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# DAILY ENTERPRISE



## (U) HISTORY TODAY - 24 September 2015 - Unlikely Warriors

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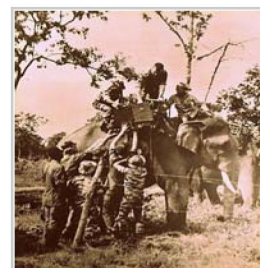
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(U) The following story, a fascinating blend of cryptologic work, language, and culture, comes to us through Gary Blackburn, co-author (along with Lonnie Long) of the recent book *Unlikely Warriors: The Army Security Agency's Secret War in Vietnam, 1961-1973*. The book is a narrative of the people and work of the Army Security Agency (ASA) in Vietnam.

(U) (The ASA was originally the Signal Intelligence Service founded by William Friedman in 1930 and is now INSCOM, the Army component of CSS.)

(U) This story is not in the book because the authors learned it after their manuscript was published. Blackburn and Long heard about it at a reunion of the 403<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Detachment (SOD) reunion at Fort Bragg in 2013. The 403rd SOD was the Army Security Agency (ASA) Green Beret unit in Vietnam. Although some details are missing or fuzzy, the core of the story was vouched for by several members of the unit.



(U) A direction-finding (DF) team (the year probably was 1970) was preparing to head out on a mission into enemy territory. However, the helicopter that was supposed to transport the team's heavy equipment to the Area of Operations was diverted for a higher priority mission. Since the DF mission, highly-classified, still needed to be accomplished urgently, one of the mission's non-commissioned officers (NCO) concocted a scheme to arrange reliable transportation for their gear.

(U) The NCO proposed to procure an elephant from the local Montagnard village to haul the equipment. The Montagnards, aka Degars, were a mountain people from the Central Highlands of Vietnam who were allied to the United States in the war. When the team approached the village chief about renting an elephant though, it learned that the Montagnards had no word for "rent" and no concept of the idea. In the end, the NCO decided to buy the elephant -- with the understanding that the Chief would buy it back after the mission was over.

(U) When the team returned the elephant, however, the wily old chief offered them a lot less for the animal than they had originally paid. The NCOs engaged in a little haggling, but in the end, the NCO was still short \$200 from what he paid.

(U) The team's company commander "created quite a commotion" when the senior NCO dared to turn in a chit to be reimbursed for the money he had lost in buying the elephant.

(U) Blackburn does not tell us if the NCO was ever reimbursed. Three of the four men involved in the episode were at the reunion and swear to the story. They even provided a photo of the elephant as proof.

(U) Further research shows that the Montagnards did "rent out" other items on other occasions so they must have learned the concept fast. How does one say "make a profit" in the Montagnard language?

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