

Night Fighter

By Tom Hawkins

I have read the book: "Night Fighter: An Insider's Story of Special Ops from Korea to SEAL Team 6," by William Hamilton (now deceased). Hamilton once served as a UDT officer. I don't understand the title, since "Night Fighter" seems irrelevant to the book, and "SEAL Team SIX" is likely intended to sell the book. Regardless, I can only comment on portions of the book, where I have some factual understanding. Simply, Bill Hamilton and the co-author Charles Sasser have fabricated a tall tale about SEAL Team origins not substantiated by facts, and not supported by official Navy records. I knew Bill Hamilton through telephone conversations, and I met him once or twice personally - the last meeting somewhat a disaster.

In this age of transparency, I must say that Bill Hamilton refused to talk to me for many years in my capacity as president of the UDT-SEAL Association and as editor and publisher of the BLAST. This, because I challenged and disputed a story he published in the U.S. Naval Institute's "Proceedings" magazine in 1989, entitled: "Farewell to the SEALs," claiming to have envisioned what became the SEAL Teams. A claim I asked him to authenticate, but he could not. The same story is repeated in a much longer narrative form in "Night Fighter." Essentially, the story is that it was he, Bill Hamilton, that had the vision responsible for creation of the SEAL Teams, and that Roy Boehm (now deceased) was his surrogate to implement this capability. Except on rare occasions, the book totally disregards any thought of activity on the west coast.

My original submission to the BLAST was simply a letter to the editor, and a copy of a review that I had provided to Amazon.com. I reconsidered that submission after seeing the article by Jim Hawes and letter in Mail Call from Dante Stephenson in the springtime issue. My aim here is not to start a dog fight, but set the record straight, which was never appropriately done with "First SEAL," by Roy Boehm. Jim Hawes allowed me to read a draft manuscript about his operations in the Congo, and the story is compelling.

As many may remember, I was editor and publisher of the UDT-SEAL Association's quarterly magazine, *The BLAST*, for 15 years, and have written somewhat extensively on the history of Naval Special Warfare. I think I can say with some authority that the book "Night Fighter" is replete with untruths and distortions. In fact, far too many to outline in any simplified form without literally challenging the book page after page. The book provides a good self-view of Bill Hamilton's involvement regarding SEALs, but that's really all that it is. Few dates are included, making it difficult to track the chronology of the story. It would be impossible to respond to the entire book, but only fair to provide a few examples.

Speaking about the period after the Korean War, Hamilton's narrative states: "The United States readily abandoned its capability for unconventional warfare with the end of World War II and the disbanding or drawdown of its SpecOps units. A number of foresighted men - Commander [Francis Douglas] Fane, Draper Kauffman, Phil Bucklew, and, I liked to think myself - saw red clouds on the horizon and realized what was coming. Third World nations were beginning to fall like dominos to the Soviet and Sino spheres." This, from Bill Hamilton, who was a Naval Aviator during Korea, attempting to associate himself with bona-fide NSW luminaries. Some facts.



Doug Fane was COMUDUTWO in Little Creek from 1946 until 1953. He adopted the OSS Maritime Unit capabilities from World War II, and created the "SUBOPs" capabilities. He became COMUDUONE in Coronado during the closing months of the Korean War. In his 1956 book, "The Naked Warriors," he concluded his chapter on Korea with this statement: "The Underwater Demolition Teams learned many new lesson during this campaign. With Lieutenant "Rog" Johnson, Lieutenant Commander Fane sat down and rewrote the "book" of advance operational doctrine for the employment of UDT, a work which will guide the tactics of UDT for years to come." After checking with others, we have concluded was likely the drafting or a rewrite of Naval Warfare Information Publication 22-4 "Underwater Demolition Teams in Amphibious Warfare." NWIPs were documents held aboard ships, submarines, and planning staffs to educated planners on UDT capabilities and tactical procedures.

NWIP-22-4 was classified confidential. I don't have a copy of it, but I can paraphrase it pretty well. It stated that UDT's primary mission was hydrographic reconnaissance and clearing of natural and man-made obstacles; up to the high-water mark on prospective landing beaches. The secondary mission included: mine clearance, clandestine attacks on enemy shipping, demolition raids on bridges, railway lines, roads, canals, and harbor facilities.



Captain Phil Bucklew was the first Commander, Naval Operations Support Group, Pacific in November 1963.

Phil Bucklew had nothing to do with UDT during or after World War II. He was one of the first Scout and Raiders trained during the war, was recalled for Korea to serve in the Atlantic Beach Jumper Unit, and remained in the Navy after that. As a navy Captain, he was selected to become the first commander of Naval Operations Support Group, Pacific in October 1963 (forerunner of NSWG-1), which required a Captain. There were no UDT captains. In this capacity he was overall commander of the west coast SEAL and UDTs, Beach Jumper Unit ONE, and Boat Support Unit ONE. He was chosen for this job, not because he had a vision for the SEALs, but because he was a navy Captain with a "special operations" background. He was a great selection, and did provide vision for expanding all U.S. Navy activities in Vietnam through his Vietnam Delta Infiltration Study Group and the now infamous "Bucklew Report." Lieutenant David Del Guiduce, the first commanding officer of SEAL Team ONE, was also a member of this group.



Draper Kauffman seen with UDT-21 operator L.K. Williams during a visit to St. Thomas, USVI, date unknown. Williams is wearing a Draeger (LT Lund II) UBA common to the UDTs in the mid 50s.

Draper Kauffman left UDT in January 1946 and never looked back. He had no vision for the future of the UDTs, which had been reduced to four 50-man post-war teams: UDT-1 and UDT-3 in Coronado, and UDT-2 and UDT-4 at Little Creek - the first UDTs ever assigned to the Atlantic. During Vietnam, as Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Philippines, Kauffman was consulted by Admiral Elmo Zumwalt about expanded operations for SEALs in Vietnam, but he had no clue about SEALs. Admiral Zumwalt later included Captain Frank Kaine in the conversation with Admiral Kauffman. Frank Kaine, was a legendary Pacific NCDU commander during WWII, and touted as "MacArthur's Frogman." He served as COMUDUTWO for several years, and later relieved Captain Bucklew as CNSWG-1. Frank Kaine was in Kauffman's first NCDU training class at Fort Pierce.

As Frank Kaine stated in his oral history: "Of course Kauffman hadn't anything to do with SEALs. He didn't know a SEAL from a bow-bow." Admiral Zumwalt sent Frank Kaine to assist Kauffman's understanding of SEALs and their training and capabilities. Kauffman then admitted that he had no knowledge regarding SEAL training or operations.

The visionary for the future of UDT was LCDR Doug "Red Dog" Fane as COMUDUTWO during the post-war period, and perhaps as COMUDUONE during Korea. The visionary for the SEAL Teams was not President John F. Kennedy, which has, unfortunately, become an urban legend. The concept of what would become the SEAL Teams began as early as 1958, when the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, proposed covert activities to keep the Communist powers off balance. If there was a "SEAL father," it would be Admiral Burke and his recognition for need of special naval units for smaller conflicts in unconventional warfare.

The above example alone provides insight as to what it would take to debate the other numerous allegations in "Night Fighter." I for one would never place Bill Hamilton in the class with Kauffman, Fane, or Bucklew. Addressing the entire book is impossible, but perhaps another example is advisable.

Hamilton states (no date is associated with this): "The fiasco in Cuba was still in the headlines, along with a new crisis developing in partitioned Berlin, when I received orders to report to the Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon as soon as possible." His narrative indicates that: "...a sour-faced civilian receptionist showed me to Admiral Arleigh Burke's office."

He then quotes the CNO as saying, "Sit Down, Commander," he invited gesturing. "I received your proposal outlining your plan to create a naval special forces unit." Hamilton goes on to state that Admiral Burke displayed to him an unsigned letter with the subject line "Development of Naval Guerrilla/Counter Guerrilla Warfare Capability," which

he quoted as saying: "...augment present naval capabilities in restricted waters and rivers with particular reference to the conduct and support of paramilitary operations. It is desirable to establish Special Operations Teams as separate components within Underwater Demolition Units One and Two..." He continues: "I read it twice to make sure I understood. I felt dizzy with disbelief. Apparently, more military people than I imagined shared my vision. While I was occupied with training and preparing for the Cuban invasion, ideas expressed in my letter were secretly floating around within the Defense and Navy Departments. My proposals, I discovered, were the impetus needed to invigorate movements already underway." The narrative goes on to cherry pick the formal and factual documentation first presented to our community by Captain David Del Giudice in the BLAST and Naval Institutes "Proceedings" magazines regarding the entire scope of how the SEAL Teams were actually studied and established.

There is a lot here to comment on. It is unclear when this dialogue occurred. This is the first time "his letter" is discussed in the book. This is the same letter I asked him to produce to validate his claim to be the visionary of the SEAL Teams. Notice that there is no date associated with his meeting with Admiral Burke, but we are led to assume it happened when he was reporting to the Pentagon for duty in August 1961. We can only suppose that the "Cuban invasion" was the Bay of Pigs operation that began on 17 April 1961. We are led to believe that his "proposals" were sent prior to that operation. And, he may be correct.

As COMUDUTWO he wrote a letter dated 24 April 1961, which requested establishment of an additional UDT for the east coast. That would have been UDT-22, of course, and not the vision for a naval special operations, counter-guerrilla or unconventional warfare capability. Here are the facts.

The concept for development of an improved "Naval Guerrilla/Counter guerrilla Warfare" capability within the Navy, and the first ever mention of "SEAL" units, was outlined in a signed 10 March 1961 Memorandum, wherein Rear Admiral William E. Gentner, Director Strategic Plans Division (OP-06), approved preliminary recommendations of the Unconventional Activities Committee (a successor to the Unconventional Activities Working Group; formed on 13 September 1960).

Admiral Genter's recommendations were provided to Admiral Burke for review and agreement. Included was a recommendation for a wide range of "additional unconventional warfare capabilities within, or as an extension of our amphibious forces." Operations conducted in "restricted waters" was emphasized, and, "One unit each was proposed under the Pacific and Atlantic amphibious commanders that would represent a center or focal point through which all elements of this specialized Navy capability (naval guerrilla warfare) would be channeled." The same memorandum stated that, "An appropriate name for such units could be 'SEAL' units, SEAL being a contraction of SEA, AIR, LAND, and thereby, indicating an all-around, universal capability." This was March 1961.

Bill Hamilton's claim is further trumped by the fact that, although there were numerous internal letters and memorandums circulated within the Navy Staff, pivotal correspondence came in a 5 June 1961 letter to from the CNO to the commanders of the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. The topic was, get this: "Development of an Improved Naval Guerrilla/Counter guerrilla Warfare Capability." This is the same letter Hamilton says he saw in draft form in August 1961 upon reporting to the Pentagon.

I can't be exactly sure what transpired, because I've never seen Hamilton's "letter," so I can only conjecture. The 5 June letter would have gone down through the chain of command from CINCLANTFLT to PHIBLANT, and from PHIBLANT to COMUDUTWO (Hamilton) for response, and back up through the chain of command to the Pentagon with endorsements. Same in the Pacific.

In the 5 June letter, the CNO staff specifically requested that the Fleet Commanders submit: "...comments on the

concepts of restricted water operations, river warfare, and Special Operations Teams." There is no question that this letter resulted in considerable actions and activities as the tasking rolled down the chain of command. I've not seen any of the letters responding back to the CNO; however, I do have a copy of a CNO letter dated 31 October 1961 that answered back to a 2 October 1961 letter from CINCLANTFLT, which I don't have. It was the LANTFLT response - although I cannot explain why it would have taken four months to respond.

Bill Hamilton told me that he wrote a letter (meaning he originated the correspondence), and that when it got to PHIBLANT, they asked him to prepare their endorsement (very likely), and when it got to CINCLANTFLT, they too asked him to prepare their endorsement (very likely). He then told me that once the letter made it to the Navy Staff, he was called to the Pentagon for duty to enact his proposals. We know for a fact that he went to the Pentagon for duty in August 1961.

The "letter" Bill Hamilton wrote was not one envisioning Navy special operations units, but rather a letter to justify establishment of UDT-22, and there is no evidence to the contrary. The CINCLANTFLT letter of 2 October: "...sets forth comments and recommendations for the development of an improved naval special operations capability, including command and staff organization charts, and a proposed concept for Naval Special Operations, Atlantic Fleet."

The fact is that in August 1961, LCDR Robert Terry, as CO UDT-21, became COMUDUTWO; relieving LCDR Hamilton to proceed to his new duty station at the Pentagon. This was five months before the SEAL Teams were established, and two months before the LANTFLT letter arrived at the Pentagon. Moreover, LCDR Terry would have finalized any response to the 5 June CNO letter, which would have perhaps taken some time to study. It is likely that Bill Hamilton would have had some deliberation involving preparation of a response to that letter. Once he learned about the Navy Staff's proposal for SEAL Teams, his letter became "the letter," but it's just not true. And, when he wrote what he did in his 1989 "Proceedings" article, the untruth became the truth, and had to be defended.

Part of Bill Hamilton's duties in the Pentagon would have made him the Action Officer on UDT and SEAL Team policy, budget, and manning matters. But it was all coming together before he got there. The workhorse driving the freight train was Navy Captain Sandy Warren, who drafted all of the correspondence for these actions and activities. Once Hamilton got to his job, he acknowledges that he worked for Captain Warren. And, part of his job would have been to assist in the establishment of UDT-22; the unit he requested. There were manning issue and money issues. The Navy allocated \$2.3 million to set up the three teams. UDT was easy, since they had an approved allowance list. The SEAL allowance list had to be developed.

Bill Hamilton talks frequently in the book about "my SEALs" or other remarking to him about "his SEALs." The fact is that after departing Little Creek in August 1961, Hamilton no longer had authority, as indicated in his book, to order Lieutenant Roy Boehm, UDT-21, or any other SEAL or UDT personnel to perform any task or assume any administrative position. His book would lead the reader to think otherwise.

Roy Boehm (now deceased) is discussed liberally in "Night Fighter." His own book "First SEAL," published in 1997 is equally replete with untruths and distortions, or, if you like, alternate facts. Boehm and Hamilton feed off of each other's vague fantasy that they were responsible for the vision of the SEAL Teams, which patently is not true, and not substantiated by facts. Both books were co-authored by Charles Sasser, who seems continually opposed to research and fact checking. The well documented establishment of the SEAL Teams in January 1962 was a total team effort and not accountable to any one individual. If you know the facts, the book "Night Fighter" is pretty appalling reading material, and nothing but an unmitigated disservice to the history of NSW.

Not related to "Night Fighter," but before closing, I'll take this opportunity to one more time dispel the notion

that Admiral Kauffman was the "Father of UDT." He was not. He is appropriately called "Father of Demolition or Combat Demolition," which is more correct. The UDTs were formed in the Pacific in December 1943 without his hand. Also, Captain Bucklew was not the "Father of Naval Special Warfare," and made no such inference in his oral history, or anywhere that I know about. This artificial and glowing title was attributed to him during dedication of the of the Naval Special Warfare Training Center, which was, fittingly, named in his honor. Captain Bucklew was never a UDT or SEAL Naval Special Warfare officer, but during his last assignment in the Navy, at the Pentagon, he was greatly responsible for getting the NSW officer career program approved. There is no father of Naval Special Warfare, just like there is no first SEAL.

I'll conclude by quoting Captain David Del Giudice's final paragraph in his 2011 "Proceedings" article, since I don't think it could be said any better:

"Formation of SEAL teams was not the act of one or two individuals, but the result of the Navy's long-term commitment to create a special-warfare capability that would extend the success of the UDTs to a new era of naval special warfare. Numerous individuals in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations worked tirelessly to formulate a strategy and mission for what would later be known as SEAL teams. And, thousands of Navy SEALs, through their individual dedication and resourcefulness, created one of the most renowned fighting forces in U.S. naval history. It remains so today."



Captain David Del Giudice