

Brigadier General Rafael O’Ferrall
“Orgullo Hispano”

By: Tony (The Marine) Santiago



Brigadier General Rafael O’Ferrall

I don’t know about you, but when Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States on August 8th, I was proud as hell, not only because she was the first Hispanic in said position, but because of the story of her humble beginnings and struggles to get where she has gotten to should serve as an example to our youth.

The story which I am going to tell you is not about Sotomayor. It is about another Hispanic of Puerto Rican descent whose humble beginnings did not prevent him from becoming one of our “Orgullo Hispano” in the military.

Rafael O’Ferrall, was born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents. Do not be fooled by his surname, because as I have made it clear in the past there are many Hispanics with non-Hispanic surnames. In the case of Rafael, his Irish descendents were among the many Irish families who moved to Puerto Rico, their new homeland, during the Irish Diaspora. Rafael was not born with a “silver” spoon in his mouth, as a matter of fact his parents moved to United States in search of a better way of life. His family was poor and when he was five years old, his mother sent him to Puerto Rico to live with his grandmother.

He went to public school in the town of Carolina. Now, let me tell you, Carolina is a good city to live in, but like every city it also has it’s bad sections and trouble makers. O’Ferrall, could have done like so many others have done and that is complain about how life is unfair and blame all of his misgivings on his parents and everyone else except himself. He could have been disobedient, joined a gang, become a drug addict; a criminal and spend his life living off the governments welfare system, but nooooo, not him. He was going to make it and he knew it, but it wasn’t going to be easy.

His loving grandmother, the person who raised him, died suddenly in the 1960s and his mother returned to Puerto Rico. O’Ferrall, then went to live with her. He was enrolled at “Dr. Jose M. Lazaro High School”. While his mother worked as a nurse, he excelled in academics and sports. This kid was really determined to show the world that negative aspects of live where not going to get the better part of him. So much so, that in 1972, he was asked by the Puerto Rican Olympic Committee to represent Puerto Rico in the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich Olympics in the track and field events, however even though he was later substituted by the more experienced Luis Alers, did not this get him down, it was only one of those things in life which he will learn to overcome.

After he graduated from high school in 1973, he enrolled in the University of Puerto Rico and participated in various competitions as member of the track and field team of his Alma Mater. In 1974, he represented the island in the XII Central American and Caribbean Games which were celebrated in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. During his student years he became a member of the university’s Reserve Officer Training Corps program, which is also known as ROTC. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree with a concentration on Natural Science on June 20, 1978 and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Army National Guard that same year.

Now, life was not all rosy for him, he had his ups and downs and had to overcome many obstacles which came along

the way. His mother returned to the United States and things were far from easy, but as I stated before, he was and is one heck of a determined individual. By 1986, O'Ferrall earned his Master's in Business Administration and Management. O'Ferrall served in various military administrative positions and from July 2001 to July 2002, he continued his military academic education and became the first Hispanic to attend the United States Army War College/ Senior Service College at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

On October 2002, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel and on February 2003, he was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where he first served as Deputy Brigade Commander and later as Brigade Commander of the Task Force Guardian Mariner, XVIII Airborne Corp. Now in case you didn't know (I know I didn't), the Guardian Mariner is a strong force which conducted multinational operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom/ Noble Eagle in what the United States and its allies refer to as the Global War on Terrorism. O'Ferrall managed and directed mobile security teams to complete over 242 security missions aboard 173 Military Sealift Command ships, ensuring the safe and timely delivery of over 500 million square feet of war fighting equipment and supplies essentials to United States Central Command. How about that, hum?

In 2008, of the same year that he was promoted to Brigadier General, he served as Assistant Adjutant General-Army/ Deputy Commanding General (Army). In this assignment he was responsible for the training, readiness, personnel, and other areas of the Puerto Rico Army National Guard. If you think that you have a tough job, check this out:

On December 2008, O'Ferrall was deployed and named Deputy Commanding General, Joint Task Force Guantanamo at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, position in which he currently serves while simultaneously serving as Assistant Adjutant General (Army) and Deputy Commanding General of the Joint Force Headquarters, of San Juan, Puerto Rico. O'Ferrall became the first Hispanic and general officer from the Puerto Rico Army National Guard supporting a joint forces mission of this caliber.

He is responsible for the supervision of over 2150 members comprised of United States Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard as well as over 5000 civilian contractors and workers on the base. Among O'Ferrall's responsibilities is to ensure that those under his supervision provide safe, humane, legal and transparent care custody of detained enemy combatants, conduct intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination for protection of detainees and personnel working in Joint Task Force-Guantanamo in support of the Global War on Terrorism, support the Office of Military Commissions to law enforcement and war crime investigations in planning for and on order to respond to Caribbean mass migrations operations.

The amazing thing about all this is that during all of this time besides earning his BA and MA he attended and completed courses in the United States Army War College, Senior Service College, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Executive Seminar Anti-Terrorism / Force Protection, Level IV, Washington, District of Columbia; United States Navy, Commanding Officer Anti-Terrorist / Force Protection Course, Level III, Norfolk, Virginia and The Joint Task Force Commander Training Course, United States Northern Command, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

He also serves in the board of various companies and as of September, 2004, is the General Manager of Dade Paper Company's Puerto Rico and Caribbean Division, a foremost supplier of paper, plastic and foam foodservice disposables as well as janitorial supplies and equipment located in Cataño, Puerto Rico and has participated either as author or co-author in the following:

"The Transformation of Reserve Component (RC) Modernization: New Options for DOD?" and "United States Army War College Article: Reserve Component Equipping: A Critical Element of the National Military Strategy."

As I have always stated, O'Ferrall who is happily married to Maria Del Carmen Vazquez and has four children: Carmen Michelle O'Ferrall (from a previous marriage); Rafael Jr., Gian and Stephanie O'Ferrall, is the type of person who is a living example what our youth can accomplish if they set their goals to seeking a higher level of education. O'Ferrall is a positive role model to follow and a true "Orgullo Hispano".