

Jose Francisco Jimenez Congressional Medal of Honor Winner

Inducted into the Inaugural SC Hall of Fame October 30, 2009

Jose was born March 20, 1946 in Mexico City. He moved with his family to Arizona at the age of 10. Jose attended Red Rock Elementary School and received his diploma in 1964. He enrolled at SCVUHS and was an active member in the Eloy Chapter of the Future Farmers of America. He was FFA president and chosen Star Chapter Farmer during his senior year. He graduated from Santa Cruz Valley Union High School in May 1968.

In August of 1968, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps and received his training at Camp Pendleton near San Diego. A member of Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, First Marine Division, Jimenez served in San Diego, then reported for duty in Vietnam. He fought in the war zone for seven months before his death. His mother, Basilia Jimenez and a sister Pilar, a junior at SCVUHS at that time, survive him.

Jimenez' Medal of Honor was awarded after his death. He is one of approximately 238 individuals in the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marines and Navy to receive this high honor for valor in action against the enemy during the Vietnam War. A presidential citation tells the tale of how death found him and the "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity" he showed "at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty..."

His citation reads of how the Eloy Marine was serving as a fire team leader in Quang Nam Province in South Vietnam when his unit came under heavy attack by concealed North Vietnamese soldiers. "Lance Cpl. Jimenez reacted by seizing the initiative and plunging forward through tall grass toward the enemy positions". Jimenez shouted encouragement to his companions and continued his aggressive forward movement. "He slowly maneuvered to within 10 feet of hostile soldiers who were firing automatic weapons from a trench," the citation reads, "and, in the face of vicious enemy fire, destroyed the position." Jimenez moved to attack another enemy position concealed in a tree line when he was mortally wounded by sniper fire. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The Eloy Marine earned praise for his "indomitable courage, aggressive fighting spirit and unflinching devotion to duty." He had "upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the U.S. Naval Service." Jo-Jo, as his fellow Marines called him, was buried in central Mexico in the town of Morelia.

From the Winter 1999-2000 issue of the Pinal County Ways By Cindy Tracy and Stephen Cooper

In November of 1987 the Casa Grande Dispatch ran an Associated Press story that added a touching postscript to Jimenez' life, a life ending so long ago and so far from Eloy. The headstone provided by the U.S. Government 17 years before finally reached its destination. It seems Jimenez' mother had been unable to take or ship the 135-pound stone, which identified him as a Medal of Honor winner, to Mexico. But after learning through the press that Jimenez' mother wanted to hear from ex-Marines who served with her son, veterans organized ceremonies in Phoenix and Morelia in Jimenez' honor and raised funds to send Jimenez' family and the headstone to Mexico.

At the graveside, The Arizona Republic reported, 60 people attended along with a Marine Corps honor guard. In a letter read at the ceremony, President Ronald Reagan consoled Basilia Jimenez for the loss of her son. "He gave his life for his buddies and for the United State," Reagan said. "His was the Marine Corps creed, 'Semper Fidelis' (always faithful), and I know you have that spirit."

But a few days later, the Arizona Republic wrote yet another chapter to Jimenez' story. Because of political touchiness between Mexico and the United States over the Vietnam War, the ceremonial placing of the headstone on the Marine's grave caused a minor amount of controversy. Apparently, though, this was not enough to overshadow the event.

After 17 years, the Marine from Eloy had received his final honors.