



Korean War film depicts Puerto Rican regiment

By Mary Louise Speer | Thursday, September 11, 2008

Producer Noemi Figueroa Soulet shared the story of creating "The Borinqueneers" documentary, Wednesday, during the Army Sustainment Command and U.S. Army Garrison's recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month at Rock Island Arsenal.

The documentary depicts the contributions made by the 65th Infantry Regiment and the importance of vital leadership during the Korean War. The 65th was a segregated unit of men from Puerto Rico who could not vote for their commander-in-chief but were subject to the draft and discrimination.

"I spent nine years of my life producing this film for no salary," Soulet, who was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York, said. "I do not have any direct connections to the 65th. I felt I needed to make this film."

Her impetus came from listening to a relative, a World War II veteran, talk about his experiences.

Soulet also wrote the movie, which debuted on PBS last year and appears on the Armed Forces Network.

The work involved researching military records and oral histories and interviewing the people featured in The Borinqueneers.

Ramon Torres Villafane, a veteran of the 65th, shared his story with the audience. An original member of the 65th Infantry Regiment, he joined the Army in 1943.

He served with an anti-aircraft artillery battalion in Panama before becoming part of the 65th at age 24. "What came first? Duty," he said.

"Our first job there was to clean up the hills and pockets the enemy left," he said. "I was assigned to a unit. Our job was to contact the enemy. Our job was more like spies."

Major General Robert Radin, commander of the Army Sustainment Command, recalled the contributions made by local men.

"How many of you know the town of Silvis? There is a block up there known as Heroes Street," he said. "The contributions in our local area of the Hispanic are very great."

The Hero Street USA monument, in Silvis, Ill., honors eight Hispanic soldiers who gave their lives while fighting in World War II and the Korean War.

"Hispanics have distinguished themselves in all of America's war efforts," Soulet said. "Unfortunately, this is a part of U.S. history that is normally not taught to us or to our children."

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