

Eulogy

Tilberto “Gulibaldo” Guili, Gil Apodaca--beloved Son, Brother, Husband, Father, Grandfather, great Grandfather, Friend, and Patriot.

Dad was a lucky man and he'd be the first one to tell you so. In his life, he'd encountered death and dying a few times, in the wars he survived and a couple earlier times with other cancers. Finally, it was AML (Acute Myeloid Leukemia)—a cancer of the blood that took his life.

Guilibaldo was the second son born to Francisco and Maria Luisa in El Centro, California in November 1933. He was raised in the *barrio* of Carlsbad where the streets are named for presidents. His family was large by today's standard with four brothers and three sisters. This was the depression period and WWII. Resources were scarce. The family was poor. The children worked to contribute what they could and often worked in the fields to harvest fruits or vegetables. Life was hard, but they were a hearty, fun-loving family and a mainstay in the neighborhood.

Guili attended Pine school in Carlsbad and then Oceanside High School. But while in high school, he was compelled to serve our country and joined the military at age 16.

His first military service was with the U.S. Marine Corp Reserves where he was sent to boot camp in San Diego. He was released from the Marines shortly after boot camp with a minority discharge because he was underage.

About the same time, Guili met the love of his life Hortencia “Tencha” Granados from Vista while they were both in high school. The year was August 11, 1950 and she was smitten by his charm. The passion of their romance was undeniable. Tencha joined Gil in his military life as wife and loyal lifetime partner. They were married in Yuma, Arizona on August 23rd, 1953. Three children were quickly born of this love, Michael Dennis, Gil Charles, and Cynthia Ann. The young family and Dad's devotion to them drove him in his military career.

In January 1951, after being discharged from the marines, Dad enlisted with the Army and was again sent to basic training, this time to Camp Roberts near the central coast of California. He was then ordered to combat service in the Korean Conflict. After his return from Korea, he was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The time was June 1952. A year later he volunteered for airborne service with the 82nd Airborne Division. In early 1957, he had orders to Germany and spent 3 years with the 3rd Army's--Armored Field Artillery and was stationed in Bidingen near Frankfurt. This was our country's "cold war" period when we were at the brink of nuclear war with the communists.

In 1960, Gil returned from Germany to Fort Bragg and was reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Division. In July 1962, Sergeant Apodaca volunteered for the Army Special Forces group, which gained prominence and presidential support as a tactical guerrilla force during John Kennedy's presidency. Dad went through more rigorous training to earn his elite warrior status and prestigious "Green Beret". He was attached to the 7th Special Forces Group.

Sergeant Apodaca served in the Viet Nam conflict beginning in 1964 and was stationed in Pleiku. He returned to Vietnam again in 1968 and 1969 for a year—when the conflict was most serious. He was with the 5th Special Forces Group. The Viet Nam conflict intensified during this period with the "Tet Offensive" that brought significant enemy numbers from North Viet Nam to the South. For the first half of this tour, Sergeant Apodaca was stationed in a place called Buon Ma Thuot in the central highlands of South Viet Nam and was attached to the Special Forces Group's MAC-SOG. It was not uncommon for teams of this detachment to venture into Laos and Cambodia for reconnaissance missions of enemy activities along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Later, in this tour Sergeant Apodaca was involved with prisoner recovery operations working from Saigon. These missions were also dark and worked in conjunction with the CIA.

In between the Viet Nam tours, Sergeant Apodaca was ordered to Panama, Canal Zone. The years were 1965-1968 and again from 1969-1971. He served there with the 8th Special Forces Group. This service period took him to many Central and South American countries where he trained foreign military in Nicaragua and El Salvador and performed other clandestine assignments down country in South America for the U.S. government.

Sergeant Apodaca retired from the military in 1971 and achieved the rank of Master Sergeant. He closed his career in Fort Bragg after an 8year period with the Special Forces Groups. His army career ended with 20 years of service.

Upon leaving Panama, Major General George Mabry wrote this of Master Sergeant Apodaca,

“The nation can well be proud of men such as you who have given so many years of their lives during war and peace to keep our country safe and protect the ideals for which it stands. The travel that you have experienced and your military service during critical periods in our country’s history have given you an opportunity to gain a keen insight into the problems which every citizen must face.”

Sergeant Apodaca left the military a decorated veteran of 2 wars and he kept certain principals with him from his military experience. One was to survive—to first live. Another was to bring his comrades home. He cared for his people, his team’s survival first. Sergeant Apodaca was a front line warrior, a professional soldier and an early special operator. During wartime, he saw others of different colors and creeds pass in death. He had seen death come to those close at hand.

Dad was a talented person. He had a special way with people. He would get to know them quickly. Some of his charm was genetic but being in the military, one finds himself in foreign places quite often. Dad learned quickly that one should make friends as soon as possible, no matter how different people are. He was an

ambassador of America, but he was also an ambassador of his family, his heritage and his own life experience.

Dad was funny and used humor as a tool of charm wherever he went. He loved a good joke or was just as happy listening to one. He loved my Compadre Rudy because Rudy would bring him a joke or 2 and would entertain my Dad by telling them so well. My cousins and uncles have that same sense of humor and ability to tell a great joke. They made Dad happy in the same way. In my experience with Dad, we could get on to some funny spells where the humor turned to complete zaniness. It was crazy and hilarious but somehow healing to the soul. But Dad believed that life should not be too serious to forget to laugh. I am certain that he used humor to loosen up an uptight crowd or team in the midst of something very serious about to occur.

Dad loved music. He enjoyed playing Spanish guitar and when we lived in Panama, he had a small electric Hammond organ that he played usually on Sundays. What impressed me about his talent was that he could play both these instruments by sound. He could not read music, but he knew enough chords to sound through a song. He often made impromptu songs by adding funny lyrics to the chords as he played. Whoever was in the room was the subject of these funny tunes. It was quite entertaining.

When we visited dad's family in Carlsbad, I remember Grandma Mary, Aunt Jenny, Dad, Uncle Malucho and others would gather and sing in Spanish many Mexican favorites together at Grandma Mary's home. It was a happy time for the family in Carlsbad on Madison Street.

As a father and husband Dad was dedicated to his young family's welfare. In the early years his family was poor, barely getting by paycheck to paycheck. But the young parents managed to always have food, shelter, and clean clothes for their

children. To help during this period, Dad chose to go airborne for the extra jump pay and the added excitement.

To further illustrate his obligation to provide for his young family I will recall for you this. We were living in Fort Bragg. The year was one in the late 50's and Dad owned a car. In the period leading up to Christmas that year, he found a way to make Christmas money by shuttling some of his buddies north to New Jersey and back. There were presents under the tree that year like there was every Christmas.

As a father, like his own parents, Dad did not spare the rod. Dad and Mom reared their children. I remember getting whopped after church one Sunday because Michael and I were cutting up way too much in mass. Usually mom would try to subdue us with a pinch but this Sunday our behavior got beyond mom's punishment capacity. The big guns were called in. Mike and I got soundly whopped that day. There were times when the 3 of us were in for it and Dad was going to issue the whopping. Cindy could not bear to wait for her turn and quickly learned to run away--smart girl.

As for education and schoolwork, dad expected excellence. A "C" grade was not good enough. You could always do better than that. We should at least be above average.

As for work, we were taught to have a work ethic early on as kids. Dad would suggest ways for us to earn money and expected action. We cut grass, delivered newspapers, cleaned stairways, washed cars, and were taught to be industrious and thrifty.

Sunday was family day. Dad used to like to go on Sunday drives and take us to see the countryside. He enjoyed his cars and was primarily a Chevy man.

But Dad's love could be tough love. On one occasion in Panama we drove to the other side of the isthmus about 50 miles. We happened to stop at a fruit stand, because mom and dad love a good fruit stand. They happened to have watermelons at this one and Michael bought the largest one of the lot with his hard earned newspaper money. It was a huge watermelon. And as he walked away with his prize, he hoisted it to his shoulder and it fell back from his shoulder to the ground and broke open. Dad made Michael buy another. It was a 14-dollar watermelon. Needless to say, it was a quiet drive home.

We are going to miss the Sarge around here. In the end dad met his fate with the same courage he knew in war and in life. He faced his condition quietly and stoically and kept it to himself. In his final days, Dad's first consideration was not to be selfish but to give to his family and friends his remaining precious time. He advised and prepared us for his end and was able to see, hug, reconcile, pray, laugh, and have some amount of closure with his loved ones before his time ended. He prepared us for his passing.

Dad' finish to this life is both sad and tragic and we have not seen the depths and degrees to each of these yet. The sadness and mourning will take time to get through. But the tragedy will be the challenge for us mortals to sort out as we review his last days and reconcile any regrets we may continue to carry.

But what would Dad say about regrets? Forget about it. You need to look forward. Do not to cry, but be happy. Be happy to know that he loved this life, his family and progeny and was concerned everyday for their well-being. In his last days, we can be happy that Dad squeezed every bit of life out of his body and ran his human race to the bitter end. And then he passed peacefully. He took a few last breaths and his heart just stopped beating. His last fight and struggle was over, and we were there with him to the final hour.

And so what is the legacy of a man? What can we take away from having known Gil as father, brother, husband, grandfather, great grandfather, comrade and friend? This is for all of us to consider as we remember what he meant to each of us, because he touched us all differently but in a common way. It was his way.

Know too, that he would want us to be good citizens, that we should help others when we can, that we should be friendly to others, and that we should choose life above all else. That we should be honest and truthful, that we should be professional, that we should be of good service, that we should compete, contribute, work hard, achieve, have fun, and play. That we should be reserved—cool and poised, that we should do what we have to do when the time comes, that we should do the right thing, and that we should have faith that he is still with us and in our corner always. In his last days, his grandson Adam said he made us all better men and one of his granddaughters chimed in “and better women too”.

The sergeant’s passing was honorable and like the American Indian warrior he bravely went alone into the woods to meet his death. He managed to provide a brief opportunity for his family to reconcile differences and say goodbye. For this we are thankful and Dad truly was lucky to get the chance.

In closing, I should share this incident with you his friends and family, because this was truly amazing and happened the day dad died. In his last hour, there came an earthly sign from the heavens. The sign came to me in the form of a bird of prey. There was a hawk flying over the house. I could tell it was a hawk because of its distinct call. A call that caught my ear and is different than the sound a crow makes or even a sea gull. I was in the driveway when I first heard it. I searched the sky and saw the hawk fly over the house. I followed it to the back yard and looked up. And there it was high in the sky, soaring, and alone. It was near the sun and there was a fluffy rain cloud along side. I shielded my eyes from the sun to see the bird better. It was graceful in the sky. Then I went to get Andrew to share this with him. When we

both returned to the yard to look again, the hawk had moved on. Dad passed on an hour later.

I think in the end, my Dad wanted us to be proud of him, his positive deeds and what he tried to do with his life. He wanted us to understand him for the simple and uncomplicated values he always espoused. In the end he brought us together again as a family. He was again a leader to his family. He showed us how to live and how to die.

Dad, in this life you were our hero and will always remain one in our hearts and minds. We salute you Dad--*mi sargento*. Yours was a good life and well lived. We will miss you often and always and we will find you again in heaven.