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OWOSSO - Police Chief Nelson Gates claims to have received a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts during combat in Vietnam. [\(read more\)](#)

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OWOSSO - Police Chief Nelson Gates claims to have received a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts during combat in Vietnam.

Gates says he'll never forget the killing he witnessed there.

However, military records show that Gates never went to Vietnam and that he holds neither a Bronze Star nor a Purple Heart. The records say his Army career consisted of two years in Georgia.

In an interview this week, the 62-year-old Gates, who's been on the Owosso force for more than 35 years, explained the discrepancy by saying he was under a CIA-connected "special assignment" with the U.S. Army, and that details about the mission remain classified.

Gates also said he didn't know where his Bronze Star or Purple Hearts were. He said he had no proof - no snapshots, documents, or anything else - to support his contention that he was in Vietnam.

My inquiry into Gates' military record was prompted by an anonymous letter I received this week. It was typed on Owosso Police Department stationery and enclosed in a department envelope.

It accused Gates of lying about his military service. Accompanying that letter was a copy of a two-page service history from the National Archives and Records Administration. The information, the letter explained, was obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Stateside

The form says Gates served in the U.S. Army from Jan. 9, 1963, to Jan. 8, 1965. After completing basic training in Fort Gordon, Ga., he spent 16 weeks at two different service schools at Fort Gordon, then got assigned to the 534th Signal Company at Fort Benning, Ga.

As for decorations, the form says he received a Good Conduct Medal, an Expert Badge and a Rifle Bar.

Gates said that record was fabricated by the Army to conceal his secret-mission.

"It's all classified," Gates said. "I never make any comments about my military service."

When I pointed out to Gates that two articles published in the past 19 months by the Argus Press quoted him extensively, and in great detail, about his combat experiences, he said, "I wish that had never appeared; I don't remember saying those things."

Gates ultimately acknowledged that the information from the articles had, indeed, come from him.

The chief said he could offer no proof he was ever in Vietnam. No photos or souvenirs; no letters or documents.



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"It would take a while, even if I could get them," Gates said.

Missing medals

As for the whereabouts of his Bronze Star and Purple Hearts, Gates said, "They might be at my grandmother's house."

When I asked if he could go there and get them, he said, "No, that's in Ohio."

Addressing the question of why somebody from Gates' own department - or somebody who had access to department stationery - would want to expose the chief.

"I guess I got on the bad side of somebody," Gates said, "which is common in this sort of work."

Lt. Col. Ryan Yantis is an Army spokesman at the Pentagon. After I described the challenge to Gates' veracity, Yantis asked me to fax him the records.

After reviewing those records, Yantis said he couldn't imagine any reason why the Bronze Star and Purple Hearts wouldn't show up.

"There is no such thing as a classified medal," Yantis said.

Asked if Gates' claims were at all plausible, Yantis said: "Under a James Bond construct, I suppose he could make those assertions. But, from the Army's perspective, there is nothing to support Mr. Gates' assertions that he's a combat veteran."

Confronted with the information supplied by Yantis, Gates said: "I don't know how to answer that. I'm totally at your mercy."

The chief added, however, that he would continue to work on obtaining the records that would ultimately exonerate him.

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