

# “Borinqueneers, venga lo que venga!”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Southside](#) April 14, 2021

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

selections from [Andrew Scott](#), “*Bethlehem honoring Borinqueneers, segregated Puerto Rican unit that fought in Korea, with memorial.*” *Morning Call, April 13, 2021.*

“Borinqueneers, venga lo que venga!”

Army veterans Enrique Vasquez, 93, and Santiago Rosario, 95, both of Bethlehem, remember that battle cry, which in English means, “Borinqueneers, whatever it takes!”

Both men served with the Borinqueneers, or the 65th Infantry Regiment, a segregated Puerto Rican unit that fought in both world wars, Korea and the Global War on Terrorism.

The Borinqueneers were largely ignored for years until 2014, when former President Barack Obama awarded the unit the Congressional Gold Medal for serving with distinction. Individual members have received Purple Hearts and Silver Stars, some posthumously. The name Borinqueneer comes from Borinquen, the indigenous Puerto Rican native name for the island.

Vasquez, a Purple Heart recipient who served in the Korean War, and Rosario, who served in World War II and part of the Korean War, joined Bethlehem officials Tuesday at a groundbreaking for a memorial honoring the unit. The memorial, to be unveiled in September, will be a domino table mural surrounded by benches.



#### Monument Groundbreaking

Korean War Veteran Enrique Vasquez, left, Bethlehem City Councilwoman Olga Negron, center, and World War II Veteran Santiago Rosario, right, break ground on the monument. Elected officials and community members gathered to celebrate National Borinqueneers Day Tuesday afternoon with a groundbreaking ceremony for a monument honoring the 65th Infantry Regiment (Borinqueneers), a segregated Latino unit that fought in both world wars and Korea along the Bethlehem Greenway Path. (Amy Shortell/The Morning Call)

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“I still have the scars from the shrapnel in my back,” said Vasquez, who arrived with a walker and sat on one side of Bethlehem City Council member Olga Negron as Negron led the groundbreaking ceremony.

Vasquez fought with the Borinqueneers in Korea, where the unit was overwhelmed and repelled by enemy troops while defending the hill at Outpost Kelly in September 1952.

“I spent a month healing at a hospital and went right back out on the front lines,” he said, speaking through a translator.

Vasquez was with the unit in November 1953, when it successfully counterattacked enemy troops in the Numsong Valley and held its position until the war’s end.

“I joined the Army at 16 in 1943 and served 10 years in the Army and later in the Army Reserve,” Rosario said. “I helped the Borinqueneers defend the Panama Canal against the Germans. I served in Aruba,

Trinidad and other places. Korea was a hard fight. A lot of the time, we were outnumbered with limited firepower.”

Vasquez and Rosario shared their memories with a diverse crowd of about 100 people, including local and state elected officials, waving Puerto Rican flags and gathered at the greenway at Taylor and Mechanic streets for the groundbreaking. The location is overlooked by a high-rise in the heart of Bethlehem’s diverse South Side community, not far from the Wind Creek casino.

“This is a testament to the centrality and import of Bethlehem’s Puerto Rican veterans and their families to our civic history,” said Mary Foltz, director of the South Side Initiative.

The groundbreaking comes after Congress passed legislation Jan. 1 designating April 13 as National Borinqueneers Day.

“I have had conversations with members of our community about creating some kind of monument to the Borinqueneers here in our city,” Negrón said. “We decided on a domino table since the game of dominos is a Puerto Rican pastime and key part of our culture.”