

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**LIEUTENANT COLONEL
EUGENE C. MCCARLEY**
U.S. Army, Retired

Inducted 2021



Lieutenant Colonel Eugene C. McCarley has dedicated his life to the ideals and principals of the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Special Forces. Enlisting in 1955 at the age of twenty he first served twelve years with the North Carolina Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserves, then choosing to further his service to his country he volunteered for the Regular Army in 1967. Completing Officer and Special Forces training, McCarley not only volunteered for Vietnam, but also for Military Assistance Command Vietnam-Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), one of the United States' premier and most classified joint-service special operations units. His leadership then and through his life provided an example of the best of Special Forces.

In a short three-month period, Lt. Col. McCarley was awarded three Bronze Stars for Valor (BSV). These Bronze Star actions may have garnered much higher awards in conventional units or even today, but what he is most noted for is his leadership and soldiering throughout Operation Tailwind, of 1970. MACV-SOG's Operation Tailwind, was the deepest cross-border penetration mission of the Vietnam War. Capt. McCarley was selected to lead his 8-Company Hatchet Force of MACV-SOG "deep within enemy occupied territory," some 70 kilometers into Laos. Their objective was to directly engage the enemy to take pressure of CIA operations in the area. McCarley led his company to engage a numerically superior and professional NVA force deep inside Laos. McCarley accomplished this successfully, as with most SOG missions; without the assistance and support normally available to conventional in-country units. When extraction finally came on Sept. 14, the last helicopter carrying McCarley was shot down. McCarley wounded for the second time, secured sensitive captured information and lead his fellow fighters to secure the crash site for extraction and recovery of the wounded. For his leadership and detailed personal actions. Capt. McCarley was awarded the Silver Star.

Lt. Col. McCarley's service to the nation did not end in 1970. With a Silver Star, three Bronze Stars for Valor, and two Purple hearts in combat, he continued to serve with the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserves until 1995.

Lt. Col. McCarley continued to serve his nation through multiple opportunities post retirement. In 1998, Lt. Col. McCarley was called to testify in hearings conducted by the Department of Defense regarding a media fabrication of the events of Operation Tailwind. Lt. Col. McCarley's testimony was vital to the investigation, as he vehemently and professionally defended the honor of the United States Army Special Forces. He further went on to ensure the individuals and organizations that fabricated the stories were held accountable. He was an active member and advocate of veteran's causes through the "Military Order of the Purple Heart Foundation" and "Save the Montagnard People". He was active in his community and a member of the Ancient free and Accepted Masons. He was also the chief advocate for the men who had served under him, including for the proper recognition of his team medic, Gary M. Rose's Medal of Honor from Operation Tailwind. Until his death he personally remained in contact with the men he served with in combat, and their loyalty and admiration of him was and still unwavering. Lt. Col. McCarley was a leader's leader, "Built like a stevedore but with a friendly, small-town demeanor, liked and respected by his men." -Maj. John Plaster, USASF, MACV-SOG Veteran and Historian. His leadership, personal bravery, and devotion to duty keep with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Special Forces, and the United States Army then, and through the rest of his life.