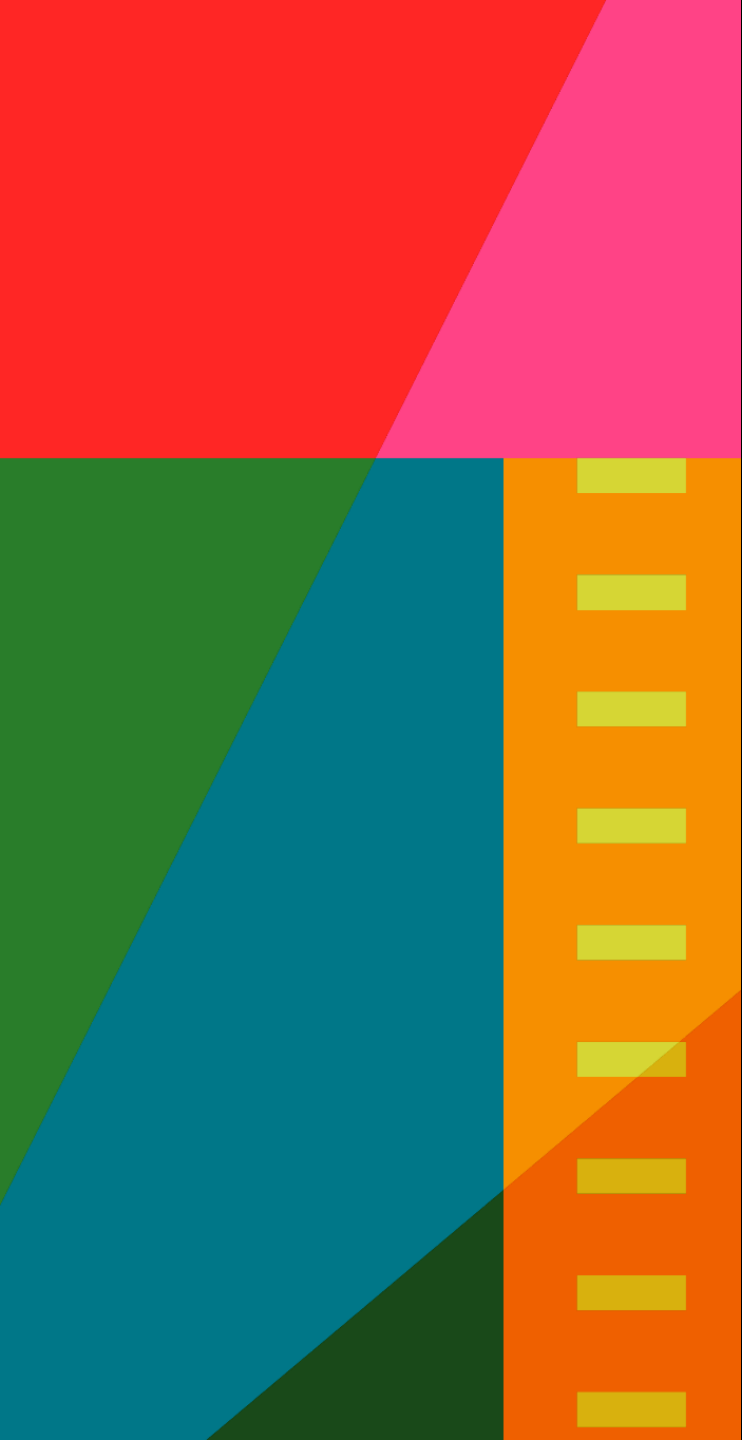




Hispanic Heritage Month

Created by: Katherine Molina,
Assistant Veterans Service Officer,
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Travis County Veterans Department

Introduction

Rich Diversity: Honoring a beautiful mosaic of traditions, languages, and stories from across Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

Historical Freedom: Starting on September 15 to mark the independence anniversaries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, followed closely by Mexico, Chile, and Belize.

Enduring Contributions: Elevating the voices and innovations that drive our communities forward every single day.

Let's listen, learn, and amplify Hispanic voices this month and all year long.

#HispanicHeritageMonth #HHM #CelebrateCulture
#DiverseVoices #CommunityFirst

Historic Hispanic Veterans



Corporal Joseph H. De Castro (U.S. Army): Became the **first Hispanic American to receive the Medal of Honor**. Serving as a flag bearer during the Civil War, he distinguished himself through extreme bravery under fire at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Private Marcelino Serna (U.S. Army): An undocumented Mexican immigrant who insisted on volunteering for service during World War I. He overcame intense prejudice and language barriers to become the **first Hispanic enlisted soldier to earn the Distinguished Service Cross** after single-handedly capturing dozens of enemy soldiers.





Technical Sergeant Carmen Contreras-Bozak (U.S. Army): Broke barriers during World War II as the **first Hispanic woman to serve in the Women's Army Corps**. She served overseas in North Africa and Europe, working in critical cryptology, communications, and interpretation roles.

Captain Michael López-Alegría (U.S. Navy): A legendary naval aviator and flight instructor who transitioned into a career as a **NASA astronaut**. He holds multiple NASA records for spacewalks and was inducted into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame.



Lieutenant Colonel Olga E. Custodio (U.S. Air Force): Achieved a series of historic firsts during her 23-year military career, becoming the **first Latina military pilot in the U.S. Air Force** and later the first Latina commercial airline captain.



Desi Arnaz (US Army) – Best known for I Love Lucy, Arnaz was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943 during WWII. A knee injury kept him from overseas combat, but he served in the Medical Corps, organizing USO shows to boost morale at Birmingham General Hospital. He was honorably discharged as a Staff Sergeant in 1945.

Zulay Henao(US Army)- Best known for her captivating performances in both film and television, where she easily transitions from intense dramas to light-hearted comedies, This Colombian-American star traded her fatigues for film scripts after serving three years, proving she can tackle any role with the same gusto she once applied to obstacle courses at Fort Bragg.



Texas has a profoundly deep and legendary history of Hispanic military service. From the earliest Tejano fighters in the Texas Revolution to modern-day heroes, Texas has produced some of the most highly decorated and barrier-breaking Hispanic service members in United States history.



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Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez (U.S. Army): A legendary Green Beret who received the Medal of Honor for his astonishing valor during the Vietnam War. Despite sustaining severe injuries, he spent six hours orchestrating the rescue of a trapped special forces team, saving the lives of at least eight men.



Staff Sergeant Lucian Adams (U.S. Army): Raised in a large Mexican-American family in Texas, he earned the Medal of Honor in World War II. Armed with a Browning automatic rifle, he single-handedly advanced through heavy machine-gun fire to defeat a German position and reopen a critical supply line.

Staff Sergeant Marcario García (U.S. Army): Born in Mexico, his family immigrated to Sugar Land, Texas, when he was young. He volunteered during WWII, and his single-handed destruction of two German machine-gun nests earned him the Medal of Honor, making him the first Mexican national to receive the award. After the war, he became a prominent civil rights advocate in Houston.





First Lieutenant Rudolph B. Davila (U.S. Army): Born in El Paso, Texas, Davila served with extreme heroism in Italy during WWII. He single-handedly silenced multiple German machine-gun nests and held off enemy forces from a burnt-out tank. He was originally awarded the Distinguished Service Cross due to prejudice but was finally upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 2000.

General Richard E. Cavazos (U.S. Army): Born in Kingsville, Texas, Cavazos was a highly decorated veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He shattered the military glass ceiling by becoming the **first Hispanic four-star general in the U.S. Army**. In 2023, Texas' massive military base Fort Hood was officially renamed **Fort Cavazos** in his honor.



Dr. Hector P. Garcia (U.S. Army): A Mexican-born physician who grew up in Mercedes, Texas. He served as a combat surgeon in World War II. Appalled by the poor treatment and lack of benefits given to returning Hispanic veterans in Texas, he founded the **American G.I. Forum** in Corpus Christi, which became a foundational pillar of the Hispanic civil rights movement.



Lieutenant General Ricardo Sánchez (US Army) : Born into a Mexican American family in Rio Grande City, Texas. He spent one year at the University of Texas at Austin on an ROTC scholarship, eventually transferring to Texas A&M University-Kingsville, where he graduated in 1973 with a double major in mathematics and history. Sánchez was named a Distinguished Military Graduate (DMG), meaning he was in the top 20% of all ROTC cadets in the nation. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Army.



Major General Angela Salinas (US Marine Corps) -Born to native Texan parents, she is a descendant of one of the first civilian settlers in Texas. She was the first woman to command a Marine Corps Recruit Depot, and the first Hispanic woman to become a general in the Marines. She serves as the CEO of the Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas and is heavily active on several community and foundation boards.

Colonel Lisa “La Coronela” Carrington Firmin, (US Air Force)

She was one the Air Force’s most senior ranking Latina officer in 2010. She led many organizations within the Air Force at various levels to include serving in USSTRATCOM, at the Pentagon and as a squadron and group commander. She is a combat veteran, served in the Sunni Triangle of Iraq and is a Bronze Star recipient. La Coronela is the Military Liaison for the University of Texas at San Antonio where she founded the UTSA Top Scholar program, the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs and the Center for Military Affiliated Students.



Specialist Vanessa Guillen (US. Army)-

Born on September 30, 1999, in Houston, Texas, to Mexican immigrant parents, Guillén grew up playing soccer, running track, and graduated in the top 15% of her class from César E. Chávez High School in 2018. She trained as a 91F, a Small Arms and Artillery Repairer.

She was assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Regiment at Fort Hood. She mysteriously disappeared from her base for two months, before being found dead. Texas House Bill 2248 of the 88th Legislature designates September 30 as “Vanessa Guillén Day” in Texas, honoring her life and raising awareness about military missing persons, sexual assault, and harassment cases. Federal Legislation Resulting from Vanessa Guillén’s Case, The **I Am Vanessa Guillén Act** is the federal law enacted in response to the 2020 disappearance and murder of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillén at Fort Hood, it is the most significant U.S. military justice reform in over 70 years. The historic legislation fundamentally altered military law. It criminalized sexual harassment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and stripped military commanders of their authority to decide whether to prosecute sexual assault and harassment cases, handing that power to independent, civilian-led prosecutor offices.



Travis County Veteran Department Staff

Katherine Molina (US Marine Corps)- She served as a warehouse clerk, a Legal Services Specialist and as Battalion Legal Chief and her typical duties included research, preparation of Non-Judicial Punishments hearings, Court-Martials and Administration Separation of Marines. She received the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for serving as the Legal Chief (SNCO Billet) as a Corporal. Currently is an Assistant Veteran Service Officer and the Women's & LGBTQ+ Coordinator for Travis County Veteran Department.



Berta Guerra (US Army) - She served as a 68W, Medical Instructor, for those Active Duty, Reservist and National Guard for Region F (15 states). She deployed to Iraq as a Civil Affairs Medic from 2007-2008. She retired from the Army Reserves with 28 years of service in 2011. Currently the Community Liaison for Travis County Veterans Department.



Angel Ramirez (US Army)- He served as a Field Artillery Man from October 1977 till August 1980 with Charlie Battery 1/82 FA Bn. at Ft. Hood, Texas. In August of 1980, he changed MOS and became a Field Medic Serving as a Senior Medic, Ambulance Supervisor, Training NCO and EFMB (Expert Field Medical Badge) Advisor at MEDDAC West Point, HHC 5/502 Berlin Brigade, 1/43 Patriot BN. Ft. Bliss Texas, 5/20 Infantry Bn. 2nd ID, Camp Casey South Korea and Med. Troop, Support Bn. 3rd ACR. Fort Carson, Colorado. He earned the Army Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal 4th Award, Army Achievement Medal 3rd Award, Army Occupation Medal, National Defense Medal, Korea Defense Medal, Non-Commissioned Officers Development Ribbon with Numeral Number 2, Overseas Ribbon 2nd Award, Expert Field Medical Badge, Driver and Mechanic Badge with Driver T-Bar, Driver and Mechanic Badge with Driver W-Bar, Sharpshooter Pistol Badge, Expert Marksman Badge with Rifle, Expert Marksman Badge with Grenade.

Jose Guerra (US Navy)- He went to Submarine School in Connecticut, Electronics A School in Virginia, then Missile C School in Hawaii. He was assigned to the Thomas Edison SSBN 610 Submarine crew stationed in Guam, where he served 2 patrols (60+ days under water). After 18 months, he served on USS 1086 Brewton FF for 2 years. He completed his service at Barbers Point Naval Air station, where he was honorably discharged after serving 6 years.





Sergeant Alma Bills (U.S. Marine Corps)- She was born in Mexico and raised in Pasadena, Texas. She served in the United States Marine Corps in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, working with the Command Operations Center in an intelligence role and deploying to Fallujah and Al Asad, Iraq. She was also a member of a Female Lioness Team, where she supported operations involving the screening and engagement of Iraqi women and children entering and leaving the city. As part of her role, she taught basic Arabic language skills to fellow female Marines to help facilitate communication during operations. While the experience may sound like Taylor Sheridan's Lioness, the reality was far less glamorous and far more focused on security, intelligence, cultural awareness, and interacting with women and children in a combat environment. She currently is a Building Security Coordinator with Travis County Office of Security & Protection

Texas Landmarks Honoring Hispanic Service thru Community Visibility & Memorials

If you ever want to pay respects to these heroes in person:

- **The Hispanic Medal of Honor Plaza** in McAllen, Texas, dedicated specifically to honoring Hispanic bravery in combat.
- **The National Medal of Honor Museum** in Arlington, Texas, houses numerous personal artifacts and stories from these exact Texas veterans.
- **The Vanessa Guillén Mural:** Located in Southeast Austin, a powerful public mural honors the memory of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillén. Her tragic death at nearby Fort Hood sparked a national veterans' rights movement, leading to historic congressional reforms in how the military handles safety, harassment, and justice for enlisted personnel.
- **The Voces Oral History Center:** Headquartered at UT Austin's School of Journalism and Media, this is the leading oral history archive in the country dedicated to recording and preserving the firsthand experiences of Latino and Latina military veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.