

CONTACT:
Frank Medina
National Chair
65thCGM@gmail.com

WEBSITE: <http://www.65thCGM.org>
FACEBOOK:
<http://www.facebook.com/BorinqueneersCGMAlliance>

BORINQUEENERS CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ALLIANCE

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Borinqueneers Not Sufficiently Engaged During Congressional Gold Medal Design Process

ORLANDO, Florida – This past Tuesday, June 16, 2015, the US Mint Citizen’s Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC) convened in Washington D.C. to unveil and discuss the candidate designs for Puerto Rico’s 65th Infantry Regiment “Borinqueneers” Congressional Gold Medal. A teleconference bridge was made available for those that could not physically attend the meeting. However, the meeting had mixed reviews from 65th Infantry Regiment veterans and their family members.

With high energy, the meeting drew high participation in person and telephonically and was initiated by remarks from the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Design Liaison Team. Toward the end of the meeting, the CCAC voted on an obverse and reverse design out of an array of various candidates composed by the US Mint artists.

Throughout the course of the dialogue, apprehension brewed between the phone participants and one of the members of the Design Liaison Team, Samuel Rodriguez.

The National Chair of the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance, Frank Medina, an Iraq-War veteran, states, **“In my best judgment, the preferred candidate design could have been more reflective of what the 65th Infantry veterans around the nation desired for the most part. In all, the whole medal survey process needed to be more inclusive of the Borinqueneers’ design feedback comments on the medal design. Not enough was done to achieve this intent. This is very unfortunate and it defeats the original purpose of the gold medal.”** The Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Alliance (BCGMA) was the leading national advocacy group for the Borinqueneers gold medal.

Furthermore, the following statement was extracted from the BCGMA’s Facebook page from one of the teleconference participants, **“Next time Congress decides to appoint people to make decisions on a military group they should try to be cognizant and only have members that are military and or come from a military family and are knowledgeable regarding the conflict unlike Sam Rodriguez. It was atrocious and highly disrespectful how my grandfather and I were ignored and he was not even asked for his input for his only medal.”**

As far as the design itself, 65th Infantry veteran and inspiration behind the Borinqueneers Gold Medal crusade, Raul Reyes Castañeira says, **“you can hardly see the bayonets on the design, and this was most representative of the 65th Infantry...In those days, your bayonet was the last means of defense in battle...”**

Another reason for discontent among veterans and family members was the time consumed for the design voting protocols, preamble and administrative remarks, which as a result left hardly any time to express comments.

To compound such issues, Medina expressed that possible technical shortcomings with the teleconference bridge hindered incoming voice transmissions heard by the CCAC.

“I was sitting next to a 65th Infantry veteran who was the last sergeant major of the Regiment [65th] during its racial integration phase in 1953. He wrote notes to express himself. When he unmuted his phone, no one heard him on the receiving end. I received similar complaints from other family members.”

The Secretary of the Treasury still has to approve the final design of the medal and there is no determined timeline for any formal medal presentation ceremonies. According to the National Puerto Rican Coalition’s website, a National Borinqueneers CGM Planning Committee has been established.

One of the planning committee’s members, Army Colonel Jeffrey Pounding, has been charged with knowingly exposing a woman to HIV in an extramarital affair, according to an “Army Times” written in January 22, 2015.

(Reference: <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/crime/2015/01/20/colonel-court-martial-hiv/22047147/>)

Medina states, “It is really unfortunate that the Alliance has not even been remotely considered for the planning committee. The Borinqueneer veterans can be served more effectively with the 65th Infantry expertise acquired throughout the advocacy crusade.”

Analogous to the Tuskegee Airmen, Nisei Japanese Soldiers and Navajo Code Talkers, the 65th Infantry Regiment was the only Hispanic-segregated ACTIVE-DUTY unit to serve in WWI, WWII and most notably the Korean War. The Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal bill H.R. 1726 was signed into law in June 10, 2014.

For more information about the progress of the Borinqueneers Gold medal, veterans and family members are encouraged to contact (in no particular order):

**George Laws, Rep. Pedro Pierluisi staffer:
Email: George.Laws@mail.house.gov
Phone: 202-226-9804/9928**

**Robert Carter, Rep. Bill Posey staffer:
Email: Robert.Carter@mail.house.gov
Phone: 202-225-3671**

**William Norton, US Mint Legislative Liaison
Email: William.Norton@usmint.treas.gov
Phone: 202-354-7458**

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