



## Celebrating the Life of Major Joseph B. Mucelli

23 June 1936 – 26 July 2012

4 August 2012

McAvoy O'Hara Company Evergreen Mortuary

San Francisco

Joseph Bartholomew Mucelli was born in 1936 in Manhattan to Dr. Joseph Mucelli of Rome and Tatiana Mikhailovskaya of Moscow and raised in their cabin in rural Putnam Valley, New York. He reminisced fondly about an idyllic childhood spent shooting and hunting in upstate New York and observing his father's medical practice in New York City. His parents fostered in him and his older brother, Louis, the values of hard work and perseverance. The brothers grew up in an accomplished family and were introduced to similarly remarkable people like violinist Jascha Heifetz. Joe learned from their example and himself became the "Renaissance man," a master of many areas. Following graduation from the McBurney School in Manhattan at age 16, and inspired by the writing of Ernest Hemingway, Joe traveled to Cuba on the first of his many adventures—an excursion that set the stage for subsequent trips to the country in which he witnessed the Cuban Revolution.

After studying psychology and biology at New York University, where he was a member of the military fraternity Pershing Rifles, he was commissioned into the Army as an infantry officer in 1957. After serving in a variety of command and staff assignments at Fort Ord, California, and Germany, Joe volunteered for duty in Vietnam in 1964. In a life-defining experience, Joe served in Lam Dong province, Republic of Vietnam, as a combat advisor from March 1965 through December 1968. For almost four years, he lived and fought with the Vietnamese and Montagnard inhabitants of the province in their struggle against communism. Joe was known to have served longer in a single province than any other advisor, and volunteered to stay in his assignment—even to the detriment of his military career—because of the close relationships that he had with many of the province inhabitants. Including subsequent assignments in Vietnam and Laos, Major Mucelli served for a total of 63 months in combat. A soldier's soldier, he identified himself as a “professional” and was told by a Vietnamese woman that he was “born for this” life.

After retiring from the Army and following his final posting at the Presidio of San Francisco in 1977, Joe began a second career as a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps instructor in 1979. Designing and implementing a program that was “of, by and for the kids,” Joe—“Maj,” as he was known affectionately to a generation of students—taught and mentored cadets at Mission, Wilson and Lowell High Schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. Countless former JROTC cadets will no doubt recall Maj's leadership and life lessons, as well as his passion for exposing city kids to the wonders of the natural world through orienteering exercises in the Marin Headlands and daytrips to destinations as far away as Yosemite. Through his tireless efforts—Joe normally arrived at school before 7 a.m. and did not leave until after 6 p.m., and worked Saturdays—hundreds of his cadets went on to successful careers in national service and the private sector. Maj always found the time to mentor his cadets in objective and decentralized leadership; encouraged them to apply to the best colleges and pursue their dreams; and served as a role model for virtues such as responsibility and integrity. He let his students apply “positive peer pressure” to each other. He was their friend and advocate. Major also established and coached competitive youth shooting programs; numerous rifle team members recall intense daily practice at the range and journeys in Maj's well-recognized minivan for competitions across California and the United States. Several of his teams competed at the national level, culminating in competition at the U.S. Olympic Training Center and a national junior three-position sporter air rifle title in 1999. After retiring from Lowell in 1998, Joe continued his involvement in junior shooting sports, serving as the state Civilian Marksmanship Program junior program director until 2010. He was also a National Rifle Association life member and coach.

Joe's interests included herpetology, travel, fine dining, wine tasting, photography, competitive shooting, gun and art collecting, history, exploration of the natural world and political activism. He could read a book a day and would investigate and exhaust a topic before moving on to the next one. He subscribed to email before most people had, yet always made the effort to handwrite letters while on his many cross-country drives and send Christmas cards to touch base with old friends. In the course of his life, he had been to all 50 U.S. states and five continents. He contributed articles on crocodilians to specialized journals, and established and supported a “private peace corps” for impoverished students in the Philippines in the mid-1980s. He helped those who helped themselves, plus adopted stray pets. A true soldier, outdoorsman, scholar and humanitarian, Joe will live on in the hearts of the many lives he touched in his rich life.

Major Mucelli's military awards and decorations include the Combat Infantryman Badge, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, three Bronze Stars, and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Silver Star.

He passed on in peace at home in San Francisco after a battle with leukemia. He is survived by his brother, his brother's two children and cousins on the East Coast and friends across the nation. He received the finest medical treatment from Kaiser Permanente, Kaiser Hospice and Compassionate Community Care. Services for him at a national cemetery in the near future are being planned.