

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Rare military arm patch launches author's career

A young man at Western Illinois University had just finished his thesis for a Master's Degree in History and was facing a panel of professors for his oral exam. They had just one question for him. "How do you plan to get this published?"

Now a critically acclaimed author, Lance Zedric, originally from Canton and a 1983 Monmouth College graduate, spoke to SunRise Rotary club Tuesday morning and told the story of how he happened to write the book, *Silent Warriors of World War II, The Alamo Scouts Behind Japanese Lines*.

Zedric and his first book were featured on television's History Channel on June 5th and again this week.

Casual and personable, Zedric told his story of discovery.

As a young boy, he was interested in his father's military arm patches. At a gun show in 1990, he spotted a military patch saying, "Alamo Scouts." The asking price was \$500. When he inquired why it cost so much, he was told, "I don't know, but it's a valuable patch." After other similar conversations, Zedric began the search to find out about the Alamo Scouts. Very little was known because information was classified for 50 years. With humor, he told how he thought the subject would be good for his Master's thesis because the professors would know nothing about it.

Eventually he heard about the Alamo Scout Association and made his first contact with a member of this elite intelligence team. The veteran responded cautiously, but soon sent him a roster of the entire unit. Over the next nine months Alamo Scouts responded to him with unbelievable stories, sending him written accounts and photos.

In 1943, General Kruger of the 6th Army in New Guinea formed the highly successful intelligence gathering team, men who completed 106 missions behind Japanese lines without one loss of life. Kruger had served in Texas, hence the Alamo name. He fought to have his intelligence gatherers separate from both General McArthur's and Australian military leader's operations so he could run the operation the way he wanted.

The men, says Zedric, are unassuming and very secretive because that was the nature of their military activity. "Their mission was about truth, and the truth saved lives," said Zedric. "Their job was to save lives through the gathering of military intelligence."

The Alamo Scouts began with 30 missions in New Guinea. They formed six or seven man teams led by a Lieutenant. The average age of an officer was 21. Among other skills, the men were trained to speak some of the language, maneuver a rubber boat, kill quietly, swim miles with full equipment and under machine gun fire. They were chosen carefully. One hundred men in each class were originally chosen, but then had to respond properly for the actual missions. "They didn't want Rambos," said Zedric. When aspiring men were interviewed there was a tray of personal items sitting before them, such as a comb, watch, book of matches. As they left the



interview the tray was covered and they were asked what was on the tray. If they weren't able to name the items, they were rejected.

The real work, said Zedric, was when they began to move towards the Philippines. They liberated 516 American soldiers, who survived the surrender of U.S. troops in Bataan and subsequent long march which killed thousands, from a prisoner of war camp in Corregidor. In 30 minutes they liberated 66 men, women and children from another prison of war camp in the Philippines.

Sometimes their missions would last 72 days and they would have rations for three. They would go without food and lose 50 to 60 pounds, but return with success. Zedric said the reconnaissance teams could refuse any mission and only one was aborted. A team was proceeding to Corregidor and halfway there decided to return. The men said there were spotlights everywhere.

The number of men who actually participated in these missions was 138, and I repeat, not one was lost. When the war ended in 1945, there was no recognition for the Alamo Scouts, no ceremony. Now, Zedric says, there are only 30 left of those who performed missions. He is in close contact with about a dozen of the men. Four former Alamo Scouts became Major Generals. Others achieved high officer status and served in Korea and Viet Nam.

Zedric graduated from United States Army Intelligence School and served in Army intelligence in Korea, Ft. Bragg, N. C. and in support of Coalition Forces during the Gulf War. He has authored or co-authored five books and published hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles on topics ranging from military history to self-help, humor and general interest.

The military arm patch is now worth \$1,500.

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