

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

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Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Tsongas, Distinguished Members of this Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of America's Army to discuss Filipino Army verification of service and measures your Army has taken to improve and streamline the process. This is personal for me because my father served in the Philippines during World War II...and so ensuring accurate recognition of service of Filipino Army members is critical.

Between late 1942 and June 1948, the United States Army developed and administered a program to extend formal recognition to Philippine guerrilla units and individuals who contributed materially to the defeat of Japanese forces occupying the Philippines during World War II. This recognition was the equivalent of induction into the Philippine Army, which was in the service of the armed forces of the United States from July 26th, 1941 through June 30th, 1946. Formal recognition of guerillas by the United States established their eligibility for the same pay and allowances as provided by law to the Soldiers of the Philippine Army, and could also result in other Veterans' benefits to include health care, educational assistance, burial assistance, social security compensation and citizenship.

This "Guerilla Recognition Program" was robust. An immense number of documents were collected, investigated, and in some cases reconstructed and rebuilt, to ensure document accuracy. The results of the program - authenticated rosters of recognized guerilla units, individual letters of recognition, certified witness affidavits, and Adjutant General's Office (AGO) Form 23 (Affidavit for Philippine Army Personnel), etcetera, - remain the basis for determination of service. This program, due to its thorough processes, is the foundation for the Army's position, past and current, for making final service determinations for eligibility. The Army maintains complete confidence that the records and files completed in 1948 provide the best and most accurate determinations that could have been made from that time until today.

The Army transferred the Filipino veteran service verification process to the National Personnel Records Center in 1998. The National Personnel Records Center already

maintained Filipino Veterans records and this transfer successfully gained efficiencies and improved verification timeliness. The Army, using the National Personnel Records Center as our agent, maintains a close relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We assist the VA in providing benefits to the Filipino Veterans by verifying their service. Today, because the service determination has already been done through the Guerilla Recognition Program, the process is fairly simple:

- 1) The VA submits VA Form 3101 or VA Form 9 to the National Personnel Records Center, who retrieves and authenticates the service determination from the archived files. If sufficient documentation is not found in the file, the National Personnel Records Center works with the VA, who in turn works with the Philippine government, to obtain additional information. Once the National Personnel Records Center has matched evidence with unit rosters and is able to authenticate service, they complete National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) Test Form 02-03 and forward it to the VA. These rosters and reference lists serve only as a quick reference to what is actually in more than 1600 boxes of well-documented material stored in the National Archives building in College Park, Maryland. If unable to match evidence with unit rosters, the National Personnel Records Center annotates the VA Form 3101 accordingly and returns it to VA. Although the National Personnel Records Center executes this function, they follow the Army's procedures and program guidelines, and do not deviate from U.S. Army policy.

- 2) The National Personnel Records Center informs VA of the final determination.

- 3) VA delivers or denies the benefit.

The Army has long-standing and close working relationships with both the National Personnel Records Center and VA, and together we are committed to sustaining an efficient claims processing program for the Filipino Veterans.

The issue of service verification has remained constant over the years. The Army has

spent significant time and resources to continually review our service verification policy. Though we have complete confidence in the final service determinations already made, as with any other Army program, a review or study is periodically conducted to ensure that we are in compliance with the spirit and letter of applicable laws and regulations.

As published on the White House website, in October 2012, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, in collaboration with the Office of Management and Budget and the Domestic Policy Council, created the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund Interagency Working Group comprised of the VA, the Department of Defense, and the National Archives and Record Administration. The working group was tasked with analyzing the process faced by Filipino veterans in demonstrating eligibility for compensation in order to ensure that all applications received thorough and fair review.

The working group increased transparency and concluded that after a thorough accounting of the process to verify valid military service for Filipino World War II veterans that the process is sound. This effort represented the first time all organizations involved in the verification process were brought together to examine the process from start to finish. In addition to clarifying the claims process, the working group digitized and made available online for the first time a report titled, U.S. Army Recognition Program of Philippine Guerrillas. This crucial report explains how the recognition process was developed at the close of World War II, and, most importantly, the Army's careful reasoning behind the current policies on service verification. I will highlight some of the Army's more significant results of that Interagency Working Group:

- The Army reviewed and revalidated the retrieval and authentication procedures used by the National Personnel Records Center, and fully supported the public release of the procedures.

- The Army recognized the need to provide more detailed responses to requests for service determinations. As a result, we fielded several more specific response

letters which state: the individual's service authentication, whether or not the individual's claims folder and/or corresponding unit rosters were located, and what the next appropriate steps are for individuals with questions regarding service authentication.

- The Army placed a priority on requests for service determinations received from VA for Filipino veterans and has asked the National Personnel Records Center to ensure the requests receive prompt servicing.

Since the end of the war, the process of verifying service for Filipino Veterans of WWII has not changed, nor should it. It is not possible for the Army to conduct a better, more detailed, and more thorough investigation today than that which was conducted between 1942 and 1948.

Every day, the U.S. Army approves or denies someone a DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, or an equivalent Statement of Service based upon documentation. The Army is not doing anything differently with respect to the Filipino Veterans than what we do, and have done, for all those that request a service statement for U.S. Army service.

The Army believes the decisions made 66 years ago were made by a competent authority that had the benefit of extensive post-war field work in conducting investigations, with first-hand evidence to determine claims validity. The Army is well-positioned and committed to meeting the claims processing needs for Filipino Veterans. We have worked in the past with members of Congress regarding eligibility rules and the criteria for service on individual cases and concerns they may have, and we will continue to do so.

Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Tsongas and members of the subcommittee, we wish to thank all of you for your continued support, which has been vital in sustaining our All-Volunteer Army through an unprecedented period of continuous combat operations and

will continue to be vital to ensure the future of our Army. I look forward to answering your questions today.