

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R17129 KSM-D

H.C.R. 71
By: Lopez et al. (Blanco)
Veteran Affairs & Border Security
5/17/2021
Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Marcelino Serna was one of the most decorated military veterans in Texas history, and his heroic actions during World War I make him a worthy candidate for the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award. Born in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1896, Mr. Serna came to the United States as a young man and spent time in Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. After the United States entered World War I in 1917, he enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 20, and after only three weeks of training, he was shipped overseas with the 355th Infantry, 89th Division. When his superior officers in France learned that he was not a U.S. citizen, they gave him the opportunity to return home, but Private Serna chose to stay and fight.

Private Serna demonstrated exceptional resourcefulness and courage on the battlefield. During an engagement near the French town of St. Mihiel, 12 members of his unit were hit by fire from an enemy machine gun, and Private Serna obtained permission from his lieutenant to scout out the gun emplacement on his own. Moving through heavy fire, and surviving two rounds that were deflected by his helmet, he tossed four hand grenades into the machine gun nest, killing six of the enemy. He then took the eight survivors captive. Shortly thereafter, during the Meuse-Argonne campaign, Private Serna embarked on a second lone scouting mission. He began by wounding a German sniper with a shot from 200 yards, then followed the injured man into a trench. Firing and hurling grenades in all directions to make it seem as if he were part of a larger force, he shot three German soldiers immediately, then attacked an enemy dugout, felling 26 more and capturing 24. He single-handedly held the prisoners at gunpoint until other members of his unit arrived.

Private Serna continued to serve in combat until the end of the war, receiving a wound in each leg, and while he was recovering in a French hospital, he was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross, our nation's second highest military decoration, from the American commander in France, General John J. Pershing. He also earned the World War I Victory Medal with five stars, the Victory Medal with three campaign bars, the St. Mihiel Medal, the Verdun Medal, and two Purple Hearts. He was further decorated by the governments of France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, receiving two French Croix de Guerre with Palm Medals, the French Medaille Militaire, the French Commemorative Medal, the British Medal of Honor, and the Italian Cross of Merit.

After returning to the United States, Mr. Serna became a U.S. citizen in 1924 and settled in El Paso, where he worked for the quartermaster at Fort Bliss. He was a charter member of VFW Post No. 2753 and volunteered with veterans advocacy groups, and when he died in 1992, he was buried with full military honors at Fort Bliss. He was the most decorated Texas veteran of World War I, winning every major military award short of the Congressional Medal of Honor, and records indicate that he was denied that supreme honor only because he was a Mexican American immigrant and did not know enough English to be promoted.

Marcelino Serna volunteered to serve our nation in combat before he was even a citizen, and he stayed to fight when he might have gone home. His courageous battlefield actions during World War I have been recognized with a host of illustrious commendations, and he truly warrants the highest honor that can be bestowed on a member of the armed forces of the United States.

RESOLVED

That the 87th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby respectfully urge the United States Congress to bestow on Marcelino Serna the Congressional Medal of Honor.

That the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to Congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.