

Commanders Corner

There were no March 2021 and April 2021 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed until further notice. We will advise if there are any updates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities. I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing

Although the 2021 Texas Boys State program was initially scheduled to be an attended event this year at UT Austin, 27 June – 2 July, 2021 it was subsequently changed to be a virtual event as was done last year. We contacted ten local area High Schools and were able to sign up thirty nine candidates from six of them. This is sure to be a good event and we are looking forward to a great participation. We will report on the results of this event in a future issue.

In a previous issue I reported on Martin (Marty) Joseph Gonzalez, son of Tomas Gonzales, a long time member of our Post and a diligent volunteer for Honor Guard services at the National Cemetery. Tomas has volunteered with the VFW providing Honor Guard services at Houston National Cemetery for over 2,000 memorial ceremonies. Tomas lost his son last November, 2020. Martin (Marty) Joseph Gonzalez was a Marine Sergeant who served in combat in Iraq. He was involved in many assaults, particularly in Fallujah in 2004. He was wounded multiple times, receiving three Bronze Stars with Valor and three Purple Hearts. He suffered ongoing disabilities and eventually succumbed to complications from his injuries. He has been profiled in documentaries on the American Heroes Channel and he is honored at the Fallen Warriors Memorial on Cutten Road in Houston. He is interred in the Houston National Cemetery. I go there often and have now added Marty to my list of veterans to visit there.

Since I previously reported on this, Tomas has provided further information. Below are the official documented accounts of two separate firefights in which Sergeant Gonzalez earned his first two Bronze Stars.

SGT. MARTY GONZALEZ'S FIRST BRONZE STAR

At sunrise on 14 November 2004, during Operation Phantom Fury (2004 assault on Fallujah, Iraq) Sergeant Gonzales led his squad in clearing buildings of enemy insurgents. At 1020am, his squad cleared the first deck of a building and moved to the second deck. As the lead fireteam moved up the stairs and made entry into the first room, a Marine was struck by enemy fire and fell into the doorway. The other Marines opened fire into the room and pulled the wounded Marine to safety. Sergeant Gonzales ran into the room and killed three insurgents at close range with his rifle and bayonet. A bayonet is a fighting knife attached to the end of a rifle for hand-to-hand combat. Sergeant Gonzalez's actions prevented further casualties and cleared the way for the expedient evacuation of the Marine who lay dying from gunshot wounds.



SGT. MARTY GONZALEZ'S SECOND BRONZE STAR

On 12 December 2004, during Operation Iraqi Freedom II a group of insurgents on the second deck of a building opened fire on Sergeant Gonzalez's squad as they attempted to clear up the stairs, killing one Marine. Sergeant Gonzalez fearlessly responded opening fire on the insurgents while simultaneously rallying three Marines to attempt recovery of the fallen Marine. The Marine lay in the upstairs room with the insurgents. At this time, Sergeant Gonzalez and his Marines did not know whether the Marine had been killed or not. During the next 15 minutes, Sergeant Gonzales boldly led 11 attempts up the stairs against a barrage of enemy small arms fire, grenades, and rocket propelled grenade fire. Two other Marines and Sergeant Gonzales were shot and critically wounded on the stairway. While under enemy fire and critically wounded, Sergeant Gonzalez evacuated the other two Marines to safety while directing another Marine to fire at the enemy. Sergeant Gonzales' squad and the insurgents were pinned down by each other.



SGT. MARTY GONZALEZ'S SECOND BRONZE STAR (CONT')

During this firefight another squad of Marines was engaged with insurgents on the second deck of the adjacent building. Sergeant Gonzalez's actions prevented the insurgents in his building from shooting at the Marines in the adjacent building, thus facilitating the destruction of the five insurgents in the adjacent building. The squad from the adjacent building moved onto the roof of Sergeant Gonzales's building and began clearing down. Instead of waiting for the other squad to come to his aid, Sergeant Gonzalez took tactical advantage of the situation by leading another charge up the stairs, under enemy fire and critically wounded, thus placing the enemy in a dilemma.

The insurgents were stuck between Marines on the roof clearing down and Sergeant Gonzalez clearing up the stairway. Sergeant Gonzalez made it up the stairs and quickly entered the room containing the wounded Marine. An insurgent hiding in the closet opened fire on Sergeant Gonzalez at close range. Sergeant Gonzalez quickly returned fire killing the insurgent and recovered the body of his fallen comrade. The firefight in the upstairs rooms continued and two more Marines were killed. Sergeant Gonzalez critically wounded and under enemy fire, killed the remaining three insurgents. After the threat was eliminated, Sergeant Gonzalez was immediately evacuated due to his serious wounds.



Sgt. Gonzalez' story inspired State District Judge Marc Carter to advocate and then preside over Veterans' Court, a special program established in collaboration with the VA.

Veterans' Court: GOALS

The primary goals of the VC program include:

- 1) Improving access to needed mental health and addictions treatment for jailed veterans;
- 2) Reducing criminal recidivism through successful treatment outcomes and community reintegration;
- 3) Improving long-term mental health recovery and community reintegration through involvement in structured, comprehensive treatment;
- 4) Reducing jail time and resolving felony charges related primarily to mental health, TBI and addiction issues; and
- 5) Reducing costs associated with unnecessary incarceration.

A Texas First



State District Judge Marc Carter presides over the Veterans' Court. Marine Sgt. Marty Gonzales was the Marine whose story inspired Judge Carter to advocate for this special program and collaboration with the VA.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Harris County Veterans' Court Program (VC) is to increase access to mental health and addictions treatment for those veterans with felony and misdemeanor offenses by diverting veterans directly into VA treatment, reducing jail time, costs, and criminal recidivism, while improving mental health recovery and successful re-entry into the community.

VA, government agencies & community partners:

Michael E DeBaakey VA Medical Center
Veterans Benefits Administration
Texas Veterans Commission
Harris County District Courts
Harris County District Attorney's Office
Harris County Criminal Defense Bar
Harris County Community Supervision & Corrections
City of Houston, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Lone Star Vets
US Vets
Salvation Army, Harbor Lights Program

CONTACT PERSON:
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Sgt. Gonzalez home unit was the Marine Corps Special Force Battalion (MCSFBn) garrisoned at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, Washington.



His Commanding Officer at the base will be receiving the final authority letter to designate the MCSFBn barracks as the “Sgt. Marty Gonzalez barracks”. An official dedication ceremony is pending.

Tomas is sending me further information about his son which I will continue to report on in future issues.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive website that showcases the diligence this agency pursues in accounting for our MIAs.

Some interesting military news from: <https://www.military.com/daily-news>

This is an informative website that I encourage you to peruse. I couldn't find anything more interesting to compare with the extraordinary story of Sgt. Gonzalez.