

Jose Quintero

By Ed Baca, in testimony to the US Senate Judiciary

Mr. Chairman members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to tell the story about a close personal friend, a WWII Veteran who volunteered for service, and did his duty during WWII. I feel that by sharing his experience with you it will serve to emphasize what the flag means to most Americans especially those veterans who have fought and died to protect it.

Let me tell you about Jose Quintero. He was born in Corpus Christi Texas and moved to Albuquerque, NM where he currently resides. Jose like many other New Mexicans from the 200th and 515th Coastal Artillery Regiments of the New Mexico National Guard were among those who defended Bataan and Corregidor during WWII. They were attacked on December 8, by a far superior force of the 14th Japanese army. They courageously defended themselves as they slowly withdrew from the enemy advance towards Corregidor and Bataan. Promised reinforcements and supplies, which they never received, they nevertheless held the Japanese up for five long months, completely upsetting the Japanese timetable of conquest. They were finally defeated by disease, hunger, and lack of ammunition on May of 1942, having bought time for the United States to regroup for an offensive war to reconquer the Pacific.

Perhaps you already know this little history lesson. However, I'd like you to take a moment to truly imagine the fear, the exhaustion, the jungle heat, and hopelessness of their situation. My friend Jose experienced this hardship and sacrifice. And he did it with one thought in mind - to do his duty, to serve with honor, to fight for the country that he loved. This isn't just some musty old war story. It was real, and remains so to this day for Jose and his comrades. You see, loyalty and patriotism are especially strong traits of these veterans.

These men fought with courage. They went beyond courage to bravery in the face of a superior force. Courage is an admirable quality. A courageous person is able to look at adversity and to face it squarely. The courageous are full of heart. The brave take it one step further and act despite overwhelming odds in an act of self sacrifice. The brave place others before themselves. Their act is one of love and generosity.

Jose Quintera was courageous during the battle for the Philippines. He proudly did his best and honored the fighting tradition of his unit. It was in the Camps that he went beyond courage. Jose so loved his country, that he looked for a way to express that love. He wanted to honor his friends and to make a symbol for himself to prove that he had not been "broken" in spirit. Most of all he wanted to honor what he calls "The real heroes of the war," those who made the ultimate sacrifice, those dying all around him. He began a project which would have meant a torturous death to him had he been caught.

He began to scrounge material in the form of a red blanket, and white bed sheets stolen from the Japanese Guards. The blue background came from Filipino dungarees. Aided by a Canadian soldier, a double amputee who worked in the tailor shop, he began to fashion these into an

American flag. At that time Jose did not even know how many states were in the Union. He had to ask an officer to tell him the significance of the thirteen stripes and the forty-eight stars in the design. The staff was made from a Japanese prod used to discipline the prisoners. The tassels were added later and made from the parachute cord from chutes used to drop supplies into the camp after the war. This flag took him over one year to complete. He wrapped it in a piece of canvas and kept it buried in the dirt under his bunk.

Close to the end of the war they heard American bombers approaching the unmarked POW camp. Jose took his flag out in the open and waved it at the incoming aircraft. The pilot in the lead plane saw him, tipped his wing in acknowledgment, and flew past the camp. Jose risked his life to save the lives of his fellow prisoners.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, Mr. Qunitero is what peace and freedom are all about. Heroes like him and those here at my side are what have made this country great and what makes me so proud to be an American. I'm sorry that Jose could not be here today to tell you, in his own words, what the flag means to him and his fellow veterans. Thank you and may God Bless America