



Vietnam Veterans of America

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A Not-For-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

September 30, 2013

The Honorable Bill Posey
United States House of Representatives
120 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-0908

The Honorable Pedro Pierluisi
United States House of Representatives
1213 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-5401

Dear Congressman Posey and Resident Commissioner Pierluisi,

On behalf of the membership of Vietnam Veterans of America, I want you to know that VVA fully supports enactment of H.R. 1726, which would award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico, known officially as the Borinqueneers.

We could not agree more that the estimable service of the troops of the 65th Infantry Regiment – the United States military's last segregated unit composed of Hispanic soldiers – is emblematic of the contributions to the Armed Forces that have been made by hundreds of thousands of patriotic American citizens from Puerto Rico from World War I through the current War on Terror.

But specifically, the legislation you have introduced, and its companion legislation in the Senate, S. 1174, recognizes the valor and tenacity of the troops of the 65th during the war in Korea. Fighting as a segregated unit from 1950-52, the 65th participated in some of the fiercest battles of the war, and the toughness, courage, and loyalty of its men earned the admiration of many who had previously harbored reservations about Puerto Rican soldiers based on stereotypes. These included their own commander, Brigadier General William Harris, who came to regard them as “the best damn soldiers I had ever seen.”

“These fine troops” – that’s what the commander of the Eighth Army, Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, called them – conducted the last recorded battalion-sized bayonet assault in U.S. Army history. Despite privations and prejudice – they were ordered to shave off their moustaches “until such time as they gave proof of their manhood” – they fought on and fought gallantly. For their extraordinary service during the Korean War, the 65th received a slew of commendations and unit citations. Individual troops earned a total of 10 Distinguished Service Crosses, approximately 250 Silver Stars, more than 600 Bronze Stars, some 2,700 Purple Hearts, but, despite numerous acts of uncommon valor, no Medals of Honor.

Certainly, it is fitting that the bill you have introduced be enacted, so that the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate can make the appropriate arrangements for the award of a single gold medal of appropriate design in honor of the 65th Infantry Regiment, the Borinqueneers, in recognition of its honorable service, devotion to duty, loyalty and acts of valor in the face of adversity.

VVA thanks you for your leadership in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Rowan".

John Rowan, National President