

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**COLONEL
CHARLES A. BECKWITH**

Inducted 9 August 2012



Col. Charles A. Beckwith, known as “Chargin’ Charlie,” was born Jan. 22, 1929 in Atlanta, Ga. He played football for the University of Georgia and was drafted by the Green Bay Packers; however, he turned down their offer to serve in the U.S. Army, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1952.

In 1958, Beckwith volunteered for Special Forces and was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, N.C. In 1960, then-Capt. Beckwith deployed to Laos for two years on Operation Hotfoot, with the White Star organization. The covert White Star teams operated against the Pathet Lao and harassed the North Vietnamese on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

In 1962, Beckwith was sent from 7th SFG(A) as the exchange officer to the British 22nd Special Air Service, where he commanded 3 Troop, A Squadron. It was during this tour, which included the conduct of counterinsurgency operations in Malaya with the British SAS, that Beckwith conceived, forged and developed his concept for an SAS-type unit in the United States.

Returning to 7th SFG(A) in 1963, Capt. Beckwith was selected to serve as a battalion and then the group operations officer. In 1965, Beckwith volunteered to return to Vietnam, where he was hand-picked to command the high-priority Special Forces unit code-named Project Delta (Operational Detachment B-52). He used his experience with the 22 SAS to test and select the right men to conduct long-range reconnaissance in South Vietnam. Following his promotion to major, Beckwith led B-52 in the rescue of the besieged Special Forces camp at Plei Me, under the most arduous combat conditions.

He was critically wounded in early 1966 (shot through his abdomen with a .50 caliber bullet). His wounds were so bad that medical personnel initially triaged him as beyond help. Recovering completely, he took over the Florida Phase of the U.S. Army’s Ranger School, transforming it from a scripted exercise based upon the Army’s World War II experience into a Vietnam-oriented training regimen.

In 1968, following the Tet Offensive, then-Lt. Col. Beckwith returned to Vietnam, taking command of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry (Airborne), 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. For the nine months that he commanded 2-327 (“No Slack”), they saw many successes in combat operations, including: Hué, Operation Mingo, Operation Jeb Stuart, Operation Nevada Eagle and Somerset Plain (sweeping the southern portion of the A Shau Valley).

From 1973 to 1974, Lt. Col. Beckwith served as commander, Control Team “B” with the Joint Casualty Resolution Center located in Thailand. JCRC’s sole mission was to assist the Secretaries of the Armed Services to resolve the fate of servicemen still missing and unaccounted for as a result of the hostilities throughout Indochina. He was promoted to colonel, and in 1975 returned to Fort Bragg as the Commandant of the U.S. Army Special Warfare School.

As the threat of international terrorism increased, Beckwith was chosen to form the SAS- type unit he had promoted for several years. 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta was founded in November 1977 as a counterterrorist unit whose main missions were hostage rescue and specialized reconnaissance. As the ground force commander, Col. Beckwith led Delta on its first mission to Iran to rescue 54 American hostages. Later, the Joint Special Operations Command was formed, directly based on Beckwith’s recommendations during Senate investigations on the failed Iran mission to rescue hostages. Col. Beckwith retired in 1981 and formed a consulting agency based in Austin, Texas.

His awards and decorations include: the Distinguished Service Cross; Silver Star Medal (2 awards); Legion of Merit; Bronze Star Medal; Purple Heart Medal; Combat Infantryman Badge; Special Forces Tab; and Ranger Tab.

He died of natural causes on June 13, 1994, and his remains are interred in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas. Beckwith was married to Katherine Beckwith, and they had three daughters. Col. Beckwith’s contributions and leadership remain legendary as part of our Special Forces history and lore, including his conceptualization of the current selection and qualification courses and standards used by U.S. Special Forces today.