



Documentary pays homage to Puerto Rican military unit

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Two Lorain veterans of the only all-Hispanic unit in the U.S. military recalled the horrors of the Korean War yesterday before traveling to Columbus to speak at a showing today of a documentary film about the unit.



Carlos Montes

Carlos Montes, 76, and Miguel Berlingeri, 82, said the film, "The Borinqueneers," is an accurate portrayal of the hardships Puerto Rican soldiers faced in wartime during the 20th century. The film, a 2007 documentary by Noemi Figueroa Soulet, was screened in Columbus today as part of Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations, and was sponsored by Nationwide Insurance.

Montes and Berlingeri served in the 65th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army, which began as a volunteer unit in 1899 and saw action in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and other conflicts.

Berlingeri said he arrived in Korea in September 1950 after a month-long crossing of the Pacific. He also fought in World War II, but not as a member of the 65th Infantry Regiment, he said.



Miguel Berlingeri

"In Korea, we fought in the south, and in the north to free the Marines from the Yalu River," he said. In the 65th Infantry, he was assigned to a heavy mortar company as a forward observer.

"I'm no hero," he said. "I observed the enemy and gave the directions to our mortar guys to send shells over our troops to hit the enemy."

Berlingeri said he has seen the film twice.

"When I started watching the movie, I saw my uncle who got killed in February 1951 in Korea," he said. "I had to stop watching it, because it brought back too many memories."

Montes trained recruits for the Korean War and had other duties at Losey Field, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, where he stayed until 1955.

"The Puerto Ricans who went (to Korea) never saw snow before, and in Korea it was below zero," he said. "In the summertime, the rain caused lots of mud. I got emotional when I saw the movie."

His duties in Puerto Rico included escorting the bodies of fallen soldiers to their families' homes. He also had to bury the casualties from Korea, he said.

After the war, Montes came to Lorain when he left the Army and worked at the Lorain Ford Assembly Plant, where he retired in 1994.

Berlingeri came to Lorain in 1966, after retiring from the Army as a staff sergeant. His service included duty as a military policeman, including guarding the gold at Fort Knox, Ky.

While Berlingeri's unit was fighting in North Korea, they had to sleep in the snow for about two months, he said.

"We got a little frostbite but we didn't get sick," he said. "There were over 2,000 Puerto Ricans in the 65th. I lost a lot of friends there."

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