



AFP Dental Service

By Lieutenant Colonel N. B. Menina, DS

WHEN the Philippine Constabulary was organized on 8 August 1901 by Brigadier General Henry T. Allen (Capt-Cav, USA), who later became the first chief of the organization, there was no provision for a dental service. Dental health, in consideration of the general well being of an individual, was not of much account then. Surprisingly enough, dentistry was more of a vogue than a necessity.

During the early years of the PC's infant existence, PC personnel found suffering from dentro-oral diseases were referred to civilian practitioners for the necessary dental treatment — a practice which cost the government much in money and precious man hours.

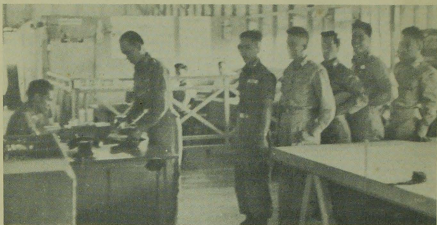
Unit commanders were bothered by continuous requests of officers and men for leaves of absence and passes so that they could go to some distant

places to see a dentist who was so scarce at the time. Thus, the grim realization that a dental service was badly needed gained force in connection with the mission of the Medical Service in preserving and conserving the general health of the troops.

Toward this end, the Chief, Philippine Constabulary recommended in 1915 to the Philippine Legislature the creation of a dental division in the PC. With the passage of the legislation in the same year, the dental division of the PC was finally created as a component of the Medical Service.

On September 1, 1916, Luciano Ferraren, a cirujano ministrante and registered practicing dentist was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant and designated Dental Surgeon of the PC. Ferraren's appointment marked the birth of the present AFP Dental Service. The new Dental Surgeon

Once a neglected branch of service in the old Philippines Constabulary, the Dental Service Corps is now a distinct and separate unit in the AFP—manned by dental officers and technicians who had trained and specialized abroad on modern trends in dentistry



Formerly the dental phase in military check-ups was given little or no attention at all by the authorities. This was particularly so during the early days of the PC. As the years went on, however, military health brass realized that dental health is as well indispensable as the physical and medical. Photo above shows enlisted men as they undergo an annual check-up designed to conserve their dental health by a dental officer of the AFP.

was assigned with the Headquarters, Philippine Constabulary at Manila.

With the creation of a dental division, officers and men stationed in the provinces were sent to Manila with recommendations from Station Commanders for dental treatment. Escorts of prisoners and others whose duties require travel to Manila were selected from among those necessitating dental attendance. The practice persisted during the many years that followed but only partly met the acute needs for dental care of the officers and men. Still the services of private dentists had to be relied upon especially in emergency cases where the dental patient could not wait for the days of travel to reach Manila.

Consequently by 1918, with the relative increase of the PC troop strength to about 3,000, five more

dentists were commissioned, namely, 2nd Lts. Alfonzo Torres, Tirso Abad, Fidel Soliven, Felix Nieva and Ramon Zagala. From then on, as the strength of the organization was further augmented, more dentists were added to the roster of dental officers.

As a result of the reorganization of the PC in 1927, the Philippines was divided into eight dental districts. The distribution of dental districts — which was later made the basis of dental stations — was deemed necessary to carry out more efficiently the dental service support in the field. During this period there was an increase of troop strength from 4,000 to 4,500 and two more dentists were commissioned, namely Lts. Mauro Ferraren and Miguel R. Fernandez, who is now the present chief of the AFP Dental Service.

District	Station	Provinces
1st Dental District	PC Hq, Manila	All transient Officers and EM, Rizal, Cavite, Marinduque, Calapan (Mindoro)
2nd Dental District	Gagalangin Brks, Manila	Samar, Leyte, Palawan, San Jose (Mindoro), Bulacan, Batangas
3rd Dental District	San Fernando, Pampanga	Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Pangasinan, La Union, Bataan, Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Pampanga
4th Dental District	Baguio, Mt. Province	PC Academy, Batanes, Isabela, Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, Abra
5th Dental District	Legaspi, Albay	Tayabas, Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Masbate, Catanduanes, Sorsogon
6th Dental District	Iloilo City	Antique, Capiz, Romblon, Iloilo, Negros Occidental
7th Dental District	Cebu City	Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, Agusan, Surigao
8th Dental District	Zamboanga City	Cagayan, Bukidnon, Cotabato, Davao, Lanao, Sulu, Zamboanga

Distribution of provinces by districts was not based mainly on their geographical location. The availability of transportation facilities was also a factor. Dental officers travelled with dental **practicantes** (dental technicians). Travels were made by the use of every conceivable means of transportation — banca, boat, truck. Most of the time these dental officers hiked inland with hired **cargadores**.

In 1935, the PC was further reorganized. To give more efficient dental care to its personnel four more dentists were commissioned 2nd Lieutenants after passing the competitive

examination given April of the same year. Those who qualified and were subsequently integrated into the regular force, Dental Corps were Agustin L. Zarate, Clifford F. Hawkins, Tomas Paredes and Salvador Ocampo.

When the Philippine Army was organized in the latter part of 1936 pursuant to Commonwealth Act No. 1, the Philippine Constabulary which served as its nucleus became a separate division in the new organization. Camp sites sprouted in practically every province in the whole archipelago. Cadre buildings were constructed and cantonment areas

were developed and prepared to receive and train the first batch of the 20-year-old trainees due to report for training on January of the succeeding year.

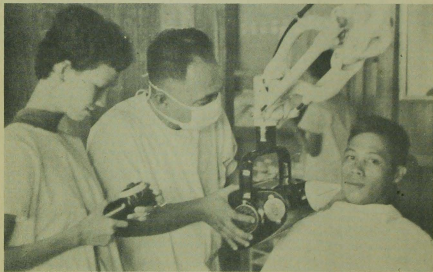
A Dental Corps was organized as a component of the PA Medical Service. Not enough dental officers could be drawn from the PC to man the Dental Corps of the new army. Consequently, on June, 1935, a competitive examination was given to about 300 dentists from all parts of the country. One hundred and seven qualified in the test given at the Rizal Memorial Stadium and were commissioned 2nd Lieutenants on September 28 of the same year.

Some dentists holding commissions as US Army reserve officers were also inducted into the Philippine Army. First batch of 25 dental of-

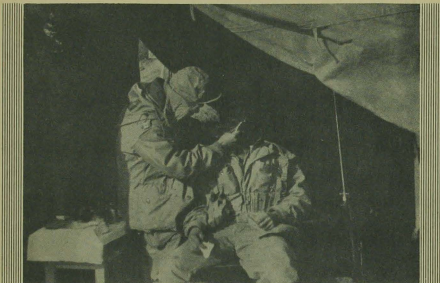
ficers were called to train for 21 days on the basic course of the Medical Field Service School at Camp Murphy. A second batch of 25 dental officers trained in December. Graduates from both classes were then called into active duty and immediately assigned to the different training centers to render dental service.

The Philippine Constabulary was separated and placed under the Department of Interior in the middle part of 1938. Different departments were created and in July, six dental officers were drawn from the PA and assigned to the different zones. This number gradually increased as the dental needs of the newly separated organization became apparent.

As the years rolled by, the infant Philippine Army buckled down to the



Modern apparatus is an adjunct for an efficient dental service. Photo above shows a dental officer making use of an X-ray on one of his patients.



During the Korean war dental teams were sent to the field to give dental treatment to the troops as shown in photo above.

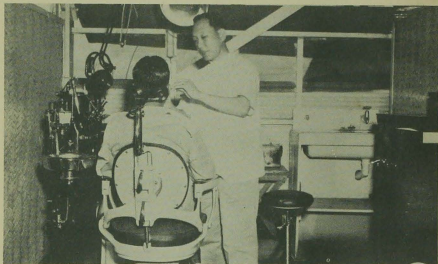
intricate task of organization. Its mission of building up organized reserves was a brain-child of that Grand Old Man of the Philippines, Manuel L. Quezon. The late President could not have taken a more qualified and capable adviser than the now renown General Douglas MacArthur.

The year 1941 heralded a world condition foaming and seething with turbulence. Statesmen of various nations were uneasy over the disintegrating international relations. While the militarists were scanning the horizon on probable battlefields, the Philippines felt the tremor of a tense situation. The battle of communiques raging among belligerent nations was a cue and the PA was

rigged and tuned to the feverish talk of war.

With the war clouds hanging low in the Philippine horizon, various refresher courses for dental officers were conducted under the tutelage of US Army officers at Fort Wm McKinley. Infantry divisions were organized and all the dental officers on active duty were assigned under the following organizational setup:

1st Regular Division, Capt. Genaro Ong, DC; 2nd Regular Division, Capt. Norberto B. Menina, DC; 31st Infantry Division, Maj. Miguel R. Fernandez, DC; 41st Infantry Division, Capt. D. Fausto, DC; 51st Infantry Division, Capt. Gil Gutierrez, DC; 61st Infantry Division, Capt. Jose P. Rodriguez, DC; 71st Infantry Divi-



A dental officer shown in photo above attends to an enlisted man in one of the Examination Sections of the Dental Service, AFP.

sion, Capt. Cresente Arnaldo, DC; 81st Infantry Division, (Not fully organized); 91st Infantry Division, Capt. Miguel Garcia Jr., DC; 101st Infantry Division, Capt. Teofilo Rojas, DC.

In the annals of the history of the Philippines is written in bold letters how the USAFFE fought a valiant fight and lost. Bataan and Corregidor, battered that they were by the relentless fight waged by the invading Japanese Forces, stood their ground for several months but to no avail. Crumpled before the enemy onslaught, these officers and men were marched to the different concentration camps, humbled physically but not spiritually.

Then came the upsurge of the underground movements to give further

resistance to the invaders. Some men rose to glory. Others were vanquished. The travail and sufferings of the Filipino people were just an index of the trials and tribulations that members of the resistance movement underwent. That was the history of a people written in blood and tears for three years.

The Dental Service sacrificed a number of its able officers and men in the pursuit of that war for democracy. Dental officers, both in the active and inactive status, at the outbreak of the war participated actively in the different guerrilla groups. Others organized and headed groups and units of their own. Some survived to tell tales of their escapades and skirmishes with the Japanese occupation forces. Foremost among them are: Lt. Bernardo Agui-



During the Korean war, PEFTOK battalion brought with it dental officers. Photo above shows an officer giving dental treatment to one of its members.

la, who organized the Aguila Regiment; Dr. Moises Montalbo, a reserve dental officer in the inactive status who headed a big group of guerrillas; Lt. Honorio Matoto, who organized a guerrilla battalion which was absorbed by the Straughn organization and later recognized by the US Army; Capt. Tomas Paredes, who joined the USAFIP, a northern Luzon guerrilla organization which made history during the war, and many others.

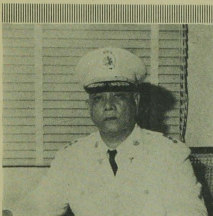
The dental service's contribution to the sacrificial days of war were Capt. Salvador Ocampo, and Lts. Jose Sapinoso, Angel Gonzales and Jose Dominguez.

Liberation came and with it new concepts. The PA, and the Dental Corps with it, was reorganized under the new concept of organization. Tables of organization and Tables of Distribution became the basis of as-

signments of officers and enlisted men. Excess personnel were reverted to inactive status in line with the general demobilization of USAFFE units preparatory to the mustering out of units from US Army attachments. In the meantime, a group of six dental officers were sent to the United States and attended on-the-job training and Refresher courses.

Those who were sent to the United States were Majors Miguel R. Fernandez, Agustin L. Zarate, Genaro Ong, Antonio Santos, Clifford F. Hawkins and Captain Vivencio P. Santos.

Later, other groups of dental officers were sent abroad to study and make observations in the newest trends in dentistry. Upon their return to the AFP, they were given key positions in major dental installations. All these invigorated and



Col. MIGUEL R. FERNANDEZ, DS
Chief, Dental Service, AFP

gave a boost to a once neglected Corps in the AFP.

Deaths and retirements had greatly reduced the number of regular officers in the Dental Corps. Thus, on May 1950, a large group of reserve officers were integrated into the regular force.

When hostilities broke out in Korea, every PEFTOK battalion brought with it a dental officer in its midst. This gave an eye opener and a very effective training ground for dental officers in actual combat situations.

In the eventful year of 1950, Republic Act No. 481 was passed and autonomy was granted the Dental Corps. With the passage of this piece of legislation, a more forceful and daring move among officers, men and supporters of the Corps was undertaken — to make the Dental Service a separate and independent service of the AFP. The move culminated in the passage of Republic Act No. 1128 which provided for the creation

of the Dental Service as a distinct entity in the AFP.

On August 1, 1954, the Dental Service was activated with Col. Miguel R. Fernandez, DS, as its first chief. Fernandez is the first dental officer in the Armed Forces of the Philippines to have attained the rank of Colonel.

Immediately after its separation from the Medical Service, the new Dental Service undertook a series of renovation. This was aimed at correcting the various ills of the service which had developed during its long period of dependency.

The reorganization came as a morale booster to the officers and men in the service and brought about marked increase of unit and individual efficiency. Units were organized where they are most needed while others with overlapping functions were deactivated. Intensive training of dental officials and technicians were undertaken to further remove the web of lethargy that had long shackled them due to an external domination.

The Dental Service's latest venture into the field of advancement is the activation of the AFP Dental Service Center of the Dental Service Group. Aimed at undertaking the training of dental personnel, conducting dental researches and operating a central dental laboratory that will serve on an army-wide basis, the center is presently headed by Lt. Col. Agustin L. Zarate, DS, concurrently the Deputy Chief, Dental Service.

The laboratory is also experimenting on the use of Ticonium metal, believed to revolutionize Prosthetic Dentistry in the AFP.