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Neftali Sanchez

On March 20th, 1934 in El Paso, Texas, Neftali Sanchez entered the world. Although he was born in Texas, he had his upbringing in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico till the age of 15. At the age of 18, following in his brother, Leopold's footsteps, he enlisted in the United States Army on January 12, 1952. Leopold, being six years older than Neftali set the example for his younger brother. His other brother, Eleazar, was a drafted medic and continued the brotherly tradition. Neftali, entering the war with an 8th grade equivalent education, never had any true plans to attend school, he just wanted to enlist and serve as a volunteer. But, he did receive his high school diploma while in the service. Sanchez was initially stationed at Fort Ord, California for his infantry training. He was next stationed at Camp Cooke, California from May 1952 to November 1952 for his Non-Commissioned Officers Training.. Sanchez's last location was at Mundung-Ni, North Korea, where he entered into combat duties as a Corporal.

Neftali Sanchez recalls his basic training as being a difficult experience and coined it as taking "quite a bit of effort." Bootcamp taught him obedience, he also feels as if it is a good experience for a young man to go through in order to learn discipline. Sanchez believes that the discipline learned here can follow you to the rest of your life. Although this was a tough time in his life, every morning he reminded himself that there is "another day tomorrow," and this is what helped him get through. He pinpoints his time at Fort Ord, for his basic training, as one of

his favorite places to be stationed at. He enjoyed running five miles every day and every morning. They had an inspection once a week, and he was labeled the best soldier and was given the honor of being able to carry the flag at one of the ceremonies which would soon become one of his best memories. While in Korea, another way he got through tough times was the fun he and his comrades improvised during spare time. They used whatever was available and once every ten days, they would lift weights, and made their own track and field equipment in order to do high jumps. One of Neftali's favorite memories was being a part of the Special Guard, Additionally, another favorite memory was the swearing in ceremony which he said was impressive as he gave the oath to his country and to the Constitution.

While patrolling on July 11, 1953, Neftali's bravery shined exquisitely as he lost both hands and his eyesight, when he walked into a booby trap explosion. After this frightful day, he was put into the Tokyo Army Hospital, where he was not told quite yet about his future physical condition but he recognized that it would be a difficult situation. Sanchez realized that he could not be "bitter or angry; with help of God, I accepted reality, as there was nothing I could do about it." He was discharged soon after.

The GI bill would provide Neftali Sanchez with an education and give him the "opportunity to do something." The GI bill provided him with counseling, tuition and books. He attended Pepperdine College and received his B.A. in 1959 and an M.A. in Psychology. He also received his B.A. in Theology from Western Apostolic Bible College in 1974, he then became an ordained minister. Neftali's goals after his leaving the war turned into "helping others in counseling." He also joined the Blinded Veterans Association where he could counsel recently blinded soldiers as they returned home. Ten years ago, Neftali went back to Korea, as far as he

could go without crossing the BMC line into dangerous territory. While on his visit, a Korean woman embraced him in tears, she told him that she remembered him from when he was stationed there, she was about five or six years old. The woman remembered him and the other men and how they used to give the children candy. Sanchez felt gratitude radiating off of the woman. Sanchez has beliefs on the Vietnam War, as well, one war in general is a “necessary evil.”

He said that the Vietnam War was a political war, and that JFK did not do a bad job, but Neftali is unsure of who to blame for it entirely. The Communists wanted to take over, so “we had to do what we had to do,” in response to our fear of the Soviets. Sanchez also believes that the Fall of the Berlin Wall was a symbol of a better future. He believes that in comparison to the Korean War, during WW2, there were different tactics used, and that it was just a “different method of war.” He said that the bomb was necessary to end World War 2 and that due to the aftermath that nuclear weapons bring, he hopes that we never have to turn to them again.

Sanchez wrote a memoir type story called “Trench Fighters,” where he recalls some of his time on the Frontlines. He talks about the packages he would receive from his family, some of his favorites, of course, being sweets. Sanchez and his six friends, coming from all parts of the United States, all rejoiced in the gifts they would receive from home. One thing that continuously kept them going was the things their family would send them, serving as encouragement. Neftali took the time to write “Trench Fighters,” 50 years after the Korean War in order to remind the people who are serving now to not be forgotten. Sanchez has received many awards for his honorable time in the service. Some of these awards being the Korean War Service Medal, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Purple Heart, the Korean Ambassador Gold

Medal, the Bronze Service Star, the UN Service Medal and the Overseas Bar. One of the things he is most proud of is his Purple Heart. Neftali Sanchez still visits and spends time with his friend Jerry, one of the six friends mentioned in the “Trench Fighters.” Sanchez was a Western Bible College Psychology teacher and has done counseling at his church for over forty two years. He is a true hero and still impacts the lives of many through his words and his willingness to help change and impact the lives of those in need.