

STATEMENT OF  
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SUBMITTED TO

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

HEALTH CARE OF FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JUNE 10, 2002

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.7 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I wish to express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to submit our views regarding the health care of World War II Filipino veterans within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The history of the World War II Filipino veteran has been an arduous one to say the least. Permit me to present some relevant background. The Philippine Islands became a possession of the United States as a result of the Spanish American War. The Philippine Independence Act, enacted by Congress in 1934, however, gave the Philippines commonwealth status providing for an eventual independence within ten years. The United States continued to retain certain sovereign powers that included calling the Commonwealth's armed forces into the military service of the United States.

On July 26, 1941 an executive order was issued by President Roosevelt calling members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army into the service of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East.

More than 100,000 Filipinos volunteered. These Filipino veterans fought side by side with American soldiers under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. Their battles were fought in the front lines of Corregidor and at Bataan. They suffered the same injuries as American soldiers. They were tortured and held as prisoners of war as they journeyed along the Bataan Death March. These men maintained their loyalty to the United States during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and their guerilla tactics delayed the Japanese advances across the Pacific.

The Philippines became an independent nation July 4, 1946. That same year, U.S. laws were passed that specifically limited benefits available to those who served in the Philippine Commonwealth Army, New Philippine Scouts and recognized guerilla forces. Benefits in these armed forces were limited to compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors. Those who qualified were paid at the rate of 50 cents on the dollar. The United States did provide \$200 million to the Philippine Army to help pay benefits to its soldiers as part of an economic plan for allocating financial assistance to the Philippines.

Despite sacrifices made by the Philippine Commonwealth Army and the Philippine Scouts, the 79<sup>th</sup> Congress passed the Rescission Act of 1946, which declared their service as “not active,” for purposes of receiving all VA entitlements, thus denying these allied soldiers benefits to which they were initially entitled to receive. This Act also denied members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army and Philippine Scouts the honor of being recognized as veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

In an effort to assist Filipino veterans of World War II, Congress amended the Nationality Act of 1940 to grant Philippine Commonwealth and Philippine Scout veterans the privilege of becoming United States citizens for having served in the United States Armed Forces of the Far East.

The Congress has recently taken action to improve benefits for World War II Filipino veterans through *The Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000*. This Act expands access to

health care and burial services and increases rates of compensation paid by the VA. Only Filipinos who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and Old Philippine Scouts had been receiving VA compensation and benefits equal to those of U.S. veterans. Now the Philippine Commonwealth Army and Philippine Scouts who served along side American troops who have an existing service-connected disability are guaranteed access to VA health care--granted they reside in the U.S. as either citizens or permanent registered aliens.

The VFW supports legislation that seeks to restore full veterans' benefits to certain military forces of the Philippine Commonwealth Army and the Philippine Scouts. Our 102<sup>nd</sup> National Convention approved VFW National Resolution 658, "Benefits For Filipino Veterans and Scouts Who Served With The U.S. Armed Forces During WWII." A copy is attached to this statement for your information. The VFW supports legislation introduced in this Congress that seeks to address the issue of health care to the veterans of the Commonwealth Army and Philippine Scouts. Many of these veterans are departing this life every day. Our responsibility as a grateful nation is to do the right thing and restore full benefits to these veterans, even at this late point in time.

President Roosevelt called these veterans to military service under the command of the U.S. Army; they fought along side American forces. Every veteran who fought under the American flag in WW II should be treated equally. When President Truman signed Public Law 79-301 it included the First Rescission Act of 1946, he stated, "...They (Philippine Army veterans) are nationals of the United States and will continue in that status until July 4, 1946...I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of Philippine Army veterans." Our government can and must fulfill this obligation in the judgment of the VFW.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes the VFW's testimony. We again thank you for allowing us to submit our views for the record on this very important and sensitive topic. Thank you.