

# Hispanics in The U.S. Navy

Hidalgo as the 54th Secretary of the Navy and the first Hispanic to hold the position. Born in Mexico, Hidalgo graduated from Columbia Law School and served as an intelligence officer aboard USS *Enterprise* (CV-6).

## Enlisted Ranks

It has been difficult to identify the Hispanic Sailors for much of the Navy's history because the Navy for many years did not require one to identify one's race or country of origin when enlisting. What is for certain during the 18th and 19th century, the Navy's enlisted ranks were a diversified group of men from many different countries, including Spain, Puerto Rico, and Latin America. One informal census conducted by a ship's surgeon in 1849 identified about three percent of his ship's company came from these regions.

Notable achievements by Hispanic Sailors can be found during this time period. During the American Civil War, Cuban-native Seaman John Ortega of USS *Saratoga* earned the Medal of Honor for heroism during several coastal raids against Confederate targets. Seaman Phillip Bazar originally from Chile earned the Medal of Honor for heroism during the Second Battle of Fort Fisher.

During World War II, it is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 Hispanics served in the Armed Forces, with a large number serving in the Navy. Despite the achievement of several individual Hispanics, it was recognized after World War II that the Navy needed to do more to recruit Hispanics. This became a particular issue with the end of the draft in 1973. This issue became one of Secretary Hidalgo's main priorities during his tenure. He pushed to elevate the Navy's appearance within the Hispanic community.



1979-Originally from Mexico, Edward Hidalgo became the first Hispanic Secretary of the Navy in 1979.

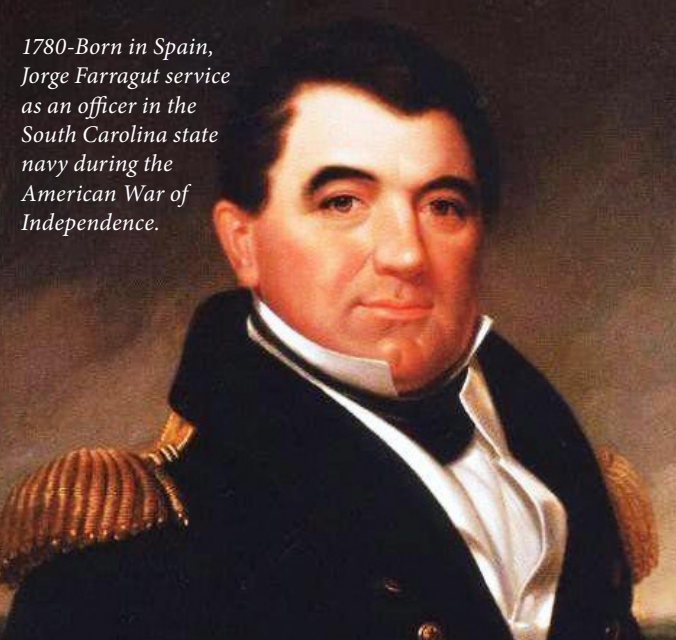


NATIONAL MUSEUM of the  
UNITED STATES NAVY

(Cover) 1938-Shown here is Navy bandmaster Jose Contreras. Originally from Chile, Contreras became one of the Navy Band's leading musicians for over twenty years.



1780-Born in Spain, Jorge Farragut service as an officer in the South Carolina state navy during the American War of Independence.



In the modern Navy, about fourteen percent of the Navy's total force identified themselves of Hispanic descendant. This includes about five percent of the officer corps. Throughout the history of the Navy, Hispanic officers and Sailors have served the Fleet with great distinction.

## Notable Officers

Since there was not institutional prejudice and restrictions against men of Hispanic or Latino descendant as there was against African Americans, a few Hispanics served as officers during the early days of the Navy. Among this group Jorge Farragut Mesquido stands out. Originally, from the island of Minorca off the coast of mainland Spain, he anglicized his name to George Farragut and settled in South Carolina. Already an experienced merchant captain, George Farragut served as a lieutenant for the South Carolina State Navy during the American War of Independence. After the war he and his wife had a

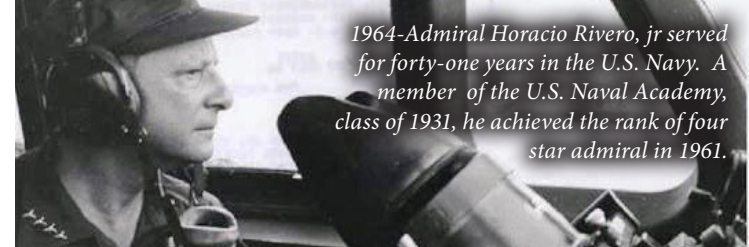
1830-David Glasgow Farragut, Jorge's son, served for over forty years in the United States Navy. He is most well known for being the Navy's first admiral and for his leadership in the American Civil War.

son that they named James Glasgow Farragut.

Changing his name to David after his adopted father Commodore David Porter, David Farragut joined the Navy as a midshipman at nine years old. He went to serve one of the most honored careers in the history of the Navy. He served in the War of 1812 when he was captured and later released. It was in the American Civil War where Farragut became a household name due to his victories at New Orleans in 1862 and Mobile Bay in 1864. Appointed the Navy's first rear admiral in 1862, and Congress made Farragut the equivalent of a four star admiral in 1865.

A few years after the war, the Naval Academy graduated its first two Hispanic midshipmen: Alberto de Ruiz in 1875 and Robert Lopez in 1879. Lopez served on USS *Olympia* (C-6) during the 1898 Battle of Manila Bay and went to achieve flag rank as commandant of the Mare Island Naval Shipyard during World War I. It was also during World War I that Lieutenant Frederick Riefkohl, the first Puerto Rican to graduate from the Naval Academy, earned the Navy Cross for actions aboard the cruiser USS *Philadelphia* (C-4) and its engagement with a U-boat. Riefkohl went on to command the cruiser USS

1944-Frederic Ramierez de Arellano commanded USS Balao (SS-294) during World War II and received the Navy Cross for his extraordinary leadership



1964-Admiral Horacio Rivero, Jr served for forty-one years in the U.S. Navy. A member of the U.S. Naval Academy, class of 1931, he achieved the rank of four star admiral in 1961.

Vincennes (CA-44).

Other notable World War II officers include Captain Marion Frederic Ramírez de Arellano, who served on three submarines during the war and commanded one of them USS *Balao* (SS-294) in 1944; Lieutenant Eugene Valencia who scored 23 kills with his Hellcat fighter, the third highest total of any Navy pilot; and Lieutenant (jg) Maria Rodriguez Denton, the first Hispanic officer in the W.A.V.E.S. who served as a communications officer and delivered the end of the war message to President Harry S. Truman.

Among the most notable Hispanic Naval Officer of the 20th century is Admiral Horacio Rivero, Jr. A native of Puerto Rico, Admiral Rivero's service in the Navy spanned over forty years. Graduating from the Naval Academy in 1931, he served in World War II as a gunnery officer in several combat actions in the Pacific and served as commander of NATO forces in Southern Europe in the 1960s.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter appointed Navy veteran and distinguished lawyer Edward



1944-Eugene Valencia (right) was a Hellcat fighter pilot in World War II and was credited with twenty-three victories.