

Hero – Roy Benavidez

"As the medevac chopper landed the wounded were examined one by one. Staff Sergeant Benavidez could only hear what was going on around him. He had over thirty seven puncture wounds. His intestines were exposed. He could not see as his eyes were caked in blood and unable to open. Neither could he speak, his jaw broken, clubbed by a North Vietnamese rifle. But he knew what was happening, and it was the scariest moment of his life, even more so than the earlier events of the day. He lay in a body bag, bathed in his own blood. Jerry Cottingham, a friend screamed "That's Benavidez. Get a doc". When the doctor arrived he placed his hand on Roy's chest to feel for a heartbeat. He pronounced him dead. The physician shook his head. *"There's nothing I can do for him."* As the doctor bent over to zip up the body bag. Benavidez did the only thing he could think of to let the doctor know that he was alive. He spit in the doctor's face. The surprised doctor reversed Roy's condition from dead to *"He won't make it, but we'll try"*.

Roy Benavidez fought his whole life. His father died when he was three years old from tuberculosis. His mother remarried, but she too was taken by the disease when he was only eight. He moved to El Campo, Texas to be raised by grandparents and extended family. He worked at the bus station shining shoes, and worked on local farms. At 15, he dropped out of school to work full time supporting his family.

He enlisted in the Texas National Guard in 1952, then in the regular Army in 1955. He completed airborne training and was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division in 1959, the same year he married his wife Hilaria. In 1965, he was sent to South Vietnam as an advisor to an ARVN infantry unit. During his tour, he was grievously wounded when he stepped on a landmine. Doctors feared he would never walk again. Not only did he walk out of the hospital the next year, he graduated from Special Forces training and was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group. He returned to Vietnam in January of 1968 as a member of Detachment B-56.

The 2nd of May 1968 started like most days. A 12-man reconnaissance team was inserted into an area controlled by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The team confirmed large enemy activity in the area shortly after insertion. Within a short time, the team made contact with a battalion-sized NVA element (approximately 300

men). Staff Sergeant Benavidez was monitoring the radio in the Forward Operating Base. He listened intently as the team requested an emergency extraction. The rescue helicopters were able to locate the team, but unable to extract them. The NVA battalion fired furiously at the helicopters. The enemy knew this was their chance to finally kill members of the highly elite Studies and Observation Group (SOG).

When the damaged helicopters returned to the Forward Operating Base, SSG Benavidez voluntarily boarded an aircraft for a second attempt at extracting the beleaguered Special Forces team. Once in the area, he realized that the team would not be able to move on their own to the helicopters. He instructed the pilot to land 75 meters from the team then jumped to the ground to assist the team. While enroute, he was shot in the leg and received additional wounds to the head and face.

He prepared the team for movement while notifying the helicopters for immediate extraction. SSG Benavidez then carried over half the wounded team to the waiting aircraft. He made a final trip to recover classified documents from the deceased team leader, and was wounded in the back from an enemy hand grenade. Before he could return to the aircraft, the pilot was mortally wounded and the helicopter crashed.

He raced back to the wreckage to organize the survivors into a defensive perimeter. He directed the fire of the team, while calling in close air support danger close. He called for another extraction before being shot again in the thigh. Despite heavy loss of blood, he carried a fellow soldier to the arriving aircraft. On the way, he was attacked and clubbed in the face by an enemy soldier's bayonet. SSG Benavidez fought with the soldier before killing him with his knife despite receiving multiple bayonet wounds.

On the way to the Forward Operating Base, SSG Benavidez was pronounced killed in action, though he would survive his injuries. In all, he suffered 37 bullet, fragmentation and bayonet wounds. He spent the next several years recovering from his wounds. He was initially awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, but it was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 1981.

Roy Benavidez died in his home state of Texas on November 29th, 1998. This country's proud military history was written by men like Roy Benavidez.

He truly is a Hero, a Stud, a Gunfighter, and a Champion.

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