

Remains of Black soldier in Korean War returned

Written by Herb Boyd, Special to the NNPA
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NEW YORK – Clara Gantt, 94, has waited more than 60 years for her husband to come home from Korea, and last Friday his remains were returned in a flag-draped casket to the Los Angeles International Airport.

Her husband, Sgt. First Class Joseph E. Gantt, was a field medic with the 2nd Infantry Division when he was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950 after his unit was overwhelmed by Chinese forces near the town of Kunu-ri, North Korea.

"He told me if anything happened to him he wanted me to remarry," Gantt told reporters at the airport. "I told him no, no. Here I am, still his wife." She said just receiving his remains was a blessing. "I am so happy that I'm living to accept them," she said.

Many readers of Rep. Charles Rangel's memoir *And I Haven't Had a Bad Day Since* will be reminded of the battle in which Gantt was reported missing in action (he was captured by the Chinese and died in a prison camp from malnutrition and lack of medical care).

Gantt is not mentioned in Rangel's book but here's how the highly decorated war veteran from Harlem recalled that battle at Kunu-ri just after midnight on Nov. 30. "We didn't know what the hell we were really doing, with all the people screaming and moaning around us. We could see some GIs being marched away by the Chinese. I had given away my wound kit, but it wouldn't have made any difference; it was so unbelievably cold that the blood was frozen in the wounds."

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Apparently one of the soldiers Rangel saw being marched away by the Chinese included Sgt. Gantt.

"It was there, seemingly below the action in another time zone that I prayed to Jesus," Rangel continued. "I told Jesus that if I ever got out of that mess, if I could somehow survive that night, which I never thought I could, that I would never be a problem to anybody, ever again."

Rangel made it home from that bloody ordeal, but Gantt was one of the nearly 8,000 soldiers who are still unaccounted for from the Korean War.

"I am very, very proud of him," Mrs. Gantt said of her husband. "He was a wonderful husband, an understanding man...We loved each other."

Sgt. Gantt will be buried with full military honors on Dec. 28 in Inglewood, Calif., not too far from where his widow lives.