

27 WWII VETERANS HONORED WITH CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

By **Mike Simbre**, Director of FilVetREP, Region 6

Photos by **Eric Smith**

The Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project (FilVetREP) Region 6's presentation of the Congressional Gold Medal in honor of WWII veterans who fought in the Philippines theatre was held at the Filipino American Community of Colorado (FACC) Cultural Center on April 28. A crowd of nearly 140 attended, honoring 27 next of kin families accepting the medal on behalf of the deceased veteran.

Special guests in attendance were Army (R) Lt General Edward Soriano, Army (R) Major General Antonio Taguba, representatives from the offices of Sen. Bennett, Sen. Gardner, Rep. Degette and Rep. Perlmutter, Jefferson County Commissioner Tina Francone, Gil Asakawa and Roberto Rey from AARP, Kim Monson and Molly Vogt of radio KDMT, and Nelson Garcia of KUSA Channel 9.

The event was organized by USAF (R) MSgt Michael Simbre, Director of FilVetREP, Region 6; Frank Francone, former Philippine Scout; the FACC Board of Directors; and the FACC community.

FilVetREP's mission is to raise awareness through academic research and public education and obtain national recognition of the Filipino-American WWII soldiers for their wartime service to the United States and Philippines from July 1941 to December 1946.

On July 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used his constitutional powers directing all organized military units in the Commonwealth of the Philippines—Philippines Army, Philippines Scout, Philippines Constabulary and separate com-

bat—into service defense of the United States, promising US nationality and veteran's benefits. Eventually 250,000 soldiers rallied and willingly served under the command of General MacArthur in the US Army Forces in the Far East. These soldiers would serve under the most grueling and brutal conditions of the war including the Bataan Death March. Over 57,000 were killed in action, thousands

acts, which declared those who were in the Philippines Commonwealth Army who fought with Americans and Filipino Americans were not classified to serve on active duty which denied the benefits originally promised to them.

It was not until December 14, 2016 that President Obama, signed into law, awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to these Americans and Filipinos and finally giving recognition to them 75 years after the war.

The Congressional Gold Medal passed by Congress in November 2016, did not discriminate in recognizing the brave men and women who undeniably and unequivocally served their country despite the ugliness and inhumanity suffered. They suffered for doing their duty and experiencing discriminatory acts by Congress after the war.

The Congressional Gold Medal is simply recognition to thank them for their valor, their loyalty, and their promise to defend their homeland. They all had guaranteed their mission with their lives.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest award bestowed by Congress to individuals or groups who displayed outstanding achievements to the United

States.

The regional ceremony in Denver welcomed a mix of military and Filipino culture. After the medals were awarded, the audience was treated to two Filipino cultural dances as well as two Filipino songs by the Mano Po choir. There were two authentic paintings depicting the Bataan Death March and the treatment of prisoners. Paintings were courtesy of



The Congressional Medal of Honor recognizes Filipino and American veterans who fought in the Philippines during WWII.

more wounded for life and hundreds upon hundreds were missing in action. So many thousands suffered as prisoners of war. Yet, they fought, died and survived for over four years and defeated the Japanese Imperial Forces and helped liberate the Philippines.

Toward the end of the war, on February 18, 1945, Congress passed and President Harry Truman signed the rescission



Left to right: Major General (R) Antonio Taguba, Mrs. Menchie Bautista Gregorio, Master Sergeant (R) Michael Simbre, Mr. Buddy Bautista, Mr. Ed Anolin, Lieutenant General (R) Edward Soriano, Sergeant First Class Nicholas Velando

Victor Fulford. In the lower level of the FACC building, posters were displayed with events of the war and the names of honored veterans who were there.

The ceremony was dedicated to the veterans. The general public does not know about this dark side of history. Which is why FilVetREP's next phase will be focused on education.

Today text books scantily mention the fighting in the Philippines. FilVetREP plans to lobby each state legislature and

the Department of Education to devote at least one chapter in the history curriculum at the high school junior level about the fighting in the Philippines during WWII.

Thanks to Tina Francone for obtaining Governor Hickenlooper's proclamation that October 20, 2018 is to be Filipino American Veterans Day. FilVetREP will be collaborating with other Filipino organizations to celebrate that day.

FilVetREP relies on sponsors and indi-

vidual donors to help the organization purchase the bronze replicas of the Congressional Gold Medal. The organization hopes to continue these meaningful award ceremonies with funds donated from the public.

It is through these events hosted by FilVetREP and other Filipino-American organizations that keep the legacy of the WWII Filipino and American soldiers alive.

To learn more, visit www.FilVetREP.org for more information and updates.



MSgt (R) Michael Simbre, Mrs. Chae Simbre, MG (R) Antonio Taguba



Dr. Erlinda Rojas Santos received the medal for her father Major Dr. Teofilo Rojas (USAFF Medical Corps, Filvet POW) with her son Arch. Mauro Bernardino Santos Jr.



MG (R) Antonio Taguba, Josephine Velando

(R) after the rank stands for retired.