

Honoring the Untold Story of U.S. Latino Veterans



The number of Latinos serving their country in the U.S. armed forces continues to grow. In 2010, Hispanics represented the third largest ethnic group among the nation's 21.8 million veterans, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Latinos have had valuable, often untold roles in U.S. history. Their participation in military service dates as far back as the American Revolutionary War. While Latinos served in many of the country's early battles, the Civil War was the first in which they served in significantly large numbers, according to Colonel Gilberto Villahermosa. By the end of the Civil War, about, about 10,000 Mexican Americans fought for both the Union and Confederate armies.

Fast Facts about Latinos in the Military

- About 11.4 percent of the individuals in the U.S. Armed Forces are Latino; this number will continue to grow.
- Almost 17 percent of new military recruits are Latino, according to a January 2013 report on NBC Latino.
- More Latina women serve in the military than Latino men, according to the S. Army.
- At 18 percent, Latinos are the largest minority group in the S. Marine Corps.
- Over 43,000 Latinos civilians and sailors served in the S. Navy in 2006.
- 11 percent of the Coast Guard's enlisted personnel and 9 percent of the students in the Coast Guard Academy are Latino.
- Nearly 5 percent of the enlisted personnel in the U.S. Air Force are Latino.

The Number of Latinos in U.S. Wars and Conflicts

- **Civil War:** 10,000
- **World War I:** 200,000
- **World War II:** 500,000
- **Korean War:** 148,000
- **Vietnam War:** 80,000
- **Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf:** Over 20,000
- **Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and the ongoing War on Terrorism:** Over 85,000
- **Marcelino Serna | World War I:** While in the trenches of France, Serna captured 24 enemy soldiers and protected them from other U.S. soldiers. For his service military service, Serna received the French Croix de Guerre medal, Distinguished Service Cross, two purple hearts and a Victory Medal with three bars.
- **Maria Dolores Hernández | World War II:** Hernández was the first Red Cross nurse from California's Orange County to be called into active duty with the rank of second lieutenant. She later transferred to the Air Force and retired as a Major after 20 years of service.
- **Roy P. Benavidez | Vietnam War:** Serving as a Green Beret sergeant in Vietnam, Benavidez was severely wounded as he extracted a Special Forces team. During the extraction, he single-handedly saved eight men. Benavidez received a Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.
- **Robert Gutierrez, Jr. | Afghanistan:** Gutierrez led over 40 controlled airstrikes and medical evacuations under heavy enemy fire, which helped the U.S. successfully extract all the service members and casualties in the area in question. After getting shot in the chest during a battle with Taliban fighters, he still defeated the enemy forces and successfully directed air support strikes. Gutierrez recovered from the gunshot wound and received the Air Force's highest award, the Air Force Cross.