

**Testimony of Colonel Romeo M Monteyro, PA (Ret.),
Spokesman for the Filipino World War II Veterans Federation
of San Diego County before the House Committee on Veterans
Affairs, February 15, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me here today. In the next five minutes, allow me to dwell on a particular subject--- the loyalty of the Filipinos to America, before, during and beyond World War II.

Private Tomas Claudio, a Filipino, was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces which fought in France in World War I. A mere foot note in history, he is unknown to Americans, but U.S. Army records place him as the first Filipino to die for America. He was a farm worker in California when America entered the First World War. He need not enlist, but he did, out of patriotism and love for his adoptive country.

Then there was Jose Abad Santos, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippine Commonwealth. He became the caretaker of the Commonwealth government after President Manuel L. Quezon was ordered out by President Roosevelt. The enemy caught up with him in Lanao, Mindanao and was told to publicly renounce his allegiance to America and pledge loyalty to the Japanese government. When he refused he was tried by a kangaroo court and was sentenced to die by firing squad. On the eve of his execution, he told his son, "Do not cry my son. Show these people that you are brave. Not everyone is given a chance to die for his country. The loyal and brave Chief Justice chose to die for America.

In the movie "The Great Raid" the loyalty of the Filipinos to America was depicted factually. Filipino civilians risked their lives by smuggling food, medicine and money to starving and sick American prisoners of war. Resistance fighters blocked a stronger Japanese force and prevented it from reinforcing the prison guards at Cabanatuan City, paving the way for the successful rescue of more than 500 American POWs by a battalion of U.S. Army Rangers.

President Harry S. Truman said, as he reluctantly signed the Rescission Act of 1946, **"This does not absolve America of its moral obligations to the Filipino veterans."** President Bill Clinton commented, during the awards ceremony for WWII Congressional Medal of Honor recipients of Japanese and Filipino descents, 59 years late, **"rarely has a country been so well served by a people it has so ill-treated. They risked their lives above and beyond the call of duty, and in so doing they did more than defend America. In the face of painful prejudice, they helped define America at its best."**

In Bataan, soldier-poet Lieutenant Henry G. Lee wrote this poem after he watched a haggard group of Philippine Commonwealth Army troops:

*Obsolete rifle without a sling
And a bolo tied with a piece of string
Coconut hat and canvas shoes
And shoddy, dust white, denim blues
These are the men who fought and fled
And fought again and left their dead
Who fought and died as the white man planned
And never quite learn to understand
Poorly officered, under fed
Often driven but never led
Lied to, and cheated and sent to die
For a foreign flag in their native sky*

Lieutenant Lee survived Bataan, the Death March and even the POW camp atrocities but was ironically killed by American bombs dropped on the ship transporting him to Japan.

Owed a moral obligation! Served well though ill-treated, subjected to painful prejudice! Lied to and cheated and sent to die, for a foreign flag in their native sky! Yet they remained steadfastly loyal!

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, isn't it high time the Filipino soldiers who fought for America in World War II, be rewarded, if only for their loyalty? I know it will probably be a question of money again. Former Congressman Stump who headed this Committee during his time in Congress, once asked, "And where do you suggest we get the money to pay the Filipino veterans?" My answer to that is, "from the same source which funds the Iraq war. The Iraqis have not done anything in defense of America. In fact most of them hate us, and even as we speak, are trying their best to kill American soldiers. On the other hand, the Filipino veterans fought for America and their shabby treatment notwithstanding, have remained loyal and ever ready to stand by America.

How loyal was the Filipino soldiers to America? Ask Col Ramsey, the living testimony to their loyalty. If had been in another country in World War II they would have turned him over to the enemy, or worse kill him and collect the prize money on his head. Yet today, he is here with us because the Filipinos remained loyal to the U.S.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee. That concludes my testimony today.