



# AMERICAN GI FORUM OF THE UNITED STATES

A Veterans Family Organization, Since March 1948

OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMANDER

2870 North Speer #104, Denver, Colorado 80211

Email: agifstcmdrluis@aol.com | Cell # 719-406-6473



National Commander

Luis A. Vazquez- Contes

Dr. Hector P. Garcia, Founder

Dear Members of Congress,

It is with great pleasure that the AGIF support the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, of Puerto Rico, in their quest to achieve the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian honor.

***Therefore, we urge you to co-sponsor the pertinent 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry legislation requesting the auspicious CGM recognition, Congressional bills H.R. 1726 or S. 1174.***

The Congressional Gold Medal will be the highest award ever for the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and for ALL Latino Veterans. This distinction will catapult Hispanic veterans into the national spotlight and will honor all Hispanic veterans past, present and future.

As mandated by an Act of Congress on March 2, 1899, the 65th Infantry Regiment nicknamed the "Borinqueneers" was the only Hispanic-segregated active-duty unit ever in the U.S. Armed Forces that played a prominent role in three U.S. wars. Although comprised of a majority of Puerto Ricans, during the Korean War the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was arguably one of the most ethnically diverse U.S. combat fight units consisting of Mexican American, segregated African-American, Philippine, Virgin Islander Soldiers and various Soldiers of other ethnicities.

Of all the honors Congress can bestow, the awarding of a Congressional Gold Medal is the most distinguished.

The pinnacle military achievements of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment came during the Korean War where the unit participated in nine major campaigns and earned two Presidential Unit Citations, a Meritorious Unit Commendation and two Republic of Korea Unit Citations. More than three thousand 65th Infantry soldiers were wounded including over seven hundred killed. Over the span of WWI, WWII and the Korean War, individual members have earned ten Distinguished Service Crosses, 258 Silver Stars, 628 Bronze Stars, and over 2700 Purple Hearts.

Awarding the Congressional Gold Medal for the "Borinqueneers" is consistent with our organizational ethos of patriotism, public service excellence and personal sacrifice. This honor will enshrine this valiant unit in the halls of those who have left an indelible mark in society and the Latino culture. This is evident in the 10 memorials & monuments emplaced around the country.

We hope that the US Congress will recognize the sacrifices and obstacles the "Borinqueneers" valiantly overcame as a segregated unit in defending our Nation. They fought bravely even while enduring the hardships of segregation, discrimination, language, and cultural barriers.

Please turn this vision into a historic reality.

Respectfully,

*LUIS A. VAZQUEZ-CONTES*

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AGIF of the U.S. National Commander

**" Education is our Freedom and Freedom Should be Everybody's Business! "**