Master Sargent Roy Benavidez – Medal of Honor Recipient – Vietnam

"Sergeant Benavidez' gallant choice to join voluntarily his comrades who were in critical straits, to expose himself constantly to withering enemy fire, and his refusal to be stopped despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men. His fearless personal leadership, tenacious devotion to duty, and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army." - Medal of Honor citation

Behold the story of Roy Benavidez:

It was supposed to be a simple recon mission. A small team of ultra-elite ass-kicking American Green Berets was infiltrating deep into the thick jungles several miles beyond the Cambodian border on a super-classified stealth mission to gather information on North Vietnamese Army troop movements. But when the evac choppers limped back to base looking like they'd just been run through a gigantic, helicopter-sized microwave, it was obvious that things hadn't gone all that smoothly for the men of the 1st Special Forces.

33-year-old Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez was off-duty attending church services when the fighting began, but he'd spent the last ten minutes anxiously monitoring the radio chatter from the front. The 12-man squad of Green Berets had stumbled into an intense firefight, and now Benavidez's brochachos suddenly found themselves surrounded and pinned down by a full battalion of North Vietnamese infantry – somewhere between 500 and 1,500 veteran soldiers who weren't in the mood to sling their rifles and

politely ask the Americans why the hell they were traipsing around Eastern Cambodia with M-16s, cameras, and walkie-talkies. Nearly every man in the American unit had been wounded or killed in the early rounds of fighting, and the three rescue choppers sent in to extract the team were driven off by intense ground fire from heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

But if there's one thing you should probably know about the U.S. Army Special Forces, it's that the Green Berets don't screw around when it comes to kicking asses, and they don't leave a man behind for anything. So, when Sergeant Benavidez saw the remains of the crippled evacuation helicopters screeching to a halt on the base runway, he knew what he had to do. There was no way in hell he was leaving his good friends – his brothers – to die alone out there in the middle of the jungle surrounded by their enemies. The off-duty Texan grabbed a rifle and as many medical bags as he could carry, and jumped onto the deck of the first chopper headed back to the front lines. Maybe he wasn't going to hold back the entire battalion by himself, but the least he could do was try.

When the helicopters reached the extraction zone, Benavidez got a good look at the situation on the ground, and it wasn't exactly a bunch of unicorns and rainbows frolicking in a lush meadow with a bunch of topless babes. Every man from the Special Forces squad had been wounded, many beyond the ability to fight, and they were completely surrounded and trapped by entrenched enemy troops with mortars and heavy machine guns. Benavidez, who was known by the badass code name Tango Mike-Mike, knew that these men weren't going to be able to get out to the LZ, and the overabundance of large North Vietnamese death implements meant that the rescue helicopters weren't going to be able to get anywhere near the firefight without exploding into dust.

So Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez did something that most sane people would never have even considered attempting – he told the pilot to find a nearby clearing and put him on the ground. Maybe he was only one Green Beret surrounded by enemy soldiers, but so was John Rambo – and while Tango Mike-Mike never blew a dude up with an explosive-tipped arrow, the similarities between these two men would soon become painfully obvious to the NVA soldiers unlucky enough to be standing in his way.

Benavidez jumped down from the hovering chopper to the grass below, his rifle slung over his shoulder and his arms loaded with as many medical supplies and first aid kits as he could carry. This one-man whirlwind of awesome then proceeded to sprint 75 meters under heavy enemy fire, hauling ass through fields of tracer bullets and stunned NVA troops looking at him like, "Who the hell is this guy?", his eyes never turning from his objective.

When Benavidez reached the Green Berets' position, he'd already taken a few bullets and some shrapnel in his face, arms, and head, but he was still upright and ready to bite off the enemy's faces and transform those faces into fertilizing manure using the transformative power of digestion. The situation wasn't good – everyone was hurt badly (including one hard-ass warrior who was somehow still fighting even though one of his eyes had been shot out), and now it was basically down to Sergeant Benavidez to organize this beat-to-hell team and hold off an entire NVA battalion almost entirely by himself.

He immediately sprang into action. Surrounded by a thousand or so NVA troops attacking him with AK-47s, RPGs, BFGs, mortars, hand grenades, and everything else this side of the Cerebral Bore from *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter,* Benavidez provided morphine and first aid to the wounded, got the troops to a more defensible position, and directed their fire against enemy weapons teams. Despite intense fire, Benavidez went guns blazing with his rifle, and when his M-16 ran out of bullets, he picked up an AK off a

dead NVA trooper and continued his one-man war against a horde of Commie bastards, holding them off

and clearing a path for the team to be extracted to safety. Once the way out was clear, Benavidez threw

some smoke canisters, signaling the rescue helicopter, and when a brave pilot landed to get the wounded

men out of there, Benavidez personally carried the wounded men to the evac point, making six separate

trips to assist wounded soldiers and recover classified documents that had accidentally been dropped in

the middle of the warzone.

Original book artwork by Steven Belledin.

While he was providing covering fire for the last of the Green Berets to board the chopper, however,

disaster struck – an NVA frag grenade landed super-close to Benavidez, blowing this insane warrior off

his feet and racking his back with shrapnel. As he hit the ground, an AK-47 bullet struck him in the abdomen. He lost consciousness, but only briefly.

When he came too moments later, he looked up to see a flaming, smoking wreck where the rescue helicopter had once been.

Now Roy Benavidez was a warrior in all aspects of his life. This was a man who had seen adversity, looked it square in the face, then kicked it in the Guybrush Threepwood and did a tap dance on its lifeless, ball-less corpse. A man of Mexican and Yaqui Indian heritage who had battled racism nearly every day of his early adult life, this guy had somehow survived despite losing both of his parents by the time he was 7. When times had been too hard and food was scarce, he'd dropped out of middle school to work back-breaking labor picking cotton to support himself and his brothers and sisters. In his sixteen years of military service, he had been through a lot of horrible stuff, but he'd always pulled through, no matter what the odds. Just four years earlier, when he was still with the 82nd Airborne, he'd stepped on a land mine during a patrol – the doctors told him he would never walk again. Not only did he walk out of the hospital, but he marched straight to the Green Berets office, volunteered for the Special Forces, and survived some of the toughest training the United States military had to offer. This is a guy who never gave the hell up for anything ever, and this would be no exception. If the North Vietnamese wanted him off their backs, they were going to have to do a hell of a lot better than just shooting him four times, blowing him up with a hand grenade, and shooting down the helicopter he'd just loaded up with wounded soldiers.

Within seconds of coming to, Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez was back on his feet, pulling survivors out of the flaming wreckage of the helicopter and organizing the stunned soldiers to set up a perimeter around the crash site. After checking on the injured guys, giving ammo to the men still capable of holding a rifle, and administering morphine and water to those who needed it, Benavidez immediately got back to the herculean task of holding off a battalion of enemy infantry and heavy weapons basically by himself. Taking yet another bullet in the thigh and bleeding badly, Benavidez got on the radio and started calling down tactical air strikes, attack helicopters, and napalm strafing runs on positions just a few meters away.

By the time the second set of rescue helicopters arrived, Tango Mike-Mike had been fighting non-stop for almost six hours straight. When the chopper hovered over the LZ, Benavidez once again started pulling men to the helicopter, loading the wounded on for extraction. The North Vietnamese, seeing their enemy escaping, decided to mount one final full-on human wave charge to crush these annoying Green Berets once and for all. With a terrifying yell, suddenly enemy troops came running in from every direction, bayonets fixed.

Benavidez was waiting for them. He'd been through too much to lose now.

In intense, no-holds-barred hand-to-hand combat, Roy Benavidez was bayoneted a couple times and had his jaw broken by a rifle butt, but he somehow continued to fight off a horde of swarming enemies with a bayonet and a pistol while the remainder of his profusely-bleeding Green Beret comrades got onto the rescue helicopter. Suffering from 37 bayonet, bullet, and shrapnel wounds in various parts of his body, Benavidez used the last of his strength to pull himself on board the helicopter, the last man to leave the battlefield. The helicopter was completely riddled with holes, covered in blood, and without any functioning instruments, but the pilot somehow took off and got the team out of there. Benavidez lost consciousness as soon as he knew they were clear.

Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez of the 1st Special Forces was credited with single-handedly saving the lives of eight men during six hours of non-stop battle. When a recovery team went through the site a few days later they discovered over 30 empty NVA foxholes with heavy weapons, and saw the battlefield littered with more dead than they had time to count.

After the rescue helicopters landed at the base, Roy Benavidez's motionless body was carried off the helicopter, and after a preliminary inspection by the medical personnel on-site, the hero was gently laid onto a gurney and wheeled into the coroner's office.

Just as they were zipping up his body bag, Benavidez used the last of his energy to spit in the doctor's face.

The mostly-dead Benavidez was rushed into surgery immediately and then transferred to Saigon for many months of intensive rehabilitation. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic balls-out actions, and once the full details of the battle came declassified the award was upgraded to the Medal of Honor, the highest award for military bravery offered by the United States military. He lived to be 63.