

The 65th Infantry Regiment in Korea: Where Did All the Medals Go?

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By the end of the Korean War, the 65th Infantry had garnered fewer awards than any of the other two infantry regiments in the 3d Infantry Division, despite the fact that it had arrived in Korea two months prior to the remainder of the division and fought superbly through at least the Spring of 1951. By the end of 1953 the men of the 65th Infantry had been awarded 557 Bronze and Silver Stars, while the 15th Infantry had garnered 795 and the 7th Infantry 1,128. The men of the 65th had also been awarded 8 Distinguished Service Crosses, while those of the 7th and the 15th Regiments had won 18 and 20 respectively. Finally, despite recommendations for the military's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor, no Puerto Rican soldier of the 65th Infantry was awarded that prestigious award, although eight members of the 7th Infantry and three members of the 15th Infantry were.

<i>Awards (1950-53)</i>				
<i>3rd Inf Div Regt</i>	<i>Bronze Stars (Valor)</i>	<i>Silver Stars</i>	<i>Distinguished Service Cross</i>	<i>Medal of Honor</i>
<i>7th Infantry</i>	<i>768</i>	<i>360</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>15th Infantry</i>	<i>447</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>65th Infantry</i>	<i>421</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>0</i>

How is this discrepancy in awards to be explained? Were the men of the 65th Infantry less brave than their counterparts in the 7th and 15th Infantry Regiment? There are a number of reasons for what may be interpreted as the 65th Infantry's under-representation in awards during the Korean War.

First, during its attachment to the 25th and 2nd Infantry Divisions, the 65th Infantry received very few decorations. This appears to be for three reasons. First, as a result of their administrative inexperience in combat, Harris and his commanders either recommended or awarded their soldiers few Bronze Stars and Silver Stars during the first few months of in Korea. Indeed, early in the war there are several instances where Harris actually recommended his men for Soldier's Medals, rather than the awards for valor they had clearly earned. Additionally, the officers of the 65th appeared to hold their men to a higher standard, awarding Bronze Stars and Silver Stars for acts rewarded by Silver Stars or Distinguished Service Crosses in other infantry regiment. The awards policy in the 3d Infantry Division and Eighth Army was far from uniform. Finally, units temporarily attached to larger formations rarely received all the awards they may have been due. As a result of monthly quotas for valor awards, infantry division commanders tended to ensure that it was their soldiers that were receiving the medals. Thus the 65th Infantry received very few awards from the commanders of the 2nd and 25th Infantry Divisions. Yet in the end, the regimental commander must bear the burden of ensuring his soldiers receive the recognition they are due. Cordero, for example, awarded few Bronze or Silver Stars during his brief tenure as regimental commander, although he departed Korea with a Silver Star himself. And there is little evidence in the archives to support the assertion that the commanders of the 3d Infantry Division failed to approve any awards recommended by its regimental commanders. Indeed, one disturbing trend within the 65th Infantry was the tendency of its officers to award themselves with half of all the decorations for valor presented to the regiment during the Korean War. In comparison, officers in Eighth Army received about a third of all the awards in Korea. And even officers could not always expect to receive the recognition they had earned. Although recommended for a Silver Star after the battle of Jackson Heights, George Jackson did not receive the well-earned decoration until fifty years after the war. The leadership of the regiment must thus bear the burden for the 65th Infantry's under-representation in 3d Infantry Division awards.