

Medal of Honor: A Vietnam Warrior's Story

MSG Roy P. Benavidez

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Introduction

This is a story of a man who fought against prejudice and his inner turmoil then later became a hero during the Vietnam War.

Mark Twain once said "Courage is not the lack of fear, it is acting in spite of it." The Vietnam War was fought mostly by the young and the poor. In every war, there are heroes and Vietnam was no different. MSG Roy P. Benavidez was one of those heroes.

This report will cover MSG Roy P. Benavidez's background, his time before Vietnam, his first tour in Vietnam, and his second tour in Vietnam.

Background

Raul P. Benavidez was born on 5 August, 1935. He later changed his name to Roy in basic training. He was half Mexican and half Yaqui Indian. Rogelio, his younger brother, was born two years later in 1937. That same year his father died of tuberculosis.

After his father's death, the family moved to Cuero, Texas which is located in South Texas. There, his mother worked as a domestic worker. The family did not have much money. So, Roy found unique ways of earning money. Cuero was a big cattle town back then and Roy loved to hang out at the stockyard. One day, some ranchers had dared Roy to sneak into the bull pen and grab the huge sack between the bull's hind leg and give it a tug. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). Well, Roy accepted the challenge. He climbed into the pen and grab the bull by the sack and gave it a tug. Luckily, he got out of there before the bull could do anything. The ranchers gave him a shiny new quarter for his troubles. The ranchers gave Roy numerous compliments for his bravery. That experience changed Roy and it turned him into a tough kid.

In 1942, Roy's mother also died of tuberculosis. After his mother's death, Roy and his younger brother went to live with their Uncle Nicholas in El Campo, Texas. Uncle Nicholas

and Aunt Alexandria had eight children. Grandfather Salvador also lived with them.

Roy grew up with racial discrimination. In the 1950s, Mexicans were treated like second-class citizens. In South Texas, cafes did not serve Mexicans. Often times, Roy had to go to the back of the café if he wanted anything.

Roy was involved in many fights during his childhood. Many of these fights involved white kids because they would taunt him with names. One white kid called him pepper belly. Well, Roy did not appreciate it at all. So, he gave this kid a beating for calling him names.

Each spring, the family would pack up their belongings and travel to Colorado to pick crops. They would later return to Texas during the fall. This was how the family supplemented their income.

By the time Roy turned fifteen, he had dropped out of school and he did odd jobs before he found work at the local tire store. He worked for Art Haddock. Art was the bookkeeper at the local Firestone. Art was the first white man who taught Roy about responsibility and treated him like a man. Roy was grateful for the job at Firestone and what Art did for him, but he knew that he wanted a better future for himself.

Roy enlisted in the Texas National Guard. During his time in the National Guard, Roy met one of his heroes, Audie Murphy. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). Audie Murphy was the most decorated soldier from World War II. To Roy's surprise, Audie Murphy was short just like he was. Audie Murphy also came from a poor family and he picked cotton when he was growing up.

Roy learned many lessons when he was in the National Guard. One day, he drove the Battalion Commander of the El Campo National Guard to an official meeting, but he ran out of gas. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). He received a butt chewing for that episode. Now, he would

check the gas gauge before going anywhere.

In 1954, Roy decided to enlist in the Regular Army. He believed the Army was the best solution for his future. At basic training, the drill sergeant called Roy by his given name, which was Raul. They would pronounce his given name, "Ra-oooool." (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). Roy did not like being called that. So, he changed his name to Roy.

After advanced infantry training, Roy went to Korea. There he stood taller than most of the Koreans. He was happy because he could walk around without having to look up at everybody. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995).

Roy was out on a patrol in Korea with two other soldiers when they became separated from the main group. They decided to stay put for the night and wait until morning before moving out. Fortunately, they survived by sharing their body heat and it did not matter to them what color their skin was. Roy knew then that he was equal to the man next to him. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995).

Roy returned to the States after his tour in Korea and reported to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. On Friday, he was told to get a haircut and he would not get his orders until Monday. Also, the First Sergeant told him he would not get his orders until he got a haircut.

At the post barbershop, Roy ran into a big commotion. Elvis Presley was there getting a haircut. So, Roy and his buddies went into town to look for a barbershop but they made a detour to a bar. Roy and his buddies were still at the bar when this guy walked over to them. He told them they better get a haircut. Well, Roy with his temper, got in his face and he was just about to deck him when his buddies dragged him away.

On Monday, Roy received his orders and it was to Germany. Then, he realized he had made a big mistake. The sergeant that cut the orders was the same guy he almost hit in the bar

Saturday night. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995).

Roy ended up in Augsburg, Germany and it was the home base of the Eleventh Airborne Division. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995), Roy decided that he would go to Airborne School, but it was not the case. Roy's temper got the best of him again. He went to a bar with his airborne buddies and they were involved in a big fight with a bunch of "legs." As a result, he was transferred to Berlin, Germany.

Berlin was a divided city and there was constant tension between the Russians and the Allied Forces. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). U.S. troops were always on alert and they were required to maintain their discipline. In this environment, Roy learned to control his temper.

Roy had written to his love interest, Lala Coy, during his sixteen months in Germany. He had one week left in Germany and he wanted to get home and marry Lala. Unfortunately, Roy was involved in another incident. This time, he had struck an officer. He knew he was in big trouble. He could have gone to prison and he could have received a dishonorable discharge. However, he received another chance in the Army.

The company commander questioned him about the incident. He asked him if he did or didn't strike the officer on Saturday night. While he was standing there, Roy noticed a plaque behind the captain's desk. The words were "I do not lie, cheat or steal nor tolerate those that do." The plaque also contained the words "Duty, Honor, Country." These are the words of West Point motto. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). Then, he told the company commander the truth because he couldn't base his military career on a lie. As a result, Roy was demoted from CPL to PFC. That incident had shaped him and that code and motto had carry him throughout his military career.

In 1959, Roy married Lala and they later moved to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. There,

Roy fulfilled his dream of being an airborne soldier. He went through tough tower training. Soon, he was jumping from planes while in flight. Later, he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division from 1959 to 1965.

First Tour in Vietnam

In October 1965, Roy was assigned to a South Vietnamese infantry unit as an advisor. There, he met an Australian Warrant Officer named Dickey who just came out of fighting the Communists in the jungle of Malaysia. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). Dickey was also assigned to the same South Vietnamese infantry unit.

Roy learned many skills from Dickey that kept him alive in Vietnam. Dickey once told him if you want to stay alive in Vietnam, you must blend in. From then on, Roy learned to walk like the Vietnamese and he squatted like them. He also ate rice like them and he balance across those little levees dividing the rice paddies just like them.

Unfortunately, Roy was severely wounded in 1966 and he was evacuated to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. The doctors told him he would not walk again. Roy could not accept that and every night he would crawl out of bed and he would try to walk. Through sheer discipline, he continued with his nightly efforts. Then, six months later, he walked out of that hospital.

Roy later transferred back to the 82nd at Ft. Bragg, NC. There, he resubmitted his paperwork to Special Forces. Two years prior, he had submitted the same paperwork, but it never made it through the system. This time, the paperwork made it through the system and he was accepted into Special Forces training.

Roy faced tough physical and mental training for Special Forces. He ran five miles a day carrying a seventy pound backpack. He made numerous parachute jumps and he ran through many obstacle courses. Roy also completed a grueling twelve day survival/navigation course.

Roy completed light and heavy weapons training. He also made it through the operations and intelligence training. He completed his Special Forces training in 1967. In January 1968, he deployed to Vietnam for the second time.

Second Tour in Vietnam

In Vietnam, Roy volunteered for the unit, B-56. He felt it was his duty to serve with people he cared for. He had friends in that unit. The unit, B-56, was responsible for gathering intelligence on the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). The unit was part of Fifth Special Forces Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG). (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). However, everyone knew that SOG stood for Special Operations Group. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). SOG was organized in 1964. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995).

The men of B-56 trained continuously. They rappelled from helicopter and practiced exiting the helicopter once it landed. This help prepared them for insertion. The men also practiced these tasks backward to help them prepared for extraction. Additionally, they trained on the use of the McGuire rig. This rig was use to extract the men when it was impossible for the helicopter pilot to land.

While in country, Roy was known as Tango Mike/Mike. That was his called sign given to him by the men of B-56. It stood for "The Mean Mexican." (Benavidez and Craig, 1995).

On May 2, 1968, a 12 man Special Forces reconnaissance team was inserted by helicopter west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam to gather intelligence on the enemy. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). The team ran into heavy enemy activities and they requested an extraction. Three helicopters made attempts to extract the surrounded team, but they were met with heavy enemy fire. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). When the helicopters returned to base, Roy voluntarily

boarded the returning helicopter for the next extraction attempt. Roy realized that the team members could not reach the pickup zone, so he directed the aircraft to a clearing 75 meters away. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). There, he jumped from the hovering aircraft and ran to the crippled team. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). He suffered wounds to his right leg, face, and head. He continued on despite his painful injuries. He took charge and repositioned the team members and directed their fire against the enemy. These actions made it possible for the extraction aircraft to land and evacuate the wounded.

On that fateful day, Roy saved eight men and secured classified documents and destroyed sensitive communication equipment. (Benavidez and Craig, 1995). The actions of MSG Roy P. Benavidez on May 2, 1968 earned him the Medal of Honor.

Conclusion

Every war has its heroes and Vietnam has many. MSG Roy P. Benavidez was one of those hero. He overcame many obstacles throughout his live. In this report, I examined MSG Roy P. Benavidez's background, his time before Vietnam, his first tour in Vietnam, and his second tour in Vietnam.

Roy wasn't part of the rescue team, but he voluntarily boarded that aircraft. He knew it was his duty because his friends were in trouble. Again, Mark Twain once said "Courage is not the lack of fear, it is acting in spite of it."

Bibliography:

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