Parachutist kept fighting even after losing eye in battle

By CLINT HALE

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After attending the ninth grade, young Fred Davalos dropped out to help the family make more money. "We were poor," Mr. Davalos said. "I got tired of wearing the same clothes every day. I came from a large family, and feeding us was hard for our parents." The family was so poor, Fred and his brothers helped their father with many of the jobs he did.

"My father worked mostly at an ice plant, and we used to go to farms during cotton-picking season, and that interfered a lot with education," Mr. Davalos said. "We couldn't get to school until January, so we missed a lot of school. But we survived." Serving in the U.S. military would become a family tradition for the Davalos brothers. Oldest brother Julian was in the Army, N.V. "Natividad" Davalos was a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force for three years before settling down in Albuquerque, N.M., where he now lives. Another brother, Joe Davalos, was a tech sergeant in the Air Force for 10 years and served in both the European Theatre, as well as, later, in Korea.

And another brother, Thomas Davalos, served 10 years as a staff sergeant in the Air Force and Army. He currently lives in California. Fred Davalos' sister, Lena Hernandez, also lives in California and is an interpreter for County Health Services.

"Those were tough times," Mr. Davalos said. "In those years, the more people you had in your family, the more work you did. And the more work you did, the more income you got." He noted, for instance, that Thomas got to the 12th grade, a rarity in those days for poor children whose families needed them to help support the family. Even though he had to forgo an education to make money, Mr. Davalos said his parents still wanted him to be well-educated.

"My dad used to emphasize education," Mr. Davalos said. "But at that point in time, it was right after the Depression, and it was hard to survive from day to day." Mr. Davalos was working as a bell-man in 1943 when he was drafted into the military to serve in World War II. Serving in the military allowed Mr. Davalos to leave the state for the first time. His tour of duty in the armed forces took him to Texas, Georgia, North Africa and Southern France. He fought in battles in Rome-Arno, Ardennes and Rhinelan.

Mr. Davalos was decorated with a number of citations, including the Bronze Star Medal, one of the honors given in the military to soldiers who exhibit courage in the line of fire. He also was awarded the Parachutists Badge and a Purple Heart.

"I just fired and hoped I hit the right guy," Mr. Davalos said of his courageous efforts. "In situations like that, you never know if you're going to wake up. Just trying to sleep at night was tough." After being released from the service, Mr. Davalos went back to Clovis, where he met his wife, Sophie Olona. Fred and Sophie were married in 1951 and had five children: Ella, Fred Jr., David, Donald and Arthur. "I met my wife at a party," Mr. Davalos said. "I had never met her before then." All of the couple's children are currently living in the United States, except for Arthur, who died of heart failure at age 19 in 1978. The couple also has six grandchil dren — three boys and three girls.

With experiences in his life that most people can only imagine, Mr. Davalos summed up his thoughts on life in one simple sentence: "It's amazing how things happen."