



# 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.