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The Borinqueneers

Reviewed by Rafael Ocasio, Agnes Scott Coll., Decatur, GA -- Criticas, 8/15/2008



(U.S., 2007) color. Spanish (English subtitles). 78 mins.
Cinemaguild. 2007. DVD. \$350. DOCUMENTARY

The Borinqueneers were Puerto Rican soldiers who organized as an American military regiment after Puerto Ricans became American citizens in 1917. Known as the Regimiento de la 65 Infantería (Regiment of the 65th Infantry), these soldiers participated in high numbers in major wars, such as World War II and the Korean War.

Until now, the history of this regiment has been largely unknown. The Borinqueneers served with high marks, despite the inherent racist attitudes of their American military superiors, who often referred to them as the “Rum and Coke Regiment.” In particular, the documentary follows the Puerto Rican presence in Korea, where they were involved in military action months before other continental regiments arrived. In a very effective interview technique, veterans of the 65th Infantry comment on its performance and express their pride in having served as American citizens despite the limits imposed upon them as a “colored” battalion. Issues pertaining to Puerto Rican culture are also presented, such as their strong adherence to religious customs, praying the rosary before fighting, and their playing music, even in the war camps. The documentary’s final segment focuses on the court-martial of many of the regiment’s soldiers, accused of leaving their posts in a failed attempt to take an important geographic site in Korea. Highly recommended for libraries serving Puerto Ricans or with collections of Puerto Rican studies.

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