

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FILIPINO VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II CONGRESSIOAL GOLD MEDAL

History

The First Philippine Republic was founded as a result of the Spanish- American War in which Filipino revolutionaries and the American military fought to overthrow Spanish colonial rule. On January 23rd, 1899, with the adoption of the Malolos Constitution, Filipinos declared the Philippines as an independent and sovereign nation. The Treaty of Paris negotiated between the United States and Spain, ignored this declaration of independence and the United States paid Spain twenty million dollars to cede control of the Philippines to the United States.

Two days before the United States Senate ratified the treaty, fighting broke out between American forces stationed in the Philippines and Filipino nationalists, who sought independence rather than a change in colonial rulers. The end of the Philippine-American War, which officially lasted for three years from 1899 to 1902, led to the establishment of the United States civil government in the Philippines. In 1901, units of Filipino soldiers who fought for the United States against the nationalist insurrection were formally incorporated into the United States Army as the Philippine Scouts.

In 1934, after thirty-six years of U.S. colonial rule, the Philippine Independence Act, Public Law 73-127, established a ten year time-table for ending U.S. colonial rule and granting Philippine independence. Between 1934 and final independence in 1946, a period known as the Philippine Commonwealth era, the United States retained certain powers over the Philippines. These rights included complete sovereignty over Philippine foreign policy decisions as well as the right to call military forces, Filipinos organized by the newly formed Commonwealth Government into the service of the United States Armed Forces.

On December 21 1935, President of the Philippine Commonwealth, Manuel Quezon signed the National Defense Act, passed by the Philippine Assembly. General Douglas MacArthur set upon the task of creating an independent army in the Philippines, consisting of a small regular force, the Philippine Constabulary (a police force created during the American colonial period), and reservists. By July 1941, the Philippine Army had 130,000 reservists and 6,000 officers.

On July 26, 1941, as tensions with Japan rose in the Pacific, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used his authority vested in the U.S. Constitution and the Philippine Independence Act of 1934 (48 Stat. 457) to “call into service of the United States...all of the organized military forces of the Government of the Philippines.” On July 27th, 1941, in accordance with a War Department directive received a day earlier, the United States Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) was established and Manila was designated as the command headquarters. Commander of USAFFE, General Douglas MacArthur planned to absorb the entire Philippine Army into the USAFFE in phases. The first phase inducted on September 1st 1941 included 25,000 men and 4,000 officers.

Filipinos who served in the USAFFE included: the Philippine Scouts, who comprised half of the 22,532 soldiers in the Philippine Department, or U.S. Army garrison stationed in the islands at the start of the war, the Philippine Commonwealth Army, the new Philippine Scouts, or Filipinos who volunteered to serve with the U.S. Army when U.S. forces returned to the island, Filipino civilians who volunteered to serve in the U.S. Armed forces in 1945 and 1946, and who became “attached” to various U.S. Army units, and the “Guerrilla Services” who had fought throughout the war, behind enemy lines. Even after hostilities had ceased, wartime service of the new Philippine Scouts continued as a matter of law until the end of 1946, and the force gradually disbanded and was disestablished in 1950.

On December 8th, 1941, 24 hours after Pearl Harbor, Japanese Imperial forces attacked U.S. Army bases just outside of Manila and in Iba, a provincial capital of Zambales. Within two days of the air raids, Japanese forces invaded on foot, landing on the northern tip and western coast of Luzon and, in the southern part of the archipelago, on the southern coast of Mindanao. Despite attempts by U.S. forces stationed in the Philippines, which included over 11,000 Filipinos enlisted in the U.S. Army, the Philippines fell within six months.

In the spring of 1942, the Japanese 14th Army overran the Bataan Peninsula and after a heroic but futile defense more than 78,000 U.S. troops were captured, 66,000 Filipinos and 12,000 Americans. Japanese transferred the captured soldiers from Bataan to Camp O'Donnell, in what is known as the infamous Bataan Death March. Forced to march the seventy-mile distance in one week, without adequate food, water, or medicine, nearly 700 American soldiers perished during the journey and estimates of 6,000 to 10,000 Filipinos.

After the fall of the Bataan Peninsula, the Japanese Army turned its sights on Corregidor. The estimated forces in defense of Corregidor totaled 13,000, and comprised of American and Filipino troops. Of this number, 800 were killed, 1,000 were wounded, and 11,000 were captured and forced to march through the city of Manila after which they were distributed to various POW camps. The rest escaped to organize or join an underground guerrilla Army.

Even before the fall of Corregidor, Philippine resistance, guerrilla armies began to wage warfare on the Japanese invaders: guerrilla armies from Northern Luzon to Mindanao, raided Japanese camps stealing weapons and supplies, sabotaged and ambushed Japanese troops on the move, and, though with little weapons and severely outmatched in numbers, small guerrillas armies managed to extract victories. In October of 1942, in Benguet guerrillas captured a Japanese garrison, in La Union they fought and killed two truck-loads of Japanese soldiers, and in Bicol guerrillas retook a town, Daet, from Japanese forces.

From the time the Japanese invaded until the return of U.S. forces in the summer of 1944, Filipinos continued to fight against Japanese forces. According to a 1944 U.S. Army report, based on the testimony of an American U.S. Army Lieutenant that had escaped Bataan, there were around 300,000 guerrillas in Central Luzon alone. The guerrilla movement against the Japanese was so strong, in 1942 the Imperial Army formed the *Morisita Butai*, a unit designated to suppress guerrillas.

Japanese intelligence reports reveal that guerrillas: routinely fired on and launched surprise attacks against Japanese troops, destroyed bridges and constructed obstacles on roads, cut electric wires, set Japanese homes and garrisons on fire, attacked power plants, reservoirs, and airfields and continually attempted to lure Japanese units into locations where guerrillas could launch surprise attacks. Guerrilla attacks were so relentless, Japanese forces continually spent time and resources attempting to track down guerrilla leaders and armies.

Philippine guerrillas also worked to lessen the brutality of Japanese occupation on the broader civilian population. In areas where the guerrilla movement was particularly strong, guerrilla's even established civil governments that printed money, planned food production and distribution, and produced counter-propaganda against the Japanese. Likewise the civilian population worked hard to sustain the guerrilla resistance. Many Filipino women served as guerrillas and fought alongside Filipino men while others formed auxiliary groups attached to guerrilla units and provided medical aid and supplies.

Because Philippine guerrillas worked to restore communication with U.S. forces in the Pacific, MacArthur was able to use the guerrillas in advance of a conventional operation. Guerrillas also provided MacArthur's HQs with valuable information. Guerrillas captured and transmitted to MacArthur's HQs Japanese Naval Plans for the Central Pacific, including their defense plans for the Marianas islands. Intelligence derived from guerrillas on aircraft, ship, and troop movements allowed for Allied forces to attack Japanese supply lines and guerrillas even directed U.S. submarines where to land agents and cargo on the Philippine coast.

On December 20, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Amendments Act, Public Law 77-360, which, among other things, allowed Filipinos in the United States to enlist in the Armed Forces. In February 1942, President Roosevelt issued the Second War Powers Act, promising a simplified naturalization process for Filipinos who served in the U.S. military, 16,000 Filipinos in California alone, decided to enlist.

The mobilization of forces included the activation and assumption of command of the First Filipino Infantry Battalion on April 1, 1942 at Camp San Luis Obispo, California. Orders were issued to activate the First Filipino Infantry Regiment and Band at Salinas, California, effective July 13, 1942. The activation of the Second Filipino Infantry Regiment occurred at Fort Ord, California, on November 21, 1942. Nearly 9,000 Filipinos and Filipino Americans fought in the U.S. Army 1st and 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiments.

Soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments participated in the bloody combat and mop-up operations at New Guinea, Leyte, Samar, Luzon and the Southern Philippines. In 1943, under the orders of General Courtney Whitney, 800 men were selected from the 1st and 2nd Regiments and shipped to Australia to receive training in intelligence gathering, sabotage, and demolition. Reorganized as part of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, this group was sent into the Philippines to coordinate with major guerrilla armies in the Islands. Filipino servicemen of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion also: took part in raids,

captured Japanese weapons and equipment, locate mined waters, repulsed “enemy landings in guerrilla territory to save survivors of damaged United States aircrafts and ships,” and helped Prisoners of War escape. Members of the 1st Regiment were also attached to the U.S. 6th Army “Alamo Scouts,” a reconnaissance group that traveled 30 miles behind enemy lines to free Allied prisoners from the Cabanatuan death camp on January 30, 1945. In addition to aiding the raid on Cabanatuan, in 1945, according to the 441st Counter Intelligence Unit of the U.S. Armed Forces, Philippine guerrillas provided “very important information and sketches of enemy positions and installations” for the liberation of the Santo Tomas prisoner of war camp an event that made front page news across the United States.

In March 1944, the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment was reorganized as the 2nd Filipino Infantry Battalion (Separate). The 2nd Filipino Infantry Battalion entered the Pacific arena in June of 1944. Though the unit was never assigned to battle, the 2nd Battalion served as a pool of “Philippine specialists” and supplied personnel to higher echelons.

Rescission Acts

Filipinos participated in the war out of national pride as well as out of a commitment to the allied forces struggle against fascism. Because they were originally considered as part of the allied struggle, President Roosevelt’s July 26, 1941 military order stated that Filipinos who served in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines were entitled to full veterans’ benefits. President Roosevelt’s guarantee to pay back the service of Filipinos through veterans’ benefits was reversed by the Rescission Acts of 1946 (Public Law 79-301 and 79-391), which deemed that the wartime service of Commonwealth Army of the Philippines and the new Philippine Scouts, was not considered active and therefore did not qualify for benefits.

The Acts denied Filipino veterans access to health care and limited service-connected disability and death compensation for Filipino veterans to 50 percent of what their American counterparts received.

To date, Filipino World War II veterans are precluded from receiving most of the veterans’ benefits that were available to them prior to 1946, and that are available to all other veterans of our armed forces regardless of race, origin, or citizenship status. Filipino veterans only receive certain benefits under Title 38, United States Code, and depending on where they legally reside, are paid such benefit amounts at reduced rates.

These loyal and valiant men fought, suffered, and in many instances, died in the same manner and under the same commander as other members of the United States Armed Forces during World War II.