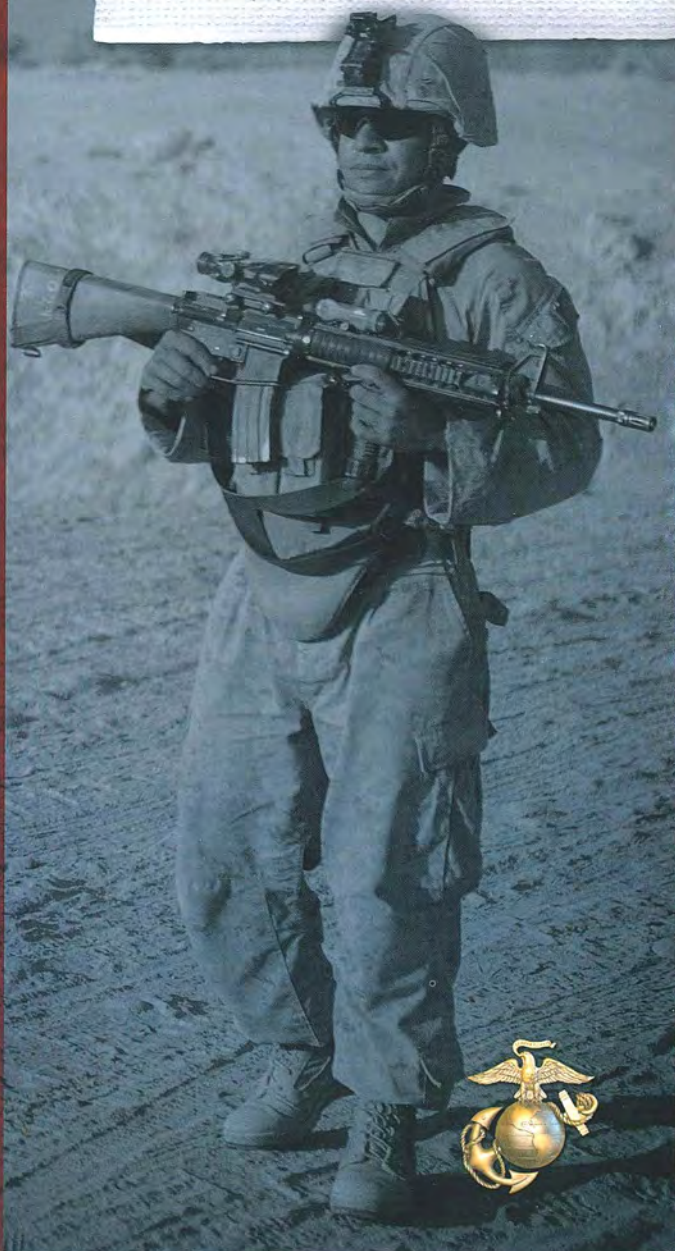


**HISPANIC
AMERICANS
IN THE
UNITED STATES
MARINE CORPS**

**FROM THE FOUNDING
OF THE MARINE CORPS IN 1775,
THROUGH OPERATION IRAQI
FREEDOM AND OPERATION
ENDURING FREEDOM, HISPANIC
MARINES HAVE DISTINGUISHED
THEMSELVES WITH VALOR ON
THE BATTLEFIELD.**



World War I

From the Spanish American War (1898) to the Banana Wars of the early 20th century, Hispanics served with honor in a mobile force of readiness. Prior to the World War, Latinos saw military action in such places as Haiti and Subic Bay. As civil unrest erupted in the Dominican Republic in 1916, Marines were deployed to protect American interests. As



a 23-year-old Marine, Pedro Augusto del Valle of Puerto Rico, and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, received his first Legion of Merit for his participation in the capture of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. He would retire as a lieutenant general in 1948. As America became entrenched in the First World War, so did Hispanic Marines. Although the official wartime numbers of Latinos within the Corps is not known, their bravery has never been doubted. On 3 October 1918, Private Joe Nichols Viera of the 78th Company, 6th Regiment, 4th Marine Brigade, seized three enemy machine gun nests and with the aid of another Marine, captured 40 enemy soldiers in the Battle of Blanc Mont, France. His heroism earned him a Navy Cross.

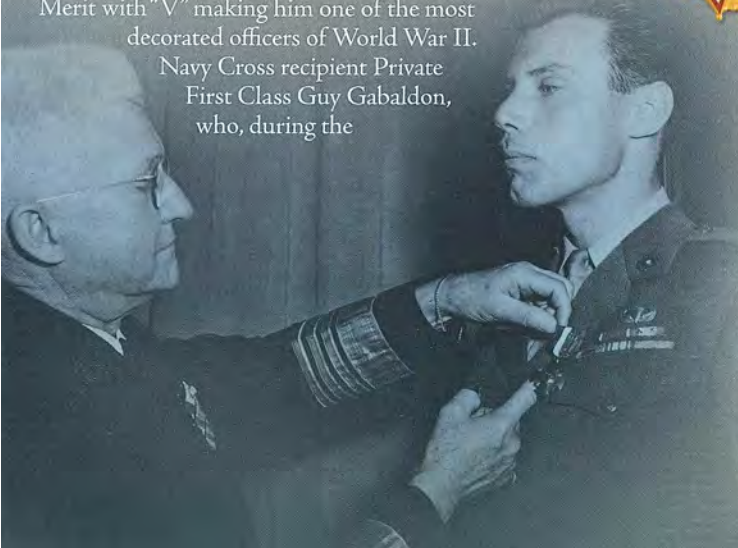
Colonel Peter Ortiz's
Navy Cross and
Legion of Merit



Uncommon Valor: Marines in World War II

In the Pacific and across Europe Hispanic-Americans distinguished themselves repeatedly in the Corps. These Marines fought courageously, earning 15 Navy Crosses and a Medal of Honor. Colonel Pierre (Peter) Julien Ortiz, born to a mother of Spanish-American heritage, received two Purple Hearts, and a Legion of Merit with "V" making him one of the most decorated officers of World War II.

Navy Cross recipient Private First Class Guy Gabaldon, who, during the



Lieutenant General Pedro del Valle's General Officers Dress Cap.

battle of Saipan, single-handedly captured over 1,000 prisoners. His actions were later depicted in the film *Hell to Eternity* (Karlson, 1960).

On 1 April 1945, without hesitation, Hispanic-American Private First Class Harold Gonsalves laid on top of a Japanese grenade. Taking the full impact of the blast, his heroism saved the lives of countless Marines. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Marines of Hispanic decent continued their valor while serving in Carlson's Raiders, an elite unit that saw action in the Solomon Islands. These Hispanic Marines battled alongside white Marines. Their commendable warrior spirit proved they were capable of any task. Colonel Pedro del Valle became the first Latino Commanding Officer of the 11th Marines. He was later promoted to brigadier general in 1942, becoming the first Hispanic to reach this rank in the Corps' history. It is estimated that Hispanic Americans made up 4% of the total Marine enlistment during World War II.

Send in the Marines: The Korean War

The military became fully integrated in 1948 through Executive Order 9981. Hispanic Marines found themselves serving with Marines of differing racial backgrounds far from home in Korea. From the street fighting in Seoul to the Chosin Reservoir, the hostilities in Korea provided a backdrop to the bravery displayed by Hispanics serving in the Corps.

In 1950, it was estimated that approximately 20,000 Latinos were enlisted in all branches of the military. By 1953, that number increased to nearly 148,000. One of those enlisted was Private First Class Eugene A. Obregon of California. On 26 September 1950, while using his body as a protective shield against a grenade, PFC Obregon saved the life of a fellow Marine. PFC Obregon was mortally wounded and received the Medal of Honor for his ultimate sacrifice.

Recruitment of Hispanics also included women. In 1954, Rose Franco, who had been born in Puerto Rico, enlisted in the Corps. When she retired in 1977, she held the rank of chief warrant officer 3.



Colonel Peter Ortiz's
O.S.S. Parachute Wings

At the amphibious landing at Inchon, west of Seoul, Korea, First Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez lost his life while smothering a hand grenade with his own body. His actions are depicted in the museum's Korean War Gallery, where visitors can watch as he climbed the seawall moments before his untimely death. The news of Lopez's heroism spread quickly when Jerry Thorp, a Scripps-Howard war correspondent, immortalized the lieutenant with these words, "He died with the courage that makes men great."



In the Air, on Land, by Sea: The War in Vietnam

On the home front, as political and cultural differences collided, Hispanic Marines displayed the same warrior courage. Operating within the Northern I Corps Regions of South Vietnam and assigned to various jobs, Hispanics served in a Marine Corps that represented gender and racial diversity. Battling through snake-infested jungles or the murky waters of rice patties during the conflict, 19 Hispanics earned the Navy Cross and six received the Medal of Honor, five of which were awarded posthumously. While no official statistics exist, it is estimated that over 170,000 Hispanics fought in Vietnam, and over 5% of those killed in action were Latino.



Medal of Honor Wall

Thirteen Hispanic Marines have received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty." The first Hispanic Marine to receive this honor was Private France Silva. Pvt Silva was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism during the Boxer Rebellion. His citation reads, "For distinguished conduct in the presence of the enemy at Peking, China, 28th June to 17th August, 1900." These Hispanics, along with the other valiant Medal of Honor recipients, are honored near the end of "Legacy Walk" on the Medal of Honor Wall.



Learn more about Hispanic-American Marines who have been awarded the Medal of Honor at the Medal of Honor exhibit along the Museum's "Legacy Walk."

The Modern Marine

Through deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan, whether native to this country or on a pathway to naturalized citizenship, Hispanics in the Marine Corps serve this nation with distinction. The Corps estimates that Latinos provide 18% of the Marine's manpower and continue to surpass all other minorities. They serve with distinction in the officer corps, too. On 2 August 2006, Brigadier General Angela Salinas became the first Hispanic female to reach the rank of general officer.

Since the beginning of the Global War on Terror, five Hispanics serving in the Corps have received the Navy Cross. In 2011 in a ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, Staff Sergeant Juan Rodríguez-Chavez was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions during an ambush in Ganjgal, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. Born in Mexico, Rodríguez-Chavez was honored for "his decisive actions, bold initiative, and selfless dedication to duty." The National Museum of the Marine Corps is a constant work in progress. As new exhibits and artifacts are added to its galleries, so, too, will new images and information about this special topic.



Hispanic-Americans' cultural backgrounds vary, with influences coming from such areas as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Spain, and Nicaragua. During times of racial segregation, Latinos marched with the general "white" population of the Corps. It wasn't until the 1970s that Hispanics were independently classified as a racial group by the Marine Corps. During the early years of the 21st century, Latinos have outnumbered other non-white ethnic groups within the Corps. Whether falling on a grenade to save the life of a fellow Marine or being the first to climb a seawall to fight the enemy, Hispanics have proudly worn the uniform of the U.S. Marine Corps.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To explore Hispanic American's contributions to the Marine Corps further, please consider the following:

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