

feature



By WILFREDO TUNGOL



Many died on the March to Prison of War Camp O'Donnel.

FACES OF COURAGE

THE UNTOLD STORIES OF WWII FILIPINO VETERANS

On December 7, 1941, Japan's war planes attacked Pearl Harbor and destroyed most of its fleet, killing nearly 2,300 individuals during that attack. On December 8, 1941, not even 24 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese imperial forces attacked the United States Army posts in the Philippines, located in the Bataan peninsula and island of Corregidor. During the battle of Bataan in the spring of 1942, the Japanese Army overran the U.S. forces, and after a heroic but futile defense of the peninsula, the

U.S. Army surrendered. More than 78,000 U.S and Filipino soldiers were captured, including 66,000 Filipinos who volunteered to fight along side the U.S. service members.

The Japanese transferred the captured soldiers from Bataan to Camp O'Donnell, in what is now known as the infamous Bataan Death March, where the prisoners were forced to march over 70 miles within one week, with hardly any break for resting and inadequate provisions for medicine, food or water. It was estimated that over 700

U.S. service members and 6,000 to 10,000 Filipinos died during this horrific trek.

Next to fall was Corregidor, sometimes referred to as the Gibraltar of the Philippines because of its strategic location for defending the country. Over 13,000 defended Corregidor, comprising of both U.S. Armed Forces and Philippine Commonwealth Army and Philippine Scouts. General Douglas MacArthur was forced to escape and evacuate to Australia but before he left, he famously declared, "I Shall Return!" He would later honor his word and return to Leyte to continue the fight.

BROTHERS IN ARMS AND BATTLE

Why did so many Filipinos join the United States to fight the Japanese? Part of it is history, part of it is patriotism,

and part of it is the promise that was made to those who joined the fight. Historically, the Philippines were colonized by the United States in 1898 after the Filipinos, with assistance from the United States, overthrew the Spaniards as colonizer of the liberated nation and the Philippines became a territorial outpost of the U.S. in the Pacific. The country was called Commonwealth of the Philippines and was governed by Americans, including General MacArthur. Patriotically, the Filipino nationals fought with the U.S. because they were assured that independence would be granted to the Commonwealth once World War II was over.

Promises were also made by the U.S. government to the Filipinos nationals who joined the U.S. forces during the war. The U.S. government promised that they would be entitled to the same benefits as the U.S. service members with whom they fought alongside.

In Hawaii and on the west coast, thousands of Filipinos volunteered to also join the fight. Some were Filipinos born in Hawaii, but most were Filipino nationals who were promised full U.S. citizenship if they volunteered to fight in the war effort. The 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment was activated in July 1942. As thousands more wanted to join the fight, the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment was activated later that year. Altogether, nearly 9,000 Filipino nationals and Filipino



WASHINGTON, D.C. - (Sept. 2, 1945) Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz signs the Instrument of Surrender as United States Representative aboard the battleship USS Missouri (BB-63) in Tokyo, Japan, Sept. 2, 1945. Standing directly behind him are (left-to-right): General of the Army Douglas MacArthur; Admiral William F. Halsey, USN, and Rear Admiral Forrest Sherman, USN.



Americans joined the First and Second Filipino Infantry Regiments.

PARTIAL BENEFITS WERE GIVEN TO LIVING FILIPINO VETERANS

A partial remedy for the service of Filipino veterans was given to them when they were allowed to immigrate to the United States in 1990. Thousands of living Filipino veterans, mostly in their late sixties, came to the United States, many settling in Hawaii. However, they were not allowed to bring their immediate family with them. The veterans would have to go through the immigration process of petitioning for their loved ones before they could be reunited. Those who became citizens were able to bring their spouses and minor or unmarried children without having to wait to be admitted under the immigration quota, which can take years.

Monetary remedy came when the late Senators Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka introduced and were able to pass through Congress an appropriation to living veterans. Those Filipino veterans living in the U.S. received \$15,000 in lump sum while those who are living in the Philippines received \$9,000 based on the

assumption that those living in the Philippines would benefit from the "strong" dollar value. A limited amount of time was allowed for the veterans to file their claim. Once the appropriation ran out or the deadline passed, any remaining veterans would not be allowed to file for this monetary benefit..

THE FILIPINO VETERANS CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL AND THE RESCISSION ACT

In recognition of the heroic contribution of the Filipino veterans who fought in World War II, the U.S. Congress passed the Filipino Veterans of WWII Congressional Gold Medal (CGM), which later became Public Law 114-265 when it was signed by former President Obama on December 14, 2016. The CGM recognizes the valiant and heroic efforts in the Philippines of living veterans and deceased veterans through their next of kin. During the two public ceremonies sponsored by the Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project Hawaii Region (FiVetREP), the CGM was awarded to over 200 Filipino veterans who were members of the First and Second Filipino Infantry Regiments, the Philippine

Commonwealth Army, the Philippine Scouts, or a recognized Philippine guerilla unit.

While it is gratifying to see that these deserving veterans are finally recognized for their contributions, many of them, primarily the Filipino veterans from the Philippines, continue to suffer hardship because the benefits that were promised to them were rescinded or withdrawn by the Rescission Act of 1946. This Act deemed that the wartime service of the Commonwealth of the Philippines and the Philippine Scouts was not considered active service, and therefore, did not qualify those veterans for benefits awarded to all other veterans of World War II. The Rescission Act is still in effect and so long as it remains law, it diminishes the sacrifices that were made by the Filipino veterans.

A full exploration of this history and related issues will be televised in the program "Faces of Courage: Untold Stories of World War II Filipino Veterans" premiering on Veterans Day, November 11, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. on KFVE, and rebroadcast on

November 13 at 6:00 p.m. on KGMB and on November 20 at 4:00 p.m. on KHNL.

This program was produced by MoveMeHawaii'i, a project of the nonprofit Beta Beta Gamma Foundation, in partnership with FiVetREP, with the goal of increasing awareness of the heroic service of the Filipino veterans, peacefully combatting discrimination and uniting all races within our community. Donations to support the ongoing education efforts of

FiVetREP's Hawaii'i Region can be made at the website MoveMeHawaii.org. For more information about Filipino veterans, visit www.filvetrep.org or www.dutytocountry.org

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