

PUERTO RICAN SOLDIER

Pvt. Fulano de Tal, the typical GI, is proud of his island, fights well and likes rice, beans and the rumba.



By Sgt. LOU STOUMEN

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SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO—As Jerry machine guns raked the exposed American infantrymen on the Oran hillside, Pvt. Anibal Irizarry sized up the outfit's position. There was only one way to halt that fire. The Puerto Rican soldier worked his way forward until he was almost on top of the gun, silenced it and killed the entire crew with his BAR. As he fired his last burst, Irizarry was seriously wounded by another enemy machine gun.

For that action, and for capturing eight prisoners and wiping out another machine gun with a grenade at 20 yards, also during the North African campaign, the Puerto Rican GI came home from the wars with the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart.

Many other Puerto Ricans have distinguished themselves in battle. It was at Guadalcanal that Col. Pedro del Valle of the Marines, an Artillery commander, pinned on the star of a brigadier general. 1st Lt. Jesus Maldonado, from his bombardier's seat, scored a direct hit on a Jap cruiser, shot down one Zero and survived two crash landings in the Southwest Pacific.

Another bombardier, 1st Lt. Manuel Vicente, was wounded by ack-ack on a bombing run in the African campaign, but he released his bombs anyway on the assigned targets. In a hospital in Sicily, Ernie Pyle met two Puerto Rican GIs, both wounded. One of them, Pyle wrote, still carried his guitar and strummed on it lightly as he lay on his stretcher.

More than 80 Puerto Ricans have been killed or wounded in action, no small casualty list for an island only 35 by 100 miles in size, especially when you remember that no Puerto Rican outfits, as such, have been officially reported at a fighting front. Men like Irizarry, del Valle and Vicente went into action with U. S. units.

Wartime service for the Puerto Rican outfits has been limited so far to manning guns, lights, listening devices and posts on Puerto Rico itself, in the Panama jungles, on Trinidad, Cuba, the Virgin Islands and Jamaica.

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The biggest, oldest and best-trained Puerto Rican units, whose organizations date from their part in the last war, include the 65th, the 295th and the 296th Infantry Regiments. They are composed mostly of volunteers, and they are spoiling for a fight. But except for U-boat attacks on shipping, and the shelling of Aruba and Mona Islands, in the early days of the war, the Caribbean has been pretty quiet.

In those early days, the war made its mark on Puerto Rico and her people. Blackouts came often and lasted long. The island was heavily garrisoned and fortified. U-boat successes kept the people hungry; butter, potatoes, milk powder, meat, eggs, even rice and beans were unavailable. Because of shipping shortages, the island could not export its sugar and rum products, its fruits, tobacco and coffee. Economic dislocation was widespread, and still is.

But the people took it. They showed their confidence and their sense of humor by the patriotic names they gave to their businesses: Restaurant *El Segundo Frente* (Second Front Restaurant), Bar *El Union de Todos* (Bar of the Brotherhood of Man), *Colmado de los Aliados* (Allies' Grocery Store), *El Victory Bar*, Laundry *El Buen Soldado* (Good Soldier Laundry).

And Pvt. Fulano de Tal, Puerto Rico's Pvt. John Doe, is a good soldier. He usually stands two or three inches shorter than his *americano* brother. He is stocky, high-cheeked, muscular, bronzed and hardened by training in the tropical sun. He's a crack shot and handy with the bayonet. He knows his jungle warfare.

Like John Doe, Fulano may have enlisted in the Army—until volunteers were no longer accepted, the island's recruiting offices were thronged with men from the canefields, the coffee and tobacco plantations and the cities who wanted to join up—or he may have been inducted by *El Tio Sam* (Uncle Sam). A working knowledge of the English language is required of each recruit, but he is issued a War Department sex-hygiene pamphlet in Spanish, translated by the San Juan Optimist Club.

Fulano loves his rice and beans, and to the great unhappiness of any *soldado americano* who may mess with him, he eats these staples once or twice a day. He also loves to sing and dance, mostly rumba. One Saturday night, when a mild earthquake shook the Camp Tortuguero Service Club and put out the lights, the music went right on and the dancers continued their rumba without breaking step. Fulano has been known to draw company punishment for doing the rumba during close-order drill. He takes his guitar on dates, and likes to sing "*Juan*" and "*Mujer de Juan*" ("Juan's Woman") the way GIs in the States sing "Pistol Packin' Mama."

The Puerto Rican GI has a real sense of humor but, like all Latins, is proud and touchy about his *honra* (honor) and the *honra* of his beloved island. His blood is of the Spanish conquistadores, of the ancient Boriquen Indians and of various European nationalities that have visited his island since its discovery by Columbus in 1493. Spanish is still the language of most Puerto Ricans. But Fulano is a citizen of the U. S. by act of Congress, like all his people, and elects his own legislature. Since the Spanish-American war, Puerto Rico has been a territory of the U. S., and her governor is appointed by the President, but a bill now pending will give Fulano and his people the right to elect their own governor.

Fulano respects American efficiency, education and high standard of living, and he has a hankering to see the States after the war is over, just as the average *soldado americano* down here plans to pay a return visit to *La Isla del Encanto* (the Isle of Enchantment) some day.

"*Que pasa?*" This much Spanish every *soldado americano* knows. It means "What's cooking?" The answer is that besides a war cooking, besides a Caribbean sea frontier cooked to a well-gunned turn, Fulano is himself cooking. He and his island have grown in maturity and stature by playing their part in this war, by their sacrifices in discomfort, hunger and blood.

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