

## The Truth About the Filipino Veterans' Lobby (Part Three) - MabuhayRadio

Written by Bobby Reyes

Thursday, 12 April 2007 02:43 - Last Updated Monday, 23 April 2007 07:43

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On Oct. 15, 2006, I posted in several Filipino e-forums the following piece on the issues facing Filipino World War II veterans. I provided with copies the members of the so-called Filipino Veterans Lobby in Washington, DC, and the Filipino diplomats. Once again, nobody answered my concerns. It seemed that everybody was in a state of denial. Please read on . . .

-----Original Message-----

From: [MEDIABCLA@aol.com](mailto:MEDIABCLA@aol.com)

Sent: Sun, 15 Oct 2006 8:14 AM

Subject: Re: The Truth About the Fil-Am Lobby for WWII Veterans (Part II)

Dear Friends:

This is not the first time that I said my piece on the issues about the Filipino World War II veterans. Sometime in 1991 then Philippine Consul General Victor Garcia III invited me to a meeting that the Philippine Consulate General hosted for veterans and community leaders in Los Angeles. This was after the Filipino diplomat learned that I am a son of a WWII veteran. And so I listened patiently to several Filipino veterans present lengthily their case, their position papers and appeal for community support.

Then they asked me to speak my mind. And so I told them in politically-correct terms the following:

1.0 I said that it would have been better to call their crusade as a &quot;Fight for

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Equality,&quot; rather than use the term &quot;Equity.&quot;

1.1 I told them that many Americans associate &quot;equity&quot; with ownership in real estate or a business. I said that the US Congress would not pass any bill that would give special benefits to a particular ethnic group. What our veterans ought to demand was equal protection of the law and the benefits due the members of the US Military.

1.2 I told them that Filipino WWII veterans have no legal right to demand a pension, as even Caucasian soldiers have to serve the US Military for a minimum of 20 years in order to qualify for a pension. It would be different to those who were war casualties and those who had to suffer service-related physical or emotional disability, in which case the 20-year requirement was not necessary.

1.3 But then almost all of the veterans said that it was &quot;either pension or nothing.&quot; And I predicted that they would eventually get nothing.

2.0 I told the veterans that perhaps they would qualify for a back-pay, as they were paid just half of what the American soldiers got as salary. I said that if I was not mistaken, Filipino buck privates received a salary of \$25 per month while Caucasian (and even Black-American) soldiers assigned in the Philippines were paid \$50 per month.

2.1 While it was true that the Filipino soldiers received back-pay in 1945 or thereafter, they could argue that they received only half of what the US Military ought to have paid them. I said that if legal interest were to be added, then the back-pay would amount to a substantial figure.

2.2 I said that since these were claims for back salaries, then the Rescission Act would not have any bearing on the said claims because American labor laws always dictate equal pay for equal work. Besides Japanese bullets or artillery shells never distinguished whether the target was paid \$50 per month or half of it. They all fought the same battle under the same circumstances.

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2.3 Then I said that the heirs of the veterans who have passed away could still collect the back-pay but the same heirs might not get any pension, assuming for the sake of argument that the US Congress would pass legislation authorizing the grant of the pension.

3.0 Then I suggested that perhaps the best strategy was just to petition the US Government to allow their children and grandchildren to migrate to the United States as immigrants.

3.1 I said that had the promise of then President Franklin Delano Roosevelt been fulfilled, then the Filipino WWII soldiers would have opted to become American citizens after they fought for the United States against Japan. Then all their children born after Sept. 2, 1945, would have been natural-born American citizens and so would their grandchildren.

3.2 I argued that the case of the Vietnamese and even the Hmong refugees would have served as good precedence in appealing to the US policymakers and decision-makers for the said immigration visas for their children and their children's children.

At the end of the meeting, many of the veterans liked my ideas but their leaders could not be swayed by my arguments. They said that they would continue the lobby in Washington, DC, for their pension, their equity and their pride.

I finally told them that I wished them all the luck but they did not have really any chance to get what they wanted. Not in a million years.

In subsequent meetings at different venues in Los Angeles, I told the same messages to our Filipino WWII veterans. But I guess that they listened more to other community leaders who pandered to them, especially those that collected from the veterans \$20 per month per head so that they could be paid their salary (or honorarium) as lobbyist(s) in Washington, DC.

For the record,

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Mabuhay,

Bobby M. Reyes

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