

ALL IN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA SHOULD BE SO PROUD, AS WE, TO HAVE GUADALUPE VELASQUEZ AS ONE OF THEIR BRAVE VETERAN CITIZENS.

**Thank you Lupe,
“Big Sis” Dominga & John**

**Below is the photo and article as it appeared in the Fort Lupton Press, Colorado,
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Photo by Rosalie Everson

Guadalupe Velasquez, of Fort Lupton, received his Silver Star more than three decades after his service in Vietnam.

By Rosalie Everson

Veteran's Day, 2008, and Lupe Velasquez is cradling the Silver Star he finally received Sept. 4, 38 years after he earned it on a battlefield in Vietnam.

It took that long for the United States government to send him the gold medal with a tiny silver star in the middle and the name "Guadalupe Velasquez" engraved on the back.

He's met others, he said, who have waited longer for their commendations, and there are more who are still waiting, something that bothers him much more than not receiving his earlier.

He doesn't know why his medal, and the accompanying certificate of commendation, arrived when it did, but he remembers, all too well, how he earned them.

Sgt. Guadalupe Velasquez was nominated for his Silver Star hours after he saved fellow soldiers and secured the bodies of those who didn't live.

He tells of that battle with 'it happened only yesterday' clarity. His first weeks in Vietnam were spent trying to win over the people. Then, Oct.12, 1970, "they helicoptered us into a battle. They took the first wave, and they dropped them there. I was in the second wave and we were coming in when all hell broke loose. The helicopters didn't land or anything. We were 20 to 30 feet off the ground and we all jumped out and we started running" straight into a battle that was being lost. They were outnumbered 20 - 1, he estimates. "There were like 60 when we left, out of about 170."

The then-20-year old Sgt. Velasquez, who had made the rank of sergeant after just nine months in the Army, sprang into action, administering first aid to his fallen comrades, moving mortally wounded soldiers, putting himself in an open area to draw hostile fire away from the wounded.

The memories of that battle, and others waged in booby -trapped rice paddies and jungles, of not being able to sleep at night and the hidden enemies haven't faded. "You'd look at this hole and think, 'it's a gopher hole,' and then you start digging and they'd gone through there. They'd come out to shoot at you a couple of rounds, then hide again."

He made friends, some of who became like brothers. "You can't leave, you are stuck there, so you have to make the best you can with your buddies," he said. "We had a guy who was with us. He wanted to be a psychiatrist, get all the experience so he could talk to the GIs when he came back and since he lived the experience he'd be able to help. We were on patrol, and he didn't make it. They wasted a lot of the young guys."

He recounts a disdain of many of the leaders who weren't out on the field. "We never did like the officers out there. They got too many people, killed. Too much authority, not enough common sense."

He had been 'gung ho, I wanted to go kill the enemy" when he left, but a different young man came home after a year in Vietnam. "I was very disillusioned when I came back." he said. Disillusioned, and also, though they didn't call it that then, suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"I went home and I wasn't happy. It changes you when you are up there."

He married Elodia, the girl he knew he was going to marry the day they met in the Keenesburg city park, the girl who wrote him nearly every day after he went to Vietnam, and the woman, who after 38 years, is the "glue that holds this all together.". The nightmares he had since returning home became her burden, too, he said.

"I don't remember any of that at night when I'm dreaming. My wife wakes me up and she says "you are screaming." The nightmares came when he could sleep, often he couldn't, and still can't.

He was a hard worker, graduating from Barnes Business College on the dean's list while working a full-time job. But when things would be going good, something would happen. "I can't get along with authority and I never knew why, till I went to these things and they told me."

"These things" are the programs for vets with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A counselor started working with him in 2003 and, in September, he graduated from a seven-week in-patient therapy at the Veterans Hospital. Still in counseling, he returns weekly, each Thursday at 2 p.m. for graduations of other vets. "I think I help myself and I hope those kids more by going to the PTSD graduations. It's not just me, you know, it's everybody. We all get together and we talk," he said. That is, those who stay. "Some sit there in that room and you can see they are scared. And they never come back again."

He received his Silver Star while he was nearing the end of his own seven week program, and as proud of it as he is, he wants something else.

"There's a whole bunch of us who still haven't gotten them," he said, "and they should."