

# DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**COLONEL  
JAMES "NICK" ROWE**

Inducted 2 October 2008



COL James N. "Nick" Rowe was born in McAllen, Texas, 8 February 1938. Upon graduation from the US Military Academy in 1960, he joined Special Forces in 1961 as a Lieutenant. After completing the Special Forces Officers Qualification Course and Chinese Mandarin at DLI, he was assigned to newly activated 5th SFG(A), and immediately sent to the Republic of Vietnam as a member of ODA-23. Since 1957, Special Forces advisors assisted the South Vietnamese government against the Viet Cong and with the organizing, training, equipping and employment of the Civilian Irregular Defense (CIDG) forces.

Just months after arrival in country, on October 29, 1963, 1LT Rowe, with Capt. "Rocky" Versace and Sgt. Daniel Pitzer, accompanied a CIDG company on an operation. They left camp at Tan Phu for the village of Le Coeur to roust a small enemy unit establishing a command post. Upon reaching the village and finding the enemy had left, they pursued them and fell into an ambush at about 1000 hours. The fighting continued until 1800 hours, when reinforcements were sent in to relieve the company. During the fight, Rowe, Versace, and Pitzer were captured. 1LT Rowe remained in captivity for five years, two months. During captivity, he convinced the Viet Cong that he was not in Special Forces, but only attached, concocting a story he was a "draftee" engineer, a graduate of a small liberal arts college. Over the course of five years, the Viet Cong tortured him to see if he would break and change his story. His bio was released by anti-war activists in the United States to the North Vietnamese government, proving that Rowe had lied to his captors. On 31 December 1968, en route to his execution, he escaped. His escape was one of only two successfully made by US Army personnel during the Vietnam War.

On his return to the US, MAJ Rowe served on the Army Staff for Intelligence as a principal planner for the Army's "Operation Egress-Recap," also known as "Operation Homecoming" in anticipation for the returning Army POWs. While working in this position as well as attending numerous public relations events due to his escape, he wrote *Five Years to Freedom* chronicling his experiences. Resigning his commission in 1974, he entered politics in Texas, running for railroad commissioner. After an unsuccessful campaign, he returned to writing, adding three more books to his credit: *The Judas Squad*, *The Washington Connection*, and *Elsa*.

In 1981, MAJ Rowe was recalled to active duty, this time assigned to the United States Army Institute for Military Assistance where he served as the Chief of the Special Forces School Field Training Division, and later the Assistant Director of Special Forces School from which he launched the establishment of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) School. He and MG Joseph Lutz were able to not only set up SERE training for Special Forces, but also to sponsor a successful bid to make USAIMA the proponent for all survival and anti-terrorism training in the US Army. In 1986, COL Rowe was assigned the battalion commander for the newly created 1st Special Warfare Training Battalion (Airborne), a position he held until being assigned as Chief, Ground Forces Division with JUSMAAG Philippines. In this capacity, he worked closely with the CIA, and was involved in its nearly decade-old program to penetrate the NPA and its parent communist party in conjunction with Philippine's own intelligence organizations. He was assassinated on 21 April 1989.

COL Rowe's awards and decorations include the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star w/Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart w/Oak Leaf Cluster, Meritorious Service Medal, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w/Palm, Vietnamese Service Medal with eight Campaign Stars, POW medal, Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Master Airborne qualification badge. His nonmilitary awards included the American Patriot Award of Freedom's Foundation of Valley Forge (1969), the Outstanding Young Man of America award, the George Washington Honor Medal of Freedom's Foundation of Valley Forge (1974), and the Legion of Honor, International Supreme Council of the Order of DeMolay.