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Hillsdale College Hosts Event with Major General William Matz

Matz spoke about his new book 'My Toughest Battle: A Soldier's Lifelong Struggle with Polio.'

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College's Center for Military History and Strategy hosted a conversation between Professor Emeritus Thomas Conner and Major General William M. Matz. Matz spoke on his recent memoir, "My Toughest Battle: A Soldier's Lifelong Struggle with Polio."

"General Matz has overcome great physical adversity to accomplish impressive feats as a soldier," Conner said. "It was a very special honor to have him on campus and hear him share his story with the College community."

Matz said his father returned from the Navy after Matz had contracted polio at the age of five and told him to get rid of his brace and crutches.

"He said, 'you take that brace and those crutches and throw them under the bed. I don't want to ever see them again. You don't want to be a cripple all your life.' I'll never forget those words," Matz said. "That was my dad who did that and took me off those braces and said, 'You can stand on your own two feet. You can walk. You just need to tough it out.' Of course, my dear mother said, 'No, the doctor said he needs those braces on and needs that crutch.' That went on for a couple of days, but my dad won."

At Gettysburg College, Matz joined ROTC. After graduation, he joined the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, where his senior officers had fought in World War II and Korea.

"A couple of them I think saw something in me that I didn't even see, and they sort of picked me up and mentored me," Matz said. "Education is important, teaching is important, but folks, I will tell you — particularly for the young people in the audience here — mentorship is very

important. And so these folks picked me up and mentored me. They sort of followed and watched my career as I moved through the Army. They encouraged me to stay in the Army when there were times maybe I was a little doubtful what I wanted to do, but that was very important.”

Matz’s Army career took him to Vietnam, Korea, and Panama, as well as three presidential administrations, and his greatest disappointment was not a battle he encountered but one he missed — Operation Desert Storm. He began writing some notes so his children and grandchildren could know about his life, and his notes turned into a published memoir.

“The book is about overcoming adversity as much as it is about Vietnam or my service,” Matz said. “It’s a book about a young kid who got terrible polio, was paralyzed for a short time, but was able to fight through it — not just himself, but with friends, a great family, faith in God, and things like that. So I would hope that as the reader turns the pages, that if a family is suffering from an adversity themselves, maybe a book like this will inspire them, give them a little bit of hope that hey, yes, it can be done.”

Major General William M. Matz, Jr., U.S. Army (Ret) received a B.A. from Gettysburg College and an M.A. from the University of San Diego. A veteran of Korea, Panama, and Vietnam — where he was wounded in action in the Tet Offensive — he served multiple tours in the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and was executive secretary to two secretaries of defense, Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci. He is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, Defense Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star for Valor, Purple Heart, and Combat Infantryman Badge. He was appointed to the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission by President George W. Bush and as the eighth Secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission by President Donald J. Trump. He is the author of “[My Toughest Battle: A Soldier’s Lifelong Struggle with Polio](#).”

The event concluded with a reception and book signing.

For photos from previous CMHS events, click [here](#). For photos of Hillsdale College, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About the Center for Military History and Strategy

The Center for Military History and Strategy (CMHS) studies warfare from all times and places to better our comprehension and military readiness. Its focus lies in academic research that joins military history with insights from strategic thinkers throughout history. By providing an education in the study of war and strategy, the CMHS strives to prepare scholars, officers, and policymakers to preserve those “inestimable blessings” of liberty in a world that continues to ignore the lessons of the past. For more information, visit warhistory.hillsdale.edu.

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its

classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, Imprimis, with a circulation of more than 6.8 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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