of going off to an A-team. But they noticed I was a medic, and a farm boy, and they told me, "You are now a veterinarian." And that's what I did for about six months. I don't know who was more terrified, the water buffalo or me! After a while it became like anything else: You just smacked them, shoved in the needle, and gave them their shot.

The war pretty much passed me by during that first six months. I liked it. I lived in the villages, did my medcaps during the day, and took my rifle out into the woods at night. The VC pretty much left me alone, and I treated VC water buffalo and NVA sympathizers along with the rest.

Where's the Beef?

One of my jobs was to take a high-quality bull around to the different camps for breeding, trying to improve the quality of the herd. We hauled this bull around from camp to camp; it had cost us about sixty-five thousand dollars. We flew the bull around in a C-123 and dropped him off at an A-camp; then two weeks later, we came back and picked him up and took him to another camp.

I dropped this bull at one camp (it might have been Gia Vuc) and then went back to my unit to work on my chicken and pig project. When two weeks had passed, it was time to go back and pick up the bull. I flew back to the camp—and I didn't see the bull anywhere. I asked the Yards, "Where's the bull?"

They said, "Well, we had this real big celebration. . . ."

Since the bull was the biggest and the baddest, they figured that if they sacrificed him they would have the most good luck possible, so they ate him! And I had to go back and tell the "old man" about it; I thought I was going to be a private! God, he was mad!

Ruff-Puff to the Rescue

Another sergeant and I had gone out of the camp at Ba To, across the river. We were talking to the Bru village chief when we noticed some beautiful urns up on the hillside. We asked the chief if we could take them, and he said, "Sure, take them."

So the two of us went up the side of this hill in our jeep. It was a gentle slope, with a nice view of the Ruff-Puff company down below. We got out of the vehicle, and like damn fools, we left our rifles in the jeep. We were checking these things out, and the other sergeant had one of the jars up on his shoulder, when a bullet went right through it! The jar shattered, and we hit the dirt. There was a little depression in the ground, and we dove into it. A few more rounds popped our direction; we knew we weren't going to make it back to the jeep!

We used our pistols to provide a little return fire, exchanging shots with whoever it was in the bushes. Then I heard a blood-curdling scream, and I looked around. There was a guy who must be fifty years old, with his old, old rifle, complete with bayonet, and this old guy was charging! While we were watching this interesting performance, we heard another scream, this time from *up* the hill! An NVA, complete with an AK, jumped out of the bushes, and he had his bayonet out, too! The two guys charged each other, the Ruff-Puff guy doing the high-step just the way the French used to teach.

The two of them converged, and the old guy did the most beautiful parry and horizontal butt stroke I ever saw in my life! He put the younger guy down on the ground! Naturally, we came running, and we tied the NVA guy up, patted the Ruff-Puff guy on the back, and loaded him and the NVA in the back of the jeep for the trip back down the hill. The Ruff-Puff guy was the hero of this one—we weren't taking any credit at all!

We got down to the village and then discovered something quite sad: the NVA was in reality the village chief's son! The village chief had banished him years before. The villagers insisted on taking the man, and they talked to him that night. He had left his unit to come home.

The next day the village chief sent somebody over to report, "The execution will be tomorrow."

We tried to talk them out of it, but they were adamant. If nothing else, we could have gotten some more information from the man, but they wouldn't stand for it. They really didn't like the North Vietnamese! The next day, the Bru who had soldiered for the NVA was executed—by his father.

"Jon, Use the Knife."

The most terrifying thing I ever did in my life was to kill a guy by throwing a knife at him. We had moved up to an area and encountered a sentry. We didn't have a silenced .22 pistol, and we had to take this guard out. Nobody felt comfortable moving across the road before we got to him. It was gravel, and the noise would have given us away for sure.

I had always practiced throwing my knives, and I carried one over my left shoulder, in my ruck. We were contemplating this situation when my partner—I forget who it was—turned to me and whispered, "Jon, use the knife."

I shook my head no.

He nodded his head yes!

Ordinarily I would just reach up, grab, and throw—but not this time! I carefully considered and calculated the throw. When I finally let go, my adrenaline must have been way up, because the knife went in up to the hilt. The sentry gurgled a little and collapsed. That was scary! I had this vision that the knife would fly right on by the guy, and then he would turn around and nail us. I didn't like that.

C&C North Recons

I started running with S/Sgt. Keith Kincaid. Keith, bless his heart, was the most unlucky son of a bitch I'd ever been around in my life! We'd go out, and within seconds of getting on the ground, it seemed like the whole world was there to greet us! We even tried inserting "dummy teams," and, no matter, the whole world would break loose on us! God!

I told him, "Keith, I don't know about this!"

We went in on one LZ on the other side of the fence where they were waiting for us. We had been unable to go in and do our own visual recon of the area before the mission, and the "zoomies" [US Air Force fighter planes] did it for us. We figured that the Air Force had swooped down to take a closer look at the spot—a sure way of giving away the plan!

My first mission with Keith was just like that. About twenty minutes after we got on the ground, Charlie showed up. Keith put his head up to look at something, and a round came by so close it just slammed Keith's head into the ground. A couple of grenades got thrown—and I still hadn't seen anything! I was looking, but I wasn't seeing anybody. A couple of my Montagnards got hurt by the grenades.

I got the Yards over beside me; one had been hit through the artery in his arm. I opened him up, put a hemostat on both sides, set up an IV with Ringer's lactate through his ankle, ace-bandaged him up, and went to work on the other guy. The second had taken some shrapnel between the scrotum and the anus. There wasn't a lot to do for him, but he wasn't in trouble, other than just beginning to go into shock.

Suddenly Keith decided to pull back. There I was, working on the Yards, and when I looked up, there he was—and he was pissed, because I hadn't fired a round, and because I was blocking his egress! I grabbed up the Yards, and the helicopters started coming in. I raced over, threw the first guy in the chopper, raced back, got the other guy on my back, raced back to the helicopter and tossed him on, then climbed on myself. Because we had the wounded, we went into the med-evac hospital at Quang Tri.

When I got back to my unit, one of the sergeant majors started talking to me as if I'd been a coward on the mission. I thought I'd been doing my job!

"How much ammo did you fire?" he said.

"None," I told him. "I didn't see anything to shoot at!" I really didn't like the feeling of that. ~~Hmodel~~ AH-1G

So we were going to go back into that area again, about a week and a half later. The ~~G~~-model Huey had just come out, the one with the 40-millimeter grenade launcher on one side and the mini-gun on the other, but otherwise it looked just like a slick.

We had gone into isolation to prepare for the mission, then went up to LT-1, up around Quang Tri; then we went out on the mission. It was the same area where I'd gone on my first mission with Keith. I started by doing a map reconnaissance with the aerial photographs from the Air Force. I noticed all kinds of stuff that nobody had mentioned in the briefings; I spotted a goat trail that looked very promising. I told Keith, "We have got to go in here!"

On the way in, from the helicopters, we could see that the NVA was building an all-weather road, with timbers and drainage. It was not a good feeling—there were a lot of people on the ground!

Keith was the team leader, and he was in the lead ship. His ship landed and unloaded first. I was in the next ship. Even before we landed, I could see seventy to a hundred people in pith helmets and NVA uniforms running with weapons at port arms toward the LZ. The door gunner wasn't even firing on them! I grabbed his helmet from him and used the intercommunications system [ICS] to report the targets on the ground to the gunship. That G-model came in and opened up on the NVA formation along its long axis and worked them over with the mini-guns.

Our helicopter flared over the LZ, and it was time to go. We were at about ten feet, but the pilot wasn't going lower, so we had to jump. We all jumped out. At the same time, Keith was trying to call the whole thing off, but we were having commo problems and couldn't hear him.

Once on the ground, there wasn't a hell of a lot to be done, and the helicopters got the hell out of there. Keith's group had run into a platoon of enemy as soon as they landed, and his element got shot up pretty badly. He was trying to get the next ship to come in and get them out—we weren't going to be running any recons out of this LZ!

Fortunately, we all were loaded for bear, so we had a lot of ammunition. We set up a perimeter. I got the open area; Keith got the trees. I was getting all my people into position when a .51-caliber heavy machine gun opened up on us and plowed a furrow in the ground right next to me.

Every time that gun fired, you could see where the rounds were hitting, and it was obvious that his traverse was limited; the barrel must have been up against a tree. I could tell that he was going to have to move the whole gun if he was going to get any closer to us. I took one of my Yards, one with an M203 [which replaced the M79 grenade launcher; it serves the same function but is attached to an M16].

I told him, "You watch right up there, and if you see where he's shooting from, hit him with a grenade." Every once in a while my Yard would chunk a 40-millimeter up there.

There was sudden movement to my front. I had already put down my RPD [a Russian machine gun similar to the US M60, very popular with Special Forces and considered by many superior to the M60]. I reached for the shotgun that I always carried, a sawed-off shotgun loaded with 00 buckshot. We were firing at each other through the brush, twenty yards apart. Up jumped three or four NVA. I took them: *Boom*! *Boom*! *Boom*! *Boom*! The guys used to give me shit for carrying the shotgun, but nobody was giving me any shit about it this time.

Finally, we were able to get some helicopters to come in and get us. My guys and I got on our chopper, and off we went. As we were lifting off and climbing out, one NVA guy stood up below us, with his AK on "rock and roll" [full auto], firing straight at us! And he didn't hit us with *one* round! Next thing I knew, somebody shot the NVA in the head, and he went down.

We swung out, and I told the pilot, "We've got to cover the exfiltration of the other guys." As we maneuvered, I could see a large number of NVA racing toward the position of the other part of the team.

I was beating on the door gunner: "See that? Those are people down there, and they are headed for my team! Fire them up!" We all started firing. We shot the hell out of them! Keith's helicopter got in and collected him and his guys. We turned around and started to leave . . . *Blam*, the helicopter took a hit, and down we went.

Fortunately, we didn't lose anybody when we went down. We got on the ground. The pilot, the copilot, and the door gunners—they didn't like this development at all. We got out, and I told them, "Okay, you've got a thermite grenade—destroy the KY-6 (a scrambler used to help provide secure radio communications). Take the M60s out of the chopper and flip the bipod legs down. Let's go!" I told them.

We moved to an area where we could set up a defensive position and still see the helicopter. "Don't shoot until they fire at you!" I told them. "If

they are running at you, let them come. If they see you, they'll shoot. You can take them then."

I got on the horn with Sgt. Donald Chaney, my Covey, and asked if there was an exfiltration LZ in the area.

He called back, "I've got a nice one at about a hundred and fifty meters from your position," and he gave me an azimuth to it.

"Okay," I told him. "Do you have another?"

"I have another LZ at a hundred meters," he said, and he gave me another azimuth.

"Okay, send the helicopters in to beat up the first LZ. Shoot the hell out of it! Then you have them race over to the other one to pick us up!"

So the helos started shooting the LZ up big time, with guns and rockets. And we could see Charlie just racing past us, over to catch us where they thought we were going to try to get out. The helicopters finished shooting, then started to land. Then they picked up, slid over to where we were, and got us. The crews had eyeballs as big as saucers! We all piled aboard, and we pulled pitch. The crews still had extremely stoic expressions, but by the time we passed 2,500 or 3,000 feet, you could see the faces start to crack into smiles.

We lucked out on that one and didn't lose anybody, and Keith didn't lose anybody out of his group. And that, basically, was what it was like to run recons in that area at that time. Occasionally you got to stay longer, to RON, and maybe spent two days and didn't see a damn thing!

The Yards

I was told that I was supposed to run with some Americans who despised the Yards, and they let the Yards know it. The result of that would have been that if that American got hit, I'd be the one who'd have to carry him out; the Yards certainly wouldn't. These guys called them all the derogatory names: "slant-eye," "gook." I did that once, and one of my Yards turned around to me and said, "Is that what I am?" I never did that again. I had Yards who died for me.

I had a deal with my Yards: "If you get shot, I won't leave you on the ground. I will come back and get you." And I did that! I was very, very close to them. I lived with them in the highlands when I was a vet.

Special Forces was successful in Vietnam because we understood the people, because we knew basic tactics. We were misunderstood by a lot of Americans who thought of us as "sneaky Petes." But we conducted conventional tactical operations; we knew basic first aid, basic engineering, and basic communications. Other units didn't. Even when we were closing down the camps and handing the operations over to the Vietnamese Rangers, I remember the Yards saying, "Can you take us out on one more operation?"

I remember ARVN troops sitting down on the helipad, saying, "We aren't going out on this operation until we get paid." I never had that problem with the Yards. The Yards knew that, if it was humanly possible, we would recover their bodies if they were killed on an operation. Most of us disliked the ARVN immensely.

The Vietnamese thought of the Montagnards as savages—the same as Americans did of the Indians during our western expansion, because we didn't want to understand them. The Indians weren't up to our standards.

That's the same way the Vietnamese looked at the Yards, and it was a real tragedy.

In other ways the Montagnards were similar to the American Indians. Many tribes didn't get along with each other. If you put Rhade, Steng, and Jarai all in one camp, you were just asking for a battle right in your own compound. We succeeded with these people by understanding them. The tribes were all different, and they had to be treated differently.

We were able to operate effectively because we were very sensitive about our security. We knew we were heavily infiltrated, and we learned to work around it. Even the Yards didn't know where we were going. I'd come back sometimes from isolation and planning a mission into Area Oscar, and they'd look at me and say, "*That* bad?" But they always had confidence in me, and I had equal confidence in them.

Sometimes, we'd be walking along and I would have a Yard on either side of me, one holding each hand. I didn't have a hand on my weapon; I put my life totally in their trust. They knew that. The hand-holding was brotherly, and I thought nothing of it, although other Americans would sometimes say, "Look at the fucking faggots!" But that was the Yard custom, and they were great! They made you feel a part of their community.

Recon Tools of the Trade

RPD—the Soviet-Designed Light Machine Gun

I normally carried a captured and modified machine gun the Russians called the RPD. I did not like the AK, and I'm glad Charlie had it. It was too powerful a rifle for the little VC and NVA, and they couldn't manage the recoil. After the first shot, everything else was going to be over your head! That was kind of a blessing. If they had had the M16, that would have been a different story.

I liked the RPD because it probably had the best buffer group of any automatic weapon anywhere. It fired 7.62x39-millimeter ammunition from a drum under the weapon. Unlike the M60 used by most American units, the RPD was balanced. Charlie recognized the sound of the RPD when it fired, and he usually stopped to think when he heard it: *Is that our guys?* If that slowed him down for just a second, you could get out of his ambush kill zone, get up to the side, and then flank the ambush.

We took off the bipod, cut the barrel off, and put a sling on it. Then you had a very good weapon. The only thing I didn't like about it was that it used twenty-five round, nondisintegrating link belts. In combat, you found yourself reaching down to retrieve those segments from the ground because they were hard to come by. It was a fantastic weapon, accurate, powerful, easy to use. I carried one, and some of the other guys were believers, too. But other weapons were also powerful, and one of our guys carried a little Swedish K.

M79

I also carried a sawed-off 40-millimeter M79 grenade launcher, with most of the stock cut off and the barrel chopped down to look just like a pistol. The range was unchanged, and it was really useful. We could shoot accurately with it to two hundred meters, normally with the HE [high-explosive] round.

Shotgun

I also carried a cut-down pump shotgun loaded with 00 buckshot. There is no question that a guy knew he'd been shot when you hit him with a load of buckshot, unlike the "dart" rounds that would go right through the guy but would leave him shooting at you because he didn't know he was dead yet!

The stock was cut off at the pistol grip, and a loop of "dummy cord" was tied to it. I carried the shotgun in my rucksack, muzzle down, with the grip sticking up over my left shoulder. I could pull it out without taking off the ruck.

Rucksack

We all mined our rucksacks. If we had to jettison them, we had a Claymore inside, primed and fused to a striker taped to the rucksack quick-release. If you had to drop your ruck in an emergency, it would drop and fire the fuse-lighter. [The fuse allowed time enough to get a safe distance away before the Claymore exploded. The hope was that the NVA or VC who were pursuing us would pause to pick up or search the ruck about the time the Claymore would detonate. At very least, the explosion would slow down the pursuing enemy force.]

Medal of Honor at Hickory

My commander said, "I've got a place I want you to command."

I didn't like the idea; I liked doing what I knew. He said, "You're gonna do it anyway." He sent me to the radio retransmission site called Hickory, across the river and northeast of Khe Sanh.

I went out there, and the place was a mess—concertina wire hanging down on the ground, old French mines poking out of the dirt. The first order of business was to get the defenses repaired. We got the Navy's Seabees to bring up a little bulldozer. We used that to get rid of the old mines and dig new fighting positions. We fixed the wire and made a lot of progress.

But we were also seeing a lot of enemy activity outside the wire. We reported it, and the intel community reported back, "Bullshit!" This was typical. We were seeing a thousand NVA guys a day, sending helicopters out to shoot them up; and the intel weenies still refused to believe me. They had been setting up a network of electronic sensors all across the northern part of the country, and these sensors weren't indicating the level of enemy activity that we were seeing. So our reports were dismissed. They said, "Our assets don't show anything out there."

I sent them a message in the clear in response: "Then you don't have any fucking assets out here!"

There was a hill overlooking our camp, Hill 1051. The 101st Airborne tried to land on top, but it didn't work. Some helicopters came in to get a couple of teams out, and one of the gunships made a straight run in from about three miles out. When he was about a mile out, I saw a single NVA kid stand up with a rocket-propelled grenade, put it on his shoulder, and take careful aim. The ground around this kid was getting all torn up from the fire from the gunship, but he just stood there, preparing to fire.

I grabbed for my rifle, because the kid was right at the range I like to snipe at, about a thousand meters. But before I could do anything, he put that RPG right through the cockpit, and the "bird" went right in. Then I had to call the gunship flight leader to report what had happened.

The buildup around us continued, and we were obviously in a bad tac-

tical location.

The night of June 4 was rainy and miserable. I checked on the Yards and the perimeter defenses a couple of times. Under cover of the rain, the NVA had emplaced Chinese Claymore mines around the camp. Some of the Yards noticed these things. We put everybody in the camp on the wall.

There were some concrete half-culverts down the hill, by the helipad. Sergeant Hill and some of the Yards moved down there. I took over the .50-caliber machine gun. I had it set up with a special ammunition mix, four "ball" to one HEI [high-explosive incendiary] round that I'd gotten from the Air Force.

While I was setting up the position, I noticed one of these Chinese Claymore mines off to the side. I called "Claymore! Hit it!" I was whipping the gun around on it when the NVA fired it. Sergeant Hill caught a piece just above the knee.

We started firing about that time. Charlie came up out of his holes, and we had a merry little firefight going for a while. They were using some old RPG-2s that were so slow you could see them coming and roll out of the way. They kept shooting, trying to knock out my fifty. I finally put a few rounds on the guys who were firing on me. A couple of the HEs must have killed them, because there wasn't any more fire from their position.

A sniper started working from the southwest of my position. Every once in a while that son of a bitch would put one really close to me! The guy was close, not more than seventy-five or eighty meters away. I couldn't spot him, though, and I got really pissed off. I called one of the Yards over and told him, "Watch right over there."

About this time a young kid—a slovenly, overweight kid with glasses (Walton was his name)—came running over. He was a sensor reader, a technician. He said, "Sarge, I think you better come back and check on your people. Everybody is just standing around. They don't know what to do."

He was pointing out to me my duties as the commander; he was right, and I had been wrong. "I'll take over the fifty," he said.

"What do you know about a .50-caliber machine gun?" I asked him.

"Nothing. I thought that, since you are Special Forces, you could teach me in one or two minutes."

Just then another shot went past my head. The Montagnard came running over, and he pointed to a spot where the sniper was. I could see where the mat was moving over the guy's hole. I reached down and grabbed my rifle. I lined up on the spot and waited. Then his rifle started to come up out of the hole . . . and as soon as he came up and began to level on me, *Blam,* that was the end of that son of a bitch!

I moved back into the compound and made sure everybody knew what to do—which I should have done in the first place. Then I went back to work on those Claymores, because nobody would want to stick their head up over the berm as long as those things were out there.

I grabbed an M60, peeked over the edge, then hosed one as soon as I could spot it. I went down the line blowing these things, one at a time. I got to the last one, flipped the gun over the berm, and started to move; and they blew it on me. That took care of the Claymores.

Then Charlie started laying on indirect fire. Those sons of a bitch could shoot! They're probably the best damn mortar men in the world! They dropped over a hundred rounds on my camp, a space maybe sixty meters by

a hundred meters, and not one of them was outside the berm. Those shots had to have been made at a range of over 1,500 meters—almost a mile.

They were firing a lot of rockets at us, but because of where the NVA were firing from, the rockets were mostly going over the top of the camp, chopping my antennas all to hell in the process. Then everything calmed down, and it got pretty quiet. So I started evacuating guys.

I decided it was time to destroy all the electronic equipment. So I went down to the vans to throw in the thermite grenades [which are magnesium-filled, incendiary grenades that burn with extreme heat. They were often used to melt critical equipment, including gun tubes]. I turned on the oxygen bottles (so much for several million dollars worth of government equipment). I came walking down the stairs to talk to my commo man just as a B-40 rocket came zooming in, right between the vans, and blew up about six feet away. It blew me on my ass.

"Man," I told the commo guy, "that was close!" The fins on the spinner ripped the back of my pants leg as it went by.

When I picked myself up and discovered that I hadn't picked up any shrapnel, I told the commo guy, Sergeant Jones, "We're going to have to evacuate the camp; I want to get you out of here. You have more experience on the ground, but you know too much about this equipment. We can't risk getting you captured. I don't know how long we can hold them off, or if we can hold them off."

Meanwhile, Walton—the fat, slovenly electronics technician—had been manning the .50-caliber and had knocked out about four machine guns! Then there was a big explosion down at that end of the camp. I went over there. A bunch of Yards had been wounded, and I started hauling them down to my Vietnamese medic.

I came around a corner, and there was Walton, dragging that big .50-caliber back to the camp. The NVA had finally managed to collapse the position, and Walton was trying to get it back where he could use it again. People were shooting at him; there were AK rounds whipping past him.

I knocked the gun on the ground and asked him, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

I looked at him. His glasses had been frosted by a near miss that had hit a sand bag in front of him. "Sergeant," he said, "I think I'm blind."

I reached over and moved his glasses up. "Does that help any?"

"I can see again!"

"Have you got another pair of glasses?" I asked him.

"As a matter of fact, I do," he said. "Down in my bunker."

I told him to lie down there, at the berm, with the .50-caliber, and I raced down there to get them for him while people shot at me. I got the glasses, raced back, and put them on him.

"It's a miracle!" he cried. "I can *see*!"

About that time, I heard one of the other guys moaning; he had taken a piece of a rocket that had hit nearby.

"I'm going to take him down to the medic," I told Walton, "but you are going to have to cover me!"

I tossed him a CAR-15. "Do you know how it works?"

"Yeah," he said, "like an M16, only faster!"

"You're catching on, Walton!" I told him.

I loaded the guy up on my back and took off across the helipad. From

behind me I could hear Walton firing; he was putting short bursts into the bushes on either side of our route. I turned around and there he was, zigzagging, returning fire from anybody nearby—not a bad performance, especially from somebody who isn't supposed to be a combatant and is about forty pounds overweight.

We raced for the other side of the camp. I deposited the wounded guy and Walton on a helicopter and told him to get the hell out of there. I had already written Walton up for the Medal of Honor for what he'd done with the fifty, and I gave the paper to my wounded team member to take back. When everybody seemed to be aboard, the helicopter took off . . . and there stood Walton.

"I fell out," he said.

I used a common military expression of respect and admiration. "You lying sack of shit!" I tossed him a weapon and grabbed my RPD. "Get over there and take that position," I told him, indicating a spot on the berm.

About 4:00 PM. some more helicopters were inbound, and I got the word: These were the last helicopters of the day. I got Walton, my commo man, some of the other guys, and some Yards, and I loaded them all on the choppers. I instructed one of the Yards to point his CAR-15 at Walton.

"Walton," I told him, "this guy has orders to shoot you if you try to get off this helicopter. Get your damn ass out of here!" A 37-millimeter opened up on them on the way out, but they made it.

My Covey appeared overhead about 5:00 P.M., along with a fast-mover. It was Chaney again. "Jon, I got an Air Force general up here for you. He's got eight two-hundred-and-fifty-pound 'drags' [bombs with drag brakes]."

"Have him put them just to the south of the camp, on the helipad," I told him.

Chaney called back; the general had declined. "Too close," he said.

"It doesn't make any difference now," I said. "Besides, that's where the bad guys are."

The general still refused the drop. "He'll stay on station until the helicopters come in to get you," Chaney called.

"You tell him there won't be any more helicopters!"

"Okay, I'll drop them," the general called.

I pulled all my people back and we got down. He came rolling in and unloaded on the target. It was close, and we were bouncing all over the ground, but none of my guys got hurt. It really did a job on Charlie.

I called Chaney, "Tell him thanks!"

When the last helicopter left, there was just Jones, me, and seventeen little people left. Later I discovered that a team from Operation Heavy Hook in Thailand was en route to us about then, and they made it to just eleven klicks to the west of us when they were ordered to turn around. They were in a "Jolly Green" [a version of the Sikorski H-53, a large US Air Force rescue helicopter]—they could have picked up the whole team. My award says we were left on the ground because of inclement weather; it was inclement inter-service politics.

We could only defend half the camp, so I shrank the perimeter. We fought them off, over and over again. A half-hour went by without them doing anything. I knew then that we were about the get knocked over. I told the Yards, "Get the fuck out of here!"

I set myself up on top of the ammo bunker. I figured that if I had to die,

I'd die in style, and that when it blew I would never know what hit me. I was up there when I noticed a couple of Yards who had pulled back. When I looked back, I saw huge numbers of people coming toward the camp. I started firing them up. I had an attack of sanity and started thinking, *Just what do you think you're doing up here?* I turned and started down, and took a round in the back that threw me asshole over tea kettle. I landed at the foot of the bunker, and my Yards came running back to get me. I told them to take off. They went over the wall.

One of the last things I did was to call in a Stinger airstrike on our position, told them there were about seventy-five hundred bad guys in the open.

I managed to run over to the bunker where Jones was. "Get out of here!" I told him. But when I turned around, there were people everywhere, so I dove into the bunker with him. While we were talking, two NVA came in, the first without a weapon, the guy behind with an AK. As far as I was concerned, the number two guy was the real threat. I stepped behind him and brought the knife arm around his head. Then I brought the point up under his jaw, up into the skull, turned his head away, and let him fall.

I was moving on the number one NVA when Jones unloaded about twenty rounds into him. Until then, Charlie didn't know we were around, but that gave us away. A little while later, Charlie threw a grenade in and wounded Jones pretty bad. He decided to surrender. When he got to the door, they shot him down.

I played dead. One guy poked me in the chest three or four times, but I didn't move. I had hemorrhaged real bad and had a lot of blood on me, so he assumed I was dead. They tried to cremate our bodies. The bunker was lined with tarpaper, and they lit it on fire. After a while I decided I wasn't going to burn to death. I got up and made a break for the door—and they'd walked off! As I was walking out the door, I got hit with a round on my helmet. It was the only time I'd worn a helmet in Vietnam. The hit knocked me out. When I came to, the soles of my boots were all melted, and my hands and arms were all burned.

I crawled into another bunker and was trying to dispose of all my stuff except my ID card. I was hiding behind some cardboard in a corner of the bunker when an NVA came in. I heard him, and I held the cardboard with one hand and my Gerber knife in the other. He came over and lifted up the cardboard. My adrenaline must have been up, because I put that knife all the way through his sternum, all the way into his spine. He got a shocked, glazed look on his face, and expelled a load of tremendously bad breath as he realized that he was dead and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it. And then I couldn't get the damn knife out of him.

I crawled under the cot, exhausted. When I came to, two guys were sitting on the cot, and one of them had ahold of my foot. He was checking to see if my boots would fit him. I guess he figured they were too big, because he just dropped the foot, *clunk*. I had already disowned the leg—he could have done anything with it. But they got up and walked out.

This bunker didn't seem to be a good place to stay, so I crawled out and around the side. Two NVA came wandering along and stopped beside me. Finally they walked off, and then I crawled down to the side of the hill and started my escape and evasion.

I lasted for eleven and a half days before being captured, right outside of Fire Base Fuller. The guy who got me was a little old man, about sixty-

five or seventy years old, with an ancient Russian rifle. He was shaking just like a leaf. I thought that if I even blinked wrong he was going to shoot me.

Medal of Honor Hassles

There are a lot of disadvantages to wearing a Medal of Honor if you want to stay in the Army. There is a lot of petty jealousy. When you get a promotion, it isn't because you're a good soldier; it's because you're a Medal of Honor recipient. There are commanders who don't like having a Medal of Honor in the unit because they feel it will bring undue attention to them.

Getting into Delta wasn't easy because of the Medal of Honor—particularly when I had the covert squadron. It was not easy at all. I had units turn me down, not because of a lack of expertise in operations (which was never questioned), but because they wanted to know, "How do you conceal a Medal of Honor recipient in the unit?"

Well, that was easy for me. I didn't go to the conventions. I didn't do speaking engagements. I stayed out of the public view. It wasn't a problem. When I dropped out of sight, or when anybody in these units disappears, you don't question where they are and what they're doing.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

I don't agree with the people who dismiss "post-traumatic stress disorder" [PTSD] as coming from fakes and phonies. I did my thesis on PTSD and have done a lot of research on it. Most people know that about fifty-eight thousand guys got killed on the battlefield during the war. What people don't know is that over two hundred thousand have died in car wrecks, from alcoholism, from drug overdoses, and from suicide since then.

The reason, I think, is that a guy could be on the battlefield one day, and he could be home on the street the next day, twenty-four hours later. During World War II and before, it might have taken you a year to get home in the belly of a troop ship. During all this time you were communicating. You had a chance to say, I feel really shitty about what I did. Your buddies could talk you through the feelings over a gradual period of adjustment. When you went to Vietnam you went with a two-way ticket, by yourself. The guys who went off to World War II went for the duration, and they went as units.

I don't think you see the same problem with PTSD in Special Forces that you find with the straight infantry units, but we had much different standards and experiences. For example, in Special Forces, dope smoking wasn't a problem. We only had one dope smoker in my team, and he got a buddy of mine killed. If you saw somebody smoking dope, the guy was gone. We had enough things to worry about.

The average mission in C&C North was what we called the "seventy/thirty." You had a seventy percent chance of not coming back, a thirty percent chance that you would return. The attitude in my unit, though, was, "They ain't made the bullet that has my name on it. If they did, they shot it off during a training exercise." Our attitude was that you had a job to do and you did it. When you came back, you were treated well. We had cooks who took care of us, who made steak and lobster for us on Sundays, with wine on the table. We were treated well. But when you went into "isolation" and started working on a mission, it was a totally businesslike attitude. Then, you would never see a guy go to the club.

The one thing that really bothered me about our unit was that the guy

that went in, ran his recon, "snooped and pooped," and got back out without a shot being fired—that guy came home with no awards! As a result, I knew guys who would go in, do the mission, and then—just before it was time for the helicopters to come get them—they would do something to really piss off Charlie just so they could have a firefight when they came out, so they would get an award!

The Airborne Mystique

The holy trinity of the US Army is called Airborne, Ranger, and Green Beret. Of the three, the Airborne (a.k.a. "paratroopers," an archaic term today) is by far the most inclusive; it is the gateway to the elite little enclaves in the Army. All SF soldiers must be Airborne qualified, but that isn't too much of a challenge. "Jump school" is a three-week program, open to virtually every man and woman in the Army, and about one in five of all soldiers wears jump wings. The current program, as one instructor recently said, is three weeks of low-impact aerobics. Students make five jumps during week three, with three "Hollywood" jumps (no combat equipment), one jump with rucksack and weapons container, and one "night" jump (seldom actually done after dark).

Anyone in the Army who isn't a super-duper-paratrooper is a "leg," normally pronounced "gawddam laay-g," and is an object of profound contempt, regardless of rank. This is more important than you might think; any officer who expects genuine personal respect from the troops in any of the combat arms better wear jump wings—at least.

Part of the SF battle plan involves jumping behind the lines, but there wasn't much of that during Vietnam or since. The Navy's SEALs tried it during the Grenada operation and got a few of their guys killed. On the other hand, the Army's Rangers jumped onto the airport at Point Salines from eight hundred feet, and although it was a tougher problem than anticipated, the drop worked as advertised. But as soon as those first Rangers got the runway cleaned up, everybody else air-landed.

But all SF units continue to train in airborne operations and all SF personnel must maintain current jump qualifications to remain on a team. That means at least one military static-line jump (twelve hundred fifty feet above ground level) per quarter, normally with rucksack and weapon.

—Hans Halberstadt

To: Martha ("Colonel Maggie") Raye—
Special Forces' own, well-loved, hard-core, hard-drinking Maggie!
A woman with more of the kind of character and integrity that men call "balls" than just about anybody of any rank in Southeast Asia.

To: The late, great Walt Shumate,
who went off to join the "advance party" on March 1, 1993,
and left a lot of loving friends behind.

To: My numerous friends and co-conspirators at 3d Battalion,
12th Special Forces Group (Airborne), for their trust,
generosity, and tolerance.

First published in 1994 by Motorbooks International Publishers & Wholesalers,
PO Box 2, 729 Prospect Avenue, Osceola, WI 54020 USA

Library of Congress Publication Data
Halberstadt, Hans.
War stories of the Green Berets / Hans Halberstadt.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-87938-955-9
1. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961–1975—Regimental histories—United States. 2. United States. Army. Special Forces—History. I. Title.
DS558.4.H34 1994
959.704'3373—dc20 94-28804

On the front cover: Green Beret Ben Baker designed the tiger stripe camouflage pattern that serves as a background here for Special Forces memorabilia. Among the items are MAC V (left) and Special Forces patches; photos from Don Green's collection; Ben Baker's Montagnard tribal bracelets; and an anti-personnel grenade. *Hans Halberstadt*

On the back cover: A captured and now-inert enemy grenade sits amid a safe-conduct pass and combat zone patches from the collections of Ben Baker and Clay Scott.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Table of Contents

We used our pistols to provide a little return fire, exchanging shots with whoever it was in the bushes. Then I heard a blood-curdling scream, and I looked around. There was a guy who must be fifty years old, with his old, old rifle, complete with bayonet, and this old guy was charging! While we were watching this interesting performance, we heard another scream, this time from *up* the hill! An NVA, complete with an AK, jumped out of the bushes, and he had his bayonet out, too! The two guys charged each other, the Ruff-Puff guy doing the high-step just the way the French used to teach.

The two of them converged, and the old guy did the most beautiful parry and horizontal butt stroke I ever saw in my life! He put the younger guy down on the ground! Naturally, we came running, and we tied the NVA guy up, patted the Ruff-Puff guy on the back, and loaded him and the NVA in the back of the jeep for the trip back down the hill. The Ruff-Puff guy was the hero of this one—we weren't taking any credit at all!

We got down to the village and then discovered something quite sad: the NVA was in reality the village chief's son! The village chief had banished him years before. The villagers insisted on taking the man, and they talked to him that night. He had left his unit to come home.

The next day the village chief sent somebody over to report, "The execution will be tomorrow."

We tried to talk them out of it, but they were adamant. If nothing else, we could have gotten some more information from the man, but they wouldn't stand for it. They really didn't like the North Vietnamese! The next day, the Bru who had soldiered for the NVA was executed—by his father.

"Jon, Use the Knife."

The most terrifying thing I ever did in my life was to kill a guy by throwing a knife at him. We had moved up to an area and encountered a sentry. We didn't have a silenced .22 pistol, and we had to take this guard out. Nobody felt comfortable moving across the road before we got to him. It was gravel, and the noise would have given us away for sure.

I had always practiced throwing my knives, and I carried one over my left shoulder, in my ruck. We were contemplating this situation when my partner—I forget who it was—turned to me and whispered, "Jon, use the knife."

I shook my head no.

He nodded his head yes!

Ordinarily I would just reach up, grab, and throw—but not this time! I carefully considered and calculated the throw. When I finally let go, my adrenaline must have been way up, because the knife went in up to the hilt. The sentry gurgled a little and collapsed. That was scary! I had this vision that the knife would fly right on by the guy, and then he would turn around and nail us. I didn't like that.

C&C North Recons

I started running with S/Sgt. Keith Kincaid. Keith, bless his heart, was the most unlucky son of a bitch I'd ever been around in my life! We'd go out, and within seconds of getting on the ground, it seemed like the whole world was there to greet us! We even tried inserting "dummy teams," and, no matter, the whole world would break loose on us! God!

I told him, "Keith, I don't know about this!"

We went in on one LZ on the other side of the fence where they were waiting for us. We had been unable to go in and do our own visual recon of the area before the mission, and the "zoomies" [US Air Force fighter planes] did it for us. We figured that the Air Force had swooped down to take a closer look at the spot—a sure way of giving away the plan!

My first mission with Keith was just like that. About twenty minutes after we got on the ground, Charlie showed up. Keith put his head up to look at something, and a round came by so close it just slammed Keith's head into the ground. A couple of grenades got thrown—and I still hadn't seen anything! I was looking, but I wasn't seeing anybody. A couple of my Montagnards got hurt by the grenades.

I got the Yards over beside me; one had been hit through the artery in his arm. I opened him up, put a hemostat on both sides, set up an IV with Ringer's lactate through his ankle, ace-bandaged him up, and went to work on the other guy. The second had taken some shrapnel between the scrotum and the anus. There wasn't a lot to do for him, but he wasn't in trouble, other than just beginning to go into shock.

Suddenly Keith decided to pull back. There I was, working on the Yards, and when I looked up, there he was—and he was pissed, because I hadn't fired a round, and because I was blocking his egress! I grabbed up the Yards, and the helicopters started coming in. I raced over, threw the first guy in the chopper, raced back, got the other guy on my back, raced back to the helicopter and tossed him on, then climbed on myself. Because we had the wounded, we went into the med-evac hospital at Quang Tri.

When I got back to my unit, one of the sergeant majors started talking to me as if I'd been a coward on the mission. I thought I'd been doing my job!

"How much ammo did you fire?" he said.

"None," I told him. "I didn't see anything to shoot at!" I really didn't like the feeling of that. ~~Hmoe~~ AH-16

So we were going to go back into that area again, about a week and a half later. The G-model Huey had just come out, the one with the 40-millimeter grenade launcher on one side and the mini-gun on the other, but otherwise it looked just like a slick.

We had gone into isolation to prepare for the mission, then went up to LT-1, up around Quang Tri; then we went out on the mission. It was the same area where I'd gone on my first mission with Keith. I started by doing a map reconnaissance with the aerial photographs from the Air Force. I noticed all kinds of stuff that nobody had mentioned in the briefings; I spotted a goat trail that looked very promising. I told Keith, "We have got to go in here!"

On the way in, from the helicopters, we could see that the NVA was building an all-weather road, with timbers and drainage. It was not a good feeling—there were a lot of people on the ground!

Keith was the team leader, and he was in the lead ship. His ship landed and unloaded first. I was in the next ship. Even before we landed, I could see seventy to a hundred people in pith helmets and NVA uniforms running with weapons at port arms toward the LZ. The door gunner wasn't even firing on them! I grabbed his helmet from him and used the intercommunications system [ICS] to report the targets on the ground to the gunship. That G-model came in and opened up on the NVA formation along its long axis and worked them over with the mini-guns.

Our helicopter flared over the LZ, and it was time to go. We were at about ten feet, but the pilot wasn't going lower, so we had to jump. We all jumped out. At the same time, Keith was trying to call the whole thing off, but we were having commo problems and couldn't hear him.

Once on the ground, there wasn't a hell of a lot to be done, and the helicopters got the hell out of there. Keith's group had run into a platoon of enemy as soon as they landed, and his element got shot up pretty badly. He was trying to get the next ship to come in and get them out—we weren't going to be running any recons out of this LZ!

Fortunately, we all were loaded for bear, so we had a lot of ammunition. We set up a perimeter. I got the open area; Keith got the trees. I was getting all my people into position when a .51-caliber heavy machine gun opened up on us and plowed a furrow in the ground right next to me.

Every time that gun fired, you could see where the rounds were hitting, and it was obvious that his traverse was limited; the barrel must have been up against a tree. I could tell that he was going to have to move the whole gun if he was going to get any closer to us. I took one of my Yards, one with an M203 [which replaced the M79 grenade launcher; it serves the same function but is attached to an M16].

I told him, "You watch right up there, and if you see where he's shooting from, hit him with a grenade." Every once in a while my Yard would chunk a 40-millimeter up there.

There was sudden movement to my front. I had already put down my RPD [a Russian machine gun similar to the US M60, very popular with Special Forces and considered by many superior to the M60]. I reached for the shotgun that I always carried, a sawed-off shotgun loaded with 00 buckshot. We were firing at each other through the brush, twenty yards apart. Up jumped three or four NVA. I took them: *Boom*! *Boom*! *Boom*! *Boom*! The guys used to give me shit for carrying the shotgun, but nobody was giving me any shit about it this time.

Finally, we were able to get some helicopters to come in and get us. My guys and I got on our chopper, and off we went. As we were lifting off and climbing out, one NVA guy stood up below us, with his AK on "rock and roll" [full auto], firing straight at us! And he didn't hit us with *one* round! Next thing I knew, somebody shot the NVA in the head, and he went down.

We swung out, and I told the pilot, "We've got to cover the exfiltration of the other guys." As we maneuvered, I could see a large number of NVA racing toward the position of the other part of the team.

I was beating on the door gunner: "See that? Those are people down there, and they are headed for my team! Fire them up!" We all started firing. We shot the hell out of them! Keith's helicopter got in and collected him and his guys. We turned around and started to leave . . . *Blam*, the helicopter took a hit, and down we went.

Fortunately, we didn't lose anybody when we went down. We got on the ground. The pilot, the copilot, and the door gunners—they didn't like this development at all. We got out, and I told them, "Okay, you've got a thermite grenade—destroy the KY-6 (a scrambler used to help provide secure radio communications). Take the M60s out of the chopper and flip the bipod legs down. Let's go!" I told them.

We moved to an area where we could set up a defensive position and still see the helicopter. "Don't shoot until they fire at you!" I told them. "If

they are running at you, let them come. If they see you, they'll shoot. You can take them then."

I got on the horn with Sgt. Donald Chaney, my Covey, and asked if there was an exfiltration LZ in the area.

He called back, "I've got a nice one at about a hundred and fifty meters from your position," and he gave me an azimuth to it.

"Okay," I told him. "Do you have another?"

"I have another LZ at a hundred meters," he said, and he gave me another azimuth.

"Okay, send the helicopters in to beat up the first LZ. Shoot the hell out of it! Then you have them race over to the other one to pick us up!"

So the helos started shooting the LZ up big time, with guns and rockets. And we could see Charlie just racing past us, over to catch us where they thought we were going to try to get out. The helicopters finished shooting, then started to land. Then they picked up, slid over to where we were, and got us. The crews had eyeballs as big as saucers! We all piled aboard, and we pulled pitch. The crews still had extremely stoic expressions, but by the time we passed 2,500 or 3,000 feet, you could see the faces start to crack into smiles.

We lucked out on that one and didn't lose anybody, and Keith didn't lose anybody out of his group. And that, basically, was what it was like to run recons in that area at that time. Occasionally you got to stay longer, to RON, and maybe spent two days and didn't see a damn thing!

The Yards

I was told that I was supposed to run with some Americans who despised the Yards, and they let the Yards know it. The result of that would have been that if that American got hit, I'd be the one who'd have to carry him out; the Yards certainly wouldn't. These guys called them all the derogatory names: "slant-eye," "gook." I did that once, and one of my Yards turned around to me and said, "Is that what I am?" I never did that again. I had Yards who died for me.

I had a deal with my Yards: "If you get shot, I won't leave you on the ground. I will come back and get you." And I did that! I was very, very close to them. I lived with them in the highlands when I was a vet.

Special Forces was successful in Vietnam because we understood the people, because we knew basic tactics. We were misunderstood by a lot of Americans who thought of us as "sneaky Petes." But we conducted conventional tactical operations; we knew basic first aid, basic engineering, and basic communications. Other units didn't. Even when we were closing down the camps and handing the operations over to the Vietnamese Rangers, I remember the Yards saying, "Can you take us out on one more operation?"

I remember ARVN troops sitting down on the helipad, saying, "We aren't going out on this operation until we get paid." I never had that problem with the Yards. The Yards knew that, if it was humanly possible, we would recover their bodies if they were killed on an operation. Most of us disliked the ARVN immensely.

The Vietnamese thought of the Montagnards as savages—the same as Americans did of the Indians during our western expansion, because we didn't want to understand them. The Indians weren't up to our standards.

That's the same way the Vietnamese looked at the Yards, and it was a real tragedy.

In other ways the Montagnards were similar to the American Indians. Many tribes didn't get along with each other. If you put Rhade, Steng, and Jarai all in one camp, you were just asking for a battle right in your own compound. We succeeded with these people by understanding them. The tribes were all different, and they had to be treated differently.

We were able to operate effectively because we were very sensitive about our security. We knew we were heavily infiltrated, and we learned to work around it. Even the Yards didn't know where we were going. I'd come back sometimes from isolation and planning a mission into Area Oscar, and they'd look at me and say, "*That* bad?" But they always had confidence in me, and I had equal confidence in them.

Sometimes, we'd be walking along and I would have a Yard on either side of me, one holding each hand. I didn't have a hand on my weapon; I put my life totally in their trust. They knew that. The hand-holding was brotherly, and I thought nothing of it, although other Americans would sometimes say, "Look at the fucking faggots!" But that was the Yard custom, and they were great! They made you feel a part of their community.

Recon Tools of the Trade

RPD—the Soviet-Designed Light Machine Gun

I normally carried a captured and modified machine gun the Russians called the RPD. I did not like the AK, and I'm glad Charlie had it. It was too powerful a rifle for the little VC and NVA, and they couldn't manage the recoil. After the first shot, everything else was going to be over your head! That was kind of a blessing. If they had had the M16, that would have been a different story.

I liked the RPD because it probably had the best buffer group of any automatic weapon anywhere. It fired 7.62x39-millimeter ammunition from a drum under the weapon. Unlike the M60 used by most American units, the RPD was balanced. Charlie recognized the sound of the RPD when it fired, and he usually stopped to think when he heard it: *Is that our guys?* If that slowed him down for just a second, you could get out of his ambush kill zone, get up to the side, and then flank the ambush.

We took off the bipod, cut the barrel off, and put a sling on it. Then you had a very good weapon. The only thing I didn't like about it was that it used twenty-five round, nondisintegrating link belts. In combat, you found yourself reaching down to retrieve those segments from the ground because they were hard to come by. It was a fantastic weapon, accurate, powerful, easy to use. I carried one, and some of the other guys were believers, too. But other weapons were also powerful, and one of our guys carried a little Swedish K.

M79

I also carried a sawed-off 40-millimeter M79 grenade launcher, with most of the stock cut off and the barrel chopped down to look just like a pistol. The range was unchanged, and it was really useful. We could shoot accurately with it to two hundred meters, normally with the HE [high-explosive] round.

Shotgun

I also carried a cut-down pump shotgun loaded with 00 buckshot. There is no question that a guy knew he'd been shot when you hit him with a load of buckshot, unlike the "dart" rounds that would go right through the guy but would leave him shooting at you because he didn't know he was dead yet!

The stock was cut off at the pistol grip, and a loop of "dummy cord" was tied to it. I carried the shotgun in my rucksack, muzzle down, with the grip sticking up over my left shoulder. I could pull it out without taking off the ruck.

Rucksack

We all mined our rucksacks. If we had to jettison them, we had a Claymore inside, primed and fused to a striker taped to the rucksack quick-release. If you had to drop your ruck in an emergency, it would drop and fire the fuse-lighter. [The fuse allowed time enough to get a safe distance away before the Claymore exploded. The hope was that the NVA or VC who were pursuing us would pause to pick up or search the ruck about the time the Claymore would detonate. At very least, the explosion would slow down the pursuing enemy force.]

Medal of Honor at Hickory

My commander said, "I've got a place I want you to command."

I didn't like the idea; I liked doing what I knew. He said, "You're gonna do it anyway." He sent me to the radio retransmission site called Hickory, across the river and northeast of Khe Sanh.

I went out there, and the place was a mess—concertina wire hanging down on the ground, old French mines poking out of the dirt. The first order of business was to get the defenses repaired. We got the Navy's Seabees to bring up a little bulldozer. We used that to get rid of the old mines and dig new fighting positions. We fixed the wire and made a lot of progress.

But we were also seeing a lot of enemy activity outside the wire. We reported it, and the intel community reported back, "Bullshit!" This was typical. We were seeing a thousand NVA guys a day, sending helicopters out to shoot them up; and the intel weenies still refused to believe me. They had been setting up a network of electronic sensors all across the northern part of the country, and these sensors weren't indicating the level of enemy activity that we were seeing. So our reports were dismissed. They said, "Our assets don't show anything out there."

I sent them a message in the clear in response: "Then you don't have any fucking assets out here!"

There was a hill overlooking our camp, Hill 1051. The 101st Airborne tried to land on top, but it didn't work. Some helicopters came in to get a couple of teams out, and one of the gunships made a straight run in from about three miles out. When he was about a mile out, I saw a single NVA kid stand up with a rocket-propelled grenade, put it on his shoulder, and take careful aim. The ground around this kid was getting all torn up from the fire from the gunship, but he just stood there, preparing to fire.

I grabbed for my rifle, because the kid was right at the range I like to snipe at, about a thousand meters. But before I could do anything, he put that RPG right through the cockpit, and the "bird" went right in. Then I had to call the gunship flight leader to report what had happened.

The buildup around us continued, and we were obviously in a bad tac-

tical location.

The night of June 4 was rainy and miserable. I checked on the Yards and the perimeter defenses a couple of times. Under cover of the rain, the NVA had emplaced Chinese Claymore mines around the camp. Some of the Yards noticed these things. We put everybody in the camp on the wall.

There were some concrete half-culverts down the hill, by the helipad. Sergeant Hill and some of the Yards moved down there. I took over the .50-caliber machine gun. I had it set up with a special ammunition mix, four "ball" to one HEI [high-explosive incendiary] round that I'd gotten from the Air Force.

While I was setting up the position, I noticed one of these Chinese Claymore mines off to the side. I called "Claymore! Hit it!" I was whipping the gun around on it when the NVA fired it. Sergeant Hill caught a piece just above the knee.

We started firing about that time. Charlie came up out of his holes, and we had a merry little firefight going for a while. They were using some old RPG-2s that were so slow you could see them coming and roll out of the way. They kept shooting, trying to knock out my fifty. I finally put a few rounds on the guys who were firing on me. A couple of the HEs must have killed them, because there wasn't any more fire from their position.

A sniper started working from the southwest of my position. Every once in a while that son of a bitch would put one really close to me! The guy was close, not more than seventy-five or eighty meters away. I couldn't spot him, though, and I got really pissed off. I called one of the Yards over and told him, "Watch right over there."

About this time a young kid—a slovenly, overweight kid with glasses (Walton was his name)—came running over. He was a sensor reader, a technician. He said, "Sarge, I think you better come back and check on your people. Everybody is just standing around. They don't know what to do."

He was pointing out to me my duties as the commander; he was right, and I had been wrong. "I'll take over the fifty,'" he said.

"What do you know about a .50-caliber machine gun?" I asked him.

"Nothing. I thought that, since you are Special Forces, you could teach me in one or two minutes."

Just then another shot went past my head. The Montagnard came running over, and he pointed to a spot where the sniper was. I could see where the mat was moving over the guy's hole. I reached down and grabbed my rifle. I lined up on the spot and waited. Then his rifle started to come up out of the hole . . . and as soon as he came up and began to level on me, *Blam*, that was the end of that son of a bitch!

I moved back into the compound and made sure everybody knew what to do—which I should have done in the first place. Then I went back to work on those Claymores, because nobody would want to stick their head up over the berm as long as those things were out there.

I grabbed an M60, peeked over the edge, then hosed one as soon as I could spot it. I went down the line blowing these things, one at a time. I got to the last one, flipped the gun over the berm, and started to move; and they blew it on me. That took care of the Claymores.

Then Charlie started laying on indirect fire. Those sons of a bitch could shoot! They're probably the best damn mortar men in the world! They dropped over a hundred rounds on my camp, a space maybe sixty meters by

a hundred meters, and not one of them was outside the berm. Those shots had to have been made at a range of over 1,500 meters—almost a mile.

They were firing a lot of rockets at us, but because of where the NVA were firing from, the rockets were mostly going over the top of the camp, chopping my antennas all to hell in the process. Then everything calmed down, and it got pretty quiet. So I started evacuating guys.

I decided it was time to destroy all the electronic equipment. So I went down to the vans to throw in the thermite grenades [which are magnesium-filled, incendiary grenades that burn with extreme heat. They were often used to melt critical equipment, including gun tubes]. I turned on the oxygen bottles (so much for several million dollars worth of government equipment). I came walking down the stairs to talk to my commo man just as a B-40 rocket came zooming in, right between the vans, and blew up about six feet away. It blew me on my ass.

"Man," I told the commo guy, "that was close!" The fins on the spinner ripped the back of my pants leg as it went by.

When I picked myself up and discovered that I hadn't picked up any shrapnel, I told the commo guy, Sergeant Jones, "We're going to have to evacuate the camp; I want to get you out of here. You have more experience on the ground, but you know too much about this equipment. We can't risk getting you captured. I don't know how long we can hold them off, or if we can hold them off."

Meanwhile, Walton—the fat, slovenly electronics technician—had been manning the .50-caliber and had knocked out about four machine guns! Then there was a big explosion down at that end of the camp. I went over there. A bunch of Yards had been wounded, and I started hauling them down to my Vietnamese medic.

I came around a corner, and there was Walton, dragging that big .50-caliber back to the camp. The NVA had finally managed to collapse the position, and Walton was trying to get it back where he could use it again. People were shooting at him; there were AK rounds whipping past him.

I knocked the gun on the ground and asked him, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

I looked at him. His glasses had been frosted by a near miss that had hit a sand bag in front of him. "Sergeant," he said, "I think I'm blind."

I reached over and moved his glasses up. "Does that help any?"

"I can see again!"

"Have you got another pair of glasses?" I asked him.

"As a matter of fact, I do," he said. "Down in my bunker."

I told him to lie down there, at the berm, with the .50-caliber, and I raced down there to get them for him while people shot at me. I got the glasses, raced back, and put them on him.

"It's a miracle!" he cried. "I can *see*!"

About that time, I heard one of the other guys moaning; he had taken a piece of a rocket that had hit nearby.

"I'm going to take him down to the medic," I told Walton, "but you are going to have to cover me!"

I tossed him a CAR-15. "Do you know how it works?"

"Yeah," he said, "like an M16, only faster!"

"You're catching on, Walton!" I told him.

I loaded the guy up on my back and took off across the helipad. From

behind me I could hear Walton firing; he was putting short bursts into the bushes on either side of our route. I turned around and there he was, zigzagging, returning fire from anybody nearby—not a bad performance, especially from somebody who isn't supposed to be a combatant and is about forty pounds overweight.

We raced for the other side of the camp. I deposited the wounded guy and Walton on a helicopter and told him to get the hell out of there. I had already written Walton up for the Medal of Honor for what he'd done with the fifty, and I gave the paper to my wounded team member to take back. When everybody seemed to be aboard, the helicopter took off . . . and there stood Walton.

"I fell out," he said.

I used a common military expression of respect and admiration. "You lying sack of shit!" I tossed him a weapon and grabbed my RPD. "Get over there and take that position," I told him, indicating a spot on the berm.

About 4:00 PM. some more helicopters were inbound, and I got the word: These were the last helicopters of the day. I got Walton, my commo man, some of the other guys, and some Yards, and I loaded them all on the choppers. I instructed one of the Yards to point his CAR-15 at Walton.

"Walton," I told him, "this guy has orders to shoot you if you try to get off this helicopter. Get your damn ass out of here!" A 37-millimeter opened up on them on the way out, but they made it.

My Covey appeared overhead about 5:00 P.M., along with a fast-mover. It was Chaney again. "Jon, I got an Air Force general up here for you. He's got eight two-hundred-and-fifty-pound 'drags' [bombs with drag brakes]."

"Have him put them just to the south of the camp, on the helipad," I told him.

Chaney called back; the general had declined. "Too close," he said.

"It doesn't make any difference now," I said. "Besides, that's where the bad guys are."

The general still refused the drop. "He'll stay on station until the helicopters come in to get you," Chaney called.

"You tell him there won't be any more helicopters!"

"Okay, I'll drop them," the general called.

I pulled all my people back and we got down. He came rolling in and unloaded on the target. It was close, and we were bouncing all over the ground, but none of my guys got hurt. It really did a job on Charlie.

I called Chaney, "Tell him thanks!"

When the last helicopter left, there was just Jones, me, and seventeen little people left. Later I discovered that a team from Operation Heavy Hook in Thailand was en route to us about then, and they made it to just eleven klicks to the west of us when they were ordered to turn around. They were in a "Jolly Green" [a version of the Sikorski H-53, a large US Air Force rescue helicopter]—they could have picked up the whole team. My award says we were left on the ground because of inclement weather; it was inclement inter-service politics.

We could only defend half the camp, so I shrank the perimeter. We fought them off, over and over again. A half-hour went by without them doing anything. I knew then that we were about the get knocked over. I told the Yards, "Get the fuck out of here!"

I set myself up on top of the ammo bunker. I figured that if I had to die,

I'd die in style, and that when it blew I would never know what hit me. I was up there when I noticed a couple of Yards who had pulled back. When I looked back, I saw huge numbers of people coming toward the camp. I started firing them up. I had an attack of sanity and started thinking, *Just what do you think you're doing up here?* I turned and started down, and took a round in the back that threw me asshole over tea kettle. I landed at the foot of the bunker, and my Yards came running back to get me. I told them to take off. They went over the wall.

One of the last things I did was to call in a Stinger airstrike on our position, told them there were about seventy-five hundred bad guys in the open.

I managed to run over to the bunker where Jones was. "Get out of here!" I told him. But when I turned around, there were people everywhere, so I dove into the bunker with him. While we were talking, two NVA came in, the first without a weapon, the guy behind with an AK. As far as I was concerned, the number two guy was the real threat. I stepped behind him and brought the knife arm around his head. Then I brought the point up under his jaw, up into the skull, turned his head away, and let him fall.

I was moving on the number one NVA when Jones unloaded about twenty rounds into him. Until then, Charlie didn't know we were around, but that gave us away. A little while later, Charlie threw a grenade in and wounded Jones pretty bad. He decided to surrender. When he got to the door, they shot him down.

I played dead. One guy poked me in the chest three or four times, but I didn't move. I had hemorrhaged real bad and had a lot of blood on me, so he assumed I was dead. They tried to cremate our bodies. The bunker was lined with tarpaper, and they lit it on fire. After a while I decided I wasn't going to burn to death. I got up and made a break for the door—and they'd walked off! As I was walking out the door, I got hit with a round on my helmet. It was the only time I'd worn a helmet in Vietnam. The hit knocked me out. When I came to, the soles of my boots were all melted, and my hands and arms were all burned.

I crawled into another bunker and was trying to dispose of all my stuff except my ID card. I was hiding behind some cardboard in a corner of the bunker when an NVA came in. I heard him, and I held the cardboard with one hand and my Gerber knife in the other. He came over and lifted up the cardboard. My adrenaline must have been up, because I put that knife all the way through his sternum, all the way into his spine. He got a shocked, glazed look on his face, and expelled a load of tremendously bad breath as he realized that he was dead and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it. And then I couldn't get the damn knife out of him.

I crawled under the cot, exhausted. When I came to, two guys were sitting on the cot, and one of them had ahold of my foot. He was checking to see if my boots would fit him. I guess he figured they were too big, because he just dropped the foot, *clunk*. I had already disowned the leg—he could have done anything with it. But they got up and walked out.

This bunker didn't seem to be a good place to stay, so I crawled out and around the side. Two NVA came wandering along and stopped beside me. Finally they walked off, and then I crawled down to the side of the hill and started my escape and evasion.

I lasted for eleven and a half days before being captured, right outside of Fire Base Fuller. The guy who got me was a little old man, about sixty-

five or seventy years old, with an ancient Russian rifle. He was shaking just like a leaf. I thought that if I even blinked wrong he was going to shoot me.

Medal of Honor Hassles

There are a lot of disadvantages to wearing a Medal of Honor if you want to stay in the Army. There is a lot of petty jealousy. When you get a promotion, it isn't because you're a good soldier; it's because you're a Medal of Honor recipient. There are commanders who don't like having a Medal of Honor in the unit because they feel it will bring undue attention to them.

Getting into Delta wasn't easy because of the Medal of Honor—particularly when I had the covert squadron. It was not easy at all. I had units turn me down, not because of a lack of expertise in operations (which was never questioned), but because they wanted to know, "How do you conceal a Medal of Honor recipient in the unit?"

Well, that was easy for me. I didn't go to the conventions. I didn't do speaking engagements. I stayed out of the public view. It wasn't a problem. When I dropped out of sight, or when anybody in these units disappears, you don't question where they are and what they're doing.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

I don't agree with the people who dismiss "post-traumatic stress disorder" [PTSD] as coming from fakes and phonies. I did my thesis on PTSD and have done a lot of research on it. Most people know that about fifty-eight thousand guys got killed on the battlefield during the war. What people don't know is that over two hundred thousand have died in car wrecks, from alcoholism, from drug overdoses, and from suicide since then.

The reason, I think, is that a guy could be on the battlefield one day, and he could be home on the street the next day, twenty-four hours later. During World War II and before, it might have taken you a year to get home in the belly of a troop ship. During all this time you were communicating. You had a chance to say, I feel really shitty about what I did. Your buddies could talk you through the feelings over a gradual period of adjustment. When you went to Vietnam you went with a two-way ticket, by yourself. The guys who went off to World War II went for the duration, and they went as units.

I don't think you see the same problem with PTSD in Special Forces that you find with the straight infantry units, but we had much different standards and experiences. For example, in Special Forces, dope smoking wasn't a problem. We only had one dope smoker in my team, and he got a buddy of mine killed. If you saw somebody smoking dope, the guy was gone. We had enough things to worry about.

The average mission in C&C North was what we called the "seventy/thirty." You had a seventy percent chance of not coming back, a thirty percent chance that you would return. The attitude in my unit, though, was, "They ain't made the bullet that has my name on it. If they did, they shot it off during a training exercise." Our attitude was that you had a job to do and you did it. When you came back, you were treated well. We had cooks who took care of us, who made steak and lobster for us on Sundays, with wine on the table. We were treated well. But when you went into "isolation" and started working on a mission, it was a totally businesslike attitude. Then, you would never see a guy go to the club.

The one thing that really bothered me about our unit was that the guy

that went in, ran his recon, "snooped and pooped," and got back out without a shot being fired—that guy came home with no awards! As a result, I knew guys who would go in, do the mission, and then—just before it was time for the helicopters to come get them—they would do something to really piss off Charlie just so they could have a firefight when they came out, so they would get an award!

The Airborne Mystique

The holy trinity of the US Army is called Airborne, Ranger, and Green Beret. Of the three, the Airborne (a.k.a. "paratroopers," an archaic term today) is by far the most inclusive; it is the gateway to the elite little enclaves in the Army. All SF soldiers must be Airborne qualified, but that isn't too much of a challenge. "Jump school" is a three-week program, open to virtually every man and woman in the Army, and about one in five of all soldiers wears jump wings. The current program, as one instructor recently said, is three weeks of low-impact aerobics. Students make five jumps during week three, with three "Hollywood" jumps (no combat equipment), one jump with rucksack and weapons container, and one "night" jump (seldom actually done after dark).

Anyone in the Army who isn't a super-duper-paratrooper is a "leg," normally pronounced "gawddam laay-g," and is an object of profound contempt, regardless of rank. This is more important than you might think; any officer who expects genuine personal respect from the troops in any of the combat arms better wear jump wings—at least.

Part of the SF battle plan involves jumping behind the lines, but there wasn't much of that during Vietnam or since. The Navy's SEALs tried it during the Grenada operation and got a few of their guys killed. On the other hand, the Army's Rangers jumped onto the airport at Point Salines from eight hundred feet, and although it was a tougher problem than anticipated, the drop worked as advertised. But as soon as those first Rangers got the runway cleaned up, everybody else air-landed.

But all SF units continue to train in airborne operations and all SF personnel must maintain current jump qualifications to remain on a team. That means at least one military static-line jump (twelve hundred fifty feet above ground level) per quarter, normally with rucksack and weapon.

—Hans Halberstadt