



A HERO AMONGST US

By Gloria Almaraz



Sgt Fernando Q. Herrera, who is the highest-decorated Vietnam veteran in the Alamo City, has a city park named after him. This modest San Antonian hardly seems the type to generate such attention; but, then again, he hardly seems the type to write military history. He is further testament to the fact that Hispanic soldiers excel in the military—representing the highest number of Medal of Honor recipients.

Born in San Antonio, Texas on December 28, 1948 to TSgt Jesse and Isabel Herrera, Fernando was raised in the east side. His father was a career Air Force man with various military assignments. While his father was stationed in San Antonio, Fernando attended Smith Elementary and Edgar Allen Poe Junior High. In 1963, his father was transferred to Alaska where Fernando graduated from West Anchorage High School in May, 1966 and, shortly thereafter, returned to San Antonio where he began playing with the *Latin Tones* and, on occasion, with his uncle Mingo Saldivar, who taught him the basic concepts of music.

On January 5, 1968, Fernando was drafted into the U. S. Army—he was 20 years old. Six months later, he found himself in Vietnam where he saw combat duty as a radio telephone operator and tank commander, duties that he performed for 12 months. What Sgt Herrera accomplished during a ten-week period in Vietnam earned him the distinction of being called “the most decorated U.S. Army soldier from San Antonio in the Vietnam War” in May 1969 by a local newspaper.

Between December 1968 and March 1969, Sgt Herrera was awarded seven medals: the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, 3 Bronze Stars with “V” device and first and second Oak Leaf Clusters, the Army Commendation Medal for Heroism and the Purple Heart. The top three military awards are: the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Silver Star. Sgt Herrera was awarded two of these three top medals.

The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the U.S. Government and is presented by the President of the United States. The Distinguished Service Cross is the second highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of the U. S. Army for extraordinary heroism. The third highest award is the Silver Star medal given exclusively for combat valor. These military decorations are followed by the Bronze Star, the Army Commendation Medal and Purple Heart.

In all, Sgt Herrera was the recipient of two of the three highest military medals for valor and five other decorations for combat heroism. Because of his heroic actions and, without

regard for his own safety, he helped save fellow buddies from death in numerous skirmishes.

It is uncommon to be awarded both the Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross. In Sgt Herrera’s case, the commanding general’s staff, in country and reviewing his award nomination, felt that his actions on December 20, 1968 were deserving of a Distinguished Service Cross and upped the award from a Silver Star. So important was this action that the Distinguished Service Cross was presented to Sgt Herrera, in country, by Major General Creighton Abrams, then head of all American forces in Vietnam. In attendance were four other generals, who had flown in for the award ceremony, and about 100 plus of the base camp troops. Sgt Herrera served in the Army from January 1968 to December 1969, one year of which was spent in Vietnam.

When the city of San Antonio was interested in honoring Vietnam veterans, Sgt Herrera was approached about having a park named after him. It took 15 years; but in 1986, after a two-hour military ceremony, the Fernando Q. Herrera Park was dedicated at 199 J Street off of S. New Braunfels Avenue on San Antonio’s east side. The dedication ceremony was attended by then Mayor Lila Cockrell, then City Councilman Henry Cisneros, military brass, other notables, family, and friends.

Fernando was very self-effacing when discussing his past military history and medals stating that survival is what was utmost in his mind. “At the same time, one develops brotherhood with fellow soldiers – looking after the other and doing what is necessary to survive and keep them safe.”

In the 1970’s, Fernando met Frank Rodarte whose musical abilities he had been in “awe” of and he had, at one time, bought one of his saxophones. Having experienced medical problems, Fernando had given up playing the saxophone and put it in storage for 40 years. He unexpectedly took up the keyboard five years ago and has performed on and off for the past two years with Frank Rodarte as *Dos Vatos Locos*.

Fernando Herrera has been married for 45 years to his wife, Lillian; and they have four daughters who are all proud of him. He has one uncle who also was a career military man; and he, too, was awarded the Silver Star for bravery in Korea and Vietnam.

San Antonio should be honored to have such an outstanding, brave, and heroic Vietnam veteran residing in its city limits.

Bio: Gloria Almaraz is a freelance writer in San Antonio, Texas and active in the music scene of San Antonio.



Texas Peace And Dignity Journeys 2016

Prayer Run for the Sacred Seeds

by Vanessa Quezada

It’s difficult to put into words what the Peace and Dignity Journeys (PDJ) is and why this movement is so important for our soul, heart, body and communities. There is so much life that blossoms while running from Alaska to Panama (Eagle Route) or Argentina to Panama (Condor Route) where connections exist between the life of the pueblos and the ecosystems keep us connected. Every four years, we run across all three continents, North/Central/South America carrying sacred staffs that have their own spirit and embody the prayers of different First Nation and indigenous communities from Abya Yala. Each day we share lifeways with indigenous communities all along the way.

Birthed as a spiritual movement to fulfill the prophecy of the eagle and the condor, PDJ is a recurring intercontinental prayer run every four years with different themes. 1992 was for elders, 1996—children, 2000—family, 2004—women, 2008—sacred sites, 2012—water and the 2016 run starting May 1st will be for the seeds.

PDJ is a catalyst for communities to explore and develop empathy and resiliency. PDJ addresses intergenerational traumas and injustices, enabling communities to remember and tell our history, not what is told in colonial/eurocentric state school systems. The revitalization of the unheard voices of indigenous people creates a path of unity and integration as a global family calling for peace and dignity of all peoples.

Many are saying these ways are being lost. These are enduring values and traditions with a lineage of thousands of years. Elders have shared, “*It’s not the ways that are lost. We humans are lost.*” By living the lifeways of our relatives and running the steps of our ancestors we restore ourselves, our direct connection to the earth, and awaken and give offerings to the spirits that nourish us every day. Elders say we have lost our balance, and we are now in a process of restoration. Life on this earth that continues to only take has nothing to offer future generations.

As we restore connections amongst our people through sharing our lifeways we allow these ways to come back to us and teach us. PDJ is a form of “retro-alimentacion”, a term I heard in a Zapatista community, a way of “retro-feeding”—a way to remember how we are all related and on the same path to make way for the Sumak Kawsay, the Quechua term translated to “*el buen vivir*”, or a good way of life for all beings on this planet.

Please join the PDJ as they run through Texas in late July-early August for a Texas Natives gathering event in central Texas. For more information please see our Texas website txpeaceanddignity.com, add us on facebook Texas: Peace and Dignity Journeys or email the Texas organizing team at txpdj2016@gmail.com

Jornadas de paz y dignidad 2016

Hablar de las *Jornadas de paz y dignidad*, es hablar de la importancia que tiene el movimiento del espíritu, del corazón, del cuerpo y de las comunidades. Hay tanta vida que aflora desde Alaska hasta Panamá (Flecha de Águila) y de Panamá va hasta Argentina (Flecha del Cóndor) que nunca ha sido posible cortar los lazos que unen la vida de pueblos y ecosistemas

Cada cuatro años, atravesamos los tres continentes que dan forma a esta América cargando con orgullo los bastones de nuestro@abuel@s que tienen su propio espíritu y encarnan las oraciones de diferentes tribus y las comunidades indígenas de Abya Yala. De esta forma, brotado como un movimiento espiritual para cumplir con la profecía del águila y el cóndor, las *Jornadas de paz y dignidad* es una oración intercontinental que aborda temas vitales para las comunidades indígenas del continente: L@abuel@s, (1992), l@sni@s (1996), la familia (2000), la mujer (2004), los sitios sagrados (2008), el agua (2012) y a partir del 1 de mayo del 2016 para las semillas.

Las Jornadas de paz y dignidad busca tejer entre la diferentes comunidades espacios para explorar

y desarrollar el dialogo y la capacidad de recuperación de pueblos destruidos por la avaricia, el olvido y el egoísmo. Las jornadas es un espacio para compartir injusticias, mientras contamos y recordamos nuestra historia con nuestra voz. No la historia que cuentan los sistemas coloniales / eurocéntricos del estado y de la escuela.

Este es un espacio que se propone la revitalización de las voces no escuchadas de

los indígenas hacia un camino de unidad e integración como pueblos continentales, haciendo un llamado global por la paz y la dignidad del mundo.

L@abuel@s dicen: “*No son las formas que se pierden. Nosotros, los humanos somos los perdidos.*” A pesar que nos condenan al olvido, seguimos caminando nuestras culturas y recorriendo los pasos de nuestros antepasados, al tiempo que nos restauramos a nosotr@s mism@s, a nuestra conexión directa con la tierra y los espíritus que nos nutren todos los días. L@abuel@s dicen que hemos perdido el equilibrio y que la vida en esta tierra va perdiendo la capacidad de ofrecer un espacio digno a las generaciones futuras. Por eso es necesario restaurar el equilibrio, para restablecen las conexiones entre nuestros pueblos y compartir nuestras formas de vida.

Para información, visite nuestra pagina web internacional del norte en peaceanddignity.org que se puede traducir en español, la pagina de Texas en txpeaceanddignity.com o mande un correo electrónico en Texas a txpdj2016@gmail.com

