

War Buddies Reunited

After 33 years they find they were living in the same home town

Two Vietnam combat veterans finally met again, 33 years after leaving Vietnam, this Memorial day. The funny thing is that they were both living in the same town of Mission and they didn't know it.

Roy Valadez and Rigoberto Ordaz Guerrero had a small reunion this Memorial Day to remember the living and the dead from their unit in Vietnam, the 1st Bn. 50th Infantry. About 180 soldiers from that unit were killed in Vietnam.

"I always thought Ordaz G. was from Arizona, because there were some guys from there, and he thought also that I was from Arizona, no wonder we couldn't find each other," Valadez said.

In the interim both have moved around the country from California to San Antonio and South Carolina to Korea.

"I had given up on finding

people from the old unit" Ordaz said. The break came when Ordaz G. joined the I/50 Association which was organized recently and read the member roster and Valadez's name and address was on it.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I say Roy's name and address, right here in Mission. I actually never thought of looking in my hometown. I drive by that street every other day," Ordaz G. added.

Both veterans saw a lot of heavy combat with the 1st Cavalry Division and later the 173rd Airborne Brigade and were in battles and firefights before, during, and after the '68 Tet Offensive. They were both wounded twice and were awarded two Purple Hearts and they also earned the Bronze Star Medal for Heroism.



Armored Personnel Carrier of Delta Co. 1/50 Infantry barrels down Hwy 1 in Central Vietnam 33 years ago. During the monsoon season we spent most of the time on Combat Air Assaults and on foot. In the photo Delta Co. 2nd Plt squad where Rigo Ordaz was Squad Leader.

"It's great to see someone again that has gone through what you went through," Valadez said. They both reminisced about mutual friends like Ignacio Evangelista "Nacho" who got a direct hit on his leg with a rocket. Valadez applied a tourniquet with a shirt, and then dragged him to the road where they got a ride to the hospital at the base camp.

"I think he saved his life, cause

the rocket cut the leg right off at the knee and he lost a lot of blood. The last time I saw "Nacho" was in 1974 in Watsonville, California, but then lost track of him" Ordaz said.

They have been trying to find other friends who served in Vietnam but sometimes it's hard to find them. It's like someone in the I/50 Assoc. once said—"They are like the Viet Cong (VC) we

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know they are out there but we just can't find them."

Aside from the physical scars the war has left on veterans, there is also the emotional or psychological scars. Ordaz Guerrero has recently been operated on and pieces of shrapnel metal taken out. Aside from the physical scars, he has also been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a condition that does not permit you to fully integrate back into society, since some of the symptoms are flashbacks, nightmares, depression, and other symptoms. Not everybody gets it, though.

Veterans sometimes want to deal with PTSD by themselves and don't even know they have it. They repress some of the memories of bad firefights and heroic scenes by getting more involved with their work. After a long time it all hits them all at once.

Both Valadez and Ordaz were squad leaders in the same unit, too. Valadez works as an insurance claims investigator and lives with his wife and family in Mission. Upon his return from Korea, Ordaz Guerrero has worked with several Valley newspapers and lives with his wife and daughter in Mission. His last job was at La Joya School District, before being disabled from the Veterans Administration.



War buddies—Rigo Ordaz G. (left) and Roy Valadez met again for the first time in 33 years after they were in Vietnam in 1968. They didn't know they were both living in the same city, Mission.