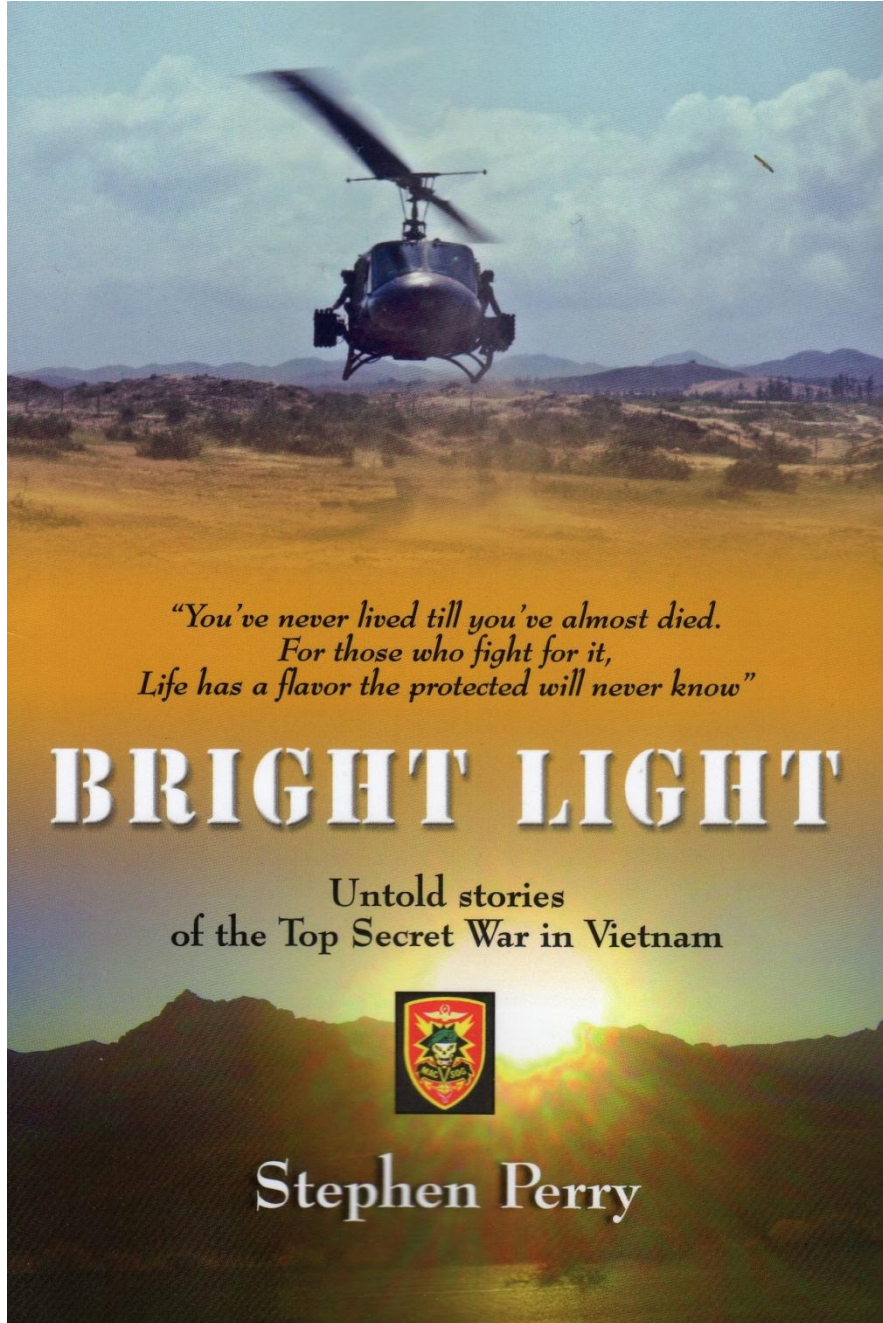


*Bright Light*



*"You've never lived till you've almost died.  
For those who fight for it,  
Life has a flavor the protected will never know"*

# BRIGHT LIGHT

Untold stories  
of the Top Secret War in Vietnam



Stephen Perry

*Stephen Perry*

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View photos of the people and places described in the book at

<http://brightlight1968.com>

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the military forces of the United States of America, especially to those left behind in the seething jungles of Vietnam. We must never allow their sacrifice to be in vain!



*“You’ve never lived until you have almost died, for those who fight for it; life has a flavor that the protected will never know”*

*SOG Motto*

*Stephen Perry*

*"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."*

Jesus Christ  
John 8:12

*Bright Light*



THE BOY NEXT DOOR..... 2

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    MACE ..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

RATS, RATS, BIG RATS..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

MY BAND OF BROTHERS..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

NEVER FORGET ..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

*Stephen Perry*

THE LAST DANCE .....ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.  
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    SO, IF WE WON, HOW DID WE LOSE? ..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.  
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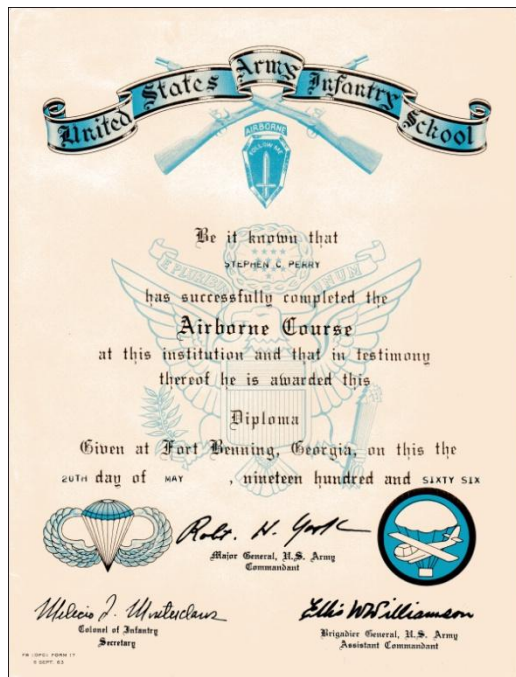
Stephen Perry

# The Boy Next Door

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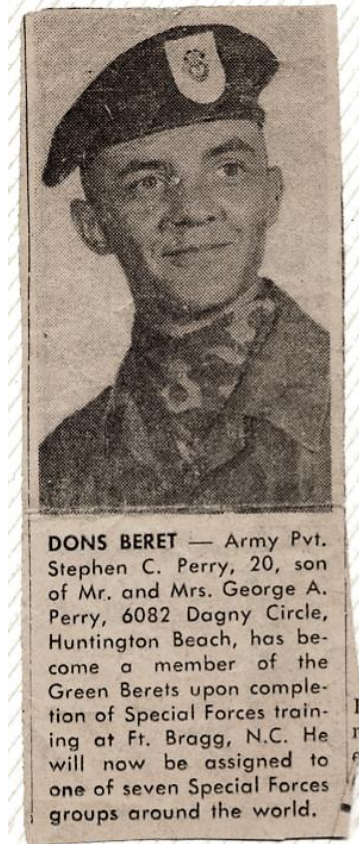
We all learned as children that the “Man of Steel”, Superman was not really human at all. Our super hero was actually an alien born on the planet Krypton and sent to earth via a rocket ship by his scientist father. I can still clearly hear the announcement that Superman stood for “Truth, Justice and the American Way.” This was something that I deemed important as a child and something that I would try to emulate as an adult.

What about America’s real super heroes? Were they also “Strangers in a Strange Land” like Robert Heinlein’s Michael Valentine Smith or maybe the sons of some fictional Rambo?



*Bright Light*

During my brief tour with the US Army I had the honor of standing and fighting beside many of those American super heroes. These real heroes were lads that sat next to you in church or who lived next door and perhaps mowed your lawn. These brave men had lived in our neighborhoods, attended our schools and churches and had done all the things that American kids do. But these brave men were different in a very special way. They too had the strong moral compass of Superman and had heard the call for "Truth, Justice and the American Way." They had heard the call of their country and had stood proudly to accept their responsibility as United States citizens. They were not afraid of the talk of war or its intrinsic dangers. These men volunteered over and over again for the good of their country. These men were the Green Berets of the Studies and Observation Group (SOG).



Green Berets were three time volunteers. First, they had to join the military on a voluntary basis and not be drafted. Secondly, they had to volunteer for airborne training and willingly jump out of perfectly good airplanes as part of that training. Thirdly, they had to volunteer for Special Forces. The volunteering part done, there was a long period of testing, qualifying and training before these young men could wear the Green Beret. Once awarded the beret, there remained a lot more training in a job specialty and in other areas such as jungle warfare and survival training. In the end, these few, these Green Berets, were the boys next door now grown into men of honor and dignity, highly trained and motivated to go wherever their Country would send them.

*Stephen Perry*



Special Forces medical class 67-1, Fort Bragg NC

My story began in Los Angeles, California where I was born to wonderful parents, George and Estelle Perry. My parents had dignity and had taught their children honor and love. My parents raised me as a Catholic. After moving to a home in Whittier, California in 1952, my sister Judy and I were enrolled in a Catholic grammar school named Saint Gregory the Great School. It was in St Gregory's parish that I learned more about my God and my Country. I learned that it was honorable to serve my Country and my God. I learned that the freedom to worship God was a right unique to free societies; and a right that was indeed worth fighting for.

Growing up I was a typical lad who enjoyed hiking, camping, nature, and the outdoors. I joined the Cub Scouts and remained a member of the Boy Scouts of America until I was fifteen years old. I made a number of the long - range hikes that were popular at the time including the Silver Moccasin and Golden Arrowhead hikes in the Angeles National Forest. I was "tapped out"(selected) for the Order of the Arrow when I was thirteen years old and I remember

### *Bright Light*

being taken out in the woods of the Brea Canyon by a young man dressed as an Indian brave and made to spend the night alone on the ground with no sleeping bag or tent. Little did I know at the time that I would repeat this act many times in the jungles of Vietnam.

One day at St Gregory's church I was saying the prayer that Roman Catholics say when they receive communion and I had a very special encounter with He who would remain my God and my protector to this very day. The prayer goes like this "*O Lord, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof. Say but the word and my soul shall be healed.*" I said the prayer devoutly while gazing upon the image of the crucified Christ hanging on the cross and I was overcome with a peace beyond my understanding. When the day ended, I got on with my youthful life and grew far from the God I had encountered that day.

I earned many badges and awards while I was a Boy Scout, but the best were the Ad Alteri Dei, the highest award a boy could earn from the Catholic Church, and the Rank of Eagle Scout, which is the highest rank a Boy Scout could earn. Not too many months after earning the rank of Eagle, my interest turned to hot rods, surfing and girls, and my days as a boy scout came to an end.

I graduated from St Gregory's in 1959 and attended high school at Don Bosco Technical Institute in South San Gabriel, California. I graduated from Bosco Tech in 1963 and attended my first year of college at what was then Fullerton Junior College (Now Cal State Fullerton). Since our family had grown over the years to now include my brothers David and John, and sisters Judy and Marilyn, it was time to replace our three bedroom house with one more suited to our family. A beautiful new five bedroom home was found in Huntington Beach and we moved in late in 1963. The following year I moved in with a few new friends from Orange Coast College. We shared apartments in Costa Mesa and later in Newport Beach where we lived until four of us enlisted in the Army in November of 1965. We enlisted on the buddy plan and each of us had hopes of winning the Green Beret.

*Stephen Perry*

I had enlisted with roommates Bert Merriman, Jim Sexton and Chris Cox. Each was just another “boy next door” until the spark of patriotism ignited a fire to serve. We all completed basic training at Fort Ord, California. We were tested and screened for Special Forces and two of us were selected to proceed to our goal. Friend Jim Sexton, the blond haired surfer I had shared many an adventure with while living on Newport Beach was found to be too young to proceed to Special Forces. At the time, a candidate had to be twenty one years old to begin training and since Jim would only be twenty, he was disqualified. Jim went on to serve out his years of enlistment somewhere in Alaska.

My friend Chris Cox was diagnosed with a severe case of asthma and was disqualified and later medically discharged from the service. Chris went on to become an entertainer. He moved to Aspen, Colorado and sang his ballads in clubs within the town over the years while he pursued his love of the mountains and skiing.

Bert Merriman and I were accepted for further qualification and training in Special Forces. We were sent to Fort Leonard wood, Missouri for training as combat engineers and from there to Jump school at Fort Benning, Georgia. After completing Airborne training and receiving our “silver wings,” we were bused to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare. Here we were assigned to Special Forces (SF) Training Group where we were tested, screened, interviewed, and tested some more as part of the SF qualification process. After passing all the mental, physical and psychological tests we were given more tests to best determine our academic abilities and strengths. From here we completed eight weeks of Special Forces qualification training followed by issuance of our Berets and assignment to a Special Forces specialty school. Bert was sent to engineer school and I was sent to medical training.

For the next year I was trained in all aspects of medicine. My training was conducted at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and Fort Sam Houston, Texas and Fort Rucker Alabama. Classroom training was followed by on the job training at the Army hospital at Fort Rucker, Alabama. My medical training class got smaller over time as men failed to complete sections of the training. After

### *Bright Light*

completing on the job training we were returned to Ft. Bragg for another eight week class on tropical medicine and then the notorious “dog lab.”

In dog lab we were assigned a patient (a stray dog collected from a local dog pound). My patient was ironically named “Whiskey” and, like my classmates, I became attached to my pet-patient. The patients were worked up medically and then one day each was taken into a chamber and shot through the meaty part of the rear thigh with a high-powered rifle. The high velocity of a bullet tearing through flesh sends out shock waves that kill flesh. Our job was to stop the bleeding, debride (cut out the dead tissue), and battle dress the wound. Over the following days and weeks we would change the dressing and nurse our patient back to health. When recovered, it was our job to put the patient under general anesthesia and amputate the leg as though it were a human patient. The patient was then over sedated and dog lab was complete. This whole process may seem cruel, but was necessary to give the Special Forces Medic the hands on training in skills that he would be expected to perform on his comrades when the need arose. Public protests at some point after my training led to a change where goats replaced man’s best friend as the new patients of the SF medics.

After successful completion of dog lab, my surviving classmates and I stood individually before oral boards where we were tested orally on everything we had learned over our year of medical training. A team of four doctors fired difficult medical questions expecting correct and immediate responses to all. Several more of my classmates fell by the wayside as they failed to perform well under the pressure of the oral boards. By this time in the process, the men who washed out of the medical training were given the option to attend some other SF specialty training, but were not allowed to serve as Special Forces Medics.

After completing the Special Forces medical training there was another short training session of about eight weeks followed by graduation and assignments to the various Special Forces Groups around the world.

*Stephen Perry*

My friend Bert had graduated long before me due to the shorter nature of his training and he was already in Vietnam. Bert had been assigned to Project Delta. My classmates from my medical class (SF medical Class 67-1) were sent all over the world: Germany, Panama, Okinawa, and Vietnam; but I was left stateside, assigned to the Seventh Special Forces Group. My assigned duties for a time were to provide medical coverage for war games being conducted in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina. It was here, in the then dry counties of North Carolina that I encountered my first moonshiners and sampled their potent brew.

Not wanting to be left behind, I called Mrs. Alexander at the Pentagon and volunteered again, this time for the Fifth Special Forces Group in Vietnam. Within a month, I received orders to report for transport to the Republic of South Vietnam. And so, the boy next door had become a man wearing the Green Beret.

After returning home for a two week leave I reported to Fort Lewis, Washington to be transported to the Republic of South Vietnam. It was here in early December of 1968 that I befriended Ken Cryan, another boy next door and native son of California. Ken and I became great friends and remained very close until his death in May of 1968. We traveled to Vietnam together, arriving at Cam Ranh Bay and from there to Fifth Special Forces Headquarters at Nha Trang. All of the other Special Forces men who had arrived with Ken and I were quickly assigned and shipped to their A or B teams around Vietnam (an A team was a basic twelve man special forces team while a B team was a larger support unit). Ken and I began wondering what was wrong with us that nobody wanted us assigned to their teams. Then one day before Christmas 1967, we were called into the office. As we stood at attention before the officers desk, the stoic faced captain informed us that we had both been assigned to C and C North, and that we had been held pending approval of our Top Secret Clearances. Neither Ken nor I had any idea of what the officer was talking about or what C and C North was. We were loaded on a C 130 transport later that day (Christmas Eve 1967) headed north to Da Nang, and by Christmas day, we had learned our fate as new guys



### *Bright Light*

assigned to the Special Operations Group (SOG). SOG was not officially part of the Special Forces operations in Southeast Asia, but Special Forces was used as a cover to shift highly trained insurgents into the top secret operations.

When Ken and I arrived at Phu Bai a few days after Christmas 1967, we stood formation with other newcomers and were greeted by the FOB 1 commander, Major Ira Snell. The Commanding Officer (CO) told us that the medics had a critical MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) and would be assigned to medical duties in support of the teams. He said that the FOB (Forward Occupational Base) was in dire need of volunteers to serve on the recon teams and that he would consider any of us who volunteered. After thinking about this overnight, I went to the COs office the following day and volunteered once again.

Major Snell was delighted with my choice and assigned me to ST Idaho under the command of SFC (Sergeant First Class) Glen Lane. In the following days and weeks, I would get to know the men on ST (Spike Team) Idaho during both training and leisure time.



Aerial View of SOG base FOB 1 (note zig zag trench lines)



*Stephen Perry*

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