

MSG Roy P. Benavidez a Warrior and Hero

NCO History Final Essay

by

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I. Introduction: The intent of this paper is to give you information on how MSG Roy P. Benavidez became a hero by living the Warrior Ethos.

A. List of References used during the research:

- (1) Bilac, Pete. The Last Medal Of Honor. Swan Publishers, Alvin Tx 1990
- (2) Benavidez, Roy P and Craig, John R. Medal of Honor A Vietnam Warrior's Story. Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data, 1995.
- (3) Field Manual 7-22.7. The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide. 2002
- (4) Skimin, Robert. Footprints of Heroes. Promtheous Books. Amherest, New York. 2005.
- (5) Stanton, Shelby L. Special Forces at War. Howell Press, Inc. Virginia, 1990.

II. Body

A. Discipline: MSG Benavidez was a warrior long before he entered the Army, and his discipline and warrior spirit would carry him through some tough periods in his life and service in the military.

B. Training: Private Benavidez in basic training, AIT, Airborne School, and culminating as a Staff Sergeant in the United States Army Special Forces Training.

C. Duties: He served in various positions and duties such as, driver, advisor, weapons specialist and clerk before being discharged.

D. Hero: SSG Benavidez distinguished himself on 2 May 1968 while assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group.

III. Closing

A. Summary

B. Questions and Answer

C. Conclusion

The man we came to know as Master Sergeant (MSG) Roy P. Benavidez was a man of honor and a Warrior who always placed the mission first, never accepted defeat, never quit, and never left a fallen comrade. MSG Benavidez' love of country and fellow Soldiers resulted in him receiving our Nations highest award, "The Medal of Honor." No award carries more honor and prestige as the Medal of Honor. MSG Benavidez' contributions to our country and the Army remind us of what a determined Warrior can do and are an inspiration to all who read or know the story of this great Warrior. Soldiers must study and learn from history and it is important for us to look at the actions that made MSG Benavidez a hero and never forget the sacrifices of such men. MSG Benavidez represented the Warrior Ethos, Soldiers Creed, and the Army Values in words and deeds. MSG Benavidez was loyal to his fellow Soldiers as well as his fellow citizens. MSG Benavidez as most others, never claimed to be a hero and he credits his family for giving him his warrior spirit.

MSG Benavidez' warrior spirit carried him through some tough periods in his life and his service in the Army. He was the son of Salvador and Teresa Benavidez; his father was Mexican and mother Yaqui Indian. His parents lived in Cuero, Texas and MSG Benavidez was born in their home on 5 August 1935; his brother Rogelio was born in 1937, which was the same year his father died of tuberculosis. His mother contracted tuberculosis and passed away in 1942 when he was seven. MSG Benavidez claims that his never-give-up, never-quit, crazy attitude came from his mother's bloodline; the Yaqui Indians were every bit as fierce as the Apaches were.

Following the death of his parents, MSG Benavidez and his siblings moved to El Campo, Texas to live with his Uncle Nick and Aunt Alexandria and their eight children. His grandfather named Salvador also lived there and loved to talk and tell stories. MSG Benavidez' uncle and

grandfather made a tremendous impact on his life; his grandfather told him to remember that he was a Benavidez and to bring honor to the Benavidez name (Benavidez & Craig 12). They raised him in old traditional values and taught him the importance of honesty, hard work, and to respect his elders. MSG Benavidez' family lived in poverty and they were subject to a lot of racial discrimination because of their ethnicity. Because of discrimination, MSG Benavidez fought a lot as a kid; his temper was fast and his fists were quick. However, his temper often got the best of him and at the age of 15, he dropped out of school and worked at a Firestone store until he decided to join the National Guard (NG).

In 1953, at age 18, MSG Benavidez joined the Texas NG and attended basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He thought basic training was similar to the labor camps where he and his family worked as sharecroppers only easier. MSG Benavidez met his hero and role model Sergeant Audie Murphy while in the guard; Sergeant Audie Murphy was the most decorated Soldier of World War II and a highly respected Warrior. MSG Benavidez and Sergeant Audie Murphy shared similar characteristics: they were small in stature, grew up in poverty; worked in the cotton fields of Texas, and both were recipients of the Medal of Honor. MSG Benavidez loved Soldiering and wore the Army uniform proudly. For the first time in his life, he realized that he was worthy as he remembered the words of his grandfather, "always bring honor to the Benavidez name."

In 1954, at age 19, MSG Benavidez joined the active Army and attended basic combat training at Fort Ord, California. An average day of training consisted of 17 hours beginning at 0500 and ending at 2200; the subjects taught were basic marksmanship, land navigation, first aid, crew weapon systems, NBC training, digging foxholes, camouflage, and hand-to-hand combat.

After basic training, he attended advanced infantry training at Fort Carson, Colorado; where he learned fundamental infantry tactics, techniques, procedures, and battle drills.

In 1959, MSG Benavidez attended Airborne School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The training was five weeks long; week one was mostly conditioning and the following four weeks consisted of glider training, parachute landing falls, swing land trainer, 34-foot towers, 250-foot towers, and then culminated in jump week where each jumper had to make five exits from a high performance aircraft.

In 1966, almost two years after MSG Benavidez escaped the snare of death and made a miraculous recovery from wounds he suffered in Vietnam; he attended Special Forces (SF) training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. SF Soldiers are elite and the best in the Army and despite the injuries and pain, MSG Benavidez was determined to be the best. All SF candidates had to complete the grueling Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC). SFQC allowed cadre to assess candidates and weed out those who were weak, not dedicated or feint of heart. SFQC consisted of three phases: the individual training phase; the Military Occupation training phase, and the collective training phase that culminated in an exercise called Cherokee Trail. MSG Benavidez completed the SFQC and then he received two-months of training in weapons, which involved a detailed study of allied and enemy weapon systems. He also completed the Operations and Intelligence Course. MSG Benavidez graduated the SF Course earning the distinct privilege of wearing the Green Beret. MSG Benavidez' training prepared him for most of his duties throughout his career and his training would take him many places and carry him through some difficult times.

MSG Benavidez' duties and career in the military provided him and his family many opportunities and took them many places. After graduating basic training in 1955, his first duty

station was Korea where he served as an infantryman in the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, which was the Buffalo Regiment. He spent most of his 16 months in Korea patrolling the border along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. He changed duty stations in 1957; his second assignment was the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division in Germany where he would spend 18 months. In 1958, MSG Benavidez decided that he wanted to be a Military Policeman; he attended Advanced Individual Training at Fort Benning, Georgia and graduated second in his class. After training, he was the driver for the Post Commander at Fort Gordon, Georgia; his duties as driver consisted of safeguarding, childcare, preparing meals and running errands for the Commanding General. He drove for many Generals including Major General Westmoreland the Division Commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. After a conversation with General Westmoreland, MSG Benavidez' dream came true, he finally got to attend airborne school at Fort Bragg, North Carolina "Home of the Airborne".

MSG Benavidez spent six years in the 82d Airborne Division from 1959 until 1965. In 1965, MSG Benavidez deployed to Vietnam and was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry "Tigers." He served as a military advisor and spent the majority of his time conducting patrols behind enemy lines. He quickly learned the techniques, tactics, and procedures of patrolling from experienced Warriors. His team patrolled the jungle looking for insurgents known to them as Viet Cong (VC), and at times, his team dressed up like VC rebels and carried Soviet made weapons to conduct patrols behind enemy lines to gather information on the enemy's location, movement, and plans. These missions were inherently dangerous because of the terrain and obstacles.

In 1966, while conducting a patrol outside Tam Ky, MSG Benavidez stepped on a mine. He never remembered this incident but he spent many months in the hospital paralyzed from the waist down and the doctor told him he would never walk again. The doctor was planning to discharge him from the Army but a determined MSG Benavidez was able to show the doctor that

he could walk and convinced him to let him continue with therapy and remain in the Army.

After he completed physical therapy, MSG Benavidez went back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where he served as a Personnel Sergeant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 325 PIR. MSG Benavidez continued to work hard on his rehabilitation and submitted his paperwork to go to SF School.

MSG Benavidez completed Special Forces training in 1968 and his subsequent assignment was with the 5th Special Forces Group where he put his new skills to work in places such as Panama, Honduras, and Ecuador. The mission of the Special Forces is “to seek out, train, and support men capable of becoming effective, friendly guerrillas. To set out, engage, and neutralize unfriendly guerrillas” (Benavidez & Craig 111).

In 1968, MSG Benavidez found himself in Vietnam again, but this time assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG). This group broke down into small teams and infiltrated deep into enemy territory to gather information; the teams also trained indigenous people on counterinsurgency operations. Stanton illustrates it well when he said, “the mission of the Special Forces was tough, dirty, and often deadly and unconventional” (89).

On 2 May 1968, three U.S. Special Forces Soldiers and nine Cambodian mercenaries were inserted by helicopter into a dense jungle area west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam; their mission was to confirm or deny enemy activity moving south through Cambodia and to avoid any enemy contact. The team made contact with a North Vietnamese battalion size element and were quickly cut-off from their escape route, pinned down by heavy fire, and surrounded. MSG Leroy Wright, the Team Sergeant, immediately called for extraction; three helicopters tried to extract the team but because of the heavy volume of fire were unsuccessful. The helicopters returned to

the Forward Operation Base (FOB) in Loc Ninh where MSG Benavidez was monitoring radio traffic; he was determined not to leave a fallen comrade.

MSG Benavidez boarded a helicopter, directed it toward a clearing about 100 yards away from the cut-off, and surrounded the SF team. Sergeant First Class (SFC) Brian O'Connor whose nickname was "Big Team", was the only member who survived and wrote the letter that provided the documentation necessary to support MSG Benavidez' Medal of Honor recommendation. O'Connor saw a chopper hover about 10 feet off the ground and then a Soldier threw a medical bag out and jumped out behind it. It was MSG Benavidez and he was determined not to leave his fallen comrades; disregarding personal safety and exposing himself to heavy enemy fire he ran 75 to 100 yards reach the SF team (Bilac 44). The North Vietnamese forces shot MSG Benavidez three times prior to him reaching the cut-off SF Team. He quickly organized a defense, provided first aid to the wounded, and distributed ammunition and water under heavy fire. MSG Benavidez could not locate his good friend Leroy Wright. He asked O'Connor and O'Connor told him Wright was dead and that he had the Standard Operating Instructions (SOI). Maps, and the team's intelligence gathering device. MSG Benavdiez could not leave his friend or let the enemy get their hands on this sensitive equipment. MSG Benavidez went back to secure MSG Wright's body and the sensitive items as the enemy's fire intensified a round struck him in the back causing him to fall face forward simultaneously hearing a loud explosion before losing consciousness. After regaining consciousness, he realized that the chopper crashed and Soldiers were crawling out of the burning wreckage. He ran toward the burning chopper and pulled Soldiers to safety and established a perimeter under heavy enemy fire. MSG Benavidez called air strikes and artillery support on the charging NVA forces and while providing first aid to a wounded Soldier, he took another round in the leg. At this time,



only five members of the team were still alive. Two F 100s dropped napalm and followed it with two CBU-29 cluster bombs and the firing ceased for a few moments, which allowed a chopper to land. MSG Benavidez was loading Soldiers on the chopper and an enemy Soldier whom he thought was dead raised-up and slammed the butt of his rifle into the back of his head several times, and cut his hand and arms with his bayonet. MSG Benavidez only had a knife but was able to kill a NVA Soldier and used his rifle to shoot two more NVA Soldiers using a concealed approach to the wreckage.

MSG Benavidez could not move or speak when he arrived at Loc Ninh; he was covered in blood and was so mutilated he was almost mistaken as an NVA Soldier. Shot seven times, slashed with a bayonet in both arms, butted in the face, and with 27 pieces of Shrapnel, MSG Benavidez' could see his intestines hanging, his jaw was broken, and he was bleeding from 37 different puncture wounds (Skimin 292). However, even this could not keep this Warrior down.

MSG Benavidez served over 20 years in the Army and retired in 1976 at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. MSG Benavidez said later, "As an NCO, you have to make split-second decisions. When you are a combat oriented NCO, you do not have to stop and think-you are thinking all the time (FM 7-22.7 3-8).

On 24 February 1981, with 43 family members and friends present, President Ronald Reagan presented MSG Roy P. Benavidez the Medal of Honor. President Reagan was so moved after he read the citation he gave MSG Benavidez a hug. President Harry S. Truman once said, "I would rather be a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor than be president!" MSG Benavidez passed away on 29 November 1998 but his legacy will live forever through the Warriors who come after him. He never claimed to be a hero, but he lived his life representing his motto, Duty, Honor, and Country and died as a hero.

Works Cited

- Billac, Pete The Last Medal Of Honor. Swan Publishers Alvin, TX 1990.
- Benavidez, Roy P, and Craig, John R. Medal of Honor a Vietnam Warrior's Story. Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data, 1995.
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