SOG was the most secret elite U.S. military unit to serve in the war in Vietnam, so secret it was black - meaning its very existence was carefully concealed, even denied by the government. Innocuously code-named the Studies and Observations Group, SOG contained only volunteers from such units as the Army Green Berets, USAF Air Commandos and Navy SEALs, and answered directly to the Pentagons Joint Chiefs, with some missions requiring approval from the White House. Inside Vietnam, only General William Westmoreland and a few senior non-SOG officers were briefed on SOG activities. Now Major John L. Plaster, a three-tour SOG veteran, vividly recounts the never-before-revealed exploits.

SOG took on the most dangerous assignments, going behind enemy lines to penetrate North Vietnamese military facilities in Laos and Cambodia and along the heavily defended Ho Chi Minh Trail, where only air support - and sometimes no support at all - was available. As colorful as they were heroic, the men of SOG were bound together by their dedication. Though few in number, they were awarded ten Medals of Honor and hundreds of Purple Hearts. Their ranks included the wars most highly decorated unit, as well as the most highly decorated American soldier. Now their stories, among the most extraordinary to come out of the Vietnam War, can at last be told.

This Paladin reprint contains an exclusive new foreword by General John Singlaub, who served as Chief SOG from 1966 to 1968.

My Personal Review:
When Plasters book first came out I was very excited--finally!--someone researched and wrote about some of Americas finest warriors. After having read the novel I was very disappointed. The exploits of the men in SOG do NOT need to be exaggerated like Plaster has done.

There are three Medals of Honor coming out of the Vietnam era that are what I call sewer covers to military cesspools; ironically all three are from Top Secret operations; LT Joseph Bob Kerreys, SSG Jon Cavaianis and Captain MacGonagles. There is nothing better to cover-up; war crimes (Murdering civilians in cold-blood and cutting the throats of children.), military disasters (RRS Hickory) or political failures (USS Liberty) than a shiny Medal of Honor.

I cannot speak for all of John Plasters book, but the parts where I have some knowledge and where I have conducted EXTENSIVE research--I find his non-fiction writing absolutely highly exaggerated fiction; specifically pages 325-330 where he writes about SSG Jon Cavaianis Medal of Honor.

Fact: Sergeant John Jones was killed after killing two NVA soldiers as he charged from the command bunker firing a M-60 machine-gun--NOT trying to surrender.

Fact: Cavaiani was captured on June 5, 1971 by the North Vietnamese ON RRS Hickory hiding in a bunker behind some cardboard and sandbags; NOT 10 days later at FSB Fuller as told in Plasters book.

Fact: There were NO living American witnesses to support Cavaianis MOH action for the 5th of June and CCN HQ thought Cavaiani was DEAD, so the portion written up by Plaster in Cavaianis MOH action covering the 5th of June is fiction. (There was a thick fog covering the area--so even observation from the air was not available.) The NVA commander claims he had 42 men in the attack and lost 4 KIA and 7 WIA. Please note: BOTH sides exaggerated how many of the enemy they killed, but both sides reported ACCURATELY their losses to their HQ.

Fact: Cavaiani joined the infamous anti-American Peace Committee at the Plantation Gardens POW camp and made written statements against the United States and made anti-American radio broadcasts over Radio Hanoi above and beyond statements made by POWs who were actually tortured. (Not disclosed in Plasters book, but well documented in traitor James Dalys book; A Heros Welcome. Plaster should have researched Cavaianis POW conduct before making him a hero.)

In my personal opinion--Jon Cavaianis Medal of Honor should be revoked--almost ALL of the combat action in the citation is without any American witnesses and does not meet Medal of Honor criteria or is highly exaggerated and the combat action that does have witnesses is Cavaiani performing his basic DUTY as the senior NCO.
Sadly--and filled with irony--many of the names Plaster drops throughout his book are REAL SOG heroes, but he tells their stories using the exaggerated bar room versions and in MANY cases he writes about them without every having talked to the actual living participants--yet--with the few men he did communicate with like Cavaiani--he takes their lies at face value without making even the most cursory of investigations producing extremely bad non-fiction. If Plaster would have just checked with the internet website [...] he would have seen Cavaiani was captured on June 5, 1971 not ten days later and could NOT possibly have done the things he claims to have done! He did NOT mow down 125 NVA with a machine-gun; kill two NVA with a Gerber knife or E&E for ten days with 120 frag wounds, two gunshot wounds and flesh dripping from his hands from burns to FSB Fuller TWENTY miles away! That is absolute bovine excrement!

For someone with a journalism degree Plaster did not learn to separate fiction from non-fiction and he TOTALLY failed in his investigative skills.

Having served with SOG-CCN as the logistics officer and a member of the senior staff, I was WELL-INFORMED having personally sat in on many debriefings and having personally read many of the now mysteriously missing After Action Reports. I can decipher the differences when Plaster drifts away from the truth in his writing--but sadly--the average reader cannot and must accept everything he has written as it is presented.

My criticism is NOT against many of the fine men who served in SOG--but against the way Plaster has chosen to embellish their stories and the ever present glory-grabbers who rush forward to have their heads patted. He did a much better job with his picture book.

Sadly, all he needed to do was tell the unembellished truth and leave the fiction writing to authors like me.

Donald E. Zlotnik, Major (Ret.) Special Forces

Author of ten war NOVELS.

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