

**STATEMENT OF
BRIGADIER GENERAL VICENTE G. "BEN" BLAZ, USMC (ret)**

AND

FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM GUAM

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND INSULAR
AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HEARING ON H.R. 44, THE GUAM WORLD WAR II LOYALTY
RECOGNITION ACT**

PRESENTED JULY 14, 2011

Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan and Distinguished Members of the Committee

It has always been an honor for me to be in the halls of Congress as a visitor, a witness, and a former Member. Since leaving the Congress, I have frequently told my friends that hearing rooms on the Hill are like mini-coliseums. The Members are the Caesars and the witnesses the gladiators!

When Guam was liberated in July of 1944, about 20,000 sons and daughters of Guam emerged from the concentration camps ragged and gaunt. Some joyous and singing, some quiet with guarded smiles, and others perplexed with lingering fear in their eyes! Virtually all the elders, however, were in unison, fingering their rosary beads seemingly in a race as though the ones who finished the fastest would be the first to be freed. Of the original number liberated, it is estimated that only several thousand are still alive. I am one of them. I appear before you on their behalf.

My compliments to my successors, Congressman Robert Underwood and Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo, and you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for your efforts in getting us to this juncture in our long odyssey to resolve an issue which has torn the hearts of American citizens on Guam, particularly those who survived the occupation. To Chairman Tamargo and fellow commissioners on the Guam War Claims Review Commission, I tip my hat and extend a hearty, *Si Yu'os Maase*,* for a report well researched, well documented, well written, and exceedingly well done. (**In the language of our people, this translates to "May God have mercy on you," the customary way of expressing gratitude*).

Filing cabinets here in Congress are replete with thousands of pages centered on the astonishing brutality suffered by our people during the occupation. The unspeakable evil inflicted on conquered peoples by Imperial Japanese forces during World War II pains the heart to recall. The rape of Nanking in 1937, the Bataan Death March in 1942, and the Manila Massacre in 1945 stunned the free world. Rape, forced marches, forced labor, and massacres were also inflicted on the people of Guam.

Numerically, the number of victims on Guam did not draw notice as those in China, Singapore, and the Philippines did; however, statistically, on a per capita basis, Guam was spared no quarter. That American nationals, on U.S. soil, under the American flagpole could be so brutally and cavalierly mistreated was extremely difficult for us to comprehend and accept. It may have earned us the dubious distinction of being the first Americans mistreated in this manner in our own American land. Remarkably, it appeared to me that the harsher the treatment, the deeper the devotion to the United States. The profound loyalty of the people of Guam was the subject of many writings and commentaries during and after the war. Among those who filed reports from Guam was war correspondent, Quentin Reynolds, who, after spending time in rehabilitation camps, reported, "These are real Americans. There never were any quislings on Guam." Sadly, these "real Americans" have been waylaid from receiving war reparations benefits on technicalities, their remarkable patriotic record notwithstanding.

Once again, Guam's strategic location in the western Pacific has attracted national attention. Once again, our small island, still only 30 miles long, is slated to host thousands of Marines and other military personnel and their families. In the early 1970's, I commanded the 9th Marine Regiment of about 4000 Marines stationed in Okinawa. One of the most challenging problems we had was maintaining cordial relations with the neighboring communities. Because we were in a foreign country, we were guided by the status of forces agreement between the U. S. and Japan. There is no such agreement between the armed forces on Guam and the civilian communities. Good will must prevail between the Americans on the base and the Americans outside the base.

Strategists are generally in agreement that there would be a large military contingent on Guam for the rest of this century. By the time deployments are executed, the chances are there would only be a handful of Guam war survivors still alive. The sons and daughters of the survivors and their children, many of whom are lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers and business men and women would be the leaders in our communities. Were the contentious matter of reparations continue to remain unresolved, it is not likely that the fabled hospitality of the people of Guam would be unaffected. Having agonized with their parents for many years over the lack of action concerning war reparations matters, the historic goodwill between the military and the people of Guam is likely to be in jeopardy.

Once again, as it has done in the past during World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War and other conflicts which followed, Guam, by virtue of its strategic location, will have a major role in the security and defense of the United States. No other community in the U.S., territory or state, has served the national and international security interest of the United States as consistently and loyally as Guam and its people. Per capita, more of its sons and daughters have given their lives in defense of the United States than any other community its size and population. With China and North Korea just a few time zones from Guam, its strategic importance remains indispensable. The U.S. needs Guam's help again. Meanwhile, Guam could use help now in its quest for reparation for its sufferings and losses during World War II.

When Guam was captured and occupied in World War II, it changed our lives on Guam profoundly and, for some, permanently. In accordance with national and international practice, custom, and tradition, we sought reparation not for broken homes but for broken bones. It has been a long journey on a trail with too many crossroads.

I was 13 when the journey started. I am now 83.