

By: Escobar

H.C.R. No. 200

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest
2 decoration for valor in combat awarded to members of the United
3 States armed forces; generally presented to recipients by the
4 president of the United States on congress's behalf, it is often
5 called the Congressional Medal of Honor; and

6 WHEREAS, First authorized in 1861 for U.S. Navy and Marine
7 Corps personnel and for U.S. Army soldiers the following year,
8 Medals of Honor are awarded sparingly and bestowed only on those
9 individuals performing documented acts of gallant heroism against
10 an enemy force; and

11 WHEREAS, Since congress authorized the award, 70 Medals of
12 Honor have been accredited to the State of Texas, yet other Texans
13 have similarly distinguished themselves by acts of courageous
14 gallantry in combat no less deserving of such recognition; one such
15 individual is Marcelino Serna, a native of Mexico whose unflinching
16 and selfless bravery and acts of uncommon valor on the battlefields
17 of World War I made him one of Texas' most decorated heroes; and

18 WHEREAS, Born in the Mexican state of Chihuahua in 1896, he
19 came to the United States as a young man in search of a better life,
20 working various jobs in Texas, Kansas, and Colorado; and

21 WHEREAS, In 1917, Mr. Serna was working in Colorado when the
22 United States, unable to remain neutral any longer while war raged
23 in Europe, declared war on Germany; later that year, federal
24 officials in Denver, Colorado, gathered a group of men and held them

1 until their draft status could be verified; and

2 WHEREAS, Included in this group, Mr. Serna chose not to wait
3 for such verification and instead volunteered for service in the
4 U.S. Army; after only three weeks of training, 20-year-old Private
5 Serna was shipped to England, where he was assigned to the 355th
6 Infantry of the 89th Division, a unit that was to see action in some
7 of the most arduous campaigns of the war; and

8 WHEREAS, By the time the unit arrived in France, Private
9 Serna's status as a noncitizen had come to light, and he was
10 consequently offered a discharge from the army; given the
11 opportunity to return home, Private Serna refused the discharge,
12 choosing to stay with his unit as it began its advance toward the
13 Meuse River and Argonne Forest in northeastern France; and

14 WHEREAS, At St. Mihiel, Private Serna's unit was moving
15 through thick brush when a German machine gunner opened fire,
16 killing 12 American soldiers; with his lieutenant's permission,
17 Private Serna, a scout, continued forward, dodging machine-gun fire
18 until he reached the gunner's left flank; and

19 WHEREAS, Having come through a hail of bullets unscathed,
20 despite being hit twice in the helmet, Private Serna got close
21 enough to lob four grenades into the machine-gun nest, killing six
22 enemy soldiers and taking into custody the eight survivors, who
23 quickly surrendered to the lone American soldier; and

24 WHEREAS, This encounter was followed shortly by an even more
25 astounding feat when, during his second scouting mission in the
26 Meuse-Argonne campaign, Private Serna captured 24 German soldiers
27 with his Enfield rifle and grenades, an episode that began when he

1 spied a sniper walking on a trench bank; and

2 WHEREAS, Although the sniper was about 200 yards away,
3 Private Serna shot and wounded him, then followed the wounded
4 German's trail into a trench, where he discovered several more
5 enemy soldiers; opening fire, Private Serna killed three of the
6 enemy and scattered the others in that initial burst; and

7 WHEREAS, Frequently changing positions, Private Serna fooled
8 the enemy into thinking they were under fire from several
9 Americans, keeping up the ruse until he was close enough to lob
10 three grenades into the German dugout; in about 45 minutes of
11 furious action, Private Serna managed to kill 26 German soldiers
12 and capture another 24, whom he held captive by himself until his
13 unit arrived; and

14 WHEREAS, Enduring several months of combat action largely
15 unharmed, Private Serna was shot in both legs by a sniper four days
16 before the Armistice; while he was convalescing in an army hospital
17 in France, General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the
18 American Expeditionary Forces, decorated Private Serna with the
19 Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest American combat
20 medal; and

21 WHEREAS, Private Serna also received two French Croix de
22 Guerre with Palm medals, the French Medaille Militaire, the French
23 Commemorative Medal, the British Medal of Honor, the Italian Cross
24 of Merit, the WWI Victory Medal with five stars, the Victory Medal
25 with three campaign bars, the St. Mihiel Medal, the Verdun Medal,
26 and two Purple Hearts; and

27 WHEREAS, Discharged from the army in 1919, Marcelino Serna

1 settled in El Paso, where he became a U.S. citizen, entered the
2 civil service, and lived out his retirement years until his death in
3 1992; although he lived the most ordinary of lives after the war,
4 Mr. Serna was, for a brief moment in time, an extraordinary hero
5 whose remarkable feats of bravery under fire elevated him into the
6 pantheon of American heroes; and

7 WHEREAS, In 1993, Texas Congressman Ronald D. Coleman
8 introduced a measure in the 103rd Congress to waive certain
9 statutory time limits on awarding the Medal of Honor and thus bestow
10 on Marcelino Serna the proper recognition he so richly deserves;
11 unfortunately, the measure did not receive a proper hearing,
12 thereby denying the legacy of Mr. Serna its proper place in history;
13 now, therefore, be it

14 RESOLVED, That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas
15 hereby respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to
16 reopen consideration of this case to posthumously award the Medal
17 of Honor to World War I hero Marcelino Serna; and, be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward official
19 copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to
20 the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the
21 senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the
22 Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this
23 resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a
24 memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.