

Here is the Story of one Filipino United States Army Veteran whose Family recently received the Congressional Gold Medal

Sergeant First Class Joe E. Paras



Patches for 12th Infantry Division "1921-1945 Philippine Division" (Left) and Military District of Washington (Right)

Joe E. Paras was born on November 19, 1919, in Macabebe, Pampanga, Philippines.

At the outbreak of World War II, Corporal Paras was a Philippines Scout assigned to the 91st Coastal Artillery Regiment on the Island of Corregidor in Manila Bay. In the battle defending Corregidor, he miraculously survived two severe gunshot wounds to his upper torso. After five months of bitter fighting, in May of 1942 American and Filipino forces surrendered to the Japanese.



Partial Roster of Philippine Scouts - Alphabetical

DECLASSIFIED Authority 76-5013				
PANCHO JESUS	5 REPL DEPOT	PVT	10303330	
PANDAY ALFREDO	3 NP BN PS	PFC	67381199	
PANDAY ISIDORE	PS DET AP	CPL	67383665	
PANGAN LIONCIO L	1 NP BN PS	PVT	10303935	
PANGANISAN GLICERIO	5 REFL DEPOT	PVT	10304884	
PANGILINAN PAOLO	1 NP BN PS	PVT	10304980	
PANGILINAN LUIS G	2 NP BN PS	SGT	690289	
PANGILINAN JOAQUIN	2 NP BN PS	PFC	6737965	
PANGILINAN SULPICIO	2 NP BN PS	PVT	10305865	
PANGILINAN A T	2 NP BN PS	PVT	10304942	
PANGILINAN LUIS G	2 NP BN PS	2 LT O	690289	
PANGILINAN ADRIANO	1 NP BN PS	PVT		
PANGILINAN DIONISIO	5 REFL DEPOT	PFC	6866127	
PANGILINAN SULPICIO	174 S H PATDET	PVT	10305865	
PANILAGAO VICENTE	5 NP BN PS	PVT	6736902	
PANILIO ALEJANDRO	1 NP BN PS	CPL	10301580	
PANIQUE JOSE	6 NP BN PS	PFC	10301510	
PANIS EVARISTO A	CONCOR	PVT	321569	
PANOGAN ALFREDO	PS DET AP	PVT	10306754	
PANONG FAUSTO	4 REPL DEPOT	PFC	6612326	
PANOTES RICARDO	5 NP BN PS	PFC	6739243	
PANSOY PROBO P	3 NP BN PS	S SG	6739396	
PANTE ISAIAS	6 NP BN PS	PFC	6738485	
PANTIG MAGNO F	7 NP BN PS	PVT	10300543	
PANTIG MAGNO	5 REPL DEPOT	PVT	10300543	
PANTOJA RUFINO	6 NP BN PS	PFC	6611969	
PANTONIAL FERNANDO	4 NP BN PS	PVT	6866510	
PANTORILLA FERNANDO	PS DET AP	PFC	6614345	
PANUELO ENRIQUE	6 NP BN PS	PVT	6611959	
PASUAGA GUILLERMO	7 NP BN PS	CPL	6614246	
PARADAN ESPERANCO P	8 NP BN PS	PVT	10303453	
PARAFINA CORNELIO A	5 NP BN PS	PFC	6739761	
PARACATES CRISANTO B	5 NP BN PS	PVT	10300125	
PARAISO RODOLFO V	CONCOR	PVT	10304419	
PARANADA JUANITO	9 NP BN PS	PFC	10302478	
PARANADA JUANITO	311 G H PATDET	PFC	10302478	
PARANGAN H	1 NP BN PS	PVT	10305122	
PARANGAN ANDREW	1 NP BN PS	SGT	6738216	
PARAGAN ESPERANCO P	311 C H PATDET	PVT	10303453	
PARAS BENJAMIN	6 NP BN PS	PFC	6865616	
PARAS JOSE E	2 NP BN PS	PVT	10300329	
PARAYNO FILEMON	8 NP BN PS	SGT	6735909	
PARAZO RENANDRO	1 NP BN PS	SGT	10304709	





Philippine Scout Regiments became the first United States Army Units to be in Combat during World War II

Corporal Paras was taken prisoner and forced to make the arduous Bataan Death March that ended at Camp O'Donnell. About 73,000 prisoners reached the camp; though exact numbers are unknown, some 2,500 Filipinos and 500 Americans died during the march, and an additional 26,000 Filipinos and 1,500 Americans died at Camp O'Donnell. They died of disease, starvation, neglect, and brutality.



Camp O'Donnell where POWs were held

Paras survived captivity and went on to serve during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. During his Army career, Sergeant First Class Paras was stationed in California, France, Turkey, Virginia, the Pentagon during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Hawai'i, and Thailand.

Coligny Caserne, Orleans, France
US Army Communications Zone, Europe
HQ COMZEUR 1951-1969 Orleans, France Area Command



HEADQUARTERS, EUCOM, COMMUNICATIONS ZONE—Aerial view of Coligny Caserne at Orleans.



The Pentagon



The Pentagon is the headquarters building of the United States Department of Defense. As a symbol of the U.S. military, the phrase The Pentagon is also often used as a metonym for the Department of Defense and its leadership. Located in Arlington County, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., the ground was broken on 11 September 1941.

The Pentagon is the world's largest office building, with about 6.5 million square feet (150 acres; 60 ha) of floor space, of which 3.7 million sq ft (85 acres; 34 ha) are used as offices. Some 23,000 military and civilian employees, and another 3,000 non-defense support personnel, work in the Pentagon. It has five sides, five floors above ground, two basement levels, and five ring corridors per floor with a total of 17.5 miles (28.2 km) of corridors. The central five-acre (2.0 ha) pentagonal plaza is nicknamed "ground zero" on the presumption that it would be a prime target in a nuclear war.

In 1963, Paras accompanied by his family, was transferred to Honolulu, Hawaii. They lived on the US Army base Fort Shafter for five (5) years. After other tours elsewhere and a military career of almost 40 years, Paras decided to retire in Hawaii.



Waikiki and Diamond Head in Honolulu, Hawaii

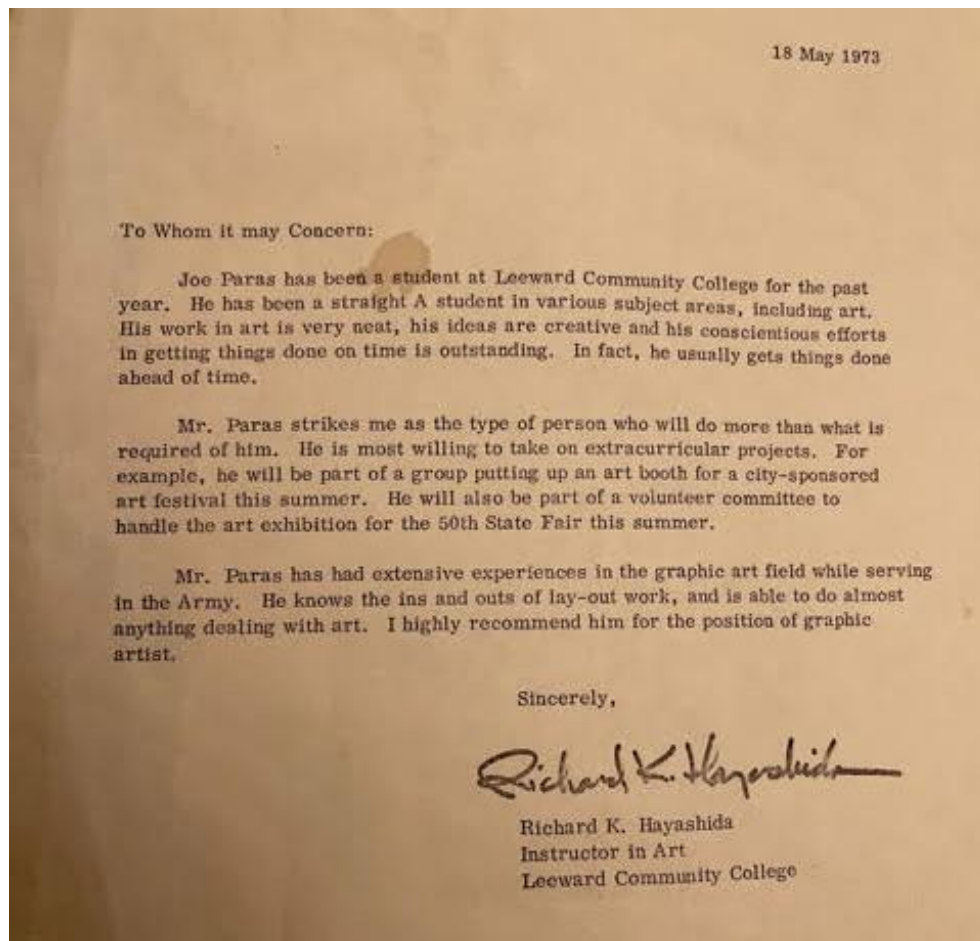


Fort Shafter Palm Circle



Fort Shafter is a United States military base in Honolulu, Hawaii. Fort Shafter was established by the Army on June 22, 1907. The base is listed as a National Historic Landmark and is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. Fort Shafter is the home base of the United States Army Pacific Command, the Major Command of US Army Forces for the Pacific Region, and the Army Corps of Engineers Pacific Ocean Division. Fort Shafter is the oldest military base on the island of Oahu in Hawaii.

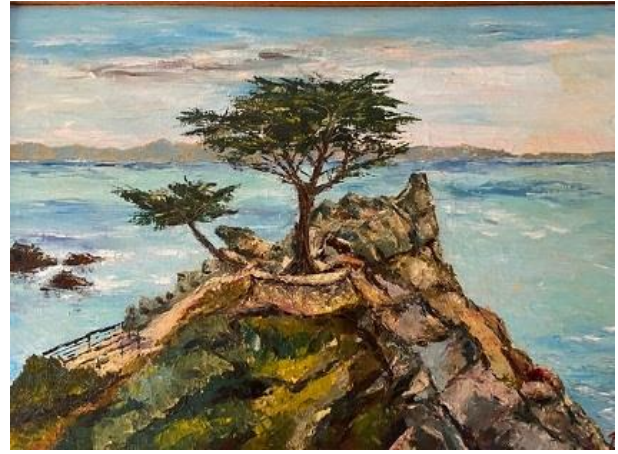
SFC Paras' MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) in the US Army was draftsman and illustrator. In the 1950s, he had attended the California College of Arts. Because of his area of expertise, he was very fortunate to be assigned to several Headquarters Army base installations throughout his military career. When he retired from the US Army, he took advantage of the GI Bill and attended the University of Hawaii, Leeward Community College where he earned his Associate of Arts Degree. He began a second career as a federal employee Arts and Crafts Instructor at Fort Shafter then later at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii and retired from Federal Civil Service.



Paras was always interested in art since his youth. In the Philippines, his parents had encouraged him to become a carpenter. After the war, Paras chose to immigrate to the United States so that he could have a better life for himself and his family. During his lifetime, he loved to paint both with oil and watercolor paints and using brushes and palette knives. Below are some of his paintings over MANY years:



1st painting in mid 1950s - Lone Cypress in Monterey, CA



2nd painting is the Lone Cypress withered down after MANY decades exposed to the elements







In the mid-1960s, Paras was one of original co-founders of the Pampanga Circle of Hawaii. In 1963, when he and his family transferred to Hawaii, there were not many Filipinos from his and his wife's (Maria) province of Pampanga, Philippines. The Pampanga Circle was instrumental in bringing fellow “Kapampangans,” along with other Filipinos from different provinces of the Philippines together for cultural, social, and community activities and events. In 1972 for a very special occasion, the Pampanga Circle hosted a reception at Camp H. M. Smith, Aiea, Hawaii, a United States Marine Corps installation. The reception was held for (then) Senator Benigno Simeon Aquino, Jr., (nickname Ninoy), who was born on November 27, 1932, in Tarlac, Philippines and assassinated on August 21, 1983, Manila, Philippines. He was the chief opposition leader during the era of martial law in the Philippines (1972–1981) under President Ferdinand Marcos.



Senator Benigno Simeon Aquino, Jr.



Maria Paras and Senator Benigno Simeon Aquino, Jr., Camp H. M. Smith, Aiea, Hawaii in 1972

Paras immigrated to the United States in 1947, arriving at San Francisco Port of Embarkation (SFPOE), California. He was assigned to Camp Stoneman (a sub-post to the Presidio), a United States Army facility located in Pittsburg, California. The camp operated during World War II and the Korean War.



Camp Stoneman

The camp opened on May 28, 1942, for the purpose of staging troops for the Pacific Theater of Operations. The camp was named after George Stoneman, a cavalry commander during the Civil War, and Governor of California. It was decommissioned as a military post in 1954.

The Presidio has a rich history spanning back to the time of the native Ohlone people. The Spanish arrived in 1776 to establish the northernmost outpost of their empire in western North America. The Presidio fell under Mexican rule

for 24 years before the U.S. Army took control in 1846. Over 148 years, the U.S. Army transformed the Presidio grounds from mostly windswept dunes and scrub to a verdant, preeminent military post. In 1962, the Presidio was designated a National Historic Landmark and the site has been part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area since 1994.



The Presidio in San Francisco, California

Paras felt blessed and proud to be in the United States. When he became a naturalized United States Citizen, he had his name officially changed from Jose Evangelista Paras to Joe Evangelista Paras. Whenever people would address him as Jose or Joseph, he'd respond saying "It's just Joe."



Joe felt very fortunate that he could provide his family with a better life than in the Philippines and was able to bring them to California to join him. His wife, Maria, and children (Brigida and Orlando, ages 5 and 3 years old) arrived in San Francisco, California aboard the vessel, USAT (US Army Transport) /USNS (US Naval Ship) General Edwin D. Patrick in 1949.

Maria, Brigida, and Orlando later became naturalized United States Citizens. In 1951, Yolanda was born at Camp Stoneman, California. In 1954, Joseph was born at The Presidio, San Francisco, California.

Partial Manifest of In Bound Passengers

Form 1-51
RECEIVED INSPECTION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE
San Francisco, Calif.

Manifest No. 171-1

MANIFEST OF IN-BOUND PASSENGERS (ALIENS)

Class 1st from Manila, P.I. 24 August 1949

U.S.A.I. "General Edwin D. Patrick" arriving at port of San Francisco 12 Sept 1949

Line No.	Name (Last-First-Middle) Description of Service	Age (Years)	Sex (M-F)	Place of Birth	Passport No. (Country)	Items and Description of Goods or Effects	Remarks	Time of Arrival at Port or Date, Month, and Year
1	HELLO, Stefania E. 2825 Kingsway Street, Los Angeles, Calif.	41	F		P.I. P.P. 4000	1 trunk 2 lbs., 1 box 3 packages		
2	HELLO, Della same as above	2	F	American				
3	MARTINEZ, Emilia L. La Veta, Colo.	25	F		P.I. PP4006	1 footlocker 2 lbs.	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
4	MARTINEZ, Evelyn G. same as above	1	F	Amer Reg Cert			105.1	Adm Sec
5	MARTINEZ, Robert P. same as above	2	M	Amer Reg Cert			105.1	Adm Sec
6	MC QUIRK, Wm. Rockwell, Texas	33	F		P.I. PP4000	2 lbs.	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
7	MC QUIRK, Eugene Jr. same as above	1	M	Amer Reg Cert			105.1	Adm Sec
8	MC QUIRK, Cattie same as above	4	F	Amer Reg Cert			105.1	Adm Sec
9	MC QUIRK, Sebastian same as above	5	F	Amer Reg Cert			105.1	Adm Sec
10	HARR, Othello E. 10th Reg Cavalry Bn. Ph. Deming, Ga.	37	F		Cuban PP4000			
11	HENSE, Friedella Fort Kent, Ky.	30	F		P.I. PP4000	1 trunk 1 lbs.	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
12	HENSE, Francisco Jr. Fort Kent, Ky.	2	M		P.I. PP4000		105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
13	O'DONNELL, Josephine Sandwich Road, Sandwich, Mass	21	F		P.I. PP4000	2 lbs.	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
14	O'DONNELL, Michael same as above	12	M		P.I. PP4000	2 lbs.	105.1	Adm Sec
15	OSB, Dorothy E. 341 Sepulveda St., San Pedro, California	25	F		P.I. PP4000	1 trunk, 2 lbs. 1 package	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
16	OSB, Mae E. same as above	24	F		P.I. PP4000		105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
17	PURAN, Orlando Camp Sherman, Cal.	3	M		P.I. PP4000		105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
18	PURAN, Bridie same as above	5	F		P.I. PP4000		105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
19	PURAN, Maria same as above	20	F		P.I. PP4000		105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
20	SALLWASH, Maria P. San Francisco, Calif.	40	F		P.I. PP4000	4 lbs., 1 box 2 packages	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
21	SULLIVAN, Maria L. Fort Bragg, N.C.	23	F		P.I. PP4000	2 lbs., 1 box	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
22	MOORE, Della L. Madison, Wis.	30	F		Tallapoosa, N.Y. PP4000	7 lbs., 1 box 1 basket	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)
23	ISHERMAN, Martha E., Capt. AC Chanute Air Force Base, Easton, Ill.	33	M		P.I. PP4000	200 lbs. 2 handbags	105.1	Adm Sec 4(a)

Lines 1-2 combined held
Lines 3-9 and 11-23 in and under the same
Lines 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 in and under the same

11-00000

Paras was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Purple Heart, the WWII POW Medal, and the Congressional Gold Medal.



Bronze Star



Purple Heart

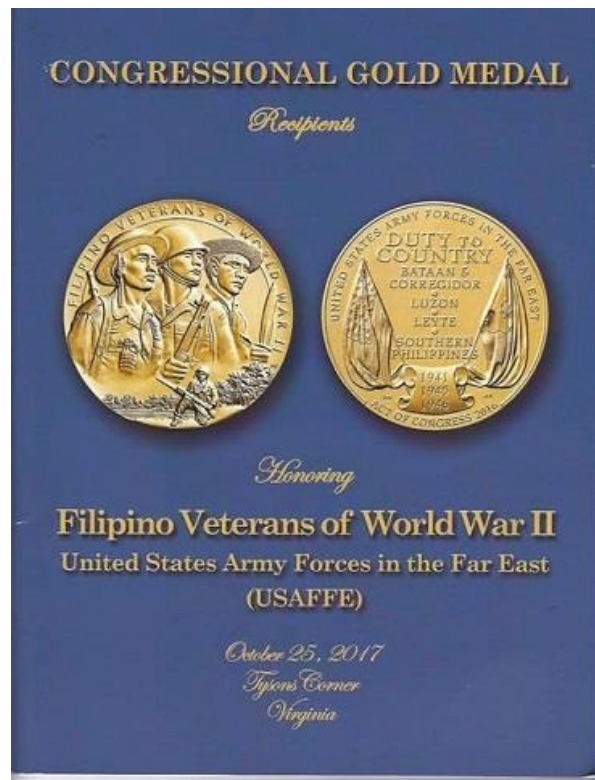


WWII POW Medal

The Bronze Star Medal is a US Armed Forces decoration awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for heroic service in a combat zone.

The Purple Heart is a US military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded while serving in a combat with the US military.

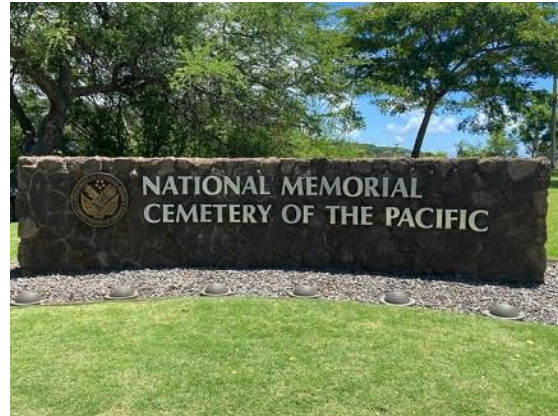
The Prisoner of War (POW) Medal may be awarded to any person who was taken prisoner or held captive while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.



Congressional Gold Medal

The Congressional Gold Medal was finally approved for Sergeant First Class Joe E. Paras.

It was given to his family at a medal presentation held in August 2021 at Punchbowl the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. This event happened 76 years after WWII ended.



The Congressional Gold Medal is an award bestowed by the United States Congress. It is Congress's highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions by individuals and groups. The congressional practice of issuing gold medals to occasionally honor recipients from the military began during the American Revolution. The medal was first awarded in 1776 by the Second Continental Congress to General George Washington. Later the practice was extended to individuals in all walks of life and in the late 20th century also to groups.

Some Notable People that have received the Congressional Gold Medal

General George Washington - 1st US president

John Paul Jones - American Naval Captain Revolutionary War

Major General Andrew Jackson - 7th US President

Wright Brothers - American Aviation Pioneers

Charles A. Lindbergh - First to Fly from New York City to Paris in 1927

Thomas A. Edison - American Inventor

Major Walter Reed - Yellow Fever (Malaria) Experimentations

Howard Hughes - US billionaire

Bob Hope - Comedian Actor Ambassador

Douglas MacArthur - General of the Army WWII

Walt Disney - Creator of Disneyland

Robert F. Kennedy - US Senator Assassinated in 1968

John Wayne - American actor, Patriot

Winston Churchill - Britain Prime Minister WWII

Harry S. Truman - 33rd US president who Ordered First Atomic Bombings

Jesse Owens – Four-time Olympic Gold Medalist in 1936

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf - US Commander of the Iraq Wars

General Colin Powell - US Joint Chief of Staff and Secretary of State

Ronald Reagan - 40th US president

Tuskegee Airmen - Black WWII Fighter Pilots

Neil A. Armstrong - First Man on the Moon

Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr. - Landed on the moon 1969

Yes, now we can add the Filipino Veterans of World War II to that list and Sergeant First Class Joe E. Paras joins the above people to receive the Congressional Gold Medal.

Joe E. Paras and his wife Maria T. Paras (over the years)



Not only a brave, loyal American soldier, Paras was a great husband and father. His strong work ethic and character traits that were passed on to his children and grandchildren are his greatest legacy.

Sergeant First Class Joe E. Paras and his wife Maria T. Paras are interred in The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Punchbowl Cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii. Their children are Brigida (deceased), Orlando, Yolanda, and Joseph. They have seven (7) grandchildren, eight (8) great-grandchildren, and one (1) great-great-grandchild.



When the Prisoners of War were finally repatriated, trucks arrived to take them to freedom. SFC Paras' best friend, Sergeant Edward Abinsay, was too weak from starvation and near death. Others urged Paras to leave Abinsay to die. Paras refused and carried Abinsay to the truck.

Forty-four years later when SFC Paras was dying (complications due to residual shrapnel from his war wounds), Sergeant Abinsay flew from California to Honolulu, Hawai'i to be by his side.

It was then Sergeant Abinsay related how he owed SFC Paras his life and because of it he was thankful to have a family of his own.

SFC Paras was buried in full dress uniform at Punchbowl the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. Sergeant Abinsay personally pinned the service ribbons in the proper order on SFC Paras' uniform. Sergeant Abinsay said it was an honor to do it for his brother in arms.



**Edward Abinsay and
Maria Paras**

Joe Paras was a POW with Edward Abinsay, his "brother forever," as Paras cared for him and kept him alive. The two were life-long buddies along with their families and stayed connected throughout their military careers. Paras preceded "Uncle Eddie" in death. When Uncle Eddie died in California, he had requested that his family bury him in Punchbowl so that he could be with his brother Joe forever! Uncle Eddie Abinsay and his wife, Susana, are also at Punchbowl.



SFC Joe E. Paras' daughter Lana who (with help from her family) provided the above information about her dad. The entire family is very proud of their father's accomplishments and fought for several years to get the Congressional Gold Medal and recognition for him and other Filipino veterans.