



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Introduction of Legislation to Award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known
as the “Borinqueneers”
April 25, 2013

Mr. Speaker:

Today, Congressman Bill Posey of Florida and I will introduce bipartisan legislation to award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, a famed U.S. Army unit known as the “Borinqueneers” composed almost entirely of soldiers from the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico that overcame discrimination and earned praise and respect for its combat performance in the Korean War.

A Congressional Gold Medal is considered the most distinguished form of recognition that Congress, acting on behalf of a grateful nation, can bestow upon an individual or group in recognition of outstanding and enduring achievement.

As our legislation states, the highly-decorated 65th Infantry Regiment is deserving of this award because of its “pioneering military service, devotion to duty, and many acts of valor in the face of adversity.”

In 1948, President Truman issued an executive order declaring that it would be U.S. policy to ensure equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without respect to race or color. However, implementation of this policy had yet to be fully realized when conflict broke out on

the Korean peninsula in June 1950, and both African-American soldiers and Puerto Rican soldiers served in segregated units.

Between 1950 and 1953, the Regiment participated in some of the fiercest battles of the Korean War, and its toughness, courage and loyalty earned the admiration of those who had previously harbored reservations about Puerto Rican soldiers based on stereotypes.

One individual whose misconceptions were shattered was William Harris, who served as the Regiment's commander during the early stages of the war. Harris recounts that he was reluctant to take command of the unit because, like many U.S. military leaders, he assumed that Puerto Rican soldiers were not as capable as other troops. Following the war, Harris recalled that his skeptical attitude did not survive first contact with the enemy and that, in fact, his experience ultimately led him to regard the men of the 65th as the best soldiers he had ever seen.

Another individual who came to hold the 65th in high esteem was General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea. In March 1951, after months of heavy engagements with the enemy in which the 65th played a critical role, General MacArthur wrote the following: "The Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the gallant 65th Infantry on the battlefields of Korea by valor, determination, and a resolute will to victory give daily testament to their invincible loyalty to the United States They are writing a brilliant record of achievement in battle and I am proud indeed to have them in this command. I wish that we might have many more like them."

By the time fighting came to a close in Korea in July 1953, soldiers in the 65th had earned 10 Distinguished Service Crosses, about 250 Silver Stars, over 600 Bronze Stars, and nearly 3,000 Purple Hearts. As a collective, the Regiment won numerous awards—including two Presidential Unit Citations, the nation’s highest unit-level recognition, for extraordinary heroism. The unit’s disproportionately high casualty rate underscored the fact that it had been serving on the front lines, face-to-face with the enemy, at the very tip of the spear.

In a 2010 obituary that appeared in the *New York Times* for 87-year-old Modesto Cartagena, one of the most decorated soldiers from the Regiment, it was observed that in Korea, “Puerto Rican soldiers surmounted not only the Communist enemy but also prejudicial attitudes.”

This same point was made with particular eloquence in 2000 by Army Secretary Louis Caldera during a ceremony honoring the Regiment, when he said: “The soldiers of the 65th were fighting to protect the people of South Korea even as they struggled against injustice in the ranks of the military that they loved and served so well.”

Mr. Speaker: In the face of unique challenges, the men of the 65th Infantry Regiment served our nation with great skill and tremendous grace. Their contributions to our country have been recognized in many forms. Streets and parks bear their name. Monuments and plaques memorialize their accomplishments. And cities and states have approved resolutions in their honor. I believe it is time that Congress pay tribute to the 65th, and so I ask my colleagues to join me in the effort to award the Regiment with the Congressional Gold Medal.