

MSG Benavidez – Contributions and
Achievements to the NCO Corps
The Vietnam War Through 1998

by

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CORPS**

THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH 1998

I have selected Master Sergeant Raul “Roy” Perez Benavidez for the Noncommissioned Officer History research and as an oral presentation topic. Benavidez is a Medal of Honor recipient as well as an outstanding noncommissioned officer who served during the Vietnam War. Over the course of the research I will address a number of issues that has placed Benavidez in a very unique pedestal in the history of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. Four major areas that will be discussed in the research regarding the contributions and achievements of MSG Benavidez include:

- Assignments
- Weapon Skills
- Specialized Training
- Awards and Achievements

A native of Texas, Master Sergeant Raul Perez Benavidez was born on August 5, 1935 in DeWitt County, Texas (Benavidez, 1995). He was the son of a farmer, who became orphaned at an early age, and was later raised by an uncle. At age 14 Benavidez dropped out of school to work in the fields of Texas before enlisting in the U. S. Army reserve in June of 1955, and changed his first name to “Roy”. While in the reserve, he met army legend Audie Murphy, who became a personal idol and role model. In 1958, he was

assigned to the Military Police School in Fort Benning, Georgia, and graduated second in his class. After four years of service, Benavidez earned his way in the Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia.

His first assignment was Fort Bragg, North Carolina with the 82nd Airborne Division where he served from 1959-1965 (Benavidez, 1995). At the time Airborne and Special Operation units were the most elite soldiers in the United States Army. The Airborne assignment was not enough for him. While serving for the first time in Vietnam in 1967, Benavidez was assigned to a Vietnamese infantry unit as a Military Police NCO, where he was injured by a land mine. Benavidez was seriously injured and immediately evacuated to an Army hospital located in the Philippines, where he spent more than nine months in bed. Over the course of an additional nine months, many doctors examined and determined that Benavidez may never walk again. His brain had been rattled so violently in his skull that the doctors never expected him to regain his senses either. While in the hospital recovering from the severe wounds, MSG Benavidez received a notification informing him that he would be discharge and sent home. Benavidez never gave up. Everyday during his last six months in the hospital, Benavidez would roll out of bed, crawl to a wall, place his back against a wall, and would attempt to stand up. Although he failed many times, he never gave up. Benavidez fully recovered after nine months in the hospital, and walked again.

MSG Benavidez later received orders to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he spent a few months in training trying to get back in shape. While stationed at Fort Bragg, he

was reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Div., 2nd Battalion of 325th Infantry, as an Administration NCO, pushing paperwork. In 1965, after two months on the job, he applied to one of the most elite military groups known as the Special Forces. Benavidez was accepted and qualified among others in the group. During this time, Benavidez held the rank of sergeant for 12 years of service. As SF, he became proficient in three areas:

- Weapons, (Light and Heavy)
- Intelligence
- Medical

Benavidez was also an interrogator and linguist (German/Spanish). He performed a number of missions in many countries around the world as a member of the Special Forces. As a noncommissioned officer (SSG) Benavidez trained numerous teams and armies in weapons, such as M16A1, M203, AK-47 among others, medical skills, intelligence, navigational skills, counterintelligence, and analysis of drop and landing zones. He was proficient in technical and tactical support among many areas, including countries such as Panama, Honduras, and Ecuador, as well as many others, promoting democracy around the world. The alpha code name given to him by the United States Special Forces was Tango Mike/Mike (That Mean Mexican). However due to his serious wounds, Benavidez was later assigned to go to Caracas Venezuela, as an Army Adviser for the Venezuelan Army. He managed to have his orders changed to go back to Vietnam. Benavidez felt the need to go back to assist his fellow soldiers in combat.

In 1968, he returned to Vietnam with the Green Berets, Detachment B-56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). On the morning of May 2 1968, he received a radio message that his team was surrounded by hundreds of enemy troops inside Cambodia and under heavily enemy fire (Benavidez, 1999). The operation was very dangerous. Three helicopters attempted extraction, but were unable to land due to the intense small-arm and anti-aircraft fire. Benavidez was at the Forward Operating Base in Loc Nihn, monitoring the operation by radio when helicopters returned to off load wounded and dead crewmembers. Benavidez courageously volunteered for the evacuation mission. Realizing that all team members were either dead or wounded, he directed the aircraft pilot to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 50 meters to reach the crippled team's position. While moving, he wounded in his right leg, face, and head. Despite his painful injuries, Benavidez carried his fellow wounded and dead team members to the waiting helicopter and provided fire to cover the remaining crew.

The mission became more complicated. After approximately six hours fighting with the enemy, Benavidez retrieved classified documents from the dead and wounded team members (Benavidez, 1999). While performing his duties, Benavidez received a gunshot wound to his abdomen and grenade fragments to his back. Attempting a take-off, the pilot was killed and the helicopter crashed. Immediately Benavidez ran to the wreckage and freed those aboard from the enemy fire. Serving as a medic, Benavidez orchestrated a battle fire by a radio from a gun ship overhead, and engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, saved the lives of eight men through his leadership,

discipline, and training. Despite his multiple wounds while engaging the enemy, Benavidez's team members defined his action as duty.

In 1976, Benavidez retired after 25 years of service. In 1981, thirteen years later, he received the Medal of Honor by President Ronald Regan (Munson, 1991). Eighteen years later, even after his retirement from the military, Benavidez continued to unselfishly serve his country by spending time with veterans groups, visiting schools, and talking with active duty soldiers. His favorite topics were: education, drugs, and gangs. MSG Benavidez died in San Antonio, TX in 1998, as a result of complications of diabetes and hearth problems. He was an outstanding noncommissioned officer who served his country well as a role model for the NCO corps, as well as many places in the United States.

Some of his most notable honors and awards include (Munson, 1991):

Texan of the Year-1981

West Point Saber-1981

Roy P. Benavidez National Guard Armory, El Campo, Texas-1983

Roy P. Benavidez Elementary School, Houston, Texas-1992

Medal of Honor autobiography, "A Vietnam Warrior's Story"-1993

Roy P. Benavidez Special Operations Logistic Complex, Fort Bragg, NC-1999

USNS Benavidez-July 2001

Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial, Indianapolis, May 1999

Roy P. Benavidez Foundation, Inc. Fall 2000

Presidential Unit Citation, May 2001

Roy P. Benavidez City Park, Colorado Spring, Colorado-June 2001

Roy P. Benavidez Military Range, Fort Knox, Kentucky-October 2001

MSG Benavidez is an authentic American hero. As a noncommissioned officer, he verified heroism. As a man he continues to inspire young men and women about merits of service to the nation. Examples where the military career of Benavidez has represented a major influence among soldiers since his time include lessons learned in areas of: duty, discipline, training, and courage.

In addition, to the significant contributions and awards Benavidez made and received over the years of his military career while serving in the United States Army, Benavidez takes his rightful place in honorary memory with other past hero's as an effective speaker, a mentor and role model among the armed forces, civilian community, the youth, and many other associations.

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