

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**MAJOR
JOHN L. PLASTER**

Inducted 10 July 2008



Major Plaster served three years in combat in Southeast Asia as a Special Forces NCO in the top secret unconventional warfare unit, the Studies and Observations Group, MACV-SOG. Qualified as both a Green Beret weapons and communications specialist, he spent his first two years leading six- and eight-man reconnaissance teams deep behind enemy lines along the Laotian "Ho Chi Minh Trail" and into enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia. SOG's clandestine operations were extremely hazardous, with nearly 300 Special Forces operators lost, including 57 men missing in action.

Major Plaster's 22 reconnaissance and direct action missions included one of SOG's most successful, the night ambush of a North Vietnamese Army convoy deep in Laos, and the capture of a key enemy prisoner, for which he was congratulated face-to-face by the Commander of U.S. Forces, General Creighton Abrams. During this period, he was wounded once and decorated for heroism four times, including the Bronze Star for Valor and Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star.

Due to his extensive ground experience, in 1970 then-Staff Sergeant Plaster was selected to fly with U.S. Air Force Forward Air Controllers in support of SOG's cross-border operations. For the next twelve months he saw almost daily combat action, overseeing the insertion and extraction of SOG elements, directing air strikes and flying through 12.7 mm, 23 mm and 37 mm anti-aircraft fire. Among these many operations was the fifth and final SOG High Altitude/Low Opening parachute insertion of the war. His final flight coincided almost perfectly with the cessation of SOG activities, by which time he had accumulated more than 350 aerial combat missions.

Receiving a direct commission as a reserve officer, in 1983 he applied all he had learned about stealth, stalking and camouflage to co-found a Reserve Component sniper training program at a time when the U.S. Army had no sniper school. His program soon became a national-level course, with sniper students from all services, plus more than 100 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. Based upon these experiences, after he retired in 1992, he authored a highly respected sniper training handbook, "The Ultimate Sniper."

When SOG's long-held secrets became declassified in the mid-1990s, Major Plaster spent an entire decade studying documents and interviewing 150 fellow SOG veterans to produce three books on these extraordinary warriors, published in 1997, 2000 and 2004. The first volume, "SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam," received the Bernal Diaz Award as the finest non-fiction military history of 1997. One year later, along with several senior SOG officers, he approached the Department of Defense to begin the lengthy process for awarding SOG the Presidential Unit Citation; the PUC was approved and officially conferred at Ft. Bragg on 4 April 2001 at a ceremony attended by more than 200 SOG veterans.