

# Silvestre S. Herrera

Silvestre S. Herrera, 90, of Glendale, AZ, joins his wife Ramona Hidalgo Herrera, who died in 1991, in heaven as he passed away peacefully in his sleep on November 26, 2007.

Mr. Herrera, renowned for his courageous actions in war, was the first Arizonan to be awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor during World War II. Additionally, Herrera was recognized with Mexico's highest honor for valor, the "Premier Merito Militar", which he wore with pride. Silvestre Herrera was the only person to earn both countries' medals for valor on the field of battle.

Herrera was born to the Almanza family on December 31st, 1916 in Camargo, Chihuahua, Mexico. Following the death of his parents to an influenza epidemic in 1917, he came to the United States via El Paso, Texas and was raised by his uncle until the age of 10. He then moved to Phoenix, Arizona. He spent the rest of his youth in the care of his maternal aunt. He adopted his mom's maiden name – "Herrera" and the country that had taken him in.

Legally, Herrera remained a Mexican National and although he did not owe service to the United States when he was drafted, entered the Army on January 13, 1944. He joined the men of the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas National Guard to train for combat in Europe. Months into his training as a Private First Class, he was busy studying to become a US Citizen; however survival took precedence over study. His unit was one of the first American units to land in Europe during World War II. The following is what happened on March 15, 1945; a day that would change his life forever:



Mr. Herrera's Congressional Medal of Honor citation reads:

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to

## **SILVESTRE S. HERRERA**

Rank and organization: Private First Class, U.S. Army, Company E, 142d Infantry, 36th Infantry Division. Place and date: Near Mertzwiller, France, 15 March 1945. Entered service at: Phoenix, Ariz. G.O. No.: 75, 5 September 1945.

### **Citation:**

He advanced with a platoon along a wooded road until stopped by heavy enemy machine gun fire. As the rest of the unit took cover, he made a 1-man frontal assault on a strongpoint and captured 8 enemy soldiers. When the platoon resumed its advance and was subjected to fire from a second emplacement beyond an extensive minefield, Pvt. Herrera again moved forward, disregarding the danger of exploding mines, to attack the position. He stepped on a mine and had both feet severed but, despite intense pain and unchecked loss of blood, he pinned down the enemy with accurate rifle fire while a friendly squad captured the enemy gun by skirting the minefield and rushing in from the flank. The magnificent courage, extraordinary heroism, and willing self-sacrifice displayed by Pvt. Herrera resulted in the capture of 2 enemy strong points and the taking of 8 prisoners.

On August 23, 1945, Mr. Herrera crossed the White House lawn in his wheelchair to the Reception Hall so that President Harry S. Truman could present him with The Congressional Medal of Honor. He was discharged in March 1946 from the Army as a sergeant and during this time, he also became a US Citizen. Despite risking his life, Herrera once said he didn't consider himself a particularly brave man. He considered himself one of the lucky ones to survive and be awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor.

After the war, he worked as an artisan, crafting leather, and lived a quiet, private and humble life.

In 1956, an elementary school was named after him at 1350 S. 11th St. in Phoenix. In 2004, the Army dedicated the Silvestre S. Herrera U.S. Army Reserve Training Center, 6158 S. Avery St., in Mesa.

Herrera is survived by five of his seven children, Maria (deceased), Silvestre (Linda), Elva Corrales (Alex), Josephine (deceased), Robert (Gail), Raquel Harris and Ramona Kempfer (Glenn), 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Visitation will start at 5:00 PM with Rosary at 7:00 PM on Friday, Dec. 7, 2007 at Church of St. Thomas More; 6180 W. Utopia Road, Glendale, AZ. Funeral mass will be at 11:30 AM on Saturday, Dec. 8, 2007 at Church of St. Thomas More, 6180 W. Utopia Road, Glendale, AZ. Cemetery Service with Full Military Honors & Escort, at approximately 1:30 pm, on Saturday, Dec. 8, 2007 at Resthaven Park Cemetery, 6290 W Northern Avenue, Glendale, AZ. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the following charities in the name of Silvestre S. Herrera: Phoenix Children's Hospital, American Cancer Society, Silvestre S. Herrera Elementary School, or St. Josephs Orthopedic Clinic.