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BORINQUEENERS CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ALLIANCE

FACT SHEET in support of H.R. 1726 & S. 1174

The 65th Infantry Regiment Borinqueneers:

Recognition sought for segregated Latino-American military unit!

Simply put, the 65th Infantry Regiment Borinqueneers are the **Latino-American equivalent** of the famed Tuskegee Airmen and Navajo Code Talkers. The Borinqueneers must be recognized in **like fashion** with the Congressional Gold Medal, and take their rightful place in American history **now!**

Hailing from Puerto Rico, the 65th Infantry Regiment Borinqueneers were the largest, longest-standing (1899-1953), and **only** active-duty segregated Latino military unit in U.S. history.

Like the Tuskegee Airmen, Navajo Code Talkers, Women Airforce Service Pilots, Nisei Soldiers, and Montford Point Marines who've **already** been recognized with the Congressional Gold Medal, the Borinqueneers overwhelmingly distinguished themselves in service and heroism, all the while enduring the **additional hardships** of segregation, discrimination, and adverse circumstances.

In its early years, the unit was termed the “**Porto Rico**” Regiment of the “**American Colonial Army.**”

The unit fired the 1st shot in defense of freedom at the onset of **WWI** when an armed German supply ship attempted unsuccessfully to leave San Juan Bay in Puerto Rico to resupply German submarines.

The unit defended the strategic Panama Canal Zone during **WWI**. While in Panama, 335 Puerto Rican soldiers were wounded by the **chemical gas experimentation** which the United States conducted as part of its active chemical weapons program.

During **WWII**, the 65th again defended the canal, and also saw action in North Africa and Central Europe. Gen. Douglas MacArthur had requested that the Borinqueneers be assigned to him in the Pacific during World War II. The Pentagon denied his request because of **prejudice** toward the 65th. MacArthur was glad to later have them in Korea.

During the **Korean War**, 2,771 Borinqueneers earned Purple Hearts. 750 of them were killed in action, and more than 120 are still missing in action. These soldiers never came home, living or dead.

Heroic successes include the last Regimental **bayonet assault** in US military history, providing valiant rear-guard fighting cover for the epic US Marines' withdrawal to **Hungnam**, and many others.

As cited in the bills, the Regiment faced **unique challenges due to discrimination and prejudice**, including the humiliation of being ordered to shave their moustaches “until such a time as they gave proof of their manhood”; being forced to use separate showering facilities from their non-Hispanic “Continental” officers; being ordered not to speak Spanish under penalty of court-martial; flawed personnel-rotation policies based on ethnic and organizational prejudices; and a catastrophic shortage of trained noncommissioned officers.

The Borinqueneers also were forced to wear “**I am a coward**” signs, ordered to paint over their unit designation “Borinqueneers” on their military vehicles, and ordered to discontinue their rations of rice and beans, termed “creole rations” at the time.

During Korea, the unit also had some Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, & several other nationalities. The 1st & only Latino 4-star Army general, a **Mexican-American**, got his start as a young Borinqueneer officer in Korea.

The remaining Borinqueneer veterans are in their 80's & 90's, having served in **WWII** and **Korea**.