

Bob Faris – The Passing of a Legend

1930-2012

By the *Small Arms Review* Staff [By Richard MacLean]

It is with great sadness that we report that Bob Faris died of cancer on February 12, 2012. A memorial service and reception organized by Kenton Tucker was held in Scottsdale, Arizona, on February 29, 2012, for approximately 100 of his friends. A bugler sounded taps followed by the folding of the flag by an Army military honor guard and presentation to Dolf Goldsmith. Overhead passed a flight of three helicopters, including Mike Dillon's restored Huey UH-1H helicopter. The service was attended by a virtual who's who of the machine gun community in the Southwest. SAR was there, of course, represented by Dan Shea, SAR publisher, and several contributors, including Richard MacLean and Idan Greenberg.

"Uncle Bob," as he was known to so many, had a profound influence on the NFA world as marked by the two-part interview we published in the October and December 2009 issues of SAR and in a follow-up article in November 2010. Much of what has been written or videotaped in the past consisted of interviews recording Bob's reflections back on his life. He conveyed his views of the weapons he analyzed and repaired while working for the government as well as those that he collected and shot as a private citizen. Contained here is a perspective of Bob from people who knew him well.

The following three excerpts from speeches at the service provide an insight into Bob's nature. At both the service and the reception the stories conveyed a consistent message: he was loved by everyone; he had no enemies; he was a quiet, caring, honest, and modest guy; and he had a knowledge of weapons that rivaled anyone in the world and was willing to share this expertise to help anyone.

Kenton Tucker, *Co-organizer of the Big Sandy Machine Gun Shoot in Wikieup, Arizona; light, medium, and heavy weapons expert and appraiser; military and police trainer; and Bob's close friend.*

Bob devoted himself and his life to collecting military firearms and accessories, accumulating both an extensive collection and a thorough knowledge of each item. Bob told me several times that if he had had a lot of money when he started working at Aberdeen in 1954, he would have worked there for free as he loved his job. He did exactly what he always wanted to do! Shoot! Bob averaged shooting at least twice a week for as long as I can remember. He simply was a shooting machine. He would go out shooting no matter how hot or cold it was. I don't think anyone has shot as many rounds as Bob did over his lifetime.

Bob was a special kind of person when it came to stopping what he was doing to help fix a malfunctioning or broken firearm, even during a major shoot. Of course, when he helped you it could be a real eye-opener. He would field strip your firearm in the dirt and scare the hell out of you by sometimes beating on it with a very large hammer –

what Bob liked to call a “Browning hammer.” Somehow everything would go back together and work. If you had a broken part, he would loan you one and ask that you replace it later. I think everyone here at this service has experienced this with Bob at one time or another. That was Bob!

One of the most amazing times that I watched Bob fix a machine gun was when he repaired a Stoner 63A commando. It would fire two or three rounds then malfunction. I checked the extractor and ejector and made sure that the links were the correct Stoner links. It still would not work. Bob was standing over me and grabbed the gun and proceeded to walk to the back of my van and use the bumper to bend the top cover. The owner turned white as he watched Bob manhandle his \$65,000 gun. I think he was in shock.

Well it worked great after that. He explained to me that the timing was off and that was how you adjusted the timing. I then asked him where in the heck he learned that and he said, “from Eugene Stoner.” He told me how he and Stoner were in the testing program with the 63 system. Bob rejected the aircraft version of the Stoner in this test program, and Eugene Stoner was mad as heck at Bob for doing that.

But he really liked what Stoner was doing in the development field. Bob always thought the Stoner 63, AR10, and AR15 were outstanding systems that should have been researched and tested more. This is just one example of the many interesting stories he would tell me.

I was fortunate enough to meet Bob when I was a young man back in the mid 70s. Bob took a liking to me, and from an early age we hit it off as close friends. I had an absolutely wonderful time growing up around Bob, and I soaked up anything he would show and teach me about firearms. I would ask him to teach me all about a certain firearm, and he would pull that item out of his collection, then go over the firearm, load the ammo, and off into the desert we would go.

He would always have the same routine when going shooting. He always wore his tan hat, tan shorts, and tan shirt. You would arrive at his place early and have breakfast, which was a bowl of cereal, milk, and a grapefruit. You would try to leave early but would end up loading guns into Bob’s car for about two or three hours. He could never take just a few guns and everything had to be packed a certain way into the vehicle.

You would get to the shoot spot just before lunch and have lunch, which was Beenie Weenies. Shooting would last all day or until you had heat stroke or the sun started going down. Then you’d pack up and leave. You’d get back to his house, unload all the guns, and have supper at the local restaurant. It was the same for me every time.

Over the years, we have done quite a bit of training for various military and law enforcement groups. Whenever I needed help, Bob would step up and help without question. He had such a wealth of knowledge and would always donate his time and effort 100%. He told me the reason he gave it his all was he felt that if he did not try his

best for the people we were training and if one of them went down because he lacked covering some aspect of the training, he could not face himself. He wanted to provide the best he could to the trainees. I was always very thankful for his help.

Bob was always one to take a good joke, and over the years we played quite a few on him. One joke we did was when he was at a shoot where he was knocking the airplanes out as quickly as we could get them up. My airplane guy and I came up with a plan. We flew the airplanes out about 200 more yards, which made them difficult to hit. I stood behind Bob, and every time he reloaded, we would fly the airplane straight over his position and dive bomb his gun. As soon as he completed his reload, we would fly the airplane back out to where it was very difficult to hit. He was getting frustrated. This went on for quite awhile until he looked behind him and noticed that I had a big grin on my face and a radio in my hand. He had a good laugh.

Another time we shoot a film with Bob and one of his guns. As everyone knows, Bob liked classical music. We purposely used the hardest rock song we could find for the music in the film. I think it was the National Anthem by Jimmie Hendrix. The look on Bob's face was priceless when he watched the tape.

We were also always ribbing him on how the Browning was a better mechanism than the Vickers, and once he even admitted it to me. Bob loved the shoots and seeing all his friends. If he had it his way, he would have had us put one on every month. He would prepare for them constantly, trying to get all his ammo and gear together. Getting all his stuff to the shoot was interesting in itself as it required usually two days of packing the vehicle and trailer. His poor Scout was way overloaded, but he always told me that half the weight would be gone when the shoot was over as half the weight was ammo that would be expended.

The happiest I've ever seen Bob was when Bob, Ralph Wong, Jimmie Heard, and I were working with Seal Team Six. At one of these events they arrived with huge amounts of all kinds of ammo and weapons: 50 cal, 7.62 NATO, 45, 9mm, 7.62x39, and 5.56, which of course was linked on Stoner belts. Most of the ammo was sterile. After shooting most of the day, the Seals said, "We can't shoot all this ammo and it is not worth the process to return it to inventory. Do you want to shoot it up?" I thought Bob had won the lottery. He had the biggest grin I have ever seen. We shot almost all night using their ammo. He was elated.

Bob had given me some orders just before his passing. First, to Ed Hope; he wanted to have us dedicate the shoot to him. Second, to Eric Lutfy; he wanted you to load up some 37mm with his ashes and shoot him out of your Bofors. Third, to Mike Simmons and Todd Byrneon; he wanted you to blow his ashes up at the shoot. We used the appropriate amount of explosives. Finally, he gave me some personal messages that I will deliver in person at the reception following this service.

Ed Hope, *Co-organizer of the S.P. Crater, Dry Creek, and the Big Sandy Machine Gun Shoot in Wikieup, Arizona; Class 3 dealer; collector; and longstanding friend of Bob's.*

Bob Faris was a true gentleman. I never heard him say anything bad about anyone, and that even includes me when I couldn't get his beloved Enfield rifles straight. Was this a Number 1 Mark 3, or a Number 3 Mark 1, or a Number 3 Mark 1 Star? When I would say things like this, Bob would have a pained look on his face, but he never said anything derogatory about me. He would just shake his head.

Bob didn't have many relatives. But he had many friends here in Arizona, across the nation, and around the world. People like Tom Nelson, Ralph Wong, Fred Kaase, Fred Novy, Herb Wooden, Fred Datig, Jack Martin, Dale Sandidge, Pat Tomlinson, Eric Lutfy, Colonel Jarrett, Val Fargett, Charlie Steen, Dolf Goldsmith, and even Peter Kokalis at one time. Some of these people are no longer with us, but these as well as many, many more will miss him, just as those of us gathered here today.

Bob was a historian and researcher. He had an enormous library that he started as a small boy. His passion for firearms, shooting, collecting, and researching can be appreciated and admired by all of us. He never wrote a book of his own, but he is listed as a contributor in at least 25 books written by other authors. It was normal for Bob to receive six to ten calls a day from people around the world asking him questions on a particular gun or gun-related thing.

Over the years, Bob was always willing and able to help anyone with a gun problem during our machine gun shoots, including myself. He would come over and tear down my Vickers, drop the various parts in the dirt, get out his hammer, beat the gun into submission, and then shake the dirt off before reassembling it. If the gun still didn't work, he would tell you what was wrong and how to fix it or what parts it needed.

Bob served his country as an armourer close to the front in Korea. Every day the guns would come back and Bob's group would repair them and send them back to the front. BARs would come in and Bob would re-barrel them with a pipe wrench. This wasn't the Army way, but this was the Bob Faris way. If there was heavy fighting, the troops would shoot the barrels out in one night, and Bob would have to do it again the next day, so the pipe wrench marks didn't really matter. Bob liked all guns, but after his experience in Korea, he hated the Browning automatic rifle and it is one of the only guns missing from his collection.

Mike Dillion came to Flagstaff and produced his first DVD, "Machine Gun Magic," in 1989 at a location north of Flagstaff called SP Crater. Bob, Ralph Wong, Kenton Tucker, and I were there helping, as well as many others. After it was over, Bob gently suggested and then later firmly pushed me to put on an annual shoot at SP Crater. I did this for two or three years by myself, and then Kenton started helping me. In about 2000, Bob suggested and then pushed Kenton and me to find a permanent range on which to hold the shoots. We knew that sooner or later we would be thrown off public land. The SP Crater Shoot, the Dry Creek Shoot, MG Shooters, and the Big Sandy Range are all the result of Bob Faris's passion for all things guns and shooting.

Kenton and I searched for a place. It took us almost five years to find the Big Sandy Range. After we purchased the land, Kenton and I named one of the roads on the property "Bob Faris Way." I think that says it all. The Bob Faris way of treating people – always trying to be helpful, sharing information. I am proud and happy to announce that Bob Faris was a friend of mine.

In conclusion, I would like to give special thanks to George Campbell and Kenton Tucker for the time and effort they both extended in helping Bob over these last three years. When Bob came down with cancer three years ago, George and/or Kenton were there for every doctor's appointment and medical procedure. Bob initially beat the cancer and enjoyed an additional three years of life. These added years were the result of George and Kenton's compassion and effort. I commend them for this.

George Campbell, *Friend and Wickenburg neighbor, fellow collector, and shooter. George first met Bob at the Great Western Gun Show when Bob spotted a rare variant of a Maxim loader that George was selling. Bob was working in Yuma at the time and later moved to Wickenburg.*

Robert Wilson Faris was a true gentleman of the gun collecting and Class 3 world. His worth is evidenced by the many friends who have traveled from near and far to remember him on this day.

Bob got along with everyone and was always ready to lend a willing hand to help others with their research or weapons problems. He lived his life the way he wanted to. Quiet and modest, Bob found daily enjoyment from his chosen profession that was also his lifelong hobby – or maybe the hobby dictated the profession – who knows. Simply put, he loved being Bob Faris. He did it so well. He truly reveled in putting rounds down range from every conceivable type of cartridge-firing military firearm. Who knows how many he fired off in his lifetime?

We all have favorite episodes of our personal association with Bob that we would like to share. Mine revolve around the enthusiasms we enjoyed together attending gun shows and our weekly shooting expeditions in the Arizona desert. It was also inspirational to see the pleasure he got interacting with his many friends from all over the world. It is very difficult to say goodbye to a friend. We always regret that we did not express our affection and appreciation of him as a unique individual while he was still with us. It is an all-too-common mistake most of us make in this life.

The Legacy

His legacy will endure. Additional information about Bob can be found on our website at www.smallarmsoftheworld.com, including a 2006 video interview. The *Korean War Educator* also has an on-line memoir submitted by Dolf Goldsmith that is available at www.koreanwar-educator.org/memoirs/faris_bob/index.htm. In 2007 Kenton Tucker had Bob's life history put on film and details of how to access this video will be released at a later date. The Robert Faris Memorial Shoots, formerly the Big Sandy Shoot near

Wikieup, Arizona, will continue. Detailed information can be obtained from the website www.mgshooters.com.

We all will miss Bob. He left a mark on all of us, and we will always be grateful to have been his friend and have had the privilege of knowing him.

Bob Faris Picture Captions



Bob Faris doing what he loved most: waiting for the next airplane to come in range with his L4 Bren at the ready. The Fall 2011 Big Sandy Shoot – the last he attended.

October 2011 shoot.JPG



Eric Lutfy (L), President of Thunderbird Cartridge Company, and Ralph Wong (R), one of earliest organizers of machine gun shoots in Arizona. Both were longtime friends of Bob's.

Lutfy & Wong.JPG



Dolf Goldsmith, respected author and longtime friend of Bob. On the mend from a recent leg injury, Dolf is examining a Maxim. At the reception there were 17 crew-served and belt-fed weapons on display, including Maxims, Brownings, MG42's, Brens, HK-21, Lewis, and Vickers.

Goldsmith.JPG



On display at the reception were dozens of photographs and memorabilia including Bob's hat with a Motor Machine Gun Cap Badge that he always wore at the shoots. At the far right an attendee is examining the select-fire Colt .45 with shoulder stock that Bob built while in Korea as shown in the picture *below*.

Display.JPG



Select Fire 45.JPG