



THE NJ DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERAN AFFAIRS



OFFICE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING



3 SEPTEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER:

PG 1-2 HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

We're kicking off Hispanic Heritage Month a little early by honoring the legacy and stories of the Borinqueneers—the U.S. Army's 65th Infantry Regiment and the first all-Hispanic unit, composed primarily of courageous soldiers from Puerto Rico.

Upcoming Events:



THURSDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2025

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Borinqueneers Day



The U.S. Army's 65th Infantry Regiment was the first only all-Hispanic unit that hailed mostly from Puerto Rico.

FUN FACT: It is believed that the first shots fired from the United States, signaling its involvement in WWI, were shot from the fort of "El Morro" in San Juan, Puerto Rico at a German ship that sailed into San Juan's Bay in 1915. [Learn More](#)

On June 10th, 2014, President Barack Obama signed the bill that awarded the 65th Infantry the Congressional Gold Medal and made April 13th national Borinqueneers Day. Throughout their service, they suffered constant discrimination. Their story often goes unnoticed, but their roots grow deep into our history more than we know.



West Point's Finest

General Luis Esteves was a well-known officer throughout the Army, the first Puerto Rican graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and a classmate of the future President Dwight Eisenhower. In addition to the 65th Infantry, Esteves raised two more units of Puerto Rican National Guardsmen, the 295th and 296th Infantry. While these two units were the primary designated Puerto Rican combat units, over 65,000 men (and even some women) from Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican descent served in World War II. Luis Esteves was the first Puerto Rican to earn the title of General. [Learn More](#)

During the 65th's voyage to Korea, the soldiers came up with the regiment's now famous nickname, "The Borinqueneers." The beginning part of the nickname refers to Puerto Rico's origin name, "la Borinquen", given by the Taino natives of the Island. Many born in Puerto Rico today refer to themselves as Boricuas. The ending of the nickname "Borinqueneers" refers to 17th CE Caribbean pirates called Buccaneers. This nickname was fitting due to the expedition being made across the Pacific Ocean.



1898

Spain ceded Puerto Rico to America along with Cuba and the Philippines

The treaty of Paris concluded the Spanish-American war. Within this treaty, hostilities were ended and Spain gave up controls of Puerto Rico and other territories at the time.

Congress authorized the U.S. military to form the Puerto Rico Battalion of Volunteer Infantry, comprised mainly of men.

On March 2nd, 1899, an act of congress allowed for the first Puerto Rican unit of the US military service. It was a volunteer battalion comprised of four groups with 100 men each.

1899



Puerto Rican Soldiers were officially incorporated into the regular U.S. Army

While the exact number of Puerto Rican soldiers in the army in 1908 is not specified, we know that this force rose to 900 men (U.S. officers and native troops) by 1901.

1908



After two years of serving in WWI, they became the 65th infantry regiment.

An infantry soldier is a frontline combatant in the military that engages in direct ground combat against enemy forces, the 65th being the first Puerto Rican regiment to do so.

1920s



1939-1945

The Borinqueneers are best known for their hard work during the Korean War

By the end of the 65th's first year in Korea, it had suffered 1,510 casualties while defeating 15,787 enemy troops and taking 2,169 prisoners of war.



The Borinqueneers suffered heavy casualties due to an attack at outpost Kelly & Jackson Heights

The 65th refused orders to retake the outposts, in fear of even more casualties. The Army court martialled and convicted 91 of them for desertion and disobeying orders. All were dishonorably discharged. Sentences ranged from one to 16 years of imprisonment and hard labor.

1952





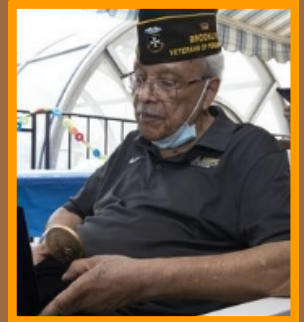
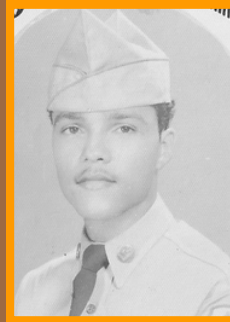
The motto of the Borinqueneers is "Honor Et Fidelitas," which is Latin for "Honor and Fidelity." This motto can be found on the infantry's badge as well as the gold medal gifted to the Borinqueneers for their service. Since the American Revolution, Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded to many for more than just military service and valor. The 65th hold the honor of being the first military unit with service during the Korean War to receive this award.

[Learn More](#)

In addition to their efforts in Korea, the 65th would see combat in France, Italy, and Germany during World War II, with a total of 65,034 Puerto Ricans who served in the US military. Along with the Gold Medal, they earned a total of ten Distinguished Service Crosses, 256 Silver Stars, 606 Bronze Stars, and 2,771 Purple Hearts. The youngest of the surviving members are in their eighties and nineties. For too

long, their contribution to our history as a country has been overlooked, giving even more meaning to this day of observance. This National day encourages everyone in Puerto Rico and across the country to take a moment and reflect on the great sacrifices and achievements of the Borinqueneers, who defended the lives of many with their underappreciated service.

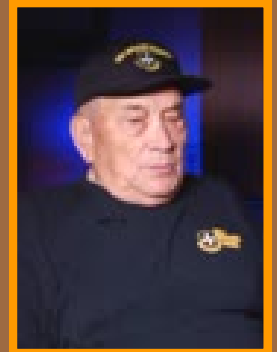
Scan the QR code to access the official Borinqueneer website and learn more about their journey. Here you can find soldier testimonials, photos of the 65th, and access to the official Documentary and book.



Private First Class Ismael Rodriguez-Detres

Ismael was a part of the 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion, Heavy Mortar Company. A mortarman, also called an infantryman or MOS 0341, is a soldier in the Marine Corps or Army who operates weapons called mortars.

Ismael courageously engaged in 2 of 9 operations during the Korean War. Scan the QR code or click the link to learn more about his story: [Learn More](#)



First Sergeant Fernando Rodriguez-Borges

Fernando entered the U.S. Army as part of the 65th Infantry Regiment and served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Scan the QR code or click the link to see Borges share his story as a Puerto Rican native that became a proud soldier for the United States: [Learn More](#)



This medal is a bronze replica of the Congressional Gold Medal presented collectively to the U.S. Army 65th Infantry Regiment in recognition of its immense military service, devotion to duty, and many acts of valor in the face of hardships. The head side depicts a portrait of a fictional soldier. The soldiers in the background are in a "V" formation, taking the high ground with fixed bayonets during the Korean War. The tail side depicts the Castillo de San Felipe del Morro of San Juan, Puerto Rico which was used as the military command ceremonial parade site of the 65th Infantry Regiment. Click the link to learn more. [Learn More](#)

