

MEMO FROM THE DESK OF

R.P. (Bob) Sanchez

ATTORNEY AT LAW

April 28, 1983

Hector,

Note that I am enclosing a photocopy of this letter. You might send the photocopy along with the original copy of the article to Roy. I am sure that he would appreciate hearing from you. Regards.

RPS

Bob

Hector,

*Regards to
lovely Rosita!*

Bob

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AREA CODE 512
686-9591

April 28, 1983

Hector P. Garcia, M.D.
1315 Bright Street
Corpus Christi, Texas 78405

Dear Hector:

In going through some of the magazines that I receive either here at my office or at my house, I came across the report of the story on the award of the Congressional Medal of Honor to our friend, Roy Benavidez. Enclosed herewith you will find a copy of the story as it appeared in the Reader's Digest. I regret that what they did not report is the fact that you, personally, helped our friend quite a bit on the matter of his finally being recognized and awarded the medal. I recall that when he was with us at Founder's Day Banquet a couple of years ago, Roy Benavidez personally recognized you and commended you on your help. I recall him from the dinner as a fellow still with alot of heart and alot of guts. From time to time either call me or write to me as you must know that throughout the many years that we have worked together I have loved and respected you deeply. Regards.

Sincerely,



R. P. (Bob) Sanchez, J.D.

RPS/rsh

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On a day in May that some men will never forget, an American sergeant—despite his own terrible wounds—fought to save his fallen, dying comrades. Now, at last, a grateful nation has recognized his valiant deeds

A MEDAL FOR



ROY BENAVIDEZ



By WILLIAM A. LOWTHER

The White House, February 24, 1981, 12:55 p.m. President Reagan stands in front of the fireplace, with MSgt. Roy P. Benavidez, in uniform, to his right. "Can't we bring the family in here?" the President says. Benavidez's wife, Hilaria, steps forward with their three children.

"Nancy, Cap, come on," Reagan urges his wife and Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger. Turning to the pool of reporters, the President says, "You are going to hear something you would not believe if it were a script. Wait until you hear the citation."

The citation, to be read by the President later at a Pentagon ceremony, describes Benavidez's "conspicuous gallantry in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty."

—From the notes of reporter Gilbert Lewthwaite, *Baltimore Sun*

Loc Ninh, Vietnam, May 2, 1968, 1:30 p.m. The chaplain had spread a white altar cloth over the hood of a Jeep, and a small band of battle-weary American soldiers stood in a semicircle before it, their heads bowed in prayer. Among

them was SSgt. Roy P. Benavidez. The son of a Texas sharecropper, he had enlisted in the Army 13 years before, at the age of 19, and was now a well-seasoned member of the Fifth Special Forces Group (Airborne).

The prayers were suddenly interrupted by helicopter pilots running by and cries of chaos coming over the shortwave radio in a nearby tent: "Get us out of here. For God's sake, get us out!" The sound of automatic gunfire filled the background. "There was so much shooting," Benavidez said later, "it sounded like a popcorn machine."

Within moments a helicopter pilot was racing back to the takeoff pad. Benavidez, who was waiting for a mission assignment, ran after the pilot.

As the two men reached the pad a helicopter was coming in, its fuselage bullet-ridden, a side door hanging open, with the gunner slumped forward. Benavidez eased him out and watched helplessly as the man died in his arms.

Screaming to be heard over the roar of the chopper's engines, Benavidez asked who was out there. A 12-man Special Forces team, he was told, one he had often worked with. Comrades. They had been dropped several hours before to check reports of enemy troop movements and had found themselves in the middle of a North Vietnamese army battalion.

A co-pilot, a crew chief and a

replacement door gunner arrived to take the helicopter back for another rescue attempt. Benavidez climbed into the crew compartment. "What are you doing?" yelled the pilot. "I'm coming with you," replied Benavidez.

From the air they could see dozens of North Vietnamese foxholes pockmarking the area. Sniper platforms had been built at treetop level. Right in the middle were the Americans. They had formed a small circle in dense jungle cover, near a clearing where the helicopter was supposed to pick them up. Enemy soldiers were no more than 25 yards away at some points.

The chopper swooped low and was met by withering small-arms fire. It couldn't stay down long enough to get the team out. But there was another clearing about 75 yards away from which no enemy fire was coming.

"Over there, over there," Benavidez urged the pilot. When the chopper reached the clearing, it hovered about ten feet from the ground and Benavidez jumped.

He landed on his feet and started running. After covering about 20 yards, he was shot in the right leg. Bowled over by the bullet, he fell, but was up in an instant and kept moving.

"When you're shot, you feel a burning pain, like you've been touched with hot metal," Benavidez recalled later. "But the fear that you experience is worse—and that's what keeps you going."

A hand grenade exploded in front of him. Shrapnel tore into his face, narrowly missing his eyes. Again he fell, and again he got up and ran. Bleeding profusely and in terrible pain, he staggered into the broken circle of his comrades, an unlikely-looking savior.

A Jungle Clearing, Vietnam, May 2, 1968, 2:15 p.m. Benavidez found 8 of the 12 men still alive, all wounded. He told them to provide covering fire for the helicopter. When it swooped in again, he ordered the men out to meet it.

As they began moving, he spotted the body of the team leader. Dangling from the dead man's neck was a pouch containing classified papers with call signs and radio codes. It had to be recovered. He removed the pouch and slipped it into his shirt.

He pushed the men into the clearing. One had been hit in the face and had a bandage over his eyes. "Hang on to my neck," Benavidez ordered him. He half-carried another soldier, who had been shot in the legs. Another who had been hit in the stomach didn't want to move. Benavidez shouted and cursed and got all the wounded moving.

Under fire they reached the chopper, and Benavidez guided the men on board. Then he ran back to retrieve the body of the team leader—and was shot in the back. He pitched over in a somersault, landing flat on the ground. *O Lord, not here. Please, God, don't let me die*

here. His head was filled with ringing bells. His body felt as if it was burning with fever. One leg seemed paralyzed.

At that moment, the helicopter pilot was killed. The chopper, which had been hovering just off the ground, crashed and tipped over. Benavidez rallied the survivors, including an injured door gunner, and led them back into the jungle. The other gunner had been killed, and the co-pilot, after freeing himself from the wreckage, joined Benavidez's group.

The men slumped down into a hollow. Wood flew everywhere as enemy bullets cut into the trees around them. A chorus of moaning and crying rose from his bloody band, and Benavidez, fearing the enemy would hear, ordered them to shut up. He opened a first-aid kit and gave several of them morphine. He gave himself two injections. Then he used the radio to direct air support from jets and gunships, hoping to suppress enemy fire long enough to allow another helicopter to land.

"Are you hit bad, sarge?" one of the men asked Benavidez.

"Hell, no," Benavidez drawled. "I been hit so many times I don't give a darn no more." Then one of the men was hit in the heel by a bullet, and Benavidez knew they had been spotted. It was get out now—or never.

"Please leave me here, sarge," one man pleaded. "I can't make it." While giving him first aid, Benavi-

dez took another bullet in the thigh.

A helicopter arrived. Benavidez ordered everyone up. "We don't have permission to stay," he shouted. "We don't have permission to die. Pray and move out."

Under cover from the helicopter gunners, with the soldier wounded in the stomach on one side and the injured door gunner on the other, Benavidez staggered into the clearing. He put them aboard the chopper and went back for the others. As he bent over another wounded man, Benavidez was suddenly struck in the back of the head by a rifle butt.

He fell, but instinctively rolled over and bounced to his feet. He stood facing a North Vietnamese soldier, who rushed at him with his bayonet. Benavidez grabbed it, cutting his hand wide open. While pulling the soldier toward him, he drew out his belt knife with his other hand and stabbed him.

Now he was covered with blood, hurting badly and screaming, and beginning to lose his senses. Most of his men were up and moving. Somehow summoning a last reserve of strength, Benavidez picked up two of the weaker ones and started toward the chopper. As he drew near, he saw two enemy soldiers crawling toward the chopper where the door gunners couldn't see them. He scooped up a nearby rifle and shot both. One of the door gunners, confused by what was happening, swung his gun around

at Benavidez, thinking the sergeant was a North Vietnamese soldier who was shooting at him. The pilot shouted to the gunner just in time.

After getting the men on board, Benavidez made one last sweep of the perimeter, looking for injured soldiers and classified material. Finally, he pulled himself aboard and passed out.

When the helicopter put down at Loc Ninh, a doctor took one look and said, "There's nothing I can do for him."

Benavidez heard the words, opened his eyes and, unable to speak, defiantly spit at the doctor.

The Congress, November 21, 1980, 1:30 p.m. The House Military Personnel Subcommittee considered a bill to exempt Roy Benavidez from the time limit on awarding medals for heroism.

Benavidez had received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second-highest award for valor, in 1968. But five years later, when Lt. Col. Ralph R. Drake, the Special Forces mission commander, learned more details of Benavidez's actions, he decided to recommend him for the highest award, the Medal of Honor. The recommendation was at first rejected for lack of new and substantive information, and by the time that became available, the time limit on Medals of Honor had expired. A Texas Congressman and an Army representative appealed to Congress to make an exception.

Maj. Robert Roush, formerly of the Army's Military Awards Branch, testified: "I must stress that Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily joined his comrades, who were in critical straits. He constantly exposed himself to withering fire, and his refusal to be stopped, despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men."

The Pentagon, February 24, 1981, 1:45 p.m. Roy P. Benavidez approaches the podium in the courtyard, his stocky frame shuddering from the dull ache in his back, his legacy of war. He extends a bayonet-scarred hand to his Commander in Chief.

"There I was, a little old Texas farm boy, with the President," Benavidez said later.

The President speaks:

"Several years ago, we brought home a group of American fighting

men who had obeyed their country's call and who fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history.

"An individual brought up on a farm outside of Cuero, Texas, is here today. His story has been overlooked or buried for several years.

"Secretary Weinberger, would you please escort Sergeant Benavidez forward." The President drapes the blue ribbon around the soldier's neck and hugs him. Roy Benavidez, retired since 1976 on 80-percent medical disability, stands proud and erect, his dark eyes clouding with emotion.

"Sergeant Benavidez," the President continues, "a nation grateful to you, and to all your comrades living and dead, awards you its highest symbol of gratitude for service above and beyond the call of duty, the Medal of Honor."



Bag of Tricks

IN CHURCH one Sunday, seated next to my daughter and her children—a three-year-old and a set of six-month-old twins—I noticed that one of the babies needed a tissue. As I reached into my purse to get one, the other twin was getting restless, so I brought out a set of keys. Then the first twin became fidgety, and once again I went to my purse for a trinket. At this point, the three-year-old whispered, "Grandma, do you have a drink of water in your purse?"

—Contributed by Maybin Meyers

I LEFT our three-year-old with my husband while I went to a fast-food restaurant to pick up dinner. When I asked the cashier for one of the restaurant's free promotional "surprises," she explained that such items were for children only. Opening my purse, I took out a half-eaten lollipop, two jacks, a cloth storybook, and a toy car with one wheel, and presented them.

Without another word, I received my "surprise."

—Contributed by Diane Shepherd Kirkenmeier

Many Unhappy Returns

INTERNAL
REVENUE
SERVICE

THANK YOU
FOR NOT
WHIMPERING

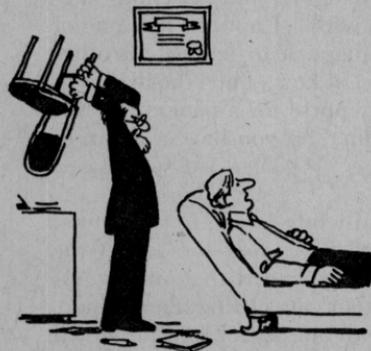


MAL IN MEDICAL ECONOMICS



*"Somehow I never expected to
get a form 1040 here."*

BURBANK IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



*"I know it's silly, doctor, but I work for
the IRS and I feel that people hate me."*

DUNAGIN © 1982 FIELD NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE



*"What do you mean, 'clarify miscellaneous'?
What do you think that word is for?"*

DRAWING BY D. FRADON. © 1961 THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC.

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