

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**SERGEANT MAJOR
JON R. CAVAIANI**

Inducted 16 December 2011



Jon R. Cavaiani was born in Murphys, Ireland, moving to England in 1943. He came to the United States in 1947 and, in 1953, moved to the small farming community of Ballico, California. Ugo Cavaiani, his stepfather formally adopted him in 1961.

Though initially classified 4E, due in part to a severe allergy to bee stings, Cavaiani joined the Army in 1969, a year before he became a naturalized citizen. He then volunteered for Special Forces where he would spend most of his military career for the next 17 years.

Cavaiani, serving in the Republic of Vietnam in 1971 with Task Force 1 Advisory Element, the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), an elite reconnaissance unit, received the Medal of Honor for his actions while a platoon leader providing security for Hickory Hill, an isolated radio relay site at Dong Tri. Erected in June 1968, the Hickory Hill post had existed on strategic Hill 953, in northwest Quang Tri Province at the edge of the DMZ. On

3 June 1971, heavy North Vietnamese artillery began battering the bunkered Hickory Hill defenses. Cavaiani with the help of SGT John Johns organized the evacuation of 15 wounded men on June 4. Five of these men were American Special Forces and the remaining 10 were indigenous Montagnards. When the relay site was overrun and after the others had been evacuated, Cavaiani played dead and avoided capture for eleven days. When Cavaiani spotted and tried to attract a passing US helicopter, he was captured by the North Vietnamese, spending 661 days in captivity. Cavaiani was released during Operation Homecoming on 27 March 1973. President Gerald Ford presented Cavaiani with the Medal of Honor during a ceremony on December 12, 1974.

After returning from Vietnam, he served as an instructor at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, from July 1973 to August 1974, before transferring to the U.S. Army Readiness Region IX in San Francisco, California where he was assigned as the Chief Enlisted Advisor. His next assignment was as an Operations Sergeant on the Allied Staff in West Berlin, Germany, from September 1977 to August 1980. Cavaiani then served with the 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, from August 1980 to May 1983, and then with the 11th Special Forces Group at Fort Meade, Maryland, from May 1983 to June 1984. His next assignment was with the 97th Army Reserve Command, also at Fort Meade, where he served until September 1985. Moving to Fort Eustis, Virginia, he assumed the position of NCOIC of Plans, Operations, and Training and then as Operations Sergeant Major with the Flight Concepts Division, a slot he held until May 1989. Sgt Maj Cavaiani's final assignment was as Chief Instructor at the Army ROTC detachment at the University of California, Davis campus, from May 1989 until his retirement from the Army on May 31, 1990.

Upon retiring, he served as the 6th region director of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society and recently graduated with honors from the culinary arts program in Columbia, California where he and his wife Barbara live. Jon has three grandsons and two granddaughters.

Among his numerous awards and decorations are the nation's highest award for valor, the Army Medal of Honor; the Legion of Valor, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star medal (valor), Purple Heart with oak leaf clusters. Jon was a freefall and static line jumpmaster and has over 5,000 jumps all over the world.