old Frank said with a shrug, "I do not know to which manner of painting you are accustomed, my lord," to which I replied: "I wish you to see the camel as Allah would see it."

The Frank and I carried on much like this the second day, and the third day, and again the fourth day and so on for fifty days. At this time he began to bemoan and weep, not knowing whether his daughter were alive and unable to let her know that he was still alive. Seeing him so weak filled me with disgust, and I let out upon his ears fifty days' worth of my frustrations. Who was he to put himself on the plane of Allah by depicting the world from his eyes rather than through His own? How dare he insult the tent of the great *sheikh* with such blasphemy? I spit fire upon him in my wrath.

The old Frank was careful and respectful with his reply, which pleased me. He said, "God gave me this brush so that I might recreate the joys of His children, not for His own joy; for the beauties He has known are too great for me to ever express." I was taken aback, as the words of this wise old man had truly stirred me. Promptly I sent him away and pondered in my tent. Laid out before me were fifty bizarre camels to keep company. After an eternity of bafflement, finally I saw my herd as I knew them, smelled their musk and relived our journeys. I wept for my happiness.

And so, up until his death, the old Frank brought me much delight with drawings of all manner of things. He even drew the becoming portrait you see before you today. When the herd moved I bound them up in skins and kept them with me, and they were my greatest sources of gladness and reminiscence.

When I was an old man, my raiding party was captured by a squad of brash janissaries. Searching my person their captain found my drawings, including the portrait of myself I often gazed at to remember what it felt like to be young and strong. Naturally he found them highly offensive and heretical, and so I died by his sword that very day. He gave the drawings to a miniaturist, who happened to be in accompaniment by request of the Sultan, and ordered that they be destroyed. But the miniaturist served his art more than he served the Sultan, and hid the paintings away for their novelty. When times were tough the drawings had to be sold, and it is after a most long and arduous journey that I arrive here before you today in this dim coffeehouse.

So, friend, I do not implore or expect you to gaze upon me with the same loving glare you show the beardless boy on your knee. I know what I am, a bizarre depiction by Frankish Infidels, and I used to see myself in the same way you must be seeing me now. But know at the least, my friend, that once I was a great man.

UNDERNEATH THE BERET: THE REALITY OF THE U.S. SPECIAL FORCES IN VIETNAM

Alex DiGregorio

The many branches of the United States military have always challenged individuals to push their own limits. Join up, they say, and be a part of something big, powerful and unique. "Be All You Can Be," the Army asks its prospective soldiers. "Aim High," the Air Force challenges pilots. "Semper Fi," vow the Marines. All claim to be able to push a man beyond his normal abilities, to hone him and make him something more. All have reputations for being able to do just that. But, since the 1960s there has been one military group whose reputation surpasses the rest. This group has been able to hold the interest of all kinds of people, from war buffs and conspiracy theorists, to simple video gamers and moviegoers. A mystique has been built around them and so, to many who would hear of them later, their actions would become exaggerated into legend. This group is the U.S. Army's Special Forces, and Vietnam was the setting for their activities. But, what is the truth about what happened there? Where can we draw the line between actual military operations and exaggerated pop culture nonsense? What were these people *really* capable of? The answers lie in the accounts of the soldiers themselves.

FACT OR FICTION?

Looking at the reality of the situation, one can easily see why the Special Forces became iconic. For a moment, imagine a group of six men moving silently through a dark jungle. They are predators, despite being far away from home and deep in enemy territory. They are camouflaged to the point of being invisible, and quiet as ghosts. They hunt the enemy, despite being outnumbered and outgunned, and they are known to be lethally dangerous. In 1990, Tim O'Brien novelized this through the eyes of regular infantry in Chu Lai. "Secretive and suspicious, loners by nature, the six Greenies would sometimes vanish for days at a time, or even weeks, then late in the night they would just as magically reappear, moving like shadows through the moonlight..."[1] There was an air of mystery about them, even among the rest of the military who were, for the most part, oblivious to their orders. For some time that knowledge was kept tightly sealed. Stars and Stripes, the military newspaper, admit that at the time they would not have published anything regarding the activity of the Special Forces. However, despite the secrecy and general ignorance of the public, the popularity of these units skyrocketed.

For years following the peak of Special Forces activity in Southeast Asia, American culture spawned numerous imitations of their actions. In film, Sylvester Stallone's Rambo character (1982) perpetuated the image of a super soldier who could do anything and may as well have been able to win the Vietnam War alone. Francis Ford Cop-

1 Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried (New York: Broadway Books, 1990) 92.

pola's Apocalypse Now (1979) was also highly regarded and accepted. Re-released in 2001, it still garners praise about being an accurate depiction of the war and a cinematic triumph.[2] However, the image that prevails in the minds of moviegoers is that of Martin Sheen riding into battle on a helicopter blasting "Ride of the Valkyries" under a CO who is more concerned with surfing the ocean than with the gunfire exploding overhead. Even later, video games like those in the Metal Gear series or Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell would allow players to assume the role of a Special Forces operative who can tackle terrorists and prevent destruction on a global scale apparently single-handedly. G.I. Joes take on fictional enemies without sustaining injury. The list goes on, and such mediums do not really depict the role these men took in very real conflicts.

In 1965, in the midst of the war, Robin Moore released what would probably be the most influential piece of material about the topic, his book, The Green Berets. Unlike the fantastic accounts which would come later, Moore's work was an accurate depiction. He had spent time training and in combat with the Special Forces in Vietnam. What he wrote, though published as a work of fiction, would be the first first-hand account of Special Forces activity in the war, and it would tell the story well. His accurate information about the scope of such activity irritated both the CIA and the Army, but his revelations were devoured by the readers. Moore sold an estimated 3.5 million copies and would follow this up by contributing to a film adaptation of the same title (starring John Wayne), and the hit song, "The Ballad of the Green Berets."[3] Though the popularity of these early works may have contributed to the perpetuation of "Rambo" stereotypes later on, they also mean that people did want to know the truth about the Special Forces in Vietnam.

So, what is the truth? By the time Vietnam exploded, the U.S. Special Forces were indeed well prepared and exceptional soldiers, but they were not war gods. They were the product of a great deal of forethought and field testing for which it is almost impossible to find a starting date. The United States has always leaned on special force teams when conducting war, going back to colonial times. In every war since before the American Revolution, such teams have been created and maintained to perform the odd jobs that each conflict would require. However, Vietnam was the first instance in American history where such teams were already in existence and active before the conflict escalated.[4] Through decades of trial and error, the military had come up with something specialized that worked in this kind of an atmosphere, and was prepared to deploy even before regular infantry would be sent to Vietnam.

2 Peter Travers, "Apocalypse Now: 2001 Redux," Rolling Stone, 20 Jul. 2001, 27 Nov. 2007 <http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/5947625/review/5947626/apocalypse_now_2001_redux>.
3 Special Forces Association, "Biography of Robin Moore," Robin Moore's Library, 2003, 26 Nov. 2007 <http://robin.sfa38.org/robin_moore.htm>.
4 Reynel Martinez, Six Silent Men (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997) xvii.

THE MODERN SPECIAL FORCES: CREATION AND EXPANSION

The first Pacific Special Forces teams were created under President Eisenhower in 1952. By 1956, there were several small groups, many based out of Okinawa, Japan, and deployed to all parts of the Southeast Asia region. Some, like the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment, would be so covertly created that the unit was even given a false name and disguised as regular army.[5]

Under Eisenhower, the Special Forces were very much a product of the Cold War. The 14th, again for example, was a 16-man group, which existed primarily to counter a possible Sino-Soviet invasion into Southeast Asia. The unit would be expected to collect what information they could on the enemy and keep them tied up and engaged, preparing for the eventuality of one or more nuclear strikes.[6] Their purpose was primarily disruption, and their first major fields of activity were Korea and Taiwan. Though the chance to fight Soviets would never come, their smaller scale activities in Asia would be more successful than anyone expected. Chuck Allen, a commander in Project Delta, claimed, "Special operations, if done right, can tie up a large enemy force or paralyze guerilla operations with a few small teams...You can tie up one province with an outfit like Project Delta with only thirty or forty Americans in it. And that's all you're exposing to the enemy."[7] In a way, it was like taking the guerilla tactics enemies like the Viet Cong used against Americans and turning the tables on them.

In order to do what they did, U.S. Special Forces really needed to be the best the military had to offer, and their training regimen shows it. Though in the 1950s and 60s there was no set procedure for training new recruits, there was a 14-week time period in which they went through all manner of preparation. We can get some insight into what was done by looking at the modern training procedure still used by Special Forces. Not only is selection rigorous, but training consists of two intense segments. Phase I training is intended to ensure the applicant is capable of wilderness survival on his own. It encompasses map reading and patrolling, as well as basic Special Forces tactical training.[8] This is on top of the fact that units are expected to train together. As such, when new members join a unit, it is not uncommon for the unit to be put through basic training again and again. Some claim to have done it more than half a dozen times, and after enough of this, responses to many combat situations become second nature.[9]

Phase II is intended to specialize each soldier into a unique part of the team. Special Forces teams are expected to have a diverse array of skills, and Phase II training encompasses five basic fields: command, engineering, weapons, medicine and

5 Shelby L. Stanton, Green Berets at War (New York: Ivy Books, 1985) 3.
6 Stanton, 3.
7 Al Santoli, To Bear Any Burden (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) 151.
8 "Phase I Training," Special Forces Search Engine, 2007, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://www.training.sfahq.com>.
9 Santoli, 151.

communications.[10] Also during Phase II, soldiers are trained for proficiency in certain infiltration methods. Underwater insertion and High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) parachuting are common examples. Recruits are also expected to be able to speak one language besides English.[11]

Despite the high level of instruction and specialization, there was a serious drawback to becoming a part of the Special Forces in the 1950s. The common view was that, in the nuclear conflict that seemed inevitable during the Cold War era, the need for such units as the Green Berets was questionable at best. Though skilled, their use in such a war could not feasibly be seen as anything more than an interesting but ultimately useless attraction. As such, to most officers early on, the beret was synonymous with the death of one's military career.[12] However, their usefulness in the Southeast Asian conflicts would change that.

Throughout 1960, Special Forces units enjoyed numerous successes in the Southeast Asian region, and the newly elected President Kennedy took interest. On March 25th of the next year he presented a special message to Congress. Though the message encompassed many proposals for advancement and modernization, particularly in the military, he included a clause for the advancement of the Special Forces projects in Asia. "...our special forces and unconventional warfare units," he said, "will be increased and reoriented. Throughout the services new emphasis must be placed on the special skills and languages which are required to work with local populations."[13] By June, Army cooperation allowed a 3,000 man increase to "counterinsurgency forces" in the region.[14] President Kennedy then made a visit to observe the operations himself and was impressed with what he saw. In September, the 5th Special Forces Group, the unit which would eventually encompass almost all Special Forces activity in Vietnam, would be activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.[15] Following their activation, resources would be directed more and more away from the early theaters of the Southeast Asian conflicts, and into South Vietnam.

EARLY ROLE IN VIETNAM

In studying the Special Forces it is imperative to distinguish their role as soldiers from their role as instructors. "Emphasis is usually placed on the role the Special Forces played as soldiers in Vietnam," the Army admits. This is in line with their gung-ho, overblown reputation. But, the scope of their activities encompassed so much more.

10 "Phase II Training," Special Forces Search Engine, 2007, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://www.training.sfahq.com>.
11 Stanton, 6.
12 Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 79.
13 John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, 30 Nov. 2007, <http://www.jfklibrary.org>.
14 Stanton, 14.
15 Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1989) 5.

"They were soldiers and good ones. But they were more than soldiers; they were, in a way, community developers in uniform too."[16] Throughout the course of the war, Special Forces members took up positions as military advisors and instructors to two particular groups in South Vietnam.

The first group America was looking out for was, plainly, the South Vietnamese. Soldiers in South Vietnam's "Army of the Republic of Vietnam" (ARVN) would work with American military advisors from their initial arrival in the 1950s until the last troops were pulled out in 1973. However, Americans never thought very highly of the South Vietnamese and, in fact, it is a commonly given suggestion that they were much more responsible for the loss of the war than the American military. This is due to accusations that the ARVN was a poorly trained military group, and that they were afraid to fight.[17] These reasons are probably why many Americans saw the eventual need to take the war out of their hands later on.

Much of the American influence was spent on groups of tribal mountain people, called Montagnards. The Montagnards had had an excellent relationship with the French, who had gone to great lengths to ensure Montagnard land rights during their reign in Vietnam.[18] As such, Montagnard appreciation of Caucasians carried over when the Americans began to appear in the 1960s. Complimenting this appreciation, the Montagnards had a severe dislike for the Asian Vietnamese. The relationship between these two races is commonly compared to that of Native Americans and European settlers earlier in American history. However, the Americans were able to use this dislike to their advantage. "The Americans discovered that Yards needed little inducement," ex-Green Beret George "Sonny" Hoffman recalls. "It was enough to say, 'We'll show you how to kill lots of Vietnamese.' The challenge then became keeping the Yards pointed north."[19]

It was this racial prejudice that gave birth to the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program in late 1961. Until the Americans arrived, the South Vietnamese, for reasons of such prejudice, made no attempt to enlist the Montagnards as allies. This was unacceptable in the eyes of Americans, for three reasons. First, the Montagnards were a powerful and untapped resource. Second, their tribal lands in the mountains could be useful strongholds against Viet Cong infiltration. Third, if the VC got to them first, they would become an incredibly dangerous enemy.[20] With these concerns in mind, the Special Forces got permission from the Vietnamese government to conduct

16 Vietnam Studies, 18.
17 Robert K. Brigham, ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army, Apr. 2006, 4 Dec. 2007 <http://www.kansaspress.ku.edu/briarv.html>.
18 Stanton, 42.
19 George "Sonny" Hoffman, "Mountain People," Sonny Reflections, 1994, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://www.vietvet.org/mountain.htm>.
20 Vietnam Studies, 19.

the "Buon Enao Experiment." The experiment offered to exchange training and equipment to the Montagnards in that region for their loyalty to the government, and it was a success. CIDG built off this model and started here.[21]

The program expanded to defend outposts and villages throughout South Vietnam from VC insurgency. Once a village was brought into the program, it would serve as a training ground for several other villages, and CIDG worked outward that way. The Green Berets trained their new Montagnard allies in many of their stealth and combat tactics, and let them loose in the jungle. As it turned out, the natives were quite adept at this type of guerilla warfare. "The jungle is where the Yards really shined," Hoffman said. "The jungle was home. Watching them operate in that environment was awe inspiring...They could tell if people were nearby—hiding, moving, or sleeping—simply by the sounds the animals and insects made."[22] Perhaps it was because the Montagnards were such adept guerillas that they became such an integral part of the American Special Forces effort. Not only did they make up the primary body of CIDG, but the Yards were intertwined in other Special Forces bodies, like MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Studies and Observations Groups).

It was not until later in the Vietnam War that the Special Forces expanded on their roles as trainers and defenders to actually become aggressive. In late 1966, the Green Berets were called on with their CIDG allies to attack interior Viet Cong infiltration routes, and began to set up camp in enemy occupied territory.[23] In this time period, their duties became more and more dangerous and diverse, and we can begin to see a turn toward the activities that earned them their reputation.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING AND ESPIONAGE

As the Green Berets became more aggressive, other specialized programs were put into place, which were designed solely to operate in a more aggressive manner. In October of 1965, the first Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) was formed.[24] LRRPs were more along the lines of Tim O'Brien's secretive and shadowy units than the typical Green Berets; volunteer groups within the Special Forces who assembled teams of only six men. These six men would enter jungles in enemy territory alone and attempt to locate and map out Viet Cong patrol locations and strongholds. Once found, these strongholds would become the targets for air strikes and bombing runs, catching VC completely off guard and never presenting more than six American soldiers to the enemy.

Not only were the LRRPs extremely successful in their reconnaissance, but the units as a whole took an incredibly few number of casualties throughout the entire course of the war. There are both procedural and technical reasons for why this was

21 Vietnam Studies, 25.
22 Hoffman, "Mountain People."
23 Stanton, 131.
24 Martinez, 2.

the case. From a procedural standpoint, the units worked out remarkably well. There was nothing in history to lay down precedent for how units like LRRPs should operate, except Delta Force which had not been in existence itself very long before this. The first LRRPs practiced their own techniques and came up with their own solutions to problems they expected to find in the field.[25] Over the course of time, tactics became solidified more and more, and Delta Force eventually produced a recon manual to be distributed amongst operatives that offered tips and advice about all aspects of unconventional warfare. This manual helps illustrate realistically how a competent Special Forces recon team not only operated, but survived.

The first key aspect of Special Forces reconnaissance was movement. These men had to keep in mind that they were not the only trackers in the jungle. The Viet Cong often had patrol units operating in the areas Delta Force or the LRRPs were looking to infiltrate. So, it was important that movement be erratic, to make their trails harder to follow. Several techniques were put into place that had a team moving in boxes, circles, or figure eights. By constantly changing direction, not only might a team disorient anyone trying to follow them, but they were also constantly crossing over their own path. This increased their ability to spot such individuals, and allowed them to prepare their own ambushes in the event that they were necessary.[26]

Patience was a virtue among Special Forces in Vietnam, so reconnaissance missions could not be rushed. As such, it was important to lay down procedure about remaining in position overnight (RON). Competent teams would move into an RON position in the aforementioned way, circling it first so they make sure they were not being followed into an area where they intended to spend the night. From these positions they would not be able to eat food or smoke, lest the smells give them away. They would not be able to make transmissions back to base, lest the transmissions be monitored and their position compromised. Delta Force did not overlook any detail. Sleeping would be in shifts. A buddy system would be in effect. If a team member spoke in his sleep, he would be gagged. The team would leave the RON site before the sun rose so as not to be caught with their pants down.[27] Tactics like these allowed recon teams to remain effectively invisible.

Patrolling in search of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong camps was one way of getting information on the enemy, but there was another large aspect of recon life. The best source for such information was the enemy themselves, and so Delta Force had extensive protocol as far as seeking out potential prisoners of war (PWs). First, there is a 9-step procedure for how to actually go about abducting a prisoner, which covers everything from blindfolding and cleaning his wounds, to extraction to the landing zone (LZ).[28] The pros and cons of different "snatch sites" were also

25 Martinez, 12.
26 Project (B-52) Delta, Special Forces Combat Recon Manual: Republic of Vietnam, 27.
27 Project (B-52) Delta, 16.
28 Project (B-52) Delta, 19.

covered, which suggest the circumstances under which a PW should be taken from either a road or a trail. Protocol seriously advised against ever snatching a PW from a village unless serious preparations had been made, serious reason existed, and immediate infiltration was available.[29] For the most part, it was difficult for such a team to continue their operations while at the same time looking after a PW. So, usually after obtaining one, extraction would immediately become the next objective.

These tactics, as well as dozens more (how to survive a firefight, how to procure an LZ, etc.) set a standard that doubtlessly helped countless men survive against the odds in the Vietnamese jungles. The other aspect of the American advantage, though, was their technology. There is no question of training or procedure here; this is just a clear cut distinction the American forces had over the North Vietnamese. Special Forces used this advantage in many ways to strike at the enemy in ways they couldn't take advantage of.

The most significant technological advantage used by recon teams was the helicopter. This machine allowed for insertion or extraction without maintaining anything on the ground that might become a target for enemy fire. At first, these maneuvers were a quick and convenient way to move Special Forces teams around, but as the war progressed the enemy became sharper about what the choppers were doing. For obvious reasons, it was standard operating procedure for LRRPs and other such units to leave LZs immediately after insertion. But, later on, these precautions were not enough and new, innovative ways of planting teams into enemy territory became necessary. Eventually, it became common that helicopters not even touch down on the ground, but rather allow recon teams to bail out on low passes. The VC retaliated against this by planting punji stakes in tall grass and areas that would be likely American LZs.[30] Americans also began sending multiple helicopters that would touch down multiple times to keep the enemy confused about where a drop would actually occur. Deception was an absolute necessity. Other methods of insertion were used of course, including watercraft and parachute drops, but helicopter insertions were the most versatile, the most common, and unfortunately, the most expected. Operations were thus usually undertaken at sunset, so the ensuing darkness would then contribute to the survival of both chopper and recon team.[31]

Though enemy contact did occur (and more frequently than was usually desired), this is where the real Special Forces can be distinguished from mock-ups like Rambo. Hoffman likened combat in Vietnam to an automobile accident. It can either be head on, or you can be blindsided. It happened most often in the rain and in the dark, and when it did communication and coordination were near impossible.[32] As such, LRRPs

29 Project (B-52) Delta, 21.
30 Vietnam Studies, 143.
31 Vietnam Studies, 143.
32 George "Sonny" Hoffman, "Combat 101," Sonny Reflections, 1994, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://www.vietvet.org/combat.htm>.

and other recon teams did not do their best work in open combat, and were usually encouraged to use tools like white phosphorous (WP) grenades and claymore mines to cause havoc and disengage when confronted by the enemy.[33] Teams would either retreat into concealment, or return to an available LZ for removal. However, though the option for emergency helicopter removal was available (and always required to be by Special Forces command) it is true that the vast majority of special operations, until the later years of the war, would not suffer from hasty or forced evacuations.[34]

The Special Forces' greatest technological weapon would often be called into play in order to assist in such retreats. This weapon was the air strike, and it was more pivotal to jungle combat than any tactic or maneuver that Special Forces units knew themselves. The ability to call in an air strike allowed for an entire arsenal of explosives and machine guns to suddenly reinforce the few men who found themselves stranded in the jungle surrounded by hostiles. Helicopters or planes would then be able to open a path for a unit under siege to escape into cover or retreat.[35] Air strikes were also used when a recon patrol managed to stumble onto a VC army or base. They were capable of removing the enemy without ever requiring the patrol to engage, and thus, not endangering the men's lives.

Like any good Cold War battlefield, combat was not always an open confrontation. Espionage was prevalent on both sides, and played a major role in the war. Reconnaissance efforts also existed within the Special Forces to place spies into Viet Cong units, and to root out those placed in South Vietnam.

Throughout the 1960s, a major thorn in the side of the joint American-South Vietnamese forces was Hanoi's VCI (Viet Cong Infrastructure) cadre. The cadre was active in many South Vietnamese towns, and actively recruited to the northern side. They also tended to cause problems by assassinating local southern politicians and leaders, as a way of driving the South Vietnamese from certain regions. By 1967, it is estimated that they numbered between 70,000 and 100,000 members.[36] Needless to say, Special Forces did not leave this problem unchecked. In 1967, the military formed the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program (ICEX), which a few months later would be reorganized and renamed Project Phoenix. Phoenix's goal was to establish a presence in towns and regions that the VCI had been procuring over the previous years, to gather evidence against suspected VCI members, and to "neutralize" (capture, arrest or kill) them. Operating hand in hand with a mirror organization in the

33 Project (B-52) Delta, 17.
34 Vietnam Studies, 146.
35 Project (B-52) Delta, 18.
36 Dale Andrade and James H. Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future", Military Review, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Apr. 2006, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/MarApr06/Andrade-Willbanks.pdf> 17.

South Vietnamese military, the Phung Hoang, Phoenix managed to neutralize a total of 81,740 Viet Cong between 1968 and 1972 (when they were most active), killing 26,369 and dealing serious damage to the VCI.[37]

Project Phoenix, however, was surrounded in controversy. Some claim that the program did not do enough to target high level VCI, and didn't neutralize anyone of great value. Others accuse it of being an "assassination bureau," committing murders and moral atrocities without significant reason or payoff.[38] It really is uncertain how well Phoenix performed in the grand scheme, but there are two indicators that it was a success. First, the statistics speak for themselves. Secondly, ex-leaders of the Viet Cong have admitted at this point that Phoenix was both effective and "extremely destructive" to their cause in the south.[39]

On the other hand, American spy efforts were not particularly organized or extensive. The racial differences between Americans and Vietnamese made it difficult to do that kind of thing, but Delta Force had access to the only ARVN Airborne Ranger battalion in existence, and did actually use it for some espionage. They would dress their soldiers in Viet Cong garb and send them out to mingle with the enemy and gather information. There is no real documentation of the effectiveness of such programs, but Delta Force commander Chuck Allen recalls having to strip careless soldiers of provisions like chocolate bars and oranges that had given them away to the Viet Cong in the past.[40] If this is any indicator, these endeavors were not particularly successful.

TAKING THE FIGHT TO THEM

SOG arguably was the most aggressive Special Forces group to be introduced into the war. Taking members from other Special Forces programs, this group was actually responsible for crossing the borders and fighting the NVA in their own country, Cambodia and Laos. Because of some of these locales, SOG's operations remain some of the most secretive in Vietnam. But, these missions presented the opportunity for a bit of a role reversal among the two militaries, and the Americans enjoyed the opportunity to be on the offensive for a change.

SOG first got the opportunity to prove itself through Operation "Shining Brass" in 1965. Shining Brass had patrols along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos tagging NVA outposts for air strikes, in an attempt to stop their movement down into South Vietnam. The bombing runs were a great success.[41] This also marked another landmark in American strategy in Vietnam. Before this point, recon teams had not been used to do

37 Andrade and Willbanks, 20.
38 Andrade and Willbanks, 20.
39 Andrade and Willbanks, 21.
40 Santoli, 148.
41 John L. Plaster, SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998) 39.

this sort of cooperative work with bombers. It began here, and would be widely used in future campaigns throughout all the theaters of the Vietnam War.[42]

SOG was also responsible for attacks on camps, weapons caches and coastal defenses that otherwise would have gone unhindered in enemy territory. They, more than anyone else, tried to do to the NVA what the Viet Cong were doing to Americans in the south. The argument has been made that the Special Forces' greatest strength was not in brute force, but in diversionary and indirect means. Here, SOG thrived. The practice is called "psy-ops," or psychological warfare. In the south, the Viet Cong did this in many ways. They would hide among and strike from the common population to hide their numbers and membership. They would lay booby traps to terrorize American patrols and kill morale. In the north, though, Americans played this game. Hoffman recalls his stint with SOG as such:

> We did recon, of course, but in addition we gave the enemy a dose of their own medicine. We mined their trails and planted false orders that moved units under B52 strikes. We found ammunition stockpiles and doctored rounds to explode in mortar tubes or in gun barrels. Some of their grenades blew up in their hands. We also destroyed much of their stockpiles and poisoned their food. We showed them how it is done by true professionals, and they hurt from the lesson.[43]

The effort to booby trap NVA weapons and ammunition was called Operation "Eldest Son." Eldest Son had SOG operatives carrying tampered ammunition into the field and leaving it not only in the caches, but more frequently on the bodies of KIAs who the enemy was sure to search for equipment. The rifle rounds were designed to backfire into the head of the person shooting the rifle, and were usually hidden among a cartridge of fully functional rounds. The mortar rounds were designed to explode in their tubes.[44] As it turns out, these rounds were near impossible to detect among functional ammunition, and the NVA distributed it widely. SOG celebrated when they would hear reports of regular infantry coming across an enemy who prematurely lost a firefight when his rifle exploded in his hand. The regular American military never understood why these things happened. The NVA were also not keen to the sabotage, and believed the faulty ammunition was the result of Chinese manufacturing errors. That, of course, was the work of SOG propaganda as well.[45] Vietnamese faith in their weapons and in their officers was greatly shaken by this project until the sabotage efforts were called to a halt in February of 1970.[46]

42 Plaster, 50.
43 George "Sonny" Hoffman, "The Loudest Noise," Sonny Reflections, 1994, 30 Nov. 2007 <http://www.vietvet.org/noise.htm>.
44 Plaster, 133.
45 Plaster, 135.
46 Stanton, 219.

Another successful psy-op used by SOG was the creation of a radio station which made disheartening broadcasts to NVA soldiers. They believed these transmissions were coming out of Hanoi, but it was really a masquerade hosted out of Saigon. The Special Forces distributed dummied radios called "peanuts" in much the same way they did their tampered ammunition. Peanut radios tended to tune into SOG's station over just about anything else, but SOG pirated common radio frequencies as well, so they could be heard from any radio. They would talk about topics like the government sending northern students abroad for "advanced study." This served to disillusion their soldiers, who were the same age but, instead of enjoying scholarships to foreign countries, were enjoying a brutal war in the south. They made soldiers long for home on the Tet holiday, and killed morale. This tactic even served to earn them defectors.[47]

Other operations spanned from forging counterfeit money and documents (which served to place blame on northern officers who were probably trustworthy) to kidnapping fishermen off the rivers and turning them into spies in an American run organization (called the "Sacred Sword of the Patriot League").[48] Though success of these programs is obviously difficult to measure, there are some indicators that psy-ops were effective, mostly from the mouths of NVA officials themselves. When later asked about the biggest threat the U.S. offered during the war, the southern NVA force commander admitted that it was the border teams like SOG. They forced him to divert 100,000 men to protect supply lines that would have been better used for other jobs.[49] Also, before Hanoi would agree to peace talks with the U.S. at the close of the war, they specifically demanded the immediate halt of psy-ops projects, with particular emphasis on the Sacred Sword of the Patriot League.[50] All indicators point to SOG causing significant harm to the northern war effort, enough to be recognized by the north, and to be considered a serious problem.

WHY DID WE LOSE?

In light of the efforts made by the men in the Green Berets, as well as the great successes of the regular infantry in circumstances like Tet '68 when conventional fighting occurred, it seems absurd that the U.S. military could not have come out on top in Vietnam. However, this failure ties very tightly into the very nature of the U.S. Special Forces. It has been suggested that their greatest strengths did not lie in their actual soldiering, but in a number of other means of spying, deceiving and misleading. Such activities were necessary because that was the nature of this war; a guerilla war which thrived on the unconventional. But, the U.S. government did not

47 Plaster, 130.
48 Plaster, 123.
49 Hoffman, "The Loudest Noise."
50 Plaster, 138.

embrace this sort of combat as its primary war effort. North Vietnam did, and while the U.S. military might have been comprised of 90% conventional army and 10% Special Forces, the NVA and Viet Cong would have been just the opposite.

North Vietnam ran their own psy-ops projects, which were made infinitely more successful by the already irritated attitude of the American public toward the war. Truong Nhu Tang, the NLF Minister of Justice, claimed, "...the American media is easily open to suggestion and false information given by Communist agents. The society is completely hypnotized by the media.[51] Negative sentiment was turned into a weapon used by the enemy against the U.S. By feeding America information that further reduced the popularity of this war, they could directly increase the pressure to remove the military. The U.S. was a nation that could, at any time, say "to hell with this," and be removed from the situation. This was not the case with the North Vietnamese. They had a vested interest in the war, and they had the resolve to keep it going despite the hindrances caused by programs like SOG and Phoenix.

Dan Pitzer, a former POW of the Viet Cong, recalls a certain tactic they used. They would show him and his fellows anti-war publications made in the United States. *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* provided constant source material. They also forced them to listen to Radio Hanoi each night, which broadcast American anti-war speakers as a morale booster to the citizens of North Vietnam. "What was being published in the U.S.," Pitzer says, "was much better propaganda than anything the Viet Cong could write. And while it was disheartening for us, it was a real boost to their self-confidence."[52]

The activities of the U.S. Special Forces ranged from trainers, to intelligence collectors, to saboteurs and soldiers. Their efforts took place on and off the battlefield, sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes behind a desk. Though they were capable of armed combat, often the successes attributed to them were usually a result of their adaptability and creativity. While the Special Forces were not the gung-ho, super soldiers they would be made out as later, they were still excellent at what they did. But, their role in the war was that of support; support for a military that was not on target as best as it could have been, and was not appreciated by the citizens at home. They came out popular because of the nature of their work, and the secrecy that allowed people to use their imaginations when considering them. They would be overblown into an action phenomenon that intrigued millions. But, as successful as the Green Berets, SOG, the LRRPs and the other programs all were, the reality is that they were not enough to turn the tides in this very unpopular, very unconventional conflict.

51 Santoli, 165.
52 Santoli, 160.

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