

Jenah Mari Paloy Yangwas, SAVE (Student Action for Veterans Equity) Member & Granddaughter of a Filipino WWII Veteran

TESTIMONY

for Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing

by Jenah Mari Paloy Yangwas

(SAVE Member & Granddaughter of a Filipino WWII Veteran)

I am here on behalf of S.A.V.E., Student Action for Veterans Equity, which has worked tirelessly on the Full Equity campaign.

Today marks the 65th anniversary of the fall of Bataan. During this time, the Philippine Islands was also US soil. Tens of thousands of American and Filipino soldiers were captured by Japanese forces and were forced to endure the Bataan death march. Those captured were confined in concentration camps and pressed into forced labor. Thousands died along the way, while some were killed brutally. For months prior, these soldier who saw no difference if they were Filipino soldiers, American soldiers were heroically able to hold off the Imperial forces but on April 9th, 1942, they were all forced to surrendered

My family's roots and loyalty to the American flag is undeniable. My father, still living, served under the US Navy for twenty years. I am a granddaughter and niece of Filipino WWII Veterans. My paternal grandfather, Santiago Yangwas served as a Captain for the US Army, my uncle Benjamin Carrido served as a guerilla, and my maternal grandfather, Dionisio Paloy was a Bataan Death March survivor. Although all of them are now passed, I recognize the incredible strength of our heroes. Our fight here today was their fight yesterday!

Before war had started in the Pacific, my grandfather, Dionisio Paloy, was employed as a mechanic in Baguio City. Shortly thereafter, he was called to duty and became a driver at the local American military base, Camp John Hay. His job was to transport ammunition from Baguio to Bataan.

During the fall of Bataan, he was caught and he became a prisoner of war (POW). He was placed in a concentration camp where he was enslaved, forced to work in the fields to care for the carabao (water buffalo) with little or no food. He and nine of his comrades were able to escape. It took them months to get back home to Baguio City, as the terrain was mountainous and steep. Only four of the ten men reached Baguio. They were all mere skeletons and bones. My grandfather was the only man to survive the escape as the others perished from hunger and thirst shortly thereafter.

We each hold a story, a story of struggle, a story of our soldiers witnessing the brutalities of war. Many of us come from points in history where our elders tell us of the great sacrifices and undoubted courage they have made in order for us all to be here today. We are here to "Remember Bataan," to attest to the heroic strength and sacrifices our soldiers have made.

My grandfather's story is not isolated. He, like many others, had witnessed his countrymen fight bravely alongside American soldiers. He witnessed countless others die brutally in war. He joined forces with the US to defend the homeland he loved.

On this day, we are here to remember the sacrifices that OUR heroes have made! As a community worker in San Francisco, I have been there to witness my heroes die at an alarmingly fast rate. I have been there to coordinate memorial services and to comfort their wives with their loss. We cannot wait any longer!

I am so proud to see my generation believe in this fight. EQUITY is so very important. Passage of the 1946 Rescission Act stripped away "full veteran's benefits" for Filipinos who were entitled. This stripped away the dignity of all the men and women that fought under US command. We are here to say that our soldiers will never be alone in this battle. Passage of HR 760 and S57 is important to us all and it's been long overdue. 61 years is 61 years too late! Our heroes deserve FULL EQUITY now!

The courage, perseverance and sacrifice made by these brave men and women who took it upon themselves to defend the islands against violent occupation are truly remarkable. We are here to standup for them, for what is right and just. We are here to demand justice and full equity! We are proud of them--Our history, our fight, our heroes will TRULY never be forgotten!!