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21st Century Shining Star:

Sgt. Joe Haralson

by Robert Nieman

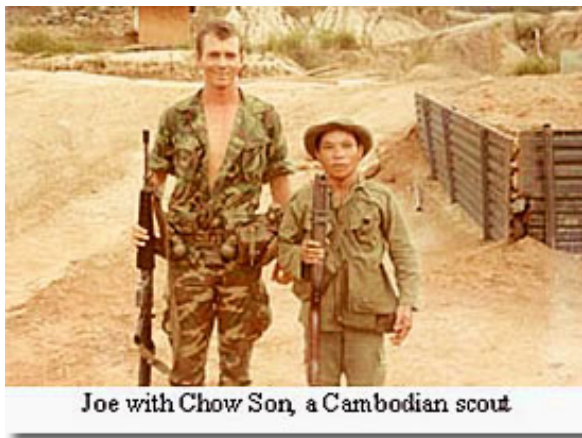
Joe Haralson has been a Ranger since 1981. This makes him one of the force's most senior Rangers, and he is one of the best.

Joe was born on August 19, 1950, in Woodville, Tyler County, Texas. He and his younger brothers, Jerry and James, are the sons of Joe and Margaret Haralson. The family moved to nearby Spurger when Joe was still a youngster, and he graduated from Spurger High School in 1968.

In April of 1969, Joe entered the Army. After completing basic training at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, and Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Ord, California, he was shipped to Vietnam, arriving in that war-torn country in October 1969. Joe has always served with the best, and this was true during his tour in Vietnam. He was a member of the Big Red One, the First Infantry Division [1/26—1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry]. It didn't take long before Joe was commanding an infantry squad as a sergeant.

Many of the First Division redeployed to Fort Riley, Kansas. Joe remained and was reassigned to the Americal Division's 4th Battalion of the 21st Infantry of the 11th Light Infantry Brigade as a reconnaissance soldier until he rotated out of Vietnam.

It has been reported that only around ten percent of the troops in Vietnam saw actual combat. Joe was one of that small number, but the amount of combat was not small. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Air Medal, with oak leaf clusters for both. [Retiring Senior Ranger Captain, C. J. Havrda, was also awarded the Bronze Star for heroism under fire in Vietnam.]



Joe with Chow Son, a Cambodian scout

Joe left Vietnam and arrived back in the United States on November 10, 1970. This was also the day of his parents' 22nd anniversary. Joe says he never has any trouble remembering that date!

Back in the states, Joe's life took a fortunate turn. On May 8, 1971, he married his high school sweetheart, Alice Dale. Today, they have four sons. Joseph, a sergeant, first class, in the Green Berets has seen action in Afghanistan and Iraq. The second son, Jason, followed in his father's footsteps and is a Highway Patrolman stationed in Corsicana. Jack is a project manager for a construction company in Houston. The youngest, John, works for the Halliburton Company.

On October 6, 1971, less than a year after Vietnam, Joe was a member of Class A-71 in the Department of Public Safety's eighteen-week training academy in Austin. After graduation, the new patrolman was assigned to Brenham.

Joe says he was lucky to have had Roy Moody as his first partner. Roy had graduated from the academy the same year that Joe was born. He was one of the great mischief-makers in the Highway Patrol, but he took his job deadly serious—and he made sure that his trainee did likewise.

When the opportunity came to transfer to Silsbee in Hardin County, Joe jumped at the chance. Silsbee is only twenty miles from the house where he grew up and in which his mother still lives. (His father passed away in 1988.) Looking back, Joe says that because of his desire to get closer to his hometown, he didn't mind leaving Brenham. It was only after he was gone that he realized how much he had enjoyed living and working there and enjoying his friends.

But Silsbee was home. Fortune smiled on Joe again when he was assigned Truman Dougherty as his new partner. Truman is currently the Newton County judge. Joe realizes that he was truly blessed to have had such great partners on the Highway Patrol.

Joe knew he wanted to eventually become a Texas Ranger, but when an opportunity was presented to promote to the Department of Public Safety's Motor Vehicle Theft Service, he took it. He really had no other choice because he couldn't even apply for the Rangers yet: you had to be at least thirty years old, and he was only twenty-nine. Joe felt that the knowledge he

would gain in the Motor Theft division could only help him when he applied for the Rangers.

On September 1, 1979, Joe assumed his duties in Corpus Christi. In those days, there were only twenty-five men in the Motor Vehicle Theft Service. Joe's nearest co-agents were Ed Sanders in McAllen and Victor Odiorne in Laredo, both more than 200 miles from Corpus Christi. These two officers were more than willing to give all the advice they could—via the telephone. They expected Joe to follow in their footsteps and take care of his own business. And he did.

Henry Lipe of the National Automobile Theft Bureau (NATB) in Corpus Christi was Joe's teacher. Lipe knew quality when he saw it and took the rookie investigator under his wing. Joe, the ever-modest Ranger, says that Henry "is the most knowledgeable automobile- and equipment- theft investigator I (ever) knew. He took me under his wing, taught me what I needed to know, and helped me make it. Any success I had in any theft investigation involving motor vehicles or equipment, I owe to Henry."

Joe's hard work and attentiveness to lessons paid off. On July 1, 1981, the cinco peso badge of a Texas Ranger was pinned on his shirt by the director of the Department of Public Safety, Colonel Jim Adams. He was assigned to Texas City as a member of Company A. Today, he is still in Texas City.

During his twenty-three years as a Texas Ranger, Joe has served under Captains Grady Sessions, Dan North, Bob Prince, W. D. Vickers, Earl Pearson, and Clete Buckaloo. "They all treated me better than I deserved." (These men would no doubt heartily disagree with that statement.)

Just as he was blessed with great partners on the Highway Patrol, Joe says he also had wonderful sheriffs, district attorneys, city police officers, and federal agents to assist him. There is a reason why these people work so well with Joe: they know they can count on him to always be there to assist them.

The inter-agency cooperation was not restricted to males. One particular case involved a female FBI agent, Flo Logan. Joe says Logan was a "good partner and good friend."

A two-day-old baby boy had been stolen out of a Galveston hospital by a woman posing as a hospital employee. She had entered the room of the mother under the pretense of returning the infant to the nursery, but she had taken the child and fled.

For several days, Joe and Agent Logan searched frantically for the child, all to no avail. Thankfully, the baby was returned to his mother by a relative of the abductor, who was unfortunately still on the loose.

The relative had given the police the name of the kidnapper, a woman. Her family said she had been pregnant and suddenly dropped out of sight. After a lengthy absence, she had reappeared, was no longer pregnant, and had a newborn baby boy.

Knowing this did not put the abductor in custody, however. With only a name for identification, Joe and Agent Logan were unable to make a positive identification. When the records were checked, they showed that three different women had at one time or another been arrested using not only the same name, but also the same social security number, driver's license number, and alias.

Among the evidence that Joe and Logan found in the house where the baby had been hidden were several soiled, disposable diapers. They carried these to Olan Malaer of the Houston Police Department, and he was able to lift a latent print. (Olan jokingly said that was "above and beyond" the call of duty!) With this evidence, Joe and Agent Logan were able to identify the defendant.

It took another year and a half to wrap the case up. The elusive child-stealer was finally located in Rome, Georgia. Galveston County Deputy Sheriff Wayne Kessler arrived there and assisted local officers in arresting the fugitive. Once the proper paperwork was completed, he returned with the woman to Texas.

Over the years, Joe has worked just about every kind of case imaginable: murder, robbery, rape, kidnapping, and on and on. Three times he has been on one side of the door when the suspect on the other side chose to commit suicide rather than submit to arrest. Joe says that sometimes you have to be lucky: lucky that they shot themselves instead of you and lucky they didn't fire through the door.

Like all Rangers, not all of Joe's cases involved violence. He fondly remembers the case of an elderly gentleman and his stolen Dalmatian puppy. The dog had been a birthday gift from his daughter, and it was obvious that the man and his wife adored their pet. They had even named the dog after the man.

Next door to this couple were a man and woman who skipped town in the middle of the night. The dog disappeared at the same time. Joe says that he didn't get the first call, but he was probably the first officer to listen to the heartbroken couple's story. He made a few inquiries and located the neighbors and the Dalmatian in San Antonio. Joe called fellow Ranger Rudy Rodriguez and asked him to pick up the dog and hold it until the elderly couple could drive to San Antonio and reclaim their pet.

"They were the most appreciative victims I ever dealt with," Joe says. "They gave me a dozen eggs every week until another dog killed all of their chickens."

Is there is any wonder why Joe Haralson is our 21st Century Shining Star?

Texas Ranger

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