

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**COMMAND SGT. MAJ.
JOHN E. KESSLING**

Inducted 26 October 2017



Command Sergeant Major John E. Kessling is a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. In 1944, he began his service with the Merchant Marines, at the age of 16. He served as a crewman on the USS Gulf Port, USS Black Jack and the USS Santa Barbara. Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling enlisted in the U.S. Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in August 1946 with orders to Airborne School. Upon completion of Airborne School and glider training in March 1947, he was assigned to the weapons platoon of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. There, he served and rose to the rank of first sergeant, and in October 1952, he applied and was accepted into Special Forces training.

Upon graduation from Special Forces training, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling was selected for a newly created Special Operations unit in Korea and arrived in April 1953. During his 11-month tour in Korea, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling's team sent 119 agents across enemy lines to gather information that was later processed as intelligence to be used against the Chinese Communist and North Korea People's Army. In 1954, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling returned to the U.S. and was selected for special duty at the 504th Regimental NCO Academy as the Senior NCO. This was followed by a position as instructor for airborne training and incoming 82nd Infantry and Artillery replacements. Following a deployment to Okinawa, Japan, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling requested transfer back to Special Forces and reported to the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) in October 1962.

Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling served as the Intelligence Sergeant on ODA 112 and deployed to Dak To, South Vietnam, in the II Corps area of operations from January to July 1963. From January to July 1964, he deployed as the team sergeant for ODA 314 to To Chau, Vietnam, in the IV Corps. In March 1965, on his final tour with ODA 322 based out of Kham Due, Vietnam, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling was seriously wounded by small arms fire. He returned to duty in December 1965, and became the Operations Sergeant Major for the U.S. Army Special Warfare School. From December 1969 to December 1970, he served in Vietnam as the 5th SFG (A) Operations Sergeant Major. Following that assignment, he returned to the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare and served as a chief instructor at Camp Mackall, and operations sergeant major until his retirement in December 1976, with more than 30 years of service; 17 of which were in the Special Forces Regiment.

Since retirement, Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling has mentored and assisted veterans and widows in filing claims with the Veterans Administration. Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling has remained active in the regiment by exposing individuals falsely claiming to be SF qualified and as a member of the Teller Committee to select the most qualified candidates to serve as officers to represent the Special Forces Association.

His awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit with oak-leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal with 'V' device with three oak-leaf clusters, the Purple Heart, the French Legion of Honor Chevalier (Knight), the Merchant Marine Combat Bar, the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Mediterranean Middle East War Zone Bar, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry and the Vietnam Civil Action Medal 1st Class. He also holds the Combat Infantryman Badge (2nd Award), Master Parachutist Badge and the Special Forces Tab.

Command Sgt. Maj. Kessling resides in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and is married to the former Barbara Bryant.