

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Ms. WARREN, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. NELSON, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. SCHUMER, and Mr. CASEY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS.**

4 The Congress finds the following:

5 (1) In 1898, the United States acquired Puerto
6 Rico in the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-
7 American War and, by the following year, Congress
8 had authorized raising a unit of volunteer soldiers in
9 the newly acquired territory.

1 (2) In May 1917, two months after legislation
2 granting United States citizenship to individuals
3 born in Puerto Rico was signed into law, and one
4 month after the United States entered World War I,
5 the unit was transferred to the Panama Canal Zone
6 because United States Army policy at the time re-
7 stricted most segregated units to noncombat roles,
8 although the regiment could have contributed to the
9 fighting effort.

10 (3) In June 1920, the unit was re-designated as
11 the “65th Infantry Regiment, United States Army”,
12 and it would serve as the United States military’s
13 last segregated unit composed of Hispanic soldiers.

14 (4) In January 1943, 13 months after the at-
15 tack on Pearl Harbor that marked the entry of the
16 United States into World War II, the Regiment
17 again deployed to the Panama Canal Zone, before
18 deploying overseas in the spring of 1944.

19 (5) Despite the Regiment’s relatively limited
20 combat service in World War II, the unit suffered
21 casualties in the course of defending against enemy
22 attacks, with individual soldiers earning one Distin-
23 guished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Bronze
24 Stars and 90 Purple Hearts, and the unit receiving

1 campaign participation credit for Rome-Arno, Rhine-
2 land, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe.

3 (6) Although an executive order issued by
4 President Harry S. Truman in July 1948 declared
5 it to be United States policy to ensure equality of
6 treatment and opportunity for all persons in the
7 armed services without respect to race or color, im-
8 plementation of this policy had yet to be fully real-
9 ized when armed conflict broke out on the Korean
10 peninsula in June 1950, and both African-American
11 soldiers and Puerto Rican soldiers served in seg-
12 regated units.

13 (7) Brigadier General William W. Harris, who
14 served as the Regiment's commander during the
15 early stages of the Korean War, later recalled that
16 he had initially been reluctant to take the position
17 because of "prejudice" within the military and "the
18 feeling of the officers and even the brass of the Pen-
19 tagon . . . that the Puerto Rican wouldn't make a
20 good combat soldier. . . . I know my contemporaries
21 felt that way and, in all honesty, I must admit that
22 at the time I had the same feeling . . . that the
23 Puerto Rican was a rum and Coca-Cola soldier."

24 (8) One of the first opportunities the regiment
25 had to prove its combat worthiness arose on the eve

1 of the Korean War during PORTREX, one of the
2 largest military exercises that had been conducted
3 up until that point, where the Regiment distin-
4 guished itself by repelling an offensive consisting of
5 over 32,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division
6 and the United States Marine Corps, supported by
7 the Navy and Air Force, thereby demonstrating that
8 Puerto Rican soldiers could hold their own against
9 some of the best-trained soldiers in the United
10 States military.

11 (9) In August 1950, as the United States
12 Army's situation in Korea deteriorated, the com-
13 mander of the 3rd Infantry Division requested an-
14 other infantry regiment to be added to his organiza-
15 tion and, owing in large part to the 65th Infantry
16 Regiment's outstanding performance during PORT-
17 REX, it was selected for the assignment.

18 (10) As the Regiment sailed to Asia in Sep-
19 tember 1950, members of the unit informally de-
20 cided to call themselves the "Borinqueneers", a term
21 derived from the Taino word for Puerto Rico mean-
22 ing "land of the brave lord".

23 (11) The story of the 65th Infantry Regiment
24 during the Korean War has been aptly described as

1 “one of pride, courage, heartbreak, and redemp-
2 tion”.

3 (12) Fighting as a segregated unit from 1950
4 to 1952, the Regiment participated in some of the
5 fiercest battles of the war, and its toughness, cour-
6 age and loyalty earned the admiration of many who
7 had previously harbored reservations about Puerto
8 Rican soldiers based on negative stereotypes, includ-
9 ing Brigadier General William W. Harris, whose ex-
10 perience eventually led him to regard the Regiment
11 as “the best damn soldiers that I had ever seen”.

12 (13) Arriving in Pusan, South Korea in Sep-
13 tember 1950, the regiment was assigned the mission
14 of destroying or capturing small groups of North
15 Korean soldiers, and its success led General Douglas
16 MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Na-
17 tions Command in Korea, to observe that the Regi-
18 ment was “showing magnificent ability and courage
19 in field operations”.

20 (14) In December 1950, following China’s
21 intervention in the war, the Regiment engaged in a
22 series of fierce battles with the enemy to cover the
23 rear guard of the 1st Marine Division as it executed
24 one of the greatest withdrawals in modern military

1 history during the fighting retreat from the Chosin
2 Reservoir.

3 (15) The Regiment was instrumental in helping
4 to secure the final foothold for the Marine evacu-
5 ation at Hungnam, and was among the last units to
6 leave the beachhead on Christmas Eve, suffering tre-
7 mendous casualties in the process.

8 (16) The winter conditions in Korea presented
9 significant hardships for the Regiment, which suf-
10 fered hundreds of casualties because its soldiers
11 lacked appropriate gear to fight in sub-zero tempera-
12 tures.

13 (17) Between January and March 1951, the
14 Regiment participated in numerous operations to re-
15 cover and retain South Korean territory lost to the
16 enemy, assaulting heavily fortified enemy positions
17 and conducting the last recorded battalion-sized bay-
18 onet assault in United States Army history.

19 (18) On January 31, 1951, the commander of
20 Eighth Army, Lieutenant General Matthew B.
21 Ridgway wrote to the Regiment's commander:
22 "What I saw and heard of your regiment reflects
23 great credit on you, your regiment, and the people
24 of Puerto Rico, who can be proud of their valiant
25 sons. I am confident that their battle records and

1 training levels will win them high honors. . . . Their
2 conduct in battle has served only to increase the
3 high regard in which I hold these fine troops.”

4 (19) On February 3, 1951, General MacArthur
5 wrote: “The Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the
6 gallant 65th Infantry on the battlefields of Korea by
7 valor, determination, and a resolute will to victory
8 give daily testament to their invincible loyalty to the
9 United States and the fervor of their devotion to
10 those immutable standards of human relations to
11 which the Americans and Puerto Ricans are in com-
12 mon dedicated. They are writing a brilliant record of
13 achievement in battle and I am proud indeed to have
14 them in this command. I wish that we might have
15 many more like them.”

16 (20) The Regiment played a critical role in the
17 United States counteroffensive responding to a
18 major push by the Chinese Communist Forces
19 (CCF) in 1951, winning praise for its superb per-
20 formance in multiple battles, including Operations
21 KILLER and RIPPER.

22 (21) By 1952, in light of the Regiment’s proven
23 fighting abilities, senior United States commanders
24 ordered that replacement soldiers from Puerto Rico
25 should no longer be limited to service in the Regi-

1 ment, but could be made available to fill personnel
2 shortages in non-segregated units both inside and
3 outside the 3rd Infantry Division, a major milestone
4 that, paradoxically, harmed the Regiment by depriv-
5 ing it of some of Puerto Rico’s most able soldiers.

6 (22) Beyond the many hardships endured by
7 most American soldiers in Korea, the Regiment
8 faced unique challenges due to discrimination and
9 prejudice, including—

10 (A) the humiliation of being ordered to
11 shave their moustaches “until such a time as
12 they gave proof of their manhood”;

13 (B) being forced to use separate showering
14 facilities from their non-Hispanic “Continental”
15 officers;

16 (C) being ordered not to speak Spanish
17 under penalty of court-martial;

18 (D) flawed personnel-rotation policies
19 based on ethnic and organizational prejudices;
20 and

21 (E) a catastrophic shortage of trained non-
22 commissioned officers.

23 (23) In 1953, the now fully integrated Regi-
24 ment earned admiration for its relentless defense of
25 Outpost Harry, during which it confronted multiple

1 company-size probes, full-scale regimental attacks,
2 and heavy artillery and mortar fire from Chinese
3 forces, earning 14 Silver Stars, 23 Bronze Stars,
4 and 67 Purple Hearts, in operations that Major
5 General Eugene W. Ridings described as “highly
6 successful in that the enemy was denied the use of
7 one of his best routes of approach into the friendly
8 position.”.

9 (24) For its extraordinary service during the
10 Korean War, the Regiment received two Presidential
11 Unit Citations (Army and Navy), two Republic of
12 Korea Presidential Unit Citations, a Meritorious
13 Unit Commendation (Army), a Navy Unit Com-
14 mendation, the Bravery Gold Medal of Greece, and
15 campaign participation credits for United Nations
16 Offensive, CCF Intervention, First United Nations
17 Counteroffensive, CCF Spring Offensive, United Na-
18 tions Summer-Fall Offensive, Second Korean Win-
19 ter, Korea Summer-Fall 1952, Third Korean Win-
20 ter, and Korea Summer 1953.

21 (25) In Korea, soldiers in the Regiment earned
22 a total of 10 Distinguished Service Crosses, approxi-
23 mately 250 Silver Stars, over 600 Bronze Stars, and
24 more than 2,700 Purple Hearts, but—despite nu-

1 merous individual acts of uncommon valor—no Med-
2 als of Honor.

3 (26) In all, some 61,000 Puerto Ricans served
4 in the United States Army during the Korean War,
5 the bulk of them with the 65th Infantry Regiment—
6 and over the course of the war, Puerto Rican sol-
7 diers suffered a disproportionately high casualty
8 rate, with over 740 killed and over 2,300 wounded.

9 (27) In April 1956, as part of the reduction in
10 forces following the Korean War, the 65th Infantry
11 Regiment was deactivated from the Regular Army
12 and, in February 1959, became the only regular
13 Army unit to have ever been transferred to the Na-
14 tional Guard, when its 1st battalion and its regi-
15 mental number were assigned to the Puerto Rico
16 National Guard, where it has remained ever since.

17 (28) In 1982, the United States Army Center
18 of Military History officially authorized granting the
19 65th Infantry Regiment the special designation of
20 “Borinqueneers”.

21 (29) In the years since the Korean War, the
22 achievements of the Regiment have been recognized
23 in various ways, including—

1 (A) the naming of streets in honor of the
2 regiment in San Juan, Puerto Rico and The
3 Bronx, New York;

4 (B) the erecting of plaques and other
5 monuments to honor the Regiment at Arlington
6 National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia; the
7 San Juan National Historic Site in San Juan,
8 Puerto Rico; Ft. Logan National Cemetery in
9 Denver, Colorado; and at sites in Boston, Mas-
10 sachusetts and Ocala, Florida;

11 (C) the renaming of a park in Buenaven-
12 tura Lake, Florida as the “65th Infantry Vet-
13 erans Park”;

14 (D) a grant awarded by the New York
15 State government to establish a memorial hon-
16 oring the Regiment at Buffalo & Erie County
17 Naval & Military Park in Buffalo, New York;

18 (E) the introduction or adoption of resolu-
19 tions or proclamations honoring the Regiment
20 by the City of Buffalo, New York; the City of
21 Deltona, Florida; the City of Kissimmee, Flor-
22 ida; the City of Orlando, Florida; the City of
23 Springfield, Massachusetts; the County of Erie,
24 Pennsylvania; the Florida House of Representa-
25 tives; the New York State Assembly; the New

1 York State Senate; and the Texas State Senate;
2 and

3 (F) the 1985 issuance of a United States
4 Postal Service Korean War Commemorative
5 Stamp depicting soldiers from the Regiment.

6 (30) In a speech delivered at a September 20,
7 2000, ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in
8 honor of the Regiment, Secretary of the Army Louis
9 Caldera said: “Even as the 65th struggled against
10 all deadly enemies in the field, they were fighting a
11 rearguard action against a more insidious adver-
12 sary—the cumulative effects of ill-conceived military
13 policies, leadership shortcomings, and especially ra-
14 cial and organizational prejudices, all exacerbated by
15 America’s unpreparedness for war and the growing
16 pains of an Army forced by law and circumstance to
17 carry out racial integration. Together these factors
18 would take their inevitable toll on the 65th, leaving
19 scars that have yet to heal for so many of the regi-
20 ment’s proud and courageous soldiers.”.

21 (31) Secretary Caldera said: “To the veterans
22 of the 65th Infantry Regiment who, in that far off
23 land fifty years ago, fought with rare courage even
24 as you endured misfortune and injustice, thank you
25 for doing your duty. There can be no greater praise

1 than that for any soldier of the United States
2 Army.”.

3 (32) Secretary Caldera noted that “[t]he men
4 of the 65th who served in Korea are a significant
5 part of a proud tradition of service” that includes
6 the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat
7 Team, the African American Tuskegee Airmen, and
8 “many other unsung minority units throughout the
9 history of our armed forces whose stories have never
10 been fully told.”.

11 (33) The service of the men of the 65th Infan-
12 try Regiment is emblematic of the contributions to
13 the armed forces that have been made by hundreds
14 of thousands of brave and patriotic United States
15 citizens from Puerto Rico over generations, from
16 World War I to the most recent conflicts in Afghani-
17 stan and Iraq, and in other overseas contingency op-
18 erations.

19 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

20 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
21 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
22 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
23 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal
24 of appropriate design in honor of the 65th Infantry Regi-
25 ment, known as the Borinqueneers, in recognition of its

1 pioneering military service, devotion to duty, and many
2 acts of valor in the face of adversity.

3 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
4 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
5 Treasury (hereinafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
6 retary”) shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems,
7 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
8 retary.

9 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
11 gold medal in honor of the 65th Infantry Regiment,
12 known as the Borinqueneers, the gold medal shall be
13 given to the Smithsonian Institution, where it will be
14 displayed as appropriate and made available for re-
15 search.

16 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense
17 of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution
18 shall make the gold medal received under this Act
19 available for display elsewhere, particularly at other
20 appropriate locations associated with the 65th Infan-
21 try Regiment, including locations in Puerto Rico.

22 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

23 Under such regulations as the Secretary may pre-
24 scribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
25 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 2, at a price

1 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
2 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

3 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

4 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-
5 als for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States
6 Code.

7 **SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; PROCEEDS**
8 **OF SALE.**

9 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
10 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
11 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
12 essary to pay for the cost of the medals struck pursuant
13 to this Act.

14 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amount received from the
15 sale of duplicate bronze medals under section 3 shall be
16 deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise
17 Fund.