

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**CAPTAIN
ISAAC CAMACHO**



Capt. Isaac “Ike” Camacho was born June 3, 1937 in the town of Fabens, Texas. At the age of 13, he moved to El Paso, Texas, where he graduated Thomas Jefferson High School in 1955. Upon graduation from high school, Camacho enlisted in the United States Army, taking his basic training at Fort Ord, Calif., followed by Infantry and Airborne School at Fort Campbell, Ky. Promoted to the rank of sergeant during his first enlistment, he became determined to make the Army his career. Volunteering for Special Forces he became qualified as a Special Forces weapons sergeant and was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Deployed to Vietnam as a member of Detachment A-21, then Sgt. 1st Class Camacho was serving at the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Camp at Hiep Hoa when it came under attack by an estimated reinforced battalion of Viet Cong on the night of Nov. 22 1963. Taking the camp by complete surprise, the Viet Cong initiated their attack with withering automatic weapons and small-arms fire followed within seconds by an intense mortar barrage, pinning down the entire Vietnamese Strike Force inside the camp. Running from his sleeping area, Camacho maneuvered through a hail of bullets and shell fragments to man a mortar position. Calmly manning the position, he began to concentrate his fire on the Viet Cong that were attempting to breach the camp and remained in the mortar position until he was ordered to withdraw from the camp. In the subsequent confusion of the battle, Camacho was captured, along with three other members of the detachment.

Following his capture, he was marched more than 150 kilometers to a prisoner of war camp near the Cambodian border, where he was held for 21 months either caged, shackled or chained to a tree. Remaining resolute and determined to escape, he made good his escape on the night of July 9, 1965. Using the cover of a monsoon rain, he slipped through the bars of his cage, which was less than 25 feet from his guard, and slipped into the jungle, evading capture for four days although suffering from starvation, malnutrition and disease. Finally finding his way to an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) outpost, he was repatriated to the United States, where then Master Sergeant Camacho was debriefed on his ordeal and received accolades from President Lyndon B. Johnson as the first American serviceman to escape from a POW camp in Vietnam.

Receiving a field commission to the rank of captain and after completing the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Cap. Camacho returned to duty with the Special Forces, serving with the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and subsequently was assigned to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he retired following his service as the commander of the Fort Bliss Stockade.

Capt. Camacho’s awards and decorations include the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star Medal (1 Oak Leaf Cluster), Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart Medal (1 Oak Leaf Cluster), Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal (2 Oak Leaf Clusters), the Prisoner of War Medal, the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, the Master Parachutists Badge, Vietnamese Ranger Badge and the Vietnamese Parachutist Badge.

In retirement, Camacho entered the U.S. Postal Service, attaining the position of station manager, and retiring with more than 20 years of service. The El Paso Chapter of the Special Forces Association has been named the “Isaac Camacho Chapter.” He is married and has two sons.