

Jesse BALTAZAR, Veteran

AMERICAN COALITION FOR FILIPINO VETERANS

Falls Church, VA 22043

Mobile Phone: 571-335-2898

E-mail: jemabalt@gmail.com

June 24, 2014

Chairman Joe Heck

House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigation

Rayburn House Office Bldg.

Washington DC 20515

WITNESS STATEMENT

Eligibility for Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation

“How was I recognized and why many of my comrades are being denied?”

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

My name is JESSE BALTAZAR, a 93-year-old Filipino American World War II veteran. I am volunteer member of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans advocacy national organization. I reside in Falls Church, Virginia, Maryland. I still work for the U.S. State Department as a security consultant.

On behalf of my comrades who are not here today, may I thank you for inviting me to give my views and recommend solutions to this eligibility problems of thousands of surviving Filipino WWII veterans.

I am here to support my friend Mr. CELESTINO ALMEDA in his fight for official recognition from the U.S. Army and the V.A. I have known Mr. Almeda for the past decade and worked with him in our veterans coalition

First, I would like to introduce myself. I am a retired Air Force Major. I have the distinct honor of being the first native born Filipino to be commissioned in the United States air force. I was born in Manila, Philippines.

When World War II started in December 8, 1941, I was sitting in a classroom in Manila. A radio announcement blasted out: “Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese

planes. All my classmates went home. I stayed and was inducted into the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE)

I fought in the Battle of Bataan in 1942. I became a prisoner of war of the Japanese when the Americans surrendered on April 9, 1942.

I was wounded and injured during combat. I suffered brutality, starvation, and diseases at the hands of the Japanese soldiers during the Infamous Bataan Death March. With the help of Filipino fishermen who smuggled me and a comrade at night through mosquito infested swamps, I managed to escape.

When Bataan fell, some 80,000 Filipino and Americans walked the Infamous Bataan Death March. I was one of them. I consider myself lucky to be here today speaking to you. I witnessed and experienced terrible things no human being should ever have to go through. In this shameful treatment of us, POW's, as well as the 10,000 civilian men, women and children who lost their lives.

The Philippines was the only country in Southeast Asia which mounted resistance against the Imperial Japanese Forces during WWII. Some 120,000 Philippine Commonwealth Army soldiers with resistance units fought valiantly alongside allied Forces. Doubtless we served as courageously as our American counterparts. Our contributions helped disrupt the Japanese timetable in 1942, at a point when the Japanese were expanding unchecked through the Western Pacific.

To be sure, without Filipino troops and guerrilla resistance units that continued to fight long after the fall of Bataan, the liberation of the Philippine Islands would have taken much longer, it would have resulted in greater American casualties and heavier financial burden on the U.S.

I was outraged that we were not treated right. During the war, we served under the U.S. flag as USAFFE soldiers. However, in February 1946, the U.S. Congress passed the Rescission Act that deemed our military service as "NOT ACTIVE" for the purposes of veterans benefits. A great many of my Filipino comrades living in the Philippines who fought courageously and suffered war-related injuries and illnesses receive HALF benefits, compared with those American G.I.s who fought beside them.

I am truly sorry that my Filipino comrades like Mr. Almeda have not received their rightful equity compensation to this day.

I am not ungrateful. I have offered my life in the other two wars: the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

I am grateful that America, as a beacon of freedom and justice, has endeavored to address this issue over the years. I am grateful that I am one of the few remaining survivors of the Bataan Death March. I love this country and thankful for all the things it has done for me and my family. Despite my age I am ready to serve again at a moment's notice.

I believe in democracy. I personally have never experienced discrimination. I believe in America, which has always stood on the right side of history and sought to address omissions of the past. I love this country.

The injustice done to Filipino fighters after 1946 in a war that we won motivated me to write a book about what we experienced. I lost my older and younger brother during that war.

I am proud that my two sons, Melchior and Thomas who are former decorated officers in the US Navy and in US Army respectively, are here with me today.

For my WWII service as a Philippine Commonwealth Army soldier, I was awarded the \$15,000 Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation in April 2010.

However, I was initially DENIED a year earlier, on March 3, 2009, by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs when they said the National Personnel Records Center could not find my name or service records in their files or archives.

The NPRC denial letter stated: "In order to establish service, his [my] name must appear in our archives and his claim folder must contain information compatible with the archives. These two requirements must be met before a positive determination can be made."

It was only after I found and produced the following seven (7) records in my possession that I was able to persuade the N.P.R.C. to recognize my USAFFE service:

1. Philippine Army discharge document dated 24 May 1946;
2. Army of the United States Honorable Discharge certificate, dated 12 December 1946;

3. Report of physical examination of enlisted personnel prior to discharge, and release from active duty, December 1946;

4. Verification of a military retiree's service in non-wartime campaigns or expeditions, dated January 30, 1975.

5. Report of Medical Examination, dated 23 February 1966;

6. Report of medical Examination dated, 23 April 1962;

7. Affidavit for Philippine army personnel, dated 21 May 1946.

MY CONCLUSION: the NPRC Archives of the USAFFE Philippine Commonwealth Army and of Recognized Filipino Guerrillas in St. Louis Missouri are NOT COMPLETE or NOT ACCURATE in determining U.S. military service.

Thus, Mr. Chairman, I respectfully request your Committee to DIRECT the V.A. Secretary, in cooperation with the US Army Secretary, to recognize the deserving Filipino veterans out of the remaining 4,500 claimants who have appealed their V.A. equity compensation denials. The U.S. military service of these elderly claimants should be individually recognized if they meet the following conditions:

1. Philippine Commonwealth Army discharge document which are certified authentic by the Philippine Government Veterans Affairs Administrator or their Adjutant General Office; OR,
2. Filipino Guerrilla service documents when their names are on Recognized Roster agreed to in 1948 by the U.S. Army with proof of their identity as certified by the Philippine Government's Veterans Affairs Administrator or the Philippine Army Adjutant General Office; AND,
3. No derogatory information such as disloyalty to the United States or fraud from the Philippine Army's Adjutant General or the U.S. Army's Adjutant General.

Mr. Chairman, Thank you again for this opportunity to speak before your committee. I look forward to answer your questions.

-----Jesse Baltazar-----

Witness Jesse Baltazar does not receive Federal contracts, grants, subcontracts or subgrants. See disclosure forms attached.