

# From Special Forces flying to ranching,

By Heather Alwin

Colby Free Press  
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Ray "Jack" Duncan, a Levant-area farmer and rancher, has carried a coin in his pocket since 1967, except when his dad held it for him while he was fighting in Vietnam. The coin signifies his membership in an elite and highly skilled group of men: Special Forces soldiers.

Born and raised in northern California, Duncan said he "forgot about school" as a teenager, spending his time and focus on the

rush of rodeo: bull riding and bareback riding. He spent two years in military school where he graduated on Jan. 28, 1966.

Eight days earlier, he had turned 18. And 17 days later, on Valentine's Day, he entered the Army.

He had been drafted, receiving his draft letter shortly after graduating high school. The draft letter meant he lost a scholarship to the University of Arizona where he had planned to study veterinary medicine.

"Your friends and neighbors have selected you for service..." the letter said.

"I kept wondering who those friends and

neighbors were," he joked.

In basic training, he was made a sergeant after only two weeks because he had gone to military school.

The young draftees were given a chance to receive better jobs by enlisting rather than simply serving out their draft commitment. Duncan opted for enlistment for the chance to go to jump school and join Special Forces.

It was the "rush," he said, that made him choose the more dangerous specialty. He volunteered to attend flight school, too.

At graduation from Special Forces training, he joked, "I got a beret, a tattoo and my coin."

By April 1967, he was in the central highlands of Vietnam at a base camp called Phu Hiep.

"Forty-nine of us went over there together," said Duncan. "Only three came back."

By 1969, at the age of 20, Duncan became the oldest man in his unit as his fellow soldiers died.

The military urged the special forces soldiers not to tell their families what they were doing, so they lied and said they were medics.

His team's mission was whatever Special Forces needed, including search and rescue for pilots and other personnel who had been shot down.



Jack Duncan

"Sometimes we could find them, and sometimes we couldn't," he said.

The team also inserted and extracted long-range patrols, groups of four to 12 men dropped in a field to search silently through the jungle for up to 28 days, collecting information on the enemy. Duncan's team was always on 24-hour notice when they were paired with a long-range patrol, keeping the helicopter warm and ready to fly with 45-minutes' or less notice.

They operated wherever they were ordered to go, including Cambodia and Laos in 1968 and 1969, even though Americans weren't supposed to be there. They went in civilian clothes and special helicopters, he said.

While Duncan remembers plenty of bad times that he doesn't like to talk about, he remembers some fun times, too.

He laughed as he recalled times when he and his co-pilot would go to a bar — enlisted or officer — and call for a fist fight. He said it was their Special Forces training that helped them win every fight. They never lost one.

"I liked to fight before I went in and liked to when I came out," he said.

Duncan also remembers going to Air Force bases and "robbing them blind," taking mattresses, sinks and even a ski boat. His base

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