

# A Belated Honor

**Suggested Application: Social Studies, Language Arts, Vietnam War**

## OBJECTIVES

### Students will:

- effectively use before, during, and after reading strategies
- use context clues to understand word meanings
- interpret a soldier's words and actions in the context of citizenship

**Medal of Honor Focus: Alfred Rascon, U. S. Army, Vietnam War**

### Introductory Activity:

The teacher will ask students to respond to the following: "Have you ever done something that you were proud of, but never acknowledged for? Explain your response."

### Whole Group Activity:

Read the Portrait of Valor for Alfred Rascon. Revisit the original prompt. Discuss Alfred Rascon's actions as they relate to receiving the Medal of Honor.

### Whole Group Activity:

View the Alfred Rascon video and complete the viewing guide.

### Small Group/Individual Activity:

Elaborate on Rascon's feelings about his ethnicity. Why do you think his friends acted as they did? How do his feelings about his ethnicity compare to your own? Discuss your responses in small groups.

### Concluding Activity:

Respond to one of the three essay prompts (see worksheet).

### Assessment:

Completed viewing guide, essay

### Resources:

Alfred Rascon Portrait of Valor and Living History video, worksheet



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**American by Choice –  
Long Khanh Province, South Vietnam, 1966**

At the age of four, Alfred Rascon came to the United States from Chihuahua, Mexico with his parents. He became a legal resident a few years later and would always think of himself as “an immigrant by birth, an American by choice.” Growing up near California’s Port Hueneme Naval Station during the Korean War, he was fascinated by the military; he made parachutes out of old sheets and staged imaginary combat jumps off the roof of his house. At seventeen he enlisted in the army and became a medic in the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

In the spring of 1966, Specialist Fourth Class Rascon’s reconnaissance platoon was part of a major operation in the jungles of Long Khanh Province. His battalion had been running into resistance from small units of North Vietnamese troops for a few days and, more ominously, finding large caches of weapons and supplies, which suggested that an offensive was being planned.

Early in the morning of March 16, the 1st Battalion’s sister battalion a mile away came under a severe North Vietnamese attack. Shortly after Rascon’s unit moved to reinforce it, its point men came upon the enemy setting up an ambush. A firefight broke out, beginning what Rascon would later recall as “ten minutes of hell.”

Ignoring orders to stay sheltered, “Doc” Rascon ran forward to tend to the wounded, who were lying along a narrow trail that was exposed to devastating fire from in front. He made his way through the intense fire to a badly hurt machine gunner; as he crouched over him, Rascon was hit by shrapnel from grenades and a bullet that entered his hip and exited at his shoulder blade. He dragged the man back, but by the time they reached cover, the gunner was dead.

When a second wounded machine gunner yelled, “Need ammo!” Rascon crawled through heavy fire to bring him bandoliers of ammunition. Then fearing that an abandoned machine gun could fall into enemy hands, he crawled back to retrieve it, but a grenade exploded, spraying shrapnel in his face. Later he used his body to shield another downed GI from fire as he administered treatment to him, saving his life.

**Alfred Rascon**

*Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Airborne), 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade (Separate)*

**BORN:** September 10, 1945  
Chihuahua, Mexico

**ENTERED SERVICE:**  
Los Angeles, California

**DUTY:**  
Vietnam War





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Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a grenade land near a sergeant who had already been hit; he jumped up and threw his body over the man. The explosion blew the helmet off Rascon's head and the rucksack off his body. He lay there for a moment in the midst of all the fighting bleeding from his ears, mouth, and nose. He refused morphine because he didn't want to be incapable of treating his wounded comrades. When he began drifting in and out of consciousness, he was taken to a field hospital. When he came to, the clean sheets made him think he was back home – until he saw that the patient in the next bed was a North Vietnamese soldier.

Rascon heard that he had been recommended for the Medal of Honor but didn't pay any attention to the rumor. He spent three months in a hospital in Japan, and then was sent home. Upon his discharge from the Army in 1966, he joined the reserves, went to college, and finally became a naturalized citizen. In 1969, he returned to active duty and was commissioned a second lieutenant. He then returned to Vietnam in 1972 for another tour.

In 1993, some of the men whose lives Rascon had saved in 1966 heard that the recommendation for his medal had gotten lost in red tape. Without Rascon's knowledge, they asked the Army to reopen the files. They took the case to Illinois Representative Lane Evans of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, who passed the information on to the White House. On February 8, 2000, with the men he had saved looking on, Alfred Rascon received the Medal of Honor from President Bill Clinton.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

## Viewing Guide

### BEFORE

Read Alfred Rascon's profile.

### DURING (Answer the following questions)

1. Where was Alfred Rascon born? What state did he move to at a very early age?
2. Alfred Rascon states Mexicans were viewed and treated equally in the town where he lived. He also says, "I tell people I'm immigrant by birth, American by choice." Does this mean he is proud of or ashamed of his Mexican heritage?
3. What was Alfred Rascon's occupations specialty in the Army when he was 17?
4. The word "caches" of weapons most likely means what?
5. All of a sudden, the troops were getting "mortared." What do you think this word most likely means?
6. What was "Doc Rascon" ordered to do when the unit was being attacked by the Vietnamese? What specifically did he do instead?
7. Despite heavy fire, what did Alfred Rascon retrieve for the wounded gunman?
8. What did a grenade finally do to Alfred Rascon?
9. Alfred Rascon said once the grenade exploded, he "didn't want to play anymore." What did he mean, and what did he end up doing?
10. How did Alfred Rascon use his body to help the soldier with the back wound?
11. How did the Army explain the delay in awarding Alfred Rascon's Medal?
12. How many years passed from the time of Alfred Rascon's action until he was awarded the Medal?
13. Which President awarded Alfred Rascon the Medal of Honor?

### AFTER (Respond to one of the following essay prompts)

1. "People may know there are thousands of people who deserve rewards, but it's just the circumstances of what's there. Sometimes people aren't there to write them up." What do you have to say for those people who have demonstrated valor but have not been nominated for the Medal? Consider that two witnesses need to nominate a soldier for the Medal. Do you think that is fair? If not, what steps should be taken to remember those people not honored?
2. When asked why they worked so hard to ensure that Alfred Rascon received the Medal of Honor, one of Rascon's unit-mates said, "We don't want to change history, we just want to correct it." Think of another well-known moment in history when a person/people tried to "correct" it. What actions did they take/are they taking to "correct" history? Include what happened in the first place that needed "correcting."
3. If you were to witness an injustice happening to a friend, what would you do to correct it? Compare your actions to those of Alfred Rascon's friends.