



# Alumni Spotlight

Col. William J. Davis III '72, USA Ret.  
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Colonel William J. Davis III '72 was born and raised in Philadelphia and he'll tell you that he's "still just Billy Davis from North Philly!" but this retired Green Beret has lived a life of service, sacrifice, and dignity.

Davis chose to attend Millersville State College to study secondary education and history and play football. In the three years that he was on the team, he was given the "M" Award for Majoring Honors in the Sport of Football and was on Dr. Gene Carpenter's first team of Marauders. Following graduation, rather than looking for his first job as a teacher, on November 11, 1971—Veterans Day—Davis enlisted in the Army.

Beginning as a Private he quickly worked his way up the ranks to Second Lieutenant after graduating from the Armed Forces Staff College and the Army War College.

As a Lieutenant Colonel, Davis commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group during the Gulf War. Between 1990 and 1991, his battalion executed demining operations on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, accounted for more than 8,700 enemy prisoners, captured or destroyed thousands of light weapons, and rescued an American F-16 pilot from behind enemy lines. All of Col. Davis's operations were completed without a single loss of American life. Additionally, no unit of its size in U.S. Army history has ever replicated the magnitude of tasks and missions executed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces.

After returning home in the spring of 1991, Col. Davis noticed some concerning symptoms—he went from overseeing highly tactical missions to struggling to dial his own telephone. As time went on, other physical and neuro-deficits developed. It wasn't until 1997 that Dr. Robert Haley began to link Col. Davis's condition to the chemical agents used in the Gulf War. Col. Davis and his identical twin brother, Bob, immediately volunteered to serve as research patients in Dr. Haley's program to help identify and treat what is now known as Gulf War Illness.

"In medical research identical twins can be like gold. Having identical DNA, they should respond virtually identically to most tests except for alterations caused by illness or injury in life," said Dr. Haley. An estimated 11,000 Gulf War veterans have died since 1991, but thanks to Col. Davis and Bob—who have subjected themselves to numerous tests for more than 10 years—doctors are better equipped to help current and future veterans who face chemical weapons in conflict.

"Without Bill's energetic and courageous commitment to our studies, we might never have found the key to the illness...Bill has made a profound contribution to medical research that will improve the lives of tens of thousands Gulf War veterans from throughout the nation," says Dr. Haley. In 2005, the Colonel Bill Davis Fund for Research on Gulf War Illness was established at the center for Gulf War Illness and Chemical Agent Exposure, UT Southwestern, Dallas, Texas.

Now retired from active duty, Col. Davis is still a leader and educator. He serves as Adjunct Faculty at Joint Forces Staff College and as Special Advisor to the National Junior Honor Society of Princess Anne Middle School in Virginia Beach, where he makes it a priority to mentor students and motivate them to be effective leaders and unselfish servants. Because of this, he was presented with the Distinguished Service Award by the Virginia Congress of Parents & Teachers in 2017.

Col. Davis was inducted into the United States Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame in 1996, the Millersville University Athletic Hall of Fame in 2009, the Distinguished Member of the Special Forces Regiment in 2013, and the Archbishop Wood High School Hall of Fame in 2018. He is also a 2019 recipient of the [Distinguished Alumni Award at Millersville University](#).

Col. Davis strives to personify in word and deed the Special Forces motto “De Oppresso Liber,” to liberate the oppressed. On good days, he finds time to pursue his lifelong love of surfing with his friends at the Freedom Surf Shop and Sandbridge Beach. He and his wife of more than 25 years, Susan Matthews Davis, reside in Virginia Beach, VA.