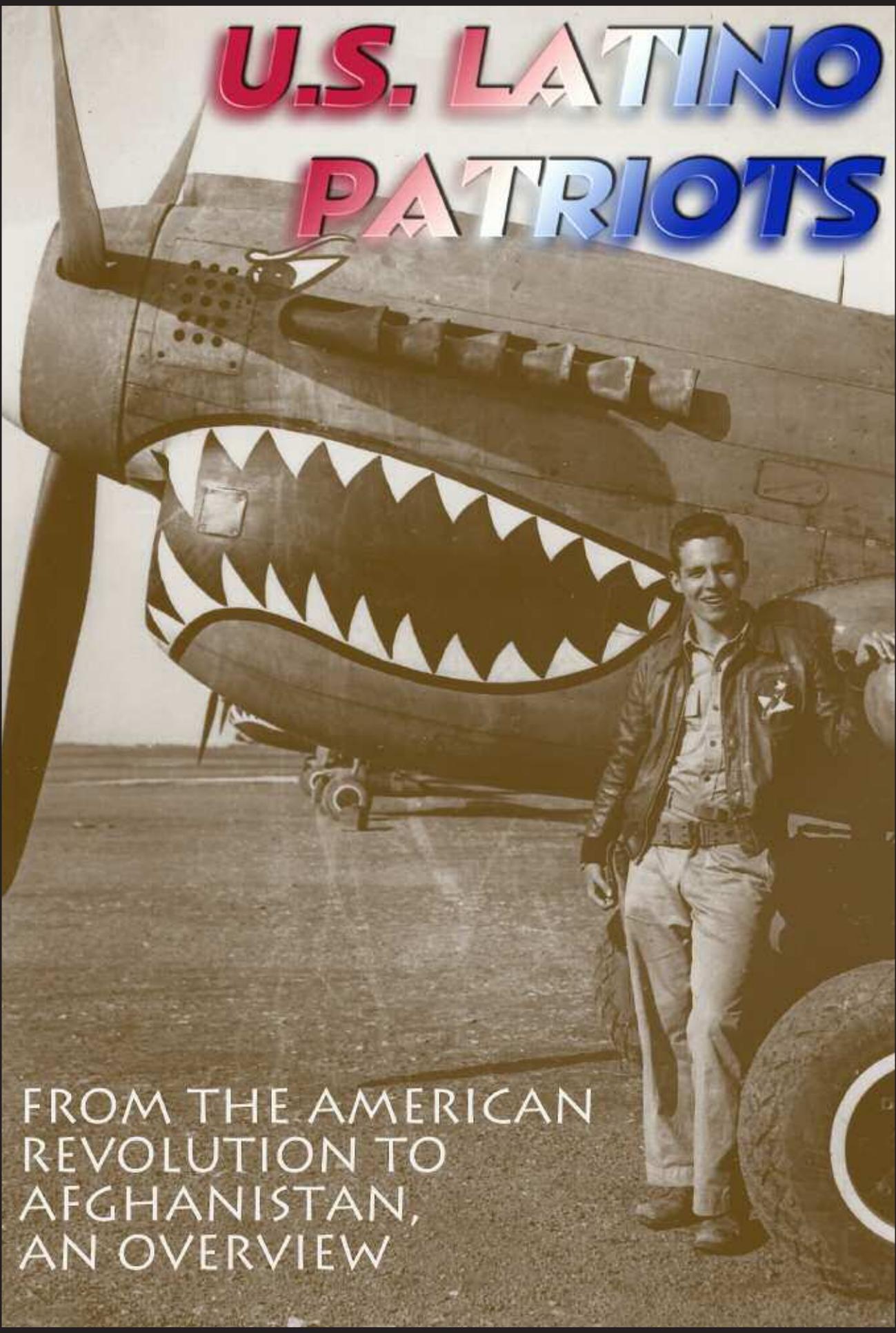


# U.S. LATINO PATRIOTS



FROM THE AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION TO  
AFGHANISTAN,  
AN OVERVIEW

# U.S. LATINO PATRIOTS

*From the American Revolution to Iraq 2003 - An Overview*

*By*

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Julian Samora Research Institute  
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## Foreword

This booklet, the first in the Julian Samora Research Institute's E-Book Series, seeks to inform a popular audience that there have been Latino Patriots in all major wars in United States history. Thus investigators interest in the history of patriots must consider the roles that Latinos have played. Professors Refugio Rochín and Lionel Fernández consider theirs an exploratory work, for the topic has not been investigated in great depth.

Rochín and Fernández emphasize the need for additional research and the creation of more archival and oral collections that document Latino participation in war, valor, and even the term "Latino Patriot" itself.

*U.S. Latino Patriots* complicates our understanding of Latino identity, evident in many of the stories related in this book. The "Latino Patriots" who receive attention in this work express a particularly strong identification with the nation. They include Brig. General Christopher Cortez, a hero of World War II, who asserted:

*"Heritage is very important, to know where we came from and the pride associated with that. But first and foremost, we are Marines."*

Furthermore, Latino Patriots have been proud to identify themselves as tough, including a soldier of more recent vintage, Master Sgt. Roy P. Benavides, who adopted the code name "Tango Mike/Mike," which stood for "That Mean Mexican."

The authors wish to thank the support of the Julian Samora Research Institute, and particularly Danny Layne, a former Marine Corps journalist who contributed photographs and artwork, along with editing and layout work for the project.

A book on Latino Patriots is complicated by a strong current among Latinos, past and present, about limits to a perspective that emphasizes patriotism above all other factors. As this e-book goes online, more than 1,921 soldiers from the United States -- along with more than 150,000 Iraqis, mostly civilian -- have died since March 2003. Citizens of the U.S. must respect all the people whose lives have been been lost in this war.

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# U.S. LATINO PATRIOTS

*Knowledge, truth, and Eternal Vigilance are the Price of Liberty!*

## **Preface**

*U.S. Latino Patriots* was developed from discussions with military veterans, current and former colleagues in Washington, D.C., and educators in colleges and universities who teach American and Latino Studies. These meetings all identified the need to recognize and publicize the military and wartime record of Latinos in U.S. history and their contributions to this nation since the American Revolution. Latino leaders in Washington, D.C. also noted the relative absence of this history in public schools, state and national museums, and archives. Many of the author's contacts themselves are American patriots of great distinction and service. It is an honor to pay them homage and to share some of their experiences in this publication.

Thus, the aim of the authors is to inform and instill a new knowledge and understanding of U.S. Latinos, encompassing Americans of Spanish, Caribbean, and Latin American descent, who served as patriots in defense of America during its wars and conflicts, dating back to the American Revolution and into the on-going engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. The report is also a brief overview of a wealth of information and knowledge that is waiting for more attention and documentation.

Now, as in the past, Latinos must bring forth their stories and messages of patriotism. This is especially true as Latinos of World Wars I and II are fading into history. And very important as Latino veterans of Korea and Vietnam are retiring and interested in reminiscing and sharing their mementos among their progeny and other generations who want a knowledge of the past. It is equally important to document and publish this heritage as Latinos are caught in a situation of being perceived in America as primarily foreign born and un-American in their attitude and behavior, occasionally profiled and stopped, or arrested, under the terms and conditions of The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (H.R. 5005) and the US Patriot Act of 2001.

Under the circumstances created by the terrorist acts of 9/11, vigilance is important for everyone in America. Nonetheless, it is equally critical for Americans to know their neighbors and to understand and appreciate the hard work, dedication and commitment they bring in defense of all Americans.

To a degree, the growing presence of Latinos and their relative youthfulness make them highly sought recruits for military service. Latinos are now officially the nation's largest minority group, numbering 38.8 million in July 2002, or 13.4% of the national total. It is evident that Latinos are joining the military in record numbers, matching their impressive growth as America's fastest growing population in many states. For some, military service is a way to redeem their lives in the United States and to prove that they are "good Americans." For others, there is the opportunity to become naturalized Americans, receiving rights to citizenship for duty served.

At the end of September 2001, according to a report of the Pew Hispanic Center, there were 109,487 Latinos in the enlisted ranks, representing 9.5% of the active duty enlisted force. They were male and female and distributed across the branches of the military this way:

While the percent of Latinos in the military was lower (9.5%) than the percent of the nation’s total population in 2001 (13.4%), the Pew report indicates that the size of the educationally qualified civilian workforce yields another view of Latinos in the military. According to measures that take into account high school completion or the GED: “Latinos are present in the enlisted military in roughly the same proportion as they are in the qualified civilian workforce.” This measure of the qualified workforce basically excludes Latinos who are not citizens or not legal permanent residents (Pew Hispanic Center, March 27, 2003, Fact Sheet). In a way, this document is for the new American Latinos who are not eligible for the military and the newly naturalized as U.S. citizens, so that they may know their own legacy in America and realize at the same time how Latino patriotism, valor and courage, have strengthened America and all the lives it contains.

In working through this document, look for answers to the following questions: *What is a “Latino Patriot”?* *What stories are unique?* *What stories are given public recognition?* *What do the stories teach us about American values and patriotism?* *Also, what stories are missing?* *Who is missing?* *Do we have information on family and neighbors who served the military and/or participated in times of military conflict as patriots?*

## Not Entirely Forgotten

From the American Revolution to the on-going conflicts against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, Latino Patriots have played an important role in serving the United States of America. That role has been as foot soldier, pilot, ship’s captain, private troop, army sergeant, general, admiral, etc., and in almost every type of service in defense of America. Most patriots who served in the military lived to tell their stories, raise their families and serve their communities. But many also died in combat far from home.

LATINOS IN MILITARY SERVICE, 2001		
<b>SERVICE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>% OF TOTAL</b>
ARMY	38,937	9.73
NAVY	33,316	10.47
MARINE CORPS	21,636	13.99
AIR FORCE	15,598	5.57
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109,487</b>	<b>9.49</b>
<b>GENDER</b>		
MALE	93,420	85.33
FEMALE	16,067	14.67
<b>OFFICERS</b>		
ARMY	2,784	4.30
NAVY	2,436	4.69
MARINE CORPS	851	5.27
AIR FORCE	1,639	2.41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,710</b>	<b>3.84</b>

For Latinos who did not return, there are some notes in the annals of American history, usually scattered in some library stacks of periodicals. Generally, however, there is a dearth of research and public information on Latino military service. Within other places, Latino patriots are remembered in very humble ways. From pictures on the walls and alters in homes to a few neighborhood plaques of recognition. A few hometowns have built parks and added memorabilia to local museums and community centers, integrating Latinos into their communities and heritage. There are a few memorials, such as the one on Hero Street, in Silvis, Ill., just west of Chicago, dedicated to the 84 Mexican-American men who participated in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Eight died in combat. Hero Street is less than two blocks long, originating with 22 families who were former Mexican immigrant workers.

There is the memorial in Santa Fe, N.M., to the victims and rescue mission of the infamous Bataan Death March of World War II, that caught the eye of Hampton Sides and inspired him to write “Ghost Soldiers: the Epic Account of World War II’s Greatest Rescue Mission.” Many of General MacArthur’s soldiers, who were captured by the Japanese in the Philippines, were native Hispanos of New Mexico.

Alexandria, Va., originally a southern city, established a small park and statue during 2001 in the name of the latest Medal of Honor recipient, Capt. Humbert Roque “Rocky” Versace (July 2, 1937 – Sept. 26, 1965), who received posthumously, dozens of years after his bravery in Vietnam, the Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush. However, the residents of Alexandria always believed Versace was Italian American, not realizing that his mother was Puerto Rican and the author of a paperback that was the basis for the TV series on “The Flying Nun.” With considerable pride, we note that Versace was a remarkable hero for all.

The stories of heroes like Versace, who did not return alive, are important for many who served in the military. The tributes and memorials are positive signs for Latinos to know that they, too, can take pride in observing and remembering people, like themselves, who fought for others. More is definitely needed today to commemorate the myriad of stories of Latino valor and patriotism in the name of the United States of America.

## **Where We Are Today**

The U.S. invasion of Iraq began on March 19, 2003 when U.S. forces struck the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. President Bush said the goal was to get rid of weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein could use to kill countless people. The aim was also to remove Hussein from power because of his orders in the past to kill with biological weapons and ruthless abandon.

In Operation Free Iraq, a disproportionate number of Latinos died in combat and in service with American troops. With about 9% of the military in Iraq comprised of Latino soldiers, Latino patriots constituted a death toll of about 30, about 18% of the nearly 200 U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq by July 2003. About half of the fallen Latino military personnel were foreign born Latinos.



In some ways, the mosaic of Latino casualties is a microcosm of today's young Latinos. Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Antonio Gutierrez, 28, was one of the first American soldiers to die in combat in the Iraq war. A *Washington Post* story by Kevin Sullivan (March 28, 2003, A-37) tells us that Jose grew up as an orphan in Guatemala City, a homeless kid who lived off and on the streets until he was 22. He followed the dream of many from Central America by making the difficult journey through Mexico and entering the U.S. illegally. He died a Marine, fighting for a country that was not recognized as his country at the time, yet a country that gave him hope for the future.

Shortly after Gutierrez's death, Pfc. Diego Fernando Rincon, 19, an immigrant from Colombia, died on March 29; he was one of four soldiers killed in a car bombing in Iraq. Rincon volunteered to serve the Army, just after Sept. 11, 2001, saying that he wanted to help fight terrorism. In our closing pages of this book, we pay our sincere respects to his mother and family by including the final letter that young Rincon wrote to his mother just before his fateful day.

Jose Antonio Gutierrez and Diego Fernando Rincon are stark reminders of Latino immigrants who joined American troops to combat terrorism. Their short lives attest to the fact that within the first two weeks of the war in Iraq, eight of the dead, two of the missing, and two prisoners of war had immigrated to the United States, and just four of those were actually U.S. citizens when the war began, according to Goldstein and Moreno of the *Washington Post* ["For Immigrants, a Special Sacrifice: War Takes Toll on Foreign Born in Armed Forces." *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2003, p. A-17].

With the U.S. assault on Iraq moving from the invasion phase into the period of occupation, and the saber rattling continuing to echo out of the Pentagon, it is time to reflect on where the Latino community in the United States finds itself within the larger context of the New World Order.

From one perspective, the number of Latino servicemen has grown faster than any other ethnic group despite a drop of 23% in overall numbers of recruits, reports *U.S. News*. Thirty percent more Latinos have joined the military since 1991. This enrollment is attributable to a large growth in America's Latino population.

The war in Iraq is unique in a morbid way, being the first major U.S. engagement with a full contingent of the press and "virtual TV" coverage. At the same time, the coverage showed the American public that thousands of non-citizens (approximately 3% of enlisted personnel, a third of whom were from Latin America.) were now in the U.S. military.

The Bush administration established a fast track naturalization process for foreign recruits in July 2002 as part of the "war on terror." With that incentive, Latino immigrants led the way in registering for this opportunity to attain legal status with United States. Although Iraq raised the standard for national patriotism to new heights of public awareness, it also gave Americans a chance to see that a growing number in the military were prominently Latino.

The historical fact is that Latinos have served in every combat situation of the United States, dating back to the American Revolution. There are hundreds of thousands of Latinos who served America with great distinction, long before Iraq. They are the unsung heroes whose stories are not yet known. Throughout our history, Latinos have enriched the American way of life, showing love of family, community and the American ideal of serving in the military with extraordinary courage, gallantry, intrepidity, and devotion, for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

## Presenting the Stories

Our stories show that Latinos have stepped into the front lines of our national defense as among the first to heed the call for **DUTY, HONOR, and COUNTRY**, often being **FIRST IN** and the **LAST TO LEAVE**. In documenting this record of patriotism, we have a 3-point approach:

First, we begin by noting that, throughout U.S. history, Americans were called a “patriot” when it was shown that they demonstrated significant valor under fire or during a national crisis. We accept this definition, but also believe that patriotism means much more than combat service.

Second, American patriotism has not been limited to acts of heroism during military service. Today, many are patriots who have rendered significant service in other roles such as police, firemen, public servants, health providers, and other professionals. From our perspective, the contributions by Latinas, who worked in munitions plants, and Latinos, who harvested food in the U.S.-Mexico Bracero program during World War II, were also patriotic Americans. In a period of military conflict of great scale, such as World War II, laborers and field workers formed part of the defense of America, filling-in where needed and giving U.S. farmers and others a chance for serving the war effort.

Of recent note was the intensified effort of Americans to rebuild the Pentagon before the first memorial service on Sept. 11, 2002. The commemoration was held as scheduled and the dedication included the construction crews and volunteers who completed the Pentagon one month ahead of schedule. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle pointed out, at the commemoration, that nearly 40% of the labor came from Latinos of the region who worked overtime and were dedicated to this project.

Third, in the U.S. Latino community, the word “patriot” has a very precise and significant meaning. In this country, which has rarely associated Latinos with the term “patriot,” Latinos have consistently demonstrated that when the U.S. is engaged in a military conflict, they have been often the first to serve with a commitment to win.

The Latino community has a long history of immigration into this country. Latino sons and daughters have not hesitated to defend their family’s honor and have shown their allegiance to this nation through military service. Evident in our stories is that being an immigrant does not deter Latino service and valor in the military. Latino immigrants do not develop split nationalities or loyalties when committed to the American cause of justice, democracy, and human rights. Latino immigrants have often been the most valiant defenders for the United States of America. Many have achieved special recognition, including the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor awarded by the President on behalf of the U.S. Congress.

Clearly, the focus of this project has been to identify Latino patriots who have participated in the military history of the U.S. and Latinos who have been instrumental in helping to determine the outcome of major battles between the U.S. and its enemies.

Perhaps there is a more precise concept for patriotism that we should underscore. Surely others have written on the topic. However, in our study, we did not identify a certain pattern or assembly of traits, or a particular role model that best describes the characteristics of an American patriot. The acts of heroism and valor that we describe have no common core or predictable qualities of loyalty and dedication to America and its people. Instead, we find that patriotism is evident in a wide range of individual circumstance and conditions. Maybe that's the core matter of being patriotic. Patriotism happens, and can happen at any time or place.

Our selection of Latino patriots shows that some of our patriots were probably born to serve the military, such as David G. Farragut and, perhaps, his father, Jorge Farragut. Some of our patriots were raised by foster parents, as well as by parents from other races and cultures. Others had tough lives as youth with no apparent orientation to serve mankind, let alone a fundamental reason to risk their lives for others. We also found that patriotism is gender neutral, a trait shared by men and women who entered into difficult situations. Age is more closely aligned to patriotism, perhaps because of the recruitment of young soldiers between the ages of 18 to 25. Yet some Latino patriots were younger than 18, perhaps as young as 15, when they enlisted for military service during a time of war. Some patriots served for decades in military service. Some were recognized heroes in their later years.

Our depictions of Latino patriots are too short and unsatisfactorily brief compared to the millions of Latinos who served the United States in military conflict. Yet we hope that our selections from history instill pride, awareness, and understanding of U.S. Latinos in defense of America. From what we have learned, U.S. history would have developed differently without the participation of Latinos.

## **Issues With “Hispanic” & “Latino”**

A continuing debate has existed among members of the Hispanic-American population regarding the use of the term “Latino” over the often-preferred term, “Hispanic.” The U.S. Census Bureau uses the term “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably to classify the origin of various self-reported Spanish-speaking groups (Spanish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South American, or “other”), into one ethnic group. U.S. born Americans who identify as Chicano, Boricua, Tejano, Hispano, etc., are also “Latino” according to the Census Bureau. Many people from ‘Hispanic ethnic groups’ prefer to use the term “Latino” for personal, political, and/or social reasons.

A key corollary question is: *How does the U.S. military define “Latino” or “Hispanic?”* Accurate documentation of the participation of Hispanic servicemen and women began after the Vietnam War. Did they base their findings on ‘self-identified’ Hispanics or Hispanics that military officials defined as persons with Spanish surnames? We do not know the answer to this question. Apparently several methods of identification were used, but none of them was specific. This is an important question because it may explain how some patriots of Hispanic descent have been overlooked by U.S. military agencies that maintain statistical records.

For many years the U.S. government and the U.S. military did not keep separate records of the participation of Hispanic-American soldiers. There were areas in the U.S. still under the control of the Spanish and Mexican governments. More recently, at the time of the Korean War in the early 1950s, the U.S. Department of Defense asked new recruits to identify themselves by ethnic background.

Puerto Rican units served with distinction, in the Korean War. However, we know that some Latinos of Puerto Rican heritage were overlooked, as in the recent case of Rocky Versace who fought in the Vietnam War. Versace was also thought to be only an Italian-American given the fame of his father. Prior to WWII, soldiers were categorized along with white Americans in the same racial classification. More accurate data was obtained for Hispanics in the armed forces with the establishment of the Department of Defense in 1949.

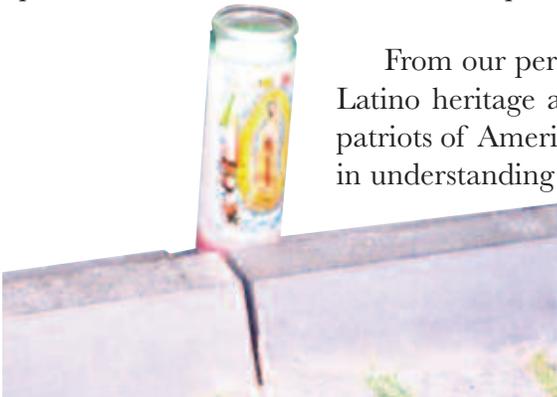
Other questions that comes to our attention: *Does it make a difference in America whether a patriot is Latino or Hispanic? Should patriots be singled out by race and ethnicity?* To answer these questions, we let some of the facts speak for us. First, there is the fact of Latino patriotism that is exceptionally evident and historic. Latinos stand out for military service and extraordinary valor. Contrast that valor with a history of unequal treatment towards them, often treated within the United States as aliens and unqualified for service. Even volunteering for military service was often difficult for Latinos. Medal of Honor recipient David B. Barkeley (World War I) reportedly hid his Mexican mother's Spanish surname in order to gain acceptance into the Army in Texas.

A history of facts indicates that Latinos, especially Mexican-Americans, faced racist slurs, physical abuse, and derision by others simply because of their ethnicity. Latino families were also denied the right to bury their military dead in public "White" cemeteries. There are also accounts of Latino veterans being omitted from parades and celebrations for "American heroes." Moreover, Latinos were sometimes excluded from military history, awards, and public recognitions

The absence of stories and recognition of their patriotism in the nation's museums and archives is another fact about Latino patriots. Docents at the Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. rarely acknowledge Hispanic contributions to America, despite the fact that many who are buried there are Hispanic. There is no public memorial in D.C. with literature or references to Hispanics in American history and service. The sales room at the Library of Congress sells thousands of books annually on U.S. military history, yet not one on Hispanic-Americans.

Notwithstanding these omissions is the historic role of Hispanics on American soil dating back to 1508 when Ponce de Leon explored Puerto Rico and, then, Florida in 1513. On each landing, de Leon claimed the territory for Spain. From that beginning, Spain (and later independent Mexico) flew her sovereign flags over California, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and parts of Utah, until 1849. This span of 336 years, during which time Hispanics built cities, roads, and fortified defenses of America, is a unique accomplishment in American history. Yet, very little is taught in American schools about the heritage from Spain and its descendants in the development of this nation.

From our perspective, the long record of omission, in the face of clear-cut Latino heritage and patriotism, is reason alone to devote attention to Latino patriots of America. If anything, a focus on Latinos could converge a huge gap in understanding the true meaning of American Patriotism.



## The Context of American Wars and Conflicts

The history of the U.S. has been marked by periods of cooperation with other nations to fight a common enemy, known as coalition warfare, or alternately acting alone to pursue political and other goals through military intervention. During the 18th-20th Century, American foreign and military policy alternated between the conservative position that it should avoid foreign entanglements and a more aggressive foreign policy. For example, the U.S. conducted war on its borders as it expanded westward to the Pacific Ocean and to its northern and southern borders with Canada and Mexico, respectively. These conflicts involved Spain, England, France and Mexico on this continent.

The question arises as to the first sign of Latino participation in American wars. *When did that happen?* W. Granville and N.C. Hough have prepared a series of studies on the extensive history of Spanish soldiers who served during the American Revolution and fought against England. They systematically reviewed the record of Spain's patriots in Arizona, California, Louisiana, and Texas. They note that Spain declared war against England on June 21, 1779 and continued operations against England until peace was declared on Sept. 3, 1783.

Granville and Hough also wrote in their preface to *Spain's California Patriots in its 1779-1783 War With England During the American Revolution (Part 2)*: "Our final thought is the same as that expressed by the historian, Herbert E. Bolton, who suggested that The American Revolution can be considered a rather limited affair between a European country and her colonies on the American east coast, or it can be considered alternately as THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, which freed a whole continent from European domination by 1821, and whose ideas are still being used today."

From our perspective, we believe that the American Revolution was continental in its breadth and impact. We therefore support the view that Latino Patriots should include the many who ultimately changed the face of the United States in many ways.

Another question to consider is "What Wars and Conflicts?" U.S. military conflicts include several military events where the U.S. Congress never officially declared war, as required by the Constitution. However, such so-called "police actions" also involved military engagements with countries that resulted in the deaths and capture of American soldiers. An often-cited book on Medal of Honor recipients, *The United States of America's Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients and Their Official Citations*, published by Highland House II in Minnesota, lists 17 wars, campaigns, and/or conflicts in organizing its Congressional citations. Some conflicts of war, like the Indian and Haitian Campaigns, and the "Action Against Outlaws – Philippines, 1911," are part of our nation's military engagement and history. In organizing our text, we focused our study on 14 wars and conflicts. Namely, the following:

- **American Revolution (1775-1783)**
- **War of 1812 (1812-1814)**
- **U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848)**
- **Civil War (1861-1865)**
- **Spanish-American War (1898)**
- **Boxer Rebellion in China (1900)**
- **World War I (1914-1918)**
- **World War II (1939-1945)**
- **Korean War (1950-1953)**
- **Vietnam War (1957-1975)**
- **Operation Desert Shield/Storm (1991)**
- **Bosnia Conflict (1995 - present)**
- **Afghanistan (2001 - present )**
- **Iraq (2003 - present )**

In our coverage of U.S. Latino Patriots, we touch upon the histories and legacies of most, but not all, periods of time when patriots were called to serve U.S. military action. Thus, in the following, we present the stories of “U.S. Latino Patriots: From the American Revolution to Iraq 2003.”

## The American Revolution (1775-1783)

The American Revolution, (1775-1783), also known as the War of Independence, was initially a civil war against the British Empire. Later, France (1778), Spain (1779), and the Netherlands (1780), joined our cause with their common enemy, creating an international war. Sea power was important to both sides, providing flexibility in the conduct of the war.

Spain had earlier established an empire that confirmed it was a world power to be reckoned with. Spain had colonies in almost every section of North America, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. England had defeated Spain in the Seven Years War (1754-1763) and subsequently, Spain was forced to relinquish its colony in Florida to England. However, Hispanics in the U.S. were eager to assist the American colonists in their struggle against England, even though Spain was not, as yet, officially engaged in the conflict. Spain’s military involvement in the early development of the U.S. began the process of demonstrating Hispanic’s loyalty, commitment and patriotism.

After the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the southern populations of Spanish colonists followed closely the course of the American Revolution. In particular, Bernardo de Gálvez was the ever-watchful Governor of New Orleans, responsible for the Spanish territories of Louisiana and the Mississippi River. From 1775-1777, Gov. de Gálvez provided rations and weapons to the Continental Army of the 13 Colonies, to help them against the British forces. In 1777, he arranged safe passage for James Willing, an American agent of the Continental Congress, who led a successful campaign along the Mississippi river harassing British shipping, plantation owners, and military outposts.



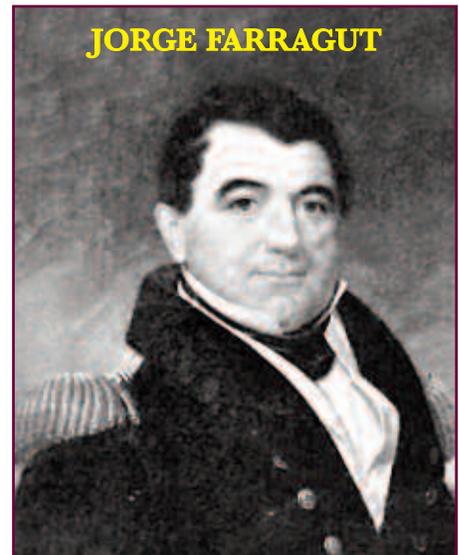
Following the British colonist’s stunning victory against the British at Saratoga, N.Y. in 1778, Spain declared war against Britain on June 21, 1779, intervening directly with its navy and army. Gov. de Gálvez took up the charge and organized a militia of American Indians, freed African-Americans, and his own Spanish regular soldiers to overcome British held forts at Baton Rouge, Fort Manchac, and Fort Panmure at Natchez, Miss. On March 14, 1780, de Gálvez took Mobile, Ala., and, on May 10 1781, gained the formal surrender of Pensacola from the British. Gov. de Gálvez successes made him a General and marked the end of the British threat in the western and southern fringes of the 13 colonies. Thus, General and Governor Bernardo de Gálvez contributed to the cause of the American Revolution a handful of victories, friendship of the Indians, aid to Continental fighters, and control of the Mississippi, which thwarted the British plan to outflank Washington’s armies from the West and South.

In 1976, at the time of the American Bicentennial, an organization, the Order of Gálvez's Grenadiers and Ladies, was founded in San Antonio, Texas, and statues of him were erected in New Orleans and Washington, D.C. Also, the Society of Sons of the American Revolution has since honored the feats of General de Gálvez on many occasions. Galveston, Texas, called "Gálveztown" as early as 1789, takes its name from the revolutionary hero, "Don Bernardo de Gálvez, Spanish Captain General and Governor of Spanish Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama."

General de Gálvez also trained and supported Hispanics who would one day contribute significantly to the defense of the U.S. colonies. One of de Gálvez's officers was Francisco de Miranda, who was born in Caracas, Venezuela on March 28, 1750. Historically, de Miranda fought in the siege and surrender of Pensacola, Florida, and later in the Spanish capture of the Bahamas, which he negotiated as the official representative of the governor of Cuba. While in Cuba, de Miranda played a role in obtaining supplies for the French Admiral de Grasse who then sailed to the Chesapeake Bay to assist the Americans to capture Yorktown, Virginia. As a result of this support for the American Revolution, statues in Washington DC and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a park in Pensacola, Florida and a commuter bus terminal in Chicago, Illinois, were dedicated in honor of de Miranda. He is also regarded as a national hero of Venezuela. His archives in Caracas are a national resource, rich with his notebooks and memorabilia collected during his diplomatic work in Europe and the United States.

Another Hispanic patriot was Captain Jorge Farragut, who came to the U.S. from the Spanish island of Minorca to help the American colonists fight the British during the American Revolutionary War. His son was another famous Latino patriot, David G. Farragut.

The contributions of Hispanics such as Bernardo de Gálvez, Jorge Farragut, and Francisco de Miranda were not uncommon. Other Hispanic people contribute to the American Revolution. There were, for example, Hispanic women. In 1781, the French and American forces were about to abandon their siege of Yorktown, Va., for lack of funds. Cuban women collected money and jewelry so the French Expedition could continue the siege. The financial support from these Hispanic women redefined the term patriot.



## War of 1812

Anglo-American relations deteriorated in the years following the American Revolution when the British attacked American shipping as trade expanded. The war of 1812, which actually lasted until 1814, was sparked by the sinking of U.S. ships and by a U.S. Congress determined to punish the British. Expansionist sentiments prompted attacks into Canada that were firmly repelled. Naval and land engagements took place against a superior British military force. The British burned the White House and significant parts of the nation's capital. The war with England ended in a stalemate with a penniless and divided U.S., revealing a nation militarily unprepared. Capt. Jorge Farragut also fought in the War of 1812 as a member of the U.S. Navy, and further research is needed to identify the Latino patriot's role in this conflict.

## U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848)

After the War of 1812, a steady stream of Anglo-Americans pushed their frontier beyond the Mississippi River, into the western territories of Indians and Mexicans. One prime area was Texas.

During the 1830's Texas-Anglos and *Tejanos* (Mexicans of Texas origin) viewed themselves as residents of an independent republic or as *independistas*. They correctly saw central Mexico as weak and fractured, especially after Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821.

In an asserted effort for independence, Texans were challenged by Mexican authorities in the famous Battle of the Alamo. In this historic battle of 13 days in 1836, a force of about 188 American volunteers had taken refuge within the walls of a compound known as the Alamo Mission, located in San Antonio. The attacking army of about 2,000 Mexican soldiers was commanded by Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna of Mexico City. Nearly all inside the Alamo were killed on March 6. Among the casualties on the American side were seven Mexicans or Tejano patriots who fought bravely against the troops of Santa Anna: Juan Abamillo, Juan Antonio Badillo, Carlos Espalier, Gregorio Esparza, Antonio Fuentes, Calba Fugua, and Jose Maria Guerrero. Rarely does history mention them in the same breath as Col. William Travis, David Crockett, Jim Bowie, and other Anglo-Texans who died defending the fortress. Also, about 600 Mexican soldiers perished while following the command of Santa Anna. What's more, David Crockett's individual last stand has been the subject of much controversy. According to Hatch: "Popular belief has always portrayed that Crockett died bravely, clubbing the soldiers with his rifle when his ammunition had run out until finally being killed. Later accounts by Mexican eyewitnesses have suggested that Crockett surrendered and was subsequently executed" (Encyclopedia, p. 8).

A survivor of the Alamo was Lt.Col. Juan Nepomucene Seguin, a native of Texas, who was sent to gather reinforcements just before the fateful Mexican siege of the mission. After the Battle of the Alamo, Seguin successfully led Texans against the Mexican army in the Battles of San Antonio and San Jacinto. Commended for his actions, Seguin was promoted by Sam Houston to command San Antonio.

Although patriotic to the Texan nation and the 1842 separation of Texas from Mexico, this gallant Tejano fled to Mexico, due to Anglo/Texan enmity against him. Feeling betrayed by the white-Texans who taunted him without mercy as being an alien, he later joined the Mexican side against the forces of the United States that were sent by President James K. Polk in a declared of war against Mexico. The U.S. act was known as "Manifest Destiny," or the supposed inevitability of the continued territorial expansion of U.S. boundaries westward to the Pacific, and even beyond. The concept was later used by American expansionists to justify U.S. annexation of other countries' territories.

In 1845, the U.S. annexed Texas from Mexico. Mexico retaliated and the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848, began.

The annexation fueled divisions within Texas, especially among Tejanos, many of whom resented the Anglos taking control of their culture and communities. On the other hand, many Mexicans living within Texas strongly opposed the Mexican government's treatment of themselves as self-proclaimed Texans. Thus, Tejanos were torn apart; some allied themselves with Texans and some with Mexicans.



**LT.COL. JUAN SAGUIN**

After the U.S.–Mexico War, Seguin served as a justice of the peace, election precinct chairman, and co-founder of the Democratic Party in Bexar County, Texas. In 1858, his memoirs appeared in his defense against those Anglo American families of Texas, who treated him as a Mexican-alien traitor. From his point of view, he was the victim and was always a patriotic Texan, having defended the land of his birth against Mexico, during and after the fall of the Alamo. Reviews of his fascinating life and memoirs are in the book by Jesus F. de la Teja, published by the Texas State Historical Association, 2002. Seguin retired to Nuevo Laredo, died, and was buried there in 1870. He was then, and is today, a Latino patriot of great distinction, conviction, and valor.

Many other Latinos fought on the U.S. side and performed gallantly and loyally for the American cause during the Mexican War. It was a time of tremendous pressure for Tejanos, in particular, that grew-up with the bilingual and bicultural heritage and traditions as Texans of Mexican descent.

In retrospect, the U.S. War with Mexico is generally described as a huge land grab in that Mexico ceded nearly one-half of its national territory to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. The United States added nearly a third its current size by gaining the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, parts of Oklahoma and assuredly Texas. Some of the tension between U.S. born Tejanos of Mexican heritage (sometimes referred to as “Tex-Mex”) and Anglo-immigrants did not disappear with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. It can be said that the border between Anglo-Whites and Tejanos remains in the hearts and feelings of many.

Today, the region of the U.S.-Mexican border is an environment of many Latino patriots. Regardless of the important line of demarcation between today’s neighboring countries, the acts of Juan Nepomuceno Seguin and other Latinos who fought on behalf of America’s defense proved without a doubt that patriotism cannot be relegated alone to White-Anglo-Americans. Patriotism is also in the hearts and commitment of Latino men and women who have sought liberty, human rights and justice for all Americans. From our perspective, men and women like Seguin served as American patriots to the end, despite poor treatment and discrimination in their homeland.

## **U.S. Civil War (1861-1865)**

Slavery was the primary and oft-repeated cause of the Civil War between the northern and 11 southern states that seceded from the Union. The key issue was whether slavery would be allowed to spread to the western territories acquired after the Mexican War (1846-1848). These included New Mexico, parts of California, and Utah. Those from the industrial North and the agrarian West were opposed to slavery and wanted to avoid competition from slave labor. The election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860 threatened the plantation system in the South and the institution of slavery.

Although slavery is the most reported pretext for the Civil War, the fact of the matter is that the American Civil War involved Cuba, Mexico, and U.S. Latinos to a considerable degree. Of the vast body of literature written on the U.S. Civil War, very little has been devoted to the contribution of Latinos on both sides in this devastating military conflict. The participation of Mexican-Americans is recounted in *Vaqueros in Blue and Gray*. The Cubans are factored into: *Cubans in the Confederacy*. In other publications, more has been written about Loreta Janeta Velazquez than any other Latino patriot, probably because of her importance to the history of women in the military.

The 1860 U.S. Census reported there were approximately 27,500 Mexican-Americans living in the U.S. at that time. When the Civil War erupted between the states in 1861, the Mexican communities were suddenly divided into different factions, both for and against the war. There were also approximately 2,500 Mexican-Americans in the Texas territory and across the southwest, who joined Confederate military units. On the other hand, another 1,000 Mexican-Americans joined the Union forces. In all, as many as 9,900 Mexican-Americans fought during the Civil War. Most volunteers served in integrated regular army or volunteer units. Others served in Mexican units with their own officers. These all-Mexican units tended to be volunteer militia units.

By 1860, Cuba also was viewed, in the words of Tucker: "...a potential threat and a potential territory and eventual state in the Union." In addition, notes Tucker: "On the eve of the Civil War, the Democratic Party demanded the annexation of Cuba, a factor leading to the split in the party that helped to pave the way for Lincoln's election as president. In this way, Cuba contributed significantly to the polarization of North and South, helping to pave the way for armed conflict among brothers. These factors helped to set the stage for the forgotten role of Cubans in the American Civil War" [Tucker, p.4].

Cubans, who had moved to the United States in order to study and establish professional careers, found themselves split into two sides of the war — some for the North and some for the South. In the north were Cubans like Lt.Col. Cavada, who was born in Cienfuegos, Cuba, to a Cuban father and an American woman from Philadelphia. Cavada was both an engineer and expert artist. He put his skills to use by flying aloft in hot air balloons near the battle lines of the enemy. From there he sketched enemy troops and helped the Union forces. He was captured during the Battle of Gettysburg and sent to Libby Prison in Richmond, Va. He kept and hid notes and sketches during his captivity. After his release in 1864, the recollections were published in *Libby Life*, a book about his cruel treatment and harsh conditions.

Others on the Northern side included volunteers of New Mexico, under Lt. Manuel Chaves, nicknamed "El Leoncito, the Little Lion." His troops met invading Confederates in March 1862 and won a difficult battle at Glorieta Pass of the Sante Fe Trail. The fighting was fierce and one Confederate described one scene in a letter to his wife:

*Once they [the Union soldiers] came to what I supposed was certain destruction, but nothing like lead or iron seemed to stop them... In a moment these devils had run the gauntlet [survived the ordeal] for a half mile and were fighting hand to hand with our men on the road (quoted in Globe Fearon, p. 153).*

Chaves captured the Confederate's supply train, destroyed the wagons and supplies, and forced the Texas Confederates to limp back home along the Rio Grande. The Confederacy never tried to take New Mexico again. Today, the victory by Chaves is proudly referred to by New Mexican Hispanos as the Gettysburg of the West, almost as significant in military history as the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania in 1863, where the Union forces stopped the Confederates from invading the North.

In 1863, the North's U.S. Government authorized California's military commander to raise four companies of native Mexican-American Californians in order to take advantage of their skills as horseman. As a result, the First Battalion of Native Cavalry was created with Maj. Salvador Vallejo in command. Some 500 Mexican-Americans served in the four companies of the First Battalion of Native Cavalry. These men were stationed at locations throughout the states of California and Arizona. They guarded supply trains, chased bandits, fought Confederate raiders, and helped defend New Mexico against Confederate incursions.

In addition, Col. Miguel E. Pino commanded the Second Regiment of New Mexico Volunteers. In addition, six other independent militia companies were formed. Most unit members were Mexican-Americans, as were their commanders. They served in roles similar to the California units, primarily as border guards and fought in numerous small engagements. There were an estimated 4,000 Mexican-Americans among the New Mexico Volunteers. Patriots, like Gen. Stanilus Montoya, commanded the Socorro County, New Mexico militia. Another non-Texan unit with a number of Spanish speaking soldiers was the 55th New York militia, “The Garde Lafayette.”

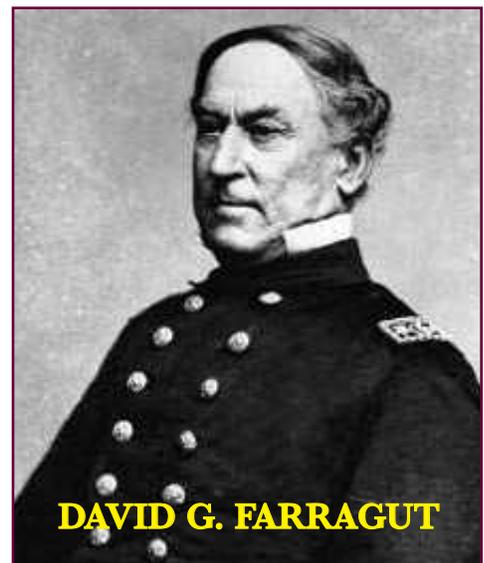
In the state of Texas, the Union raised 12 companies of Mexican-American cavalrymen, consolidated into the First Regiment of Texas Cavalry. Most of the officers were non-Hispanic, although several Mexican Texans (Tejanos) served as captains, such as George Trevino, Clemente Zapata, Cesario Falcon, and Jose Maria Martines, and lieutenants, such as Ramon Garcia Falcon, Antonio Abad Dias, Santos Cadena, and Cecilio Vela.

Another important patriot of the North was Luis Fenellosa Emilio, born in Salem, Mass., of Spanish immigrant parents. He was a company commander in the famous 54th Massachusetts (“Colored”) Regiment. One of the few officers who survived the charge on Fort Wagner, S.C., later became the Regiment’s commander. His memoirs, *A Brave Black Regiment*, are the basis for the Academy Award-winning film, “Glory.” This regiment of Black soldiers was known for its valor and extremely courageous acts in defense of Abraham Lincoln’s Northern troops.

Perhaps the most famous Hispanic patriot during the Civil War was Adm. David G. Farragut (FAR-uh-guht). Two of Washington D.C.’s Metro Stations are now named in his honor: Farragut North and Farragut West. A plaza between the Metro stations holds a prominent statue of Adm. Farragut, designating him as one of America’s Civil War heroes and a personal favorite of President Lincoln.

Farragut is not known generally for his Hispanic background, probably because he was born in Knoxville, Tenn., and had an unusual last name. Nonetheless, his Hispanic heritage is established through his father, Jorge Farragut, who came to the American colonies from the Spanish island of Minorca during the American Revolution. Jorge Farragut joined the Carolina Navy, became a lieutenant, and fought the British at Savannah and Charleston. David G. Farragut was born in 1801 and named James at birth. After his mother’s death, young Farragut, with the consent of his father, was adopted by Navy Capt. David Porter, and took the name David in Porter’s honor.

When David G. was nine years old he was appointed a midshipman in the U.S. Navy on Capt. Porter’s ship. At 11, he served aboard the U.S.S. Essex during the War of 1812 against the British. He later fought pirates in the Caribbean region and in the war with Mexico, 1846-48. On July 26, 1866, David G. Farragut was named the Navy’s first Full-Admiral by President Abraham Lincoln, a rank awarded to him by the U.S. Congress after victories against the Confederate forces on the Gulf of Mexico, in New Orleans, and along the Mississippi River. It was his victory at



**DAVID G. FARRAGUT**

Mobile Bay on Aug. 5, 1864 where his fame was solidified. After seeing the ironclad U.S.S. Tecumseh sunk by floating “torpedoes” of “gunpowder in barrels,” Farragut took command with his wooden vessel and shouted this famous order: “*Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!*” Other ships followed this brave leader and soon captured the ironclad *Confederate Tennessee* and the fort defending Mobile. This southern port was in Union control for the remainder of the war.

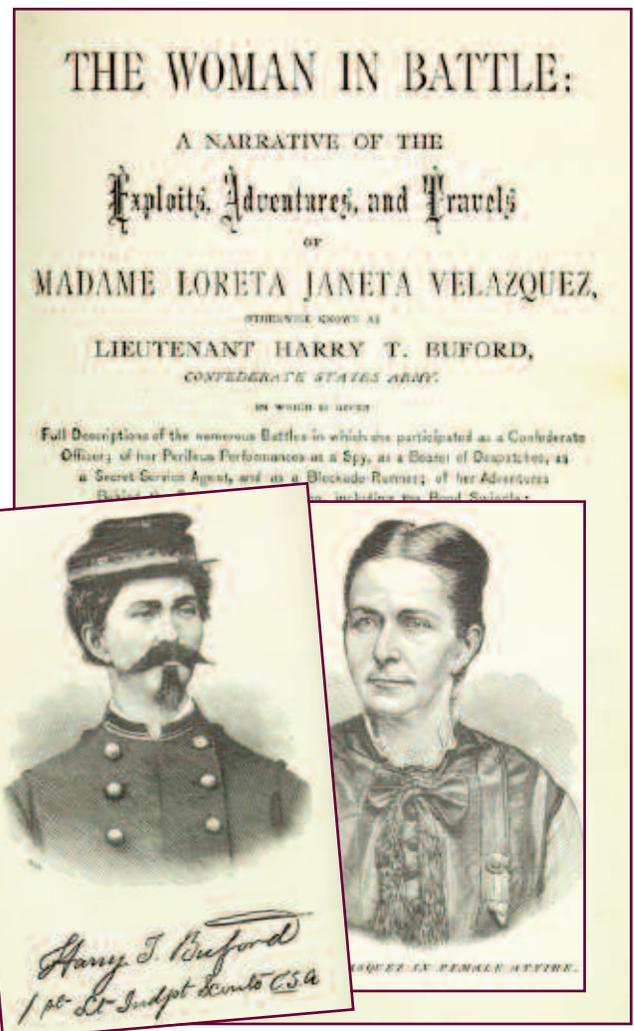
The Naval Academy’s library and museum contain many of Adm. Farragut’s memorabilia, including his signature under his oath as a cadet, signed on Dec. 19, 1810 when he was nine years old. There is also a reproduction of the plaque on the destroyer U.S.S. Farragut, summarizing his life. David G. Farragut, 1801-1870, will always be known in the American annals as the U.S. Navy’s First: Two Star Rear Admiral (1862), Three Star Vice Admiral (1864), and Four Star Full-Admiral (1866).

The South also had its share of Latino Patriots. The highest ranked Latino was Col. Santos Benavides, a former Texas Ranger, who commanded the Confederate States of America’s 33rd Texas Cavalry during the Civil War. This Mexican-American unit defeated Union forces in the 1864 Battle of Laredo, Texas.

A very unusual historical figure was a woman named Loreta Janeta Velasquez who was born in Cuba. During the Civil War, she masqueraded as a Confederate soldier using the name of Lt. Harry T. Buford, enlisting in 1860 without her soldier-husband’s knowledge. According to her controversial biography and the confirmation of others, she fought fearlessly at the Battles of Bull Run, Ball’s Bluff and Fort Donelson, but was detected in New Orleans and discharged.

Loreta Velasquez re-enlisted and fought at the Battle of Shiloh until rediscovered. She spied in both male and female disguises and her bravery in the Civil War showed extraordinary courage and commitment.

Her biography can be read in the book, *The Woman In Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States Army,*” edited by C.J. Worthington, 1876. It should be mentioned that some men of her generation refute her case, arguing that it was impossible for a women to hide her body and womanly ways. The arguments have been countered by men and women who say that the soldiers of the time could maintain privacy and bathed alone using buckets of water when possible. Such accounts make for interesting debates of the Civil War.



## The Spanish-American War and Related Incidents (1898)

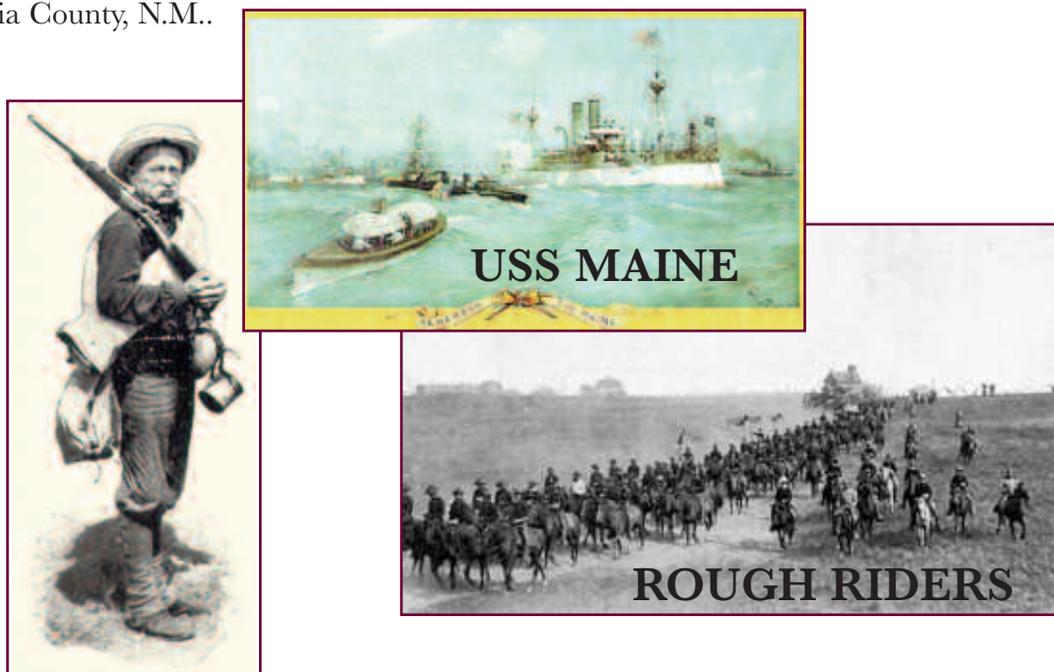
During the brief Spanish-American War, the main conflict was between the U.S. and Spain. Within months it had spread to other Spanish possessions throughout the Western Hemisphere and Asia.

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. In 1826 and 1835, Cubans initiated at least two unsuccessful armed revolts against Spain. Later, failed attempts in the 1840's to gain their freedom were supported by Cuban refugees in the U.S. By the 1890's, several U.S. groups, comprised of former Cuban refugees and other interests, gathered national momentum to free Cuba from Spain. Some American leaders and businessmen wanted President McKinley to help Cuba renounce its mother country. American investors reportedly lost fortunes in the conflict. Spain loomed as a thorn in the side of American prosperity.

Then, on Feb. 15, 1898, war fury escalated when the U.S. learned of the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana Harbor and the heavy loss of 260 American sailors. On April 11, the U.S. declared war on Spain. The war lasted four months, caused the deaths of another 460 American soldiers and resulted in the U.S. paying Spain \$20 million to vacate not only Cuba, but also Guam, Puerto Rico, and the 7,100 archipelago of the Philippines.

Among the U.S. forces that landed in Cuba in 1898 was the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry under Col. Leonard Wood and Lt.Col. Theodore Roosevelt. The "Rough Riders" reflected American diversity with about 5% recent immigrants, and 20% of the troops from Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

Many Hispanic patriots served in the "Rough Riders" with Theodore Roosevelt. Among them were Pvt. John B. Alamia, Sgt. George W. Armijo, Pvt. G.W. Aringo, Pvt. Jose M. Baca, Pvt. Frank C. Brito, Pvt. Jose Brito, Pvt. Abel B. Duran, Pvt. Joseph L. Duran, Capt. Maximiliano Luna, and Saddler Joe T. Sandoval. Of all these Latino patriots, perhaps Capt. Luna was the most distinguished Latino member of the "Rough Riders." He was descended directly from conquistadors who settled New Mexico in 1650 and his family had lived along the Rio Grande River since the 17th Century. He studied at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and joined the "Rough Riders" at the age of 38. He served earlier as a sheriff in Valencia County, N.M..



The Monroe Doctrine, enunciated in 1823 by President James Monroe, sought to prohibit European nations from interfering in the events and actions of Latin American nations. In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, the U.S. intervened several times in the affairs of Latin American nations. President Theodore Roosevelt, in 1904, established the so-called “Roosevelt corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. This new doctrine stated that the U.S. reserved the right to intervene in Latin American nations that experienced internal disorder or economic ills.

Encouraged by its ability to wrest Cuba from Spanish control and impose its will in 1898, the United States embarked on its own imperialist road. Puerto Rico and Guam were occupied. By December, the U.S. Navy, along with diplomatic pressures, dislodged the Spanish from the Philippines. Unlike the occupation of Cuba, which eventually led to its independence, the U.S. presence in the Philippines was opposed by significant segments of the Filipino population. Although Filipinos were barred from the U.S. negotiations with Spain, the U.S. decided to take control of their country. Historically, Filipino descendants from that period can consider themselves Hispanic. They spoke and studied in Spanish and inter-bred with the Spanish for nearly three centuries. This part of history is important because it ties to the period of World War II when U.S. Spanish-speaking troops, mostly of Mexican descent, fought with Filipino guerrillas for their liberation from the Japanese.

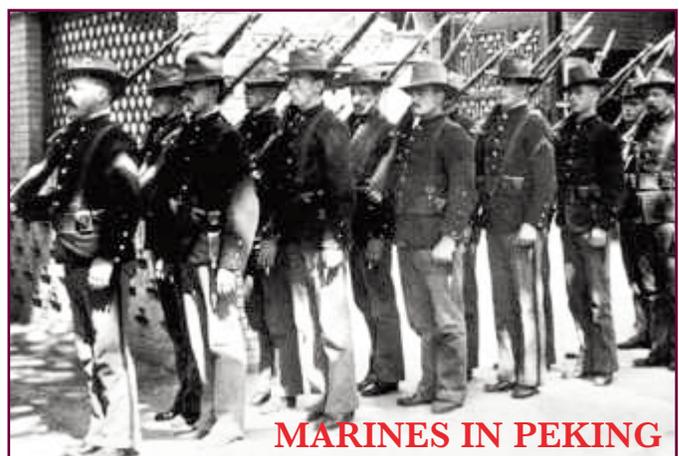
In 1903, the U.S. intervened in the Panama Canal Zone that, at the time, was part of Colombia. The country later seceded from Colombia to allow the U.S. to construct the Panama Canal. A year later the U.S. intervened in the Dominican Republic, presumably to restore the financial credit of that nation. Over the next decade, the U.S. got involved in the domestic and foreign affairs of Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. By 1930, the U.S. State Department repudiated the Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

The numerous contributions of Latino patriots at the time of the U.S. war with Spain serve as reminders that Latino patriots have also fought against aggressors in Latin America and the Caribbean. They fought gallantly on the side of the U.S. in order to preserve the principles of democracy first established at the time of the American Revolution. Years after the war, George Armijo became a member of the U.S. Congress while a military camp at Las Vegas, N.M. was named after Capt. Luna. These patriots served the U.S. with distinction through their military service, paved the way for participation by other Latino patriots in future wars.

Ironically, to this day, investigators have never definitively fixed the loss of the Maine on Spain. Today, Spain is a close ally of the United States in its war against terrorism.

## **The 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China**

In 1900, the U.S. occupied the Philippines. In that same year, a rebel force determined to remove foreigners spread across China. Subsequently, the U.S. joined a coalition force to free embassies that were under siege in Peking and other Chinese cities. The decision to take part in this international effort led by the U.S. and Great Britain, resulted in



the formulation of the U.S. Open Door Policy – a policy that sought to preserve trade and oppose dividing up China by various occupying nations that included Japan and Russia.

Latino patriots participated in the Boxer Rebellion in which patriots such as France Silva, Private, U.S. Marine Corps, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery and heroic actions. In Peking, from June 28 to Aug. 17, 1900, Private Silva secured order in situations that could have jeopardized the safety of his fellow soldiers. He, along with his fellow marines and sailors, helped to preserve and maintain security until the coalition armies relieved them.

## **World War I (1914-1918)**

When the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, three years after the war began in Europe, it was not in the role of ally but as an “associated power.” These semantics reflected the majority of U.S. public opinion against abandoning the nation’s isolationist policy, the dominant outlook of the time.

The U.S. Army had only about 200,000 active personnel at the beginning of the war. An Act of Congress was passed in 1917 to obtain needed manpower and about 3.8 million men were drafted into military service. In 1910, the total U.S. population was almost 92 million people. Of these, 13.3 million were foreign-born, while another 12.9 million Americans had two foreign-born parents. Latinos were eager to serve in the U.S. armed forces with the outbreak of W.W. I. They included both native born, mostly of Mexican descent, and new immigrants from Latin America, Mexico and Spain. About one-third of the U.S. population consisted of recent immigrants, and undoubtedly many spoke little or no English.

Training Latino patriots for military service was difficult insofar as these men lacked English language skills. Since the U.S. military was engaged in the war in Europe, however, it needed fighting men immediately. The U.S. went ahead and recruited Hispanics and offered them intensive training at Camp Gordon, Georgia. The training of soldiers with limited English language skills was known as the “Camp Gordon Plan.” More than 4,000 Hispanics were trained for military service, but were often relegated to menial jobs and were ridiculed by their English-speaking military peers. Most Hispanic draftees were trained at Camp Cody, New Mexico and at seven other camps. Hispanic recruits were grouped according to their language proficiency and were assigned officers who could speak Spanish. World War I ended before the implementation of much of the English language training for Hispanic recruits.

During World War I one young Hispanic soldier, Nicolas Lucero, a 19-year-old from Albuquerque, New Mexico, received the French Croix de Guerre for his brave action in destroying two German machine gun emplacements and maintaining, for three hours, a constant fire against enemy positions.



Private Marcelino Serna, a Latino patriot, enlisted in the Army and was sent to fight in the trenches of France. He was shot by a German soldier and seriously wounded. Private Serna was able to continue fighting and subsequently captured 24 German soldiers. He even managed to protect them from execution by other U.S. soldiers. For his actions, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and later was decorated with the French Croix de Guerre, the Victory Medal with three bars, and twice, with the Purple Heart.

Another distinguished Latino patriot during World War I was David Barkeley, Private U.S. Army, who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. He was on a mission behind the enemy German lines on Nov. 9, 1918. He volunteered to swim across the Meuse River to reconnoiter the exact location of the enemy. He succeeded in reaching the opposite bank, despite the evident determination of the enemy to prevent a crossing. Having obtained his information, he again entered the water for his return, but before his goal was reached, he was seized with cramps and drowned. Many did not know that David's mother was Mexican, a fact he hid in order to join the Army. At the time, Mexicans of Texas, where David was from, faced discrimination and exclusion.

After World War I economic activity declined and a serious recession followed in the early 1920's. By the mid-1920s, a new period of prosperity in the U.S. helped many in the Hispanic community. That help was short-lived. Within a decade the Great Depression uprooted U.S. economic life. In the early 1930's, the U.S. adopted a repressive anti-immigration policy against "Mexicans," using mass deportation roundups and repatriation that forced many established Hispanics from their homes and separated families. These events during the depression (1929-late 1930's) were motivated by the insecurity of European Americans who believed that Mexicans had taken scarce jobs from them. Mexicans were deprived of their jobs and their many past contributions to the military and the nation were ignored.

## **World War II (1939-1945)**

The controversial U.S. policy toward immigrants, however, did not prevent or discourage Latinos from participating in the next major military conflict, World War II, against the totalitarian regimes of Germany, Japan, and Italy. The European policy of appeasement pursued by England and France in its relations with Germany during the 1930s achieved no lasting protection for these nations as they had hoped. Appeasement was unmasked as a diplomatic and political failure that came to an abrupt end with the invasion of Poland by the German army on Sept. 1, 1939. World War II had begun.

The U. S. entered World War II on Dec. 8, 1941, following the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by an armada of Japanese airplanes. Other U.S. military installations also were attacked, such as ships and aircraft in Manila, the Philippines. The U.S. declaration of war with Japan was extended to include Germany and Italy on Dec. 10, 1941, after they declared war on the U.S. The attack on Pearl Harbor, in particular, shook the U.S. out of its isolationism and, ultimately,

forced it into the forefront of world powers.



## **ISLAND FIGHTING IN THE PACIFIC**

Short of direct military engagement, the U.S. supplied materiel and ordnance to its allies, England and France, between 1939 and 1941, despite strong non-intervention sentiment. Nazi Germany's military forces advanced rapidly across Western Europe after it invaded Poland and then parts of its army swept east across Europe and invaded Russia on June 22, 1941. The U.S. fought in World War II until the formal surrender of Nazi Germany on May 9, 1945, and later the formal surrender of Japan on Aug. 14, 1945. The Japanese surrender took place at sea on the U.S.S. Missouri, under the supervision of General Douglas MacArthur, following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945 and Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945 by the 509th Bomb Group, commanded by Colonel Paul Tibbets. The Army Air Force bombers were from the B-29 "Superfortress" class — the "Enola Gay" and the "Box Car," respectively.

Japanese cities had already been heavily bombed by conventional warfare. The morning of Aug. 6 in Hiroshima seemed perfectly normal, with workers and children on their way to their offices, schools, or to join disaster work teams in the city. The bright flash of this new atomic weapon heralded the beginning of a new era of warfare and brought an unexpected finality to everything that had gone before. The destiny of nations and the role of the U.S. as a world leader were radically altered as a result of the bombings on Aug. 6, and Aug. 9, 1945.

An estimated 250,000 to 500,000 Hispanics served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II. More than 65,000 Puerto Ricans are estimated to have served in the military during the period 1940-1946. However, there is a lack of systematic documentation because records were incomplete as they related to the ethnic backgrounds of soldiers.

Hispanics served in all theaters of conflict during World War II. In the Pacific theater, Hispanics served primarily on the Philippine Islands and other U.S. Pacific territories. When the Japanese forces first attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on Dec. 7, 1941, the first U.S. casualties included Sgt. Felipe Trejo of Santa Fe, New Mexico and Epimenio Rubi of Winslow, Arizona.

There were several National Guard units made up primarily of Mexican-Americans that came from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Most Latinos were placed in regular military units, except the 65th Infantry regiment from Puerto Rico. Notably, about 200 Puerto Rican women served in the Women's Army Corps, created to fill needed non-combat roles.

The New Mexico National Guard, comprised of one-third Hispanics, was "the first to fire" on Japanese enemies in the Philippines Islands after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. After four months of heavy combat, with supplies exhausted, malaria widespread, and without reinforcements, the U.S. and Filipino soldiers defending the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines were overwhelmed by superior Japanese military forces and taken as prisoners on the infamous "Bataan Death March." In the words of those who survived, "we did not surrender, we were surrendered." In March 1942, not long after MacArthur fled the fall of Corregidor, in the Philippines saying, "I shall return," there were approximately 16,000 captured U.S. soldiers on this fatal trek from the Bataan Peninsula near Manila Bay. The



Japanese soldiers were not prepared to handle this many prisoners and transportation, food or medical supplies were lacking. They forced their prisoners to march up the Bataan Peninsula some 85 miles to prison camps. They killed American troops who fell or stopped walking. During this “death march,” of up to 10 days, fewer than 10,000 U.S. soldiers and some thousand of their Filipino allies survived. On this tragic march, the soldiers that died were mostly from New Mexico units. They were moved to prison camps where some of the prisoners kept accounts of their mistreatment, the brutality, disease, and malnutrition, lasting nearly three years, until rescued by so-called: “Ghost Soldiers,” in December 1945,



a term coined by author Hampton Sides (2001). Today, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, there is a modest collection to remember the men of the 200th Coast Artillery Regiment, in the Bataan Memorial Museum. In the end, General Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippines and took command of Japan after their defeat in 1945. He had stated that New Mexican bravery accounted for slowing down the Japanese advance so that the Philippine nation had time to organize a massive counter offensive and victory.

During the Pacific campaign, the 158th Regimental Combat Team (a largely Hispanic National Guard unit from Arizona) adopted the term “cuidado” which means “take care” as their motto. When the U.S. entered World War II, the unit was sent to Panama to guard the Panama Canal Zone. They were moved in January 1943 to Brisbane, Australia, where they saw combat in 1943 at Milne Bay, Kiriwina Island, Port Moresby, and Arawe — all in New Guinea. The 158th then fought their way on to Wake and Noemfoor Islands — all in New Guinea during 1944 and then to the Lingayen Gulf, Batangas and Legaspi, Luzon, in the Philippines during 1945. Finally, this heroic regiment reached Yokohama, Japan as military combatants. They were among the first U.S. units to see action in the Pacific and were referred to by General Douglas MacArthur as “the greatest fighting combat team ever deployed for battle.”



**CLETO RODRIGUEZ**

Other units with large numbers of Hispanic participants in the Philippines included groups such as the 148th Infantry Regiment, of the 37th Infantry Division, in which San Antonio’s Private Cleto Rodriguez, U.S. Army, received the Medal of Honor for personally killing 82 enemy soldiers in two and a half hours of fierce fighting, face to face, on Feb. 9, 1945. Two days later, Pvt. Rodriguez again enabled his comrades to advance when he single-handedly killed 6 Japanese and destroyed a well-placed 20-mm gun.

Other heroes include Private First Class Manuel Perez of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the 11th Airborne Division, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for destroying 11 Japanese pillboxes on Luzon in the Philippines. In the reduction of these pillboxes he single handedly killed 18 of the enemy in hand to hand combat, rushing the Japanese with his rifle and fixed bayonet, entering their trenches and seizing their rifles, with heroic disregard of grave danger. He made possible the advance of his unit toward their objective, providing a lasting inspiration of valor.

Other examples are Staff Sergeant Ismael Villegas and Private First Class David Gonzales of the 127th Infantry Regiment of the 32nd Infantry Division. Both received Medals of Honor for their action on the Villa Verde Trail in Luzon, in March and April 1945. Villegas of Casa Blanca, Calif., charged from one to another foxhole, five in all, firing and destroying the enemy single handedly, until he was hit and killed by enemy fire. Gonzales of Pacoima, Calif., saw a 500-pound bomb smash into the company's perimeter, burying 5 men with its explosion. Without hesitation, he seized an entrenching tool and under a hail of fire crawled 15 yards to his entombed comrades and succeeded in digging three men out under a hail of fire before being hit and mortally wounded.



**DAVID GONZALES**

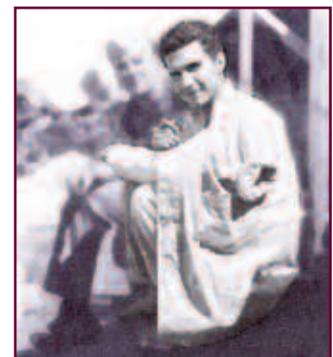
Sergeant Alejandro Ruiz from the 165th Infantry Regiment, of the 27th Infantry Division, received the Medal of Honor for his bravery in Okinawa. This native of Loving, New Mexico, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, trained as a mortar crewman, a Japanese translator, and a scout observer. On April 28, 1945, when his squad was pinned down under a hail of machine gun fire, he jumped to his feet, seized an automatic rifle and lunged through flying grenades and rifle and automatic fire. When his gun jammed and an enemy soldier attacked him, Pfc. Ruiz whirled on his assailant and clubbed him down. Then he ran back through bullets and grenades, seized more ammunition and returned again, killing 12 of the enemy and completely destroying the position. He later received amphibious training and was sent to Saipan on June 15, 1944. He also received a Silver Star while serving as a Japanese interpreter.



**ALEJANDRO RUIZ**

Guy "Gaby" Gabaldon (Gah-ball-doon), with heritage from New Mexico, was later responsible for personally capturing over 1,000 Japanese and forcing them to surrender to the U.S. military on Saipan. He was able to do this with first hand knowledge of the Japanese "Bushido Code," which called for banzai attacks and suicide rather than capture by one's enemies.

Born in 1926 and raised by the Japanese-American family named Nakona in East Los Angeles, Calif., he learned Kana (the Japanese alphabet) and some Kanji (ideograms) and spoke limited Japanese. With his Japanese language skills, Gabaldon showed tough bravery by entering caves and communicating with enemy Japanese soldiers and forcing their surrender. As a scout from regimental intelligence he was also wounded in action and killed 33 Japanese who fought back. In his book, Gabaldon wrote: "The Marine Corps did a good job indoctrinating us to kill without emotion – to kill to stay alive – to kill to win the war...I captured the enemy, not by telling them that I loved them, but by telling them I would blow their heads off if they did not surrender." (Gabaldon, 1990, p.8).



**GABBY GABALDON**

For his determined efforts, Marine Private Gaby Gabaldon was awarded the Navy Cross, the second-highest Marine Service award. He became a celebrated hero in the U.S., which led to his appearance on the popular TV show, "This Is Your Life" in 1957 and a 1960 movie depicting his actions at Saipan titled "From Hell To Eternity." Gabaldon later wrote an autobiographical account of his experiences in the

Marine Corps and his heroic deeds in capturing over 1,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians titled, "Saipan: Suicide Island." In his book, Gaby Gabaldon describes how his two Japanese-American "brothers" joined the U.S. armed forces in the European campaign, but his foster parents and sister were sent to a U.S. detention center.

Latinos also served in the Aleutians, in the Northeastern Pacific, a defensive line intended to help protect Alaska from invasion by Japanese forces. Military action in the Aleutians resulted in honoring Private Joe Martinez, the first Hispanic recipient of the Medal of Honor during World War II. Martinez was a native of Taos, New Mexico and was drafted in August 1942 and was trained at Camp Roberts, Calif. He was assigned to a unit in the 7th Infantry Division and on May 11, 1943, he landed on Red Beach with his fellow soldiers at Holtz Bay, Attu island at the western end of the Aleutian chain. Japanese soldiers attacked his unit fifteen days later after they landed at Holtz Bay. Private Martinez, took the initiative and led his comrades on a counter attack. When they were pushed back, Private Martinez again led the charge against the enemy. On two separate occasions, he went into the enemy trenches to dislodge them. He was mortally wounded on his second attempt, the key event that gave his combat unit the determination to drive the enemy back from their position.



**JOSEPH P. MARTINEZ**

Another excellent example of a Hispanic patriot is Donald S. Lopez who served in the U.S. Army Air Force in China and Burma while defending our ally China that had been occupied by Japan. Since the 1930s, the Japanese had aggressively expanded their dominion across many parts of Southeast Asia. Donald Lopez flew Curtiss P-40s and North American P-51s as a "Flying Tiger" under General Claire Chennault during 1943-1944 at which time he became an "Ace" after downing five Japanese aircraft in aerial combat.

Lopez's other military assignments included five years as a fighter test pilot, a short combat tour flying North American F-86s in Korea, and five years at the U.S. Air Force Academy as an Associate Professor of Aeronautics and Chief of Academic Counseling. More recently, he served as Deputy Director at the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, from 1983 to 1990, and was reappointed in 1996.



**DONALD S. LOPEZ**

Latino soldiers also fought and died in the Mediterranean campaign of 1943. One notable combat unit was the 141st Infantry Regiment that had evolved from the original 2nd Texas Volunteers that fought in the Texas Revolution of 1836. In particular, Company E of the 141st had a high concentration of Hispanics and had already seen its share of action in the Mediterranean. The men of the 141st Infantry regiment fought through 361 days of combat during World War II. Of these, they spent about 141 days in Italy, 209 days in France, 17 days in Germany and four days in Austria. They suffered more than 6,000 casualties including 1,126 killed, 5,000 wounded and over 500 missing in action. This group received numerous citations for valor and courage, including three Medals of Honor, 31 Distinguished Service Crosses, 12 Legions of Merit, 492 Silver Stars, 11 Soldier's Medals, and 1,685 Bronze Stars.

In a related story, the 142nd Infantry Regiment included a contingent of Hispanic soldiers, some of whom were cited for their heroism. Among these soldiers was Sergeant Manual Gonzales from Fort Davis, Texas. Sergeant Gonzales located the position of a German 88mm gun used to provide heavy resistance against U.S. Forces landing on the shores of Salerno, Italy. The enemy opened fire as he approached their position. Gonzales threw several grenades when he was close enough, even as German grenades were thrown at him. Although severely wounded, he was able to destroy the enemy's position. Sergeant Gonzales was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism.

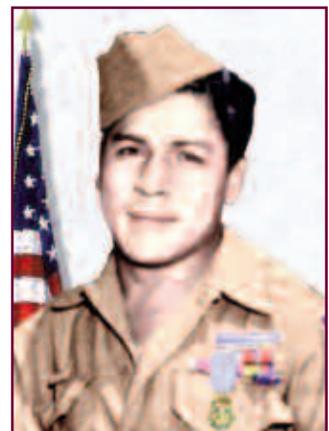
However, Hispanic soldiers not only engaged in battlefield action but also performed non-combat activities. This support included providing supplies, equipment and life-saving services for the men engaged in combat.

One non-combat unit was the 713th Railway Operating Battalion of the Military Railway Service. The "Santa Fe" Battalion, as it was known, was formed at Camp Clovis, New Mexico on March 12, 1942. Its members included experienced railway personnel selected to clean, repair, and build military railways. They also operated the trains to transport vital supplies to the troops fighting on the frontlines. Most of the Hispanic soldiers of the 713th in Company A, repaired railway systems and laid new track. The Hispanic members of this unit included: Eulogio Chavez, Lionzo Chavez, Juan Cornejo, Charles Fernandez, Hilario Flores, Jose Gonzales, Jose Martinez, Luz Martinez, Joe Padilla, John Salas, Christmas Tapparo, and George Vassios. They all performed vital services in the war effort.

During the war in Europe, Latinos were assigned to various military units. At the D-Day landing on June 6, 1944, Oswaldo Ramirez was a Section Leader of an 81-mm mortar platoon, part of the 1st Infantry Division better known as the "Big Red One." His unit's assault landing craft arrived on the Normandy beaches in France and he made it ashore helping to rescue 12 wounded men from his unit. For his bravery, he was awarded the Bronze Star. After securing the beach, U.S. soldiers fought their way through German positions to the French mainland. Ramirez was later assigned to Regimental Headquarters as a Liaison Officer and became a Company Commander. He worked with Generals Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and Omar Bradley and he rose to the rank of Major.

Lt. Colonel Louis G. Mendez, Jr. a West Point graduate with the 82nd Airborne Division, was honored June 6, 2002 for his gallantry in leading his men against the enemy and liberating the village of Preto, France. The main square of Preto has been renamed La Place de Colonel Mendez.

Notable among the units with Latinos was the 30th Infantry Regiment, part of the 3rd Infantry Division in which Staff Sergeant Lucian Adams served and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous action near St. Die, France. In face to face combat on Oct. 28, 1944, Adams personally killed 9 Germans, eliminated 3 enemy machineguns, cleared the woods of hostile elements and reopened the severed supply lines to the assault companies of his battalion.



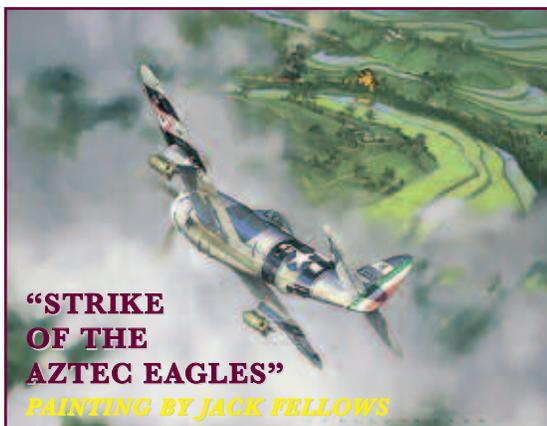
**LUCIAN ADAMS**

Another heroic Latino, Staff Sergeant Macario Garcia of Villa de Castano, Mexico, received the Medal of Honor for his military action near Krinkelt, Belgium. On Nov. 27, 1944, while acting squad leader, his company was pinned down by intense machinegun fire and concentrated artillery and mortar barrage. Although wounded, he led an assault, hurling grenades, firing his rifle, and attacking machine gun positions. He killed 3 Germans and captured 4 prisoners, before permitting himself to be removed for medical care.



**MARCARIO GARCIA**

The U.S. Armed Forces also received additional assistance from other allied nations during World War II and a major ally was Mexico from which a large majority of Latino patriots trace their ancestry. The government of Mexico declared war against the Axis powers (Germany and Japan) on June 11, 1942 and sent a unit of Mexican fighter aircraft, El Escuadron 201 (Squadron 201), to assist the Allies. The squadron was known as the “Aztec Eagles.”



These Mexican pilots were trained for one year in Pocatello, Idaho to fly the P-47 Thunderbolt fighter airplane. The squadron finished all phases of their training by March 1945, were attached to the 58th Fighter Group, and sent to the Philippines. They began their combat missions June 1945 and during the next two months flew 59 combat missions, totaling over 1,290 hours of flight. During World War II the unit operated with a full strength of 32 pilots and an average of 17 Republic P-47Ds. They have the distinction of being the only Mexican armed forces unit to serve in combat outside of an official Mexican war. Twenty pilots were

awarded U.S. Air Medals, as well as the Philippine’s Presidential Unit Citations and the Mexican Medal of Merit.

On Veteran’s Day, Carlos Foustinos, a former member of the squadron, would fly a Mexican flag in his home, along with the American flag. He flew the Mexican flag to commemorate the sacrifice of the men of the 201st Fighter Squadron who fought and died in aerial combat alongside Americans in the South Pacific. He flew in approximately 25 missions and was awarded the “La Cruz de Honor” (The Cross of Honor), equivalent to the U.S. Medal of Honor, from the Mexican Government.

Another Hispanic hero who is given too little credit is Gerard Rodriguez whose military career exceeded 38 years. He was born in Andorra, a small country in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain. He was engaged in military conflict at an early age when the Spanish Civil War reached his homeland in the late 1930s. After the death of his parents, he hiked across France and acquired a job as a cabin boy on a ship headed for the U.S. He became a U.S. citizen in 1940 and joined the Army. He was assigned to the 3rd Cavalry. When his unit was mechanized, he volunteered to join the 5307th Composite Group, which soon gained fame as “Merrill’s Marauders.” The 5307th was the first U.S. long-range penetration group that in arrived in India, trained with British military units, and filtered into the jungles of Burma behind Japanese lines. Rodriguez was assigned to the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon. His unit marched 600 miles to accomplish their mission, lived off the land, and occasionally received airborne supplies. The unit fought in several major battles and was instrumental in preventing a Japanese

invasion of India. Throughout their mission, the “Merrill’s Marauders” were hunted by Japanese soldiers and suffered extreme hardships caused by the weather and terrain.

After the war ended, Rodriguez moved to Wichita, Kansas, where he joined the Army National Guard and, later, the Army Reserve. During his reserve tour, he served in the Special Forces and the U.S. Bicentennial Color Guard, and eventually was promoted to Master Sergeant. He later became a member of the 5048th U.S. Army Reserve Noncommissioned Officers Academy, when he could no longer participate in parachute jumps with the Special Forces. He retired in 1981 after a promotion to the rank of Sergeant Major. He was the last of “Merrill’s Marauders” to leave active service.

Upon returning home from the bloodiest war in history, Hispanic war veterans suffered discrimination due to their skin color and “greaser” features. Even the brave recipients of the Medal of Honor were not spared the prejudice that became a barrier for Hispanics during the economic prosperity following World War II. Yet during the war, 12 Hispanics earned the Medal of Honor for their bravery and heroic actions in military service.

In early 1949, Dr. Hector Garcia helped to bury Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American soldier whose remains had been returned home long after his death in combat in the Philippines. Beatriz Longoria, the soldier’s widow turned to Dr. Garcia because the owner of the Rice Funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas, told Mrs. Longoria that the burial would be in the town’s segregated “Mexican cemetery.” Her family was also denied the use the funeral home’s chapel for a wake in honor of Private Longoria. The funeral home management simply stated that local “whites would not like it.”



The American G.I. Forum fought hard to secure Private Longoria’s rightful **FELIX LONGORIA** place in the cemetery and obtained key assistance from then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. He helped them to arrange for Longoria’s remains to be buried at the Arlington National Cemetery. The direct intervention of the American G.I. Forum signaled to Latinos that they rightfully deserved equal treatment. Henry A. J. Ramos has written an excellent history in “The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983.” The Forum had been founded by a group of decorated Hispanic soldiers and gained national recognition after it responded to acts of blatant discrimination. Latino patriots developed other community service organizations to fight the discrimination that Latino patriots faced and to improve the socio-economic status of all Hispanics.

Maggie Rivas Rodriguez, director, U.S. Latino and Latina World War II Oral History Project at the University of Texas at Austin is documenting Hispanic bravery. She cites the valor of Hispanics who fought across the Pacific theater with the 158th Regimental Combat Team and those who saw action in the 30th and 88th Infantry Divisions in Europe.

Hispanic Americans contributed significantly to winning World War II, often without receiving proper recognition. Since then, the government has shown its appreciation for the sacrifices of Latino patriots who gave their lives to defend American democratic values. This shift reflects a growing societal respect for diversity.

# U.S. LATINO PATRIOTS: PART II

Korean War (1950-1953)



The Korean Conflict was waged between South and North Korea, with significant involvement of the U.S. on the South Korean side and China and Russia assisting North Korea. Once again, Latino patriots were called for duty and served with distinction and honor. They served in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps combat units, the Navy, Coast Guard, and Air Force, as the previous generation had done in World War II. Among these patriots were remarkable contingents of Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans from the barrios of Los Angeles, San Antonio, Laredo, Phoenix, and Chicago.

An all-Latino combat unit that served with distinction during the Korean War was the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment. This unit was initially constituted as the Puerto Rico Regiment of Volunteer Infantry. There were two battalions, one at San Juan, Puerto Rico (PR) and the other at Henry Barracks, PR. From the time this unit arrived at Pusan, Korea on Sept. 20, 1950, they saw heavy combat and long service. The 65th Infantry Regiment endured heavy ground fighting in Korea and was exposed to some of the most mountainous terrain in the world. Some of the fiercest battles also took place during the winter months in Korea, which can be extremely cold with heavy snow and ice.

The 65th Infantry Regiment participated in nine major campaigns over the next three years, earning a Presidential Unit Citation, a Meritorious Unit Commendation, and two Republic of Korea Unit Citations. Members of the 65th Infantry Regiment were awarded four Distinguished Service Crosses and 124 Silver Star medals. These patriots were also credited with capturing 2,086 enemy soldiers and killing an additional 5,905 of the enemy.

The Korean War was the first U.S. engagement in which jet aircraft were used on a large scale in wartime. While the Korean War was winding down, the Chinese Communist forces introduced the Russian built MiG-15 jet fighter and the U.S. Air Force responded with the F-86 "Sabre." Of the 839 MiG-15s shot down during the war, the F-86 Sabres destroyed about 800 of the North Korean planes. In contrast, only 58 F-86s were shot down by the MiG-15s. There were many air-to-air engagements that became common throughout the war. Some of these encounters would reach altitudes of 40,000 feet. From these engagements, the "Jet Ace," the new generation of fighter pilot was born.

One heroic pilot was Captain Manuel J. Fernandez, Jr. who was assigned to the 334th Squadron, 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing. From September 1952 to May 1953, he flew 125 combat missions in the F-86 Sabre. On most of these missions, his job was to seek and destroy Communist MiG-15s in the air. His first air combat victory occurred on Oct. 4, 1952. When Fernandez completed his fifth victory, he was designated an “Ace” and finished the Korean War with 14 confirmed air victories. This feat placed him 60th among the top U.S. Air Force Aces in both world wars, and in the Korean War combined. After the Korean War ended, he set a new world record while flying an F-100C, “Super Sabre,” attaining in September 1956, an average speed of 666.661 mph. He retired from military service with the rank of Colonel. Latinos in the Korean conflict continued to fight and die for their country and they received nine Medal of Honor awards for their participation in the Korean War.

The combat experiences of Latino Medal of Honor recipients during the Korean War, illustrates their commitment to duty and country. Six Latinos unselfishly gave their lives to protect their fellow soldiers. Three others returned to the United States. Each Medal of Honor recipient was cited for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the repeated risk of their lives above and beyond the call of duty. Most did not survive the fateful day of their supreme effort for this nation.

Reginald B. Desiderio, was a Captain, U.S. Army, and commanding officer, Company E, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division who fought near Ipsok, Korea on Nov. 27, 1950. Capt. Desiderio’s company was on a mission to defend the command post of a task force and prevent an enemy breakthrough. After making contact with the enemy during darkness and under intense enemy fire, he moved his men to defensive positions to repel an attack.



**REGINALD DESIDERIO**

He was wounded initially, but refused evacuation. Despite enemy fire, he continued to move among his men checking their positions to ensure that each unit was prepared for the next attack. Wounded again, he continued to direct his men. Through his inspired leadership he encouraged his men to defend their position. Eventually, the enemy penetrated their position, and he fought with carbine, rifle, and grenades, inflicting several casualties until he was mortally wounded. His men, inspired by his sacrifice, repelled the final attack. “Capt. Desiderio’s heroic leadership, courageous and loyal devotion to duty, and his complete disregard for personal safety reflect the highest honor on him and are in keeping with the esteemed traditions of the U.S. Army.”

Pfc. Fernando Luis Garcia served in the U.S. Marine Corps, Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein.), Korea, on Sept. 5, 1952 as a member of Company I, in combat against North Korean and Chinese forces. He defended a combat outpost located forward of the main line of resistance during a savage night attack by a hostile enemy force that attacked with grenades, mortars, and artillery. Pfc. Garcia, though severely wounded, slipped through an intense hail of hostile fire to obtain more hand grenades. He reacted quickly when a live grenade landed nearby, endangering the life of another marine, as well as his own. Without hesitation, he chose to sacrifice himself and threw his body upon the grenade, absorbing the full impact of the explosion. “His great personal valor and cool decision in the face of almost certain death sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

## The combat-related stories of the nine

Pfc. Edward Gomez, U.S. Marine Corps, Reserve, Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein.), fought on Sept. 14, 1951 with exceptional courage in Korea in an attack on the enemy that defended Hill 749. Pfc. Gomez served as an ammunition bearer in Company E in action against enemy aggressor forces. He boldly advanced with his squad to support a group of riflemen assigned to assault a series of strongly fortified and bitterly defended hostile positions on Hill 749. Pfc. Gomez continued to expose himself to heavy weapons fire in order to keep his machine gun supplied with ammunition as they advanced on the enemy to capture Hill 749.

As his squad deployed to prepare for an expected counterattack, he tried to reposition his gun. When a hostile grenade landed next to him, he warned those near him and grasped the live grenade. Determined to save his comrades, he did not hesitate to sacrifice himself and dove on the grenade, absorbing the violent explosion with his body. With exceptional “courage, incomparable valor, and decisive spirit of self-sacrifice, Pfc. Gomez inspired the others to heroic efforts in subsequently repelling the outnumbering foe, and his valiant conduct throughout sustained and enhanced the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”



**EDWARD GOMEZ**

S/Sgt. Ambrosio Guillen, U.S. Marine Corps, Company F, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Reinforced) was on duty near Songuch-on, Korea, 25 July 1953. While serving as a platoon sergeant of Company F in action against enemy forces was assigned to defend a forward outpost. S/Sgt. Guillen maneuvered his platoon over unfamiliar terrain under hostile fire and placed his men for the next fight. His unit was pinned down when the outpost was attacked under cover of darkness by an estimated force of two enemy battalions who were supported by mortar and artillery fire. Exposed to heavy enemy barrages and attacks, he and his unit defended their positions. He also supervised the treatment and evacuation of the wounded. Inspired by his leadership, the platoon rallied and fought the enemy in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Although critically wounded, S/Sgt. Guillen refused medical aid and led his men during this fight, thus defeating the enemy. He subsequently died from his wounds. “S/Sgt. Guillen, by his outstanding courage and indomitable fighting spirit, was directly responsible for the success of his platoon in repelling a numerically superior enemy force. His personal valor reflects the highest credit upon himself and enhances the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

Cpl. Rodolfo P. Hernandez, U.S. Army, was assigned to Company G, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team near Wontong-ni, Korea on 31 May 1951. Cpl. Hernandez, distinguished himself in action against the enemy. His platoon, occupying defensive positions on Hill 420, came under ruthless attack by a numerically superior and hostile force, accompanied by heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire that inflicted numerous casualties on the platoon. His comrades were forced to withdraw as their ammunition was depleted. However, Cpl. Hernandez, although wounded in an exchange of grenades, continued his deadly fire into the ranks of the advancing enemy until a ruptured cartridge disabled his rifle. Cpl. Hernandez rushed the enemy armed only with rifle and bayonet. Fearlessly engaging the foe, he killed six of the enemy before facing death from grenade, bayonet, and bullet wounds. As recorded in Smith’s book, *Beyond Glory*, (2003), Corporal Hernandez was so badly torn up and had bled so heavily following his bayonet charge into a crowd of enemy on Hill 420 near Wontong-ni on May 31, 1951, that



**RODOLFO P.  
HERNANDEZ**

the soldiers who found him early that morning thought he was dead. He had been shot, blown up, and stabbed. A large part of his skull and part of his brain were gone. He had been bayoneted in the back and carted off the hill. Then someone noticed a bit of movement from inside the bag. He finally came to a month later in a hospital in South Korea. His heroic action momentarily halted the enemy advance long enough to allow his unit to counterattack and recapture the lost ground. “The indomitable fighting spirit, outstanding courage, and tenacious devotion to duty clearly demonstrated by Cpl. Hernandez reflect the highest credit upon himself, the infantry, and the U.S. Army.” He was born in Colton, Calif., on April 14, 1931, to a mother from Mexico City – Guadalupe Perez – and a father who was born in Texas. His parents were farmworkers with eight children and Rodolfo joined the Army at 17 years of age to serve his family and community.

1st. Lt. Baldomero Lopez, U.S. Marine Corps, led Company A of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein.) fought during the Inchon invasion in Korea on Sept. 15, 1950. As a marine platoon commander of Company A, he fought against enemy. With his platoon 1st. Lt. Lopez was assigned to destroy the enemy defending the beach where allied forces had landed with the amphibious assault waves. Advancing under hostile fire, he moved next to an enemy bunker and prepared to throw a hand grenade into the next pillbox that was firing down on the beach. He was severely wounded by an enemy automatic weapon, fell backwards, and dropped the live grenade. He tried to retrieve the grenade and throw it, but was unable to do that. 1st. Lt. Lopez chose self-sacrifice rather than endanger the lives of his men and thus he placed the grenade under his body and absorbed the full impact of the explosion. “His exceptional courage, fortitude, and devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon 1st Lt. Lopez and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

Cpl. Benito Martinez, U.S. Army, was assigned to Company A, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division and fought near Satae-ri Korea on Sept. 6, 1952. Cpl. Martinez, a machine gunner, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and outstanding courage above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy. While manning a forward listening post, his position was attacked by an enemy at reinforced company strength. In the furious fighting that followed, the enemy penetrated the defense perimeter and with encirclement imminent, Cpl. Martinez chose to remain at his post in an attempt to slow the enemy advance. In a daring defense, he raked the attacking troops with crippling fire causing numerous casualties. Although contacted by phone several times, he discouraged efforts to rescue him to avoid further danger to his comrades. Soon hostile forces rushed the emplacement, forcing him to make a limited withdrawal carrying only an automatic rifle and pistol. After a courageous six hours of combat, dawn approached as the enemy closed in on his position. His tenacious defense allowed friendly elements to reorganize, attack, and regain the key terrain. “Cpl. Martinez’ incredible valor and supreme sacrifice reflect lasting glory upon himself and are in keeping with the honored traditions of the military service.”



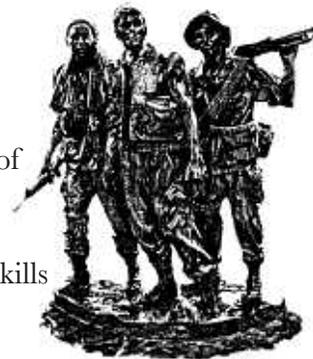
**BENITO MARTINEZ**

Pfc. Eugene Arnold Obregon, U.S. Marine Corps, was attached to Company G, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein.). He was serving in Seoul, Korea on Sept. 26, 1950 and saw action against enemy forces in a machine gun squad in a marine rifle company that was pinned down by hostile fire. Pfc. Obregon went to the aid of a fellow marine fall wounded in the line of fire. Armed only with a pistol, he unhesitatingly dashed from his covered position to the side of his comrade. Firing his pistol with one hand as he ran, he grasped his comrade by the arm and dragged him to the side of the road. Still under enemy fire, he was bandaging the man's wounds when a platoon of the enemy advanced on his position. Seizing the wounded marine's carbine, he shielded the wounded man while firing and killing the enemy. Ultimately, he was fatally wounded by enemy machine gun fire. By his courageous fighting spirit, fortitude, and loyal devotion to duty, Pfc. Obregon enabled his fellow Marines to rescue the wounded man and aided essentially in repelling the attack, thereby sustaining and enhancing the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Joseph C. Rodriguez was a Pfc. in the U.S. Army, Company F, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, when, near Munye-ri, Korea, on May 21, 1951, he distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. In action against an armed enemy of the United Nations, Sgt. Rodriguez, an assistant squad leader of the 2d Platoon, was participating in an attack against a fanatical hostile force occupying well-fortified positions on rugged commanding terrain. His squad's advance was halted within approximately 60 yards by a withering barrage of automatic weapons and small-arms fire from 5 emplacements directly to the front and right and left flanks, together with grenades which the enemy rolled down the hill toward the advancing troops. Fully aware of the odds against him, Sgt. Rodriguez leaped to his feet, dashed 60 yards up the fire-swept slope, and, after lobbing grenades into the first foxhole with deadly accuracy, ran around the left flank, silenced an automatic weapon with 2 grenades and continued his whirlwind assault to the top of the peak, wiping out 2 more foxholes and then, reaching the right flank, he tossed grenades into the remaining emplacement, destroying the gun and annihilating its crew. Sgt. Rodriguez' actions exacted a toll of 15 enemy dead and, as a result of his incredible display of valor, the defense of the opposition was broken, and the enemy routed, and the strategic strongpoint secured. He entered the service in his hometown of San Bernardino, Calif. in February 1952. He was born there on Nov. 14, 1928.

## **Vietnam War (1957-1975)**

Within the decade of the fifties, America interceded in Vietnam. The record of Latino participation dates back to the early period of this war. They were sent initially to Vietnam as members of Special Forces advisory units instructing the South Vietnamese on methods to strengthen their military defenses and combat skills against Communist aggressors.



Before World War II, Indochina, including Vietnam, had been under French colonial rule. During World War II, Japan occupied the region and, later, France struggled to reestablish its authority and control over Vietnam. By the mid-1950s, the U.S. started to send military and economic aid to the French. The French Army was engaged in a military conflict against nationalist and communist forces that had spearheaded the armed resistance to the Japanese. The French army was defeated by communist military forces at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

In 1957, a U.S. Special Forces unit had arrived in the Republic of Vietnam (the southern half of Vietnam was partitioned by the 1954 peace agreement with France). In May 1960, another Special Forces unit was sent to South Vietnam to train the Vietnamese Army, which was now engaged in fighting a guerrilla war initiated by the North Vietnamese.

From 1961 to 1965, over 80 Special Forces camps were established as part of the U.S. supported Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program. The CIDG program was intended to help the South Vietnamese to raise paramilitary forces to resist the North Vietnamese and defend their villages. Each CIDG camp had a South Vietnamese Special Forces team, a U.S. Special Forces team, and from two to seven companies of indigenous self-defense troops.

Each of the CIDG camps was intended to be a self-contained, fully independent organization. The U.S. Special Forces team was there to advise and assist with camp administration, and prepare and train military personnel for eventual turnover of the camp to South Vietnamese authorities. However, the North Vietnamese (known as the Viet Cong), quickly realized the threat of the CIDG camps. The fighting intensified as the Viet Cong penetrated several camps.



In November 1963, a reinforced battalion of Viet Cong attacked the CIDG camp at Hiep Hoa, Long. The attack occurred at night and the defenders were taken completely by surprise as heavy machine gun and mortar fire bombarded the camp. Among the U.S. Special Forces personnel at Hiep Hoa was Sergeant First Class Isaac Camacho. The camp defenders were pinned down by Viet Cong fire and Sergeant Camacho ran to a mortar position and began to return fire. Pressure from the attacking force soon opened the camp's defensive wall and the commanding officer ordered a withdrawal. In the confusion of the battle and the darkness of the night, Sergeant Camacho became separated from his Special Forces comrades and was captured by the Viet Cong. He remained a prisoner for almost 20 months, until on July 9, 1965, when he was able to escape from his isolation and make his way to freedom crossing through miles of Viet Cong controlled areas.

For his personal courage and action in defending Hiep Hoa and later escape, Sgt. Camacho was awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star Medals in September 1965. He was promoted to Master Sergeant and later given a battlefield commission to the rank of Captain. He retired from the Army to live in El Paso, Texas.

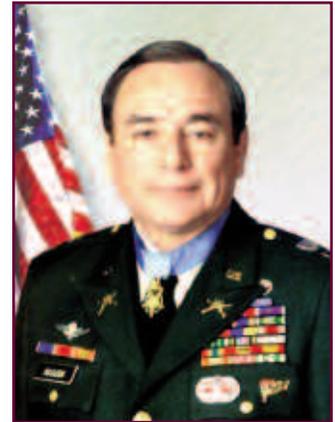
Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, Jr. is another Latino patriot who distinguished himself in combat. He was one of the first Latinos to participate in the U.S. aerial campaign against Viet Cong forces. Early on Aug. 4, 1964, he was ordered to sink several North Vietnamese gunboats that had attacked two U.S. destroyers. Unfortunately, he and another Navy pilot were shot down by enemy fire in this engagement. The other pilot died and North Vietnamese communists captured Lt. Alvarez. He was a prisoner for more than eight years. During this time, his family in the U.S. suffered greatly, but maintained contact with him by mail.

Lt. Alvarez was able to survive this ordeal by his religious faith and patriotism for his country. The North Vietnamese released Lt. Alvarez in February 1973, after negotiations between the U. S. and the North Vietnamese government. He was among the first group of prisoners to regain his freedom after a peace agreement was negotiated in Paris. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Commander. In March 1973, a city park in Santa Clara, Calif., was dedicated in his honor. He left the Navy soon there-after, and later served as the Deputy Director for the U.S. Veterans Administration. He has since written two autobiographical accounts, “Chained Eagle” and “Code of Conduct,” about his experiences as a prisoner of war. He is currently employed as a private consultant.

During the early stages of the War in Vietnam, another Latino patriot rose to the occasion of protecting others in spite of risk of his own life at the time. Alfred V. Rascon, Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army, distinguished himself on March 16, 1966 while assigned as a medic to the Reconnaissance Platoon, 1st. Airborne Battalion, 503rd Infantry, and 173rd Airborne Brigade in Viet Nam. His platoon attempted to aid a sister battalion, that was under intense enemy attack by a larger enemy force. Though told to move to a safer rear position, he instead ran through a shower of bullets and grenades to help his comrades. Rascon was wounded by shrapnel but continued to tirelessly provide support to the gunnery positions of his unit. Each foray against the enemy added to his already serious wounds.

His Medal of Honor citation captures the essence of his heroism that day:

*“Specialist Rascon’s extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire, his heroism in rescuing the wounded and his gallantry by repeatedly risking his own life for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.”*



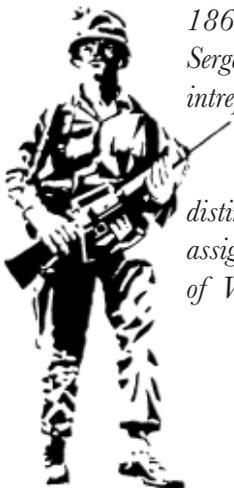
**ALFRED RASCON**

Today in 2003, Specialist Rascon serves the nation as the Director General of the Selective Service System in Washington, DC. For an immigrant from Mexico, who joined the U.S. Army at age 17, he responded to the call of duty in Vietnam and continues to call on others to serve as well.

The story of Master Sergeant (then Staff Sergeant) Roy P. Benavidez is so incredible, that we use the full text of the Medal of Honor Citation to show what he had done:

*“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of the Congress the Congressional Medal of Honor to, Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, United States Army (Retired), for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:*

*“Master Sergeant (then Staff Sergeant) Roy P. Benavidez United States Army, who distinguished himself by a series of daring and extremely valorous actions on 2 May 1968 while assigned to Detachment B56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Republic of Vietnam.*



*“On the morning of 2 May 1968, a 12-man Special Forces Reconnaissance Team was inserted by helicopters in a dense jungle area west of Lo Ninth, Vietnam to gather intelligence information about confirmed large-scale enemy activity.*

*“This area was controlled and routinely patrolled by the North Vietnamese Army. After a short period of time on the ground, the team met heavy enemy resistance, and requested emergency extraction. Three helicopters attempted extraction, but were unable to land due to intense enemy small arms and anti-aircraft fire.*

*“Sergeant Benavidez was at the Forward Operating Base in Lo Ninth monitoring the operation by radio when these helicopters returned to off-load wounded crewmembers and to assess aircraft damage. Sergeant Benavidez voluntarily boarded a returning aircraft to assist in another extraction attempt.*

*“Realizing that all the team members were either dead or wounded and unable to move to the pickup zone, he directed the aircraft to a nearby clearing where he jumped from the hovering helicopter, and ran approximately 75 meters under withering small arms fire to the crippled team. Prior to reaching the team’s position he was wounded in his right leg, face, and head. Despite these painful injuries, he took charge, repositioning the team members and directing their fire to facilitate the landing of an extraction aircraft, and the loading of wounded and dead team members. He then threw smoke canisters to direct the aircraft to the team’s position.*

*“Despite his severe wounds and under intense enemy fire, he carried and dragged half of the wounded team members to the awaiting aircraft. He then provided protective fire by running alongside the aircraft as it moved to pick up the remaining team members. As the enemy’s fire intensified, he hurried to recover the body and classified documents on the dead team leader. When he reached the leader’s body, Sergeant Benavidez was severely wounded by small arms fire in the abdomen and grenade fragments in his back. At nearly the same moment, the aircraft pilot was mortally wounded, and his helicopter crashed.*

*“Although in extremely critical condition due to his multiple wounds, Sergeant Benavidez secured the classified documents and made his way back to the wreckage, where he aided the wounded out of the overturned aircraft, and gathered the stunned survivors into a defensive perimeter. Under increasing enemy automatic weapons and grenade fire, he moved around the perimeter distributing water and ammunition to his weary men, re-instilling in them a will to live and fight.*

*“Facing a buildup of enemy opposition with a beleaguered team, Sergeant Benavidez mustered his strength, began calling in tactical air strikes and directed the fire from supporting gun-ships to suppress the enemy’s fire and so permit another extraction attempt.*

*“He was wounded again in his thigh by small arms fire while administering first aid to a wounded team member just before another extraction helicopter was able to land. His indomitable spirit kept him going as he began to ferry his comrades to the craft.*

*“On his second trip with the wounded, he was clubbed from additional wounds to his head and arms before killing his adversary. He then continued under devastating fire to carry the wounded to the helicopter. Upon reaching the aircraft, he spotted and killed two enemy soldiers who were rushing the craft from an angle that prevented the aircraft door gunner from firing upon them. With little strength remaining, he made one last trip to the perimeter to ensure that all classified material had been collected or destroyed, and to bring in the remaining wounded.*

*“Only then, in extremely serious condition from numerous wounds and loss of blood, did he allow himself to be pulled into the extraction aircraft.*

*“Sergeant Benavidez’ gallant choice to join voluntarily his comrades who were in critical straits, to expose himself constantly to withering enemy fire, and his refusal to be stopped despite numerous severe wounds, saved the lives of at least eight men.*

*“His fearless personal leadership, tenacious devotion to duty, and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.*

Altogether, Master Sergeant Benavidez was wounded more than 50 times from arms fire, stabbings and clubbing. He endured six hours of concentrated combat, doing the remarkable rescue of others while severely wounded. He died in 1998, thirty years later, a hero of heroes of Vietnam.

On Sept. 15, 2000 the secretary of the Navy, Richard Danzig, announced that the Navy would honor Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez in naming the seventh in the Bob Hope Class of large, medium speed, roll on/roll off sealift (LMSR) ships after him. The ceremony took place in July 2001.

On Nov. 6, 2002, the short life of Richard Rocco, 63, was featured in the obituary columns of the Chicago Tribune: “Medic a Medal of Honor recipient.” He died on Thursday Oct. 31, 2002 at his home in San Antonio, Texas. The cause of death was cancer, according to his wife, Maria.

There was nothing in Rocco’s civilian background of personal hardship and poverty that foreshadowed his exemplary act of heroism in Vietnam. He was born in Albuquerque and grew up in East Los Angeles. He said he often stole so his family could eat. He was a high school dropout and frequently landed in trouble with the law. “I hated being at home,” he told a reporter in 2000, citing his abusive, alcoholic father. “I had a lot of problems, and I got kicked out of school. I don’t know how many times. Whenever a test of something would come up, I would act out or do something to get into trouble. That way, my secret could be kept.” He was arrested at 16 for armed robbery. With an hour’s break before sentencing, he walked into an Army recruiting office and found himself telling his life story to a sympathetic officer. That officer accompanied Mr. Rocco to court, where he got a suspended sentence. The judge said if he stayed in school, obeyed a curfew, and shunned his gang, he could join the Army at 17.



**L. RICHARD  
ROCCO**

On May 24, 1970, Sgt. Rocco was aboard a medical evacuation helicopter that was shot down on a mission to remove wounded South Vietnamese troops besieged near the village of Katum. In an interview in 1998, Sgt. Rocco noted: “We started taking fire from all directions. The pilot was shot through the leg. The helicopter spun around and crashed in an open field, turned on its side and started burning. The co-pilot’s arm was ripped off – it was just hanging.” (Source: The American Forces Information Service, 1998.)

Sgt. Rocco suffered back injuries, a broken hip and a broken wrist, and the other four crew members were shot. “I guess I was going on reflexes,” he said. “I jumped out and pulled the pilot out first. I looked for cover and saw a big tree lying on the ground. I dragged him to the tree, knowing that any time I was going to get shot.” Sgt. Rocco went back to the helicopter and carried the co-pilot, the crew chief and another medic to cover, one at a time, crossing 20 yards of open ground under a hail of fire, his hands and face burned by flames engulfing the helicopter.

The next day, two American helicopters were shot down in an attempt to evacuate the crewmen who had called in artillery and air strikes on their own position to turn back an assault by North Vietnamese troops. All five crew members were rescued that day. “They didn’t have time for litters of anything else,” Rocco recalled. “They just threw us into the helicopter and took off.”

In 1974, Warrant Officer Rocco — a medic — received the Medal of Honor from President Gerald R. Ford. His other decorations included the Purple Heart. Before leaving the Army in 1978, he received his general equivalency diploma and an associate’s degree.

He later was the Director of the Veteran’s Service Commission in New Mexico and subsequently moved to San Antonio in 1998. Over the years he worked extensively in advocacy groups to keep children off drugs and out of gangs. He often used his own story to show the benefits of a military career. Rocco said that he suspected his cancer was linked to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam, but he told an interviewer as he was dying that he was forgiving. “It doesn’t bother me anymore,” he said. “I’m at peace. I’m going to die. I don’t want to die angry” [Source: The Washington Post Obituary (Nov. 6, 2002) entitled: “Louis Richard Rocco Dies; Received Medal of Honor,” by Adam Bernstein].

## **U.S. Army Medal Of Honor, Vietnam Humbert Roque Versace**

The story of Captain Humbert Roque “Rocky” Versace is another example of individual courage in the face of a ruthless enemy. He was born in Hawaii on July 2, 1937. His father, Humbert Joseph Versace, was a graduate of the United States Military Academy Class of 1933. Captain Versace’s mother was Marie Teresa Rios Versace (Pen Name: Tere Rios) of Puerto Rico. Tere Rios authored three books, one of which was the basis for popular T.V. series known as: “The Flying Nun.”

The background to Versace’s patriotism is important for understanding why he received posthumously the Medal of Honor decades later. Vietnam was a different kind of war from World War II and Korea, and so was the Prisoner of War (POW) experience in several aspects. There were fewer prisoners (estimated at about 1,200 military, civilians, and foreign nationals known to have been captured) for two reasons. There were no mass surrenders of American forces such as those ordered for the defenders at Bataan and Corregidor in the Philippines at the beginning of WWII. Nor were entire American combat units enveloped and overwhelmed, as happened during the forced withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter at

the beginning of the Korean War. American prisoners were captured in Southeast Asia individually when soldiers were wounded or became trapped and couldn't be rescued, or, as crew members of aircraft and helicopters that were shot down deep in enemy territory. Moreover, Vietnam was America's longest undeclared war, and as a consequence, American prisoners endured captivity longer under inhumane conditions longer than in any previous conflict (*Source: Congressional Medal of Recommendation for Captain Humbert Roque Versace, prepared by Duane E. Frederic, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, 2000, posted at: <http://www.powmiaff.org/MOH.html>*).

Captain Versace, a West Point graduate (1959) like his father, served in Korea and later as an officer with the Old Guard at Arlington National Cemetery. In 1962, he volunteered for a tour of duty in Viet Nam as an intelligence advisor helping the South Vietnamese government fight the Viet Cong insurgency. He immersed himself in Vietnamese culture and language in the delta town of Camau. He established medical clinics, obtained tin sheeting to replace thatch roofs, and arranged for wheat shipments to feed the family pigs. He worked on behalf of Vietnamese children and contacted schools in the U.S. to obtain sports equipment for village playgrounds.

He volunteered for a second tour of duty and intended to retire from the U.S. Army to enter the Maryknoll Order and work with children in Vietnam. In Oct. 29, 1963, Captain Versace was captured during an operation near the U Minh Forest, a Viet Cong stronghold. He was wounded in a fierce firefight and then kept in solitary confinement, without medical treatment, for open defiance of his captors. He vehemently opposed attempts at indoctrination by the Viet Cong and was a primary target for their brutality. Captain Versace made three known attempts to escape, his treatment becoming more severe with each failed effort. He was loudly singing "God Bless America" from his isolation box the last time the other prisoners heard from him. On Sept. 29, 1965, communist Hanoi Radio announced Versace's death in retaliation for communist sympathizers killed by the South Vietnamese.



*Capt. Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace receives his 90-day combat infantry badge from his father, Col. Humbert Joseph Versace. [http://www.tvworldwide.com/event\\_rocky.cfm](http://www.tvworldwide.com/event_rocky.cfm)*

In 2000, following a complete review of Captain Versace's heroism, the Army Special Forces Command resubmitted his award recommendation. Subsequently in January, 2001, Secretary of the Army, Luis Caldera approved the Medal of Honor for Captain Versace. The Versace family received the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor on July 8, 2002. Congress acted on Senate bill S. 1155, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2002, and the president signed it into law. The Medal of Honor Citation notes: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his own life above and beyond the call of duty, while held captive by the communist National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) In the Republic of Vietnam during the period of Oct. 29, 1963 to Sept. 26, 1965. Captain Versace was executed by the enemy for his steadfast refusal to betray God, country and his fellow prisoners. He lies buried in an unmarked jungle grave known only to God in Vietnam."

The Rocky Versace Plaza and Vietnam Veterans' Memorial located in Alexandria, Virginia, was dedicated on July 6, 2002. The memorial contains the names of all 65 Alexandria patriots – soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who sacrificed their lives.

## Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm (1991)

Operation Desert Shield (the air war) and Operation Desert Storm (the land war) provided another opportunity for Hispanics to serve their country. This war brought together a coalition military force composed of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries to oppose Iraq's Aug. 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait, our ally and an oil rich nation.

The Iraq invasion force completely surprised and overwhelmed the defenders in a matter of two days. The United Nations Organization (U.N.), after a period of discussion approved military action in November 1990 against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader.



U.S. President George Bush, Sr. subsequently initiated military action in collaboration with our NATO allies. Allied planes attacked Iraq in January 1991 launching Operation Desert Shield. The land war began in February 1991 and dealt a crushing military blow to Iraq. A “Hail Mary” tactic was used by the U.S. military. Initially, a diversionary move to the southern border of Iraq was made by U.S. troops. Then undetected, a larger force was shifted out to the western desert and then swung northward to strike the enemy decisively from both the north and south. Iraq accepted a ceasefire in April 1991 and U.S. and coalition forces withdrew. Subsequently, two “no-fly” zones were established: one in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds and a second in southern Iraq to protect the Shiite Moslems.

The story of Sergeant Roy Tabron exemplifies the valor shown by many Latino patriots in this war. Sergeant Tabron, a Green Berets soldier, together with Master Sergeant Jeffrey Sims and Sergeant 1st class Ronald Torbett, were operating in the Euphrates Valley just 100 miles south of Baghdad on Feb. 23, 1991. Their mission was to set up an observation post in preparation for a decisive attack on the Iraqi enemy on Feb. 24. The three Green Berets were dug in a camouflaged “spider hole” when a child spotted them. She ran to the Iraqi soldiers nearby and told them about her discovery. Soon 100 enemy soldiers were advancing on their position. An F-16 air strike was requested while an M-60 Black Hawk helicopter raced to the scene to extract the embattled trio. Despite heavy fire from the Iraqis, they managed to escape without harm to either the helicopter crewmen or to Sergeant Tabron and his two Green Berets teammates.

Two Hispanic patriots rose to the top levels of the Marine Corps and distinguished themselves in the Desert Shield/Desert Storm war. One, Brigadier General Michael J. Aguilar, who was the Military Assistant to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Brigadier General Aguilar served as the Executive Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 16 that supported the air and ground initiatives that contributed to the coordinated effort to free Kuwait.

The other Marine was Brigadier General Christopher Cortez, head of the Strategy and Plans Division at the Pentagon. He served as commander of the 1st Marine Division in 1945 during World War II. He shares a background and philosophy with many Hispanic patriots, namely, a tremendous will to work hard and succeed, along with a profound love of family and country. His parents came to the U.S. as immigrants, as many others had from different backgrounds and cultures. American born, he was determined to learn from the experience and sacrifice of his parents, to build a career in the U.S. military. He is quoted as saying: “Heritage is very important ... to know where we came from and the pride associated with that. But first and foremost, we are Marines.”

There were 20,000 Hispanic servicemen and servicewomen who participated in Operation Desert Shield/Storm among some 425,000 Americans who served in the war at its peak strength. According to Defense Manpower Data Center Statistics, Hispanics comprised 7.9 percent of the Fleet Marine Force, 6.0 percent of the Navy, 4.2 percent of the Army and 3.1 percent of the Air Force military personnel in the Persian Gulf military operation.

The story of the sacrifice of Latino patriots, expressing a deep pride and love for their country, America, would not be complete without identifying those who did not return home to their families from the Desert Shield/Desert Storm conflict. These 26 brave Hispanic heroes are included among the 144 Americans killed in action and the additional 121 who died in non combat-related events. They are: Andy Alaniz (Texas), Jose Arteaga (Connecticut), John A. Bolivar (Pennsylvania), Manuel Danila (Wyoming), Manuel M. Davila (Wyoming), Delwin Delgado (Florida), Luis R. Delgado (Texas), Mario Fajardo (New York), Eliseo Felix, Jr. (Arizona), Arthur Galvan (California), Arthur O. Garza (Texas), Daniel Garza (Texas), Rosendo Herrera (Texas), Candelario Montalvo, Jr. (Texas), Garrett A. Mongrella (New Jersey), Patbouvier E. Ortiz (New York), Daniel G. Perez (Texas), Kip A. Poremba (Virginia), Manuel Rivera, Jr. (Florida), Eloy A. Rodriguez, Jr. (Florida), Ronald Rondazzo (Maryland), Mario V. Velasquez (Puerto Rico), Carpio Villareal (Texas), and Carlos A. Viquez (New York).

Writing in “Hispanic Heritage Month 1996: Hispanics — Challenging the Future,” Army Chaplain (Capt.) Carlos C. Huerta of the 1st Battalion, 79th Field Artillery observed, “Hispanics have always met the challenge of serving the nation with great fervor. In every war, on every battlefield, Hispanics have put their lives on the line to protect freedom.”

### **Bosnia Peacekeeping Operations (1995-)**

Latinos have served in Bosnia in Task Force Eagle-SFOR XI since 1995 as members of an international peacekeeping operation. This military conflict resulted from the breakup of Yugoslavia and the ethnic conflicts between Serbians and Bosnians. The U. S. and its European allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been involved in the peacekeeping operation.

Two Latino patriots that were called up for military duty in Bosnia were Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, and Staff Sergeant Andrew A. Ramirez. On March 31, 1999, while serving with the Stabilization Force SFOR XI near the Macedonian border, Serbian aggressors ambushed and captured them. These Latino patriots were held as “illegal detainees.” One day later, their status was changed to Prisoners of War (P.O.W.).

Specialist Steven M. Gonzales was born in Huntsville, Texas (1978) and entered service with the Army in September 1996. When he was captured, he was 21-years-old member of B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry of the 1st Infantry Division, “The Big Red One,” which assumed command on Nov. 12, 1996.

Staff Sergeant Andrew A. Ramirez was born in Los Angeles, Calif. in 1973 and entered service with the Army in July 1992. At the time of his capture, he was 26 years old and a member of B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry of the 1st Infantry Division. These two patriots were released on May 1, 1999 as a result of negotiations between the Serbian led government and civil rights leaders in the U.S.

Upon their return to the U.S., they received a hero’s welcome from American communities.

## **Afghanistan (2001-)**

The military campaign in the war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan began soon after the devastating aerial attack of Sept. 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Thousands of innocent Americans and others were killed, most in the buildings and hundreds in the airplanes that were commandeered by the assailants. Reportedly hundreds of Latinos were also among the dead and wounded.

The perpetrators of this terrorism were identified as Osama bin Laden and the worldwide al Qaeda terrorist network. They were found to be in Afghanistan, training more terrorists and organizing dangerous cells of conspirators within America and other countries.

The task of destroying the Taliban forces in Afghanistan continues. U.S. Marines and Special Forces, along with allies from many countries, continue to counter-attack the al Qaeda network. The U.S. has declared the al Qaeda as a menacing terrorist threat to all civilized nations. Vigilance and homeland security are national priorities.

Latinos patriots are certainly a good part of this developing military history. The rugged mountains of Takur Ghar, Afghanistan, were the scene of a bloody encounter with al Qaeda soldiers on March 4, 2002. Specialists Oscar J. Oscano and Omar J. Vela, Army Rangers, helped rescue 10 Rangers whose helicopter was shot down. Over 17 hours, through heavy enemy fire, Army air crews, Air Force, and Rangers worked together to limit casualties and effect a rescue. Specialists Oscano and Vela were among the 24 who returned alive. Seven Americans died in this dangerous mission.

Sgt. Steven Checo, 22, a soldier in the 82nd Airborne Division, died on Dec. 22, 2002 from wounds sustained in a firefight with al Qaeda or Taliban fighters who fled into Pakistan. His death marked the 17th fatality during hostile action in Afghanistan since the war began 14 months earlier. There had been several hostile contacts and skirmishes with tribal and other enemy forces, particularly in border areas of Afghanistan, involving firefights, rocket attacks, and sporadic small arms fire. However, this was the first reported Latino combat death in Afghanistan. His mother, Arelis Perez, and other family members attended the funeral in New York City. The funeral mass was held in Spanish at Mother Cabrini Church and was conducted by the Rev. Joseph Orlandi, and Cardinal Edward Egan offered a prayer. Sgt. Checo was honored with a 21gun salute from members of the 82nd Airborne Division.

## Iraq and Operation Desert Scorpion (2003-)

The ink is still wet on the news from the front lines of Iraq. The military engagement started on March 19, 2003 when President George W. Bush, ordered U.S. warplanes to bomb a home in Baghdad in which President Saddam Hussein and his aides were thought to be staying. Months afterwards, it was unclear if anyone was killed, but Saddam Hussein seemingly disappeared from Iraq, leaving the country for the United States to successful take over by mid-April 2003.



The Latino legacy in Iraq is unique and increasingly significant. The Bush administration established a fast track naturalization process for foreign recruits in July 2002 as part of the “war on terror.” Instead of waiting three years before applying for citizenship, green-card holders in the armed forces who entered after Sept. 11, 2001 could apply immediately for citizenship. Senators John McCain, Ted Kennedy, and eight other senators introduced a bill that would reduce permanently the waiting period from three to two years and provide benefits for non-citizen spouses of non-citizen soldiers killed in action.

Although the Bush Executive Order contained no guarantees that citizen status would be granted or even expedited, the rumor that automatic citizenship was being granted for military service began to circulate in Latino communities both here and abroad. The number of permanent resident enlistees jumped from 300 a month before the fast track reform to 1,300 a month. Mexican nationals reportedly flooded consulates attempting to volunteer (Jorge Mariscal, April, 2003).

During the engagement, President Bush ordered that green-card holders (i.e. legal alien residents in the U.S.) who are on active duty, to be allowed to apply immediately for citizenship, waiving the usual three-year waiting period. The Bush administration also created a process to move quickly. With about 40 percent of the Latino population being foreign born, a relatively large number of Latinos joined the military service, many to act on citizenship.

Two Latinos who responded to the cause, Marine Corporals Jose Gutierrez, 28, and Jose A. Garibay, 21, from Southern California, died in Iraq and were granted their citizenship posthumously in April 2003. Garibay was killed March 23 in Nasiriyah by Iraqi soldiers who pretended to surrender then opened fire when Marines approached. [Source: Amy Goldstein and Sylvia Moreno, “For Immigrants, a Special Sacrifice: War Takes Toll on Foreign Born in Armed Forces.” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2003, p. A-26].

Other Latinos were native born Americans. On April 25, 2003, 1st Lt. Osbaldo Orozco died when his vehicle rolled over while traveling through rough terrain in Iraq. In his hometown of Earlimart, Calif., a tiny farming community north of Fresno, he died a hero to many (*US Today*, May 5, 2003, p.6A). Even before he entered the military, he was the pride of farm worker families who saw him star in high school and college football at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. According to the write-up in *US Today*, (April 28), Osbaldo’s parents came to every game he played. They worked in the farm fields in the morning and they would drive almost three hours to see him play at Cal Poly. He graduated from Cal Poly in 2001, received his Army commission and married his high school sweetheart. He lived the American Dream and went to Iraq to fulfill his military obligation.

Within the week, 1st Sgt. Joe Garza died in Baghdad on April 28, 2003. A dedicated military career veteran, he had more than 20 years in the Army as a mechanic, drill instructor and respected non-commissioned officer. Yet Garza, 43, a native of Robstown in South Texas, fell out of a Humvee when it swerved to avoid a civilian vehicle. He left behind his wife of 24 years, Mary, and three children (*US Today*, May 5, 2003, p.6A).



With the declared end of the period of war in Iraq in May, 2003, most Latino troops can expect to complete their service abroad and safely return to the United States. Among the fortunate are Marine Cpl. Christopher Castro of San Antonio, who led the rescue mission on April 17 that freed seven U.S. soldiers held as prisoners of war by Iraq. Also, among those that Castro helped rescue are a Panama-born Latina, Army Spc. Shoshana Johnson, 30, and Spc. Edgar Hernandez, 21, a Mexican American. They were part of an Army convoy, from the 507th Maintenance Company of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, that veered off course near the Iraqi city of Nasirayah on March 23 and was ambushed by Saddam Hussein's Fedayeen troops. Also captured with this group was Pfc Jessica D. Lynch, an Army supply clerk who was rescued from an Iraqi hospital on April 1, 2003.

Army Pfc. Diego Fernando Rincon, an immigrant from Colombia, reported for service in Iraq from Conyers, Ga. He died a patriot on March 29, 2003, by a suicide car bombing north of Najaf. He was 19 years young when he wrote his last letter, summing-up his courageous inner feelings of what he was about to face:



*“Hola Mother: So I guess the time has finally come for us to see what we are made of. Who will crack when the stress level rises and who will be calm all the way through it. Only time will tell. ... Mother, I love you so much! I'm not going to give up! I'm living my life one day at a time, sitting here picturing home with a small tear in my eyes. Spending time with my brothers, who will hold my life in their hands. I try not to think of what may happen in the future, but I can't stand seeing it in my eyes. There's going to be murders, funerals and tears rolling down everybody's eyes. But the only thing I can say is keep my head up and try to keep the faith and pray for better days. All this will pass. I believe God has a path for me. Whether I make it or not. It's all part of the plan. It can't be changed, only completed. Mother will be the last word I'll say. Your face will be the last picture that goes through my eyes. I'm not trying to scare you, but it's reality. ... Maybe I just want someone to know what goes through my head. It's probably good not keeping it inside. I just hope that you're proud of what I'm doing and have faith in my decisions. I will try hard and not give up. I just want to say sorry for anything I have ever done wrong. And I'm doing it for all you, Mom. I love you.”*

[Source: Goldstein, Amy and Sylvia Moreno, *The Washington Post*, Sunday April 27, 2003, p.A18, “In Their Own Words: Last Letters From Troops Who Died in the Iraq War.”]

The war was declared over by President Bush in May 2003. In June 2003, a “Tejano”- to use the Latino vernacular – became the top U.S. military commander in Iraq, Major General Ricardo S. Sanchez, 52. He faces perhaps the biggest challenge of a Latino patriot of the 21st Century by being the Chief of Coalition Joint Task Force 7. As chief he command roughly half the ground combat power of the active-duty U.S. military – four full Army divisions, parts of others, two cavalry regiments and large segments of the Special Operations Command and the Marine Corps. He also oversees the allied troops in Iraq and Polish peacekeepers.

Before that assignment, three star General Sanchez was the General in Command of the Army’s 1st Armored Division, which replaced the 3rd Infantry Division, as the lead unit for peacekeeping in Baghdad. Originally a tank officer, in the 1991 Persian Gulf War he commanded a battalion in the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division. Later he gained experience as a peacekeeper, commanding the U.S. force in Kosovo from December 1999 to June 2000.

Like many Latinos before him, General Sanchez began life on the poor side of a small town in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Not too far from the Alamo and the birthplace of legions of Latino patriots. He was raised in a single-parent home on welfare. He did not come from a military family, but saw in it the way out of poverty.

Some of the wounded veterans of Iraq have returned home. Among them Officer John Fernandez, age 25. Before the War, John was a West Point graduate and the captain of the Army’s lacrosse team. In July 2003 he was learning to use his new prostheses for both legs in Ward 57 of Walter Reed Hospital. John, a double amputee, was part of the 13th Field Artillery unit, just 21 miles from Baghdad, when on April 3, 2003, an explosion blew him from his cot as he slept by his Humvee. He woke-up and reported: “My legs were numb. I took off the sleeping bag and I screamed.” John and his newlywed wife, Kristi, served America in Iraq with courage and tenacity. Now he and Kristi look forward to a normal life and the new next steps ahead into the future. And to inspire him further is his grandfather, Frank Fernandez, 81, a veteran of the Navy and World War II. Frank survived the bombing of Pearl Harbor, being on two torpedoed ships that sunk underneath him, and 33 hours in the open sea before being rescued (*Source: Anne Hall and Tamara Jones “The War After the War: Soldiers’ Battle Shifts From Desert Sands to Hospital Linoleum,” The Washington Post, Sunday July 20, 2003, pp. A-1, A-16 & 17*).

Our stories end here at a time when the U.S. occupies Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and other military outposts. But this is not the end of military vigilance and peace-building endeavors.

It is a time of dynamic change, complex situations, and the need for faith, hope and charity. Life goes on and so do the generations of millions of Latinos who have served in defense of America, Latinos who have met the call for duty since the founding of this nation, to protect the America ideal of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Latinos are not unique in this respect as millions more have all shared valor, conviction, hope, and an intense expression of patriotism as American soldiers.

May all their contributions to Americans be inspiring, cherished and revered, may peace and harmony reign forever.

## Epilogue & Dedication

U.S. Latino patriotism is evident in the history and spirit of America, since the American Revolution to Afghanistan and Iraq. It has no particular claimant or heirs because the spirit of patriotism resides in most people. Yet patriotism waxes and wanes. It is especially strong in times of conflict and challenge to the basic principles and values of our society. Patriotism takes many forms and each expression is a lesson for others.

In 1998, America lost a great Latino patriot who was diligent in the defense of his country and protected American lives many times. His code name “Tango Mike/Mike,” stood for “That Mean Mexican.” A better term would have been “That Tough, Gallant American Soldier.” Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez received the Medal of Honor for his valor, clearly remarkable under the circumstances described in the declaration for the Medal. In the annals of the USA’s Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients, the official citation of his valor is possibly the longest of all, nearly two full pages, as compared to a half page for most. He was wounded over 50 times by shrapnel, bullets, bayonets and clubs, while carrying and defending fallen American troops. He carried eight to a rescue helicopter before finally accepting relief for himself and safety from open combat. He is truly a remarkable warrior in any sense of the word.

In his book, *Medal of Honor: One Man’s Journey from Poverty and Prejudice*, “Tango Mike/Mike” Benavidez wrote the following memorable words, capturing the quintessence of a patriot:

*“I believe that there is no greater calling for a man or woman to serve in the military of a free nation. “ I believe that it is a calling that transcends all others because imbedded deep within the soul of every free man or woman is the knowledge that every freedom we have was earned for us by our ancestors, who paid some price for that freedom. Each and every generation must relearn those lessons, and they are best learned by doing. The strength of every free nation depends on this transfer of knowledge. Only through the transfer of knowledge from generation to generation will free men survive.”*

### **American Hero from the War in Vietnam**

**Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, US**

**1935 - 1998**

*Army, Special Forces*

We proudly dedicate this document to U.S. Latino patriots like “Tango Mike/Mike.”



## United States Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor was created in 1863 by an Act of Congress to acknowledge the highest act of valor in combat by members of the U.S. military. The example of valor must be of such outstanding quality that it distinguishes the heroism of a specific individual to his/her country above that of one's own life. President Abraham Lincoln awarded the first of these medals to exemplary American military heroes in the Civil War.



The 40 Latino American Medal of Honor recipients are identified in Appendix I.

## The Original Navy Medal of Honor

The Navy's Medal of Honor was the first approved and the first designed. The initial work was done by the Philadelphia Mint at the request of Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. The Mint submitted several designs for consideration, and the one prepared by the Philadelphia firm of William Wilson & Sons was the design selected.

The selected design consisted of an inverted, 5-pointed star. On each of the five points was a cluster of laurel leaves — represent victory — mixed with a cluster of oak to depict strength. Surrounding the encircled insignia were 34 stars, equal to the number of stars in the U.S. Flag at the time in 1862... one star for each state of the Union, plus the 11 Confederate states. The stars also symbolized the “heavens and the divine goal which man has aspired to since time immemorial,” according to Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress back in 1777.

Inside the circle of 34 stars are engraved two images. To the right is the image of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war. On her helmet is a perched owl, representing wisdom. In keeping with the Roman tradition, her left hand holds a bundle of rods and an ax blade, symbolic of authority. The shield in her right hand is the shield of the Union of our states (similar to the shield on our seal and other important emblems.)

Recoiling from Minerva is a man clutching snakes in his hands. He represented discord and the insignia became known as “Minerva Repulsing Discord.” Taken in the context of the Civil War soldiers and sailors struggling to overcome the discord of the states and preserve the Union, the design was both fitting and symbolic.

The ribbon holding the medal was originally a blue bar on top and 13 red and white stripes running vertically — the 13 representing the original 13 colonies. White represents purity and innocence, red represents hardiness, valor and blood, blue signifies vigilance, perseverance and justice. The stripes also represent the rays of the sun.

Since then much of the symbolism in the Medal of Honor has not varied much. The Army MOH was created soon after the original Navy MOH in 1862. It included an Eagle, symbolizing the United States of America, was perched on a cannon and saber grasped in its talons.

In 1904 the Gillespie version of the MOH included a simple portrait of a helmeted Goddess of War to replace the “Minerva repelling discord” scene. The red, white and blue ribbon was replaced with a light blue and 13 white stars — again, representing the original 13 colonies.

In 1919, the Tiffany Cross version of the MOH had a Maltese Cross instead of an inverted star. The Maltese Cross’ eight points symbolize the eight virtues of a knight. The cross itself also represents the four cardinal directions and the sun. This design was discontinued in 1942 due to its unpopularity.

In 1965 the Air Force MOH was created and it replaced the Minerva portrait with the head of the Statue of Liberty, with pointed crown instead of helmet. Although she stands for liberty, she is derived from the imagery of Semiramis, wife of Nimrod, and Queen of Babylon. Semiramis was famed for her beauty, strength, and wisdom. She was said to have built the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon and purportedly reigned for 42 years after taking control from Nimrod.

# APPENDIX A

## THE HONOR ROLL OF U.S. LATINO MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS

<i><b>NAME</b></i>	<i><b>SERVICE BRANCH</b></i>	<i><b>EVENT</b></i>	<i><b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b></i>
<i><b>Civil War</b></i>			
Philip Bazaar	U.S. Navy	6/15/1865	Chile
John Ortega	U.S. Navy	12/31/1864	Spain
<i><b>Boxer Rebellion</b></i>			
France Silva	U.S. Marines	6/25/1900	Hayward, CA
<i><b>WWI</b></i>			
David B. Barkeley	U.S. Army	11/9/1918	Laredo, TX
<i><b>WWII</b></i>			
Lucian Adams	U.S. Army	10/23/1944	Port Arthur, TX
Macario Garcia	U.S. Army	11/27/1944	Villa Castano, Mexico
Harold Gonsalves	U.S. Marines	4/15/1945	Alameda, CA
David M. Gonzales	U.S. Army	4/25/1945	Pacoima, CA
Silvestre H. Herrera	U.S. Army	3/15/1945	El Paso, TX
Jose M. Lopez	U.S. Army	12/17/1944	Mission, TX
Joseph P. Martinez	U.S. Army	5/26/1943	Taos, NM
Manuel Perez, Jr.	U.S. Army	2/13/1945	Oklahoma City, OK
Cleto Rodriguez	U.S. Army	2/9/1945	San Marcos, TX
Alejandro R. Ruiz	U.S. Army	4/28/1945	Loving, NM
Joseph F. Valdez	U.S. Army	1/25/1945	Governador, NM
Ysmael R. Villegas	U.S. Army	3/20/1945	Casa Blanca, CA
<i><b>Korean Conflict</b></i>			
Reginald A. Disiderio	U.S. Army	11/27/1950	Clairton, PA
Fernando L. Garcia	U.S. Marines	9/5/1952	Utuaado, PR
Edward Gomez	U.S. Marines	9/14/1951	Omaha, NE
Ambrosio Guillen	U.S. Marines	7/25/1953	La Junta, CO
Rodolfo P. Hernandez	U.S. Army	5/31/1951	Colton, CA
Baldomero Lopez	U.S. Marines	9/15/1950	Tampa, FL
Benito Martinez	U.S. Army	9/6/1952	Fort Hancock, TX
Eugene Arnold Obregon	U.S. Marines	9/26/1953	Los Angeles, CA
Joseph C. Rodriguez	U.S. Army	5/21/1951	San Bernardino, CA
<i><b>Vietnam Era</b></i>			
Roy P. Benavidez	U.S. Army	5/2/1968	Laredo, TX
Emilio De La Garza, Jr	U.S. Marines	4/11/1970	East Chicago, IN
Ralph E. Dias	U.S. Marines	11/12/1969	Shelocta, PA
Daniel Fernandez	U.S. Army	2/18/1965	Albuquerque, NM
Alfredo Gonzalez	U.S. Marines	2/4/1968	Edinburg, TX
Jose Francisco Jimenez	U.S. Marines	8/28/1969	Mexico City, Mexico
Miguel Keith	U.S. Marines	5/8/1970	San Antonio, TX
Carlos James Lozada	U.S. Army	11/20/1967	Caguas, PR
Louis Richard Rocco	U.S. Army	5/24/1970	Albuquerque, NM
Alfred V. Rascon	U.S. Army	3/16/1966	Chihuahua, Mexico
Euripedes Rubio	U.S. Army	11/8/1966	Ponce, PR
Hector Santiago-Colon	U.S. Army	6/28/1968	Salinas, PR
Jay R. Vargas-Sandini, Jr.	U.S. Marines	4/30/1968	Winslow, AZ
Humbert Roque Versace	U.S. Army	9/29/1965	Alexandria, VA
Maximo Yabes	U.S. Army	2/26/1967	Lodi, CA

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*(Memorial in honor of M.Sgt. Roy P. Benavidez, Medal of Honor Recipient, Vietnam War.)*

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[http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/TFE/bosnia/bosnia\\_history.htm](http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/TFE/bosnia/bosnia_history.htm)

<http://www.wtj.com/articles/gabaldon>

## THE TOLL OF WAR TODAY

### *Snapshots May 20, 2008*

*American battlefield deaths in major wars against other countries:*

Revolutionary War .....	4,435
War of 1812 .....	2,260
Mexican War .....	1,733
Spanish-American War .....	385
World War I .....	53,402
World War II.....	291,557
Korean War .....	33,741
Vietnam War.....	47,414
<i>(Note: approximately 58,000 names are recorded at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.)</i>	
Persian Gulf War .....	147
Afghanistan .....	493 est.
Iraq War .....	4, 078 est.

### **War Casualties Given Citizenship — Agence France-Presse**

*From correspondents in Los Angeles, July 30, 2003*

*[www.heraldsun.news.com.au/footy/common/story\\_page/0,8033,6231081%255E1702,00.html](http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/footy/common/story_page/0,8033,6231081%255E1702,00.html)*

*TWO U.S. marines of Hispanic origin who were killed in Iraq have been posthumously awarded US citizenship. The pair were permanent residents, but not citizens of the United States, when they lost their lives. U.S. government officials named them as Jose Gutierrez, 22, from Guatemala, and Jose Angel Garibay, 21, from Mexico. The Marines, who lived in California, were among the first U.S. troops killed in the Iraq war.*