

ALFRED V. RASCON
Medal of Honor, 34 Years Later

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Outline

I. Introduction: Specialist Four Alfred V. Rascon earned the Medal of Honor March 16, 1966 while serving as a Combat Medic during a battle in Vietnam, Warzone Delta, north of Saigon. Poor record keeping and failure to forward paper work resulted in Rascon not receiving the Medal of Honor until February 8, 2000. President William Jefferson Clinton awarded him the Medal of Honor thirty-four years after his act of heroism.

A. References:

1. Smith, Larry. Beyond Glory. London, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003
2. Batens, Algin. "Medal of Honor Citations – Medical Personnel." 11 December 2002. 20 September 2004 <https://home.att.net/steinert/medal_of_honor_citations.htm>
3. Seaf, Grant. "Reactivation of the 173rd Airborne Brigade." 12 June 2000. 16 September 2004 <www.hqusareur.army.mil>

B. During my research on Specialist Four Rascon, it became clear that he truly felt he was only doing his job and anyone else would have done the same. He places more value on the comrodery and brotherhood achieved in the trenches of Vietnam.

II Body

A. Include the place he was born, immigration to the United States, childhood experience in the lemon fields and high school sports.

B. Military training and 1st duty assignment.

C. Weapons and equipment utilized in Vietnam.

D. Acts of heroism and absolute discipline.

E. Awarding the Medal of Honor 34 years later.

III Closing

A. Summery

B. Questions

C. Conclusion

Medal of Honor, 34 Years Later

Specialist Four Alfred V. Rascon earned the Medal of Honor March 16, 1966 while serving as a Combat Medic during a battle in Vietnam, Warzone Delta, north of Saigon. Because of poor record keeping and failure to forward paper work, Rascon did not receive the Medal of Honor until February 8, 2000. President William Jefferson Clinton awarded him the Medal of Honor 34 years after his act of heroism.

Alfred V. Rascon was born September 10, 1945 in Chihuahua, Mexico. As an infant his parents, Andrea and Alfredo, brought him to the United States in search of a better life. In 1951, Alfred and his parents returned to Mexico in hopes of getting back into the United States legally. In 1957, six years later, Alfred and his parents legally immigrated to the United States. They settled in Oxnard, California. Living in a garage Alfred worked helping his father pick lemons from the lemon fields. Alfred attended school, learning English as he went. Alfred, being from a poor family, often went without many creature comforts. He remembers “some white guy” (Regimental) giving him an old, used tennis racket so he learned to play tennis. He was so good he lettered all four years of high school on the varsity team. Alfred also played basketball and baseball well, but because of his size, only five foot seven and 110 pounds, he could not compete with the other students. The thought of attending college sounded good to him, but he didn’t know it was possible for someone who did not have the financial resources.

In August 1963, at age 17, Alfred persuaded his parents to sign so he could join the Army. At the time he did not have his U.S. citizenship. Rascon said “I wanted to give back something to this country and its citizens for the opportunities it had given me and my parents.” (Collier) He wanted to be a paratrooper, Ranger or Special Forces, but after he completed basic training, he was selected to be a medic. He was sent to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he

received 14 weeks of medical training. After completing training at Fort Sam Houston, he transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia, to attend Airborne school. Four weeks and five jumps later, he was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division and sent to Okinawa, Japan, with the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

In May of 1965, Specialist Four Rascon's unit deployed as part of the fourth landing in Vietnam. This was the first Army unit to deploy. Rascon was assigned to the Reconnaissance Platoon. The 173rd was one of the units that already had the M16 rifle because of the uniqueness of their unit. His platoon was also equipped with hand grenades and .50 caliber machine guns. As a medic, Rascon carried his aid bag, food, 300 rounds of ammunition, hand grenades, and water. Realizing that he could not carry everything, he had the soldiers in his platoon carry their own blood expander in order to lighten his load.

Specialist Four Rascon went on many missions while in Vietnam. On some of those missions they would walk in the woods for days and not see anything. On other missions, as soon as they landed they were immediately involved in a firefight. "On March 16, 1966, the Reconnaissance Platoon came under heavy fire from a numerically superior enemy force. The intense fire from crew-served weapons and grenades severely wounded several point squad soldiers. Specialist Four Rascon, ignoring directions to stay behind shelter until cover fire could be provided, made his way forward. He repeatedly tried to reach the severely wounded point machine-gunner lying on an open enemy trail, but was driven back each time by withering fire. Finally, he jumped to his feet with total disregard for his personal safety. He raced through heavy enemy fire and exploding grenades to reach his wounded comrade. He then intentionally placed his body between the soldier and the enemy machine guns, sustaining numerous shrapnel injuries and a serious wound to the hip. Ignoring his own wounds, he dragged the larger soldier from the

fire-raked trail. Hearing a second machine-gunner yell that he was running out of ammunition, Specialist Four Rascon, still under heavy enemy fire, crawled back to the wounded machine-gunner, stripped him of his bandoleers of ammunition, and gave them to the machine-gunner who continued his suppressive fire. Later, Specialist Four Rascon, fearing the abandoned machine gun, its ammunition, and spare barrel would fall into enemy hands, made his way to retrieve them. On his way, he was wounded in the face and torso by grenade fragments, but continued to recover the abandoned machine gun, ammunition and spare barrel items, enabling another soldier to provide added suppressive fire to the pinned-downed squad. While searching for additional wounded, he saw the point grenadier wounded by small arms fire and grenades. With complete disregard for his own life, Specialist Four Rascon covered the wounded soldier with his body thereby absorbing the blasts from the exploding grenades and saving the soldier's life. As grenades were being thrown at the wounded point squad leader, Specialist Rascon again, in complete disregard for his own life, covered the soldier with his body, absorbing the full force of the grenade explosions. Once more, Specialist Four Rascon was critically wounded by shrapnel, but again he continued to search for and aid the wounded. Although severely wounded, he remained on the battlefield, inspiring his fellow soldiers to continue the battle. After the enemy broke contact, he disregarded aid for himself, and continued treating the wounded and directing their evacuation. Only after being placed on the evacuation helicopter did he allow aid to be given to himself." (Regimental) Specialist Four Rascon was injured so severely that he was given last rites and evacuated to the 93rd Field Hospital at Bien Hoe and later transferred to a hospital in Japan. He recovered from his injuries and was discharged from the Army. Later that year he was assigned to the Army Reserves. Members of his platoon immediately nominated him for the Medal of Honor, but the paper work never went forward to be processed. In

February of 1967, Rascon received a yearbook and a Bronze Star. He quickly realized that the award only covered about 10 percent of the events that happened that day. Moving on with his life Rascon earned his American citizenship, re-entered the Army in 1967, and graduated from the Army's Infantry Officers Candidate School and in 1970 was commissioned as a second lieutenant of Infantry. Lieutenant Rascon then returned for a second tour in Vietnam.

It was not until 1993, when his wife Carol talked him into attending a reunion for the 173rd in Washington, D.C., that Rascon learned he had been nominated for the Medal of Honor. Members of his platoon expected to see him with the medal and they were angry that the medal had not been awarded. Chaplain Frank Vauvin and other members of the platoon immediately started the process to get Rascon the recognition he deserved. At first, the Pentagon would not consider the award because too much time had passed. With the help of Congressman Lane Evans, President Clinton received the award packet in 1997. In November 1999, Defense Secretary William Cohen approved the award. On February 8, 2000, President Clinton presented Alfred V. Rascon the Medal of Honor. At the ceremony Rascon stated, "I did it because I had to do it and that's all there is to it. I don't consider myself a hero anybody in combat would do the same thing for their buddies and friends. We were all color blind We were all different nationalities; the important thing is that we were Americans fighting for America." (Collier)

After receiving the Medal of Honor, Rascon's life changed in many ways. After being nominated by President George W. Bush, he was confirmed by the United States Senate as the 10th Director of the Selective Service System on May 22, 2001. He is directly responsible to the President for the management of the Selective Service System. Lt. Gen. James Peak, the Army Surgeon General, administered the oath, making Rascon an Army Reserve major in the Army Medical Corps returning him to the service where he began his career over three decades ago.

Alfred V. Rascon, born in Mexico, came to the United States with his parents. At age 17, he enlisted in the Army and became a medic in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. In a firefight in South Vietnam on March 16, 1966, he ignored orders to stay behind cover and ran forward to treat the wounded. Specialist Four Rascon was wounded by a grenade and rifle fire, but ignored his injuries and carried ammunition to a wounded machine gunner. When a grenade landed near a wounded sergeant, he covered him with his own body to save the soldier's life. The United States Congress awarded over 3000 Medals of Honor, Alfred V. Rascon was only the 31st medic to receive the award. His courage and devotion to duty in the face of danger exemplifies the character and values of a true hero. Hopefully, in future conflicts soldiers of Alfred Rascon's caliber will not have to wait 34 years to get the recognition they deserve.

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