

= Humbert Roque Versace =

Captain Humbert Roque " Rocky " Versace (July 2 , 1937 ? September 26 , 1965) was a United States Army officer of Puerto Rican @-@ Italian descent who was awarded the United States ' highest military decoration ? the Medal of Honor ? for his heroic actions while a prisoner of war (POW) during the Vietnam War . He was the first member of the U.S. Army to be awarded the Medal of Honor for actions performed in Southeast Asia while in captivity .

= = Early years = =

Humbert Roque Versace was born in Honolulu , Hawaii on July 2 , 1937 . He was the eldest of five children born to Marie Teresa Ríos (1917 ? 1999) ? the author of three books , including the Fifteenth Pelican , on which The Flying Nun (starring Sally Field) , the TV series of the 1960s , was based ? and Colonel Humbert Joseph Versace (1911 ? 1972) . Versace grew up in Alexandria , Virginia and attended Gonzaga College High School in Washington , D.C. during his freshman and sophomore years . His junior year he attended Frankfurt American High School in Germany . He graduated from Norfolk Catholic High School in his senior year . He joined the Armed Forces in Norfolk , Virginia . As had his father before him , Versace entered the United States Military Academy West Point . He graduated in 1959 and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Armor in the U.S. Army .

He was a member of Ranger Class 4 ? 60 and was awarded the Ranger Tab on December 18 , 1959 . Upon graduation from Ranger School , Capt. Versace attended Airborne School and was awarded the parachutist badge . He then served with 3rd Battalion , 40th Armor , 1st Cavalry Division in the Republic of Korea as an M @-@ 48 tank platoon leader from March 1960 to April 1961 . Captain Versace was then assigned to the 3d U.S. Infantry (Old Guard) , where he served as a tank platoon leader in Headquarters and Headquarters Company . After volunteering for duty in Vietnam , he attended the Military Assistance Institute , the Intelligence course at Fort Holabird , Maryland , and the USACS Vietnamese language Course at the Presidio of Monterey .

= = Vietnam War = =

On May 12 , 1962 , Versace began his first tour of duty in the Republic of Vietnam as an intelligence advisor . In May 1963 he volunteered for a six @-@ month extension of his tour , planning to attend seminary at the conclusion of his service and join the Catholic priesthood , hoping to return to Vietnam as a missionary working with orphans .

Less than two weeks before the end of his tour , on October 29 , 1963 , while visiting a Military Academy classmate in Detachment A @-@ 23 , 5th Special Forces Group in the Mekong Delta , Versace accompanied several companies of South Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense (CIDG) troops who had attacked to remove a Viet Cong (VC) command post located in the U Minh Forest , a VC stronghold . A VC Main Force battalion ambushed and overran Versace 's unit , wounding him in the process . He was able to provide enough covering fire so that the CIDG forces could withdraw from the killing zone .

A second government force of about 200 men operating only a few thousand yards from the main fight learned of the disaster too late to help . U.S. authorities said the communist radio jammers had knocked out both the main channel and the alternate channel on all local military radios . Versace was captured and taken to a prison deep in the jungle along with two other Americans , Lieutenant Nick Rowe and Sergeant Dan Pitzer . He tried to escape four times , but failed in his attempts . Versace insulted the Viet Cong during the indoctrination sessions and cited the Geneva Convention treaty time after time . The Viet Cong separated Versace from the other prisoners . The last time the prisoners heard his voice , he was loudly singing " God Bless America " . On September 26 , 1965 , North Vietnam 's " Liberation Radio ? announced the execution of Captain Humbert Roque Versace . Versace 's remains have never been recovered . His headstone at Arlington National Cemetery stands above an empty grave and can be located in the Memorial section MG @-@ 108 .

Upon learning of their son 's fate , Marie Teresa Rios Versace and her husband , Colonel Versace , tried to find out what they could about the circumstances . She went to Paris in the late 1960s , trying unsuccessfully to see the North Vietnamese delegation as it arrived for peace talks . Rios Versace expressed her frustration and anguish in poems .

Nominations to award Versace the Medal of Honor were initiated in 1969 , but the nomination failed and he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star instead . The quest for a Medal of Honor for Versace languished until the " Friends of Rocky Versace " reinitiated the crusade once more in 1999 . Language added by Congress in the 2002 Defense Authorization Act ended the standoff and authorized the award of the nation 's highest military decoration for combat valor to Versace .

On July 8 , 2002 , in a ceremony in the White House East Room , Versace was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by President George W. Bush for his heroism , the first time an Army POW had been awarded the nation 's highest honor for actions in captivity . Present were his surviving siblings , Dr. Stephen Versace , Richard (former coach of the Indiana Pacers) , Michael and Trilby Versace . On November 7 , 2008 , the Department of the Army announced that the Silver Star awarded to Versace was revoked because the Silver Star award was upgraded to the Medal of Honor .

HEADQUARTERS

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

WASHINGTON , DC , 29 December 2009

IV ? SILVER STAR @-@ REVOKE . So much of Department of the Army General Orders , No. 31 , Headquarters , Department of the Army , Washington , D.C. , dated 1 July 1971 , pertaining to the award of the Silver Star to Captain Humbert R. Versace , United States Army , is herein revoked ; as announced in United States Human Resources Command , Permanent Orders 312 @-@ 07 , dated 7 November 2008 .

= = = Medal of Honor citation = = =

Humbert Roque Versace

Rank and organization : Captain , U.S. Army , Intelligence Advisor , Special Operations

Place : Republic of Vietnam

Entered service at : Norfolk , Virginia

Born : Honolulu , Hawaii

Citation :

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while a prisoner of war during the period of October 29 , 1963 to September 26 , 1965 in the Republic of Vietnam . While accompanying a Civilian Irregular Defense Group patrol engaged in combat operations in Thoi Binh District , An Xuyen Province , Republic of Vietnam on October 29 , 1963 , Captain Versace and the CIDG assault force were caught in an ambush from intense mortar , automatic weapons , and small arms fire from elements of a reinforced enemy Main Force battalion . As the battle raged , Captain Versace fought valiantly and encouraged his CIDG patrol to return fire against overwhelming enemy forces . He provided covering fire from an exposed position to enable friendly forces to withdraw from the killing zone when it was apparent that their position would be overrun , and was severely wounded in the knee and back from automatic weapons fire and shrapnel . He stubbornly resisted capture with the last full measure of his strength and ammunition . Taken prisoner by the Viet Cong , he demonstrated exceptional leadership and resolute adherence to the tenets of the Code of Conduct from the time he entered into a prisoner of war status . Captain Versace assumed command of his fellow American prisoners , and despite being kept locked in irons in an isolation box , raised their morale by singing messages to popular songs of the day , and leaving inspiring messages at the latrine . Within three weeks of captivity , and despite the severity of his untreated wounds , he attempted the first of four escape attempts by dragging himself on his hands and knees out of the camp through dense swamp and forbidding vegetation to freedom . Crawling at a very slow pace due to his weakened condition , the guards quickly discovered him outside the camp and recaptured him . Captain Versace scorned the enemy 's exhaustive

interrogation and indoctrination efforts , and inspired his fellow prisoners to resist to the best of their ability . When he used his Vietnamese language skills to protest improper treatment of the American prisoners by the guards , he was put into leg irons and gagged to keep his protestations out of earshot of the other American prisoners in the camp . The last time that any of his fellow prisoners heard from him , Captain Versace was singing God Bless America at the top of his voice from his isolation box . Unable to break his indomitable will , his faith in God , and his trust in the United States of America and his fellow prisoners , Captain Versace was executed by the Viet Cong on September 26 , 1965 . Captain Versace's extraordinary heroism , self @-@ sacrifice , and personal bravery involving conspicuous risk of life above and beyond the call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army , and reflect great credit to himself and the U.S. Armed Forces .

= = In memory = =

The name Humbert R Versace is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (" The Wall ") on Panel 01E , Row 033 . On July 6 , 2002 , Rocky Versace Plaza in Alexandria , Virginia was dedicated in honor of Humbert R. Versace . There is a statue with the likeness of Versace in the Plaza , which was made possible with a donation of \$ 125 @,@ 000 raised by the citizens of Alexandria , Virginia . On July 9 , 2002 , the day after the White House Medal of Honor ceremony , Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White and Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki inducted Versace into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes .

In 2003 , he was inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame . The Military Intelligence Hall of Fame is a Hall of Fame established by the Military Intelligence Corps of the United States Army in 1988 to honor soldiers and civilians who have made exceptional contributions to Military Intelligence . The Hall is administered by the United States Army Intelligence Center at Fort Huachuca , Arizona .

The name of Humbert Roque Versace was engraved in " El Monumento de la Recordación " (Monument of Remembrance) , dedicated to Puerto Rico 's fallen military members and situated in front of the Capitol Building in San Juan , Puerto Rico , and unveiled by Puerto Rico Senate President Kenneth McClintock (see copy of speech) and PR National Guard Adjutant General Col. David Carrión on Memorial Day , 2007 .

= = Awards and decorations = =

Among Capt. Humbert Roque Versace 's military decorations are the following :

Medal of Honor

Purple Heart

POW Medal

Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal

National Defense Service Medal

Vietnam Service Medal

Vietnam Campaign Medal

Badges :

Combat Infantryman Badge

Parachutist badge

Tabs :

Special Forces Tab

Ranger Tab