

Veterans News

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March 18, 2014

President Obama Awards Long Overdue Medals of Honor to Californians Alvarado, Duran, Gomez, Gandara and Lara

President Obama today awarded long overdue Medals of Honor to five Californians who served our country valiantly during WWII, the Korean War and War in Vietnam. Although these men received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest military award back then, a review of Jewish American and Hispanic American Veterans through the Defense Authorization Act of 2002 found that these men were more than eligible to receive the Medal of Honor.

"These Medals of Honor have been a long time coming and I am most pleased that such a regrettable oversight is finally being addressed," said Peter J. Gravett, Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). "These men fought for our country and their fellow soldiers with bravery, commitment and patriotism and now their descendants can receive comfort in knowing they descend from authentic American heroes."

On Tuesday, May 27, 2014, CalVet will hold a special ceremony to recognize the bravery and gallantry of these patriotic Hispanic soldiers on the West Steps of the Capitol in Sacramento. Being recognized will be:

- Specialist Fourth Class Leonard L. Alvarado
- Sergeant Jesus S. Duran
- Sergeant First Class Eduardo C. Gomez
- Private Joe Gandara
- Private First Class Salvador J. Lara

From a White House news release:

In 2002, Congress, through the Defense Authorization Act, called for a review of Jewish American and Hispanic American veteran war records from WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, to ensure those deserving the Medal of Honor were not denied because of prejudice. During the review, records of several Soldiers of neither Jewish nor Hispanic descent were also found to display criteria worthy of the Medal of Honor. The 2002 Act was amended to allow these Soldiers to be honored with the upgrade - in addition to the Jewish and Hispanic American Soldiers.

Californians being awarded the Medal of Honor:

- **Specialist Fourth Class Leonard L. Alvarado** will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as a Rifleman with Company D, 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry,

1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) during combat operations against an armed enemy in Phuoc Long Province, Republic of Vietnam, on Aug. 12, 1969.

- **Sergeant Jesus S. Duran** will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as an acting M-60 machine gunner in Company E, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) during combat operations against an armed enemy in the Republic of Vietnam, on April 10, 1969.
- **Sergeant First Class Eduardo C. Gomez** will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving with Company I, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Tabu-dong, Korea, on Sept. 3, 1950.
- **Private Joe Gandara** will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving with Company D, 2d Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 17th Airborne Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Amfreville, France, on June 9, 1944.
- **Private First Class Salvador J. Lara** will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions while serving as the Squad Leader of a rifle squad with 2d Platoon, Company L, 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Aprilia, Italy, on May 27 and 28, 1944.

THE MEDAL OF HONOR

The Medal of Honor is awarded to members of the Armed Forces who distinguishes themselves conspicuously by gallantry above and beyond the call of duty while:

- engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
- engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
- serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.