

COLONEL DAVID A. MCKNIGHT US Army, Retired (Deceased)



COL McKnight was a 1966 graduate of Texas Western College, today known as University of Texas, El Paso. He joined the Army that same year and was branched into Military Intelligence. He was detailed to the Infantry Branch and attended Infantry Officers Basic Course in September 1966. He was immediately sent to MI Officer Basic Course and the Resident Officer Technician Course following the Infantry course. He was then assigned as an Infantry officer to the Republic of Vietnam in 1967. He served as an Infantry Platoon Leader and Long Range Reconnaissance Platoon Leader for the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. During this eventful tour, he led his soldiers on numerous critical and exceptionally dangerous missions. Through his efforts the 101st Airborne Division made substantial gains throughout its area of operations.

He returned to the United States as a Captain in 1968 to serve with the Paris Negotiating Team seeking to end the Vietnam War. He returned to Southeast Asia in May 1972 working as a member of the Laos Defense Attaché team. His next assignment sent him to the US Military Academy at West Point where he instructed physical education, coached the free-fall parachute team and taught scuba. While there he left an indelible mark on hundreds of young officers and imbued them with his personal example of selfless service and dedication.

Upon receiving an early promotion to Major, McKnight was assigned to 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. He earned his Special Forces qualification and then took command of B Company, 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (A).

In April 1980, COL McKnight was reassigned to the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force in Tampa, Florida. He coordinated and authored the intelligence plans and documents for what was to become the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). His efforts were later validated and used during Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM (see below).

He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and selected for battalion command of 165th MI Battalion (Tactical Exploitation) in Germany. Following command, he was assigned as

Director of Operations to a sensitive Special Mission Unit. He is credited with changing the unit from a reactive posture to a proactive organization. He updated and improved selection and training of personnel for highly specialized missions. While serving as Director of Operations, he was personally selected to deploy to a hostile contingency area in response to that Nation's crisis in the Arabian Gulf in 1987-1988. He made several perilous trips into denied areas in order to establish effective contingency support arrangements for potential CENTCOM operations in the area of responsibility. His accomplishments underpinned many of the successes CENTCOM achieved during subsequent operations. COL McKnight left the Special Mission Unit to participate in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) fellowship where he served with the CIA's Office of Military Affairs.

His next duty sent him back to the Special Operations community as the Deputy Chief of Intelligence, Special Operations Command. From this position, he put several key initiatives in motion to include a tactical Signals Intelligence collection capability, a national-level means for personnel tracking, and innovative methods of collecting intelligence using Special Forces Soldiers and equipment. During Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, COL McKnight was hand-picked to return to the CIA as US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) Senior Liaison Officer. He provided critical and unique support to surgical Special Operations units involved in National Command Authority operations in western Iraq. The success of these numerous incursions, deep behind enemy lines, to attack Iraqi capabilities in western Iraq was singularly due to his outstanding planning and coordination skills.

Upon return to the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), he assumed duties as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence and then as Chief of Staff for a brief time. Throughout his time in the Special Operations community, he continued to advocate initiatives for personnel tracking and recovery, beacon operations, tactical Signals Intelligence support and expanded his contributions to include innovations in training and doctrine.

In March of 1991 COL McKnight assumed duties as J2 JSOC and held that position until his retirement in 1994. From that position, he participated directly or indirectly in more than 100 missions in support of National Command Authority requirements. He directed the JSOC intelligence system through numerous complex joint exercises. As the J2 of Task Force Ranger in Somalia, and because of his unique blend of intelligence and operational experience, he was personally selected to lead the first of two operational assessment teams into that troubled country. The tactics, techniques and procedures first envisioned by him ultimately became the basis for intelligence support to surgical operations both during combat in Somalia and continue today as a major element of special operations planning.

COL McKnight's awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal (with V device and 3 Oak Leaf Clusters), Air Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army National Defense Service Medal (2 service stars), Vietnam

Service Medal (3 service stars), Southwest Asia Service Medal (2 service stars), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Kuwait Liberation Medal, Special Forces Tab, Master Parachutist Wings, Aircraft Crewman Badge, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

COL McKnight passed away in 1997. He was inducted posthumously into the MI Hall of Fame in 2003.