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**Puerto Rican Soldiers 'Parranda' at Hispanic Heritage Month observance**

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By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson, 16<sup>th</sup> SB Public Affairs

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq — Soldiers from the 266th Ordnance Company, out of Aguadillo, P.R., wanted to make this year's Hispanic Heritage Month observance special, so they performed a Puerto Rican Christmas tradition and sang "En Mi Viejo San Juan," for the crowd at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center here Sept. 28.

They call the Christmas tradition "Parranda," an event that involves going from house-to-house, singing Christmas carols such as "La Paloma," and taking the carol-recipients along with them to the next house, in an escalating night of carols and socializing.

"We go to houses and wake people up and they join in," said Staff Sgt. Guillermo Matos, operations non-commissioned officer, 266th Ordnance Co. "That's what we're doing here, trying to bring something from home."

The Hispanic Heritage Month, from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, raises awareness of the contributions made by Soldiers of Hispanic origins. Sept. 15 marks the anniversaries for the independence of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

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September 16 is Mexico's Independence and Chile's is Sept. 18.

President Lyndon B. Johnson declared Hispanic Heritage week in 1968, but it was later changed to Hispanic Heritage Month by President Ronald Reagan in 1986.

Hispanic Soldiers have served in the U.S. military since the Civil War. Two Hispanic Americans received the Medal of Honor for their heroism during the Civil War, and the Navy's first admiral, David G. Farragut, was Hispanic. He is best remembered for uttering "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead," during the capture of New Orleans.

In the Army, Richard E. Cavazos broke new ground when he became the Army's first Hispanic brigadier general in 1976, and later became the Army's first Hispanic four-star general in 1982.

"The U.S. Army is a diverse force; it's a conglomeration of different ethnicities and backgrounds" said Staff Sgt. Omar Cardona, ammunition inspector, 266th Ordnance Co. "It's important to know what Hispanic and Latino Soldiers have given the Armed Forces."

Other speakers at the event gave presentations on Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Spain, and dancers performed bachata, merenge and salsa dances. Guest speaker 1st Sgt. Euripides Perez, first sergeant, Task Force 151, spoke about the importance of taking the time to get to know Soldiers and their families, using the fictitious "Sergeant Morales" story.

"At the end of the month, when his Soldiers were out of money, Sergeant Morales would cut their hair himself," Perez said. "Once a month he gathered the Soldiers with their families so they could get to know each other, this was before FRGs (Family Readiness

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Groups). We need to be that kind of leader.”

In Europe, the Army has the Sergeant Morales Club, similar to the Audie Murphy Club in the U.S.

The singing Soldiers from the 266th Ordnance Co., the unit that oversees the ammunition supply point at Q-West, are unique because all the Soldiers in the unit volunteered to deploy, said Sgt. 1st Class Jimmie Crespo, first sergeant, 266th Ordnance Co.

“This is our second deployment,” Crespo said. “They only needed one platoon so basically everyone that came here came as volunteers.”

The Soldiers of the 266th Ordnance Co. began their 12-month deployment here in April. Their ammunition supply point supports not only Q-West but also Multi-National Division-North.



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Soldiers from the 266th Ordnance Company, out of Aguadillo, P.R., perform a Puerto Rican Christmas tradition by putting on skit and singing “La Paloma” for the crowd at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center at Q-West Sept. 28. “Parranda” involves going from house-to-house, singing Christmas carols such as “La Paloma,” and taking the carol-recipient along with them to the next house, in an escalating night of carols and socializing. “We go to houses and wake people up and they join in,” said Staff Sgt. Guillermo Matos, operations non-commissioned officer, 266th Ordnance Co. “That’s what we’re doing here, trying to bring something from home.” The Hispanic Heritage Month, from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, raises awareness of the contributions made by Soldiers of Hispanic origins. Sept. 15 marks the anniversaries for the independence of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. September 16 is Mexico’s Independence and Chile’s is Sept. 18. This year’s theme was “Getting involved: Our Families, Our Community and Our Nation.” (Photos by Sgt. Keith M. Anderson)