

EXPLAINER: THE GUERRILLA ROSTER



THE FILIPINO VETERANS RECOGNITION
AND EDUCATION PROJECT

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Among the most important and fascinating historical documents from World War II is the roster of Filipino guerillas. Because it was classified for almost 75 years, the Guerilla Roster is little known by most Americans, but it's a key part of the story of the war in the Philippines *and* the fight for justice and equity for Filipino veterans.

As many as 260,000 Filipinos served as guerillas during World War II. Some served in large and well-organized forces that functioned like armies and stayed in close contact with America's temporary headquarters in Australia. Such units included Filipinos trained by the U.S. armed forces and American soldiers who stayed behind. Others built guerrilla movements from the grassroots. They had little experience and few connections to the U.S. military, but they mobilized peasants' discontent toward their landlords and drew on the long tradition of Filipino nationalism that dated back to the revolution of the 1890s. Many sought revenge against Japanese occupiers for their atrocities against Filipino civilians. Some units allowed women to serve; many women served as nurses and filled other crucial non-combatant roles, though Filipina women did serve in combat roles, and at a higher rate than in many other theaters of the war. General MacArthur, from his command in Australia, declared that members of the organized guerilla groups were part of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE). The status of outlaw guerilla groups was less clear.

Guerillas collected intelligence and undermined the Japanese. They used the tools of guerrilla warfare: hit-and-run ambushes, sniper attacks, and kidnappings that targeted Japanese soldiers on patrol. Guerrillas sabotaged Japanese military equipment and infrastructure. Guerillas depended on local civilians for food, shelter, and intelligence.

In June 1945, after the liberation of the Philippines, the Americans established the "Recovered Personnel Division" (RDP) to locate, recover and take care of U.S. and other Allied military and civilian personnel who had been captured by the Japanese. The RDP was also tasked with gathering personal information on civilians employed by the Army during the war, guerillas and POWs. The RDP's records would be key to determining who had served in the war, and therefore who was owed pay, pensions and other benefits. They were also often the only records of Filipina women's service in the war effort.

The RDP records, especially those concerning guerillas, are fascinating. Typically U.S. military records were much more organized, but the nature of the conflict in the Philippines, where most of the trained American military withdrew, leaving behind POWs and guerilla fighters, meant that wartime records had to be assembled after-the-fact. Documents produced during the war indicate the wartime paper shortage: records were often recorded on brown paper bags or on the backs of letters, sales receipts, court documents, and food labels. More than 350,000 people, civilians and guerillas, were interviewed by the RDP after the war. The Philippine Archives Collection, now housed at the U.S. National Archives, totals 1,665 boxes.



In 1949, the U.S. classified the guerilla roster. This meant that the thousands of Filipino men and women who fought with the guerillas had no documentation of their service. Further, it meant it was impossible for these veterans to claim benefits. It was only in 2009, after the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund was established, that the guerilla roster was declassified. Retired Major General Antonio Taguba was key to the effort to release these records, pressing the Army and the V.A. for documents that would help veterans prove their eligibility for compensation.

In 2015, the government of the Philippines sent a team of archivists to the United States to digitize the collections; due to time and financial constraints, they only digitized the Guerilla Roster (about 270 boxes and 270,000 documents). These digital records were posted online by the Philippine military, so that veterans and descendants based in the Philippines don't have to travel to Washington, D.C. to find these important service records. The digitized collection can be found here: <http://collections.pvao.mil.ph/>

Note: "Roster" is sort of a misleading term; it sounds as if there's one long list of all people who fought as guerillas, when in fact there are thousands of pages, corresponding to hundreds of units. The roster includes lists of those who served, questionnaires with guerillas, histories of each unit's wartime service, and U.S. Army personnel's recommendations for whether or not to recognize the service of the units.

Activists' efforts began to bear fruit, though their victories were incomplete and took many years. Immigration laws passed in the 1980s and 1990s finally allowed Filipino veterans to naturalize as U.S. citizens. In 2009, as part of the omnibus stimulus bill passed by President Obama, Senator Daniel Inouye, a Japanese American veteran who had long been a champion of Filipino veterans, succeeded in earmarking funds that would provide modest one-time payments to living Filipino veterans.

SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES

- › Start by reviewing the experiences and contributions of guerillas in the Philippines during World War II. Be sure to emphasize the risk that guerillas took by resisting the Japanese, and to review the kinds of services guerillas performed. If time allows, students can read through the online exhibit *Under One Flag*, which includes oral history interviews, primary sources and background information on Filipino guerillas. <https://exhibition.dutytocontry.org/the-crucible-of-war/guerrillas/>
- › Ask students to carefully examine the questionnaire with Jose Gonzales Geronimo, who was part of a guerilla unit in the East Luzon Guerilla Area during the war (you may want to have students identify Luzon on a map). The focus questions will help them draw out information from the record.
- › After examining the document, share details from the Teacher Background, above, about why and when this record was created and the larger context of the Guerilla Roster. Discuss with students



the stakes of the guerilla roster’s classification and declassification, especially as it relates to compensation for Filipino veterans.

- › We strongly suggest pairing a look at the historical document below with listening to one or more of the oral histories of Filipino veterans who served as guerillas, especially that of Celestino Almeda. Almeda was a long-time activist for Filipino veterans’ recognition and equity; he received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2017 at the age of 103 and spoke at the ceremony in Washington, D.C. <https://dutytocountry.org/project/celestino-almeda/> Ciriaco Ladines, one of the 7,000 “Anderson Guerillas” who refused to surrender at Bataan and organized under Lt. Col. Bernard Anderson, also recounts combat as a veteran; we recommend using clips of his interview with students: <https://dutytocountry.org/project/ciriaco-ladines/>.
- › If time allows, have students comb through the digitized Philippines Archive Collection and look for examples of different kinds of service performed by the guerillas and the general difficulties of life in the occupied Philippines. <http://collections.pvao.mil.ph/Guerilla/Overview>

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Common Core: Middle School

- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9 Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

Common Core: High School

- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE OF JOSE GONZALES GERONIMO, 1947

After the war, the U.S. military set about collecting records of wartime service in the Philippines. Between 1945 and 1949, they interviewed approximately 350,000 people, the vast majority of them guerillas. The records include lists of guerillas, questionnaires, short histories of guerilla units' wartime experiences, and Army personnel's recommendations about whether or not to recognize each unit's service. The records were classified in 1949 and remained so until 2009, when they were declassified so that Filipino veterans could prove their eligibility for payments from the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund. This is one such record from the vast Guerilla Roster.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 883078

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE
UNIT INVESTIGATIONS

Date 23 May 1947

To be filled out by the Contact Team upon investigating the individual members

1. Name of individual being interviewed (Print) Jose Gonzales Geronimo
Address Sta Elena Hagonoy, Dulacan
2. Name of unit being investigated. (Sqd, Pltn, Co, Bn, etc) Company
3. Location of unit Sta Elena Hagonoy Dulacan
4. What was your period of service with this unit? From April 1945 to October 1945
Were you a member of any other guerilla organization? No
Reason for break in service, if any Not recognized
5. What was your highest rank? 1st Sergeant
6. What were your duties with the unit? Platoon Sergeant
7. Who was your platoon leader? 1st Lt. Maximo C. Reyes
Who was your company commander? Capt. Jacinto Feliciano
Who was your battalion commander? Major Dominador Austria
Who was your regimental commander? 1st Col. Mariano Tallano
Who was your overall commander? 1st Col. Edwin P. Ramsey
8. Where were your quarters while serving with the unit? in the field
9. How was your family cared for and supported while you were a guerilla?
Supported by my parents
10. How often did you visit your family and how long did you stay? Once a month
11. While you were with the unit, in what activities did you engage? Combat
Subotage
12. What activities other than purely military did you engage in while a guerilla? None
13. Combat: (Most important) Location Sta Cruz, Pangasinan August 13, 1945
Time 7:00 AM Against whom Japanese
Strength of enemy Two Platoon Number of weapons your unit had in this engagement 45 Number of men with you in this engagement 49 Casualties: Japanese undetermined your unit 2
14. How many weapons did your unit have? 1942 None 1943 40 1944 all as med 1945 all as med How secured? Bartered, buying & confiscating
Weapons on hand now? None Were any turned in? all To whom U.S.A.



15. While with the unit were you armed? Yes Kind Guerrilla
 To whom did it belong? To our Unit

16. How many men were in your unit? 1942 None 1943 Complete 1944 Complete 1945 Complete

17. Have you or any other member of this unit been officially recognized by the United States as a member of another guerrilla unit? None
 With what unit? None

18. Period of recognition None
 Were you ever paid? Yes How much? None

19. From whom did your unit receive its orders? Regimental Command

20. Have you ever been employed by the Japanese Army; Japanese Navy; the Japanese controlled constabulary; the Japanese controlled civil government; any agency controlled by the Japanese during the occupation? Yes
 IF ANSWER IS "YES"

a. The name of the organization, agency, or firm for which you worked.
None

b. The date you were employed and the date you were transferred, discharged, released, or quit None

c. Your duties while working for the above mentioned organization None

d. Amount paid None

e. Your reason for accepting employment None

21. To what American unit were you attached, if any? 1st Inf. 6th Div. U.S.A.
 From April 1945 To October 1945 Duties during this period of attachment Combat & patrol
 Amount paid None
 Certificate of attachment? with the record of 32nd Inf. ECLGA

22. Any further remarks about the unit? None of the members of the unit was recognized

I certify that the statements made by me in the foregoing questionnaire are true to the best of my knowledge and given without fear or promise.

Jose G. Geronimo
 (Signature of person interviewed)

GAD G-3 Form #10
 October 1946

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Source: 32nd Infantry Regt., Bataan Military District (BMD), East Central Luzon Guerilla Area (ECLGA), File Number 308-20, Box Number 507, National Archives ID 1431822, 1941-1948; online at Philippine Archives Collection <http://collections.pvao.mil.ph/>.

Focus Question:

- > What kind of service did Jose Gonzales Geronimo perform as a guerilla? How long was he a guerilla?
- > What kind of weapons did Jose's unit have, and how were they acquired?
- > How did the conditions for Gonzales' unit change over the course of the war?
- > What was the effect of classification of this and other records from the Guerilla Roster, for Filipino veterans?

