

Pastor gets caught in tall tale

The Rev. Jim Moats, pastor of Christian Bible Fellowship Church in Newvilleand, Pa., told his local newspaper a stirring story about his service as a Navy SEAL during the Vietnam War. An expert swimmer, he said he had been asked to sign up for one of the underwater demolition teams. He endured brutal physical training to become a SEAL – even undergoing waterboarding. The story was accompanied by a Stephen Colbertesque photo of the now 59-year-old former SEAL clutching a waving American flag.

There's just one problem. None of it was true. While he did serve in the Navy, Rev. Moats was never a SEAL and he never stepped foot in Vietnam. After the Patriot-News published his account, the newspaper began receiving e-mails questioning the story's authenticity. Rev. Moats recently came clean and admitted that he made it all up.



Rev. Jim Moats (Sean Simmers, Patriot-News Photo)

The Navy awards the gold Trident medal to those who have completed SEALs training and have earned the right to be called a SEAL.

The same gold Trident can be bought at a military surplus store, and that's where the Rev. Jim Moats of Newville got his.

Moats was never a Navy SEAL — even though that's what he told The Patriot-News on Friday, and that's what Moats has allowed his congregation at Christian Bible Fellowship Church in Newville to believe for five years.

Moats came to the newspaper office and acknowledged in an interview Sunday that he never was offered SEALs training in the Navy and that he never was accepted into the program, let alone completed it.

"I never was in a class, I never served as an actual SEAL. It was my dream. ... I don't even know if I would have met the qualifications. I never knew what the

qualifications were,” Moats said.

Several people emailed PennLive about Moats’ claim after the story was posted online.

Don Shipley, a retired SEAL who lives in Chesapeake, Va., said he is one of a few former SEALs who are entrusted by the Navy with maintaining the database containing the names of all SEALs. The database cannot be accessed by the public.

Moats was never a SEAL and never had set foot in Vietnam, Shipley said. The information can be verified through a Freedom of Information Act request from the Naval Special Warfare Command in San Diego, he said.

Shipley called Moats on Saturday night to confront him about the issue.

“We deal with these guys all the time, especially the clergy. It’s amazing how many of the clergy are involved in those lies to build that flock up,” Shipley said.

There’s more here, including a video confession.