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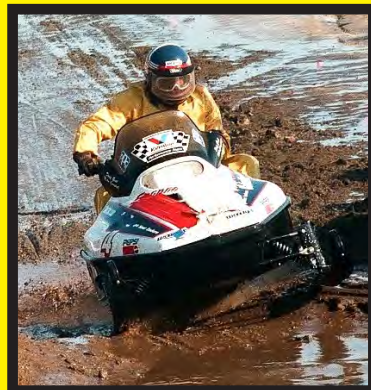
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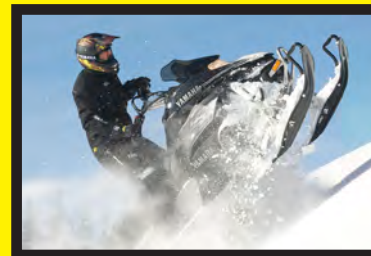
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THE VINTAGE EDGE

YOUR TOTAL MOTORSPORTS MAGAZINE

Sheer Determination

Written by Louie Livecche and Wendy Wulff

Dan Wulff was born in Chiangmai, Thailand, and didn't even see snow until he was 10 years old. The son of Robert Wulff, a missionary who worked with lepers in the northern jungles of Thailand, and Ajana Sangsawanwatana, the daughter of a Thai doctor, Dan spent the first ten years of his life living primarily in Thailand and Laos. His father later worked for the U.S. Government in Laos and Vietnam. For a little boy, the thrill of seeing fighter jets, helicopters, and other aircraft was a dream come true. Pilots would fly over the Wulffs' house when returning from missions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but it was years later before Dan realized what the men who laughed and played with him had gone through and even what his own father did. Some of the men were Raven spotter pilots and are documented in the book, "Ravens," by Christopher Robbins. Other pilots flew for Air America, the CIA's air line.

At the end of the Vietnam War, Dan, Tim and his dad moved

to Albert Lea, MN. Robert Wulff had spent almost a quarter of a century in Asia, starting in Manchuria as a soldier in the US Army at the end of WWII. After college, Robert went back to Asia to see how he could help the people he had met in China, but the Chinese government wouldn't let him in. He ended up in Northern Thailand working with lepers, and founding a successful leper village in the mountains, and wrote about his adventures in a book, "Village of the Outcasts". Mr. Wulff then transferred over to working for the U.S. Government. His understanding of customs and culture in SE Asia was key to working in Vietnam and Laos. At the end of

the war, Robert Wulff was in charge of refugee relocation for all of Laos, and aided in gathering intelligence to locate and recover our POWs, many of which were Airmen who had been shot down flying missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As a side note, Dan told me, "When I lived in Savan-nakhet, Laos, I could feel the rumbling of the bombing runs on the Ho Chi Minh Trail done by the B-52's. I didn't know what the slight shaking of the ground was from, I just thought it was cool." Dan also fondly recalls watching a T-28, LoA Fighter plane, crash land on the runway next to his grade school. Most of the students were children of CIA and State Department

employees. Dan stated, "How cool was that! We would take cover in the bunkers in the playground every now and then, but I would peek over the top to watch the wounded aircraft limp back to base. A T-28 once landed with its front landing gear shot out...it skidded down the runway, bent prop, sparks flying, but the pilot made it. Those guys were amazing!"

Dan's respect for those pilots drove him to become an officer. His eyes were not good enough to be a pilot, so he chose to go in the Army. He then chose EOD, Explosive Ordinance Disposal, as his job of choice. This is

the Army's "Bomb Squad" and Dan wanted it because his father told him, "what ever you do, don't go EOD." This came from a father who had been involved with many EOD missions in Laos, but not out of choice. In order to make it from one village to the next, Robert Wulff would hop on any available helicopter. Quite often the choppers would be on an EOD run to clear up unexploded ordinance near villages. After the mission was complete, the chopper would continue on to their final destination. Dan recalls stories of these brave soldiers gathering up unexploded CBUs (Cluster Bomb Units), stacking them up and then blowing



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them in place. At that point, the ordinance should have already detonated, and they could have detonated when the techs handled and gathered the CBUs. These stories not only did not deter Dan from wanting to be an EOD tech, they inspired and motivated him to pursue that career path.

When Dan finished college, he served in Germany with the 3rd Infantry Division - but not in EOD. He was discouraged, but enjoyed his job nonetheless. During his tour, he saw the end of the Cold War and the fall of Communism. As a young Lieutenant, his soldiers knew he was a snowmobile nut. During winter training exercises, with cold winds and blowing snow, Dan would quite often tell his soldiers that it was perfect sledding weather. Dan's driver, Corporal Terry Bridges, was a captive audience for many tales of sledding adventures. Dan told Cpl Bridges about the first time he ever saw a snowmobile race. It was in the winter of 1975, just after Dan and his family moved to Albert Lea from Laos. It was the first time Dan had ever seen snow! He played in the snow until he was numb, but would not stop building his forts. "I love snow", Dan would say. Dan lived very close to the Fair Grounds in Albert Lea and watched from outside the fence as the 1975 race season was in full swing. He was amazed that any vehicle could go so fast on ice and snow. He wanted one!

After watching from a distance Dan knew that he wanted a snowmobile.

His cousin Larry had a Swinger, which was new at the time, and let Dan ride it. There Dan was, in his JC Penny snowmobile suit, riding around the yard in the "wicked fast" Swinger. Dan wasn't sure if he ever opened up the throttle, but it whetted his desire for more.

Dan started to read about snowmobiles and would frequently look through the magazine aisle at the local Bob and Joe's Supervalu. He still has a copy of the 77-78 SnoPro Magazine. Team Decker's, Team Destroyer, The Midnight Blue Express, Black Magic Cat...all were featured in the magazine.

Dan recalls, "I would drool over the photos on the racing sleds. It wasn't enough to ride a Swinger any-

more, but now I had to move up."

"I would sit in class and read snowmobile magazines, which is probably why I had a good solid C+ average. How could I read Homer's Odyssey, when I could read "Race and Rally" instead? I would find myself wondering what it would be like to have a family that all raced together like Team Decker's. I probably asked my father several times if he was open to snowmobile racing, and he wasn't. He was just fine with me riding around, but he didn't want to have anything to do with snowmobiles. When I

O-1 Birddogs were called "Spotter Planes". This is what the majority of the Raven's flew. In the background you can see T-28's lined up. They were also flown as spotters, but were mainly used for close air support strikes. They were slow moving, but really accurate. Spotter Pilots would fly around looking for targets then fire a WP (White Phosphorous) missile at the target. Once marked, the T-28s would come in and strike the target. If it was a large target, F-4 Phantoms would come in from Thailand and hit the target.



A Spooky Gunship, also known as "Puff the Magic Dragon". These flew gun mission in support of ground troops and hit targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This aircraft was immortalized in the movie starring John Wayne, "The Green Beret". The air strip was a classified field, notice all the planes have no tail markings, other than a tail number. The Spooky has a small Lao flag on the tail, however, they were US planes.

started drag racing, though, he never missed a race. He was my biggest supporter and would always help me buy parts."

Dan got his first sled when he was in junior high. It was a beautiful 1969 Arctic Cat Panther with a single cylinder JLO engine. "Boy was that a dog", stated Dan, "I loved it when it ran, but that was not all that often." He later bought a '74 Polaris 440cc TX and '73 Thunder Jet. He was hooked on snowmobiles and racing them at the drags around southern Minnesota.

Being stationed in Germany, Dan could only talk of sleds. He served as a liaison to the German Army and would laugh and joke about snowmobiling with German soldiers. As in many European countries,

Germany only had sleds at the ski resorts. They were used for rescue and most Germans didn't snowmobile, but they all seemed to like the idea of sledding as Dan would spread the word of the sport.

After his tour in Germany, Dan was hired on with the Minneapolis Police Department. He worked in North Minneapolis, the

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FORUM

notoriously gang infested part of the city. Eventually he worked in the Gang Unit and later Homicide. However, Dan never gave up on being a Bomb Technician and opportunity finally knocked. There was an opening on the Bomb Squad and Dan wanted it. After interviewing, and an extensive background check, Dan was off to Bomb School in Alabama. Dan was at home at school, as it was located on an Army base and many instructors were either active Army or had been Army. Dan's sense of humor became his trademark. Whether playing a joke on his fellow classmates, or instructors, Dan was always up to something. He loved the school and the job - he was in heaven.

While serving as a bomb tech, he was involved in many high profile call-outs. From drug dealer-made booby trap IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) to meth lab take-downs, Dan loved each and every minute of it. He was awarded the Medal of Valor for a call-out that involved the evacuation of several square blocks of residential Minneapolis. He was the first tech in the history of the Squad to be given this high award. Dan trained throughout the country, and even made his way to Israel to train on anti-terrorism protocols. Dan was made commander of the squad and was known as being quite knowledgeable on terrorism bombings. It was during one training exercise that Dan's life changed forever.

Dan and several of his squad were conducting training on "explosive breaching," a technique used by elite units in the police and military community for gaining entry into a building or room by the use of explosives. Often depicted in movies, explosive breaching uses explosives to gain entry to an area, usually a hostile area. Dan had been on several operational breaches and this was nothing new to him. Calculations were made before each "shot" and SWAT teams were being briefed and trained before and after each breach. The building used for the

training was an old school that was going to be demolished. It was perfect for training the SWAT teams and also perfect for the "shot" that ended Dan's career.

Each breaching charge is precisely made and calculated. Pressures are calculated and safety is paramount when building each explosive charge. Too much explosives and it becomes dangerous to the SWAT team, not enough and you don't succeed in your mission. On this day, everything was going perfect, but then something changed. Dan felt a charge go off and it stunned him. His head hurt, he felt ill, but wrote it off as fatigue from a long day of intense training. Several days later, Dan's eyes looked odd, with one pupil larger than the other. The right side of his face was also drooping. He called an Army Doctor, Major Allen Autrey,



who was assigned to a unit that the Bomb Squad supported. Doctor Autrey immediately informed Dan to go the Emergency Room, because something was really wrong with the symptoms that Dan displayed.

After several tests, it was discovered that Dan's right carotid artery had totally collapsed from his neck to the front of his skull, just above his right eye. The doctors were amazed that Dan had not had a massive stroke. Dan explained, "Doc, I never really used my brain that much anyway, so a loss of blood flow is just normal for me". Dan would smile at the doctors and laugh, but he knew by the looks on their face that this was a serious matter. This didn't stop Dan from keeping a positive attitude, in fact, he laughed when he had his pubic hair shaved by a Hell's Angels

biker. He had to have an angiogram, a procedure in which a camera is inserted in an artery near your groin. In the Angiogram Room, surrounded by medical personnel, Dan said, "a bald white guy with lots of tattoos walked in to shave me." Small talk filled the room and eventually it came out that Dan had been a Gang Unit officer. The room was silent....then the nurse stated, "The Hell's Angels are a nice group of guys...and 'so and so' is one of those nice guys." Dan said, "Boy, I guess I should have taken a closer look at those tattoos"(smiling), as the guy continued to shave his nether regions. Ironically, Dan had recently breached the Hell's Angels Club house on a search warrant! Dan still laughs about having "a white supremacist shave the nether regions of a half-Asian bomb tech, who had just blown up their club house. You can't

make that story up."

When Dan was in the Intensive Care Unit, he thought of many things: family, friends, jobs, hobbies... hobbies, you may ask? Why? Why would anyone think of hobbies, just after being told that there was a good chance of having a massive stroke and dying within the next 24 hours or so?

For Dan, the answer was easy, because the memories are fond. He has had many sleds, but his old 1975 Moto Ski Sonic always had a special place in his heart because of the memories of time shared with friends. It was easy to know that he would keep the Sonic, even though he sold the rest of his sleds, because the doctors told him to never ride again. How does an avid sledder stay active, yet not be able to ride? Easy - build

sleds, let your buddies ride them, and enjoy the action and friendships.

Actually it wasn't that easy, because Dan had never raced ovals in his life, nor had any of his friends. They had drag raced, but that is a totally different animal. Dan's long-time friend Kevin Weitzel decided to drive Dan up for a visit to the snowmobile museum in St. Germaine for motivation. After a rather disheartening trip, which ended with not being allowed to see a single sled, they made their way back to the Twin Cities.

Discouraged, they pressed on. Dan emailed the Derby Track, to ask the Decker family if they would share any stories of racing the 1975 Sonics. Mike Decker e-mailed back and answered every question Dan could come up with, and even answered them several times over, if Dan couldn't remember. He invited Dan and Kevin to the 2007 Eagle River Derby races and promised they would enjoy the visit.

Dan, Kevin, and their sons arrived in Eagle River filled with excitement and trepidation. Dan remembers, "As I walked into the front office, there was a hustle and bustle of vendors, workers, and volunteers coming and going. Mrs. Audrey Decker asked if she could help me. I told her my name and asked for Mike. She said, 'The Bomb Squad Dan Wulff?' I must have looked like a deer in the head lights, but she gave me a warm welcome, saying she had heard all about me. She paged Mike and introduced me to others in the office."

"I cannot express the gratitude I felt towards the Decker family, as they thanked me for my service to the nation, treated me like I was some sort of hero, and were so gracious that I felt like I was family." Dan took hundreds of photos and walked through the pits admiring all the race sleds. Kevin and Dan had dreamt of racing at Eagle River since they were kids, and were finally there. The smell of race fuel burning through a two stroke engine is a wonderful aroma!

They were so inspired by the races, that Dan was determined to race his Sonic at Eagle River in 2008. With no experience in oval racing, and a brain injury, it wasn't going to be easy, but he was not going to quit.

Dan comes from a military

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and police family, from ancestors who served in the Civil War, to cops in Chicago during the roaring 20's, to an Uncle who served in the 1st Marines in the Pacific during WWII. Dan and his brother, Tim, were raised to be thankful and know that they are blessed with so many things as Americans. So it wasn't a tough decision to become an Army officer and serve in Germany, or to become a cop and a bomb tech. Tim is now a Colonel, and Dan's oldest son is in the Army as well.

When Dan started building the Sonic to race, he decided to honor the men and women who serve this country. They risk their lives so that we may live in freedom and safety.

Building the sled was not easy. Dan had to change out the track, figure out how to put together a sled that only turns left, and make it pass the tech inspection. Mike Decker helped with advice on the tech specs the entire way through the build. Other friends and team members including Kevin and Norb Weitzel, Travis Boesch, Larry Fisher, Bernie White, and Dale Stensrud helped with finding and machining parts and wrenching in the garage. Dan would make an adjustment, forget...and do it again the next day. He would weld something and then the next day wonder who had snuck into his shop and welded the piece.

The brain injury rehab program at Courage Center in the Twin Cities taught Dan to understand his deficiencies, work around them, and learn to compensate. He had to realize that the blast injury meant that his brain would never be the same. He could no longer multi-task, navigate, remember certain things, and most of all, when his brain was tired, it turned off. He couldn't fight his way through the injury, but rather had to work with it. After a couple hours of trying to solve a problem on the shop, his brain would pretty much shut down. He would be awake, but couldn't solve a simple arithmetic problem or even remember to eat. So how was he going to build a race sled?

As Dan sat in the shop working feverishly on the Sonic, his wife, Wendy walked in and stood quietly by the door, observing as he tore into the sled like a hyena on a sheep carcass. She said, "You will win on sheer determination alone." He looked up and said, "That's it, that's the perfect name for the race team!"

Sheer Determination Racing is dedicated to all those who never give up. "Never quit" has always been Dan's motto. In the Army, and as a cop, that is how you survive. You can't ever quit on yourself or your partner. Dan was determined to complete the sled to show he would never quit on this mission either.

Since then, the team has raced at Eagle River twice, 2008 and 2009, and is preparing for its third season in 2010. They now are running two sleds. The Sonic will be retired and used in a new program. Mr. Richard Decker and Dan have discussed using the Sonic as a sled to be ridden by any soldier wounded in action. The soldier would be given the opportunity to take a lap on the Derby Track between heat races. Dan only asks that you contact him ahead of

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Vintage Pride Honor the troops

"A nation reveals itself by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers."
- President John F. Kennedy

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time so he can make modifications for the sled, if needed, to make it accessible.

Sheer Determination Racing is also assisting in a Vintage Show to be held in Albert Lea, MN. The show is titled, "Vintage Pride", and all proceeds will go for care packages for the soldiers stationed

overseas. They want to show the military community that the snowmobiling community appreciates their dedication to this great nation. The event will be the 26th of September, at the Freeborn County Fair Grounds.