



COBRAY: TURNING THE TABLES ON TERRORISTS

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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

The Journal Of Professional Adventurers

**STAKEOUT:
RIZZO'S RAIDERS**

**JOHN VANN:
VIETNAM
VISIONARY**

**U.S. FIELD GEAR
EXPOSE**



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE



COVER

Zap, you're dead, terrorist. Television reporter Colin Seldur enrolled in Mitch WerBell's Cobray school to do a documentary. A pacifist when he entered the course, Seldur soon got with the program and became an outstanding student. Here he blasts away with an Ingram M-10 during training. Seldur now appreciates the value of being able to defend one's self with either bare hands or weapons.

RUNNING DOWN AN SOF NOTICE

Edmond Lamb

A reader tracks a merc employer in old London town.

26

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Dana Drenkowski

Historical view: US Border Patrol from past to present.

30

STAKEOUT:

RIZZO'S RAIDERS

N.E. MacDougald

First US SWAT team spreads brotherly love — in its fashion.

38

COBRAY: TURNING THE TABLES ON TERRORISTS

Tom Dunkin

Mitch WerBell teaches how to keep those executives alive and well.

46

EX-GREEN

BERET'S SYSTEM

Capt. Jerry Lee

Go "loco" with the LOCO pack.

54

FIELD GEAR

NEEDS FACE LIFT

1st Lt. Steven J. Lynn

ALICE shouldn't live here any more.

57



Page 38



Page 46



Page 54



Page 68

UNDER NORTHERN LIGHTS

Duane Tigges

In Norwegian tent with Anna.

64

VIETNAM VISIONARY

J. David Truby

Highest ranking American to die in 'Nam... J.P. Vann did it his way.

68

TAPS FOR A TROOPER

Bob Poos

"Shep remembered the good things about life."

80

IPSC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Al J. Venter

South Africa hosts international match.

86

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Bulletin Board | 6 |
| Full Auto | 8 |
| Flak | 10 |
| Combat Pistolcraft | 14 |
| Editorial | 16 |
| Steele on Knives | 12 |
| In Review | 18 |
| Terrain & Situation | 22 |
| I Was There | 28 |
| Editorial | 51 |
| Fighting for Keeps | 52 |
| Classified | 91 |
| Advertisers Index | 94 |



WERBELL'S COBRAY SCHOOL

by Tom Dunkin

TERRORISTS BEWARE!

SOME call it a school for killers. The founder, Mitchell L. WerBell III, says it's a school for survival.

"What we're trying to do is keep people alive, and that ain't easy." WerBell speaks from experience. He's dealt with war, revolution and domestic as well as foreign intrigue and violence for almost four decades.

EXECUTIVE SECURITY

WerBell's curriculum is designed to provide "executive security" for business and political leaders whose prominence makes them prime targets for kidnapping and/or assassination. His students are taught to protect such leaders, to prevent their getting into tight spots if possible, and to get them out safely, with deadly force if necessary, if unable to prevent jeopardy.

Called Cobray International, Inc., the school is arousing considerable interest. It isn't the only school offering to teach bodyguards to be effective — as the advertising sections of *SOF* will attest — but it has certain important distinctions. That includes founder WerBell and his staff, and their track records.

WerBell's experience with violence and surviving it dates back to World War II service with the Office of Strategic Services. Most of his staff are retired military men, or young law enforcement officers and civilians who have proved their ability, including one private detective who is a genius at surreptitious photography.

Newly appointed acting president is retired Air Force Col. Barney Cochran, whose lengthy military service included heading up the Air Commando training

program during the Vietnam War. Cochran also teaches the unconventional weapons course for Cobray.

Although just now coming into public view, the Cobray concept had a brief start some 10 years ago. That led to WerBell organizing a company known as Security Arms Training Affiliates, Inc. President of SATA was retiring Col. John S. Wood Jr., who failed to lead SATA to the prominence envisioned. SATA offered specialized weapons and tactics training to law enforcement officers. The effort fell flat, even though one of its specialties, SWAT training, was a big thing then, in the aftermath of the mid-'60s Watts riots and the Texas tower sniper. The latter involved the 1966 University of Texas incident in which student Charles Whitman killed 12 persons and wounded 31, from

an observation tower 280 feet above the campus. Whitman's reign of terror ended only after police got above him and gunned him down.

TERRORISM CHECKMATE

Cobray evolved about a year ago from the exigencies of politics. In 1977 the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency released a report forecasting a spread of terrorism in the U.S. similar to that in Europe and other parts of the world. Meanwhile WerBell, aside from the earlier abortive SATA effort, had made a visit to Argentina in the mid-'70s. WerBell appraised the security measures in force for Coca-Cola Company executives abroad, and made two positive recommendations. Coca-Cola denies it. WerBell doesn't dwell on the subject, nor debate it; he merely notes,

"Coca-Cola hasn't had anybody kidnaped lately."

Regardless of whether the feared spread of politically-inspired terrorism materializes, Cobray seems to have attracted the attention of a number of persons interested in personal emergency preparedness. Several Atlanta area physicians have taken the Cobray course, and negotiations are going on with Army officials on the possibility of Cobray training for military policemen from Atlanta's Fort McPherson, which among other things is headquarters for the U.S. Army Forces Command.

Cobray's courses began with 11 subjects taught over a six-day period of 10-hour days. This provided 50½ hours of classroom lectures, shooting and hand-

to-hand combat training, with another two days optional which was devoted to evasive driving maneuvers.

With the shakedown period past, Cobray now has added five more optional courses. They are Convoy Procedures, a four-hour course; Shotgun Techniques, four hours; Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation, six hours, with certification by the American Heart Association; Crisis Intervention-Hostage Negotiation, four hours; and Medical Trauma-First Aid, four hours.

COURSE OUTLINE

The original course of study offered, in addition to the optional two-day evasive driving class, is:

·38 Caliber Revolver
·Marksmanship.....12 hours

.45 Caliber Pistol 12 hours
 Marksmanship 12 hours
 Martial Arts 12½ hours
 Situation Awareness 2 hours
 Photography 5 hours
 Counter-terrorist
 Procedures 3 hours
 Rifles-Scopes 5 hours
 Electronic

Countermeasures 5 hours
 Unconventional Weapons 3 hours
 Another innovation since Cobray began operations is the offering of separate courses in combat pistolcraft and a sniper rifle course, both at a minimum of six hours each, at a cost of \$35 an hour.

Basic cost of Cobray training is \$1,200 for the six-day course, with another \$200 a day for evasive driving. The student also must provide his meals and lodging except for lunch.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

Cobray students are screened before enrollment. "You don't just walk in off the street," WerBell stresses. Among the desirable attributes are a life membership in the National Rifle Association; being an active-duty or retired member of the military forces of the United States; or active service with a public law enforcement agency. The personal recommendation of a Cobray staff member is also helpful. A notarized statement of a good character from the senior law enforcement officer or magistrate from the student's place of residence is required.

Also required are a personal history, and a "need for attendance" statement, for each enrollee. Cobray offers a 15 percent discount to law enforcement officers and a discount is offered to them for sniper rifle and combat pistol courses.

The school is conducted at WerBell's baronial estate at Powder Springs, an Atlanta, Ga., suburb. There are some, including some of his neighbors, who feel it should be renamed Gunpowder Springs, in WerBell's honor.

WerBell's association with weapons and their uses has been long and constant.

Following his World War II service, which primarily was in the CBI Theater, WerBell tried a brief fling at advertising. This included heading the advertising department for Rich's, a major Atlanta department store. He then became a partner in an advertising agency, which later folded, and his activities then become hazy.

WerBell surfaced with a bang in 1965 in the Dominican Republic. He maintains he was there growing bananas. He was photographed, however, with top Dominican brass, including Gen. Antonio Imbert. The late Paul Bethel, in his book, *The Losers*, says WerBell occupied the lead tank — as a civilian — as Imbert's forces, loyal to President Joaquin Balaguer, drove to the Ozama River.

Bethel gave no other information on WerBell's reasons for being in the area. WerBell highlighted his presence even



This 28-year-old housewife became proficient with unconventional weapons such as a screwdriver, hatchet, and knife. She fired a better handgun score than her husband. Both made expert.



TOP: Martial arts instructor Chris McLoughlin (second) limbers up class before instruction period. ABOVE: Mitchell L. WerBell III in his booklined "gun room" office, which sports a variety of firearms and cutlery.

more dramatically in a spectacular dash on foot, under fire, to pull Miami *Herald* reporter Al Burt and a photographer, the late Doug Kennedy, from a burning taxi cab. The vehicle, whose Dominican driver was killed, came under fire from U.S. Marines who were suspicious of its presence and occupants.

Burt and Kennedy were seriously wounded. (Kennedy died several years later, of cancer.) WerBell escaped with minor burns on his hands. Questioned as to WerBell's presence and purpose, Burt would only say, "He was working with some Cubans."

"SPOOK" WERBELL

The aura of mystery which has surrounded WerBell's activities in recent years is beginning to diminish, although he stoutly maintains he's never been asso-

ciated with the CIA. The label, "Spook," however, has been hung on WerBell by a number of his associates. Among them is Andrew St. George, a freelance journalist who, several years ago, published an article in which he stated the United States was responsible for assassination of the late Dominican Republic dictator, Rafael Trujillo. St. George also said WerBell arrived on the scene shortly before Trujillo's demise, as the CIA's specialist in assassination weapons.

Mike Accia, a former *Life* magazine reporter based in Miami, says WerBell was a CIA contract employee at the time of the 1965 rebellion. A similar position is taken by author Jim Hougan in his book, *Spooks* (William Morrow & Co., Inc., New York, 1978). Hougan says WerBell "worked under contract to the CIA in the 1960s, organizing amphibious landings against Cuba from a base in the Dominican Republic...."

Spooks is an interesting bit of literature. It appeared a couple of years after the industrious St. George, whose distinction includes being scooped by the late *Ramparts* magazine in acquiring and publishing Che Guevara's diary, began laboring mightily on a *roman a clef* magnum opus about WerBell. The portly St. George has yet to produce his biography of WerBell.

VIETNAM TRAVELS

Hougan also says WerBell's travels in Vietnam during the late '60s and early '70s involved huddling with CIA officials, "Siamese princes and Asian intelligence czars on the subject of programmatic liquidations."

WerBell's ostensible purpose for his flying the friendly skies of Vietnam during that time was as head of research and development for his weapons manufacturing firm. In a unique application of cottage industry, WerBell had, fiddling around in the basement of his palatial home, developed the efficient Siemons firearms silencer. After testing it on several visits to Fort Benning — including an unscheduled and undetected impromptu demonstration, emptying a .22 caliber pistol skyward from a fourth floor downtown Columbus motel balcony — WerBell took his silencer to Vietnam for the acid test.

From one of those jaunts WerBell returned with Gordon Ingram, a reclusive aeronautical engineer responsible for the Ingram submachine gun. It has been rumored WerBell kept Ingram locked in a dungeonlike area of his basement at Powder Springs until Ingram perfected the gun. There are those who feel the Ingram surpasses the Thompson.

Also during this time, WerBell, working with the Army Marksmanship Training Unit at Benning, helped to produce the M21 sniper rifle system — which features the Siemons silencer.

That weapon helped establish the record for WerBell's chief marksmanship instructor at Cobray, Bert Waldron, of 113 confirmed sniper kills in Vietnam. Waldron earned two Distinguished Service Crosses, the code name "Daniel Boone" and an uncollected Viet Cong bounty of \$50,000 on his head.

COBRAY REORGANIZATION

In a recent reorganizational shuffle, brought on by Cobray's actual and an-

anticipated growth, Waldron was named director of the newly formed Cobray Training Center, which has evolved as the school formerly known as Cobray International, Inc. The latter designation has been elevated to the overall corporate umbrella which covers WerBell's entire operations. This includes Defense Systems International, an arms brokerage firm — that also can provide the men to use them.

Acting president of Cobray International, Inc., is Barney Cochran, who recently retired after 28 years of command service in the Air Force. This was preceded by two years of W. W. II Navy duty.

Cochran, 53, and WerBell have crossed paths in many parts of the world, such as the Dominican Republic and Vietnam.

COCHRAN'S CREDENTIALS

A brief review of Cochran's credentials shows half of his 30 years active duty was spent in unconventional warfare and special operations for the Air Force. He was a squadron commander in the 1st Air Commando Wing, and a detachment commander of a T28 unit in Vietnam in 1963. He also headed a classified detachment in northern Thailand in the '60s.

Cochran also served as area adviser to a Special Forces group in the Dominican Republic during the period the DR appeared likely to become another Cuba. Later he served as deputy commander for the Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force Europe (SOTFE), during 1970-74. Earlier, from '65 to '70, Cochran had been Chief of Unconventional Warfare Branch and special assistant for counterinsurgency and special activities organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In that job he was responsible for development of "hardware" for global special operations and unconventional warfare.

Cochran is a rated parachutist and command pilot and has a Master's degree in anthropology. Cochran considers his most important billet at Cobray to be teaching use of unconventional weapons.

Those weapons include files, screwdrivers, knives and hatchets, thrown at short range, and ballpoint pens at close quarters.

TOTAL FORCE

Cochran teaches that "when you commit force; commit it totally." He warns that when opponents "are going to pull a kidnap, they're going to take out the security forces first."

Cochran also teaches, "It is as important to know when to throw a knife as to know how to throw it." To learn how to throw it takes "one hour a day, five days a week, for three weeks," according to him. He adds that one of his former comrades in Air Commandos "gets two or three deer each hunting season, using a throwing knife." Cochran favors the Randall and Blackie Sewell knives, and the Paris Theodore holster, which he says, "provides concealment and comfort."

Cobray's martial arts classes are taught by civilian Chris McLoughlin, who is a

veteran of some 12 years study and teaching. McLoughlin is co-author, with Blackie Collins, of *Personal Defense*, a book published in 1977 (see SOF, Nov. '77). McLoughlin holds a Black Belt in American Karate and serves as a consultant to several law enforcement agencies.

OTHER INSTRUCTORS

Among the handgun instructors is Barry Worrell, a young investigator for a Georgia sheriff's department, who is a phenomenal marksman. After watching Worrell fire several magazines of .45 caliber at three different targets, one student said, "His upper body has become a gun turret."

Worrell and his fellow instructors teach the two-handed Weaver combat stance of handgun use. Worrell is assisted by Larry Cooper, formerly a law enforcement officer for 15 years. An associate instructor is Bill Krilling, retired recently from the U.S. Army Marksmanship Training Unit at Fort Benning. Krilling also serves as a consultant to several foreign governments on small arms weaponry and their uses and in coaching military marksmanship teams at shooting matches.

The Georgia State Patrol's driving instructor, civilian Terry Earwood, handles the evasive driving course. Earwood's class is rough on automobiles. It includes the classic 180-degree "bootlegger" turn to thwart roadblocks. Most kidnappings occur at blockades or roadblocks, according to Earwood.

Van Keller, a Georgia State Patrol trooper who specializes in detection and de-fanging of automobile bombs teaches this countermeasure to Cobray students.

Communications security is taught by a civilian, Ed Lowery, who is a staff

member of an Atlanta-based company with a worldwide clientele in electronics. Lowery cautions his students as to the legal complexities of "bugging," and he advises them to learn what Public Law 9351 says on this subject. Lowery is an expert on radio frequency-shielded rooms for business security. He tells his students that in a pinch, "An old electric fan generates so much electrical disturbance that it breaks up radio frequencies. A room air conditioner and box-type window fans also are good." But, says Lowery, "if a bug is court-ordered, legal and installed by the telephone company, forget it — you won't find it." One of his textbooks is *The Electronic Invasion* by Robert M. Brown (revised second edition. Hayden Book Co., Inc., Rochelle Park, NJ, \$5.45).

COBRAY'S PURPOSE

Cobray's purpose, says WerBell, is "to equip the student with a knowledge of martial arts, small arms, personal defense weapons and techniques, and to promote efficiency in the use of such arms and combat skills to a level of confidence and mental awareness which will enable him to engage an adversary with quick response and accurate fire," when a "kill-or-be-killed" encounter is unavoidable.

In today's society, "the clock is running out for the inadequately trained police officer and the private individual who, when faced with a situation of stress, will panic or pull a weapon, reacting blindly and in desperation because they lack skill, knowledge, and mental preparation. Knowing one is competent to handle violence helps avert violence. The presence of a highly trained individual in a confrontation can act to deter violence before it begins."

FINAL FIGHT

The clock also is running out for WerBell, who, like so many other figures in history that lived by the gun and sword — such as George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston and Simon Bolivar — seems destined to die in bed with his boots off. For the last 18 months he has been under treatment for prostate cancer. He's been admitted twice to the controversial Ra-Mar Clinic of Dr. Ray Evers in Montgomery, Ala., for Evers' "chelation" vitamin and laetrile treatment, upon which the American Medical Association frowns.

But WerBell at this time is still considerably active, although following a rigid medical regimen. How long he can maintain the pace is unknown. His doctors, at last report, declined to give him a prognosis more specific than, "maybe two years ... maybe less"



Instructor Waldron mans spotting 'scope while teaching Seldor on .223 sniper weapon.

