

Sergeant Jose Calugas, Congressional Medal of Honor

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The United States Army has a rich and colorful military history. Great men and women gave the ultimate sacrifice in defense of this great country. The Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) has always been at the tip of the spear. A great example is the NCOs of the Philippine Scouts. Originally inducted back in 1901 by authority of the United States Congress, the 6,000 Philippine Scouts were inducted into the regular U.S. Army as a result shortage of Soldiers during World War I. Additionally, the scouts provided the necessary skills and proved to be a combat multiplier during the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection.

The scouts were all volunteer natives. Well versed on the terrain and considered jungle experts, they were the perfect weapons in the Philippines. The enlisted troops were generally under the command of American officers; however, a handful of Filipinos did received commissions from the United States Military Academy. The Philippine Scouts had several famous commanders. Among them is Major General Douglas MacArthur (1928-1930 and 1941). Major General Lucius Roy Holbrook (1936-1938), Lieutenant General Mayhew Wainwright IV (1941-1942).

Although the scouts were battle proven in the south against the Muslim Moro, the remained segregated until 1920. The Philippine Scouts were then redesignated as the 43<sup>rd</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments, plus the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment and the 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. Service and support units assigned as costal artillery, medical, and quartermaster units. The Philippine Scout was under the tactical control of the U.S. Army Forces – Far East (USAFFE). During that time, the unit consisted of 22,532 troops. Of the 1,340 officers, 775 were reservist. Seven thousand two hundred ninety three troops assigned to the infantry and 4,967 assigned to the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bay. Less than 2,500

troops served in a service or supply position, mainly quartermaster or medical units. The vast majority of the troops stationed in the island of Luzon.

The duties and responsibilities of the Noncommissioned Officers have not change in the United States Army since June 14, 1775. The training, caring and discipline of troops has always been the charge of the Noncommissioned officers. It was true in the Philippines Scouts. As stated before, American officers led the scouts and the enlisted men were all natives. The Filipino Noncommissioned officers in the Philippine scouts epitomized our Army values. Being battle harden and jungle experts, they trained not only their Soldiers, but also the officers with necessary skills in jungle warfare. They ensured that their Soldiers are physically fit for combat and proficient in marksmanship. Additionally, lessons learned from fighting with the Moro dictated that they become expert on hand-to-hand combat.

Tough love was a common term for these Noncommissioned Officers. They believe that by training their troops to high standards of combat readiness will prepare them for the hardships of actual combat. The NCOs way of showing that, they care for their troops. Cuddling of troops was never in their vocabulary. Although, compared to our current standards the scout Noncommissioned Officers were borderline abusive to the troops because they enforce strict discipline and do not tolerate insubordination. A whip from a kali stick for insubordination was common during those days. The NCOs believe that the discipline of troops is their charge and taking it to the Officer level was only the last resort. Although the life of a scout trooper was hard, desertion in the ranks was very low. It was a direct reflection of the superb leadership and professionalism of the Noncommissioned Officers.

The scouts just like our current Army went through several transformations. Examples of it are their weapons. During their initial induction into the U.S. Army, the scouts had the 1903 Springfield rifle. It was a very accurate weapon, chambered with a 30-06 caliber round. Patterned after the Model 98 Mauser, a well-trained scout can knock out a target from 100-yards without any problem. This rifle was a standard issue for all scouts. Although the Army replaced it with the M-1 Garand in 1936, some units kept their rifles and used them as sniper rifles.

The M-1 Garand became the standard issue weapon for the scouts in 1936. A heavy battle rifle, it is also chambered with .30-06 caliber (7.62x63 mm). The weapon was gas operated shouldered fired. It was the first semi-automatic rifle to become standard infantry rifle. The rifle held eight rounds using an "en block" ammunition clip. Again, the scouts trained and became proficient on this rifle. It gave an average infantry rifle squad additional sustained, accurate rate of fire and added a distance of 550 meters.

In addition to the standard issue rifle, the scout NCO was also issued the Colt M1911 caliber .45 pistols. It is a single action, semi-automatic handgun. The pistol came in response to the units fighting Moro insurgents during the Philippine-American war. Then the standard .38 caliber (.38 long colt) revolver was inappropriate for the rigors of jungle warfare, particularly in terms of stopping power. The Moros had a high combat moral and regularly used local drugs to reduce the sense of pain.

It is interesting to not though that the most preferred weapon of the scouts is the jungle bolo. Relatively easy to make with a skilled artisan, the scouts considered this weapon the most important weapon during hand-to-hand combat engagements. Silent and deadly, a jungle bolo can severe a man's body in two with just one hack.

On the eighth/ of December 1941, the Japanese carrier planes bombed the main bases of the American Far East and Asiatic Fleet in the Philippines. From December 8 to 10, sprinkled but heroic fight back by ground troops and remaining American Air and Naval forces failed to stop diversionary landings at Bataan Island, Appari, Vigan, Legaspi, Davao, and Jolo. Preceding a main landing on December 21, 1941 at Lingayen gulf in Pangasinan and Lamon Bay, Tayabas by the 14<sup>th</sup>/ Japanese Imperial Army led by Lt. General Masaharu Homma.

The enemy hurled back the forces of General Douglas MacArthur. In the face of this offensive, General MacArthur ordered a fighting retreat by all units to Bataan; at which point the defending forces in accordance to War Plan Orange-3 would regroup and make an indefinite stand. The idea of War Plan Orange-3 was to holdup invading enemy forces until the U.S. Pacific Fleet reorganizes at full strength and fights its way to the Philippines. Unfortunately, the Japanese forces destroyed Pacific Fleet in Pear Harbor, so no aid came to the troops in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Manuel L. Quezon, the President of the Philippine Commonwealth, together with his family and staff evacuated to Corregidor, as well as all USAFFE military personnel removed from all major urban areas. The city of Manila declared an open city to avoid destruction. The Japanese forces occupied it on January 2, 1942.

From January 1-5, 1942, as the entire USAFFE converged from south to north, delaying actions conducted to allow struggling withdrawal to Bataan. The bloodiest occurred at the Porac-Guagua line, where the 11<sup>th</sup>/ and 21<sup>st</sup>/ Divisions, respectively led by Brig. Generals William E. Brougher and Mateo Capinpin. The 26<sup>th</sup>/ Cavalry of COL Clinton A. Pierce in reserved, held the line, mostly on open and unprepared ground, against massive aerial and

artillery bombardment, strong tank assaults, and infantry banzai attacks by the Takahashi and Tanaka Detachments. Both side suffered heavy casualties.

One of the heroes of the scouts is SGT Jose Calugas. He was born in the province of Iloilo, Philippine Islands on 29 December 1909. He entered the service and went to Basic Combat Training in Fort William McKinley. SGT Calugas proved himself as a Soldier and subsequently promoted through the ranks. He eventually promoted to Sergeant and assigned to Battery B of the 88<sup>th</sup>/ Field Artillery, Philippine Scouts. On the sixth / of January 1942, at Culis, Bataan Province Sergeant Calugas observed the bombing, shelling of a nearby scout gun position until it was out of commission, and its crew killed or wounded. Sergeant Calugas without orders ran 1,000 yards through direct and indirect fire to the gun position. There he organized a volunteer squad, which placed the gun back into operation. The gun crew fired effectively against the advancing Japanese Soldiers, thereby saving countless lives of fellow Soldiers. Sergeant Jose Calugas awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions that day.

Sergeant Jose Calugas survived the battle of Bataan, but was taken as a prisoner of war and was one of the thousands of American and Filipino Soldiers that was sent to join the famous Bataan Death March. He survived the war to retire from the United States Army with the rank of Major. He died on December 1999. His family donated his medal to the Fort Sam Museum and a street in Fort Sam Houston, Texas was dedicated in his name.

I was lucky enough to interview my uncle, Sergeant Cecil Alba (U.S. Army – Retired). He was one of the Philippine Scout Soldiers that taken prisoner in Bataan. Their order of the day was to march or die from Bataan to Cabanatuan. He bared witness to the atrocities of the Japanese Soldiers. For over a year and a half he endured hunger, disease, and torture in the hands of the enemy. Until one, he was part of a work detail just outside the camp when a group

of local guerilla force suddenly attacked the camp. He was lucky enough to be rescue and nursed back to health. In talking to my uncle, he told me that he never once lost faith that General MacArthur will be back and liberate the Philippines as he promised.

My uncle joined the guerrilla group and continued to conduct raids, ambushes, and intelligence gathering for the American Headquarters in Australia. When General Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippines October 1944, my uncle was one of the proud Scouts that met him at the beach of Leyte.

There are many more like Sergeant Jose Calugas and my uncle Sergeant Cecil Alba. They are truly warriors they lived the Army values. It is my hope and prayers that our grateful nation never forgets the sacrifices they paid for our freedom.

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