



**David M. Gonzales**

**William W. Kouts**

## **The David M. Gonzales - William Kouts Story**

**By: Tony (The Marine) Santiago**

### **Introduction:**

Memorial Day is a day set aside to honor the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Not only should we honor those who are no longer with us, but we should also thank our veterans who have served and were willing to give their lives so that all of us can continue to enjoy the freedoms which we sometimes take for granted.

It seems to me that most of our children are raised with the misconception as to what is the true meaning of the word hero. If you ask a child who their hero is, I'm sure that the child will name an entertainer, be it an athlete, singer, actor or even in some cases a someone who does not even deserve the publicity given such as a rich heiress. Some of these people are negative role models and have led lives with low moral standards. We must teach our children that true heroes are those who are willing to give their lives for others regardless of their race, religion and social standings. A true hero is a person who does not expect to gain fame nor fortune. The only satisfaction that they receive is the knowledge that they have made a positive difference in another person's life. A true hero is willing to give his life for his fellow men and we have many. Just look around you and when you see those who serve in the police and fire departments or those who with pride wear the military uniforms of our country with pride. I ask myself how many of today's entertainers are willing to give up everything that they have and serve their country? Pat Tillman, bless you wherever you are you are an exception.

I want to share with you the amazing story of two American World War II heroes whose lives have been linked forever. One of these men was a young Mexican-American who made the ultimate sacrifice and was awarded the Medal of Honor for saving three men, among them a young Anglo-American who never forgot the person who saved him. Please bear with me as I continue.

### **PFC David M. Gonzales**

David Maldonado Gonzales was a quiet young man from California who loved to play the

guitar. This humble man met a young and beautiful girl by the name of Steffanie and it wasn't long before they were married. Upon the outbreak of World War II, Gonzales joined the Army because he believed that it was his patriotic duty to serve his country. He was soon sent with his unit to the Philippines to fight against the Japanese invaders. Not only did he leave behind his mother and his wife whom he loved so much, but his unborn child (Steffanie was pregnant) whom he would never meet and who would be named after him.

On December 8, 1945, on the Villa Verde Trail in the Philippines. Gonzales in face of fierce, relentless barrage of gunfire, succeeded valiantly in freeing two fellow soldiers buried alive by a bomb explosion by digging them out with his bare hands and was mortally wounded by an enemy sniper after freeing and saving the life of a third soldier. The third soldier saved by Gonzales' selfless heroics was Sgt. William W. Kouts.

### **William Walter Kouts**

William W. Kouts known to all as "Bill" was born in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. In 1941, Kouts followed in his fathers footsteps (His father was a veteran of World War I) and joined the Army. When the United States declared war against the Japanese Empire, Kouts was among the thousands of Americans who without any hesitation was ready to bear arms and give his life in defense of our country.

In 1945, Sgt. Kouts was in the Philippines and remembers the day that new troops had arrived to replace those who had already served their tour of duty. Among the new arrivals was PFC . Gonzales. It was long before the action which occurred and the young PFC was killed, but not before saving the live of Kouts and two other men.

Kouts, who was the senior NCO at the time of the incident, wrote the initial account citing the heroic efforts of David M. Gonzales on that December day. The report resulted in the posthumous awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Harry S. Truman to David M. Gonzales.

### **A grateful hero**

Kouts was given a field commission and after the war he found a job at the Atlas Powder Co. In 1948, Kouts returned to the military and served as a Captain with the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division in Korea during the Korean War. After the war, he meet and married Madeline King and together they had three children, Nanette, Maribeth and William.

You would think that that was the end it, but it wasn't, not for a man like Kouts. All of these years he has wondered about the family of the man who saved his life. He asked thought about them everyday and asked himself countless times, Why did I serve and Gonzales die? He knew that because of Gonzales' sacrifice he was able to raise a wonderful family. Kouts is grateful for that and he and his family made it a personal quest to try to locate the Gonzales family to thank them.

## **A brave son**

David M. Gonzales Jr. never met his father. He was born in California, after his father so gallantly gave his life for his fellow men and for the country did he loved. The only thing that he knew about his father was what his family told him and that he was hero who was awarded the nations highest military decoration the Medal of Honor. I can't imagine how tough life must have been for young David, seeing other kids with their parents, but it was hard. David always thought about his father and always hoped that someday someone who knew his father in the Army would be able to tell him what he was like. Countless days he would wonder about those whom his father saved, he wondered whom they were and if they continued to remember his father.

David married twice. His second wife Beatrice became aware of the heroic actions of her father-in-law and became the driving force behind David and encouraged him to participate in activities which honored the memory of David M. Gonzales. Among the things that they accomplished was that they made the Pentagon replace the erroneous picture that they had on display that was supposed to be of Gonzales and which wasn't with a real one of him.

## **The search**

William W. Kouts, is now 85 years old and in ill health. One of his wishes has always been to make contact with the family to thank them and to tell them about Gonzales' heroic deed.

I was totally unaware of all this when on November 24, 2006, I wrote an article about PFC David M. Gonzales in Wikipedia, as part of a project which I started called "List of Hispanic Medal of Honor recipients" and which is now a series run in "Somos Primos"

On March 4, 2007, the daughter of William Kouts, Maribeth, who lives in Georgia, wrote to me via Wikipedia and told me about her dying fathers wish . I wrote back to her and promised to do everything within my power to make her fathers wish come true. Honestly, I had no idea of how I would be able to accomplish such a feat. I did know from the article that I wrote that David Gonzales Jr. attended a ceremony held in 1999 in Santa Ana, California in his fathers honor. So, I started by writing e-mails to Los Angeles Mission College and to Congressman Howard Berman, but no response and no luck. Then I looked up the listed phone numbers of every David M. Gonzales in Berman's district and called everyone of them, but still no luck.

On April 2007, I ran the story of Gonzales in Mimi Lozano's internet magazine "Somos Primos" with a plea that anyone who has any information on the where-about of the Gonzales family to please get in touch with me via e-mail

On April 11, 2007, I received an e-mail from Ernestine Gonzales, whose uncle was the MoH recipient requesting my telephone number. On April 13, 2007, David M. Gonzales Jr. and his wife Beatrice called me and they were very excited about everything that I told

them. I then gave them the phone number of Maribeth Kouts so that they could talk. Both families agreed to meet for the first time in Power Springs, Georgia for the Memorial Day weekend. Maribeth Kouts invited me to attend the historical meeting, she even offered to pay for my airfare and hotel. I was supposed to go to Puerto Rico as an invited guest of the Puerto Rican Senate on the same weekend, but I opted to go to Georgia with my son, Jose instead.

### **The Gonzales and the Kouts finally meet**



**(L-R) Tony the Marine, W. Kouts and D. Gonzales Jr.**

On May 25, I arrived with my son at the house of Maribeth Kouts, beautiful house in Powder Springs. The day was beautiful and I felt the excitement building up in me. We were greeted by Maribeth, Nanette and her husband Jim. We then were taken to the backyard and finally I meet William “Bill” Knouts and his wife Madeline, a handsome couple if I ever saw one. We also meet William Jr, or as we call him “Woody” and Bill’s granddaughters Katie and Taylor. After awhile the Gonzales’ David and Beatrice arrived and from then on there were tears of joy.

Bill was finally able to thank the Gonzales family, thank them for the ultimate sacrifice that their father had made. He told David how his father died and that last thing that he remembered was looking into Gonzales’ eyes before he was killed. David finally got his wish and so did Bill. They hugged and I believe that everyone broke down in tears with the emotional encounter. David then took out of a bag and showed all of us the Medal of Honor which was awarded to his father. He also had with him a display with the other military decorations which his father was awarded posthumously. I spent the most wonderful Memorial Day weekend with two of the most wonderful families.

I realized that I was amongst heroes, both physically and spiritually. I told David that I was sure that his father’s spirit was looking down at all of us from heaven and that he was smiling. On May 28, we all gathered for the last time to say our goodbyes. I was sad, but at the same time happy that I was able to help Kouts and the Gonzales put a closure and

an end to 62 years of searching and wondering. I now have a bond with these two families until the day that I die.