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Stratford Veterans Museum
VETERAN OF THE MONTH
HERCULANO DIAS



Stratford High School graduate Herculano Dias made history as a member of the Army's first and only all-Black company of elite Ranger infantry.

Now, a part of that history will be on display locally, with the addition of a Purple Heart and other medals Dias received to the collection of the Stratford Veterans Museum in Boothe Memorial Park.

Dias now lives in Maryland, and shipped the medals to his son, Allan, a Stratford resident, to donate to the museum.

He grew up in Bridgeport to Cape Verdean immigrants before graduating from Stratford High School in 1947. He signed up for the Army after seeing so many men from the area returning from duty in World War II in their uniforms, "happy and proud and successful," Allan Dias said. "He was spurred on by that," he said — and by the prospect of being a paratrooper specifically.

"I know the allure of the paratroopers, making that jump, was really big to him," Allan said, recalling his father talking about his time in the Army long after his service. "They were all excited about that. I had an uncle-in-law who was a paratrooper. They were always swapping stories, jumping off the back porch roof."

Dias was proud of his service despite the fact that he faced discrimination — and segregation. Though an executive order from President Harry S. Truman officially integrated the armed forces in 1948, many units were still de facto segregated, including the 2nd Ranger Infantry Company in which Dias served. The unit was nicknamed the "Buffalo Rangers" in homage to the "Buffalo Soldiers," all-Black regiments formed after the Civil War.

"The training was rough, especially for us because our company commander, [Army] Capt. Warren Allen, did not want us to fail because we were the only blacks," Herculano Dias told Military Officer Magazine in 2012. "So consequently, we trained harder than anybody else [who] was there."

"They had a sense of duty," Allan Dias said. "They sucked it up, didn't complain and just went about their business." The unit reached Korea in December 1950 and saw action almost immediately in several engagements. In March 1951, they put their airborne training to full use by making a parachute assault in combat.

In addition to the Purple Heart, Herculano Dias also earned a Combat Infantry Badge, a Parachutist Badge with Combat Jump Star, and a Presidential Citation for his service that will now have a place at the Veterans Museum, along with a picture of him in uniform.

It will be a fitting home, Allan said, noting that his father was active for years in many veterans groups, met with Secretary of State and former general Colin Powell and President Barack Obama, and worked to help others receive benefits for which they were entitled.