
ALFREDO A. CALVO (AKA FRED CALVO), 1968-1969, Specialist E5 (SP5)

His assignments with the 2nd Platoon, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry included . . . Gunner, Scout Track 23 (M113 "ACAV" - Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicle) and Loader, Tank 27 (M48 Patton Tank)

Fred crossed a river to start and traversed an ocean along the way on his journey to become a special man and exceptional American

Through our Mexican-American brother Alfredo "Fred" Calvo we have the honor of realizing firsthand just how one of our very own has become an integral part of the fabric of America. The greatness of America is embodied in the totality of the epic stories of our diverse mix of individuals and groups of people. They shaped our past, present and future.

The exceptional qualities of Fred Calvo epitomize him as among the best of Americans. He is a man of many talents and aspirations, he is a humble and gracious man, a courageous man, a spiritual and moral man, and a conscientious man dedicated to sharing good works with others. Fred's life story is very much a part of the great American experience.

Whether we realize it and are willing to admit, we prefer our lives will amount to something of significance beyond our mere presence on earth. Fred was raised to appreciate the values of family love and unity well enough for him to know the crucial issues of his life center around family values. Fred focuses on nurturing his family's love, revering his Creator, and memorializing his fallen brothers-in-arms. According to Fred's religious testimony: "I know where I came from, why I am here, and where I am going."

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Fred was born on May 27, 1947 in the small city of Linares, the hometown farming center of the Calvo family in Nuevo León, one of Mexico's 31 states. With the Rio Grande River as their northern border with Texas, the four Mexican states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua and Coahuila are historically, culturally and economically aligned with Texas.

As the backdrop to Fred's birth, Nuevo León was then dependent on the output of many small traditional



Fred in Dec. 1969

farms, and was no better off economically than most of the other Mexican states. Mexico itself was still an underdeveloped nation with a limited and constrained industrial base, a small middle class, and a large class of low-wage workers. Ironically, Nuevo León was ultimately transformed into one of the most prosperous of the Mexican states, based on the vast industrialization of Monterrey and the conversion of many of the small farms into agribusiness conglomerates. The dramatic change came about starting in 1965 with Mexico's

Border Industrialization Program that built a series of *maquiladora* factories in the Mexican Border States specifically to perform manufacturing for many American companies. Further economic expansion followed the startup of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994.

Another part of the setting was how Mexico had its own caste system (*castizo*). The *castizo* generally differentiated the people of Spanish and other European ancestry as the upper class of means and influence in contrast to all the peoples of mixed and indigenous ancestry as the lower or working class of peons (peasants). Peons made up the majority of both Mexico's rural agricultural and urban industrial labor forces. Beginning in the early 1900s, Mexican workers were increasingly used on American border farms and ranches from California to Texas. As migrants, they crossed the border freely each season and most returned to Mexico each winter.

Fred was the sixth of seven siblings born to Narciso and Juanita Alejandro Calvo, farm workers, between 1931 and 1949. His brothers and sisters, in order, were Lupe, Ponciano, Carolina, Narciso, Josephine, and lastly, Mary as the only child born in the U.S. The Calvo family went on to acquire U.S. citizenship starting in 1966 and ending with Carolina in the 1980s. Three of Fred's siblings survive, currently with Josephine Stokes residing in Tennessee, and with Ponciano and Mary Hernandez residing in Texas for the second time.

Narciso and Juanita Calvo were *mestizo* Mexicans, the descendants of mixed lines of Spanish and indigenous peoples, very typical of the large majority of Mexican nationals. What distinguished Fred's family was the fact his maternal bloodline also included Apache and Chinese forefathers as of the mid-1800s. Fred's Apache and Chinese forefathers would seemingly make themselves evident during his adult life.

Fred's great-great-grandfather was a Mescalero Apache who left his tribe by the early 1850s to opt for a sedentary life in Mexico with Fred's maternal family. Historically, the Apache people were formed into six large tribes as nomadic hunters, horsemen and fierce warriors who roamed freely in small bands in the Southwest from California to Texas between present-day Mexico and the U.S. They fought all occupiers of their tribal lands, starting with the Spanish, next the Mexicans, and then the Americans. Their resistance to pacification led to the start of the Apache Wars in 1846 as one of the many theaters of the overall Indian Wars (1823-1918) with the U.S. Army. By the 1880s, the six Apache tribes were subdued and forced to settle on separate reservations in Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma. All the Mescalero bands were rounded up and confined on the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico between 1873-1883. The last major campaign of the Apache Wars was in 1886 and involved 5,000 soldiers against, none other than, Geronimo, the legendary Chiricahua leader. Lesser actions were necessary until 1895 in order to end the many uprisings led by upstart Apaches. All ten of the existing U.S. cavalry regiments participated at various times and places in the campaigns of the Apache Wars.

Of relevance to Fred, the 5th Cavalry engaged the Mescalero and other Apaches in the 1870s. That campaign was recognized as a part of the design of the 5th Cavalry's coat of arms (unit crest). The top of the crest consists of a bundle of five arrows tied together with a rattlesnake. In particular, the arrows represent the five different Indian nations, against which the regiment campaigned between 1856 and 1879, including its singular campaign against the Apaches in Arizona during 1872-1874.

Fred's Chinese great-grandfather was one of the many "coolies" who worked in building the railroads between Mexico and the U.S. during the 1870s. His working alongside Mexican laborers led to his becoming a part of Fred's maternal family. He likely came to Mexico after helping to build the Central Pacific Railroad between 1863 and 1869 as the western portion of America's first transcontinental railroad.

Fred described his father and mother as "goodly parents," who were devoted to the well-being of their children and prided themselves in being responsible hard workers. With Fred but a year old in 1948, Narciso and Juanita decided to move to Texas where an "open border" policy had prevailed over the years to permit Mexican migrant workers to solve the state's shortage of

farm labor. Typically, migrant farm workers were only interested in earning higher wages in the U.S. for repatriation to their families left behind in Mexico. Contrary to most Mexican migrants, Fred reflected, "Our parents believed the destiny of our family was to make the best of remaining in the U.S." His parents knew firsthand how Mexico's large class of peons was often subjected to the abuses of indebtedness and involuntary servitude. "Their ambitions were to escape peonage and to expose our family to better opportunities in America," commented Fred.

CHILDHOOD MOVE TO TEXAS

After the decision was reached for their three oldest children - Lupe, Ponciano and Carolina - to remain with relatives in Linares, Narciso and Juanita Calvo boldly crossed the Rio Grande River with their three youngest children and barest possessions to enter Texas as an undocumented family. They made the crossing by paddling a small rectangular raft made of four logs tied together with leather straps and covered with a waterproof canvas. Commonly known as a *pato* ("duck"), they rented the raft from a *patero*, whose business was to build and rent rafts, and furnish ground transportation as needed to final destinations in the U.S.

The work season previous to their making the river crossing, Fred's father, Narciso, had been one of the many contract or guest workers (*braceros*) for Harold Hansen, the patriarch of large cotton and vegetable farms in Mercedes, a small border farming city in the fertile Rio Grande Valley in Hidalgo County, Texas. At the time, the joint governmental Bracero Program allowed adult Mexican male laborers to work for American growers under seasonal contracts. Impressed with Narciso's character and qualities, Mr. Hansen offered



Fred and mother Juanita
Completion of basic training 1967

Narciso offered the opportunity to bring his family to live at Hansen Farms year-round, during which he would assist the Calvos in acquiring legal status to live in the U.S. As the Calvo family was excluded from accompanying Narciso as a *bracero* across any of the guarded border crossings, their decision to accept Mr. Hansen's offer necessarily meant they had to enter Texas as illegal aliens and make the river crossing nearest to Mercedes. They made a midnight crossing from Las Flores, between Reynosa and Matamoros in Tamaulipas, and went directly across to Progreso, where they were met by the *patero* and driven the ten miles to Hansen Farms in Mercedes.

Fortunately, the family's move to reside at Hansen Farms did lead to their ultimately breaking away from peonage and achieving their version of the American Dream. The Calvo family was blessed in being taken in as one of the four resident Mexican families at Hansen Farms. Mr. Hansen was an exceedingly good man, who was particularly kind and generous to the Calvos. He provided them with year-round work, tended to their welfare, accommodated their special needs, encouraged and assisted them in acquiring legal status, and as Fred recalled, "I still remember that every Christmas he would give us presents." Mr. Hansen even enabled Fred's mother to raise hogs and chickens for her private sale. The reliance and mutual respect between Mr. Hansen and the Calvo family spanned 16 years under three different family situations from the start in 1948 to 1964.

In 1951, after three years at Hansen Farms, Fred's parents came down with tuberculosis. His father, Narciso, died at age 39 and his mother, Juanita, was hospitalized in nearby Mission. Fred and his three younger siblings, Narciso, Josephine and Mary, were vaccinated and quarantined at their house at Hansen Farms, and looked after by Catholic nuns. As soon as Juanita was able, Mr. Hansen drove her and the four younger children across the border to live in nearby Reynosa for the start of her long convalescence.

To replace the other half of their family, the three older Calvo siblings left their homes in Linares and took up residence at Hansen Farms in 1951. Ponciano and Carolina were still single and as Lupe was married, he preferred to bring his young family along. They were intent on supporting their mother and younger siblings living in Reynosa and fulfilling their family's commitment to Mr. Hansen. Fred said, "Like the rest of us, they too had to cross the Rio Grande as wetbacks. "

The final period of the Calvo family residence at Hansen Farms started in 1955 and ended in 1964. To ensure



Fred at age eight in 1955

the education of the younger children, Juanita Calvo and Mr. Hansen arranged for the youngsters to acquire U.S. entry visas to return to Hansen Farms in order to enroll in the Mercedes school district. Beyond their school year, the youngsters

worked side-by-side with their older siblings each season in picking cotton and vegetables. Grateful for his chance at a formal education, Fred learned English well, excelled in his other studies, and was the first in his family to graduate high school. By 1964, Narciso had relocated to Oxnard in Southern California's agricultural belt, and persuaded the rest of the family to move to Oxnard that year. By the next year, Juanita Calvo had

recovered her illness well enough in Reynosa to rejoin her family in Oxnard. Subsequently, Juanita returned to South Texas and died in McAllen at age 90 in 2005. The Calvo family has remained forever grateful for the humanitarianism of Harold Hansen, who made all the difference in their greatest period of need.

MOVE TO CALIFORNIA

Initially in Oxnard, most of the family members worked in farm fields. Fred, in particular, picked celery and strawberries for Garden City Farms. In 1965, first Fred and later Narciso were hired as sandblasters at the Arcturus Manufacturing Corporation, a specialty producer of die forgings for the aerospace industry. This new line of work was a far cry from the farm labor of the Calvo family. Fred was the pathfinder in leading his family out of the peonage of farm work. He has typically been the first member of his family to experience many changes of lifestyle. As one of the initial members of his family to attain U.S. citizenship in 1966, Fred's naturalization had the unexpected consequence of immediately bringing on his next change of lifestyle.

U.S. ARMY SERVICE

While working at Arcturus, Fred was drafted into the U.S. Army on July 18, 1967. He went on to complete Basic Training at Fort Ord, California in October 1967 and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Knox, Kentucky in February 1968. Fred's completion of AIT earned him the promotion from PFC to SP4, the military occupational specialty of a diesel mechanic (MOS 63C20), and orders for Vietnam as his next assignment.

Fred arrived in Vietnam in April 1968. He was promptly sent to the 9th Infantry Division at Camp Bearcat in the



Camp Evans Vietnam

southern III Corps Tactical Zone, and further transferred to the 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry at the Wunder Beach combat base to the north in the I Corps Tactical Zone. His ultimate assignment was to the 2nd Platoon of C Troop as one of the two M-60 gunners on SGT Buckner's Scout Track

23. This put Fred in a front-line combat role (in MOS 11D20), which was a very different line of duty than intended by his training as a diesel mechanic. In November 1968, Fred was moved to the position of loader on SGT Whitehead's Tank 27 (in MOS 11E20), only to be returned to Scout Track 23 in February 1969, again as a gunner with the promotion to SP5 (MOS 11D30) for the duration of his tour. Was it possible that Fred's assignment as a scout in Vietnam was his hereditary fate in light of his Apache forefather? Beyond the typical duties of an armored cavalry scout, Fred alone possessed the keen ability to smell the enemy's presence near the defensive positions of the 2nd Platoon. His

extrasensory perception often triggered the 2nd Platoon to conduct the "mad minute" of firing all weapons around their night defensive positions to ward-off any encroaching enemy from launching attacks.

Fred's tour with the 2nd Platoon was in the upper portion of the I Corps zone from the city of Hue north to the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). The area included such other landmark cities as Quang Tri and Dong Ha, and notable places such as the Street Without Joy, the A Shau Valley, the Rockpile, and Khe Sanh. Fred participated in a series of major engagements, such as the three-day Battle of Binh An near the DMZ in June 1968. With a minimal loss of troopers, his platoon and the rest of the 3/5 Cavalry were credited in killing and capturing over 300 NVA (regular soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army). Other than the daily assignments of securing villages and Army engineers and Navy Seabees at their work sites, keeping roads and bridges open, and conducting search and ambush missions, Fred's platoon took part in a number of special operations with a variety of major commands, such as the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions, and units of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division (South Vietnamese Army). The operations went by such names as Task Force Kilo, Lam Son 203, Charleston, Jeb Stuart, Black Knight, Rich, Nevada Eagle, Comanche Falls, and Apache Snow. In February 1969, the 9th Infantry Division put the 3/5 Cavalry under the operational control of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Camp Red Devil in Quang Tri. The re-assignment caused the squadron to move its combat support base from Wunder Beach to Dong Ha.

Fred departed his platoon and the 3/5 Cavalry on April 18, 1969 to end up the next day down south at the 9th Infantry Division's Camp Dong Tam for processing to go home. Considering how fortunate he was to have made it through his entire tour with the 3/5 Cavalry unscathed, Fred came to suffer a misfortune at Dong Tam on April 21st. During an enemy mortar attack on the camp that morning, Fred joined a few other soldiers in taking cover in a bunker, in which a poisonous snake bit Fred on his right leg. He was quickly taken by jeep to the field hospital, where he was treated and released on April 25th to depart Vietnam, albeit he had not fully recovered from the snakebite. Over the years, the snakebite has continued to manifest itself by causing Fred to endure occasional leg swelling and circulation difficulty. In spite of his own suffering, Fred was impacted far more by what he learned while in the hospital from the news reporting on front line action. The dreadful news was on how more than half of the members of his platoon were killed or wounded in a major engagement with the NVA during the night of April 18th, the very day of his departure from the 2nd



Induction photo 1967

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Platoon. Ever since, Fred has been personally troubled by both his not having been with his brothers-in-arms and his not having had the chance to initiate another life-saving alarm for a "mad minute" that fateful night. The wounds of war often run deep, which is what occurred in Fred's case by the irrevocable internalizing of the tragic loss of his fellow troopers.

Fred remains the only member of his family to have thus far served in the U.S. military. For his Army service, Fred was the recipient of the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal (with four bronze stars for gallantry), and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. He was further entitled to the two Vietnamese unit awards that were presented to the 3/5 Cavalry during his tour with the squadron, including the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Medal (with palm) and the Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal (first class). He also earned the Sharpshooter Weapons Qualification Badge (with rifle bar) during his Basic Training.

RETURN HOME AND MARRIAGE

Immediately upon his return home in Oxnard, Fred received the notice of his early and honorable discharge from the Army effective on April 28, 1969. The early discharge by nearly three months allowed him to promptly resume his employment with the Arcturus Company. Until he left Arcturus in 1976, Fred progressed in performing a variety of increasingly challenging jobs from sandblaster, rough grinder, finish grinder, and ultrasonic inspector to steel cutter.

Up to his entering the Army in 1967, Fred had his eye on neighbor Gloria Esparza, a friend of his younger sister Mary. Gloria was born in Raymondville in South Texas in 1950 to a family of Mexican-American landowners in the business of renting land to tenant farmers (sharecroppers). At a young age, her family sold their land holdings in South Texas and moved to Oxnard. Within a month after his discharge from the Army, Fred decided he wanted to date Gloria. Figuring he needed to impress Gloria's mother, Fred put on his army uniform, went to their house, and like a gentleman, asked Mrs. Esparza to permit him to date Gloria. She turned to Gloria and said, "Go and have a good time," which set the stage for their marriage on July 12, 1969. Gloria has been the love of Fred's life and his Rock of Gibraltar. She has been by Fred's side to celebrate and experience all the typical highs and lows of life, as well as to support and comfort Fred through his subsequent major illnesses.



Mr.&Mrs. Fred Calvo 1969

RETURN TO TEXAS

As the next phase of their life, in 1976 with their two children Noel and Rebecca, Fred and Gloria decided to leave their mutual families in Oxnard and strike out on their own back in South Texas. They settled in McAllen in Hidalgo County, across the border from Reynosa. Fred was hired as an outreach worker for the Hidalgo County Health Department. Without a college degree to qualify him for a higher position, Fred's entry level job kept him at the low end of the county's salary scale for professional workers. To help make ends meet, Gloria was amiable to work as a cook at local rest homes. Their desire for a better lifestyle was ultimately realized through Fred's innate quest for upward mobility.

Fred's drive home from his job typically took him past the constantly busy Three Star Muffler shop in McAllen. Inquisitive about the success of the business, one day in 1985 Fred stopped at the shop to talk with the owner, Adan González. Mr. González also owned a second shop in Kingsville in nearby Kleberg County where, by coincidence, the manager had just quit. Mr. González took an immediate liking to Fred and offered him the manager's job in Kingsville. Fred recalled, "I said no thanks to his offer, and started to walk away when he convinced me to instead consider buying the Kingsville shop from him. Promptly, he arranged for his local bank to finance the deal, and he even co-signed the bank loan. He helped me in getting started in Kingsville, and was he ever so proud of how I managed the success of the Kingsville shop and paid off the bank loan."

PASSION FOR TEACHING

By 1990, Fred was ready for his next station in life. He decided to sell his muffler shop in order to enroll at Texas A&M University-Kingsville as a 43-year-old freshman, and as the first member of his family to seek higher education. For some time, Fred's passion had been his entering the teaching profession, based on his conclusion that teaching was the best possible avenue for him to make the difference in the lives of youngsters. Fred believes "Children are the best hope for the future of our society, and thus deserve the best we have to offer." His proudest moments came whenever and however his students acknowledged his importance as their teacher. Remarkably when Fred chose Bilingual Education as his major course of study, Texas A&M in Kingsville had long held the distinction of being the first American university to offer degree programs in Bilingual Education. Fred graduated with a B.S. degree in 1994 and went on to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in the elementary schools of the Donna, Weslaco and McAllen school districts in Hidalgo County.

LIFE CHANGES

Fred's life was changed dramatically in 2004 with his diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as the aftermath of his service in Vietnam. The surfacing of his PTSD necessitated Fred's retirement from his beloved

career in teaching the same year. Fred was initially cared for at the Veterans Administration hospital in Topeka, Kansas. Since then he has undergone a regimen of medications and therapy sessions to minimize the haunting effects of his war scars and demons. Then in August 2009, Fred was further diagnosed with cancer. Fred and Gloria are determined to beat their latest challenge through the strength of their religious faith and aggressive medical treatment.

Over the years, Fred has pursued three self-taught hobbies, all as further examples of his multi-talented abilities. As forms of therapy in themselves, Fred's hobbies help him to relax in-between each fight against his illnesses. Some 20 years ago Fred took up nature and landscape photography.

His inspiration was Ansel Adams, the renowned 20th century nature and landscape photographer of the American West. In 2004 while a resident at the VA hospital in Topeka, he became inspired by the on-site painting of a fellow resident and Navajo artist. Subsequently, Fred developed his own style of painting



Fred and his grandsons
Isaac and Jared
2009

in acrylics in the forms of landscapes, still life and scenes depicting military themes and equipment. In 2005, Fred decided to add cooking to his repertoire of retirement activities. Of all possible cuisines, he chose Chinese! By studying and practicing the art of Chinese cooking, Fred became quite the new cook in his household. He delights in hosting dinner parties to impress his family and friends with his cooking skills. Fred smiles whenever he tells the story of how his Chinese forefather coaxed him into becoming a master cook of Chinese food.

FAMILY VALUES

In 1989, Fred and Gloria converted to Mormonism from their having been non-practicing Roman Catholics. Since then and through their stake in missionary work, they and daughter Rebecca have brought others into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Known as "grampa" by his five grandchildren, Fred's prayer is for him to live long enough for Isaac, 17, Jared, 16, and Jose Emilio, 14, to serve their missions for the Mormon Church, to witness Jonathan, 15, accomplish his dream of playing university basketball, and see Chelsea, 17, marry in a beautiful wedding dress. And then there is Joseph, the first grandchild of Fred and Gloria by their daughter Rebecca and her husband Jose Alvarado. Joseph would be 18 years old by now had he lived past his second day of birth. Fred keeps up a dialog with Joseph, which makes Joseph every bit a part of Fred's expressions of love, prayers and hopes for his grandchildren.



YOU'VE GOT THAT LOVING FEELING
Branson MO 2009

Fred regards his 3/5 Cavalry brothers as an extension of his own family. Other than having devoted his inner emotions to the memory of his fallen brothers of the 2nd Platoon of C Troop, Fred has also made it a priority to attend most of the reunions of the 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry (Black Knights) Vietnam Association. His first was at the squadron's initial reunion in Colorado Springs, June 1989, and his most recent was at the C Troop reunion in Williamsburg, August 2010. Gloria has been a genuine supporter of Fred's participation in the reunions by having accompanied him each time as a faithful Lady Black Knight.

Fred's legacy is his love of family. Whenever we take a hard look at life, it usually boils down to the two primary themes of love and family. Fred has said, "I love my wife Gloria, our children Noel and Rebecca and their spouses Patsy and Jose, and specially our six grandchildren. It is my hope and my prayer they are all proud of who I am and what I have done."

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IF YOU AIN'T CAV - YOU AIN'T #\$\$%@