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***JGL Eye Column***

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*)— Edilberto U. Briones was 23-years old on Nov. 4, 1942, when he joined the Second Guerilla Brigade of the 92nd Division of the Philippine Army of the Leyte Area Command of the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East in Abuyog, Leyte in the Philippines under Maj. Pedro Gallego.

After his induction into the service on Dec. 14, 1942, Briones joined the Leyte Area Command under Col. Ruperto K. Kangleon, who ordered him to help unload 75 tons of war supplies carried by USS Submarine Nautilus at San Roque, Leyte, on July 14, 1944.

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But because his war records that included guard duty, espionage on enemy movements, burning bridges, cutting telephone lines and sabotaging and fighting the Japanese were never found in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louie, Missouri, Briones, who rose to the rank of captain, has never received the \$9,000 lump sum payment from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Briones' son-in-law, Luke Perry, of Las Vegas, Nevada, told this columnist that his father-in-law is among the 24,000 Filipino World War II veterans, who were denied the benefits by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs under the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation of the ARRA, that provided \$15,000 one-time benefits to U.S. Citizen Filipino veterans.

I e-mailed Mr. Jim Benson, my media relations contact at VA in Washington, D.C., for the exact number of benefit applicants, who were denied, but I am still waiting for his response.

Barely struggling to survive at the age of 92, Briones has only one wish before he dies – recognition by the U.S. government of his war service records by granting him the lump sum payment that is enjoyed his other colleagues, who were able to receive their benefits.

**NPRC IN MISSOURI IS THE ONLY RECOGNIZED SOURCE**

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To be eligible for the benefit, a Filipino veteran must be able to get a certification from the NPRC under the National Archives and Records Administration that his name appears in the archives.

The VA only recognizes the records from the NPRC and not from “documents that came from the Philippine government.”

Last July 28, 2011, Mr. Briones received a letter from the DVA in Manila, denying his claim for benefits that he performed “valid military service in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines  
, including the recognized guerillas, in the service of the Armed Forces of the U.S..”

Earlier, he also received a letter from U.S. Senator Harry M. Reid, the senator of his son-in-law in Nevada, delivering him the grim news that Briones’ name did not appear in the NPRC and “further attempts to request a positive service determination cannot be favorably considered.”

The letter dated June 8, 2010 signed by Director R. L. Hindmand of the NPRC added, “For Briones’ name to be added to the rosters, the guerilla recognition program would have to be

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re-opened. However, the guerilla recognition program terminated  
June 30, 1948

. No names or organizational units have been added since that date. We are in the process of locating the documentation that indicates that the guerilla recognition program was terminated.”

Among others, Briones provided VA a copy of an affidavit from Philippine Army Personnel dated Dec. 20, 1947 and a copy of a “Diploma of Merit” issued to him by the Philippine Veterans Board, indicating that he was being cited by Philippine President Manuel Roxas on April 1st, 1948 “for meritorious service to the Philippines in World War II based on Rep. Act. 65.” But these documents were not given weight.

The case of Briones is one of those being rectified by H. R. 210 (Filipino Veterans Fairness Act of 2011) introduced by Rep. Jackie Speier (Dem.-CA-12) and S. 63, introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (Dem-HI).

## **SPEIER, INOUE BILLS PENDING**

Also among others, the Speier’s bill that has 64 co-sponsors mandates the Secretary of VA “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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While S. 63 requires the Secretary of the Army to “determine the validity of the claims of certain Filipinos that they performed military service on behalf of the U.S. during World War II.” It asks the Secretary of the Army to consider “all information and evidence that is available to the Secretary, including information and evidence submitted by the applicant, if any.”

The Secretary of the Army shall issue a certificate of service to each person determined by the Secretary to have performed military service. The Secretary of the Army shall also accept application submitted by a surviving spouse, child or parent of a deceased person. Application will only be accepted “two years after the enactment of this Act.”

Mr. Perry said that at the rate gridlock is turning up in U.S. Congress, it is very unlikely that any of the bills of Rep. Speier and Sen. Inouye has a chance of passing.

For this reason, Perry said, he is initiating a lobby, appealing to President Obama to sign an executive order, in keeping with the spirit of the Speier and Inouye bills, to authorize the VA Secretary to accept other sources of Filipino veteran war records other than those found in the Missouri List in considering the benefits.

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Like the recent immigration executive order that relaxed the deportation of illegal immigrants that was signed by President Obama, the executive order, expanding sources of documentation of Filipino veterans claims, can also be signed by President Obama. Mr. Obama signed the immigration executive order under the so-called “prosecutorial discretion.”

At an average of 90-years old, Filipino veterans should be dying at a fast clip.

If Filipino Americans will write a letter or email or call the White House, President Obama might be nudged into signing the executive order, coming at a time during the upcoming election season. # # #

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