

# Rambos we are not

By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

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## Hollywood's version of Green Berets untrue.

The myths and misconceptions that surround "The Green Berets" are many and pervasive. Most commonly, they are falsely perceived as militaristic types prone to violence and mayhem. Regrettably, that impression is reinforced when they are portrayed on the big screen by the likes of Sylvester Stallone, in the Rambo films, and Chuck Norris. Truth be told, members of the U.S. Army's Special Forces are not nearly as exciting, certainly not as criminally inclined, as Hollywood would have us believe.

A majority of American foreign-policy analysts would agree that the most significant military threat to U.S. strategic interests in the Third World is represented by Low Intensity Conflict. That is, terrorism, guerrilla warfare and certain other kinds of political violence. Such conflict describes the environment in which military activities, short of war, are conducted.



These activities are aimed at assisting another country, not destroying it. Typically, they include construction projects, basic military training, public-health training and medical assistance. In short, the goal is to fight the causes of unrest rather than a hostile military force. The military advisory support in El Salvador is one example, but there are, and have been, many others. It is in Low Intensity Conflict, during "the violent peace," that Special Forces play their critical and singular role.

Any foreign-service officer will tell you that working among peoples from different religious, educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds requires a unique personality and thorough training. Special Forces soldiers are cut from this cloth.

Special Forces soldiers, contrary to myth, are mature, seasoned profes-

sionals. Although trained in traditional military skills, they also are instructed in language, culture and the nuances of cross-cultural communications. Their primary purpose is to advise and assist the militaries of fledgling democracies and friendly governments worldwide. In this role, their mission is to *train*, not fight.

Seen in this light, the soldiers of Special Forces are on the cutting edge of democracy — by their *acts* they foster the growth of democracy. In so doing, Special Forces soldiers endure long periods away from home and their loved ones. Frequently, they voluntarily live in primitive conditions. In many parts of the world, they are the only Americans the native population ever sees or comes in contact with. Thus, their role takes on special importance.

That's why individual misconduct is not tolerated. Hollywood's hard-drinking, two-fisted, womanizing image of Green Berets does little justice to the superb job being done by some of these men.

True, Special Forces can perform, by virtue of their intensive training, many other tasks, among them guerrilla warfare, strategic reconnaissance and direct-action missions (which include raids and rescues). The importance of physical prowess and advanced soldier skills cannot be underestimated. During the Vietnam war, Special Forces men won 17 Medals of Honor, 80 Distinguished Service Crosses, 705 Silver Stars and 2,559 Purple Hearts.

But experience, intelligence and maturity, all traits of a Special Forces soldier, are equally important, if not more so, to the task of training. Therein lies their greatest worth.

If Special Forces can train, and thereby strengthen, the militaries of friendly nations, the United States can expect those nations to fight and win their own battles without the commitment and deployment of American troops. Winning a battle — or better still, a war — without firing a shot is the pinnacle of tactical achievement. That is the goal of the Special Forces, admittedly one that will not make Hollywood richer.

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