



World War II Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund: February 16, 2010 Deadline to File a Claim

by I.C. Go

President Barack Obama signed into law the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (Pub.L. 111-5) on February 17, 2009. A provision in the stimulus bill called for releasing \$198 million through the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to Filipino veterans who served with American troops in World War II.

The veterans are eligible for one-time lump-sum payments of \$9,000 for non-U.S. citizens and \$15,000 for Filipino Veterans with U.S. citizenship. **Only surviving veterans and not the families of deceased veterans are eligible.** According to the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, an estimated 15,000 of these veterans are still alive. Because claims must be submitted by Feb. 16, 2010 (a year after the bill's signing), Filipino veterans worldwide need to be informed.

The one-time payment is an additional benefit and does not affect existing benefits the applicant may already be receiving as a veteran or from other U.S. government assistance programs. The VA regional office in Manila provides approximately \$15 million monthly to Veterans living in the Philippines. Each month, about \$8 million of this goes to Filipino World War II Veterans or their survivors.

I was in the Philippines when I heard the news. All of the Filipinos I was with at the time exclaimed that it was about time the Filipino veterans received some kind of benefit for their service to the U.S. during war time. They felt that so many of them had already died waiting in vain but at least there were those who lived long enough to be acknowledged for their service.

During World War II, the Philippines was a U.S. commonwealth and the U.S. military promised full veterans benefits to Filipinos who volunteered to fight. More than 250,000 Filipinos volunteered. In 1946, President Truman signed the Rescission Act, which ended that promise.

Truman acknowledged to the House and Senate then that "The record of the Philippine soldiers for bravery and loyalty is second to none. Their assignment was as bloody and difficult as any in which our American soldiers engaged. Under desperate circumstances they acquitted themselves nobly. There can be no question but that the Philippine veteran is entitled to benefits bearing a reasonable relation to those received by the America veteran, with whom he fought side by side. From a practical point of view, however, it must be acknowledged that certain benefits granted by the GI bill of rights cannot be applied in the case of the Philippine veteran."

There is no denying that granting full veterans benefits to the quarter of a million Filipinos was a costly proposition in the wake of a costly war. Filipinos veterans and their supporters had been fighting for full benefits for decades. Bills were stuck in Congress. Sixty years later, Sen. [Daniel] Inouye, D-Hawaii, in the Senate added the text in the stimulus bill, calling it "a matter of honor."

Patrick Ganio, 88, and president of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, emphasized, "it does not correct the injustice and discrimination done to us 60 years ago. ... We were not granted school benefits. We were not granted hospital benefits. ... And in the 60 years, several billion dollars were saved by the U.S. government for not paying 250,000 of us. ... Now we are only 15,000. And the amount that they're giving us is a small amount. But we appreciate that. Because it will finally recognize our services ... as active service in the armed forces of the United States."

On the way home to the U.S. in March 2009 I noticed an elderly Filipino man with a World War II veteran cap. I struck up a conversation with him and confirmed that he was indeed a Filipino veteran who served in World War II. **Guillermo Ragot Roa** was part of the Liberation Forces in 1945 (Mindanao, HQ 2nd battalion, 34th infantry, 24th division). He had just turned 84. I asked him how he felt about the new law and he said that it will help the surviving veterans and that he was happy about it. However, he was not sure if he was qualified to file a claim.

The following are eligibility requirements as posted on the United States Embassy in Manila web site on May 15, 2009:

- Persons who served before July 1, 1946, in the organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, while such forces were in the service of the Armed Forces of the United States;
- Members of the organized guerrilla forces under commanders appointed, designated, or subsequently recognized by the Commander in Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, or other competent authority in the Army of the United States;
- Persons who served in the Philippine Scouts under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Voluntary Recruitment Act of 1945.
- To be eligible for the new benefit, service members in each of the three categories above must have been discharged or released from service under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Filipino WW II veterans wishing to submit a claim for this benefit should provide the following items to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (if applicable):
 - Two forms of identification such as a driver's license, birth certificate, Senior Citizen ID, Bureau of Post ID, Voter ID Card;
 - Copies of any military discharge documents showing service in one of the three qualifying types of service mentioned above.
 - Philippines Veterans Affairs Office claim number;
 - Philippines Veterans Affairs bank account number;
 - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs claim number; and
 - U.S. citizens should bring their U.S. passport if appearing in person.

In the event an eligible veteran files a claim before the February 17, 2010 deadline and passes away before the benefit is paid, a surviving spouse can claim the benefit. The surviving spouse does not have to be a U.S. citizen to receive the benefit. The amount of the benefit will be based on the citizenship of the veteran and not the surviving spouse of the deceased veteran.

It is important that the surviving veterans know about the benefit and the deadline for filing claims. The application form is free and there is no processing fee. Help spread the word.

Where to Get the Claim Form (VA Form 21-4138 Statement in Support of Claim)

- ❖ **Through the Internet:** The form can be downloaded from the VA web site (<http://www.va.gov>) or at the U.S. Embassy Manila web site (<http://manila.usembassy.gov>).

- ❖ **By Mail:** U. S. residents may call 1-800-827-1000 to receive information by mail.
- ❖ **Through Regional Offices:** Forms can be obtained from a VA Regional Office. The VA Regional Office in Manila is located at the U.S. Embassy there.

Filing a Claim

Claims with supporting documents can be submitted via mail. The application can be mailed to the VA Regional Office in Manila directly since it will be processing all claims for this benefit. If the mailer is in the Philippines, the address to use is:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
1131 Roxas Blvd.
0930 Manila, Philippines

If the mailer is in the U.S., the address to use is:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Regional Office
PSC 501
FPO AP 96515-100

A personal appearance is not required when filing a claim, but the applicant may do so in person to any VA Regional Office. If submitting in person in Manila, call (632) 528-2500 within Metro Manila or by dialing toll free 1-800-1888-5252 from outside Metro Manila but within the Philippines for an appointment. All visitors must have an appointment to be admitted to the U.S. Embassy.

References:

- ❖ *U.S. to pay 'forgotten' Filipino World War II veterans.* Retrieved May 5, 2009, from the CNN Web site: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/02/23/forgotten.veterans/>
- ❖ *Stimulus bill provides \$198 million for Filipino veterans: Congress recognizes World War II service.* Retrieved May 5, 2009, from the United States Department of Veteran Affairs Web site <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1654>
- ❖ *World War II Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund.* Retrieved May 15, 2009, from the Embassy of the United States in Manila Web site <http://manila.usembassy.gov/wwwvhs581.html>
- ❖ *Letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House Transmitting Bill on Philippine Veterans' Benefits.* Retrieved May 20, 2009, from the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum Web site <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1564&st=&st1=>

This is an online article of the **Fil-Am Bulletin**, the official newsletter of the Filipino-American Association of Greater Columbia, S. (June 2009).