

ART A. CALEDA, President of WWII Fil-AM Veterans and Ladies Auxiliary Hawaii Chapter

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS
Statement of ART A. CALEDA, President of WWII Fil-AM
Veterans and Ladies Auxiliary Hawaii Chapter
TESTIMONY Before the Senate VA Committee
April 11, 2007

The Honorable Chairman,
Distinguished Committee Members

ALOHA !!! Good Morning.

This is the voice of my Comrades, of the more than 2,000 Filipino veterans of World War II and Ladies Auxiliary residing in the State of Hawaii.

My name is Art Caleda. I am 83 years old, a naturalized American citizen residing in Honolulu, Hawaii. Currently, I am the President of the WWII Fil-Am Veterans and Ladies Auxiliary Hawaii Chapter. I am a retired Regional Director of Forestry in the Philippines and a retired Sales Associate in Hawaii.

I'm honored to be here. I thank you all for this great opportunity with my special thanks to our very own Senate VA Committee Chairman Senator Daniel Akaka for inviting me to appear and testify before this committee hearing. I register my FULL support to pass legislation of the Senate bill S. 57, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007.

My thanks also to our very own Senator Daniel Inouye for introducing in 1992 the original Bill S. 68 with identical title and the same language adopted in the current Senate Bill S. 57 mandating the U.S. government to confer full recognition and full benefits to World War II Filipino-American veterans.

However, the Bill until today, failed to pass legislation and died a natural death at the closing of the U.S. Congress session every year.

BACKGROUND: I was a Guerilla Intelligence Officer with the 11th Infantry Regiment, of the United States Armed Forces in the Philippines (USAFIP) Philippine Army assigned in the Northern Luzon. I took my oath of allegiance under the American flag in response to the call by the military order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

I survived the war through blood and sacrificed with a shrapnel wound I suffered in my lower left chin during a mission to rescue a US pilot officer Lt. Paul Foster of the 39th Brigade when we were exposed in the battle front in the middle of heavy staffing and bombing by the Japanese troops. Many were wounded and some died during the rescue operation.

After the Philippines was granted absolute independence on July 4, 1945, the Rescission Act of 1946 created a new battle for injustice against the Filipino veterans of World War II when the US government unceremoniously stripped our well-earned honor and highly- deserved benefits.

LEGAL BATTLE:

In 1992, fifteen years ago today, our very own US Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) introduced the original Senate bill S. 68 with identical title and the same language adopted in the current Senate bill S. 57 as the Filipino Veterans Equity Act 2007 mandating the US government to confer full recognition of the military service and benefits of Filipino veterans who served with the Armed Forces of the United States. However, the bill died a natural death at the closing of the US Congress session every year until to-date.

The inability of the "Power-that-Be" to pass legislation of the bill apparently attributed to the failure to amend the Rescission Act of 1946 as a scapegoat of the US government to continue denying the Filipino veterans privilege and rights for benefits. Our long battle for justice with the US government had been unpopularly delayed and to think about it, justice delayed is justice denied, prejudicial to the welfare of the Filipino veterans.

Consequently, records from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Veterans Services, Hawaii, revealed that between 15 and 20 veterans died every year. In December 2006 and January 2007, eight veterans died in Honolulu, Hawaii, apparently attributed to a prolonged frustrations suffered by the veterans who are fast aging at their 80's of age and over, most of them are sickly, bedridden and poor, solely dependent on their SSI and Food Stamps provided by the US government.

To supplement their SSI income they collect empty cans and bottles and sell to the recycle redemption center. They frequent food banks for free food and second hand clothing. Some do backyard gardening to raise vegetables. They save money for their families in the Philippines. Most of the veterans just confine themselves within the four walls of their one bedroom. The scenario when a veteran dies alone, he/she is noticed because of the stinky smell after three or more days. The veterans really live a very miserable life waiting and hoping against hope for their equity benefits to alleviate their living from poverty.

FACTS:

"On April 9, 1942 - United States surrenders the Philippines leaving 75,000 USAFFE and regular soldiers to the Bataan Death March where close to 10,000 die along the trudge to POW camps. However, even after the American surrender, Philippine resistance to Japanese occupation continues". (source: www.fullequity.com).

The infamous Fall of Bataan that marked the treacherous Bataan Death March, the surrender of Corrigidor including other military installations and the Prisoners of War (POW) concentration camps located all over the country will remain historical events to remember symbolizing the sacrifices, courage, and loyalty of Filipino veterans in defense of freedom and democracy.

The organized guerilla resistance units in coordination with the reinforcement liberation forces exemplified their bravery and valor throughout the intensive mopping operations against the enemy and excelled over heavy battle until the surrender and capture of Gen. Yamashita "The Tiger of Malaya" in the Central Cordillera mountain ranges of the Mountain provinces and Baguio City.

The war was the bloodiest battle we ever experienced considering the heavy toll of casualties. It is part of American history about the World War II in the Philippines when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the military order calling and ordering all organized military forces of the Philippine Commonwealth government to join the Armed Forces of the United States. Cognizant to the military order, we are entitled to full recognition and benefits provided by the US Constitution.

However, the US government persistently continues to ignore our military service since 1946 until to date and avoid to grant our benefits rightfully due to us. While soldiers from 61 other nations who fought under the American flag received their highly deserved benefits. We, the Filipino veterans were singled out for exclusion.

It is unconceivable that Filipino veterans must be "killed, disabled, wounded, paralyzed, deaf, half-blind, AND POW to be honored and eligible to benefits, yet they were all confined in the hospitals and military camps, while Filipino veterans with limbs intact and normal who carried and sustained the battle and survived the "Holocaust" of the war were ignored of their military service and denied of benefits available by the US Constitution. Both must be granted equal opportunity.

Mr. Chairman and Members of this August Body, on behalf of my Comrades, I confide to you all our unconditional trust and confidence to your leadership and advocacy to support passage for legislation the much awaited Senate bill S. 57,. The Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007.

To capsulize my testimony, I profess for consideration, the following:

1. The HUMANITARIAN aspect as equally, if not more relevant to the legal rights of the World War II Filipino-American veterans benefits provided by the U.S. Constitution and promised by Uncle Sam.
2. The U.S. government to rectify the injustice committed since the Rescission Act of 1946 against the Filipino-American veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the United States.
3. To mandate the U.S. government to confer FULL recognition of military service of Filipino veterans of World War II who served in the Armed Forces of the United States, under military order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
4. The U.S. government to grant FULL benefits to Filipino veterans of World War II for reason of their military service in the Armed Forces of the United States with equal benefits by the Americans available by law of the U.S. Congress.

5. The U.S. government to save the lives of the remaining living Filipino veterans who are fast aging at their 80's of age and over and most of the veterans are sickly and poor dependent solely on SSI and Food Stamps provided by the U.S. government.

6. To reward the Filipino veterans, much less not to be forgotten as heroes of freedom and democracy who bravely sacrificed through blood and life in defense of the people and nation.

7. The U.S. government to improve the quality of life of the Filipino veterans as naturalized American citizens to live decently from poverty.

Enclosures: