

The News UpFront: (Commentary in lieu of the TOP STORY) Dateline San Diego, CA, Saturday, 7 July 2007, as reissued on Veterans' Day of 2007

Perhaps, this struggle for equity rights and benefits by our old-and-ailing Filipino veterans of World War II is the longest epic battle being waged in history. It's already sixty-one years this year, and the fight for respect and dignity is far from being won in the halls of the US Congress.

THE FILIPINO-VETERANS ISSUE

{xtypo_quote} There is no chance, no destiny, no fate,

Can circumvent or hinder or control

The firm resolve of a determined soul.

-- Ella Wheeler Wilcox {/xtypo_quote}

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

It's taken two generations and now on the brink of a third before some members of the United States Congress finally gazed at the inevitable sunset of the declining years of our beloved veterans of the Second World War.

The long and interminable fight for skimpy benefits has made mendicants out of these valiant men and women who, without question or foreboding, had answered the call for help to stem the tide of the Japanese invasion in the Pacific.

The Last Battle of Our Fathers - MabuhayRadio

Written by Romeo P. Marquez

Saturday, 07 July 2007 12:36 - Last Updated Sunday, 11 November 2007 16:05

After everything is said and done, slavery had not been totally stamped out, for no sooner had the war ended than the US government reclaimed in the Rescission Act of 1946 what it had so generously given to others, non-Filipinos, who had bravely fought in the same war.

In the fighting and dying against the Japanese, Filipino soldiers waved Old Glory, not their motherland's tricolor that an earlier generation of proud warriors had proudly unfurled and raised against the mighty imperialist Spaniards.

In the gruesome counting of lives lost in the many battles that Filipinos had joined in as ardent supporters of democratic ideals under the American flag, Filipinos accepted the realities of war, thus freeing themselves from the ghastly task of assigning blame for the grief and misery that thousands of soldiers had left their families with.

Yet the rich and powerful US government was not equal to the task; it counted nickels and dimes as if every Filipino life wasted by war was measurable only by dollars and cents, cheapening the man's worth and reducing him to penury.

The proud Filipinos fought the war head-on without hesitation and with a fearlessness inherently theirs not because the vast opportunities for material gain presented themselves, as some idle talk now goes.

They fortified themselves with raw courage knowing that no amount of gold would afford them the priceless chance to show the world that they too deserved a place in the universe of nations and in their own peculiar way, they could let the sun shine on their land with every hope for peace and a little prosperity.

The bullets of war pierced layers of steel and hordes of men, but not their resolve, not their indomitable spirit. Yet the US government, for what little justice it owes, would try to break that will and put them to a test again and again and again in the last one-and-half decade for what they rightfully deserve in respect and dignity.

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Yes, respect and dignity, the poor man's most valued treasures in a world soaring with false adoration, indecency and apathy. Yet what these Filipino veterans so richly have in their persons are mocked by what they may lack in earthly possessions and creature comforts.

How much have a people accomplished in the march to progress but only decadence? To continue to trample on the rights of our Filipino veterans over another, to let them suffer in ignominy and want while others wallow in opulence, who is the richer and the stronger if not these Filipinos themselves?

From the ruins of war the US emerged victorious, at what cost to Filipinos? The savage destruction of Manila was beyond words. The number of deaths was incomprehensible. And when the peace settled on the islands, the real picture revealed itself.

Manila's sorry situation could only be seen in the worst comparable light -- the devastation of Warsaw. The Polish capital was pulverized by the same wrecking machine of mass slaughter that leveled Manila to the ground.

And now, the US fiddles with nickels and dimes whose totality would not even touch the depths of our veterans' eternal misery.

Sixty-one years of utter helplessness, waiting for the gracious soul to acknowledge a mistake, praying for the last miracle of genuine goodwill, grasping for understanding, relying on humanitarian greatness -- our Filipino veterans have not lost hope in the goodness of America.

They would breathe their last soon. Age and disease have ravaged their bodies and their numbers have gone down to a few hundreds.

If this current battle for respect and dignity could not be won by their indestructible will, let them

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fade into the sunset knowing that "there is but one pleasure in life greater than winning, that is, in making the hazard."

BREAKING NEWS - Commentary

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