

The Hon. Ben Garrido Blaz
Former Member of Congress (1985-1993)

Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 1595,
A Bill to Implement the Recommendations of the
Guam War Claims Review Commission
April 20, 2005

Chairman Pombo and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify in today's hearing on H. R. 1595, the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act. I thank also my successors, Congressman Robert Underwood and Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo, for their commitment to resolving an issue so dear to the hearts of the people of Guam. They have carried the torch for Guam higher and higher with each passing year to get us to where we are today.

Once again, I tip my hat to Chairman Tamargo, his fellow commissioners on the Guam War Claims Review Commission, and its Executive Director. Much was expected from the Commission and much was delivered - a report well researched, well documented, well written, and exceedingly well done.

This question in the Disclosure Requirement form that witnesses are required to complete always brings a smile whenever I see it: What training and educational experience qualifies you to testify on the subject of the hearing? My response over the years remains unchanged: "on-the-job training under duress at a forced labor camp and involuntary attendance at a school of hard knocks under the hateful eyes of hostile guards in enemy occupied territory." I have never been peremptorily challenged so I trust that I am a qualified witness.

When I read the Bill a few days ago, the short title, the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act, caused an immediate flashback to 1945, the year World War II ended. In Europe, the Norwegians wasted no time convicting their war-time Minister President, Vidkun Quisling, for betraying his country to Hitler and executed him by firing squad. Instantly, the name Quisling became synonymous with traitor and was entered as part of the lexicon of World War II.

At about the same time in the Pacific Theater, Quentin Reynolds, one of the most prolific and popular correspondents in World War II, wrote a piece about Guam. The substance of his piece is embodied in these two short sentences: These are real Americans. There never were any Quislings on Guam. By contrasting the loyalty to America by the people of Guam to Quisling's disloyalty to Norway, Mr. Reynolds captured the intensity of the people of Guam's steadfast loyalty to the United States during World War II despite deprivation and threats by occupying forces. I can attest to Mr. Reynolds's characterization of our people. The "Loyalty Recognition" embodied in HR. 1595 is a welcomed gesture of acknowledgement.

In its report, the Review Commission highlighted the shining loyalty of the people of Guam which sustained them during the difficult years of occupation. This loyalty and appreciation for their liberation made many of them hesitant to seek compensation for death, injuries, and damages in the years immediately following liberation. As one of our elders put it, when someone saves you from drowning, you do not turn around and demand payment for broken bones sustained during your rescue.

There was a major shift in the sentiments of our people when it became obvious that the United States was seemingly more concerned with war reparations for the natives of the former Japanese mandated islands in Micronesia than for the loyal American citizens on Guam. The rationale that, on the question of war reparations, different laws apply to U.S. nationals and U.S. citizens as opposed to foreigners, was not persuasive to the Guamanians, many of whom felt betrayed by the U. S. (whose interests in the islands of Micronesia was largely focused on developing a political relationship with the United States which eventually became a reality).

A very significant development emerged last year when the Guam War Claims Review Commission confirmed what has long been the position of the people of Guam -- that they did not have parity with other Americans on war claims matters. The Bill before us seeks to implement the recommendations of the Commission to remedy this disparity that has long been the centerpiece of Guam's repeated appeals to Congress for resolution.

As I gave thought to today's hearing, I was surprised at my inability to recall how many times I have appeared before groups, tribunals, inquiries, and committees to testify on this very matter before us. I remember providing a statement as

a student at the University of Notre Dame. This was followed by several appearances and testimonies as a Marine officer plus a few more as a Member of Congress. I now return again, an aging veteran of three wars.

No matter the title, no matter the place, no matter the audience, I have always testified as a Chamorro son of Guam and on behalf of a generation so profoundly loyal to that country in "san lagu" (to the north) which is named America. Recollections of those days when we learned to be tolerant when things were intolerable, to be generous when there was little to give, and to smile when you wanted to cry, never fail to moist the eyes.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, Si Yu'os Maase. In the Chamorro language of our people, it translates to, May God have mercy on you.

It is our way of expressing appreciation.