

BILL ANALYSIS

H.C.R. 200
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Defense Affairs & State-Federal Relations
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest decoration for valor in combat. Generally presented to recipients by the president of the United States on congress's behalf, it is often called the Congressional Medal of Honor; and is awarded sparingly and bestowed only on those individuals performing documented acts of gallant heroism against an enemy force.

Marcelino Serna, whose unflinching and selfless bravery and acts of uncommon valor on the battlefields of World War I made him one of Texas' most decorated heroes, volunteered for service in the U.S. Army in 1917. After only three weeks of training, 20-year-old Private Serna was shipped to England, where he was to see action in some of the most arduous campaigns of the war. His unit began its advance toward the Meuse River and Argonne Forest in northeastern France. At St. Mihiel, Private Serna's unit was moving through thick brush when a German machine gunner opened fire, killing 12 American soldiers; with his lieutenant's permission, Private Serna, a scout, continued forward, dodging machine-gun fire until he reached the gunner's left flank. Having come through a hail of bullets unscathed, despite being hit twice in the helmet, Private Serna got close enough to lob four grenades into the machine-gun nest, killing six enemy soldiers and taking into custody the eight survivors, who quickly surrendered to the lone American soldier. This encounter was followed shortly by an even more astounding feat when, during his second scouting mission in the Meuse-Argonne campaign, Private Serna captured 24 German soldiers with his Enfield rifle and grenades, an episode that began when he spied a sniper walking on a trench bank. Although the sniper was about 200 yards away, Private Serna shot and wounded him, then followed the wounded German's trail into a trench, where he discovered several more enemy soldiers; opening fire, Private Serna killed three of the enemy and scattered the others in that initial burst. Private Serna fooled the enemy into thinking they were under fire from several Americans, keeping up the ruse until he was close enough to lob three grenades into the German dugout; in about 45 minutes of furious action, Private Serna managed to kill 26 German soldiers and capture another 24, whom he held captive by himself until his unit arrived.

Private Serna was shot in both legs by a sniper four days before the Armistice. While he was convalescing in an army hospital in France, General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, decorated Private Serna with the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest American combat medal; and Private Serna also received two French Croix de Guerre with Palm medals, the French Medaille Militaire, the French Commemorative Medal, the British Medal of Honor, the Italian Cross of Merit, the WWI Victory Medal with five stars, the Victory Medal with three campaign bars, the St. Mihiel Medal, the Verdun Medal, and two Purple Hearts. In 1993, Texas Congressman Ronald D. Coleman introduced a measure in the 103rd Congress to waive certain statutory time limits on awarding the Medal of Honor and thus bestow on Marcelino Serna the proper recognition he so richly deserves; unfortunately, the measure did not receive a proper hearing, thereby denying the legacy of Mr. Serna its proper place in history.

ANALYSIS

HCR 200 resolves that the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to reopen consideration of this case to posthumously award the Medal of Honor to World War I hero Marcelino Serna.