

# Latinos in Military History



**Cesar Chavez**, United States Navy Veteran, was born in Yuma, Arizona, where his family owned a small farm and a local store. Due to the effects of the Depression, Cesar and his family were forced to move to Delano, California to work as farmworkers. Field labor, as a young boy, would play a pivotal role in Cesar's desire for social change—it showed him the social injustices of farmworkers, the importance of hard work, and the priceless value of showing compassion to the less fortunate. Before settling in Delano, Cesar attended over 30 schools before he stopped attending in 8th grade. From childhood to young adulthood, Cesar faced several adversities such as being punished in school for not being able to speak English, living in a segregated community, as well as serving in the United States Navy during World War II while it was still segregated. After two years of military service, Cesar realized his passion would be devoting his life to others in need, especially farmworkers.



Before becoming the leader that Cesar is well-known for, he met a local priest in San Jose, California, Father Donald McDonnell, who introduced him to the concept of peaceful protests and nonviolent acts for social change. Father McDonnell's mentorship directly impacted how Cesar carried out his mission to improve the lives of farmworkers. Once Cesar established the United Farmworkers Association (UFWA), he led peaceful protests that directed enormous attention to the injustices of farm workers, such as when the Delano grape growers cut the pay rates of farmworkers during the harvest of 1965. Because of Cesar's self-sacrificing dedication to the Delano Grape Boycott, over 13 million Americans supported the boycott by not buying grapes. In 1969, Delano growers signed contracts with the UFWA which then became the United Farmworkers Union.

Cesar continued his passion for social change by staying politically active thus strengthening the Latino electoral vote and increasing the number of Latino officials. He also produced the nation's first law giving farmworkers the right to union elections. Cesar's unrelenting dedication to Latino's better quality of life was nothing short of monumental, and his remarkable drive for equality still empowers individuals of all backgrounds today.

Have a Latino-inspired photo or story? We would love to hear from you! Send it our way to [minorityveterans@calvet.ca.gov](mailto:minorityveterans@calvet.ca.gov).

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