Fernando Mendez-Aceves (March 6, 1978 – April 6, 2004)

Fernando was born in Mexico City and was the third child of fours sons born to Sandra Aceves-Zuriaga. Fernando graduated from Caribbean School, a private school in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

He joined the Navy in Puerto Rico on July 9 1998, and became a Hospital Corpsman and was assigned to Marine Corps units, with his first assignment at the Marine Corps base at Camp Le Jeune, North Carolina. In 2001 he was part of the UNITAS team that went around South America. In addition to his duties as a corpsman, he provided services as interpreter, translator and liaison between the armed forces of the countries that were visited and the Commanding Officer of the USS Lamoure. In September of 2002, he was accepted into the Basic Underwater Demolition School (BUDS), but unfortunately, was involuntarily removed during "Hell Week" because of the instructors concern that he had suffered hyperthermia too many times for their comfort.

He was then assigned to the Naval Medical Center in Balboa Park at San Diego, California. As an experienced Combat Corpsman with the Marine Corps, he was attached to the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division and deployed to Iraq on February 16, 2004. On April 6, 2004, he was shot to death in Fallujah while rendering aide to a fallen Marine. The news of the incident on April 6, 2004 appeared in a Marine Corps journal and is summarized below:

Lance Cpl. Deschon E. Otey's nights are still plagued by thoughts from four days of intense fighting. Otey and the rest of the infantrymen from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division lost nearly 20 of their buddies during operations in Ar Ramadi April 6-10. They're back out on the streets again, having exacted a heavy toll on the enemy for killing Marines. Still, bouncing back is never easy.

In the mid-day hours of April 6, Marines from 3rd Platoon were patrolling the streets of Ar Ramadi when they began to receive fire.

"We had heard that Golf Company had been hit earlier," 21-year-old Lance Cpl. John R. Huerkamp, a 2nd Squad team leader, said. "A few minutes later we heard that the guys from 3rd Squad, 3rd Platoon had also been hit."

Otey described the first few seconds of the attack.
"I remember when we got to our objective I started to hear 'tink, tink, tink,'" Otey, 24-year old from Louisville, Ken. "I was like, 'Man, we're being shot at. Get out of the vehicle. "The squad returned fire for about 15 minutes. They then raided the house from where the shooting was coming. "After we were done, we loaded back up and were heading back to base," Otey explained. "But then on the way back we got ambushed."

The squad's convoy was split, and two humvees were under heavy small-arms fire. Otey immediately jumped out of the unarmored vehicle and sought cover behind a concrete wall. The rest of the Marines remained inside the vehicle and returned fire.

"Our vehicle was going to help (Otey's) humvee, but we didn't make it in time," Cpl. Marcus D. Waechter, 21-year-old from Mckinny, Texas, added. No one is sure what happened in the moments before the other vehicles returned to Otey's humvee. Time and events are jumbled among the survivors and recollections sometimes don't match up from one Marine to another. One thing is certain. By the time reinforcement arrived, all but one passenger in the truck was dead. The sole survivor was Otey who was still laying down fire from behind the wall.

Twenty-one-year-old Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Adam P. Clayton, senior line corpsman, remembered the scene vividly." When we got to the scene, we saw a humvee canted on the side of the road with the windshield shattered," said the Vernal, Utah, sailor. "There were dead bodies all over the place and the closer I got to the vehicle I could see it was covered in blood." But it wasn't the sight of mangled bodies that disturbed the hospital corpsman. It was a pair of military-issued glasses lying smashed on the ground. The glasses belonged to the truck's machine gunner.

"I'm still not exactly sure why seeing those glasses upset me so much, but the vision of them on the ground still gets to me," Clayton said. **One of Clayton's close friends, Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Fernando Mendez-Aceves was also riding inside the doomed humvee. It appeared HM3Mendez-Aceves died trying to save a Marine. His body was found near that of 3rd Platoon's platoon sergeant. Clayton believes Mendez-Aceves was treating the staff sergeant before being shot and killed.**

"We all took cover. There was firing coming from all directions," Otey said. "They were shooting AK-47s, RPK machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades." After a fierce fight, the squad was able to gain control of the situation but not before losing most of their own Marines. The remaining Marines were divided up amongst the other two squads in 3rd Platoon.
Meanwhile, Huerkamp and his squad were already en route to help quell the remaining violence.

A newspaper article in April 2004 said that "plenty of women had crushes on Fernando Mendez-Aceves, who was a friendly, good-looking guy. But when it came time to choose a date for the Navy hospital corpsman's ball last year, he showed up with his mother. He was such a gentleman to his mom," said Navy Petty Officer Shervic Crouch, a friend".

Mendez-Aceves' friends described him as a hard worker who was quick to volunteer for assignments. "He was just a good guy, man, all the way around," said Petty Officer Staginald Walthour, 23, a hospital corpsman stationed at the medical center.

Mendez-Aceves' fellow petty officers in San Diego found out about his death last week (April 2004), just as they were preparing to send him a package of clothing, beef jerky, trail mix and other supplies.

His body was cremated, and his ashes remain in Chula Vista with those of his great grandfather, Fernando Zuriaga. He is survived by his mother, Sandra, and three brothers, Rodrigo, Enrique, and Kenneth. *The Veterans Advisory Commission is grateful to the family of HM3 Mendez- Aceves for providing assistance with this biography.*