

James “Maggie” Megellas, lieutenant colonel, U.S. Army (retired)

James “Maggie” Megellas was born and raised in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, a son of Greek immigrant parents and a proud member of the city’s ethnic Greek community. He attended Fond du Lac public schools and graduated from Ripon College in 1942. He accepted a commission as a second lieutenant, infantry, U.S. Army, upon graduation and began his service in World War II.

Four years later, Megellas was acknowledged as the most decorated officer in the acclaimed 82nd Airborne Division and was discharged with the rank of captain. He continued serving as a citizen-soldier in the Army Reserves and retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

His awards include the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Purple Hearts, Presidential Citation with Cluster, the Belgium Fouragere, six campaign stars and Master Parachutist Badge.

He was selected by General James Gavin, the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, to receive the Military Order of Wilhelm Orange Lanyard from the Dutch Minister of War in Berlin in 1945. Megellas was the first American to be honored with the award by the government of Holland.

Megellas fought in the Italian and Western European Campaign, as a platoon leader. While still a 1st Lieutenant, he was named Company Commander of H Company, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) in the waning days of the war.

His most notable battle experiences include action in the Italian mountains near the Anzio beachhead, his combat jump into Holland as part of Operation Market Garden, crossing of the Waal River under heavy German fire in broad daylight, and the Battle of the Bulge in January of 1945, when he singlehandedly destroyed a German Mark V Panther Tank and led his platoon to liberate the town of Herresbach, Belgium, without a single American casualty.

He finished World War II in the occupation of Berlin and led his company, the only company with which he served during all of his World War II service, down Fifth Avenue in New York City in the January 1946 Victory Parade.

Megellas continued his service to our nation with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for 32 years, holding assignments in Yemen, Panama, South Vietnam and Colombia.

During his assignment with USAID, he served two years in Vietnam holding the equivalent rank of two-star general, leading 4,000 soldiers and civilians from Vietnam and other nations in civil military relations. For this mission, he received the National Chieu Hoi Medal and the Psychological Warfare Medal from the South Vietnamese government.

In his 80s, Megellas invested five years to research and write his autobiographical best-seller, *All the Way to Berlin: A Paratrooper at War in Europe*, published in 2003 by Random House. This riveting chronicle details his firsthand experiences as a young infantry leader and those of his fellow combat soldiers in his outfit.

In 2006 at the age of 89, Megellas visited the modern-day version of his World War II outfit, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, then serving in Afghanistan along the Pakistani border. He shared with them his book, *All the Way to Berlin*, and his continuing message of military service.

He returned to Afghanistan on two other occasions — at Christmas in 2007 and in September of 2008 — to meet with soldiers and encourage the efforts of U.S. military personnel.

Megellas continues to receive honors for his service to community and the nation.

In 2008, he was invited by the German government back to the town of Ludwigslust, where he was honored for liberating the Wöbbelin Concentration Camp on May 2, 1945, and also freeing the town from the Nazis. He traveled with Holocaust survivor George Salton, who was liberated from that camp.

In 2010, Megellas received the Daughters of the American Revolution Medal of Honor.

Megellas and his World War II service are subjects of a 2013 World War II Foundation documentary film titled “Maggie’s War: A True Story of Courage, Leadership and Valor in World War II,” airing nationally on PBS stations around the country.

On September 20, 2014, Maggie returned to the Netherlands at the invitation of the Dutch government for the 70th commemoration of Operation Market Garden, and crossed the Waal River once again in a rubber boat. He was again honored on Memorial Day 2015 by the Dutch King and Queen in Washington, D.C., at Arlington National Cemetery, and they have requested to present copies of his book, that was translated into Dutch, for all schools in the Netherlands.

On November 8, 2014, Maggie received the American Veterans Center Audie Murphy Award, and celebrated his 98th birthday on March 11. Megellas resides in Colleyville, Texas with his loving wife and “general manager”, Carole. They have two sons and five grandchildren. “Maggie” continues to travel and lecture whenever called upon. It’s his mission.