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By Baltazar Soto, LTC, (Ret.)
US Army; Alliance Member

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The Borinqueneers
SPECIAL REPORT—CELEBRATING HISPANIC HERITAGE!

Mambo on Hill 167

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Cannon fire from El Morro:

1st Salvo of World War I

The first shots of WWI in defense of freedom!
From “El Morro” fort, Old San Juan, early Borinqueneers fired on the armed German supply ship Oldenwald as it tried to force its way out of San Juan Bay to resupply German submarines in the Atlantic Ocean at the onset of WWI. The Puerto Rican soldiers confiscated the ship which was later renamed the SS Newport News, in US service until 1924.

Shown above from 1899: Caption reads “First Company of native Porto Ricans enlisted in the American Colonial Army, Porto Rico.”

WWI, WWII, & Operation PORTREX

During WWI, the 65th Infantry Regiment Borinqueneers guarded the strategically important Panama Canal Zone. In WWII, the segregated unit guarded the canal again, and also saw action in Northern Africa and central Europe. In March 1950 on the eve of the Korean War, the Operation PORTREX military exercise was held on the island of Vieques, where the Borinqueneers prevented more than 32,600 combat troops from the Army & Marines, aided by Naval & Air forces, from establishing a beachhead on the island. This victory helped establish the Borinqueneers’ reputation as a potent fighting force.
Mambo on Hill 167, continued from page 1.

Capture prisoners; leave a squad of volunteers on 167 to observe Chinese Main Line of Resistance (MLR) area—squad to remain for 48 hours.” Clark’s unit was the assault platoon for the company, so it was his mission to go into the objective, seize the hill, and take the prisoners. POWs were needed for gathering intelligence on the enemy, and Third Division had taken no prisoners of war (POWs) in a number of weeks. C Co. Commander Capt. Henry E. Hutcheson told Clark that the S-2 (Intelligence) estimated “half an enemy squad” occupied the objective and assured him that his platoon would have no problem. The rest of the company would provide suppression, security, and support. A tank section on the MLR would provide support by fire. The plan sounded good, but when any plan is “executed” in a field environment during wartime, unpredictable obstacles—friction—can occur. After assembling in darkness on 18 Jul 1952 near the steep slopes of Hill 250 along the Outpost Line of Resistance, C Co. moved out and crossed the Line of Departure (LD) at 2400 (thus, enemy contact would occur on 19 Jul), and quickly became lost in the dark. Noise discipline was poor, undoubtedly providing the enemy early warning. It was not until the sun began to rise that C Co. found the objective, negating the “stealth” part of the mission. Clark’s 2nd Platoon began the assault from the north. Someone once said, “No plan survives contact with the enemy”. C Co. had a plan, but so did the Chinese. The Chinese allowed 2nd Platoon scouts to move within a few feet of the objective before releasing a murderous fire with four Soviet Maxim Heavy Machine Guns, small arms, and grenades. All hell broke loose resulting in total chaos. The infantrymen instinctively threw themselves down to hug the earth for cover. A Chinese soldier on top of the hill signaled with a large red flag. Clark and the 2nd Platoon quickly found out what it meant. “Fire within the battle position!” The Chinese, with complete disregard for their own soldiers, fired mortar and artillery shells into their battle position as 2nd Platoon advanced. Clark knew he had to do something. He immediately charged into the enemy position leading his platoon of infantry with fixed bayonets shouting “Arriba muchachos!” Clark’s platoon sergeant, MSG Santos Candelario helped to rally the rest of the platoon to follow their lieutenant. Clark fearlessly led his men into a hill position of three concentric trench lines. Though wounded by an enemy grenade, he continued his charge, hurling grenades and shooting several enemy soldiers. Then he entered a trench and turned a corner, and came face to face with a Chinese soldier. Several things happened almost instantaneously. Both men raised their weapons and fired. Clark’s M2 Carbine jammed, but the enemy’s didn’t, and a burst from a Soviet Model PPSh-41 “Burp Gun” hit Clark in the thigh. …

Continued on page 5.

The 65th Inf. Reg. Borinqueneers: Heroes of Hungnam!

SEMPER FIDELIS & HONOR ET FIDELITAS: One of the pinnacle achievements of the Borinqueneers in Korea was when they rushed to the defense of the US Marines, 1st Division, and stayed behind to valiantly fight off the enemy after the Marines were encircled and ordered to withdraw to Hungnam. After providing rear-guard cover of heroic proportions for the Marines, the operation culminated on Christmas Eve 1950 as the last Borinqueneers boarded ship. Hungnam is considered as one of the epic, successful withdrawals of military history.
“Fijar Bayonetas!” (Fix Bayonets!)

The Borinqueneers are credited with the last regimental bayonet assault in US military history. In early 1951 while fighting in Korea, two battalions of the 65th fixed bayonets and charged straight up hill toward the enemy, over running them and overtaking the enemy's strategic position. General Douglas MacArthur had high praise: “The Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the gallant 65th Infantry give daily proof on the battlefields of Korea of their courage, determination and resolute will to victory, their invincible loyalty to the United States and their fervent devotion to those immutable principles of human relations which the Americans of the Continent and of Puerto Rico have in common. They are writing a brilliant record of heroism in battle and I am indeed proud to have them under my command. I wish that we could count on many more like them.”

1st & only Latino 4-Star General began as a Borinqueneer

The 1st and only Latino 4-Star Army general began his career as a young Borinqueneer officer in Korea. A Mexican-American, Richard E. Cavazos earned his first of two Distinguished Service Crosses while a Borinqueneer for his heroic actions during an attack on Hill 142. This award is our nation’s 2nd highest medal for individual heroism. He also was awarded his 1st Silver Star and 1st Purple Heart as a Borinqueneer. The Puerto Rican soldiers in the segregated unit held him in high esteem and regarded him as a true soldiers’ officer. Later, he attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the British Staff College and the Armed Forces Staff College.

In 1967, Cavazos commanded 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, in Vietnam. His valiant leadership of that unit in the attack at Loc Ninh earned him a second Distinguished Service Cross. After Vietnam, he served in various command capacities, and was awarded his fourth star in 1982, assuming command of the US Army Forces Command.

Don Modesto Cartagena de Jesús

The most decorated Puerto Rican soldier in US history, a proud 65th Infantry Regiment “Borinqueneer”, the late Sergeant First Class Don Modesto Cartagena de Jesús served in WWII & Korea. He is a recipient of the nation’s 2nd highest award for heroism, the Distinguished Service Cross, as well as the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster and “V” device, the Purple Heart, and many others. Hailing from Cayey, Puerto Rico, he was very active in veterans affairs for many years following his renowned military service. Due to the language barrier and the often inadequate respect for their heroic actions at the time, numerous Latino soldiers were under-recognized, and Don Modesto’s Distinguished Service Cross citation reads more like a Congressional Medal of Honor citation, which he has merited. Learn more at http://www.Borinqueneers.org!

A Mexican-American, Gen. Cavazos got his start as a Borinqueneer!

SFC Modesto Cartagena
Clark threw his carbine away and instinctively jumped on the soldier. At the same time, he took his steel pot off and began beating the Chinese soldier senseless. When the soldier moved, Clark remembered he still had his Smith & Wesson 45 revolver and shot him. Other enemy soldiers nearby hurled grenades at Clark wounding him in the legs, knee, and face. Cpl. José Otero-González ran through the hail of fire, following Clark, firing his rifle, and throwing hand grenades at the Chinese. Near one of the enemy trenches, he found his platoon leader injured and stretched out on the ground. Otero told his lieutenant, “I’ll save you.” PFC Maximino Paoli, who had charged with Otero, was suddenly knocked down, wounded in the head. Clark thought he was dead, but Paoli jumped back up furious and bayoneted the two Chinese who were throwing grenades directly at Clark. Later Paoli discovered a bullet wedged in his helmet between the liner and the steel pot. Cpl. Otero spotted another 2nd Platoon NCO and rescued him, too.

The intensity of the enemy fire was so severe; it did not allow the other two C Co. rifle platoons to the east to provide any support. The promised tank fire support from the MLR never materialized either. The 2nd Platoon was already intermingled with the Chinese on the hill, and the tanks could not risk firing into friendly forces. Except for a small attached rifle team, 2nd Platoon was on its own. Chinese bunkers were blown up by the 57mm recoilless rifle team or were directly assaulted by the infantryman. As the brutal fight progressed for several hours, it became apparent that the alleged “half squad” of 3-4 enemy riflemen was a lot more, possibly an enemy Company of a hundred soldiers. On its own and outnumbered at least two to one, 2nd Platoon still managed to chase the enemy from the position, thenmachine gun the Chinese who were running away back to their lines. Then Clark directed fire against outlying Chinese mortar positions. The 2nd Platoon succeeded in capturing two Chinese Prisoners in the gruesome melee.

Perhaps the bravest man Clark witnessed that day was the medic attached to his platoon, PFC Demetrio Villalobos-Melendez. With all the death and maiming going on in the bloody brawl, he calmly saved lives, attended the wounded and moved through enemy fire. Clark and his platoon of Puerto Rican infantry owned Hill 167 until they received orders to withdraw from the position. Refusing medical aid and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, Clark moved through the heavy hostile fire assisting in the evacuation of the wounded. During the withdrawal, the POWs were killed by the intense Chinese fire.

Clark was the last platoon member to leave the enemy position. The platoon had taken all their wounded and dead back with them, including the upper half of one of its soldiers. No platoon member living or dead was left behind. During the platoon’s withdrawal to the MLR, the Chinese fired an estimated 3,000 rounds of mortar and artillery. Clark was unable to keep up with his men since he was severely wounded and since he was the last to leave the objective. During his lone-walk back, he was lifted off the ground three times by the 122mm mortar shelling along the withdrawal route. Miraculously, he finally reached the Battalion Aid Station at approximately 1100 hours. As 2nd Platoon neared the MLR, other soldiers including Capt. Enrique A. Vicéns, risked their lives to run to the aid the wounded C Co. First Sergeant MSG Rafael E. Balzac also assisted in evacuating a wounded comrade. Upon reaching friendly positions, he refused medical aid for his own wounds, and after calling for volunteers to accompany him, returned to help evacuate more wounded. As he was carrying a fallen comrade on his shoulders to safety, a devastating barrage of enemy mortar fire swept the entire area, killing him instantly. His body was not recovered until a couple of days after the battle. The casualty rate for 2nd Platoon was 50% with 7 killed and 24 wounded.

The Borinqueneers gave a special name to Hill 167: Mambo 167. Mambo was a very popular Latin music and dance that swept the Latin world in the early 1950s; when the men of the 65th were going to “rumble” in combat, they referred to it as “going to the Mambo.” Clark learned about the name while in the hospital recovering from his wounds; it was months before he recovered.

Conclusion on page 6.
Clark was awarded the Silver Star and two purple hearts for six separate grenade wounds and the bullet wound he received. First Sergeant Balzac was posthumously awarded the Silver Star and Capt. Vicéns, Cpl. Otero and PFC Villalobos-Melendez received the Bronze Star. Two Silver Stars and nine Bronze Stars were awarded that day, most to the soldiers of 2nd Platoon. The Puerto Rican soldiers had shown what they could do with good leadership. Despite being outnumbered and out-gunned, these fierce warriors won the day against a heavily armed and entrenched enemy force that outnumbered them two-to-one. Today Hill 167 is deep inside the Demilitarized Zone near North Korea, but Borinqueneers will never forget their Mambo 167.

LTC Baltazar (Bart) Soto is a 1976 ROTC graduate of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico. He serves on the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance national steering committee.

Similar in nature to the famed Tuskegee Airmen and other segregated U.S. military units, the 65th Infantry Regiment Borinqueneers were the largest, longest-standing, and only active-duty segregated Latino military unit in U.S. history. Like the Tuskegee Airmen, Navajo Code Talkers, Nisei Soldiers, and Montford Point Marines who’ve already been recognized with the Congressional Gold Medal, the Borinqueneers overwhelmingly distinguished themselves in battle all the while enduring the additional hardships of segregation and discrimination. Hailing from Puerto Rico, the US Army unit was active from 1899-1959. The youngest of these remaining Latino-American heroes are in their 80’s and 90’s, having served in the Korean War. A nationwide, non-partisan, all-volunteer group, the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance has been advocating the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to these elderly veterans since late last year. Made up of veterans, Latino-Americans, and like-minded patriots, the organization has worked closely with members of the U.S. Congress to facilitate the successful introduction and subsequent support of special bipartisan legislation, which requires Co-Sponsorship by two-thirds of each chamber for passage. The U.S. House of Representatives bill, introduced this spring by Representatives Pedro Pierluisi (D-PR) and Bill Posey (R-FL), H.R.1726, currently has 100 of the required 290 Co-Sponsors. The U.S. Senate bill, S.1174, introduced in June by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), has 18 of the necessary 67 Co-Sponsors. You can help by asking your 1 US House of Rep’s member & 2 US Senators to become Co-Sponsors of the bills NOW!