



**Veterans'
Spotlight
Rudy
Casas**

EARLY YEARS

Rudy Casas is an Army Veteran who was born on October 4th, 1931 and has lived in Pico Rivera for nearly 26 years. Raised in the heart of Los Angeles, a young Rudy Casas used to shine shoes to earn enough money to go to the theater to watch films in the 1940s during the golden age of cinema. At this time, movie theaters would show patriotic war films that would inspire even the unlikeliest of heroes to step up in the face of adversity and answer the call of duty. Casas was 17 years old when he decided to enlist in the U.S. Army. "I volunteered to go to the 11th Airborne at Fort Campbell Kentucky. I thought for sure I was going," said Casas. However, the United States government had more ambitious plans for Rudy Casas. Once he completed his boot camp training, Casas received papers indicating that he wouldn't be reporting to the Midwest; instead, he would be assigned to Far East Command duty in Tokyo, Japan.

To say Rudy Casas came from a large family would be an understatement. His parents raised a family of 14 total siblings, ten sisters and four brothers. "A crowded house was the real reason for deciding to join the service," he joked. However, that was not the case. From the moment Rudy Casas joined the service, he knew it was not only a way to give back to his country but as well a chance to get away from the gang-ridden environment around him. "I didn't want any part of that, and I needed a way out," he said. Growing up around the constant threats of gang activity and violence, he was looking for an escape

from a life he saw many boys his age fall down that path. The U.S. Army provided him that passage away from a life that would invariably result in him fighting to defend himself from senseless violence on the streets, to bravely fighting to defend his country while protecting his loved ones back home.

Rudy Casas recalls being surprised the first time he found out he was being sent to training at communication school in Sapporo, Japan.

There, he would train for three weeks to learn cryptography, his Military Occupational Specialty (or MOS), learning how to decode and encode messages. He found out that the Airborne Division had completed their assignment and were being sent home, so Casas was attached to the 32nd Infantry Regiment,

7th Infantry Division for active duty in the war. "During amphibious assault training with the Marines on a Sunday, June 25th, 1950 we all huddled around a small radio reporting that the North Koreans had attacked the South." This day would be known as the start of the Korean War. Several weeks before serving in active duty in South Korea, Casas and his Division were sent to hike up Mt. Fiji to complete their military training.



KOREAN WAR

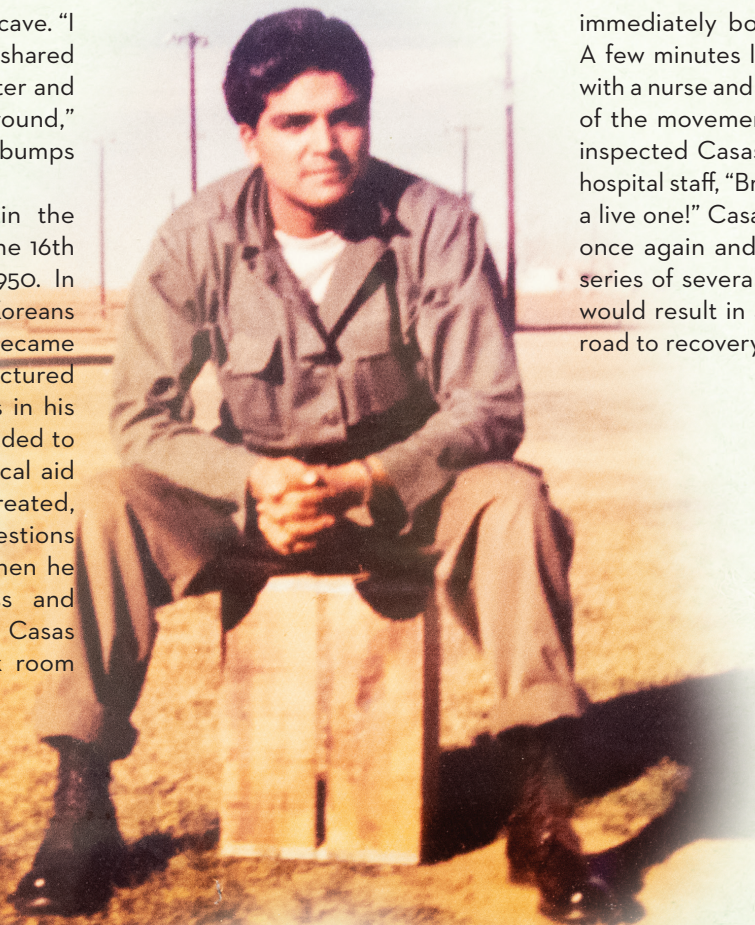
To this day, Rudy Casas vividly remembers one particular flashback that he will never forget. After crossing the Han River off the Korean Peninsula, near the Capital City of Seoul, Casas and his company were told that North Koreans were holding up in a cave on the top of Nam San Hill. Once they reached the entrance of the cave, muffled voices could be heard, but were difficult to quite make out. He and another soldier stood with their rifles pointed asking for whoever was in the cave, to come out with their hands up. "I spoke in Japanese, English, and even Spanish telling them to surrender," he said. Just as they were about to pull their triggers, about a dozen scared children and two women came running out of the cave. "I broke out my C-Rations, and we shared with them. We asked for hot water and made hot chocolate to pass around," he continued, "I still get goosebumps thinking about that day."

Rudy Casas would serve in the Korean War from September the 16th through the end of October in 1950. In a surprise ambush by the North Koreans on October 5th, 1950, Casas became severely wounded from a punctured lung, along with several others in his company. Once field medics tended to Casas, he was taken to a medical aid station. While he was being treated, a nurse asked him a few questions to evaluate his mental state when he completely lost consciousness and blacked out. When he woke up, Casas found himself in a quiet, dark room



surrounded by what he thought at the time were merely bodies of severely wounded soldiers. Lying on a wooden box in nothing but a white sheet over his body, it was quickly becoming clear to him that this was a big misunderstanding.

When an aide walked into the room, he tried to speak, but his words had failed him as his mouth was parched. Casas had no other choice, so he used every ounce of strength in his body to raise his left arm in an attempt to get the nurse's attention. Finally, through a labored struggle, Casas whispered in Japanese, "Kudasai...mizu...mizu" or roughly, "Please give me water." The medical aide noticed movement from a once-believed deceased Casas and immediately bolted out of the room. A few minutes later, the aide returned with a nurse and pointed in the direction of the movement. The nurse carefully inspected Casas and called out to the hospital staff, "Bring a stretcher; we have a live one!" Casas became unconscious once again and would soon endure a series of several hospital transfers that would result in a long and challenging road to recovery ahead.



COMING HOME

After Rudy Casas completed his service, he got a job with the Los Angeles Unified School District starting as a custodian, eventually working his way up to Maintenance Operations Supervisor until he retired in 1994. "I would like to say I learned a lot from joining the service; I improved my language skills, I made new friends, and I got an opportunity to experience different cultures in Japan and Korea. I can say I had the chance to climb Mt. Fuji. Ultimately, it made me a better person." Casas has been happily married for 35 years. Together, he and his wife are grandparents to 16 grandchildren, and great-grandparents to nine great-grandchildren. Today, he has three grandchildren who serve in different branches of the military. "Overall, it was quite an experience. Would I do it again? Yeah, absolutely."

Today, Rudy recounts his days serving his country during the Life Story Writing Class offered at the Pico Rivera Senior Center. Rudy has been a member of the Life Story Writing Class since 1995, bringing a myriad of personal experiences to his class that allows seniors to write down their own stories of their lives. Rudy is also very active in the community - he's a member of VFW Post 7734, he has also been a speaker at the City's Veteran's Day

Ceremony, and you can find Rudy on the softball field where he volunteers for the Pico Rivera Go Getters, in which he has been a member since 1995. As a result of his sacrifices and service to his country, Rudy Casas earned several awards of recognition, including the Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, National Defense Medal, Army of Occupation Japan Medal, Good Conduct Medal, a Combat Infantry Badge, and a Purple Heart Medal.



▲ Badge and Stamp



▲ Collection of Rudy Casas medals

