

# NATIONAL HISPANIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

September 15 – October 15



# **75<sup>TH</sup> WORLD WAR II ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION PROGRAM**

The Department of Defense joins the nation in paying tribute to the Hispanic Americans who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in the U.S. Armed Forces: Army, Army Air Forces, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, National Guard, and the home front during World War II.

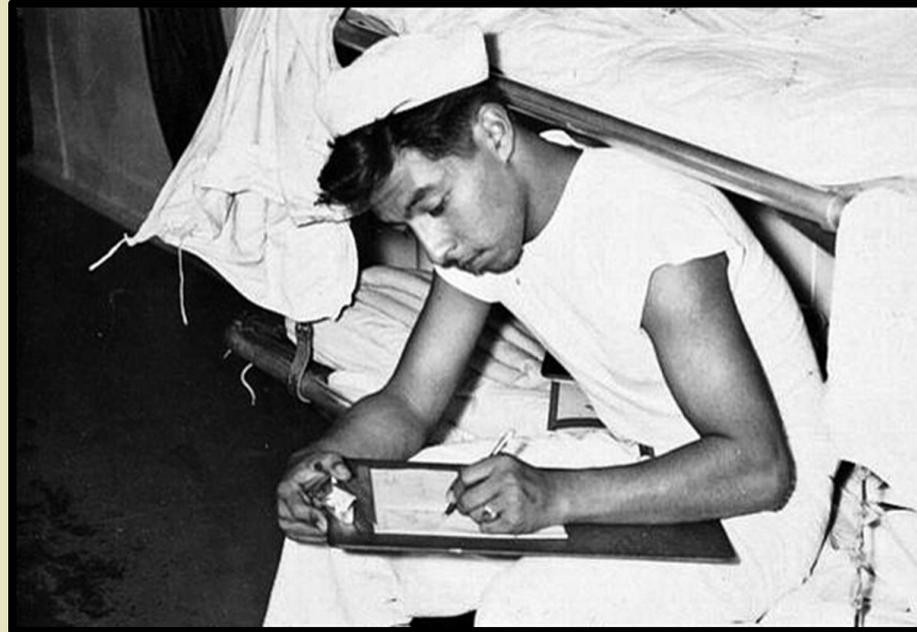
When war was declared on December 8, 1941, thousands of Latinos were among those that rushed to enlist. They fought in every major battle in the European Theatre where U.S. Armed Forces were involved, from North Africa to the Battle of the Bulge, and in the Pacific Theater of Operations, from Bataan to Okinawa.

# PRESENTATION



This presentation highlights Hispanic Americans' military service in WWII and their contributions on the home front. It honors three Hispanic Americans, each with their own unique experiences from World War II: Sergeant Consuelo Mary (Macias) Hartsell, Corporal Julius Casarez, and Staff Sergeant Ladislao "L.C." Castro.

# MILITARY SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR II



According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Hispanics were not identified as an ethnicity on military records until the Vietnam War — so the exact number who served during WWII is unknown — however, unofficial estimates range between 400,000 and 500,000.

# **HISPANIC WOMEN & MILITARY SERVICE**

Latinas served in spite of cultural barriers, that had in the past, prevented them from leaving their families or traveling unaccompanied.

Bilingualism was highly sought during the war and Latinas found essential work in cryptology, communications, and interpretation.

Serving as linguists, nurses, and Red Cross aides within the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, these women broke through both gender and cultural barriers to serve their country.

# BRACERO PROGRAM

Hispanic Americans played an important role on the home front. Due to a lack of jobs during the Great Depression, many Latinos had been repatriated, especially Mexicans.

Once the United States entered into the war, a great demand developed for additional workers to replace those who had enlisted in the military. The Mexican and United States governments forged an agreement known as the Bracero Program, which brought Mexican contract laborers to work in agricultural jobs in the states.

# ON THE HOME FRONT



As the defense industries grew, Hispanics gained entry to jobs that had been previously closed to them. Latinos were able to move away from traditional occupations such as agriculture, and were employed in shipyards, armament factories, and aircraft facilities.

# STAFF SERGEANT CONSUELO MARY MACIAS



Consuelo (Macias) Hartsell grew up in Rawlins, Wyoming, where the Macias family was the only Latino family in town.

Her parents had eloped as teenagers, and then moved from Texas to Wyoming to work in the beet fields.

The family had seven children, five girls and two boys. Four of the Macias children would serve in the U.S. Armed Forces as Marines.

# **CONSUELO MARY MACIAS**

In 1942, after graduating from high school, she asked permission from her parents to move to Waco, to join her sister Juanita who was employed by Braniff Airlines.

When the airline moved to Dallas, the Macias sisters followed. Consuelo got a job selling ladies gloves. "This is ridiculous. I'm joining the Marines. I'm sure they'll find something for me," she recalled in an interview in 2015.

In 1944, the sisters enlisted in the newly created U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve. As far as they knew, they were the only sisters and the only Latinas at Camp Lejeune.

# CONSUELO MACIAS

The sisters were given orders assigning them to the 1st Marine Division in San Francisco. Consuelo was tasked to oversee supplies shipped overseas, while Juanita did drafting work.

On the train trip to California, male and female Marines rode in separate cars and were ordered not to speak to one another. But one of the men sent Consuelo a note: "I'd like to meet you when we get off the train." She ignored it, but there was a second note as they got closer to California.

Months later at a Marine Corps club, she finally met the sender, Louis Orosz, who asked her to dance. "We danced all night," she said.

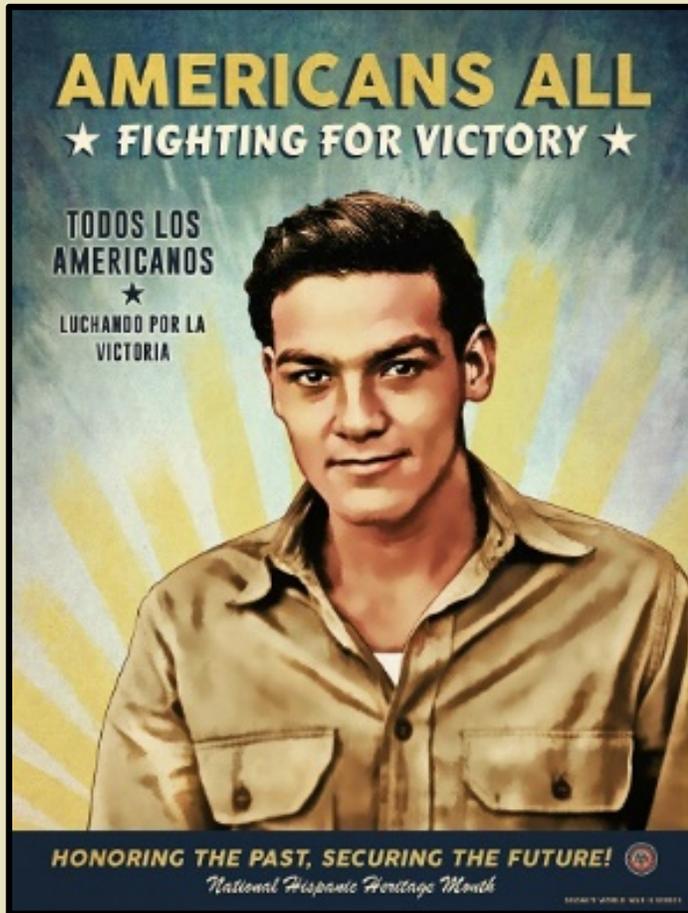
# MACIAS

Macias and Orosz married on Dec. 15, 1945. When she became pregnant, she left the service in August of 1946, at the rank of staff sergeant.

She was awarded the American Campaign and World War II victory medals, as well as recognition for her honorable service.



# CORPORAL JULIUS CASAREZ



Julius Casarez didn't know exactly what he was getting himself into when he enlisted in the Army. "My brother told me that if I enlisted sooner rather than later, I could pick where I wanted to be stationed," he shared in a 2002 interview.

Little did he know when he enlisted, Pearl Harbor would be bombed in a few days.

# PRIVATE CASAREZ

Private Casarez was part of the 703rd Special Forces (a machine-gun battalion). His unit was sent through Africa into India to protect the bridges that were used to transport supplies to Army units. He recalled his time during the war fighting not people, but time and the elements.

In 1945, word came that they could go home. However, the captain of the unit could not schedule transportation out of the area. After a month, he told the men to, "get out of here the best way you can." Casarez hitchhiked through China, where he was one of the lucky few who found a flight home. Lucky, however, wasn't the word he used to describe his trip stateside.

# CASAREZ

“I almost died three times. First, in India we lost a tire when he hit the runway. Second, when we were flying over Africa in a two-engine plane, we lost one of the engines. And lastly, when we were near Puerto Rico, we had to fly through a tropical storm. The plane bounced all over the place. When I got off the plane in Florida, I kissed the ground,” he said.

When Corporal Casarez was discharged in November of 1945, he was awarded the China Burma India medal and a Good Conduct Medal.

# STAFF SERGEANT LADISLAO "L.C." CASTRO



Returning from a bombing mission in their B-24 bomber, the "T-Bar," L.C. Castro and the rest of the crew could see the cliffs of Dover across the English Channel. But, a 4-foot section of their wing was missing, the gauges reflected the fuel tanks were empty, and the control cables were severed. The bomber began a downward spiral toward occupied France.

As orders came to abandon the bomber, Castro was the first out. "I didn't open my parachute till I was real close to the ground," he said in a 2001 interview.

# L.C. CASTRO

Castro gathered his parachute and limped away, finding cover in a haystack. He saw his fellow crewmembers drifting helplessly downward as the Germans shot at them.

According to squadron historical accounts, the other nine crewmembers became prisoners of war. Castro, however, began life as an “evadee” (airmen who eluded capture).

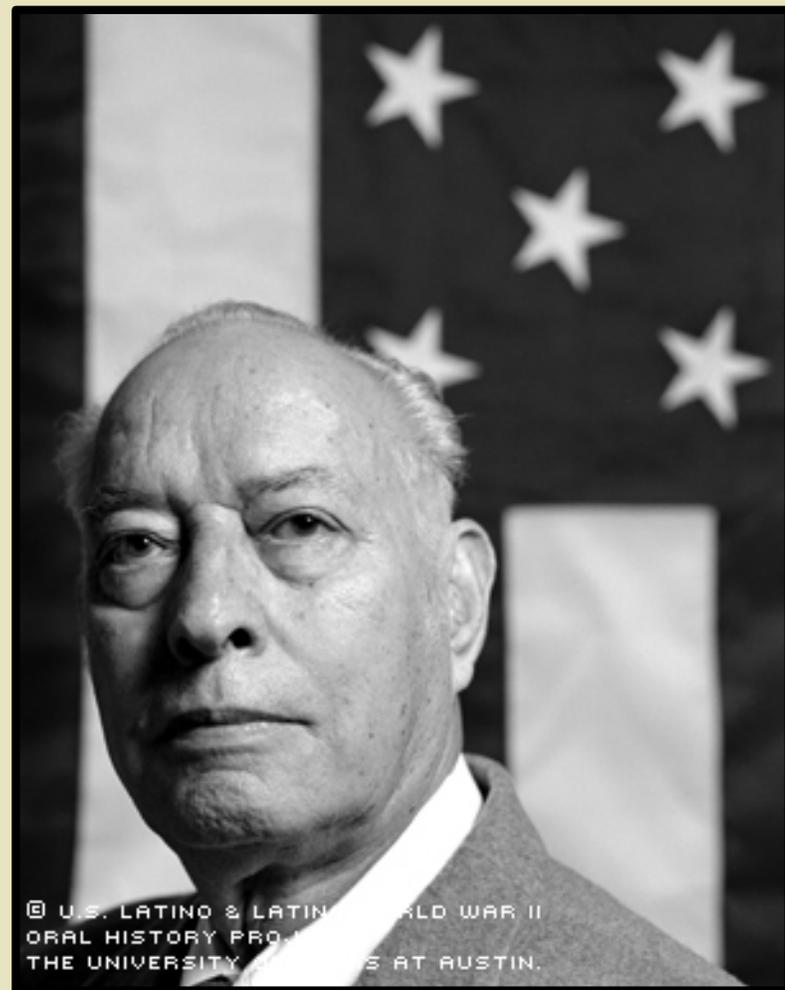
He was discovered the next morning, not by the Germans, but by a barking dog. French villagers hid him in a barn and brought a doctor to treat his injuries. He was moved from house to house, until the French Underground, picked him up. For five months, he was hidden in a house in Amiens with 16 other allied airmen.

# CASTRO

In September 1944, the Canadian Army liberated Amiens. Castro put on a Canadian uniform and traveled back across France to a captured German airfield. He was flown out on the next available flight.

Staff Sergeant Castro was discharged from the military in October 1945.

A member of the Air Force Reserve, he was recalled to active duty as an aircraft mechanic during the Korean War.



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# CONCLUSION

Hispanic Americans played an immeasurable role in the United States Armed Forces during WWII. They served bravely and with distinction from the initial attack on Pearl Harbor to the last days of the Pacific campaign.

The nation remains forever indebted to WWII veterans, who not only forever changed the course of history, but who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in defense of global peace and security.

We remember the legacy of the “Greatest Generation” by Honoring the Past, Securing the Future.

# End

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