

**Tribute
to
Maria Ines Ortiz
and our other Heroes
By: Tony (The Marine) Santiago**



Captain Maria Ines Ortiz

I was saddened when I read in the news about the death of Captain Maria Ines Ortiz, the first Puerto Rican nurse to die in combat and first Army nurse to die in the Iraq War. You see, we tend to talk about and glorify the exploits about our male military heroes, but we seldom mention the heroic actions of our female soldiers. Our Puerto Rican women are known for their loyalty and for being wonderful mothers and home keepers. However, let me make myself clear our modern Boricua women are not only hard workers, they are also strong and very patriotic. Our women in the military are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice so that we can all continue to enjoy the freedoms which we at times take for granted. It is for that reason that I, Tony the Marine, dedicate this tribute not only to my hero Captain Maria Ines Ortiz, but all the women who have given their lives for us. I know that Heaven is now a much better place with your presence.

Captain Maria Ines Ortiz was born in 1967 in Camden, New Jersey. It wasn't long when her parents, Jorge and Iris Ortiz moved back to the island and settled in the city of Bayamon where she received her primary and secondary education. Maria was always a wonderful and caring person and in 1991, she enlisted in the United States Army. Her first two years of active duty included service in Honduras, South Korea and the Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Army Nurse

Maria became interested in nursing and pursued her dream to become a registered nurse by continuing her academic education in the University of Puerto Rico. She earned her degree in nursing in 1999. In 2004, Maria earned her Master's Degree in quality management from the Massachusetts National Graduate School. Maria was assigned to Kirk U.S. Army Health Clinic at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, where she was chief nurse of general medicine.

In September 2006, she was reassigned to the 28th Combat Support Hospital, 3rd Medical Command in an area known as the "Green Zone" in Baghdad, Iraq. The Green Zone is a fortified district that also hosts the U.S. Embassy and Iraq's Parliament. That area has been the target of a series of recent attacks which have added to safety concerns for key Iraqi and international officials who live and work there.

On July 10, 2007, the Green Zone area, came under a heavy mortar attack. Maria felt safe and was not wearing body armor at the time of the attack. She was doing what she enjoyed doing the most, caring for the wounded Iraqis at the hospital when she was mortally wounded. She was the only U.S. citizen among three people killed.

According to Margaret Tippy, a spokeswoman for the United States Army Medical Command, as of July 13, 2007, 90 Army medical personnel had been killed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Maria is the first Army nurse to perish. She was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

In memory

Captain Ortiz is survived by her parents, and four sisters in New Jersey and Florida. A memorial service was held on Wednesday, July 18 at the Aberdeen Proving Ground chapel.

Awards and Recognitions

Among Capt. Maria Ines Ortiz's decorations and medals were the following:

Bronze Star Medal
Purple Heart Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Iraq Campaign Medal

Badges

Combat Medical Badge

Maria is the fourth Puerto Rican women to die for us all. These young women were somebody's daughters, mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives or friends. They loved and were loved. My warmest sympathy goes out to their loved ones and may God bless them. Our other heroes (and you better not forget their names) are the following:



SPC Frances M. Vega (June 1983 – November 2, 2003), also known as "That Girl Benitez", born in San Francisco, California, was the first female soldier of Puerto Rican descent to die in a combat zone. She was deployed to Iraq in what is known as the War on Terrorism. On November 2, 2003, a surface-to-air missile was fired by insurgents in Al Fallujah and it hit the U.S. transport helicopter (Chinook) which Vega was in. She was one of 16 soldiers who lost their lives in the crash that followed.

SPC Lizbeth Robles (1974 – March 1, 2005), born in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, was the first female soldier born in Puerto Rico to die in the War on Terrorism. On March 1, 2005, SPC Lizbeth Robles and Sgt. Julio Negron were riding in a Humvee by the town of Bayji, when they had an accident and the vehicle flipped over. They were rushed to the 228th Command Support Hospital in Tikrit where both of them later died of the injuries sustained from the accident.



SPC Aleina Ramirez Gonzalez (1972 – April 15, 2005) born in the town of Hormigueros, Puerto Rico died in Tikrit, Iraq, when a mortar struck her forward operating base.