

## A NEW KIND OF AMERICAN SOLDIER

By ROBIN MOORE

Author of "THE GREEN BERETS."

THE PHOTOS ON these pages show some of our anti-guerrilla specialists in Vietnam, along with many of the native Vietnamese whom they have trained to battle the Viet Cong. All of our armed forces and many of our overseas civilian agencies are now getting more training in "special warfare"—which has civilian as well as military aspects. Here we focus on a special breed of American soldiers, uniquely trained to help natives fight back against the whole spectrum of organized communist terror and disruption. They are the men of the Army's Special Forces, a military arm first created at Fort Bragg, N. C., in 1952, and built up rapidly in recent years on orders of the late President Kennedy.

The men of the Special Forces are rugged, self-reliant, resourceful, mature professional soldiers—so incredibly trained, so remarkably able and so selflessly dedicated that a group of them as small as a dozen men can go into an enemy hinterland by itself and remain indefinitely to carry on both the military and civilian aspects of our new counter-insurgency warfare against the red terror.

Off and on since 1952 you may have read about these men in green berets in the hairy-chested men's magazines. You probably learned that they are rough and tough and can eat snakes if they have to. True enough, but hardly the half of it. Every man jack of them is a paratrooper first. In fact, when I wanted to train with them and go overseas with them as a civilian writer, in order to produce my book, "The Green Berets," they made me start by earning my own jump wings with the airborne troops at Fort Benning, Ga. Small wonder. Their favorite way of going somewhere is by airdrop. A "leg" (a man not qualified to parachute) could hardly travel anywhere important with them.

As a paunchy writer, 17 years out of the WW2 Army Air Force, parachuting at Fort Benning was a rugged go for me. But as a result I was able (a) to train with the Special Forces at Fort Bragg,

(b) to go on maneuvers with them, and (c) go with them to Vietnam, along the Mekong Delta and up into the hills to live with the "Montagnard" Vietnam hill people (known as "Yards" to the Special Forces men), and go patrolling with the Yards and the Green Berets against the Viet Cong.

The intelligence and resourcefulness of the Green Berets—and their ability to absorb a fantastic amount of special training—far outrank their muscular prowess. On a single patrol in Vietnam I watched Sergeant 1st Class Robert Pronier repair a captured red Chinese machinegun for use against the enemy; handle all radio communications with his unit; make an area assessment complete with photographs; operate on a wounded Viet Cong we captured, removing a bullet from his arm; and then win the Bronze Star with Valor by leading his Montagnard irregulars head-on into a communist ambush, so that purely by bold action the ambush was ambushed instead. This was on a patrol where Pronier, with about 50 Montagnards, went out from their village on a foray into Viet Cong territory with me tagging along. We went through the thickest brush and forest, keeping off the trails. (Just try *that* routine in the nearest thicket to your home for six days.) We set up several ambushes in which we routed overconfident VCs. We burned a VC jungle headquarters and made a frontal attack on a party of VCs by a river (where we took our prisoner). We stayed so many days in VC territory that the enemy—especially eager to get back the prisoner or kill him before he talked

too much—finally ambushed us. It was then that they were overrun by the Pronier-led charge. The party got back to the village without losing a man. All the villagers plus 12 Green Beret men and I had a whopping Yard-style celebration that night. It goes without saying that Pronier and his chums (who'd been operating another patrol at the same time) were able to talk with the Yards in a common language. The Montagnards weren't members of the South Vietnam army. They were remote, undefended Rhade mountain villagers, harassed for years by the communists. The 12-man Special Forces "A" team had organized them into an armed force. On patrol, Pronier never asserted leadership except in moments of crisis. Diplomatically he left it to the newly-trained Montagnard headmen to prove their teaching and lead their own people.

By then I'd been with the Green Berets so long that I'd learned to expect Pronier's competence in any Special Forces sergeant.

The first time I was with them in action was during the 1963 Army maneuvers in North and South Carolina, called Swiftstrike III. On the first day of the war games a Special Forces team infiltrated the woods around Pope Air Base, the air center for the entire Army exercise. That night, with mortars and demolitions, they completely "destroyed" the air base and all the planes. Gen. Paul D. Adams, commanding general of U. S. Strike Command, was astounded. He nullified the destruction of Pope so that

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the games could go on. The following morning, when he entered his top security office, he found a note signed by the Special Forces. It read, "We wuz here, you iz dead!"

A little more than a year later, the communists used the same tactics that my friends had used to "destroy" Pope Field—to wreak real and terrible damage on our airbase at Bien Hoa, near Saigon, Vietnam. When the news broke, the Green Berets I was with shook their heads and asked, "When will they ever learn?"

Such experiences, plus a tendency to regard the Special Forces as an "elite corps," have created strained feelings on occasion within the Army. Their green berets weren't official when the Special Forces first affected them, and in 1956 they were ordered not to wear them. But President Kennedy felt that our country had to build up better counter-insurgency forces and their *esprit de corps*. Among other things he made the green beret the official headgear of the Special Forces.

NEVERTHELESS, the Special Forces are not an "elite corps." They're a part of the regular Army with a highly specialized function. The officers (now about 2,000 in number) are regular Army officers who take three-year tours of duty with the Special Forces, some electing a second tour for six years in all. The enlisted men—now more than 8,000—can make a whole Army career of Special Forces. There's a lively ten-year club among senior sergeants who have watched their officers come and go. The proportion of sergeants to lower non-com ranks is extremely high, since in action every man has to be a leader. In addition to the regulars there are now about 10,000 Special Forces reservists who take the fantastic training as weekend warriors.

Today the 1st Special Forces Group is based on Okinawa. Many of its teams have had duty in Vietnam. Some of them have trained native Vietnamese Special Forces in their own image. The Vietnamese units also proudly wear berets. In the Vietnamese mountains and valleys, units of the 1st have gone out beyond the regular Vietnamese army battalions to organize guerrilla and anti-guerrilla bands among the villages and tribes; they have brought medical aid and education; reopened harassed transportation routes, and got the disrupted means to food and income going again. Late in 1964, the units of the 1st in Vietnam were augmented when the entire 5th Special Forces Group moved out there from Fort Bragg.

Vietnam is nothing to what the Green Berets would jump into in a major war.

In the event of war with Red China itself, the "Okies" of the 1st would, says a quotation in an Army book on special warfare, "form Red-hating loyalists into marauding forces—in China, North Korea or wherever—which can bleed the Communists' strength from within. . . ." Their first problem would be "to vault the battle lines in order to reach Asian freedom fighters." To that end, the 1st has long been practicing battle-order air-drops with full equipment on flights from Okinawa to friendly areas in Asia.

The 10th Special Forces Group has a similar mission from its present base at Bad-Tölz, Germany, where it conducts field exercises in the Bavarian mountains. In the event of a big war in Europe "these volunteers," says Army Magazine, "are ready and waiting for a signal that will send them anywhere from 200 to 2,000 miles inside enemy territory. Working in small detachments they will there contact local groups of friendly guerrillas to begin military operations for which they have been thoroughly and uniquely trained."

Four more Special Forces Groups are operational today. The 3rd, 6th and 7th are at Fort Bragg. The 8th is in Panama, where the Army runs its Jungle Warfare School. It has quietly organized natives against insurgent armed groups in the interiors of several Latin countries—always at the invitation of the host nation. Colombia recently announced that the 13-year-old "Independent Kingdom of El Pato" in its southern hinterland—a notorious, illegal, armed stronghold—has been eradicated. Colombia had earlier invited the 8th to teach its beleaguered peasantry, constabulary and soldiery how to deal with the hit-and-run warfare of the deep jungle. For obvious reasons, many operations of the Green Berets around the world are secret. So as not to give anything away, let's just say that U.S. news media have already published reports of American "counter-insurgency" aid, which may or may not have involved the Special Forces, in such places as Venezuela, Chile, Guatemala, Iran, Ethiopia, Mali and the Congo.

The following story is true in all its essentials, except that I have obviously faked all the names and twisted some of the details for security reasons.

Several years ago it looked as if the strategic "Republic of Walrus" would be overrun by communists. Capt. "Herbert Ambrose" (now a Lt. Col.) arrived in Walrus as an invited guest, with a Green Beret 12-man "A" team that was part of a special mobile group organized at Fort Bragg. This wasn't Vietnamese-type warfare, it was a counter-insurgency intelligence-directed

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operation. Ambrose and his men went up into the mountains of Walrus that bordered on the red-run nation of "Killum."

FOR THREE FULL years Ambrose's little team provided a classic example of Special Forces action in independent operations. The regular army of Walrus was ineffective, while the border tribesmen—or "Boogoo"—could fight like mad. But the Boogoo hated all lowlanders—Walruses and Killums alike. However, the communists over the border in Killum had been terrorizing the Boogoo, raiding their villages and shooting chiefs who refused to order their people to work and fight for the Killum army or the red guerrillas in Walrus. So the Boogoo hated the communists most of all.

Ambrose and his team joined a large Boogoo community under a chief named "Badger." They immediately armed and trained the Boogoo men and gave them the necessary political indoctrination to resist communist propaganda. With three well-trained companies of Boogoo warriors, Ambrose could take two companies out on raids and ambushes and have a third company to guard the now-fortified fields and villages where the Boogoo grew their crops. Ambrose and his men achieved two remarkable results in the Boogoo community. First, they made the independent Boogoo people loyal to the U.S.-backed government of Walrus. Second, they took such a heavy toll of communists who had to pass through the Boogoo country in their efforts to capture "Grimshaw," the capital of Walrus, that the reds negotiated a "peace settlement" with Walrus' political leaders. This was a terrible settlement. Foreign arms were withdrawn from Walrus, and Ambrose had to leave Chief Badger disarmed, in spite of his pleas that the reds would be back to punish his people. Finally, Ambrose begged to be detached from the U.S. Army and go back to Chief Badger on his own. The Boogoo were overjoyed to have their old friend back. He retrained them and began to collect arms from non-U.S. Army-anti-communists. As predicted, the communists in Killum suddenly violated the agreement on Walrus. Thinking it fairly defenseless, they marched across the border again. Ambrose, Badger and three fierce companies of armed Boogoo slowed them down so much that the reds lost the surprise value of breaking the agreement. The lowlands of Walrus were strengthened with U.S. help before they got there. On top of that, Badger's men captured two "Sovchin" officers, proving to the world that a major communist power was part of the

armed attack on Walrus. Today, Walrus is still free, though not out of danger.

When I first joined up with the Green Berets to see how they could turn out men like Ambrose, Pronier and their teammates, the 12-week Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg seemed short to me. How could you become a one-man army in that time, as the men's magazines indicated? I took the course with a group of officers, and there learned that it was just the end of a long trail for the enlisted specialists. Before he gets to that stage, every Green Beret is already an airborne infantryman, and on top of that has had fantastic training in a host of specialties. Almost every man has completed studies in one or more foreign languages at the Fort Bragg language center. A basic two-officered, 12-man Green Beret "A" team will go into action with two enlisted specialists each in: (1) Demolitions, (2) Intelligence and Operations, (3) Medicine, (4) Weapons and (5) Communications. Each enlisted man is cross-trained in the other four specialties and qualified in at least two of them besides his own. No wonder Sergeant Pronier could be an intelligence officer, a surgeon, an infantry officer, a weapons specialist and a communicator on that Vietnam patrol! The depth of the training has to be seen to be believed. The enlisted medic, for example (already a parachuter and an all-around infantryman with a foreign language under his belt, and destined to qualify in two non-medic specialties and have some training in two more), gets 35 weeks concentrated medical training in two Army hospitals. He goes into the Special Warfare School with what has been officially described as the skills "of a regimental surgeon," able to treat battle casualties, do emergency surgery and handle infections and common ailments. To that he adds the basics of the missionary doctor and the clinical instructor—able to hold sick call for isolated civilian groups out of his drop-kit, deal with exotic diseases, and teach natives to become guerrilla medics. If he chooses Weapons for one of his other specialties, he'll join the weapons specialists in their eight-week study of U.S. and foreign weapons, coming out with the ability to field strip American, British, German, Russian and Chinese guns of all types. He may also be able to use a bow-and-arrow or any other weapon used by any people anywhere. If Communications is his third specialty, he'll absorb the substance of the 14-week communications course, dealing with radio equipment of all sorts, cryptography, and sending and receiving Morse code at a minimum rate of 18 words per minute.

Only senior sergeants can take the Operations and Intelligence course. It's

a 16-week brain bender, whose graduates become the team leaders, next in line to the officers. Besides learning photography, finger printing, all forms of interrogation, tactics and methods of agent recruiting, the Operations sergeant must learn the elements of command that West Pointers get. Only in this way can a small "A" team become the equivalent of a colonel and his staff to as much as a regiment of foreign irregulars, to lead them in surreptitious operations in enemy territory, and also to create them as a fighting unit out of raw civilians in the first place.

All of this training would be fairly useless if the men lacked the ingenuity to apply it in original ways under conditions that no training could anticipate. In Vietnam I watched an Operations sergeant secure a trustworthy South Vietnamese undercover agent. In areas where the Viet Cong had tortured and murdered villagers, the sergeant photographed the remains of the pitiable victims. Then he patiently went looking for relatives. In Saigon he showed a Vietnamese pictures of the mutilated remains of both parents and brother. The sergeant had his Green Beret agent on the spot—literally with a vengeance.

I'D BEEN AT Bragg but a short time when I realized how far afield the idea is that the Special Forces are a bunch of tough, rambunctious, young adventurers. They spoke very little to me until I got to know them intimately, and I adjudged them taciturn. Nor were they young. While their ages ranged from about 20 to over 50, the average must be well in the 30s. They were all pro's who had volunteered from other branches of the Army. A high percentage came from the airborne units. I learned that young toughs who think this might be a great career for them are quickly weeded out. One of the slogans of the Special Warfare School is "Maturity." Instead of being tough talkers, even the young men among them were mature for their years, quiet, dedicated and competent. Most of the Green Berets are happily married and have growing or grown children. They look upon themselves as nothing more than professional men with a highly demanding job to do. But their general opinion of their wives is that they are remarkable women. When I got to know them better I, too, fell into their short, noncommittal, dry-humored kind of conversation that reveals little unless the listener already knows what's being said. They weren't taciturn after all. The loose tongue is simply the Achilles heel of the guerrilla warrior.

Perhaps 10% of the Green Berets are naturalized citizens, born elsewhere. The rest, native born, are American descend-

ants of Europeans, Africans, Latin Americans, Arabs, Syrians, Polynesians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, American Indians, or you name it. There's not a country in the world where some members of the Special Forces don't look like natives. Americans of non-European appearance are proving extremely valuable in operations with friends in the tropics and Asia. Highly competent American Negroes in Green Berets are able to produce quick rapport in dealing with these overseas allies and in educating them.

These men of many backgrounds operate in tight, mutually loyal teams as mature Americans. There's no room for conflict or sensitivity among men whose missions are so delicate and exacting. Recently I talked with a film producer who was trying to come up with a popular movie on Special Forces loaded with internal conflict. First he tried to produce a "race-prejudice" conflict between a Negro "A" team captain and his white executive officer. I told him it wouldn't wash. Next he tried to have a by-the-book West Point captain feuding with his militarily unorthodox exec. When I told the producer that this was unauthentic and an insult to the team loyalty of the Special Forces my career as a movie writer ended before it began.

**T**HE GREEN BERETS just have too much to do, in a dangerous and demanding calling, to take time out to act like children for Hollywood.

Here's a piece of Green Beret life in Vietnam that covers just 24 hours. There's no room in it for fighting among themselves. I arrived at "Odd Zooks" (fake name) on the Mekong Delta in the evening, by helicopter. Met the Vietnamese major and his American counterpart, Capt. Perry De Gracia, a short, aggressive, totally competent Special Forces officer of Filipino descent. It was near ~~His~~ Chi Minh's birthday, and we were on the lookout for signs of a communist celebration attack building up in the villages and rice paddies surrounding Odd Zooks. Early in the morning I went out on an 80-man patrol, led by a Vietnamese lieutenant and advised by two U.S. Special Forces sergeants. Four miles out we ran into an ambush and fought through it, going straight on. Radioed the news back to our "A" team at Odd Zooks. They radioed the "B" team at "Bye-Bye" (fake name), which was the local headquarters commanding all the "A" teams in the Mekong Delta. Intelligence experts on "B" team checked our report against others coming in from other "A" teams, trying to see a pattern of communist guerrilla activity.

Less than a mile farther on from Odd Zooks, about 200 Viet Cong guerrillas pinned us down with small arms and

automatic weapons. We fought back fiercely and radioed Odd Zooks, which radioed Bye-Bye of our predicament. The "B" team at Bye-Bye called in armed helicopters and fighters. Pinned down in a mucky ditch, only our M-79 grenade launchers—lovingly called "elephant guns"—kept us from being overrun. As soon as the air cover arrived the Viet Cong disappeared and we got back to Odd Zooks with only light casualties. Full information was radioed to Bye-Bye, and relayed from there to the Special Forces Operating Base in Saigon, whose operations and intelligence rooms hourly plotted the course of the war of the Green Berets throughout Vietnam.

That night Bye-Bye radioed us that Saigon, from all available reports, expected an attack on one of the "A" teams in the Delta—maybe us. We kept a 100% alert, and as the night wore on strange lights appeared in the fields all around us.

"It's the VC," De Gracia muttered. "They're getting ready for something." Bye-Bye radioed in that other "A" teams also reported lights and fires ringing their fortifications—so it was too early to know where to send air cover. But very shortly, we at Odd Zooks were under an intense mortar barrage. We told Bye-Bye and Bye-Bye told Saigon. Saigon answered that all the camps to the north were quiet. If we needed extra air cover in the Delta, Saigon stood by to request it. It was reassuring, in the midst of the mortar barrage, to know that the whole chain of Special Forces command was watching us closely. As Odd Zooks responded with a heavy barrage of its own on the communists, Bye-Bye reported that it was committing all available air cover to us. Twenty minutes later the rice paddies were lighted by flare ships as fighter planes bombed and strafed the VC. The attack was broken up and soon the planes were going home, ready for the next call from "B" team. Early next morning Bye-Bye sent in helicopters to take out six men who were too badly wounded to remain. Shortly afterward, Saigon sent in a load of supplies from the enormous warehouse at its logistical center in "Gorblimey" (fake name), 250 miles to the north. Thus ended a routine 24 hours of tight teamwork.

**A** FEW MORE vignettes of how the men really spend their time:

At Buon Mi Ga, I sat in a first-grade class in which a Special Forces teacher was getting a grandfather, father and young son to compete for promotion to the second grade—in a schoolhouse the Green Berets had built. While advising 500 tribesmen on combat with the communists, the Special Forces team at Buon Mi Ga also built fortifications, taught water purification and hygiene, and were

restoring the village economy by shipping out genuine Montagnard crossbows for sale in American Post Exchanges. Meanwhile, constant patrols were building up the loyal population of the town and taking needed civilians away from the communists by bringing in outlying Montagnards who'd been pressed into the service of the Viet Cong against their will to serve as fighters and farmers. I went on one such patrol. After four clashes with the Viet Cong we brought back 50 new residents.

At another camp I saw Green Beret medics, along with Vietnamese and Montagnards they'd trained, giving 300 people a day the first medical care that most of them had ever had in their lives. An American Negro, Sergeant Wisbone, was the chief medic of this team. Medical aid, more than any other single service, is winning the loyalty of rural populations to the central government supported by the United States. The communists destroy. The Americans, when they aren't fighting, build.

**T**HERE ARE strident public voices today which cry that we can't beat communist guerrillas. Americans have fought successfully on both sides of guerrilla warfare since before the American Revolution. Communist guerrillas were beaten in Greece, and have been defeated elsewhere. The way to beat guerrillas is so well known that it is old hat. You press them without letup. You meet them on their own grounds with men who know how to do it. You must have the local people on your side. The French lost Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for lack of local support. They were harried on all sides and couldn't even find out what was going on. The communists complicate the problem by offering a safe haven in a bordering country, and a supply route from there for men and matériel.

President Johnson has said that the South Vietnamese can handle the problem in their country when North Vietnam is cut off from helping the Viet Cong. So long as the South Vietnamese are taught how to do it, the President's statement conforms to all experience with guerrilla warfare throughout history.

There's even something bigger than that in our growing ability to deal with "special warfare" when it is forced upon other people. For the day may come when aggressors who dread to use the big bomb may find they will have to shy away from local warfare too, anywhere in the world. That day may come when they find that native populations—strengthened by American aid resources, and led and trained by American specialists wearing green berets—aren't pushovers any more.

THE END