The Virgin Islands Consortium

Five Virgin Islands Veterans Awarded Congressional Gold Medal For Korean War Service

VIC News / **Published On April 26, 2016 11:06 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert April 26, 2016

ST. CROIX -- Five Virgin Islands veterans -- Jerome Ferdinand, Jerome Jackson, Aubrey Nelthropp, Carl Thomas, and Leroy Woodrup - who served with the 65th Army Infantry Regiment, also known as the Borinqueneers (bohr-ehn-kin-EERS') in the Korean War, were awarded with the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor at Government House here on Tuesday.

"It's my distinct honor to be here in the Virgin Islands to recognize the service of so many Virgin Islands natives," said U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald, who presented the awards. Mr. McDonald spoke highly of the work that the 65th Army Infantry Regiment did in Korean War, including when they prevented the

advance of a Chinese unit. He said the group, "frankly, faced a situation of segregation in their own country; yet fought for the freedom of the country that didn't yet recognize the equality that they should have been treated with."

The Borinqueneers fought in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. The soldiers have earned numerous military awards, including a Medal of Honor, about 250 Silver Stars and more than 2,700 Purple Hearts. The unit was first formed as Puerto Rican, and was redesignated as the 65th Infantry Regiment in 1920.

Mr. Ferdinand said receiving the honor was a great feeling, and that his days with the 65th Regiment were times he would never forget.

"I feel great. After 1951, going to Korea and serving there with the Puerto Ricans, I am very proud today. It was not easy, but I made it. I didn't prepare my mind for any awards or anything. I'm glad for today and think it's well deserving because it was not easy in Korea," he said. Mr. Ferdinand, who served as an interpreter during the most difficult days of the 65th Regiment, said, "those were days that I will never forget."

Mr. Jackson echoed Mr. Ferdinand's sentiment both of receiving the honor and being part of the unforgiving war. He also wondered whether they would have received the distinct honor for their peculiar service during the Korean War. "I thought they forgot us," Mr. Jackson said. "We endured and suffered a lot. You hear about the Iraq war, but I thought they forget us."

View the original embedded media

Mr. McDonald then presented the Borinqueneers with the distinct honor, shaking hands and thanking each veteran while doing so.

During the ceremony, Governor Kenneth Mapp honored Army Veteran John Tranberg, who celebrated his 100th birthday on April 17, by proclaiming April 25th as John Tranberg Day. Mr. Tranberg was assigned initially to the 873rd Port Company, and later transferred to the 872nd in Louisiana during World War II. In addition to the proclamation, he was presented with the V.I. Office of Veterans Affairs Director's Test of Time Award.

“On behalf of all Virgin Islanders we want to express our thanks,” the territory's leader told Mr. Tranberg. “We have named a day in your honor.”

At a town hall meeting that followed the ceremony, Mr. McDonald said he would work with the Mapp administration to bring healthcare for local veterans to the territory’s two hospitals. According to Government House, the goal is to relocate the islands' two veterans clinics to Juan F. Luis Hospital and Roy L. Schneider Medical Center in order to provide a full range of services to the veterans, who now must travel to Puerto Rico for care.

Mr. Mapp and Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs Director Patrick Farrell reiterated that remedying the problems brought on by lack of local healthcare for veterans was a priority of the administration and meetings with federal officials have largely focused on addressing this issue.

Feature Image: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald presents Jerome Ferdinand (Ernice Gilbert, VIC).

© Viconsortium 2026