



A Team Effort: The Montagnard Uprising of September 1964

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

THE Montagnard Uprising of 1964, was a complex event with the potential to alter the course of the Vietnam War. The one constant during this political and military maelstrom was the efforts of Special Forces soldiers, noncommissioned officers and officers, that defused the situation. The eight-day Montagnard uprising was just a “blink of an eye” in the fifteen years of American involvement in Vietnam, but had a lasting impact. This event will be explained from the perspective of a single Special Forces team.

American Special Forces (SF) teams built a close relationship with the Montagnards in the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Suddenly, on Sunday, 20 September 1964, the American soldiers were jolted into a new reality

“Yard” is an abbreviation of Montagnard. It is a term of endearment used by the Special Forces soldiers who worked with the Montagnards in Vietnam. The CIDG units were called “Strike Forces.” The Montagnard soldiers were referred to as “strikers” by the SF advisors.

when the friendly “Yards” revolted against the Vietnamese government. The U.S. Special Forces soldiers watched in horror as their trusted allies killed or imprisoned their Vietnamese Special Forces “commanders” and other Vietnamese present in four CIDG camps. In some camps, the Montagnards imprisoned the American SF

teams. However, in one camp, Buon Brieng, the teamwork, quick response, and resourceful actions of one A-Team prevented a takeover; the Americans remained in control, and ultimately defused the uprising. This article features Special Forces Team A-312, 1st Special Forces Group (1st SFG), based in Okinawa, Japan. Sent to train, advise, and lead Montagnard irregular soldiers against the Viet Cong in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, A-312’s experience typified that of many other SF teams in Vietnam in 1964. Although this article

centers on Team A-312, it also encapsulates the early role of SF in the CIDG program in Vietnam.¹

In the Central Highlands, the Special Forces and CIDG fought two groups, the Viet Cong (VC) and the Viet Montagnard Cong (VMC). The VC were ethnic Vietnamese who traced their lineage to the Viet Minh, the communist movement that fought the Japanese and then the French for Indochinese independence. The VMC were ethnic Montagnards who worked with VC units in the region. While the Viet Cong had pressed many Montagnards into service, others were trained as a political cadre by the communists to organize the Montagnards to fight against the Vietnamese government. Their targets in the Central Highlands were the American-supported CIDG camps.²

Five CIDG camps surrounded Ban Me Thuot. They were organized as light infantry battalions. Depending on recruitment, the Strike Force battalions varied in strength. Buon Brieng had the largest force, with five companies. The other four camps had between three and four companies. Each Strike Force company was organized as a light infantry company with a small headquarters and four platoons of thirty Montagnards armed with surplus World War II weapons.³ American Special Forces teams advised the CIDG units in conjunc-

The scope and level of American involvement in Vietnam would change from 1960 to 1965, moving from an advisory role to the deployment of major conventional forces after 1965. Prior to 1965, Special Forces A Teams established camps and trained primarily Montagnard tribesmen (as well as Nung, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) as part of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. The CIDG units formed a counter-guerilla force to fight the Viet Cong. From 1961 to 1964, teams from the 1st and 7th SFGs (from Okinawa and Fort Bragg respectively) rotated in six-month temporary duty (TDY) tours in Vietnam.

tion with their Vietnamese SF counterparts.

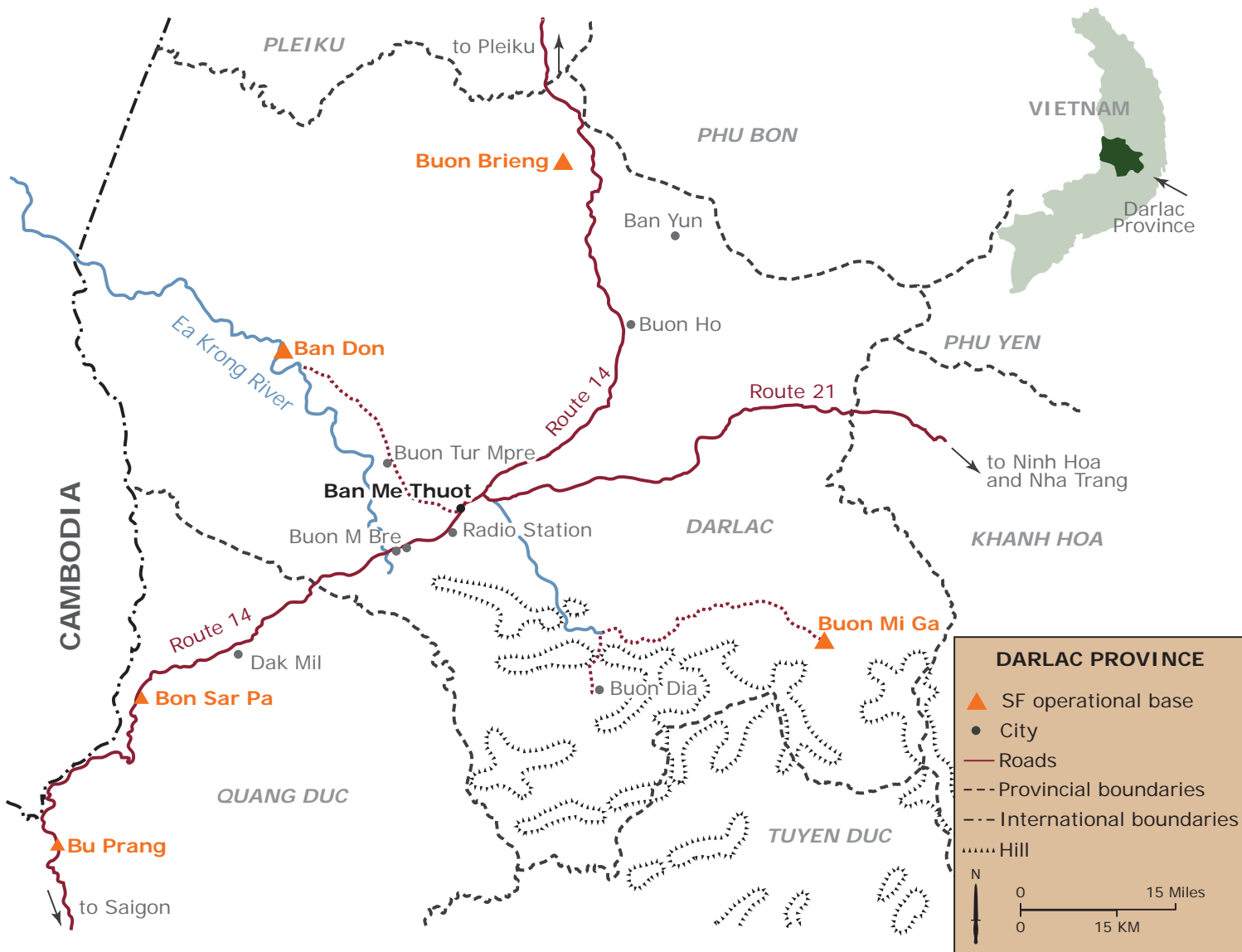
Officially, *Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt* (LLDB, the Vietnamese Special Forces) teams were in charge of the CIDG at each camp. American SF were only there to advise the Montagnards, but in reality, they commanded and led the CIDG companies. The LLDB were content with this arrangement and rarely left camp. Every camp had an assigned area of responsibility. The belief was that as more camps were established and patrols expanded, the Viet Cong would be driven out of the area.⁴ The Montagnards were the key element of the CIDG program, but they also hated the Vietnamese because they had “invaded” their territory.

In many of the CIDG camps throughout Vietnam, a strained relationship existed between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese Special Forces (LLDB). When Captain Gary A. Webb and Team A-311B arrived at Bu Prang on 27 August 1964, they discovered a major problem. The LLDB were “in cahoots with the merchants in the ‘ville’ [village] to cheat the troops,” and “instead of paying the troops, [the Montagnards] were given credit in the ‘ville’ for food, clothes, wine, or whatever at a particular shop . . . and the bill was sent to the LLDB Finance

Officer or NCO. The individual’s account was debited by the amount he owed in the ‘ville,’” recalled Gary Webb.⁵ The scam enabled the LLDB and the ARVN (Army of South Vietnam) Camp commander to pocket part of the CIDG payroll. The American SF invariably found themselves in the middle between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards.

The Montagnard uprising of September 1964 did not occur in a vacuum. The spring and summer of 1964 was filled with “political conspiracies; attempted military coups; and Buddhist, Catholic, student, and labor demonstrations and protests.”⁶ At the end of the summer, General Nguyen Khanh seized power, by coup, in Saigon.⁷ The uprising cannot be written off as a mutiny against South Vietnamese authority and the traditional oppression of the Montagnards. It was a combination of both during a turbulent period. The center of the Montagnard population was in the II Corps area of operations around the city of Ban Me Thuot, the traditional Montagnard capital.

The Montagnard organization, “*Fronte Unifié Pour La Libération des Races Opprimées*” (United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races—FULRO) planned



the uprising against the South Vietnamese government. It would take place in the Ban Me Thuot area of the Central Highlands in Darlac province. When Ban Me Thuot became predominately Vietnamese in population, the Montagnards migrated deeper into the highland regions. The mountains surrounding the city were filled with villages of traditional Montagnard longhouses. According to the FULRO uprising plan, the Montagnard strikers would seize the central five CIDG camps in the II Corps Tactical Zone (Buon Mi Ga, Bon Sar Pa, Bu Prang, Ban Don, and Buon Brieng). This would start the eight-day open rebellion against the South Vietnamese government.⁸

The second phase of the FULRO plan called for the strikers from all five camps to seize and secure control of Ban Me Thuot. The Montagnards would leave a nominal security force at each camp, while the majority of the units established blocking positions on the roads to Ban Me Thuot or moved into position to seize the city. Once the city was secured, the FULRO leadership planned to negotiate with the Vietnamese government to regain the political autonomy enjoyed under the French. Although it was a loose coalition/confederation, every camp was critical to the success of the uprising.⁹

During the night and early morning of 19–20 September 1964, the Montagnard CIDG troops in all five camps executed—without warning—the well planned phase I of the uprising. At four camps (Buon Mi Ga, Bon Sar Pa, Bu Prang, and Ban Don), the Montagnards disarmed

Left to right: front, Sergeant First Class Billy Ingram and Sergeant Ron Wingo; back row, Sergeant Burhl Cunningham, Sergeant Lowell Stevens, and Specialist Fifth Class Ricardo Davis.



and restricted their U.S. Special Forces advisers to their billets. In the fifth, Buon Brieng, the Strike Force did not harm the Vietnamese nor disarm the Americans.¹⁰ Because of the events at Buon Brieng and the proactive measures taken by the Special Forces there, the overall uprising failed.

In September, Team A-312 was over halfway through its six-month TDY tour in Vietnam that had begun in June 1964. “Typical” of many Special Forces A Teams in Vietnam, A-312 recruited, trained, led into combat, and suffered casualties with their Montagnard irregulars. Aggressive patrolling led to the team’s first casualty. On 23 July 1964, Specialist Fourth Class George Underwood, the junior medic, was killed in a VC battalion-sized ambush while leading a resupply convoy back from Ban Me Thuot. Specialist Fifth Class Ricardo Davis was his replacement from Okinawa. “In the Rhade tribe, men’s names began with a ‘Y.’ Since Davis arrived with a buzz cut or ‘burr’ haircut, someone nicknamed him ‘Y-Burr,’” said Sergeant Lowell Stevens. It stuck for several years.¹¹ When Sergeant First Class Billy Akers was transferred to B-52 Delta, a classified reconnaissance project, Sergeant First Class Billy Ingram became the medical sergeant.¹² The team continued to execute their mission while incorporating the new members.

A-312 built a strong rapport with the CIDG and the Vietnamese Special Forces. The newly appointed Montagnard battalion commander, Y Jhon Nie, was a product of two worlds; his father was French and his mother Montagnard. His mother had raised him as a Montagnard before being sent to a Catholic boarding school. There he learned French and English. After completing school, he returned to the Montagnards because he was still discriminated against by the lowland Vietnamese. He joined the CIDG and rose rapidly through the ranks as a combat leader. When A-312 arrived at Buon Brieng, in June 1964, he was Sergeant Earl Bleacher’s 3rd Company commander. Y Jhon soon rose to be the battalion commander.¹³

After three months, the SF of A-312 had bonded closely with their Yards. Buon Brieng was exceptional. The relationship between the Vietnamese and Montagnards was good. That was the case until “leading up to the uprising there was something going on, but we couldn’t put our finger on it. The Montagnards were edgy,” said SGT Bleacher. “Several [of the Montagnards] had asked us the question, ‘If the Vietnamese fought the Montagnards who would you side with?’”¹⁴ Team commander, Captain Vernon Gillespie, radioed his concerns to the SF B Team in Pleiku and to SF Headquarters in Nha Trang. The issue was significant enough that he followed the radio messages with coordination visits to Nha Trang and Saigon. However, the Americans had no solid intelligence, “it was just a shadow,” Gillespie remembered.¹⁵ That shadow soon emerged from the darkness on 19 September 1964.

On 18 September 1964, A-312 received a surprise guest. Howard Sochurek, a World War II combat pho-



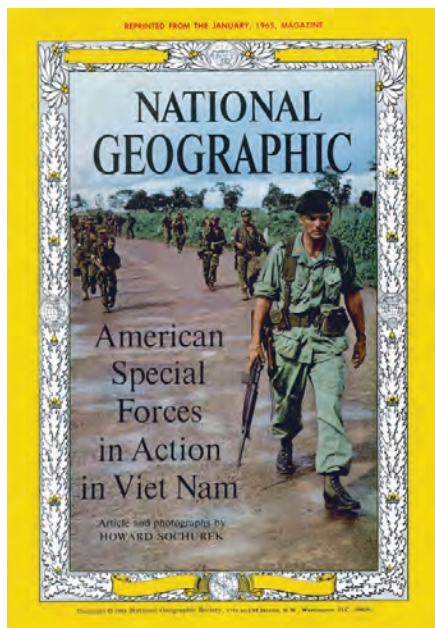
First Lieutenant John T. Horn and Sergeant Earl Bleacher. Both would play an important part in stopping the uprising.

tographer and career journalist, came to research the Montagnard tribes and write an article for *National Geographic* magazine. Sochurek proved to be lucky. He was the only American journalist in the area when the uprising started. The first thing the Vietnamese government and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) did was to restrict all movement into the area, thus keeping the press out. His exclusive story was featured in the January 1965 issue of *National Geographic*.¹⁶ Sochurek was there when it erupted.

CPT Gillespie was well respected by the 1st SFG soldiers. He was an experienced leader who demanded excellence from his team. At the same time, he expected the NCOs to do their jobs and fully supported them. His standards were clearly articulated to the Americans and Montagnards. The Yards (who were considered

simple hill people by the Vietnamese) were keen observers of leadership. The Americans, led by Gillespie, set the example; the Montagnards emulated the Special Forces.

The first official notice of a potential problem that CPT Gillespie received was a radio message on Saturday afternoon (1310 hours), 19 September 1964. The B Team in Pleiku alerted teams throughout the area that there could be Montagnard demonstrations on either the 19th or 20th. The reason for the demonstrations was to show support for an autonomous Montag-



National Geographic cover showing Major Edwin Brooks leading the rebels away from the radio station. The photo was taken by Howard Sochurek.

Howard James Sochurek (1924–1994)

by Charles H. Briscoe

BORN in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1924, Howard J. Sochurek attended Princeton University before serving in the Pacific during World War II. As the 3234th Signal Photo Detachment commander, Second Lieutenant Sochurek covered the 77th Infantry Division from Guam through its invasions of Leyte and Cebu in the Philippines and Okinawa. After a stint as an Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) photo officer, he was the photo assignment officer for General Douglas MacArthur in Tokyo.¹

Discharged as a First Lieutenant in June 1946, Sochurek joined the *Milwaukee Journal*, working as a staff photographer until hired by *LIFE* magazine in September 1950. The combat veteran was quickly dispatched to Korea where he joined the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team to parachute behind enemy lines at Sukch'on on 20 October 1950. His photos of the airborne assault and subsequent capture of P'yongyang, the North Korean capital, were featured in several issues of *LIFE*.²

From Korea, Sochurek journeyed to Malaya, Burma, India, and then French Indo-China to cover that colonial war. There, the intrepid photo journalist parachuted into the beleaguered French fortress at Dien Bien Phu. As the only American photographer on the scene to record the final surrender to the Viet Minh and subsequent Communist takeover of North Vietnam, *LIFE* had exclusive coverage. Sochurek's photos of the Indo-China war merited the Overseas Press Club "Robert Capa Award" for "superlative photography requiring exceptional courage and enterprise" in 1955.³

After working in several *LIFE* domestic and overseas bureaus that included Paris and Moscow, Sochurek became the first photographer to serve as a Nieman Fellow in Journalism at Harvard, 1959–1960. Production of a documentary film, "X-Pilot," on American rocket plane test pilots was followed by *LIFE* coverage of United Nations operations in the Congo in 1961, and the build-up of U.S. support in South Vietnam.⁴ The return to Southeast Asia marked the beginning of a second long tour in the region for Sochurek. While documenting America's training effort in the Republic of Vietnam, Sochurek captured early Special Forces work with the Montagnards in the CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) for *National Geographic*.⁵

This anecdote reflected Howard Sochurek's philosophy about a photo journalist. One evening while on bivouac in Vietnam, an American officer asked him, "Why do you come out here? You don't have to do it." Before he could respond, another officer spoke up, "I don't know the answer, but maybe I can guess. If there are people

out here—both Americans and Vietnamese—fighting and dying, there should be somebody to tell about it.” Sochurek agreed that it was the best answer that he could give.⁶

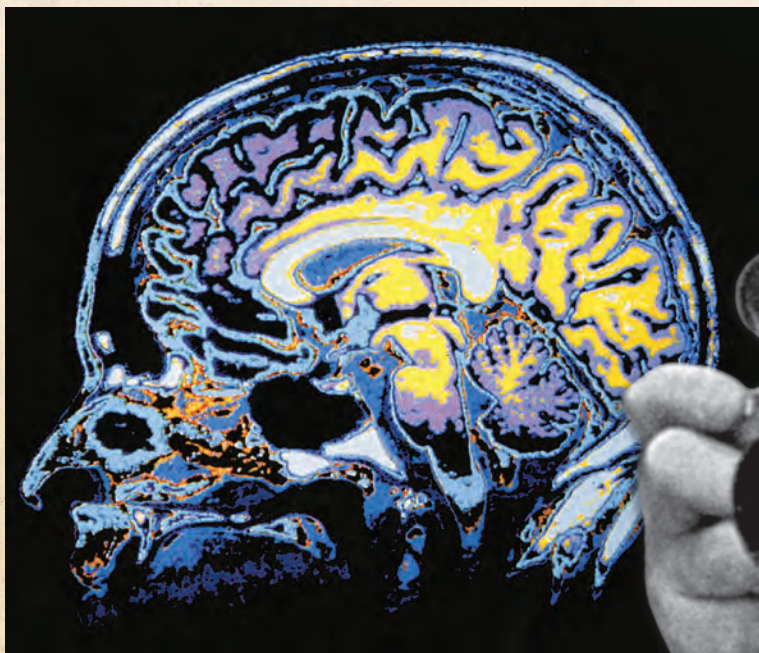
Howard Sochurek’s photographic revelations in *LIFE* covered Russian geography and life, Mongolia between the major Communist powers, New York City slum schools, harsh realities of a Norwegian fishing village, the war in Vietnam, and the multiple Asian religions.⁷ His fascination with the indigenous people of Southeast Asia continued well into the 1980s with *National Geographic* assignments.

Since he was a pioneer in television news, the photo journalist realized that the growing popularity of this communications media would spell the demise of weekly photo news magazines like *LIFE* and *LOOK*. During an investigation into the future of imaging, printing, and electronic press production for Henry Luce and *TIME/LIFE* in 1965, Sochurek was introduced to computer graphics. He was ready to adjust his forté to capitalize on the wonders of the Electronic Age.

Working on his own in New York City in 1970, Sochurek began exploring his “electronic palette” to produce color pictures more vivid than real life color. Electronic photography could assist doctors save lives by helping them to diagnose major diseases early in their onset. He worked side-by-side with engineers and doctors to enter into the human body with sound, magnetic, and heat waves as well as X-rays to make picture records of conditions rather than resort to exploratory surgery. After his article, “Medicine’s New Vision,” appeared in the *National Geographic*, January 1987, twenty-one children’s lives were saved. When you think MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), think Howard Sochurek.

Photography is a chameleon of art and science. It can save lives and win battles. It is limited only by the imagination of the person behind the camera, and Sochurek placed no limits on his.⁸

- 1 “Sochurek to Korea,” *TIME/LIFE Inc.* news release, undated, courtesy of Tania Sochurek, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Howard Sochurek, “Camera Records a Combat Jump,” *LIFE*, Issue No. 19, 6 November 1950, 36–38; Howard Sochurek, “In the Wake of War,” *LIFE*, Issue No. 19, 6 November 1950, 39.
- 3 William Littlefield, *LIFE* Promotion, “Howard Sochurek Bio,” 6 June 1962, courtesy of Tania Sochurek, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 Littlefield, “Howard Sochurek Bio.”
- 5 Howard Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” *National Geographic*, January 1965, and Howard Sochurek, “Viet Nam’s Montagnards Caught in the Jaws of War,” *National Geographic*, April 1968, respectively. Thanks to Tania Sochurek, this *Veritas* article contains many of the unpublished photos taken by Howard for these *National Geographic* articles.
- 6 Littlefield, “Howard Sochurek Bio.”
- 7 “Sochurek on Life,” *TIME*, Inc., 1966, courtesy of Tania Sochurek, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 John Durniak, “Life Cycles: Photo Pioneer: Howard Sochurek—The Hidden Universe,” *PhotoPro* (May June 1994), reprint courtesy of Tania Sochurek, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



nard state. They were expected to be peaceful.¹⁷ As soon as he received the warning, Gillespie spoke with Y Jhon, his Montagnard Strike Force battalion commander. Y Jhon assured Gillespie that there would not be a problem at Buon Brieng.¹⁸

Throughout his military career, Gillespie had been taught to think ahead and plan contingencies for the “what ifs” that might happen during operations. The entire team embraced this philosophy, whether planning for a weapons range or a combat patrol.¹⁹ Throughout the uprising period, the Americans in Buon Brieng were thinking and acting faster than the Montagnards as well as American decision-makers in Nha Trang and Saigon. The A-312 SF soldiers not only had the “ground truth,” but they also dealt with the Montagnards on a day-to-day basis. Based on the experience and the recommendations of his NCOs, CPT Gillespie knew that if the team controlled the ammunition, denied the Montagnards the use of the vehicles, and protected the Vietnamese Special Forces, it could maintain control of the camp. Gillespie thought out these priorities mentally on Saturday night before he went to bed.²⁰ As a precaution, he ordered the two on-going patrols back into camp.

The team members on one CIDG patrol were surprised by the recall message. Sergeant Ron Wingo remembered, “I was on a company-sized operation with First Lieutenant [John T.] Horn and received a message [from Gillespie] to return to camp immediately. I did not understand this, but did not question or ask why. We walked most of the night and arrived at camp in the early morning [20 September].”²¹ The Americans on the other patrol had a different experience, never getting the message to return.

Sergeants Lowell Stevens and Burhl Cunningham were leading the second patrol. Stevens noticed the Montagnards had been talking on the radio more than normal. The men also seemed uneasy. Suddenly, the patrol stopped moving. After a short, yet intense, communal discussion, the Montagnard strikers turned around and started back to camp. They ignored the protests of the

Americans. Stevens and Cunningham tried to explain the predicament to Buon Brieng. Their radio calls went unanswered.²² The Americans were forced to either follow the Montagnards or stay alone in enemy territory.

On the way back to camp, the two Americans “heard a large amount of gunfire, grenades, and mortars in the distance off to the west. “It sounded like either a fire-fight or a firepower demonstration by the Viet Cong,” said Stevens. “I was certain they were staging to attack the camp.”²³ After a rapid foot march, the patrol reached Buon Brieng in the afternoon. “When we arrived at the camp, we didn’t know what to expect,” said Stevens. “Nothing was really out of place, but then I noticed the flag was not the South Vietnamese one. It was something else.” It turned out to be the FULRO confederation flag, a symbol of the Montagnard uprising.²⁴

Sunday was usually a relaxed day in the camp. The first patrol had just returned and Gillespie was getting a haircut when he received an urgent message from the B Team alerting him to problems at the other CIDG camps. “At 0830 hours [20 September], I called Captain Truong, the *Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt* (LLDB), Vietnamese Special Forces commander, and Y Jhon [Y Jhon Nie], the CIDG battalion commander, into the team house. I informed them that for the time being and until further notice, I was taking command of all forces at Buon Brieng. A Montagnard revolt had started. [I told] Y Jhon, ‘Do not move against the Vietnamese here. They are under my protection. To kill them, you’ll have to kill me first,’” said Gillespie.²⁵ The Montagnards knew that Gillespie was a man of his word and that the other Americans would follow him unquestioningly.

Afterward, CPT Gillespie assembled A-312 in the team house. “He informed us that under no circumstances would we be disarmed and [that we] would fight if any attempt [were] made to take our weapons. The Vietnamese SF would not be harmed and we would protect them at any cost,” said SGT Wingo.²⁶ “We gathered all the ammo we could carry and went to our respective duty stations.” The acting team sergeant, Sergeant First Class Gene Bell, gathered the Vietnamese LLDB and brought them inside the SF team house. The potential for VC sympathizers in the Strike Force was another concern.

Gillespie told Y Jhon, the battalion commander, “There were some of the Strike Force I was suspicious of. So I told Y Jhon to bring his family to a building in the U.S. perimeter with six trusted strikers to protect the family.”²⁷ Once his family was safe, Y Jhon announced that there would be a ritual sacrifice at 10 A.M. Both Gillespie and CPT Truong would participate as his guests of honor. In times of crisis, the Montagnards referred back to their traditional ways.

To get rid of “bad spirits,” a sacrifice had to be made by the Montagnards. Animal sacrifice was a significant part of their religion and culture. Animals from chickens to water buffalo were killed, depending on how serious the problem was deemed. Part of the ritual included drinking Montagnard rice wine, *Nhom Pae*.



Sergeants Burhl Cunningham (left) and Lowell Stevens (right) on patrol with one of the CIDG companies.

“Montagnard women would chew the rice for a while and spit the mixture of rice and saliva into large ceramic jugs,” said Stevens. “The saliva was a fermenting agent for the wine.”²⁸ The number of jars of *Nhom Pae* measured the importance of the ceremony; seven jars were the highest level. The entire Montagnard camp participated. The ceremony for Y Jhon, CPT Truong, and CPT Gillespie merited seven jars of *Nhom Pae* and the sacrifice of a water buffalo, plus other animals (a pig and several chickens). It was extremely significant in the eyes of the Montagnards.²⁹ Howard Sochurek, the photo journalist who had come to the camp to document Montagnard culture, was permitted a rare opportunity to view a ceremony.

Sochurek was taking photos when Y Jhon, Gillespie, and Truong stepped out, dressed in traditional Montagnard clothing for the two-hour ceremony. As Gillespie, Y Jhon, and Truong drank *Nhom Pae* through long reeds, a Montagnard shaman chanted and daubed their bare feet with the blood of the sacrificed buffalo to drive the evil spirits away. At the same time, “Montagnard women danced in the background to the tune of brass gongs.”³⁰ When the ceremony ended, the shaman placed identical copper bracelets on the wrists of Y Jhon, Gillespie, and Truong to symbolize the bond of brotherhood and friendship. The three soldiers from different cultures were now joined together as allies. The “bad spirits” mollified, the Montagnard camp went back on a modified work schedule.³¹ After the ceremony, a sense of calm permeated the camp.

In the meantime, with the word of the uprising still in its early stages in other camps, the NCOs of A-312 moved into action. “Captain Gillespie told me to disable all vehicles in the motor pool,” recalled Wingo. “We had five or six 2½-ton trucks and three ¾-ton vehicles and a couple of jeeps.”³² “I knew that we might need them again, so I simply removed the carburetor jets.”³³ One ¾-ton with a .30 caliber machinegun was left in operation just in case the team needed to escape.³⁴ His work on the vehicles done, Wingo went back to the radio room. “There was a frenzy of activity in the radio room. Y Jhon Nie was talk-

Captain Vernon Gillespie, Y Jhon, and Captain Truong walk through the camp together to the sacrifice ceremony.



ing at great length with the other camp leaders on the TR-20 radio. It got very heated at times. I couldn’t understand what was being said, but it was very intense,” remembered Wingo.³⁵

The other FULRO Montagnard leaders wanted the Buon Brieng force to join the attack on Ban Me Thuot and block Route 14, to stop the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) reaction forces from Pleiku. Y Jhon refused to join the Montagnard uprising. “Y Jhon spoke fairly good English and was briefing Captain Gillespie on the situation and what [was happening in] the other camps. It appeared to me that the bulk of the troops [in Buon Brieng] seemed somewhat confused,” said Wingo.³⁶ The camp’s link to the outside world was the communications center (or “commo bunker”). The two communications sergeants, Wingo and Bell, were helped by SGT Bleacher because Bell, the senior radio-man, was the acting team sergeant. “The radio traffic was heavy. The B and C Detachments wanted regular sitreps [situation reports],” remembered Wingo.³⁷

From the radio, the A-312 soldiers learned that everything was not going as well at other camps. They heard from the Bu Prang sitrep that the Montagnards had killed the LLDB and other Vietnamese in camp.³⁸ “It got a little scary when you realize that twelve of you are in the middle of a battalion of anxious and nervous CIDG, who were armed to the teeth. One mistake or unintentional act could have had some serious consequences,” recalled SGT Wingo.³⁹ “I feel that Captain Gillespie’s positive leadership and the team’s good rapport and trust with the troops had an effect in calming the situation.”⁴⁰ By then the second patrol had returned to Buon Brieng.

After from his patrol, SGT Stevens went to the team house. “I had a good meal and drank a *Ba Moui Ba 33*



The Shaman puts a copper bracelet on Captain Vernon Gillespie’s wrist to signify brotherhood.



Captain Truong receives his copper bracelet. The two-hour Montagnard ritual was designed to drive out the bad spirits.

beer. As I sat there, I began to get angry at the VC sitting out there waiting to attack," said Stevens. As he had done almost every night in camp, Stevens decided to fire the mortar, but with a twist. "The VC were out of range, or so they thought. The 81mm mortar has a maximum charge 9 (which is a range of 4737 meters). I estimated where the VC were and added an extra charge (charge 10) to the mortar and set it at 800 mils (45 degrees) to put it past the maximum range." Then, Stevens went to the mortar pit to prepare about thirty WP [white phosphorous] and HE [high explosive] rounds, with the "extra charge." The Montagnards, probably used to seeing Stevens in the mortar pit, seemed oblivious of him. "I began to drop the rounds as fast as I could. When I was finished with the fire mission, I looked up and surrounding the mortar pit were ten or fifteen of the Yards with M-3 submachineguns pointed at me. One said 'Finis sir, no more mortars.' I swear the .45 caliber bore of those grease guns looked larger than an eight-inch howitzer," remembered Stevens.⁴¹ Discretion being the better part of valor, he returned to the team house and did not go into the mortar pit for four days. "Later, the Montagnards told me that I did hit the VC assembly area and caused some casualties. I was convinced the VC were massing for an attack while the Yards were preoccupied with the uprising."⁴²

On 21 September (Day 2), the CIDG at Buon Brieng made no attempt to start the vehicles and the camp remained quiet. Still, the strikers remained alert with weapons ready. Y Jhon was getting pressure from the FULRO leadership to move south to Ban Me Thuot. Y Jhon responded by holding a battalion formation. He explained the situation to the assembled troops. "He received a hundred percent vote of confidence from the Strike Force. Following this, Captain Truong and I talked to the Strike Force and explained our respective positions. We received the same vote of confidence," said Gillespie.⁴³

The strikers prepared to defend the camp against a Vietnamese Army attack. "The Montagnards were prepared to stand their ground and moved all of the ammunition out of the ammo bunker—mortar and small arms—and positioned it around the perimeter," said SGT Wingo.⁴⁴ Ambushes/observation posts were set up on the camp road from Route 14. "Things were very uneasy that night. We expected to see South Vietnamese Army tanks in the morning. As I remember, no one slept that night," said Wingo.⁴⁵ It was anticipated that the ARVN would attack the camps to put down the uprising.

This was confirmed the next morning (Day 3) when the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) buzzed the camp. The first plane dropped leaflets instructing the Americans to take cover in the bunkers. Soon after the leaflet drop, a flight of VNAF planes with loaded bomb racks "buzzed" Buon Brieng a few times. The U.S. response was to wave their t-shirts while standing on the team house roof. They hoped that the pilots would see the American Special Forces and not bomb or strafe the camp. "We were

sure that the Vietnamese would be merciless against the Montagnards. They would not hesitate to bomb the women and children in camp," said Stevens.⁴⁶ The CIDG did not fire at them and the aircraft did not attack. Further to the south, the various factions were feverishly seeking a peaceful solution.

Caught in the middle, World War II and Korean War veteran, Major Frederick C. Patton, became one of the negotiators. Patton had arrived in Vietnam with SF Detachments B-110 and A-111 from 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa to develop a Vietnamese-led reconnaissance unit. The mission was cancelled because of LLDB infighting. Patton became the Special Forces coordinator at Ban Me Thuot responsible for the five SF teams in the surrounding area. Patton had traveled to all camps and met all of the Montagnard, LLDB, and ARVN commanders. During his command visits in July 1964, Patton had encountered a Montagnard commander being rebuffed by the U.S. 8th Field Hospital staff. He was merely trying to visit his wounded soldiers.⁴⁷

Major Patton was in Nha Trang when he happened upon the upset CIDG battalion commander from Bon Sar Pa. Y Mot had come to Nha Trang to visit his soldiers who had been wounded in a major ambush.⁴⁸ When the two entered the hospital ward where the wounded Montagnards were convalescing, Patton was impressed. Wounded strikers, some with amputations, got out of their beds when Y Mot entered. It was an obvious sign of high respect. Y Mot was concerned that the Americans would not properly care for his soldiers. They would not have been given appropriate treatment in an ARVN hospital.⁴⁹ After the emotional visit, Patton arranged for a UH-1 "Huey" to fly Y Mot back to Bon Sar Pa in style. This personal compassion and soldierly respect would pay dividends during the uprising.⁵⁰

Throughout the region, other U.S. commanders were seeking peaceful solutions. Major Edwin E. Brooks, the Special Forces B Team commander in Pleiku, flew to Ban Me Thuot and asked CPT Gillespie for help. A helicopter was sent to bring him to Ban Me Thuot. Y Jhon and Howard Sochurek were invited to accompany him. "I

In Buon Brieng, Y Jhon addresses his troops before he and Captain Vernon Gillespie go south to Ban Me Thuot.





Negotiations taking place at Buon M'Bre. Left to right: Y Jhon (in green "cowboy" hat smiling), center Major Frederick Patton (in Green Beret), Y Mot (in tan "cowboy" hat), and Captain Richard Haskell (in Green Beret with arms crossed).

knew we had the situation under control in Buon Brieng. I knew my NCOs and the XO [executive officer] could control the situation in camp," said Gillespie.⁵¹

MAJ Brooks, MAJ Patton, Captain Richard Haskell (the B-Team surgeon), and Sergeant First Class Ernie Tabata (the A-311B engineer from Bu Prang) met the trio from Buon Brieng at the airfield. Their first stop was the Ban Me Thuot radio station. Rebel strikers from Bon Sar Pa had seized it to broadcast the FULRO message to the surrounding area. The Americans watched as Patton and Brooks boldly marched into the compound and ordered the Montagnard strikers to leave and follow them. Initially, the Montagnards hesitated but then followed the order. They formed up and started a road march toward Ban Me Thuot behind the U.S. soldiers. Howard Sochurek called it the "Pied Piper move."⁵²

The five Americans and Y Jhon accompanied the rebel platoon. The striker platoon bypassed Ban Me Thuot, turning southwest on Route 14. They stopped at the FULRO command post in the village of Buon M'Bre (five miles southwest of Ban Me Thuot). One of the key FULRO leaders at that time was Y Mot, the Bon Sar Pa battalion commander. Based on their previous meeting and his mutual respect for Y Mot, Patton was able to open negotiations with the leadership.⁵³

The environment that MAJ Patton and CPT Gillespie entered was tense and hostile. There was an openly anti-American element led by a Cham (a Cambodian Montagnard) [identified in Howard Sochurek's photographs as wearing a checkered scarf]. Gillespie confirmed that the faction led by the Cham, a Montagnard named Y Wat, and the Bon Sar Pa interpreter, Y Clur, were the "hot heads." Another group controlled by Y Mot was reasonable.⁵⁴ A heated discussion began. The Montagnards insisted that the uprising was only against the Vietnamese, not with the United States nor the Special Forces. It was obvious that they did not appreciate the American intervention.

In the middle of the discussions, a 2½-ton truck came

into the village filled with captured Vietnamese soldiers. "I felt it was necessary to show in some small way that these men were under the protection of the U.S. to keep them from being killed," said Gillespie.⁵⁵ As the Montagnards watched in disbelief, Gillespie, Y Jhon, and Patton cut the bonds on the Vietnamese prisoners. "This act seemed to have an effect as no further move was made against the Vietnamese," wrote Gillespie.⁵⁶ The Vietnamese were still prisoners, but at least they weren't tied up. The Americans established themselves by changing the rules. Since the Montagnard leadership was split, MAJ Patton, CPT Gillespie, and Y Jhon elected to stay in the village overnight. This did not please the "hot head" faction. After a small meal, the Americans and Y Jhon went to sleep to get a fresh start in the morning.⁵⁷

Though they resumed negotiations early the next day, Patton and Gillespie "faced a stone wall of resistance to moving back to Bon Sar Pa."⁵⁸ At 0730, Patton and Gillespie announced that if they did not move back to Bon Sar Pa by 0830, the two American SF officers would leave "and with us would go any hope of future Special Forces support."⁵⁹ This spurred a lot of discussion among the Montagnard leaders, but no movement. For the Americans, the negotiations had ended. As Patton and Gillespie prepared to leave, the negotiations took a new direction.

An outsider to the CIDG, Colonel John T. "Fritz" Freund, the deputy senior advisor to the ARVN II Corps, showed up in Buon M'Bre. He stepped into the middle of negotiations trying to help. But his lack of experience with the Montagnards' situation quickly became evident to the SF soldiers. Freund spoke fluent, cultured Parisian French and assumed that because the senior leaders in the Vietnamese army spoke that language, all others did as well.⁶⁰ Freund immediately demanded in French to speak to the leader. The rebels provided a proxy because they didn't know the American colonel. An old-



The rebel Montagnard platoon that seized the Ban Me Thuot radio station on their road march to Buon M'Bre. The white armbands on the right arm identify them as FULRO.

er Montagnard was produced.⁶¹ Freund demanded food and sat down to eat with the elderly Montagnard who understood a little French. Freund talked with the older gentleman for almost an hour, and then triumphantly announced to the Americans that an agreement had been reached. The Montagnard leaders were glad that Freund was leaving for Ban Me Thuot to radio MACV headquarters. The elder Montagnard was relieved. He only spoke a few words of French and spent the most time saying “*Oui, mon Colonel,*” and nodding passively in agreement to whatever the American had been saying.⁶²

Though an agreement had not been reached, there were obvious divisions in the Montagnard confederation. Instead of the five planned CIDG battalions and a general popular uprising by the people, the FULRO leadership had gotten less than half of the forces and the popular uprising had not happened. Just as Freund was leaving, as if by plan, two VNAF aircraft buzzed the village at low level. “The expression on the faces of the troops was that of doom and the leaders showed great concern,” wrote Gillespie.⁶³ Seizing the opportunity, Patton and Gillespie yelled, “Back to Bon Sar Pa! Back to Bon Sar Pa!”⁶⁴ Surprisingly the Montagnard troops responded. They loaded their trucks and began a tactical road movement to Bon Sar Pa. With the strikers going home, the SF officers devised a plan.

Major Patton took one of the FULRO leaders to Ban Me Thuot to open negotiations with the Vietnamese. SFC Tabata, CPT Gillespie, Y Jhon, and Sochurek climbed in a jeep to lead the Montagnard convoy south. COL Freund changed his mind and joined the procession to Bon Sar Pa. “After a short period on the road, a jeep full of ‘hot-headed’ [FULRO] leaders whipped around Colonel Freund. . . . They went around [me] at high speed and I gave chase. After following for about ten kilometers and not being able to catch up, I came upon a jeep accident,” wrote Gillespie.⁶⁵ The jeep accident was another



Colonel John T. Freund (in the center holding a submachine gun) in discussions with Americans and Montagnards at Bon Sar Pa.

group from Bon Sar Pa that had lost control on a curve. The photojournalist snapped photos while Gillespie and Tabata rendered first aid, put the injured on makeshift stretchers, and loaded them into the jeep for the trip to Bon Sar Pa.⁶⁶ When Freund and the rest of the convoy reached the scene, he thought it was the result of an ambush. After searching for CPT Gillespie and SFC Tabata for an hour, the strikers told Freund that they had received a radio message that the two Americans were already in Bon Sar Pa.⁶⁷

Bon Sar Pa became the site for the next round of negotiations. MAJ Brooks and CPT Haskell flew in by helicopter from Ban Me Thuot with Colonel John T. Spears, the Special Forces Vietnam commander. With all of the senior leadership involved in the negotiations with the Montagnards, “I asked Major Brooks to return Y Jhon and me to Buon Brieng as we were [of] no further use at Bon Sar Pa and had work in our camp,” said Gillespie.⁶⁸



Captain Vernon Gillespie and the B Team surgeon, Captain Richard Haskell, during the road march to Buon M'Bre.



Captain Vernon Gillespie and Sergeant First Class Ernie Tabata at the jeep accident scene. The Montagnard standing to the rear with the red and white checkered scarf was called the “Cham.”

Captain Gillespie and Y Jhon boarded the helicopter to return to Buon Brieng. Upon arriving, Y Jhon immediately called a battalion formation to explain the situation to his men. "Another vote of confidence was received," said Gillespie.⁶⁹ The Team had kept a lid on problems in the commander's absence. Soon after the formation, Gillespie received a message from the B Team for all of the Vietnamese to evacuate the camp by helicopter. CPT Truong prepared his team for evacuation, but announced he would remain with Gillespie. Only a direct order from General Co, the ARVN II Corps commander, changed Truong's mind. The LLDB departed by helicopter that afternoon.⁷⁰

Later, Y Jhon held a meeting with all the Strike Force leaders and the Americans. He restated his views and asked the advice of the leadership, who adopted a "wait and see" attitude. "It became quite clear that the U.S. was in control of the camp only because the Strike Force wanted us in control," said Gillespie.⁷¹ However, they also made it clear to Gillespie that if the ARVN attacked Ban Me Thuot, they would have to join the uprising.⁷²

The next morning (Day 4, 23 September), Gillespie and Y Jhon flew out of camp. This time the pair were flown first to Ban Me Thuot to brief U.S. officials. While Y Jhon remained in the city, CPT Gillespie was joined by Captain Charles Darnell (from Bon Sar Pa) and flown to Saigon to brief the MACV staff. "We were taken straight to General Westmoreland's office and briefed both General [William] Westmoreland and General [Joseph] Stilwell," said Gillespie.⁷³ They were sent to the U.S. Embassy to do the same for Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor and his deputy U. Alexis Johnson. Instead of returning to Buon Brieng, Gillespie stayed overnight in Saigon to brief the MACV J2 and J3 staffs.⁷⁴

In his time at the headquarters, Gillespie learned that MACV had directed U.S. Special Forces, Vietnam to prepare a plan to rescue the Americans and Vietnamese from the camps in revolt. Operation SNATCH was to be conducted by volunteer soldiers from the Nha Trang staff with supporting helicopters.⁷⁵ Instead of returning to Buon Brieng, Gillespie was dropped off at Ban Me Thuot on the afternoon of 24 September.

Back in Buon Brieng, A-312 monitored the situation. Although the Americans still controlled the gate, the SF soldiers developed an escape and evasion plan if conflict broke out between the Montagnards and the ARVN.⁷⁶ "The ammunition and communications bunkers had been prepared with explosives. We had electrical and manual fuses in place to blow it sky high if we needed to," said SGT Bleacher.⁷⁷ That contingency was never needed, as the revolt had begun to unravel.

The eight-day Montagnard uprising ground to a halt. Colonels Freund and Spears acted as intermediaries during the negotiations between the FULRO leaders and the Vietnamese Army at Bon Sar Pa. Other negotiations were held in Pleiku. In the midst of the drawn out negotiations, the FULRO communist-led "hot head" faction disappeared one night.⁷⁸ In the aftermath of the uprising,



U.S. helicopter assets were prepared for Operation SNATCH.

the fallout for the Montagnards and the Americans was quite different.

When the uprising was over, it was as if nothing had occurred. "On 27 September, everything went back to normal [in the camps], it was as if nothing had ever happened. The Yards were ready and eager to go back on patrol," said SGT Stevens.⁷⁹ Most Montagnards were anti-communist and eager to fight the VC. "We started normal operations to keep the CIDG busy," said SGT Wingo. "Sergeant First Class Bell planned two company-sized operations for seven days each; one north and one west of camp [beginning on 29 September]. Sergeant [Vincent] Skeebea [intelligence sergeant] planned a twenty-one day intelligence gathering operation in the area to the south," said Gillespie.⁸⁰ For the Americans, the backlash by U.S. SF Command, Vietnam was severe.

Four of the team commanders were relieved by COL Spears and sent back to Okinawa and Fort Bragg. When it appeared that CPT Gillespie would be relieved, General Westmoreland intervened to keep him in command. Gillespie returned to Okinawa with the rest of his team in December 1964.⁸¹ The ARVN reaction was more subtle.

During the next year, four of the five CIDG camps were closed. New camps were built near the old sites. The highly trained strikers were simply too valuable to eliminate, but the Montagnard battalions were broken up and scattered by company to the newly established camps. Then the battalions were reorganized to include multiple Montagnard tribes to inhibit indigenous cohesion.

Y Jhon Nie, the Buon Brieng CIDG Battalion commander, "Was an able, sharp and articulate individual, and had made some serious enemies when he defied the order [for his unit] to move on Ban Me Thuot," said Wingo. A local shaman put a spell or hex on Y Jhon. "He absolutely came apart mentally and believed that he had been cursed. He mentally degraded into what I can best describe as a babbling idiot," said Wingo.⁸² Gillespie had him treated by doctors and psychiatrists at the 8th Field Hospital. They used drugs and other medical protocols in a month-long treatment.⁸³ Afterward, CPT Gillespie

At Camp Bon Sar Pa the three company CIDG strike force of Rhade and Mnong tribesmen (just over 400 soldiers) quickly seized control. The Montagnards killed eleven Vietnamese Special Forces troops at the camp. Captain Charles B. Darnell Jr. and his team (A-311A) were disarmed and held hostage in the team house. The strikers seized the nearby district headquarters at Dak Mil (four miles north on Route 14).¹ Using the trucks from the camp, a platoon seized the radio station at Ban Me Thuot, thirty-five miles the north-east. Two companies of CIDG staged in Buon M'Bre for an attack on Ban Me Thuot.

At Bu Prang (southwest of Bon Sar Pa), the three companies of strikers seized the camp early in the morning. Fifteen Vietnamese LLDB were killed. Later, seventeen Popular Forces (the equivalent of a Vietnamese Army security unit) soldiers were killed at a nearby checkpoint. In the morning, the Strike Force tried to move to Ban Me Thuot, but it was faced with a dilemma. All of the camp's 2½-ton trucks were, by chance, in Ban Me Thuot picking up supplies. The rebels could wait for transport or walk.³ One Strike Force company walked the twenty-five miles to Bon Sar Pa, while the remainder stayed in camp. (This turned out to be critical since the plan called for the three Bu Prang companies to travel by truck up Route 14 through Bon Sar Pa to help secure Ban Me Thuot.)

The CIDG force at Ban Don, advised by Captain Richard Terry's A-752 (a 7th SFG team), consisted of Rhade and Jarai Montagnards. Terry and Captain Nguyen Van Huong, the LLDB commander, were in Nha Trang when the uprising began. The Strike Force disarmed and tied up the LLDB. The Americans were disarmed and put under guard. Taking the camp's trucks, they headed southeast towards Ban Me Thuot, but stopped ten miles short of the city.⁴ CPT Terry met the force and convinced them to return to camp.



The mission of the five-company Strike Force Battalion at Buon Brieng was critical: block Route 14, the main north-south road, and stop any Army of Vietnam (ARVN) reaction forces coming in from Pleiku. The remainder of the force would go by truck down Route 14 to join the attack on Ban Me Thuot. With five companies in the CIDG battalion, Buon Brieng had a crucial role. It was the relationship between the Montagnards and their SF advisers that ultimately determined the outcome of the uprising.



- 1 Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 63–64; “Historical Resume of the Montagnard Uprising, September 1964,” Headquarters, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), APO San Francisco, 96240, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 80; Gary Webb, note to Steve Sherman, *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*, CD-ROM (Houston, TX: RADIX Press, 2000); Captain Charles B. Darnell Jr., “After Action Report, Montagnard Rebellion in Camp Bon Sar Pa, 20 September–3 October 1964,” Detachment A-311, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 “Historical Resume of the Montagnard Uprising, September 1964,” Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 80.
- 3 After Action Report, Montagnard Rebellion in Camp Bon Sar Par, 20 September–3 October 1964; Ernie Tabata, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 4 March 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, interview notes, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971*, 64; Historical Resume of the Montagnard Uprising, September 1964; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 80; John E. Fischer (XO A752), note to Steve Sherman, *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*, CD-ROM (Houston, TX: RADIX Press, 2000).



FULRO flag



The Mnong Montagnards at Camp Buon Mi Ga (located southeast of Ban Me Thuot) were organized into four companies (about 614 soldiers) and advised by Captain Donald L. Loa's detachment A-121A. The Montagnards killed the ten LLDBs and disarmed CPT Loa's team before leaving the Americans under guard as they took the trucks to drive to Ban Me Thuot. American helicopters arrived and CPT Loa and his team were allowed to leave the camp.²

UPRISING AREA

- SF operational base
- Airfields
- Actual rebel routes
- Proposed rebel routes
- Major rebel incidents
- City
- Roads
- Provincial boundaries
- International boundaries

N

0 15 Miles

0 15 KM



Sergeant Lowell Stevens (left), holding a captured Viet Cong flag, and Captain Vernon Gillespie (with cigarette in his mouth) on patrol with some of the Montagnard CIDG.

brought Y Jhon back to Buon Brieng. A week later, he suffered a relapse (the Montagnards believed a more powerful hex had been put on him). The former battalion commander eventually became a guard at the Ban Me Thuot B Team compound.⁸⁴ Though Y Jhon's situation could be explained, analysis of the Montagnard uprising proved difficult.

It was unclear if the Montagnard uprising of 1964 was an armed political demonstration, a mutiny against the ARVN and South Vietnamese government, or a Communist attempt to promulgate reprisals that would cause the Montagnards to align with the Viet Cong. Some Montagnards regarded the uprising as a political demonstration, like earlier ones done in Saigon. The uprising was planned to last eight days. It did that. The uprising did force the Vietnamese government to grant some political concessions to the Montagnards, such as property ownership and political representation.⁸⁵

One thing is certain, A-312, led by Captain Vernon Gillespie, made it known that the Montagnard Upris-



A-312 in a relaxed moment en route back to Okinawa. Left to right: Sergeant Burhl Cunningham, Sergeant Lowell Stevens (back to camera), Specialist Fifth Class Ricardo "Y Burr" Davis, Sergeant Earl Bleacher, and Captain Vernon Gillespie.

ing at Buon Brieng was "nipped in the bud" by a team effort. They would not have succeeded without the complete professionalism of everyone on the team. Gillespie refused to endorse the "official" report because of what he felt were discrepancies. In his own after action report Gillespie emphasized, "the total effort at Buon Brieng never has been a one-man show, but was a team effort. . . . I assure you it would read quite different[ly] if I had not had the complete support of every member of this detachment."⁸⁶ When A-312 found itself in the center of the September 1964 Montagnard uprising, it was the only team not disarmed by rebelling Montagnards. The decisive actions of CPT Gillespie and his team effectively stopped the uprising in its tracks.

Author's Note: This article is not meant to "gloss over" the accomplishments of the other A Teams and SF soldiers during the uprising. While the focus of the article is about A-312, two other events contributed to defusing the Montagnard uprising. The missing trucks at Bu Prang stopped the rapid movement of that force to Ban Me Thuot. The efforts of A-752, led by Captain Richard Terry caused the Ban Don Strike Force to return to camp. ♣

The author wishes to thank Lowell Stevens, Earl Bleacher, Ronald Wingo, Vernon Gillespie, and Steve Sherman for their help with this article. The Howard Sochurek photos are courtesy of Tania Sochurek, all others are from Lowell Stevens.

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Endnotes

- 1 Most readers are more familiar with the current term for a Special Forces team, namely an operational detachment alpha (ODA). During most of the 1960s, however, the basic elements of Special Forces were usually referred to as "A Teams."
- 2 Earl Bleacher, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 18 November 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Lowell W. Stevens Sr., interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 27 October 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Vernon W. Gillespie Jr. and Shirley Gillespie, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 23 February 2006, Locust Grove, VA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005; **The CIDG forces were armed primarily with M1 and M2 carbines, M3 submachine guns ("Grease Guns"), Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), and M1919A6 .30 caliber light machine guns. The Buon Brieng CIDG Battalion had four rifle companies, plus a headquarters company of about 100.**
- 4 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005; Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
- 5 Gary Webb, note to Steve Sherman, *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG*

- Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*, CD-ROM (Houston, TX: RADIX Press, 2000), *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
- 6 Graham A. Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam: MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2006), 144.
 - 7 William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1976), 97.
 - 8 Colonel Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 1989), 63–64.
 - 9 Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 63–64.
 - 10 Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 63–64.
 - 11 Lowell W. Stevens Sr., interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 3 November 2005, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; **The “Y” in a Rhade name is pronounced as an “ee” (“ee-Burr” or “ee-Jhon”).**
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 - 13 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 14 Bleacher interview, 18 November 2005.
 - 15 Captain Vernon Gillespie, “After Action Report, CIDG Revolt at Camp Buon Brieng, 30 September 1964,” Detachment A-312, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC (hereafter cited as “Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964”); Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 16 Ronald Wingo, e-mail to Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 27 November 2005, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Howard Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” *National Geographic*, January 1965, 38–65.
 - 17 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 18 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 19 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 20 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 21 Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 22 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005.
 - 23 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005.
 - 24 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005.
 - 25 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” 47–48.
 - 26 Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 27 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 28 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
 - 29 Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” 48, 51–52; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 30 Stevens interview, 27 October 2005.
 - 31 Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” 48, 51–52.
 - 32 Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
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 - 36 Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
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 - 41 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005.
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 - 43 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 44 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005; Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 45 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005; Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 46 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005; Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 47 Frederick C. Patton, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 8 June 2007, Fayetteville, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Frederick C. Patton, Special Forces Coordinator, Ban Me Thuot, note to Steve Sherman, *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*, CD-ROM (Houston, TX: RADIX Press, 2000), hereafter “Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.”
 - 48 Patton interview, 8 June 2007.
 - 49 Patton interview, 8 June 2007.
 - 50 Patton interview, 8 June 2007.
 - 51 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 52 Sochurek, “American Special Forces in Action in Viet Nam,” 56; Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.”
 - 53 Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
 - 54 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
 - 55 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.
 - 56 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Patton interview, 8 June 2007.
 - 57 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 58 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 59 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 60 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
 - 61 Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
 - 62 Patton interview, 8 June 2007; Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Patton note in *U.S. Army Special Forces in the CIDG Program Vietnam (1957–1975)*.
 - 63 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006; Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets, The First Thirty Years* (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 172.
 - 64 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.
 - 65 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.
 - 66 Ernest K. Tabata, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 4 March 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, interview notes, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 67 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.
 - 68 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.
 - 69 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
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 - 72 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 73 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 74 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 75 “Historical Resume of the Montagnard Uprising, September 1964,” Headquarters, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), APO San Francisco, 96240, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Patton interview, 8 June 2007.
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 - 81 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964; Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 82 Wingo e-mail, 27 November 2005.
 - 83 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 84 Gillespie interview, 23 February 2006.
 - 85 Stevens interview, 3 November 2005.
 - 86 Buon Brieng AAR, 30 September 1964.