

In loving
MEMMORY



CHARLES
"SID"
HEAL

1950-2022

Remembering Sid Heal:

Reflections on a Friend and Legendary Leader

BY NTOA DIRECTOR EMERITUS PHIL HANSEN

On May 24, 2022, the tactical community lost a national treasure with the passing of Sid Heal. Sid departed this life unexpectedly but peacefully as he slept next to Linda, his wife of 52 years. Those of us who knew Sid are still in shock, and the impact of his absence is only beginning to be realized.

NTOA Executive Director Thor Eells asked me if I would be willing to write a piece for *The Tactical Edge* about Sid and his impact on our association. It has been my honor to do so, but it has been a daunting task because the measure of the man is so great and his influence on our profession so immense. In reference to the legacy of Abraham Lincoln in the wake of his passing, American historian Carl Sandburg wrote, “A tree is best measured when it has fallen.” Using this metaphor, Sid Heal was a stately, giant sequoia among his contemporaries. His innumerable contributions will continue to shape the tactical community and save lives for many years to come.



AS IRON SHARPENS IRON, SO A
FRIEND SHARPENS A FRIEND.

— *Proverbs 27:17*¹

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Most of you are acquainted with Sid through his books, his training presentations or the many articles he authored for *The Tactical Edge*, but some will be unaware of just how remarkable a life he lived. I couldn't begin to chronicle all of Sid's accomplishments in this article. His CV alone is 23 pages long. I'd prefer that this piece is about who Sid was as a person, but it wouldn't be right to attempt that without first providing at least a very abbreviated glimpse of his extraordinary life and career.

Sid was born into a loving family in rural Michigan and grew up attending classes in a one-room schoolhouse. In 1968, at the age of 18, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Within six months, he was serving his first combat deployment in the Republic of Vietnam. Sid was wounded, recovered for two months in a naval hospital in Guam, and returned to Vietnam to complete his tour. When he came home, there were two things Sid knew he wanted to do: marry the love of his life, Linda, and go to college. Sid's first inclination was to get out of the Marine Corps right away and not look back, but then he discovered that if he stayed in the reserves, the Corps would pay for his



SEB Team Leader, Sergeant Sid Heal (kneeling, second from left) and members of the Blue Team, circa 1987.

education. This was the genesis of Sid's eventual 35 years of service with the Marines, during which he saw combat deployments to Vietnam, the first Gulf War, Mogadishu (Somalia), and the second Gulf War.

During the course of his parallel careers, Sid advanced both as a Marine and as a law enforcement officer. When faced with the growing challenges imposed by peacekeeping missions, the Marine Corps wisely sought to leverage Sid's extensive law enforcement experience. He was given carte blanche to develop less-lethal options and tactics for the Corps, and Sid soon earned a worldwide reputation as a pre-eminent expert in less-lethal weapons systems. His counsel on this topic was sought out at the highest echelons of the Marine Corps, and he became a longstanding instructor at all US military war colleges. Sid retired from the Marine Corps in 2004 as a Chief Warrant Officer-5. At the time, he



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was one of only 13 Marines to have achieved that rank.

As a young Marine, Sid developed an insatiable thirst for knowledge. In the course of his formal education, he earned his bachelor’s and two master’s degrees. Anyone who knew Sid, knew him to be a voracious reader who possessed remarkable insight into wide-ranging subjects that included law, religion, philosophy and history, as well as a vast array of technical knowledge relating to our profession.

While taking a criminology class early in his undergraduate studies, Sid became enthralled with law enforcement, and in 1977, he joined the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department



(LASD). During his 30-year career with the LASD, Sid served two tours at the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB), one as a SWAT team leader where he further honed his tactical skills, and the other as the bureau's captain and commanding officer, where he developed a broader perspective on overseeing tactical operations.

Sid also served as a lieutenant at the department's Emergency Operations Bureau (EOB), where he gained significant experience in emergency management during large-scale crisis events like earthquakes, civil disorder incidents and wildland fires. During that time, EOB also served as the home of the Los Angeles Terrorism Early Warning Group, predecessor to what is now the Joint Regional Terrorism Task Force. There, Sid became acquainted with domestic intelligence operations.

In his final sheriff's department role, Sid was commander of the department's Technology Exploration Project, giving him oversight of department-wide development, testing and evaluation of new technologies. This assignment intentionally dovetailed with his extensive military experience and connectivity to the development of less-lethal weapons systems. Sid retired from the LASD in 2008 at the executive rank of commander.

Sid Heal possessed a brilliant and unfailingly inquisitive mind fed by substantial formal education and incessant reading. It was honed by a lifetime of military and law enforcement service that included combat experience and extensive, specific expertise in tactics, emergency management, intelligence gathering and technology development. We are the beneficiaries of Sid's gifted and untiring nature, as well as his uncanny ability and desire to share his knowledge and experience with others.

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REFLECTIONS ON A FRIEND AND MENTOR

Sid and I first met in 1978, working as all new deputies did in the county jail system while we awaited our patrol assignments. He was senior to me and just about to transfer to one of our busier patrol stations in south-central L.A. County. Even in those early days, I could see that there was something a little different about Sid. He had a maturity about him that most of us had not yet developed. He was unfailingly pleasant, helpful and professional in both his conduct and appearance. It was the 1970s, and while most of us were trying to look cool by growing our hair, mustaches and sideburns to the furthest limits that policy allowed, Sid had that same clean-cut, Marine Corps appearance he maintained until the day he left us. He even preferred to wear our less comfortable but more professional-looking wool patrol uniform and hard badge in the jail, rather than



Sid and the love of his life, Linda Heal

the more comfortable khaki utilities we were authorized to wear when working in the custody environment. With Sid, what you saw was what you got. He was squared away from day one.

We soon went our separate ways to different patrol stations and our paths next crossed in the mid-1980s, when we were both assigned to the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) as SWAT team leaders. Sid was again my senior, and he was tasked with mentoring me as I adjusted to my new assignment. As a new team leader, I could not have asked for a better role model. Sid's passion for our mission, his creativity and his incredible level of energy were contagious, and they made a mark on me that would last a lifetime.

Speaking of creativity, I recall one long-rifle training session Sid planned, back in the days before we had the technology like cell phones, GPS and digital rangefinders that we now take for granted. Sid wanted to give our riflemen experience at taking high-angle shots, simulating a firing position from atop a multi-story building. He arranged to have one of our heavy-lift helicopters fly us to a remote area and do a one-wheel deployment of our riflemen onto the top of a sharp, steep ridgeline that overlooked a riverbed. I remember watching Sid in the riverbed, enthusiastically placing targets, calling for shots, and using a tripod-mounted surveyor's transit and compass to determine our distance and firing angles. It was a classic example of Sid's uncanny knowledge and thinking outside the box. I have no idea where he learned to use those surveyor's tools, but I do know that when the shooting was done, the other guys didn't seem to share my appreciation for Sid's creativity as we clawed, crawled and slid down the ridge on our backsides to our pick-up point in the riverbed below.

In those early days, Sid and I had the opportunity to be mentored and inspired by legendary first-generation SWAT innovators like Mike Hillmann, Ron McCarthy, and NTOA founder John Kolman. It was John who encouraged Sid to write his first article for *The Tactical Edge* in 1989. With such remarkable mentors, our duty to become contributors in our own right became obvious. It became our passion to further develop our profession and pass on the lessons we learned to future generations, as our mentors had done for us. While still a team leader at SEB, Sid conducted original research and wrote his groundbreaking *Diversionsary Devices Reference Manual*, which was eventually published and distributed by the NTOA. This seminal publication remains relevant today and has served as the catalyst for all that has followed with respect to training, deployment and courtroom testimony concerning the deployment of flash/sound diversionsary devices.

Sid always displayed boundless energy and enthusiasm. Even in a classroom setting, most of us would tire just trying to keep up with him. Our running joke has always been that Sid actually had a way of maintaining his level of energy by

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somehow sapping it from the rest of us. As improbable as it seems, Sid appeared to pick up his pace even more during the later stages of his career and on into his “retirement.” He was extremely active in professional associations, serving as a director and then as president of the California Association of Tactical Officers (CATO), and also serving as chair of the NTOA's Strategy Development Section. Sid was instrumental in advancing the productive relationship between CATO and the NTOA as we worked together to raise the professional bar for law enforcement tactical operations at both the state and national levels.

Sid was a prolific writer who authored many groundbreaking publications, including “Sound Doctrine, A Tactical Primer”² and his exceptional textbook, “Field Command.”³ He penned over 160 articles addressing aspects of tactical science. Since 1989, more than 130 of Sid's articles have appeared in *The Tactical Edge*. He has been a mainstay of this publication and his impact on our collective professional learning is unparalleled.

A COMPLETE MAN

I was blessed to spend some time with Sid just days before his passing. We attended a dinner gathering of current and retired SEB personnel, and we talked with one another about how we were spending our time in retirement. Among other things, I mentioned that I had obtained a study bible and was reading it from cover to cover. Sid seemed delighted, and he enthusiastically told me how he had done the same thing (twice) and that the last time he rode his recumbent bike across the country, he had listened to the entire bible on audio. I had to laugh to myself as it was just one more example of how I couldn't seem to keep up with him!

In my own articles on leadership, I have often discussed how the best leaders among us are inspired and driven by something greater than their own ego and need for advancement. They lead by aligning others in pursuit of a noble

cause, and they sincerely care for those they lead. Sid was a tremendous leader and a man of faith who loved his God, his country and his family with all his heart. He also loved the people he led. Sid never tried to force his beliefs on others, but he expressed his faith in his everyday behavior and treatment of his fellow man. He was tough as nails and demanded excellence from his personnel, but he was never officious or petty. He was caring, compassionate and considerate of others. In over 40 years that I knew him, I never saw Sid act in a disingenuous or malicious manner. In all that time, through good times and bad, I'd never even heard him curse. He treated others as he would wish to be treated. He was a Christian and gentleman to the core.

When Sid passed, I was honored to attend a private memorial service at his church, as well as the public gathering held in his honor at SEB. Sid's wife Linda spoke beautifully at the church, as did all five of their children. I was overwhelmed by the poise and grace each of them displayed. The character of each child shone through as they lovingly articulated the gratitude and respect they had for their dad. As I watched and listened, it made me realize that of all Sid's accomplishments, the greatest was undoubtedly this beautiful family that he and Linda had created.

In a recent podcast interview, *The Debrief* with Jon Becker,⁴ Sid mentioned that someday, when someone wrote his obituary, he'd like it to say, "He was a teacher and a mentor, and he took the information entrusted to him and made it available to those who needed and would benefit from it."

All I can add to that is: Well done and Godspeed, my friend. You accomplished all that for us, and so much more.

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ENDNOTES

1. Proverbs 27:17, The Holy Bible, New Living Translation
2. Sound Doctrine, A Tactical Primer, Charles "Sid" Heal, Lantern Books, 2000
3. Field Command, Charles "Sid" Heal, Lantern Publishing and Media, 2020
4. The Debrief with Jon Becker podcast, Episode 2, Sid Heal, Part II, Understanding Tactical Science (<https://thedebrief.live/>)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Hansen retired as chief of police for the Santa Maria (CA) Police Department. Prior to his service in Santa Maria, he retired as a captain from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department with 36 years of service. Most of his work was in the field of tactical operations and critical incident command, including 13 years as a full-time SWAT sergeant/team leader and six years as the SWAT lieutenant/team commander for SEB. He was an elected member of the NTOA board of directors for 20 years and was chairman of the board from 2008 to 2013; he now serves as a director emeritus.



Phil Hansen and Sid Heal enjoying a moment of fellowship at an SEB gathering, May 19, 2022