

**MARCAIO GARCIA BECOMES FIRST MEXICAN NATIONAL TO RECEIVE THE U.S. MEDAL OF HONOR BUT...**

**THIS RECIPIENT WASN'T ALWAYS CELEBRATED**

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**ONCE HE RETURNED TO FORT BEND COUNTY, HE WAS FORCED TO ENDURE MUCH MISTREATMENT**



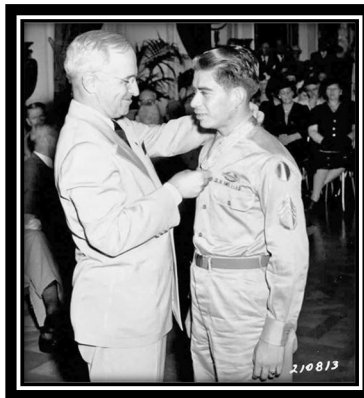
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Though he had landed on the beaches of Normandy and been wounded in battle fighting with the U.S. Army, Staff Sergeant Marcario García was not yet a U.S. citizen when President Harry S. Truman awarded him the Medal of Honor on August 23, 1945.

"I would rather have a Medal of Honor than be President of the United States," President Harry S. Truman told then-Staff. Sgt. Macario Garcia along with other military members at the White House that day to receive the nation's highest award for combat valor.

García became the first Mexican national to receive the American military's highest honor.

He was awarded the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star and the Medal of Honor.



***MOH presented by Pres. Harry Truman on August 23, 1945***



***The actual Medal of Honor presented to Macario Garcia by President Harry S. Truman.***

***On August 8, 2016 the Houston Chronicle newspaper published an article about Macario Garcia and included this rare close-up photo of Garcia's original Medal taken in November 1960.***

Born in Mexico, Garcia was working as a farmhand in November 1942 when he was drafted into the Army. ***He was 22***, and within about three years, Garcia would battle his way across Europe and, later, fight for his own dignity back home in Texas.

The wartime battle that secured a place in the history books for Garcia was waged on Nov. 27, 1944, while he was an acting squad leader with B Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment - part of the 4th Infantry Division.

Like many other allied units in the European Theater at that time, Garcia's 4th Division - nicknamed the Ivy Division - was struggling through Germany's impossibly dense Hurtgen Forest and fighting in a series of vicious clashes that lasted from September 1944 until February 1945. ***The Germans and the Allies each suffered about 30,000 casualties during the action.***

Garcia's unit was pinned down by an overwhelming mortar barrage and machine-gun fire on the outskirts of Grosshau, Germany. According to his Medal of Honor citation, Garcia - then only a private - was himself wounded but refused to be evacuated. There was no easy way to get to the entrenched German position now raking his fellow soldiers with fire. Inch by inch, the still-bleeding Garcia crawled forward until he got close enough to hurl a grenade into the machine-gun emplacements. Then, he killed three of the German soldiers who attempted to escape.

***But his fight that day wasn't over.***

Another enemy machine gun opened up when Garcia returned to B Company. Again, he raced forward and destroyed the emplacement, killing three more German soldiers and capturing four others. Garcia continued fighting on with his fellow soldiers in B Company until their objective was taken.

"Only then did he permit himself to be removed for medical care," his Medal of Honor citation states.

In an interview with the Houston Chronicle several years later, Garcia said: "I did not know the wound was so serious. I was numb, I think, and besides, we were moving forward, and it was not the time to stop."

Capt. Tony Bizzarro, the B company commander, made the initial recommendation for the Medal of Honor. ***He thought Garcia was nothing less than the best soldier in the Army.***

***"He was always willing to do anything he was asked to do,"*** Bizzarro later told the Chronicle.

Macario Garcia in 1943 was away fighting the Nazis when his brother, Lupe, was born. "He was 23 years older than me," Lupe Garcia, who lives in the Houston area, said in a recent interview.

For a few years, the significance of what Macario Garcia had accomplished on that bloody battlefield in Germany was lost on his younger brother. "I didn't know what (the Medal of Honor) was," Lupe Garcia said. He doesn't remember his older brother talking about the war after he returned home to Texas.

"He would probably talk to some GI, but if he noticed I was listening, he would quiet down," Lupe Garcia said. Macario Garcia became something of a local celebrity when he returned to Sugar Land. He once brought his younger brother to a baseball game in the neighborhood where strangers would ask to shake his hand.

"Next thing you know, somebody sent over a round of drinks," Lupe Garcia recalled. "People would want to have him as the best man at their wedding."

The surrender of the Nazis in Europe did not signal the end of his struggles. On Sept. 10, 1945, Garcia stopped in for a meal at the Oasis Cafe in Richmond. At that time, shortly after the White House ceremony, he was the toast of the town. Newspaper reporters wrote glowing articles about his combat heroism, and a party was thrown in his honor at Richmond's city hall.

But his reception at the Oasis was less welcoming. Although in full uniform, including a chest covered in combat decorations, Macario Garcia was refused service because of his Mexican ancestry.

"I've been fighting for people like you, and now you mistreat me," he reportedly told the proprietor.



A fight broke out after Anglo sailors at the cafe sprang to his defense. *Garcia was the only one arrested.*

The case against Garcia quickly became something of a cause célèbre after Walter Winchell, the famous newspaper columnist and radio host, criticized local authorities for their treatment of the returning hero.

Charges against Garcia eventually were dropped.

Michael Olivas, the interim president of the University of Houston-Downtown and a University of Houston law professor, has written about the Garcia case. What happened to the war hero at the cafe, Olivas said, wasn't particularly unusual in Texas. "This was sort of standard practice," he said. "The Texas Restaurant Association printed up signs that appeared in most white restaurants that said, 'No Mexicans or dogs.' It would say it in English and Spanish."



He said Winchell's interest proved so embarrassing for Fort Bend County officials that they simply let the charge against Garcia die.

*In June 1947, Garcia became a U.S. citizen.*

*"The only thing he didn't have was an education," Lupe Garcia said.*

After returning home, he resumed classes and eventually graduated from what was then known as Sam Houston High School in downtown Houston.

He met his future wife, Alicia Reyes, at a dance after the war. The couple married and had three children, Carlos, Maria and Rene.

For 25 years, he worked as a counselor in the Veterans Administration. He continued in the Army reserves after the war, *eventually achieving the rank of command sergeant major.*

On Nov. 21, 1963, Garcia greeted John F. Kennedy at the door of the Rice Hotel during the president's visit to Houston. *The next day, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.*



*Macario and his family on Dec 2, 1961*

*On Christmas Eve in 1972, nine days before his 53rd birthday, Macario Garcia was killed in an automobile crash. His wife died in February this year.*

His portrait now hangs in the Fort Bend County Courthouse in Richmond.

In addition, Garcia Elementary School in Houston and the Fort Bend Independent School District's Garcia Middle School both were named in his honor. City officials renamed a 1.5-mile stretch of 69th Street "Staff Sgt. Macario Garcia Drive." It runs through the heart of the city's east side Mexican-American community.

In 1983, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush dedicated the Macario Garcia Army Reserve Center in honor of the soldier from Sugar Land.



[Houston National Cemetery](#)



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