

Written by

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – While President Barack Obama was offering mortgage relief to hundreds of thousands of Americans in Las Vegas, Nevada on Monday, Oct. 24, a Filipino American veterans group was trying hard to get his attention.

In fact, while the President was in the Sin City, the veterans group led by Luke Perry, a son-in-law of a veteran, was able to cause the publication in Las Vegas' mainstream daily, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, a story of a 99 year-old Filipino-American veteran, who was denied the \$15,000 lump-sum benefit tacked in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 signed by President Obama. The same act provides \$9,000 lump sum benefit to non-U.S. citizens.

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Silverio Cuaresma, whose picture and videoclip in the front page showed him tied to an oxygen tank, was among the 24,000 or roughly 42% veterans being denied by the "Asian" office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Manila because their service records cannot be located in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri.

The veterans group handed a petition to President Obama's assistants, appealing to President Obama to issue an Executive Order that will allow sources other than NPRC to be considered in the application for benefits by the veterans.

Under the present procedure observed by the VA, only names of veterans found at the NPRC can be considered for ARRA benefits. Sources from the Philippine military and government are being rejected.

"We ask for an emergency order (due) to the fact many of these elderly men and (women) are dying weekly fighting to be paid and are not recognized as veterans after they served the United States of America under current VA policy," the petition reads.

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Another separate letter sent to President Obama by a son of a veteran, Fr. Prisco Entines, said that records other than the NPRC should be accepted by the VA because of the “July 1973 fire (at the NPRC) that caused the loss of so many records. Not to mention of the undeniable fact that NPRC loaned many thousand documents (mostly medical records, probably) that they were never returned to NPRC.”

MACARTHUR ADMITS RECORDS LOST

Father Entines added, “No less than the late Gen. MacArthur admitted personally that during the surrender of Bataan more probably records got lost. Not to mention of the loss of war records due to typhoons. Without mentioning the fact that it is in the Philippine Department's National Archives (in Maryland) where it officially recorded that there were unrecovered records at the Ryukus islands most probably.

“Aside from the fact that in the fact-finding investigation conducted by no less than the Hon. Senator Inouye with the late Col. Frank Quesada (a retired U.S. Army and WW2 POW but did not get any POW Benefits till his death per my personal knowledge) as the Secretary there were documents in the Senator's Possession that admitted some anomalous deletion of names during the Guerrilla Reconstruction of War records that closed in

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1948. Without omitting the open-court admission by a certain Col Edwin Ramsey in the case of either *Serquina v. I.N.S.*, or *Almero v. I.N.S.* that there was a deliberate deletion of even names of his unit. Only reason was economic that rationalized the treacherous and enslaving February 18, 1946 , SECTION 107, 38 U.S. Code.”

According to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, Cuaresma was a Philippine guerrilla intelligence officer who served under famous U.S. Army cavalry Maj. Edwin Ramsey and led raids that killed many Japanese Imperial Army soldiers in central Luzon. Cuaresma is currently midstride in appealing the VA's denial of his benefit claim.

“MAYBE THEY DON'T LIKE ME TO WIN”

Although he met the Feb. 16, 2010, filing deadline and has authentic, yellowed, type-written papers documenting his service under Ramsey's command as well as a signed affidavit by Ramsey himself, the VA rejected his claim. His case is not unlike more than 24,000 other Philippine-American veterans whose claims have been denied.

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"I feel very sad," Cuaresma said, sitting at the dining room table of his daughter's house on the Las Vegas Valley's west side.

"Despite my bravery and fighting for the cause of peace, freedom and democracy for the United States and the American people, they do not recognize me as one of the defenders. It's bad. I am a hero of World War II.

"They are waiting for me to die," he said. "Maybe they don't like me to win, but I keep on trying."

A VA spokesman in Los Angeles, Dave Bayard, will attempt to verify Cuaresma's service records.

When the ARRA bill was filed, an initial 18,000 out of the more than 200,000 stood to benefit from it.

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As of Oct. 13, there have been 9,334 claimants who were granted \$9,000 each while there are about 9,165 who received their \$15,000 each, bringing to the total of \$221 million payouts.

Luke Perry, outreach co-ordinator for the nonprofit, Filipino-American Veterans of Nevada, believes Cuaresma is the oldest Philippine veteran living in Nevada. Perry is the son-in-law of Capt. Edilberto U. Briones of the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East, who was also denied the \$9,000 benefit like Cuaresma.

Perry and group leader Caesar Elpidio are optimistic President Obama will consider their petition.

Rep. Joe Heck, R-Nev., said he would do "everything in my power to ensure these heroes receive the benefits they were promised."

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"It's unconscionable that these documented American veterans are being treated the way they are," according to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

Rep. Jackie Speier [Dem.-CA-12] has introduced H.R. (Filipino Veterans Fairness Act of 2011) while Sen. Daniel K. Inouye [Dem.-HI] has also introduced S. 63 that mandates the Secretary of VA and the Secretary of the Army "to take into account any alternative documentation regarding such service, including documentation other than the Missouri List, that the Secretary determines to be relevant." .# # #

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