

provinces of Yunnan, Kwangsi, Kwangtung, and Hainan Island in China. Activated on 24 January 1964, the organization was a MACV subordinate command and not a Special Forces unit. The 5th Special Forces Group funneled required personnel into MACV-SOG through the group Special Operations Augmentation, making it appear that the men were assigned to the group when, in fact, they were under secret orders posting them to MACV-SOG.<sup>14</sup>

Cross-border reconnaissance and intelligence operations into Laos were commenced by mixed Special Forces and LLDB teams under Project SHINING BRASS in September 1965. As U.S. combat commitment to Vietnam increased, participating elements upgraded the intensity of operations by emplacing antipersonnel devices, engaging NVA or Pathet Lao personnel in open combat, performing B-52 bomb damage assessment, and controlling airstrikes. The project, aimed at countering North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos into South Vietnam, became the largest and most important Special Forces strategic reconnaissance and interdiction campaign in Southeast Asia. SHINING BRASS was renamed PRAIRIE FIRE in 1968, and finally PHU DUNG on 8 April 1971.<sup>15</sup>

On 26 January 1967 General Westmoreland advanced a plan for further expansion of Special Forces PRAIRIE FIRE operations to include deep penetrations of long duration in Laos for the purpose of developing a resistance movement within certain ethnic groups. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge replied that a clear assessment of political implications could not be made but agreed to further study. In May, Lodge was succeeded by Ellsworth Bunker, and action on the expanded plan for PRAIRIE FIRE "stalled out." While PRAIRIE FIRE operations continued until the end of the Second Indochina War, Special Forces was prohibited by the Congressional Cooper-Church Amendment from crossing into Laos on such missions after April 1971.<sup>16</sup>

As early as 1963, Special Forces identified Cambodia as a likely Viet Cong sanctuary and source of supply, and reported that the South Vietnamese border controls were ineffective in stopping such VC use. Since the Joint Chiefs of Staff had put tight restrictions against employment of American personnel in Cambodia, the Special Forces began building camps along the frontier. Throughout the Second Indochina War, nearly all Special Forces border surveillance efforts were directed against Cambodia, and

only half a dozen camps faced Laos. On 3 May 1965 Cambodia severed diplomatic relations with the United States, and battlefield events later in the year verified active North Vietnamese military use of the country.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized General Westmoreland to develop a cross-border reconnaissance capability using Special Forces on 27 June 1966, and the undertaking was coded Project DANIEL BOONE. Permission was not granted to use these teams until May 1967, and then only for the small section of the Cambodian tri-border area above the Se San River. The DANIEL BOONE operations were expanded in October 1967 to cover Cambodia's border facing Vietnam to a depth of twenty, and later thirty, kilometers, which was divided into two zones. Zone Alpha stretched approximately from Snuol north to Laos, Zone Bravo from Snuol to the Gulf of Thailand. However, missions in the latter zone required Presidential approval on a case-by-case basis.<sup>17</sup>

In many cases vital MACV-SOG information was simply not acted upon. Throughout latter 1967 the Special Forces DANIEL BOONE teams detected a menacing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong buildup in such areas as the "Fish Hook." These later proved to be key NVA/VC staging bases for the Tet-68 offensive, but General Westmoreland's urgent requests to launch spoiling attacks into the detected bastions had been denied. The success of this strategic reconnaissance effort was not capitalized upon.

Project DANIEL BOONE was renamed SALEM HOUSE, and in December 1968 mission restrictions were finally relaxed. The Cambodian border region was divided into three zones as Zone Bravo was split in two. The new zone, Charlie, or Central Salem House, extended from Snuol to the town of Prey Veng, while Bravo, or Southern Salem House, now extended from there to the Gulf of Thailand. Special Forces received permission to scour Zones Alpha, or Northern Salem House (nicknamed the "Wasteland"), which extended as far west as Kratie and Stung Treng, and Charlie, without prior Washington approval. Zone Bravo excursions required Presidential approval, which Nixon readily granted. Although the Air Interdiction Zone (AIZ), nicknamed FREEDOM DEAL, later gave Special Forces maneuver area behind Alpha as far as Kompong Thom city, helicopter range limited such missions. Project SALEM HOUSE was renamed THOT NOT on 8 April 1971.<sup>18</sup>



In addition to Projects SALEM HOUSE and PRAIRIE FIRE, the Special Forces sent teams north of the international demarcation line inside the western DMZ as part of Project NICKEL STEEL. Formerly, the Special Forces spike teams that were sent into the DMZ under III Marine Amphibious Force authority were called DOUBLE CROSS operations. There were also other projects throughout MACV-SOG jurisdictional regions that required Special Forces assistance, such as BRIGHT LIGHT teams. These teams performed specific prisoner and evader and/or escapee-recovery missions.

Although most MACV-SOG launch sites were emplaced in existing Special Forces camps along the South Vietnamese border, other sites were also used in Special Forces operations. For example, the launch site at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, was used as an alternate PRAIRIE FIRE jumping-off point after September 1967. The training centers at Kham Duc and Long Thanh (Detachment B-53) trained selected Special Forces and indigenous personnel in commando tactics. While natives were chosen for their absolute loyalty and excellent jungle-fighting abilities, several security and reaction companies were simply hired from the CIDG Mike Forces.

The eight operational commands within MACV-SOG were known as studies groups to maintain their cover on organizational charts. Most Special Forces personnel served in the Ground Studies Group (SOG 35), Airborne Studies Group (SOG 36), or Training Studies Group (SOG 38). Some were assigned to other elements, such as the Recovery Studies Division (SOG 80), which was established to implement Joint Recovery Task Force requirements searching for crashed aircraft and missing personnel.

The Ground Studies Group was part of the Command and Control Detachment, located at Da Nang. The detachment controlled the Kham Duc Training Center and four forward operating bases. FOB-1 at Phu Bai was specifically oriented toward PRAIRIE FIRE, while FOB-2 at Kontum handled both PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE missions. Each base had fifteen Reconnaissance Teams (known as Spike Teams) and contained a reaction force, an exploitation battalion of four SLAM (Search-Location-Annihilation-Monitors) companies composed of Hatchet Force (later Hornet Force) platoons. Multiplatoon forces short of SLAM company size were known as Havoc

Forces. FOB-3 at Khe Sanh and FOB-4 at Da Nang provided another seventeen Spike Teams each for all MACV-SOG missions and projects.<sup>19</sup>

On 1 November 1967 MACV-SOG absorbed Projects OMEGA and SIGMA and reorganized. In lieu of the four FOBS, the Ground Studies Group (SOG 35) now included Command and Control North at Da Nang for NICKEL STEEL and PRAIRIE FIRE areas of operation, Command and Control Central at Kontum for PRAIRIE FIRE and Zone Alpha DANIEL BOONE, and Command and Control South at Ban Me Thuot primarily for Zone Bravo and Charlie DANIEL BOONE missions.

MACV-SOG Special Forces reconnaissance team missions normally included linear, area, point, and route reconnaissance; road, trail, and river watch; route mining, interdiction, and ambush; capture of prisoners; bomb damage assessment; ground photography; wiretap; direction of artillery and airstrikes against targets of opportunity; limited direct ground combat as part of a mission; crash site inspection; and allied prisoner recovery. Each team contained three Special Forces and nine indigenous special commandos and was generally supported by four helicopters, four helicopter gunships, one A-1E aircraft (as required), and one forward air controller aircraft.

MACV-SOG Special Forces exploitation, or hatchet, forces were capable of rapid engagement of reconnaissance-team-produced targets by direct ground combat. Tailored elements ranging from one to three platoons could perform reconnaissance-in-force, route interdiction, ambushes and raids, security of temporary patrol bases to support reconnaissance teams, short-term area denial, cache destruction, and allied prisoner recovery.

The Airborne Studies Group (SOG 36) was responsible for agent operations that complemented other cross-border intelligence and psychological warfare programs. These included the "Earth Angels," teams dressed in NVA uniforms composed of North Vietnamese ralliers; "Strata" teams, which translated into short-term roadwatch and target acquisition teams; "Pike Hill" Cambodian intelligence collection teams dressed in Khmer Rouge uniforms; "Oodles" clandestine notional agents in North Vietnam; "Borden" diversionary NVA agents; "Cedar Walk" Cambodian unconventional warfare teams; and "Singleton" single agents.



Special Forces missions in MACV-SOG were unusually hazardous. For example, a number of night HALO (High-Altitude Low-Opening) parachute jumps were made into remote areas. Sometimes missions were too successful. In one program, teams inserted faulty and rigged ammunition into the North Vietnamese munitions system on a selected basis throughout Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The program, labeled ELDEST SON, ITALIAN GREEN, and, later, POLE BEAN, was a tremendous success. The contaminated ammunition exploded firing rifles, killed mortar crews, jammed machine guns, and was beginning to affect North Vietnamese morale and to cause them to lose faith in their bullets and shells. On 23 February 1970 the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the program should be stopped and ordered MACV-SOG to cease the operations.

The MACV-SOG missions remained highly dangerous. On the morning of 24 April 1969 a Command and Control South hatchet platoon led by Capt. Paul R. Cahill was air assaulted into Cambodia by four helicopters. The platoon contained three Special Forces members and twenty-five Montagnard special commandos. Immediately after leaving the landing zone, the platoon was hit by concentrated automatic weapons fire while approaching its initial rallying point. Sfc. Jerry M. "Mad Dog" Shriver led several commandos in a charge on the machine gun bunkers in the woodline, which were protected by entrenched NVA soldiers.

Captain Cahill and the platoon medical aidman, Sgt. Ernest C. Jamison, were forced to take cover in a bomb crater. Cahill maintained radio contact with Shriver after he entered the forest until transmissions ceased; Shriver was never seen again. Jamison jumped out to retrieve one of the wounded Montagnards who had fallen in the charge. The medic reached the soldier but was almost torn apart by concentrated machine gun fire. At that moment Cahill was wounded in the right eye, which resulted in his total blindness for the next thirty minutes. The platoon radio man, Y-Sum Nie, desperately radioed for immediate extraction.

Maj. Benjamin T. Kapp, Jr., was in the command helicopter and could see the platoon pinned down across the broken ground and rims of bomb craters. North Vietnamese machine guns were periodically firing into the bodies in front of their position and covering the open ground with grazing fire. The assistant platoon leader, 1st Lt. Gregory M. Harrigan, reported within minutes

that half the platoon was killed or wounded. Harrigan himself was killed forty-five minutes later.

Helicopter gunships and A-1E aircraft constantly bombed and rocketed the NVA defenses. The heavy ground fire peppered the aircraft in return, wounding one door gunner during low-level strafing. Ten airstrikes and over 1,500 helicopter rockets were used in an effort to force the NVA to break contact. Several attempts to lift out survivors had to be aborted. First Lt. Walter L. Marcantel, the third in command, tried to disengage from the bunkerline. He called for napalm only ten yards from his frontline, and both he and his nine remaining commandos were burned by splashing napalm from the explosions.

After seven hours of continuous fighting, three helicopters dashed in and pulled out fifteen wounded troops. As the aircraft lifted off, several crewmen saw a panel being waved from a bomb crater. A fourth helicopter set down, and Lt. Daniel Hall twice raced over to the bomb hole. On the first trip he recovered the badly wounded radio operator, and on the second trip he dragged Harrigan's body back to the helicopter. The aircraft was being buffeted by shellfire and took off immediately afterwards. No further MACV-SOG insertions were made into the NVA stronghold. Jamison was declared dead and Shriver missing in action by later Army board proceedings.<sup>20</sup>

The dangers inherent in MACV-SOG's cross-border raids matched the high stakes involved. For every insertion like Cahill's that was detected and stopped, dozens of other commando teams safely slipped past NVA lines to strike a wide range of targets and collect vital information. The number of MACV-SOG missions conducted with Special Forces reconnaissance teams into Laos and Cambodia increased from 117 in 1966 to 258 in 1967, 327 in 1968, and 452 in 1969. Demolished convoys, blazing ammunition depots, slain guards, and kidnapped personnel highlighted the most sustained American campaign of raiding, sabotage, and intelligence-gathering waged on foreign soil in U.S. military history. By 1970, when 441 recon missions included commando forces up to company strength, MACV-SOG's legacy of success had already earned it a global reputation as one of the most combat effective deep-penetration forces ever raised.

However, as Colonel Roger M. Pezzelle aptly points out,



The fact that full-scale unconventional warfare *was* not conducted throughout the history of MACSOG-V (that is, between 1964 and 1972) raises some difficult issues. The short tour of duty, with its inevitable effect on unconventional warfare, was undoubtedly a major reason for the lack of special operations in Vietnam. On MACSOG-V's behalf, it must be said that the missions it performed—strategic reconnaissance and other covert operations not yet declassified—it did well.

MACV-SOG service was the first major application of Special Forces in a strategic ground reconnaissance and exploitation role. Special Forces success in this mode was combined with foreign internal defense programs, like the CIDG concept, to expand SF scope far beyond its limited prewar major mission of guerrilla warfare.

## NOTES

1. Project DELTA became stabilized at 11 Special Forces officers and 82 enlisted men, alongside 34 LLDB officers and 87 enlisted men, although actual field strength varied. Increases placed the Nung Security Company at 105 men, and the CIDG Roadrunner Company at 123 men. The BDA and Mortar Platoons had 36 men each. The LLDB airborne ranger battalion was finally fixed at 43 officers and 763 enlisted men. Civilian hire was set at 198 persons. 5th SFGA Form 252-R, B-52, *Monthly Operational Summary*, dtd 28 February 1970; Detachment B-52, *Unit History SOA*, dtd 18 July 1970. The number of teams and compositions given in the text are representative because the composition of Projects DELTA, OMEGA, and SIGMA varied from year to year. However, Col. Francis J. Kelly, in *Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1973), gives a tentative organization for these elements on pages 138 and 139. His samples are actually the 5th Special Forces optimum submissions to MACV extracted from proposed organizational tables, which were not adopted in their entirety.
2. Detachment B-52, *After Action Report*, dtd 9 February 1966.
3. Detachment B-52, *After Action Report*, dtd 7 September 1966.
4. Detachment B-52, *After Action Report*, dtd 8 October 1966.
5. Detachment B-52, *After Action Report*, dtd 16 June 1967; Detachment B-52, *Debriefing Report, Team #1*, dtd 15 May 1967.
6. Detachment B-52, *After Action Reports*, dtd 7 April 1968 and 11 June 1968.
7. Detachment B-52, *After Action Report*, dtd 25 July 1969, Appendix I, X(16). (Bracketed clarifications added by author.)
8. Material for this section derived primarily from Detachment B-52, *Unit History*, dtd 18 July 1970; and 5th Special Forces Group, *Case Study—Project DELTA*, dtd 5 January 1965.
9. 5th Special Forces Group, *Fact Sheet*, Subject: 5th Special Forces Group Long Range Reconnaissance Projects, dtd 22 April 1968.
10. Project FLAMING ARROW, which was to be conducted by 5th Special Forces Group within the confines of South Vietnam, raised the teams and other assets but were absorbed by DANIEL BOONE. The latter was the code word for cross-border operations into Cambodia.



until he tripped after traveling a short distance, tried to administer first aid until Copley's face showed signs of death, and was forced to leave because of pursuit by hostile forces.

**Douglas Edward DaHill**, Specialist 4th Class Patrol member, Detachment B-52 DELTA, 5th Special Forces Group. Born 6 March 1949 in Lima, Ohio. Entered service on 28 June 1966 at Columbus, Ohio.

Missing in action since 17 April 1969, when Reconnaissance Patrol 6 was ambushed by numerically superior Viet Cong force in Thua Thien Province 9 miles from Laotian border; last heard from by radio transmission to circling aircraft requesting assistance, whereupon radio contact was lost.

**David Arthur Davidson**, Staff Sergeant Reconnaissance patrol member, Command & Control North, MACV-SOG. Born 8 March 1947 in Washington, D.C. Reenlisted on 18 May 1968 in the Republic of Vietnam. Missing in action since 5 October 1970, after his patrol had established its overnight position 12 miles inside Laos west of Ta Bat and was attacked by a hostile force; according to the two surviving indigenous patrol members, Davidson was hit once in the head and fell down a ridge, after which he lay motionless with a probable fatal head wound.

**Ricardo Gonzalez Davis**, Sergeant First Class Reconnaissance patrol leader, Command & Control North, MACV-SOG. Born 17 March 1941 in Fort Stockton, Texas. Reenlisted on 30 May 1967 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Missing in action since 20 March 1969, when his six-man patrol was attacked 11 miles inside Laos west of Kham Duc; Sgt. James C. La Motte was two feet away when Davis was hit by rifle fire in upper chest and face and said, "Jim, Jim!" and fell; the assistant patrol leader advanced to Davis's position seven minutes later but detected no signs of life, whereupon the patrol was forced to evacuate the area because of advancing hostile soldiers.

**Ronald James Dexter**, Master Sergeant Reconnaissance patrol member, Command & Control, MACV-SOG. Born 23 July 1933 in Chicago, Illinois. Entered Service on 2 September 1951 at Chicago, Illinois.

Missing in action since 3 June 1967, when last seen exiting a downed CH-46 helicopter as it was being grenaded by approaching hostile forces 15 miles inside Laos west of the A Shau Valley; the Nung commander, Mr. Ky, saw several men in a large bomb crater firing red star clusters from a flare gun as Ky was lifted out on the last helicopter.

**Edward Ray Dodge**, Sergeant First Class Administrative supervisor, Detachment C-1, 5th Special Forces Group. Born 16 December 1933 in

Norfolk, Virginia. Entered service on 21 December 1950 at Norfolk, Virginia.

Missing in action since 31 December 1964, while an observer aboard an Air Force O1-F aircraft (Number 572823) of the 336th Tactical Fighter Squadron piloted by Capt. Kurt C. MacDonald, on a reconnaissance flight over the A Shau Valley, as the aircraft failed to return to Da Nang.

**Raymond Louis Echevarria**, Master Sergeant Reconnaissance patrol leader, Command & Control, MACV-SOG. Born 16 September 1933 in Brooklyn, New York. Entered service on 3 December 1950 in New York City.

Missing in action since 3 October 1966, when patrol was inserted 1 mile inside Laos west of the DMZ and immediately engaged in firefight under adverse circumstances; sole survivor, interpreter Bui Kim Tien, last heard of him when Sfc. Eddie L. Williams had told Tien, "Jones is dying and Ray (Echevarria) is the same way."

**Lawrence Jesse Englander**, Sergeant Radio supervisor, Detachment A-109, 5th Special Forces Group. Born 19 April 1943 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Entered service on 4 August 1964 at Van Nuys, California.

Missing in action since 2 May 1968, when participated in a CIDG heliborne assault that came under intense automatic weapons fire from fortified NVA positions 8 miles southwest of Thuong Duc; last heard from by Sgt. John M. Vincent on radio stating he was wounded in foot and arm and pinned down in open field behind dead Vietnamese radio operator, refused help because he claimed to be "zeroed in," that any movement would bring heavy fire, and that he would try to crawl back to friendly lines; LLDB Lieutenant Ho Tang Dzu stated he saw him hit by machine gun fire in back and head, but attempts to reach him failed and battlefield was abandoned.

**Danny Day Entrican**, 1st Lieutenant Reconnaissance patrol leader, Task Force 1 Advisory Element. Born 12 August 1946 in Brookhaven, Mississippi. Entered service on 1 October 1969 at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Missing in action since 18 May 1971, after his reconnaissance team "Alaska" was inserted into the Da Krong Valley in Vietnam on 15 May and overwhelmed in a firefight three days later 1 mile from the Laotian border; surviving commando Truong Minh Long and interpreter Truong To Ha stated that they rolled downhill after hostile search party detected them hiding in bush, at which point Entrican was apparently wounded and yelled at them to move out.

**Richard Allan Pitts**, Specialist 5th Class Reconnaissance patrol member, Command & Control North, MACV-SOG. Born 23 February 1946 in