

The PAF, Aged 21 Years, and the Jet Age

By Aurelio Repato



PAF, then known as PAAC, was equipped at outbreak of Pacific War with a very few planes, among them trainer planes as appear on photo and several pursuit planes. PAF personnel however disregarded overwhelming odds and met Jap air invaders headlong.

ust 15, 1941 General Douglas MacArthur inducted the Philippine Army Air Corps into the service of the United States Army Forces in the Far East. It was the first Filipino unit inducted into the USAFFE.

At the outbreak of World War II, the PAAC was maintaining four military airfields. Maniquis Field in Nueva Ecija, under the command of then Major Pelagio A. Cruz, was home base for the advanced flying school together with the 10th Bombardment Squadron headed by Captain Pedro Q. Molina. The trainer planes and Martin Medium bombers were de-

vastated by the first Japanese aerial attack on this field. Aircraft equipment of the Primary and Basic flying school which were based at Zablan Field (named after the late Porfirio Zablan, groomed to head the air force but died in an aircraft accident while undergoing training in America) in Camp Murphy, under Major Edwin Andrews, were also destroyed by the Japanese bombardiers. Lahug Field in Cebu City housed the 9th Observation Squadron with a few reconnaissance planes. The death of its base commander, Major Oscar Sales, in a crack-up on take off for reconnaissance at twilight on Decem-

ber 14, 1941 was a setback to this airfield before the Japanese planes wrought havoc to its equipment installations.

Among the four PAAC stations, only Batangas Field was a fighter base. Here, Captain Jesus Villamor commanded the 6th Pursuit Squadron with its six Boeing P-26s. This type of planes was considered obsolete as compared to the Japanese Zero fighters. On December 12, the Japanese forces dispatched 54 twin-engine bombers with 18 Zeros as escort to destroy Batangas Field. Seriously outnumbered three to one,

Captain Villamor led his fighter boys to the air to engage the enemy fighter escorts in one of the most sensational dogfights during the last war. While his comrades were engaged in aerial combat at 12,000 feet above him, Lt. Cesar Basa, who was returning from a patrol with 15-minute fuel left in his tank, soared to join the melee. With noses spitting hot lead, seven Zeros sent his plane, bullet ridden, plummeting to the ground. Lt. Basa was the first Filipino pilot casualty in dog fight of the last war. For his gallantry in action, the United States

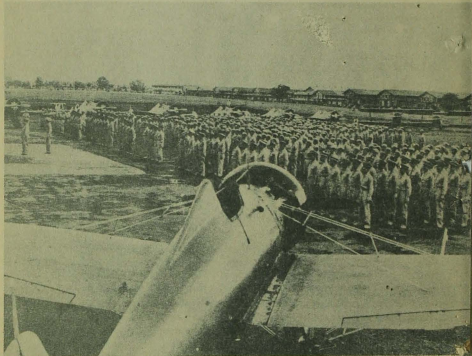


Photo shows air force personnel, including cadets and their instructors, during ceremonies marking induction of PAAC into USAFFE immediately before Pacific war. Note plane in foreground, one of 12 P-26 pursuit planes, and trainer planes in background.



Pioneering in nation's air force, a fair number of PC officers emerged as air heroes. Photo was taken some 35 years ago at Curtis Aviation School. Standing from left Maj. Porfirio Zablan (deceased), ex-Lt. Mariano Rueda, Lt. Victor Real (deceased), Lt. Col. Ramon S. Bañez (Ret.), Ex-Lt. Osmundo Ramos, and Maj. Marcos Estacio (deceased). Seated in front is Maj. Alonzo Gatuslao (Ret.). Standing in background are Lt. Col. Eduardo Montilla (Ret.) and Maj. Basilio Fernando (deceased). Not shown are ex-Lt. Madialdea and Col. Mariano C. Reyes (Ret.). These pioneers in the air force are worthy of emulation.

government awarded him (posthumously) the Silver Star. Basa Air Base in Pampanga is named in honor of him. Another casualty during this raid was Lt. Salvador Manlunas who was hit by a bomb shrapnel while directing anti-aircraft machine gun fire.

With its planes destroyed or permanently grounded for lack of spare parts, the PAAC regrouped to form the 1st Provisional Infantry Battalion. Dubbed the "flying infantry" by their neighbor units, the air corps boys made a heroic stand at Aglaloma Point in the Western part of Bataan. In an engagement with the enemy in this sector, Captain Eustacio D. Orobia was wounded seriously in the left hip. In complete disregard of his personal safety, Captain Pedro Q. Molina performed

a dramatic rescue of his fallen comrade under a hail of enemy machine gun fire. To the air force, for its historic resistance in Aglaloma, goes the nation's tribute, as well as to Lts. Setzer and Paulino and the rest of the men who gave up their lives for love of God and Country.

Not long after the fall of Bataan and Corregidor, due primarily to the air superiority of the Japanese, an air force man, Captain Jesus Villamor, with radiographic orders from Southwest Pacific Area Command, organized the Allied Intelligence Bureau. Later headed by Colonel Edwin Andrews, this unit gathered information about the enemy, through thousands of underground operatives throughout the archipelago, and transmitted them to SWPAC by submarine or radio. These informations



Their planes destroyed in fight, undaunted PAAC personnel regrouped to form 1st Provisional Infantry Battalion, dubbed the "Flying Infantry", and joined ground forces, making a heroic stand at Aglaloma Point, Bataan, during the early phase of war.

later became important intelligence which were used by General MacArthur in employing his frog-jump tactics to liberate this country.

After liberation in 1945, the PAAC was reorganized and later redesignated Philippine Air Force.

Peace and Order Campaign

The rise of a recalcitrant group, popularly known as the Huks or HMBs and other lawless elements in the early part of 1946, necessitated the employment of air power in support of ground troops to establish peace and order throughout the land. Aside from the punitive airstrikes conducted by fighter pilots in such military operations as *Four Roses*, *Gumamela*, *Columbus*, *Smile*, *Milagrosa*, *Omaha*, and *Kamlon*, airlift and airdrop of supplies and equip-

ment and air-evacuation were also rendered for ground troops. Interviews of surrenders in the latest operations against Kamlon and his die-hard followers which were conducted by Intelligence personnel of JOTAF, revealed that the continuous bombing, strafing, and pin-down missions launched by elements of the Sulu Air Group (SATAG), under Major Jose L. Rancudo, along with the relentless pursuit of ground troops had forced them to come into the folds of the law.

"We can fight ground troops but what chance have we against the devil planes that come swooping and dropping deadly explosives amidst our lairs?" More surrenders confessed. As a result of the bombing and strafing in this latest

major operations, SATAG chalked on its scoreboard 30 outlaws verified killed, 17 verified wounded, 25 forced to surrender, 9 captured, 35 vintas destroyed, 27 huts burned, 7 smuggler-kumpits captured, and 1 Taiwanese vessel apprehended. While employment of air power to curb lawlessness in the southern extremities of the country has demoralized the enemies and facilitated their surrender it has also bolstered the morale of the ground troops besides affording excellent training and experience to the fighter pilots of the PAF.

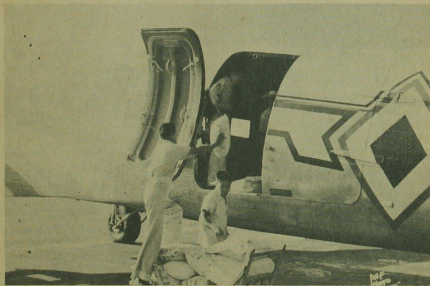
Relief Missions

Whenever disaster strikes in any of its horrible forms such as typhoons, floods, fires, earthquakes,

and volcanic eruptions, conduct of relief work demands the fastest means of transportation to bring food and medicines on time to save the people in grief-stricken areas from hunger and diseases. Delay in this kind of work might prejudice many precious lives. The Philippine Air Force planes come in handy. In all major disasters throughout the island, the Philippine National Red Cross and the Social Welfare Administration have realized the usefulness of PAF planes in accomplishing their mission of bringing relief to the people expeditiously.

When rats and pests invaded Cotabato and other provinces in Mindanao, the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources employ-

Present PAF is engaged not only in fight against Huks, but also, among others, in relief mission especially when calamities strike in any distant part of the country.



ed PAF planes for spraying chemicals to save the crops from total destruction.

The PAF has also participated in search missions for fishing vessels lost at sea or private planes and commercial aircraft long overdue at their destinations and even Fullbright professors — Robert Conklin and Pittman — who were later found murdered by hostile natives of Kiangan in Mountain Province.

Present PAF

Today the PAF has reached the point for its shift to the jet propulsion stage. A historic event occurred last August when US Ambassador Homer Ferguson signed the papers transferring six T-33 jet trainers to the Philippine government at

Nichols Air Base. This marked the beginning of the transition of the PAF into the jet stage. In the brief time that these jets have been based in Clark Air Force Base for the training of PAF fighter pilots, 28 Filipino airmen graduated from the jet transition course and 12 from the jet familiarization course. Out of these graduates, 16 are now competent jet pilot instructors three of whom are in America specializing in jet aircraft operation. Along with these pilots, 28 airmen completed the jet maintenance course. When the multi-million peso modernization of Basa Air Base into a jet airfield is finished, the PAF will be ready to receive its jet fighters from the



United States and start operating a jet squadron aimed at absorbing the initial shock action of a future invader.

A hitch, however, that threatens to disrupt the progress of the PAF is the imminent cut in its budget by P2 million. If pushed through, this budget slash would be enough cause for abandonment of the modernization project of the PAF. The training of PAF pilots along with air mechanics to man jet equipment shall have been a waste of time, money, and effort aside from a loss of the government's investment on several hundred technical men of the PAF's present strength.

A recent announcement from the JUSMAG, published in local dailies,

states that "the Philippines will continue to receive sufficient economic and military aids commensurate with its ability to absorb them." The cut in the PAF budget indirectly declares the inability of the Philippines to absorb jets from the United States. Adhering to the accepted fact that no country preparing for adequate defense can do without a modernized air force, small free Asian countries such as Taiwan, Thailand, Korea, and Pakistan have taken full advantage of the US military aid under the Mutual Defense Assistance Program by absorbing the jets offered them.

Speaking at the 11th commencement exercises of the FEATI Institute of Technology, on which occa-



A group of PAF fighter pilots prepares to take off for anti-dissident operation in Mustang planes, which are still very effective in strafing Huk lairs. Modernization project of PAF is aimed at changing these planes with all-jet squadrons.

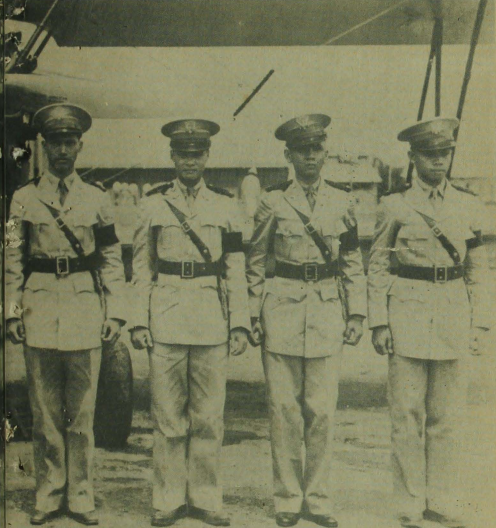


Basa
BASA

Gozar
GOZAR

Manlunas
MANLUNAS

Rico
RICO



Maniquis
MANIRUIS

Festejo
FESTEJO

Yuson
YUSON

Kare
KARE

Filipino air heroes of last war wrote with their blood early chapters of stirring PAF history. Among them (in photo, from left) are Basa, Gozar, Manlunas, Rico, Maniquis, Festejo, Yuson, and Kare. Airfields of some of the heroes were named after them.

sion he was conferred a degree of Doctor of Science in Aeronautics (honoris causa), the PAF chief pointed out that in the event of hostilities, the local air force will have to shoulder the brutality of an enemy initial shock action. He emphasized that the security of the skies under which defenders fight must be insured because invasion by airborne or waterborne troops will be undertaken with a substantial air covering force. "All other forces earmarked against overt aggression must assume a subordinate role," Gen. Cruz declared.

At the PMA graduation early this month, Speaker Jose B. Laurel, Jr. stressed, "Under modern concepts of warfare, with which I am familiar, the indispensability of the air force is

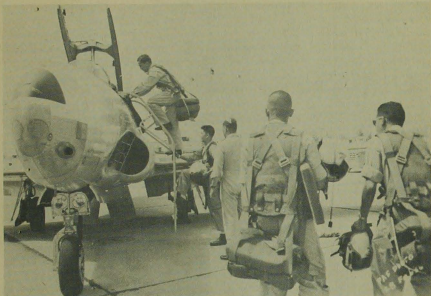
no longer open to question. Actually it is air strength that is now considered as the first line of defense among modern powers, for which reasons emphasis has been gradually shifted to its development in lieu of other services." Modernization, therefore, of the Philippine Air Force deserves the full support of the Filipino people to insure the effectiveness of our first line of defense.

Preparedness

An air force cannot be created overnight to face the enemy in the event of hostile aggression. It is necessary to insure that it is a well-trained and adequately-equipped organization to be ready to cope with the demands of modern warfare any time the enemy strikes. A high standard of training, therefore, is

"They take to jet planes as ducks to water" was how an American pilot described Filipino airmen shifting to jet planes under PAF program of transition to jet stage. Modern warfare demands a modern air force. PAF strives to meet demand.





PAF pilots who have learned to fly jet planes train fellow pilots. Filipino airmen, college-educated and accustomed to American technology, language and materials, are announced by original instructors as the easiest to teach among Asian peoples.

the main task of an air force in time of peace.

Today, the PAF is geared for this gruelling task of training its personnel both in the air and on the ground for emergency. Training in the air force is a continuous process of maintaining discipline at its highest level and keeping pace with advancements of modern techniques in aerial warfare. No airman, no matter how experienced and well-trained he is, can say, at any time, that he knows everything in his chosen art. Intensified participation of the air force in local military operations is a twofold mission: that of supporting the ground troops and that of training. Maintenance of a regular flight schedule in all types

of aircraft seasons the professional skill of the airman keeps him in constant readiness to carry out his task effectively as a part of a great team.

As an appeal to the Filipino people for support in the modernization of the Philippine Air Force, on the occasion of its 21st anniversary, we quote a simple acknowledgement of the important role which air power plays in our modern world by one of the greatest statesman and military leader of today, Winston Churchill: "For good or ill air mastery is today the supreme expression of military power, and fleets and armies, however necessary, must accept a subordinate rank."