

Arlington National Cemetery - Hispanic American History

Borinqueneers — A memorial tree and plaque in Section 21 honor members of the U.S. Army's 65th Infantry Regiment, which fought bravely in the Korean War. Nicknamed "The Borinqueneers," the regiment was comprised almost exclusively of soldiers from Puerto Rico. In English and Spanish, the plaque reads: "Dedicated to the men of the 65th Infantry Regiment United States Army for their Valor and Patriotism During the Korean War 1950-1953" / "Dedicado a los Soldados de El Regimiento 65 de Infanteria Ejercito de los Estados Unidos por su Valentia y Patriotismo durante la Guerra de Corea 1950-1953." The memorial tree is a sugar maple. (Section 21)

Felix Longoria, U.S. Army (1920-1945) — Born and raised in Texas, Longoria enlisted in the Army in November 1944 and was assigned to a regiment fighting in the Philippines. On June 16, 1945, fifteen days after landing in Luzon, Private Longoria was killed in an ambush. It took several years for his remains to be recovered and repatriated. Then, a Texas funeral director refused to hold a wake for Longoria because he was of Mexican descent. The GI Forum, a Hispanic veterans and civil rights organization founded in 1948, brought national attention to the case, and Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson obtained authorization for Longoria's remains to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. On February 16, 1949, he was laid to rest with full military honors, with Sen. and Lady Bird Johnson in attendance. People gathered at his grave annually for decades, and the "Felix Longoria Affair" played a significant role in catalyzing Mexican American political consciousness and activism. (Section 34, Grave 4608)

Maximiliano Luna, U.S. Army (1870-1899) — Originally from New Mexico, Capt. Maximiliano Luna fought in the Spanish-American War (1898) as the only Mexican American officer in the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry — the famous "Rough Riders." While serving in the Philippine-American War, Luna drowned while crossing the Agno River on the island of Luzon on November 18, 1899. His name is the first listed on the Rough Riders Memorial in Section 22.

Louis Gonzaga Mendez Jr., U.S. Army (1915-2001) — A decorated airborne combat veteran of World War II, Colonel Louis Gonzaga Mendez was of Mexican, Spanish and Navajo descent. As commander of the 3rd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, he was dropped behind enemy lines in Normandy, France on June 5, 1944, the day before the D-Day invasion. For leading an attack that captured the town of Pretot, Mendez received the Distinguished Service

Cross. He also led his battalion during Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge. In his Army career after the war, Mendez held a variety of command posts in the United States and abroad, rising to the rank of colonel; he also served as secretary of the Organization of American States' Inter-American Defense Board. He earned a master's degree in international relations from Georgetown University and taught at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning. After retiring from the military in 1970, he held leadership positions in the Department of Education. (Section 7A, Grave 145)

Bernardo Carlos Negrete, U.S. Army (1951-2005) — Brig. Gen. Bernardo Carlos Negrete, who came to the United States as a 10-year-old Cuban refugee, spent 30 years in the U.S. Army. He completed four combat tours, serving in Operation Urgent Fury (Grenada), Operation Just Cause (Panama), Operation Desert Shield/Storm (Saudi Arabia and Iraq) and Operation Desert Thunder (Kuwait). In his final posting, as deputy commanding general of Army Recruiting Command West, he made special efforts to recruit Hispanic Americans for military service. His awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star and the Meritorious Service Medal. (Section 60, Grave 2962)

Maria Ines Ortiz, U.S. Army (1967-2007) — Capt. Ortiz, who grew up in Puerto Rico, served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and was killed by mortar fire in the Green Zone of Baghdad on July 10, 2007. She was the first Army nurse killed in combat since the Vietnam War. (Section 60, Grave 8647)

Elwood R. "Pete" Quesada, U.S. Air Force (1904-1993) — Lt. Gen. Elwood Quesada's career spanned military and civil aviation. In 1929, as a reserve officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps, he served as a crew member on the record-setting "Question Mark" endurance flight, which stayed aloft for more than six days to demonstrate the feasibility of in-flight refueling. All five members of the crew, which also included legendary pilots Ira Eaker and Carl Spaatz, received the Distinguished Flying Cross. During World War II, Quesada held fighter commands during campaigns in Italy, North Africa and Europe, including the D-Day invasion in June 1944. He received two Distinguished Service Medals, the Legion of Merit and the Purple Heart. After retiring from active duty in 1951, Quesada entered private industry as an executive at Lockheed. From 1959 to 1961, he served as the first administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). (Section 30, Grave 439-LH)

Henry Gabriel Sanchez, U.S. Navy (1907-1978) — Rear Admiral Henry Gabriel Sanchez, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a decorated naval aviator. During World War II, he commanded Fighting Squadron 72 (VF-72), an F4F squadron of 37 aircraft, aboard the carrier USS Hornet. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for meritorious achievement on October 26, 1942, during the Battle of Santa Cruz — the fourth major naval engagement between the United States and Japan. According to the medal citation, Sanchez "led a division of fighters in a determined and daring attack on Japanese interceptor planes." His other awards include the Air Medal with Gold Star and the Presidential Unit Citation with three stars. (Section 2, Grave 4736-3-4)

Hector Santa Anna, U.S. Air Force — This decorated World War II B-17 bomber pilot, Berlin Airlift pilot and career military leader had a memorable last name: Santa Anna happened to be the great-great nephew of Mexican general Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who famously led the siege of the Alamo during the Texas Revolution of 1836. In July 1943, he completed his flight training at Brooks Army Air Field in San Antonio, Texas (ironically, near the Alamo). Among the 97 cadets in his class, Santa Anna was the only Latino. In a 2003 interview for the University of Texas at Austin's Voces Oral History Project, he recalled, "It wasn't easy being the only one. They would always single you out, you know? With a name like Santa Anna, you stood out. Some would accept you and others would not." Following his graduation from flight school, the Army utilized Santa Anna's bilingualism by assigning him to train Central and South American military pilots at Waco Army Air Field in Texas. He volunteered for combat duty in August 1944 and, in October, deployed to England with the 486th Bomb Group, 3rd Bomb Wing, of the 8th Air Force. Between November 1944 and March 1945, Santa Anna flew 35 combat missions over Western Europe, earning two Distinguished Service Medals, five Air Medals and a Commendation Medal. After the war, Santa Anna continued his military career in the nascent United States Air Force. During the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949, he flew 127 missions in support of Allied efforts to provide humanitarian aid to Soviet-blockaded Berlin. His later Air Force career took him to the Pentagon, where he served as special assistant to the secretary of defense for public affairs. After retiring from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel in June 1964, Santa Anna held leadership positions at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). During the administration of President Richard Nixon, he served as the Office of Equal Opportunity's White House representative and a member of the president's Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People. (Section 54, Grave 571)

versace

Humbert Roque Versace, U.S. Army (1937-1965) — A Vietnam War POW, Captain Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace received the first Medal of Honor for actions performed in Southeast Asia while in captivity. After graduating from West Point in 1959, Versace was commissioned as a second lieutenant and subsequently earned a Ranger Tab and a Parachutist Badge. He volunteered to go to Vietnam, enrolling in Vietnamese language and military intelligence courses. In May 1962, he arrived in the Republic of Vietnam as an intelligence advisor. On October 29, 1963, less than two weeks before the end of his tour, he was wounded and captured during a Viet Cong ambush. Capt. Versace tried to escape four times, and his captors ultimately chained him in an isolation cell. Still, he tried to boost fellow prisoners' morale by singing popular songs; he was last heard loudly singing "God Bless America." On September 26, 1965, North Vietnamese radio announced that he had been executed. Capt. Versace posthumously received a Silver Star, and on July 8, 2002, President George W. Bush awarded him the Medal of Honor. Versace was of Puerto Rican descent, and his name is engraved on the Monument of Remembrance in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (Section MG, Grave 108) Capt. Versace's father, Colonel Humbert Joseph Versace, is buried in Section 13, Grave 494-2.