

# 8 MYTHS ABOUT THE BORINQUEENERS

by Noemí Figueroa Soulet



Over the years, many myths about the Borinqueneers have been perpetuated in the media, by the public and even amongst other Borinqueneer veterans that are untrue. Here are the facts:

1. **The 65th was a National Guard unit. FALSE!** After the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded the island of Puerto Rico to the United States. By 1899, Congress approved the creation of the *Porto Rico Battalion of Volunteer Infantry* comprised of four companies each with 100 native men, responsible for the defense of the island. This battalion would expand to become the *Regiment of Puerto Rico* with various name redesignations. In 1908, the unit became part of the Regular Army, the only one on the island with professional full-time soldiers. In 1920, it is reorganized as the 65th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army, becoming the only Hispanic-segregated unit in Army history.
2. **61,000 Puerto Ricans served in the Korean War, most of them with the 65th Infantry. FALSE!** For this to be accurate, at least 30,500 Puerto Ricans should have served in the 65th. In fact, most Puerto Ricans who served in the Korean War served in other units. From September 1950 through May 1953, the 65th received troops and replacements totaling 15,828 and 468 officers bringing the grand total to 16,296. The majority were Puerto Rican, but there were also many continentals. From March 1953 until the regiment was deactivated in 1956, the 65th served as an integrated unit comprised primarily of continentals with approximately 10% being Puerto Rican.
3. **The Borinqueneers suffered 3,540 casualties, of which 747 were killed in action. FALSE!** Most people mistakenly attribute these figures to the 65<sup>th</sup> but in actuality they refer to all Puerto Rican casualties during the Korean War who were inducted from Puerto Rico. Casualties is defined as those who were killed, wounded and captured. My research indicates there were 845 Puerto Ricans (including 29 drafted from U.S. States) killed and 2,376 wounded and killed. This includes those who were serving in the 65th which number 519 Puerto Ricans killed (including 12 who were residing in other States) and 1,787 Puerto Ricans wounded/captured. When you include the continentals, the totals for the 65th go up to 634 killed and 2,211 wounded/captured. The total casualties for the 65th is 2,845 (Puerto Ricans and continentals wounded and killed).
4. **The 65th was the highest decorated unit of the Korean War. FALSE!** The 65th was underrepresented when compared to the awards earned by its sister regiments of the 3rd Infantry Division: the 7th and 15th Infantry regiments, and despite the fact that the 65th had 60 days more of combat time. In 1950, the 65th was initially attached to the 2nd Inf. Div. and thus earned few medals as it was a non-organic part of the Division. Most of the medals were earned in 1951 when the 65th was part of the 3rd Infantry Division's offensive to the North. Almost 45% percent of the total medals were earned in 1953 when the desegregated unit had few Puerto Ricans. Most of the 65th's medals were

awarded to the unit's continental soldiers and officers. About half of all the decorations for valor presented to the regiment during the Korean War were awarded to its officers. In comparison, officers in Eighth Army received about a third of all the awards in Korea. Puerto Ricans received one-third of the 15 Distinguished Service Crosses, 42% of the Silver Stars, and less than 50% of the Bronze Stars. The one Medal of Honor attributed to the 65th was as a result of an upgrade in 2014 for a Distinguished Service Cross awarded to Master Sgt. Juan E. Negrón. And yet, Puerto Ricans suffered 83% of the unit's casualties of those wounded, killed and captured.

5. **Lt. Juan Guzman was arrested because he refused to sacrifice his men at the Jackson Heights battle. FALSE!** On October 28, 1952, Companies A and F climbed Jackson Heights while Lt. Juan Guzman of Company A remained pinned down at Outpost 270 with a small group of men. Guzman never reached Jackson Heights and was arrested for not complying with repeated orders to go up to the hill. But Guzman never outright refused these orders; he just never went up. He was the only member of Company A arrested. About 40 soldiers of Company F were arrested for abandoning the hill without orders and disobeying the commands of a superior officer to return to the hill. On October 29th and November 3rd, incidents occurred with two other companies of which Guzman had no part in. A total of 103 soldiers were arrested but only 94 were court martialed. Although Guzman did not play a major role in these incidents, throughout the years he has been credited as having had an inflated role as the hero of these events.

6. **The 65th lost its colors after Jackson Heights. FALSE!** Many Borinqueneer veterans have expressed this sentiment, but the 65th never lost its colors. The unit continued fighting experiencing heavy casualties at Outpost Harry where from May through July 1953, the regiment suffered 414 casualties, including 90 killed and 324 wounded. In total, five Presidential Unit Citations were awarded for the extraordinary efforts at Outpost Harry, including one for the 65th Company F. In those three months, the 65th earned 6 Distinguished Service Crosses, 76 Silver Stars and 261 Bronze Stars for Valor, representing 38% of all medals earned for the regiment in its three years at war.

7. **The 65th was desegregated because of the courts martial incidents. They were the last unit to be desegregated. PARTIALLY TRUE!** This may be partially true as I'm sure the courts martial played a role. But the other truth is that in 1948 the U.S. Armed Forces had been ordered to be integrated. It was not until the start of the Korean War that this was slowly implemented and many units arrived in Korea still segregated. Throughout the war, the units began to be desegregated and the 65th was integrated in the spring of 1953, but it was not the last unit to be desegregated. The last segregated Army units were not dissolved until 1954.

8. **The 65th no longer exists. FALSE!** After the Korean War, the 65th was inactivated. In 1959, it ceased to be a Regular Army unit and was allotted to the Puerto Rico Army National Guard as a parent regiment. The 65th's 1st Battalion still exists and is currently in the 92nd Military Police Brigade consisting of two MP battalions, one infantry battalion and some support units. They have trained extensively in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and played a key role in state missions continuing their legacy of service now for 125 years.

*Sources: NARA (National Archives), Col. Gilberto Villahermosa, National Park Service and Noemí Figueroa Soulet*