



# National Park Arts Foundation Announces Author Robert Sholly as 2017 Artist in Residence for Big Bend National Park

*Colonel Sholly, author, public speaker, UN Peacekeeper, and Vietnam War soldier, plans to write memoir about his childhood growing up in the National Parks.*

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*Colonel Bob Sholly*

It's May 18, 1967, in the Central Highlands of the Republic of Vietnam along the Cambodian border. A young, but experienced company commander leads his Bravo Company with tactical orders to tempt the experienced NVA regulars (generally much larger forces) into firefights. Sholly, nursing a swollen ankle, has briefly left his company to recover at battalion HQ when suddenly one of his platoons is overrun by a larger force of 700 North Vietnam Regulars (NVA) and suffers extensive casualties. Circling overhead in a helicopter with his commander, Sholly undergoes an officer's worst nightmare: a desperate request for artillery fire on the beleaguered platoon's position in hopes of breaking the attack

— in effect, a last stand...

This young Captain, now Colonel Bob Sholly (Ret.), a combat veteran, experienced UN peacekeeper, and historian by training, comes full circle to return to Big Bend National Park where he grew up. His father was the first Chief Ranger of the park when it was established in 1944. Colonel Sholly has been selected as the National Parks Arts Foundation's 2017 Veteran Artist in Residence at the park, the first author to be so honored. He will conclude his residency with a public presentation at 7:30 PM on November 25th at the Park's Basin Amphitheatre.

Colonel Sholly will use the month-long residency in November to develop a memoir of his life in the park. The memoir, which will include other events in his unusual childhood, will cover growing up in the Big Bend, Bandelier and White Sands National Monuments as well as other parks of the West. Sholly credits the Park Service, and his free and spartan childhood as key to his career as an infantryman and officer: “The fact that I was raised in National Parks, with an independence not permitted many children, gave me far more outdoor experience for the Army than most other people. I was an accomplished mountain climber, hiker, compass and map reader, and survivalist before the age of ten.”

Then-Captain Sholly, in consultation with his CO, and trusting in the judgment of his platoon leader on the ground, gives the order for this heart-stopping barrage. The ordinance shaking the ground makes the situation even more bloody and chaotic. When the artillery ends, the Vietnamese still bring overwhelming force and sweep through the battlefield. By this time, the platoon leader is dead along with many others of the small command. The NVA identify and execute the wounded. Eight survivors of the thirty members of the platoon play dead as they wait for nightfall. While the chopper refuels,

Sholly grabs four medics and immediately heads back to the rest of his company, still fighting within a few hundred yards of the cut off platoon. In the confusion, he neglects to tell his CO that he has rejoined his unit. The CO is suddenly surprised to be talking to him on the radio below. Sholly rallies his men and sets about to prepare for the next attack and rescue the cut-off survivors. Within the 60 days of brutal March, May and June fighting, the men of the 1st-8th Infantry Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division suffer much and fight bravely. Its members earn unit citations and four medals of honor, three posthumously, along with numerous other awards and decorations for valor and bravery. By the end of its first year in Vietnam, the battalion becomes one of the most highly decorated battalions of the entire Vietnam war.

Sholly tells the story of his brave men in those early months of the brutal year of 1967, in his best-selling and acclaimed book, *Young Soldiers, Amazing Warriors*. The book combines riveting storytelling with lessons learned about leadership, the joys and miseries and companionship of warriors and the hard decisions and enlightening mistakes that all effective leaders make.

One of Sholly's later military assignments was as the Chief of Operations for the UN Truce Supervision Organization, headquartered in Jerusalem. During 1981-83, there was significant military activity and combat operations involving Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. Sholly and his Peacekeepers were deeply involved in these events. Due to the extreme operations tempo throughout the overall UN peacekeeping organization, the Nobel Committee honored the UN Peacekeepers with the Nobel Peace Prize.

After his military service, Sholly at last began to process his feelings and recollections of his wartime experiences in Vietnam. This was therapeutic, not only for him but for the men under his command, who recalled he had written in his journal in the infrequent downtimes of war. They often asked him, only half in jest, "When is the book coming out?". Unpacking these memories on the page was a complex and emotionally fraught process. He had to learn to trust the teller in himself. "My artistic approach is more akin to storytelling. I have lived a very eventful and dramatic life. While I have enjoyed most minutes of it, it is only now as I slow down a bit, that I find that others find it of interest."

An experienced and avid public speaker, Colonel Sholly plans public talks while at the park. The dates and times for these will be announced. "It has been my experience that visitors to national parks are not only interested in the physicality of the area. I anticipate my discussions and stories from behind the scenes will provide visitors enjoyment from another perspective. The programs will complement the official histories and put a personal face to the visitor's experience."

NPAF is a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to the promotion of the National Parks of the U.S. through creating dynamic opportunities for artworks that are based in our natural and historic heritage. This project is supported by the Big Bend National Park Projects Budget, the National Endowment for the Arts, Big Bend Natural History Association, and other generous benefactors. NPAF is always seeking new partners and donors for its wide-ranging artist-in-residence programs.

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