

'There's no justice on the matter'

Artemio Caleda
Filipino veteran

A Filipino veteran of World War II has been waiting for 20 years to reunite his family in the U.S., but now his predicament is getting attention from high places

By Deborah Manog
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Deep wrinkles crease Artemio Caleda's face as he brushes his hand against a scar on the left side of his chin.

He calls it a souvenir — picked up during World War II while dodging a cascade of explosive particles while taking part in the rescue of an American pilot. Although the shrapnel scar is now seven decades old and faint, it serves as a stinging reminder that Caleda is still fighting a battle: to have his three grown sons join him in the United States.

"We have waited for 20 long years and no visa has been issued," said Caleda, who served as an intelligence officer of the U.S. Army's 11th Infantry Regiment, part of the Filipino Organized Guerrillas.

In an effort to address the matter, this month U.S. Sens. Mazie Hirono and Harry Reid, D-Nev., reintroduced legislation that aims to expedite the visa process for sons and daughters of Filipino World War II veterans.

Co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz and two senators from Alaska and California, the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act would exempt Filipino veterans' children, about 20,000 individuals, from a cap on immigrant visas. Because of annual limits on how many green cards are issued, the wait for an adult child's visa can continue for decades. Petitions that Caleda and his wife filed on behalf of their sons in 1995 have yet to be processed.

As a former president of Fil-Am WWII Veterans of Hawaii, Caleda has participated in rallies in Washington, D.C., and attended hearings for similar bills introduced by Democratic lawmakers. All of the past bills have failed to move through Congress.

Caleda recalled fellow veteran Rizal Agbayani, whom he said died from exhaustion shortly after returning to Hawaii from a five-day rally in Washington, D.C., in 1997.

"I remember him seated on my left side in the taxi-cab, he was complaining, 'I feel so weak,'" Caleda said. "When he was home, he collapsed, did not recover."

Hirono told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser in a statement that ending the immigration backlog for the Filipino World War II veterans has long been a priority for the Hawaii delegation.

Previously, she pushed for a measure to end that backlog as part of comprehensive immigration re-



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form. That bill passed in the Senate with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote but the legislation was killed by the leadership in the House.

"I am continuing to look for every avenue, that we can end the backlog for these veterans," Hirono said. "Time is running out."

The Filipino veterans who served in World War II, including survivors of the Bataan Death March, were offered U.S. citizenship under the 1990 naturalization act signed by President George H.W. Bush. Some veterans immigrated immediately with their spouses

Artemio Caleda, 91, of Royal Kunia, is a veteran of the U.S. Army's 11th Infantry Regiment. Filipino veterans who served in World War II were offered U.S. citizenship in 1990, but the offer did not extend to adult children of the soldiers.

Please see **VETERAN, B3**



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Artemio Caleda shows a photo taken at Christmas when most of his family was able to be together.

VETERAN: Caleda's 3 sons await their U.S. green cards

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and young children, but legislation excluded adult children.

Reid said in a statement: "Over 260,000 brave Filipino veterans made a great sacrifice and answered America's call to serve in World War II." He continued, "No service member should be prevented from reuniting with their families because of our antiquated immigration system."

Caleda and his wife, Luz, moved to Royal Kunia in 1992. At age 91, he worries that the green card applications filed on behalf of his sons will die with him.

His gaze fell to a portrait of his late wife situated next to a fresh flower bouquet and a dozen birthday cupcakes. Luz Caleda, who died last spring, would have turned 85 this month.

Two applications for family-sponsored visas were filed under Luz Caleda's name, but Emmanuel Guerrero, a local attorney, says that a humanitarian policy allows Artemio Caleda to stand in place of his wife as the petitioner without penalty.

The couple's three daughters secured student visas to study in the U.S. and now live on Oahu.

Contemplating the dimming prospects of his three sons receiving their green cards, Caleda shakes his head.

"My eldest is going to be 61 years old, the next is 58 and the other one is 54 — there's no justice on the matter," he said.

The applications of Caleda's sons and those of many of his World War II

only to Mexico in the length of its waiting list for family-sponsored visas with a queue of 399,061 applicants as of November, according to an annual report compiled by the National Visa Center. The worldwide queue stands at 4,331,750 applicants.

Earlier this year, U.S. Rep. Mark Takai introduced a bill — his first as congressman — identical to Hirono's. While grateful for the support shown to the Filipino veterans, Caleda is anxious about the proposal's chances of succeeding.

"Are we moving forward, backward, sideward or upward?" Caleda asked. "Time is of the essence."

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comrades' children fall into the family third-preference category.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is currently processing petitions of this category dating back to 1993, according to the latest Visa Bulletin from the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs.

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