

## Saluting Our War Heroes / Stories about those who served

# Handshakes bookend veteran's career

By LOU MICHEL  
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Sixty-four years after Juan B. Negron served in the Army's segregated unit for Puerto Rican soldiers, the 65th Infantry Regiment, he experienced the highlight of his military career.

The 82-year-old Korean War veteran and other Puerto Rican soldiers were summoned to the White House June 10 to witness President Obama award the Congressional Gold Medal to the regiment, the Borinqueneers. The regiment was formed in 1899 and had fought in World War I and World II, before Korea.

Awarding the highest civilian honor to the regiment was a way of providing long overdue collec-

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**Juan B. Negron, 82**

**Hometown:** Jayuya, Puerto Rico  
**Residence:** Buffalo  
**Branch:** Army  
**War zone:** Korean War  
**Years of service:** 1950 - 1953  
**Rank:** Private 1st class  
**Most prominent honors:** Combat Infantry Badge, United Nations Medal, Korean War Service Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon  
**Specialty:** Infantry

President Obama reaches over to shake hands with Korean War Veteran Juan B. Negron of Buffalo (wearing the VFW hat).

Want to honor a veteran? Contact News Staff Reporter Lou Michel at [lmichel@buffnews.com](mailto:lmichel@buffnews.com) or call 849-5594

# Met Gen. MacArthur in Korean trenches

NEGRON • from B1

tive recognition, also given in recent years to other segregated units such as the African-Americans of the Tuskegee Army and the Native Americans of the Navajo code talkers.

When Negron received a phone call from the White House inviting him to the ceremony, he thought it was hoax.

"I'm under the weather," he said. "I'm not going to make it." He then hung up.

The White House persisted and called Negron's son, Ed, and explained that this was no joke.

A few days later, Negron and his three children, Ed, Vivian, and Janet, were in the White House for the presentation. On stage were several Puerto Rican veterans from the Korean War, who watched as the president signed the bill authorizing the award.

Negron and two other veterans were in the front row.

"The president came down from the stage and shook hands with us," Negron said. "I felt like a million dollars."

It was a big reward for Negron, who enlisted while still



Mark Mulville/Buffalo News

**Juan Negron finds delight these days working outside, tending his flowers.**

in high school.

"I was in Puerto Rico in my senior year when I received my draft notice. I had to leave high school. I was doing my duty," he explained.

By June 1951, following a 30-day journey in a troop ship that passed through the Panama Canal, Negron arrived in Korea. "The minute you stepped out of the ship, you could see it was a war zone. Soldiers were everywhere," he said.

Assigned to Company E, Negron arrived at the front lines three days later.

"We were ready for anything, but the fighting was a little farther north, a couple miles," he said. "Two days later, I was up there in a trench."

He recalled his first battle.

"We were shooting at night, and I don't know if I hit anybody," he said, "but the enemy retreated."

Negron's next assignment was at an outpost.

"That was scary. We were in the middle of the enemy's front lines and our front lines. It was no man's land. Oh my God, I was a kid and didn't know where the hell I was, but I prayed every night that nothing would happen to me."

His prayers were answered - well, almost.

He was slightly wounded a month later while on a reconnaissance patrol.

"We came in contact with the enemy and fought. There were a couple other soldiers wounded. I was hit in my left arm between the elbow and the wrist from a little piece of a hand grenade. We retreated only after the enemy had."

A medic patched him up.

Enemy fire wasn't the only danger for Negron and his fellow soldiers. There was also

the brutal winter on the Korean peninsula.

"It was cold, and there was a lot of snow."

And more fighting.

One evening while in the trenches, the 65th was surprised by a visitor who wanted to thank them for their service.

"Gen. MacArthur was going around saying hello to the soldiers, and I shook his hand. That was like, wow, I'm shaking hands with a general."

Only one handshake topped that, he said: President Obama's.

After 13 months in Korea, Negron was discharged Dec. 1, 1953, and returned to Puerto Rico, where he finished high school and graduated from a technical school with an accounting degree.

He moved to Buffalo in 1957 and worked in area factories for more than a decade, before landing a job with the City of Buffalo and serving as a crew chief installing traffic signs.

And while war filled his early days, Negron, a widower, says he finds delight these days, working outside tending to his flowers.

"My beautiful garden," he said.