

# Three Green Berets



## Help House Veterans

By Mike Keele

### FOREIGN ENEMIES and traitors

The Greater Depression and Civil War 2



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**MATTHEW BRACKEN**

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While most people ate, drank and engaged in holiday merriment during the Special Forces Association Chapter 78 Christmas party two years ago at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club in Corona Del Mar, unconventional soldier and entrepreneur Richard Simonian was engaged in an intense conversation about a topic near to his heart. How could he and his company, Santiago Communities, help veterans find affordable housing? Not stick houses, but manufactured homes that are less expensive and easier to maintain.

Since that time, Santiago Communities has partnered with a non-profit organization, Affordable Community Living, which offers the Veterans Affordable Housing Program. It has provided over \$150,000 in funds for the program.

During that time, the Veterans Affordable Housing Program has placed 70



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Right: Det A-109 Thuong Duc, VN. Far right, Cpt Jim Duffy, Det CO A-109, Thuong Duc, VN



veterans in manufactured homes throughout many of the 40 manufactured home communities that Santiago Communities oversees in five Western states.

With the addition of two Chapter 78 members and Vietnam War Green Berets and Purple Heart recipients to its Board of Directors, Simonian is joined by Jim Duffy, who was wounded as the team leader of Detachment 109 in the Thong Duc District southwest of Da Nang, and John S. Meyer, who served two tours of duty with MACV-SOG.



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### Three Green Berets

Sixty years ago, Richard Simonian completed training to become a Green Beret. He then dedicated three years of his life to the mission expressed in the Special Forces motto *De Oppresso Liber* – to free the oppressed. During those pioneer days, “it was not uncommon to have SF men die in training...those early years were rough,” Simonian added.

Today, he and his two fellow Green Berets, Duffy and Meyer, are on another mission. They are working together under Simonian’s leadership to place a roof over the heads of veterans who might otherwise end up homeless or living in less-than-desirable conditions with relatives.

That mission is a far cry from when Duffy was a young captain in Quang Nam Province southwest of Da Nang, where Detachment A-109 was assembled to monitor and assess enemy activity between the rural areas west of the camp and the more populated coastal plain. Detachment A-109 played a critical role in protecting Da Nang from enemy attacks where North Vietnamese

Army troops would mass in Laos, cross the border, attack and return to their Laotian sanctuary. The NVA knew why the A team was in that area of operations, because the SF men and their Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) indigenous troops patrolled key river valley chokepoints and major trails enemy soldiers used to infiltrate into South Vietnam. As recon men operating across the fence in Laos, Meyer and fellow SOG soldiers looked for enemy troops massing to attack the A camps, such as Det. A-109.

Now, Duffy and Meyer are working with Simonian to help veterans find affordable housing despite a languishing economy, unavailability of business credit and ever-increasing taxes. In the Green Beret spirit of adapting to changes, when the economy threw curses at them, they improvised and adapted to move forward.

“I simply wanted to make a difference in the lives of veterans,” Simonian said in a recent interview with *SOF*. “God has blessed me and I wanted to give something back.”

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### One veteran helped

Vietnam-era veteran Lorenzo R. Almada is one of the 70 veterans assisted through the Veterans Affordable Housing Program. He is a classic example of how the program works. Having lost their home, their jobs, their cars and all part-time income, Almada and his wife were living in a garage. "We were hurting," Almada told *SOF*, until a friend told him about the new affordable housing program for veterans. Today, Almada and his wife live in a three-bedroom manufactured home in Orange County, in Southern California.

"I was so impressed with the program, that I asked Richard if I could help him to get more veterans into it," Almada said.


Duffy is quick to point out, "What is truly unique about all of this is the fact that we have a for-profit company committed to helping veterans without any governmental programs."

Meyer adds, "We always hear companies giving lip service to helping veterans. Richard, in his SF spirit, gets it done and strives for more ways to help

veterans."

That assistance comes in many different ways, as one woman resident learned earlier this year after her husband died suddenly. Instead of being evicted when she couldn't make her monthly payment, as a Santiago Communities resident living under the affordable housing program, staff found creative ways to assist her in remaining in her home and helped her obtain food. Such service to a widow is one more example of how Simonian works to honor veterans and their loved ones.

For more information about the Veterans Affordable Housing Program, call 888-923-VETS (8387), [www.VeteransAffordableHousing.org](http://www.VeteransAffordableHousing.org).

*Mike Keele earned his DFC while pulling a SOG team out of A Shau Valley while assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division in early 1968.* 

## F L A K Continued from page 38

I heard from a friend that on Sunday, a CBS show which involved people competing in a global race were in what I'll always call North Vietnam and used a downed B-52's wreckage as a marker for their route. The immaturity and absence of sensitivity in that scene destroy, at least for a moment, what I would consider to be the core integrity of CBS. Just remember on future shows, that brave Americans experienced their last mortal moments in that aircraft as it fell from altitude to the ground. Many Americans were held as POWs in the North. I, myself, was a POW twice during the Cold War. I can't imagine the anger and feelings of betrayal that many Vietnam veterans and those from WW II and Korea, as well as later generations, must have felt.

Consider us, the people who volunteered or were drafted to protect and defend those left behind enjoying, as they should, their lives and their liberties. In the future, more careful planning should be exacted when scenes are being designed for entertainment shows.

Sincerely,  
William H. Northacker  
Lieutenant Colonel, Special Forces  
US Army (Retired)  
1970-2008

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