



Legend: The Incredible Story of Green Beret Sergeant Roy Benavidez's Heroic Mission to Rescue a Special Forces Team Caught Behind Enemy Lines

By Eric Blehm

NY: Broadway Books, 2015, 288 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)

Rick Baillergeon

In today's society, we seem to be very quick to bestow the title "legend" on a person. In many cases, the term is used arbitrarily with little or no understanding of what truly constitutes a legendary figure in a profession. However, when the members of a profession proclaim in near unanimous agreement that a person is a legend, then the moniker is rightly merited. This is unquestionably the case with Roy Benavidez, a Soldier who is revered as a legend in the Special Forces community. In his superb volume, *Legend*, author Eric Blehm highlights Benavidez's life and in particular his courageous actions during the Vietnam War.

For Blehm, his passion for crafting books tied to the Special Forces community is well established. His past two volumes were *Fearless: The Undaunted Courage and Ultimate Sacrifice of Navy Seal Team Six Operator Adam Brown* and *The Only Thing Worth Dying For: How Eleven Green Berets Fought for a New Afghanistan*. Each of these was well-received by critics and the public alike. There is no question that *Legend* will garner the same praise.

Within *Legend*, Blehm has deftly organized this volume into basically four parts. He begins with a concise retrospective of Benavidez's youth and early years in the military. He follows with discussion on the use of Special Forces in Vietnam and addresses the state of the war at the time. These sections perfectly set the conditions to focus on the emphasis of the book — the role of Benavidez in the rescue of his fellow Soldiers in early May 1968. He concludes the volume with the process of how Benavidez was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor and a summary of his life following his heroic actions.

For those who are not aware of Benavidez's actions, perhaps the best way to summarize them is to read part of his Medal of Honor citation. It states, "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 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."

Readers will find that Blehm superbly captures the essence of the above words for readers. This is achieved by two attributes which the author has displayed throughout his previous bodies of work. First, Blehm conducts exhaustive research in support of his books. This research is not only rich in quantity but in quality as well. The sources he utilizes within *Legend* include recently declassified military records, interviews with Benavidez' family members, and discussions with surviving Soldiers who fought with Benavidez on 2 May 1968.

The second attribute is the author's ability to take this in-depth research and transform it into copy that will grip a reader. For those who have read Blehm's past books, you know he possesses an extremely engaging writing style. This is prominently displayed within the volume. In particular, this is highlighted when he focuses on the events of 2 May.

Blehm dedicates one of book's concluding chapters to describe how Benavidez was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor. He originally received a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on 2 May. Blehm details the series of events which occurred (and the people who were involved) that led to upgrading the award to the Medal of Honor.

Benavidez passed away on 29 November 1998 of complications from diabetes. He continues to be remembered as a National Guard Armory, a West Point Conference Room, a Navy troop and cargo ship, and numerous other facilities are named after him. It is hoped that this superb volume will enable many others to learn and understand the incredible service he gave to his country.