Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Well, the Navy/Coast Guard Team â€œlost,â€• but many wounded warriors won a reconnection to life this ValOUR-IT fund drive. Here is the first post I committed to with John, the Armorer:

MSGT Roy Benavidez, US Army was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on May 2nd, 1968 in the Republic of Vietnam. He went out to help rescue his friend from an incredible firefight, ended up saving 8 of the team, recovering all of the dead, and being wounded over 40 times during close combat. On return from the rescue, the medical personnel thought he was dead.
Senator John McCain opens the first chapter of his book â€œWhy Courage Mattersâ€• with the story of MSgt Benavidez. The medal award, initially awarded as a Distinguished Service Cross by General Westmoreland and later upgraded to the MOH, was delayed many years, was conducted at the White House. This is how the President began the ceremony:

On February 24, 1981, President Ronald Reagan presented him the Medal of Honor. During the ceremony President Reagan turned to the gathered press and said, â€œyou are going to hear something you would not believe if it were a script.â€• He then read Master Sergeant Benavidezâ€™s citation:

BENAVIDEZ, ROY P.

Rank and Organization: Master Sergeant. Detachment B-56, 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam

Place and Date: West of Loc Ninh on 2 May 1968

Entered Service at: Houston, Texas June 1955

Date and Place of Birth: 5 August 1935, DeWitt County, Cuero, Texas

Citation:

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Master Sergeant, then Staff Sergeant, United States Army. Who distinguished himself by a series of daring and extremely glorious actions on 2 May 1968 while assigned to Detachment B-56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 2 May 1968, a 12-man Special Forces Reconnaissance Team was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Loc Ninh, Vietnam to gather intelligence information about confirmed large-scale enemy activity. This area was controlled and routinely patrolled by the North Vietnamese Army. After a short period of time on the ground, the team met heavy enemy resistance and requested emergency extraction. 3 helicopters attempted extraction, but were unable to land due to intense enemy small arms and anti-aircraft fire. Sergeant Benavidez was at the Forward Operating Base in Loc Ninh monitoring the operation by radio when these helicopters returned to off-load wounded crew members and to assess aircraft damage. Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning aircraft to assist in another extraction attempt. Realizing that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone, he directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team. Prior to reaching the teamâ€™s position he was wounded in his right leg, face and head. Despite these painful injuries he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft, and the loading of wounded and dead team members. He then threw smoke canisters to direct the aircraft to the teamâ€™s position. Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by running alongside the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members. As the enemyâ€™s fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the leaderâ€™s body, Sergeant Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back. At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded, and his helicopter crashed. Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and made his way back to the wreckage,

where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft, and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter. Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men, reinstilling in them a will to live and fight. Facing a buildup of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Sergeant Benavidez mustered his strength, began calling in tactical air strikes and directed the fire from supporting gun ships to suppress the enemyâ€™s fire and so permit another extraction attempt. He was wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land. His indomitable spirit kept him going as he began to ferry his comrades to the craft. On his second trip with the wounded, he was clubbed with additional wounds to his head and arms before killing his adversary. He then continued under devastating fire to carry the wounded to the helicopter. Upon reaching the aircraft, he spotted and killed 2 enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to ensure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed, and to bring in the remaining wounded. Only then, in extremely serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the extraction aircraft. Sergeant Benavidezâ€™ gallant choice to voluntarily join 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 8 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.

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In honor of the service of MSGT Benavidez, the Navy named a ship after him: USNS BENAVIDEZ (T-AKR 306). This ship is a â€œRO-ROâ€• (roll on-roll off) ship, used to transport heavy wheeled equipment to a battle zone, such as tanks self-propelled artillery.BENAVIDEZ is one of the ships of the Bob Hope Class RO-RO ships. Some specs:

The USNS Benavidez is a non-combatant vessel built by Litton-Avondale Industries in New Orleans, La. The launching/christening ceremony is scheduled for next summer. The ship will be crewed by civilian mariners and operated by the U.S. Navyâ€™s Military Sealift

> Command, Washington, D.C. The LMSR ships are ideal for loading U.S. military combat equipment and combat support equipment needed overseas and for re-supplying military services with necessary equipment and supplies during national crisis. The shipâ€™s six-deck interior has a cargo carrying capacity of approximately 390,000 square feet and its roll-on/roll-off design makes it ideal for transporting helicopters, tanks and other wheeled and tracked military vehicles. Two 110-ton single pedestal twin cranes make it possible to load and unload cargo where shoreside infrastructure is limited or non-existent. A commercial helicopter deck enables emergency, daytime landings. The USNS Benavidez is 950 feet in length, has a beam of 106 feet, and displaces approximately 62,000 long tons. The diesel-powered ship will be able to sustain speeds up to 24 knots.

Logistics is what wins wars. The USNS BENAVIDEZ is part of the logistics train to keep forward operating troops supplied and supported with heavy equipment.

The USNS BENAVIDEZ was delivered to the Military Sealift Command in 2003 and has been a player in the ongoing GWoT as noted in this MSC press release in 2005:

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> [â€¦]
> Since her delivery to the Navy in September 2003, the 950-foot Benavidez has made 10 trips to the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the global war on terrorism. The ship has transported 1.9 million square feet of combat cargo, enough to fill 33 football fields from end zone to end zone.
> [â€¦]

End note: MSgt Benavidez passed away in 1998. The â€œValor Remembered is working to make a memorial to MSGT Roy Benavidez. Read about that effort here.

Bonus reading: The Original LCS Ship in the Sunday Ship History series at Eagle1â€™s place. Hint: It also is a story about a Medal of Honor Winer.

Category

1. Army
2. Charities
3. History
4. Military
5. Military History
6. Valour-IT

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