
Defense Report

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The Philippine Scouts—Good Soldiers Who Should Not Be Forgotten

When the United States seized the Philippine Islands from Spain at the turn of the Century it found it needed local troops to maintain security. The Philippine Scouts were formed and one of their earliest successes was the capture of the guerilla leader Aguinaldo. They later played a major role in bringing the fierce Moro tribesmen under control.

By 1920 their importance to the United States had grown to the point that the Scouts became part of the Regular Army of the United States. Formed at a strength of 6,000, with both American and Filipino officers, the Scouts had two infantry regiments with all necessary support, two coast artillery regiments in the harbor defenses of Manila and, finally, a cavalry regiment.

In 1941, as World War II loomed on the horizon, the strength of the Scouts was doubled to 12,000 and a number of U.S. Army units were sent to the islands to bolster their defenses. When the Japanese attacked the Philippines the Scouts earned the admiration of their American comrades, inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Japanese and only surrendered when ordered to do so. Even then, many Scouts fled into the jungles to carry on guerilla actions against the Japanese throughout the balance of the war.

When they became part of the United States Army pay for the Scouts was set at the rate of one Philippine peso for each dollar paid to American soldiers of the same rank. When an American private was paid \$21 per month his Filipino counterpart got 21 pesos. It was a bargain for the United States. The peso was worth just 50 cents so the Filipino soldiers served for what amounted to half pay.

Now there are hundreds of former Scouts and widows of Scouts who are attempting to exist on pensions based on that original pay scale and, like all people with a fixed pension income, they are caught in the grip of inflation.

Legislation to provide some relief for these deserving people has been introduced into the U.S. Congress but has not even had a committee hearing. It would pay each living former Scout, or his eligible survivor, a lump sum equal to the difference in pay he would have received from December 6, 1941 to December 31, 1946 if he had been paid in dollars rather than in pesos. Any who served long enough to retire from the U.S. Army would have their retired pay recomputed on the U.S. dollar rate for the same grade and length of service. The total cost would be small.

What started as a bargain has now become a serious inequity. The former Scouts have no one to speak for them but an appreciative American Public and Congress. That appreciation should be manifested quickly.