

It's not hard to find heroes in your own back yard . . .if you just take the time to look!



My first duty assignment on recruiting duty was Pharr, Texas . . .and here are a couple of those type of stories that keep that light burning and or stir up those warm motivating feelings of the pride we share as Marines. How does that go, "it really is a small world after all."



January 1943—Recruiting Station, San Antonio, Texas - All the Seniors on the Weslaco Panthers Football team (Conference Champions) enlist in the Marine Corps together. Their studies were accelerated so they could graduate midyear.

The boys are:

- |                   |                   |                          |              |                  |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1. Sam Magee      | 2. Leo LaDuke     | 3. Ben Guess             | 4. Carl Cole | 5. Leo Ryan      |
| 6. Pete Hall      | 7. Billy Burger   | 8. Bobby Walker          | 9. Carl Sims | 10. Harlon Block |
| 11. Glen Cleckler | 12. Robert Sooter | 13. Billy Jack Robertson |              |                  |

Captain D.M. Taft is swearing them in.

... further research revealed some of these young men were from Donna, Texas!



## Harlon Block

Weslaco was the hometown of Harlon Block, one of the Marines photographed raising the flag at Iwo Jima. During World War II, sandbag production reached a peak in Weslaco, Texas and the town declared itself the "sandbagging capital of the world".



...threads

Glenn Cleckler coached at Harlingen high school for many years. We all knew "coach" Cleckler, but we didn't know the whole story until many years later and then only from "flags of our fathers". He's 80+ and I'm 75 but still enjoy seeing coach when I'm in the valley.

M. Little, Jr.

Some facts provided to make minor accuracy adjustments for this thread: R. C. Whitmill was junior coach in Weslaco, and a family friend. Buck Henson was the Assistant Senior Coach, and a college classmate of Osborne Little. Osborne Little was the Senior Coach. The photo published above has young guys from Harlingen and Donna being sworn in at the same time. The "Weslaco Eight" were: Leo Ryan, Carl Sims, B. R. Guess, Pete Holt, L. H. LaDuke, "Doc" Cleckler, Robert Sooter and Harlon Block. The references for these comments are the 1940, '42 and '44 La Palmas the high school yearbook from Weslaco High School, Weslaco TX.

David Stewart one correction: Pete Hall, not Pete Holt. Pete Hall was my uncle.

Paula Ledbetter my dad, Carl Sims, also survived Iwo. He spoke of it often. He also spoke of Glen Cleckler, B. R. Guess, Leo Ryan, Bill Burger, Robert Sooter and of course, Harlon Block. All these, he counted as "brothers" as they grew up together. I have a picture of my grandmother and many of the other mothers. Leo LaDuke ended up here in the town where I live and died about 7 years ago. The widow of these boy's football coach also lived here. He was R. C. Whitmill. My dad got to visit with Mrs. Lucille Whitmill before his death in 1986.

Ron Ryan

Leo Ryan also survived the war. I know this because he is my uncle and is alive and well. Also on another note my dad Kenneth Ryan, was a good friend of Harlon Block and also was from Weslaco and survived not only the battle of Iwo, but also the war. He was a year behind Leo and Harlon in high school. Thanks, Respectfully SSGT Ronald Ryan, U. S. Army.

Jeff Cleckler my father, Glen Cleckler, Ben Guess, Sam Magee, and maybe Carl Sims are the only ones I know for sure survived.

**Weslaco** is a city in [Hidalgo County, Texas](#). The population was 35,670.

Weslaco derives its name from the W. E. Stewart land company. It was the hometown of [Harlon Block](#), one of the Marines photographed raising the flag at [Iwo Jima](#).

Streets north of the railroad tracks have Spanish names, and streets south of the railroad tracks bear names in English as a consequence of a 1921 municipal ordinance which declared that land north of the tracks be reserved for Hispanic residences and businesses, and land south of the tracks be reserved for Anglo residences and businesses. During [World War II](#), sandbag production reached a peak in Weslaco, and the town declared itself the "sandbagging capital of the world."

Weslaco is part of the [McAllen–Edinburg–Mission](#) and [Reynosa–McAllen](#) metropolitan areas.



Mrs. Dolia Gonzalez attended the dedication ceremonies of Alfredo Gonzalez Elementary School in Edinburg, Texas. The school was named in memory of her son, who lost his life in Vietnam.



### In Memory

A South Texas Marine who gave his life for his country and earned the nation's highest award for valor was remembered by the citizens of his hometown, Edinburg, when they dedicated an elementary school in his honor.

Sgt Alfredo Gonzalez lost his life in Vietnam on February 4, 1968, during the battle for Hue City, and was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his heroic actions during the campaign. Gonzalez was platoon commander of the 3rd Platoon, "A" Company, 1st Battalion, First Marines.

On January 31, 1968, Gonzalez sustained fragmentation wounds while rescuing another Marine who had been hit. Later that day, he exposed himself to heavy enemy fire while moving his platoon to a better position. Disregarding his own safety, he crossed a roadway which was being swept by hostile fire and wiped out a fortified machine gun bunker with hand grenades.

Gonzalez was again seriously wounded on February 3, but he refused medical attention and continued to lead his troops. The next day, his company again pinned down by enemy rockets



**Alfredo Cantu "Freddy" Gonzalez** (May 23, 1946–February 4, 1968) was a [United States Marine Corps sergeant](#) who posthumously received the [Medal of Honor](#) for service in the [Battle of Huế](#) during the [Vietnam War](#).

### Biography

Gonzalez was born on May 23, 1946, in [Edinburg, Texas](#), the only child of mother Dolia Gonzalez. He graduated from Lamar Grammar School in 1955, and from [Edinburg High School](#) in 1965. Despite his small size, weighing only 135 pounds (61 kg), he was an All-District [football](#) player in high school.

He enlisted in the [U.S. Marine Corps Reserve](#) from [San Antonio, Texas](#), on June 3, 1965, but was discharged and enlisted in the regular Marine Corps a month later, on July 6. He completed [recruit training](#) at [Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California](#), the following September, and individual combat training at [Camp Pendleton](#), California, that

October. He then became a rifleman with Headquarters and Service Company, [1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division](#), and served in that capacity until January 1966. Promoted to [Private First Class](#) on January 1, he served a one year tour of duty in [Vietnam](#) as a rifleman and squad leader with Company L, [3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division](#). He was promoted to [Lance Corporal](#) on October 1 and to [Corporal](#) on December 1 before his tour ended in February 1967. Upon his return to the United States, he saw duty as a rifleman with the [2nd Battalion, 6th Marines, 2nd Marine Division](#), at [Camp Lejeune](#) in [North Carolina](#).

He became an instructor at Camp Lejeune, teaching Marines the techniques of [guerrilla warfare](#), and expected to serve out the rest of the war in that capacity. His plans changed when he learned that an entire platoon, including men who had served under him during his tour, had been killed in an ambush in Vietnam. Gonzalez requested to be sent back for a second deployment. Ordered to the [West Coast](#) in May 1967, he joined the 3rd Replacement Company, Staging Battalion, at Camp Pendleton in California for transfer to [east Asia](#). On July 1, 1967, he was promoted to sergeant, and later that month arrived in the [Republic of Vietnam](#). He served as a squad leader and platoon sergeant with the 3rd Platoon, Company A, [1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division](#).

During the initial phase of the [Battle of Huế](#) in late January 1968, Gonzalez and his unit were sent by truck convoy to reinforce units in the city. When the convoy came under fire near the village of Lang Van Lrong on January 31, he led his men in clearing the area. Further down the road, he received shrapnel wounds while carrying an injured man to safety. When the convoy was halted by a machine gun bunker, he led his platoon towards the position and destroyed it with hand grenades. Eventually reaching the city of [Huế](#), his unit became engaged in heavy combat there. Gonzalez was seriously wounded on February 3, but refused medical treatment. The next day, when a large North Vietnamese force inflicted heavy casualties on his company, he used [anti-tank](#) weapons to fire on the fortified positions. He successfully checked the North Vietnamese advance and silenced a rocket emplacement before being mortally wounded by a rocket. He took cover in the Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Church, where he died.

For his actions during the Battle of Huế from January 31 to February 4, 1968, Gonzalez was awarded the Medal of Honor. Vice President [Spiro T. Agnew](#) formally presented the medal to Gonzalez's mother on October 31, 1969, during a ceremony at the [White House](#).

He is buried at Hillcrest Memorial Park in his hometown of Edinburg, Texas

