



James Megellas

March 11, 1917 - April 2, 2020

James “Maggie” Megellas, beloved husband, father, and grandfather, passed away April 2nd at the age of 103. Maggie was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin on March 11, 1917 to Greek immigrants Daphne and Peter Mitzalis and was one of seven children. During the Great Depression, he worked in the Civilian Conservation Corp to help provide money for his large family. Maggie attended Ripon College and upon graduation in May 1942, he immediately accepted a commission in the US Army. He then volunteered for the newly formed 82nd airborne division insuring that he would see the worst of what the war had to offer. He led H company, 504th battalion of the 82nd Airborne as a first lieutenant for 29 months of continuous combat in the European theater including Anzio, Operation Market Garden and the famed Waal river crossing, and the Battle of the Bulge. He would never forget the men he served with and those who never returned home. To this day, Maggie is the most decorated officer in the history of the 82nd Airborne with the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars with V for Valor, two Purple Hearts, Presidential Citation with cluster, the Belgium Fouragère, 6 Campaign Stars, and Master Parachutist badge and was nominated numerous times for the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was selected by General James Gavin, the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division to accept the “Military Order of William” on behalf of the Division and to be awarded the “Military Order of William Orange Lanyard” from the Dutch Minister of War in Berlin in 1945, the first American so honored by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. After the war, Maggie served as the president of the Fond du Lac city council. In May 9, 1962, Maggie married the love of his life, Carole Laehn, and they remained in love for the rest of his life.

Maggie ran for US congress in 1960 and campaigned with John F. Kennedy who was running for president at the time. After Kennedy’s election, he appointed Maggie as the Mission Director (USAID) Agency for International Development to the country of Yemen. They remained close friends until John Kennedy’s death and Maggie was asked to speak at his funeral. He also served as USAID Mission director to Panama from 1964-1968. During the Vietnam War, Maggie was the head of the Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in Vietnam from 1968-70. In 1971, he received his Master’s degree from Johns Hopkins University in International Public Policy.

Again he served as Mission Director USAID from 1975-1979, this time in Colombia. After his retirement from the US State Department in 1979, Maggie taught economics and international affairs at Florida Institute of Technology for 9 years. In his eighties, Maggie wrote his World War 2 memoirs, *All the Way to Berlin*, which was published by Random House, and became a best seller used as a basis for the documentary film *Maggie's War*. In 2003, Maggie and Carole moved to Texas to be close to their two sons. Maggie continued to serve his country his entire life, visiting his 82nd Airborne "brothers" in Afghanistan on three different occasions while in his nineties. In 2007, the German government honored him for his role in liberating the Wöbbelin Concentration Camp in northern Germany, May 2, 1945. He started the Maggie Megellas foundation and spent a decade speaking at high schools around the country. His message was always clear: "The greatest generation has not yet been born. They will be the generation that does not send its young people off to die in wars but rather learns to live in peace. The Lord did not put us on this earth to kill each other."

Maggie was a wonderful father to his two sons and grandfather to his four grandchildren. He is survived by his wife Carole, sons James and Stephen, and grandchildren Trace, Mackenzie, Marshall, and Piper. He is also survived by the thousands of people that called him an inspiration, a hero and a friend. He is a loss to us all, and to the world as a whole. Maggie spent his entire life serving others and proved that one person can make a difference.

A memorial service will be planned in the future to allow people from every corner of the globe to pay their respects. The family prays you keep Maggie in your thoughts until a time the world allows us to all gather together to celebrate his life.

Comments



“ Just finished Maggie's War documentary. What a true hero he was!!! It promoted me to look further into his life journey. My sympathies to his family and many Thanks for sharing his legacy with the world.

Maria Lockhart - August 05, 2020 at 03:55 PM



“ Wow what a man! I only met Maggie one time in 2010. I was traveling on business and he was promoting his book in the airport I was traveling thru. I think it was Dallas Texas. I walked up to him and said hi. We exchanged war stories, I'm a Vietnam veteran, he signed my book I purchased and I was on my way. . I did not read the book until recently. During the Covid 19 pandemic. Often times while reading his book I wondered when and if Maggie had passed. This past weekend my wife and googled LT Col Megellas to find out he lived to be 103 years old and passed away April 2, 2020. I said, What? he passed away almost on the same day I began reading his book. Pretty amazing. I have an uncle who served in some of the some places Maggie did. My uncle is still alive at age 97 and in pretty good health, he reminds me of Maggie. Has a silver star too. was a Tank Destroyer commander. How many of our guys survived these battles is amazing. The weather, the equipment etc. Just amazing life he had. Rest in Peace Lt Col Megellas.

Dave - July 20, 2020 at 01:57 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Doug Clapp - April 09, 2020 at 12:57 PM



“ Thank you Jim Magellas for your life of service, heroism and leadership. My father was a friend and supporter of Jim in his '58 and '60 runs for Congress. His campaign button holds an honored position in my collection (picture). My deep condolences to the entire Magellas family. Douglas Clapp, Captain USCG (Ret).

Doug - April 09, 2020 at 01:03 PM



“ A sympathy card was purchased for the family of James Megellas.



April 07, 2020 at 04:50 PM



“ God Bless you Maggie for all the lives you touched in so many ways. Your shared candid wisdom and insights will be missed.

Charlie Anderson

Ft. Worth Airpower Council

Charles C. Anderson - April 06, 2020 at 01:09 PM



“ Maggie Magellas is the kind of airborne infantry leader that we, the next generation of platoon leaders who fought in Vietnam, aspired to emulate. His example of leading from the front will inspire future combat leaders for generations to come. All the Way —Bruce Stacy

Bruce Stacy - April 05, 2020 at 10:48 PM



“ I'm fortunate to have met Maggie and will treasure the memory till we meet again. God bless America and God bless the Magellas family. -- Roger Latham, Fort Worth Airpower Council

Roger Latham - April 05, 2020 at 10:00 AM



“ Carole and family...so many memories of Maggie cross our minds. For me, him giving me his paperback copy of his book in that cosy restaurant in Holland in 2004 and the inscription he wrote. But the years are filled with joyful times with both of you. Know that we love the two of you dearly and our hearts are in pain with you. He will be greatly missed by many. Love, Jil and Dom Launay

Jil and Dom Launay - April 05, 2020 at 03:11 AM



“ We love you and will miss you. We will treasure your stories, your wisdom and will be forever grateful for your service. Your legacy will live on. Rest well and fly high
Grandpa

With love
DJ and Judie

Judie Joseph - April 04, 2020 at 11:22 PM



“ So sorry for the passing of James Megellas, a great hero during WWII, who gave his all

Louis Miller - April 04, 2020 at 02:17 PM