



***Staff Sergeant Mario Vega-Velazquez***  
***27 November 1955 - 21 February 1991***

Staff Sergeant Mario Vega-Velazquez was born 27 November 1955 in Ponce, Puerto Rico. He graduated from high school in 1974 and volunteered for service in the U.S. Army to become an Infantryman. He served two tours in Germany and returned to the United States in 1984. SSG Vega-Velazquez was very proud of his Infantry heritage, but he decided to become a Black Hawk Mechanic. He worked as a Mechanic, but his love for flying brought him to working as a Crew Chief. He joined the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in 1990 and was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion.

His bearing, maturity, and experience brought him on line from day one. He was a unique individual and shared his personal strengths whenever possible. Truly a team player, he is well remembered for recalling excerpts from movies and his love for sports. He was a gifted man with uncommon wisdom and foresight. He was able to present a new perspective to any given situation and always find the positive side. He made people feel special by wanting to know about them, while he himself, remained in the shadows.

His awards and decorations include the Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal (w/1 OLC), Good Conduct Medal (5th Award), NCO Professional Development Ribbon (w/Numeral 2), the Army Service Ribbon and the Overseas Service Ribbon.

On 21 February 1991, SSG Vega-Velazquez was a member of the crew that responded to a request for an urgent medical evacuation deep in enemy territory. His mission was conducted at an extremely low altitude to evade air defense artillery threat. After the extraction of the injured Soldier and while returning to the medical facility, the aircraft encountered a sandstorm and the pilots lost visual reference with the ground. The Black Hawk helicopter, #251, crashed and he selflessly gave his life for his country. SSG Vega-Velazquez was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, and Air Medal (w/"V" Device) for his outstanding heroism.

SSG Vega-Velazquez is survived by his sister, Marilyn. SSG Vega-Velazquez is laid to rest in Madison, Tennessee, at Nashville National Cemetery, Section 1, Site 48-CC.