



# Sog: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam

By John L. Plaster

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**Major John L. Plaster**, a three-tour veteran of Vietnam tells the story of the most highly classified United States covert operatives to serve in the war: The Studies and Observations Group, code-named SOG. Comprised of volunteers from such elite military units as the Army's Green Berets, the USAF Air Commandos, and Navy SEALs, SOG agents answered directly to the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs, with some missions requiring approval from the White House. Now for the first time, the dangerous assignments of this top-secret unit can at last be revealed!

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## **Sog: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam By John L. Plaster Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Plaster (*The Ultimate Sniper*), a retired Army major, served three tours with the secretive "Studies and Observation Group," aka SOG, during the Vietnam War—a background he has put to good use in this authoritative and insightful look at the now defunct commando unit. Plaster does much to illuminate both this frequently misunderstood group and its extraordinary participants. Made up entirely of volunteers, SOG tackled a wide range of vital and dangerous duties, including missions deep into enemy territory and rescues of downed American pilots. Special Forces veterans in particular will delight in the descriptions of America's old tribal allies, the Montagnards of Vietnam. Specialists in poison-arrow warfare, the primitive "Yards," Plaster explains, were both fierce fighters and a constant source of wonderment to the Americans. Plaster reveals the core of the relationship between 'Yards and Yanks in a telling anecdote in which two Green Berets win over a village chieftain with the help of some pipes and two cans of Prince Albert tobacco. Elsewhere, on a more somber note, Plaster sheds light on part of the ongoing mystery of POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia. The secretive nature of SOG, he writes, was such that its members were accounted for via a "double bookkeeping" system. The method "proved so confounding that the Pentagon had understated casualties, a fact that became evident when families of MIAs demanded more information." A true insider's account, this eye-opening report will leave readers feeling as if they've been given a hot scoop on a highly classified project. Photos not seen by PW. Military Book Club main selection.

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### **From Library Journal**

For all the negative imagery attached to Americans who served in Vietnam, an unbiased and sober review of the historical accounts reveals an astonishing record of valor and sacrifice. Largely unknown outside of military circles, the Studies and Observation Group (SOG) was a U.S. Special Forces detachment formed to penetrate the Ho Chi Minh Trail and to rescue downed airmen. Plaster (*Ultimate Sniper*, Paladin, 1993), a veteran of three tours of duty with SOG, has written the most complete account of the missions to date. Together with their Montagnard and Nung allies, these small-raiding, observation, and rescue parties were inserted within enemy strongholds on uniformly perilous missions. Always outnumbered, SOG volunteers suffered catastrophic casualty rates. They also earned ten Congressional Medals of Honor. Written as a tribute to the memory of fallen comrades, Plaster's narrative is an engrossing and thoroughly exciting account of this unknown aspect of the Vietnam War. Highly recommended for academic and public libraries. John R. Vallely, Siena Coll. Lib., Loudonville, N.Y.

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### **From Booklist**

Retired Special Forces officer Plaster tells the story of the study and observation group, or SOG, that, during the Vietnam War, controlled Special Forces cross-border reconnaissance missions, "black" propaganda (i.e., propaganda whose source is concealed), and the infiltration of agents into North Vietnam. SOG-Vietnam members suffered casualties exceeding 100 percent (i.e., the same persons were wounded more than once), won seven Medals of Honor and countless other decorations, and did a heroic share of the work of mobilizing and training the Montagnards; the group may well have been, overall, the single most effective unit of its size in the American war effort. Plaster has used his own experiences, the experiences of a virtual who's who of other special-ops veterans, and extensive published sources to cover everything from how to booby-trap a pornographic poster to the tactics of a firefight deep in Laos and without hope of air support. Some of the achievements he limns would be rejected by the editors of action-filled war novels, but it is time

that they--and the men, living and dead, who performed them--are properly chronicled. An indispensable addition for Vietnam and special-warfare collections. *Roland Green*

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#### **Marcia Marshall:**

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