

LAND

of fulfillment

By First Lieutenant Eduardo T Guingona

Considered for a long time as a land of promise, area in Mindanao, author notes, is fast becoming a land of fulfillment thru AFP's helping hand

WHEN President Magsaysay went to Catobato in January, he found one big problem for the settlers: water. They had to walk from four to five kilometers from the farm for the vital liquid. This problem took away daily for hours a strong man in the family who would otherwise have been in the fields picking up the insects from the cotton plants. The President promised them 20 artesian wells on the spot. Today, barely one month afterwards all the promised wells have been installed. Valuable man-hours have been saved for the cotton industry.

The speed with which the army solved the problem is a credit not all their own. There simply cannot

be a turtle agency in an administration whose head bursts with activity, whose energetic spirit rouses the whole machinery of government to action.

The writer was a fortunate member of a team which visited the cotton province of Cotabato on 8 February 1956. Composed of Brigadier General Alfonso Arellano, Vice-Chief of Staff; Colonel Antonio Chanco, Chief of Engineers; Major Catalino R. Ibañez, Jr., senior aide of the Vice-Chief of Staff; and Majors Inocencio Yambao, and Modesto C. Zapido, the team pulled by plane from the Manila International Airport, and arrived in the afternoon of the same day in Gen. Santos, a

town with a population of 30,000 souls. The team, whose mission was to see for themselves how the Armed Forces is implementing the rural development program of the President in the town, saw satisfactory progress attained by the settlers. They have no more complaints; instead they are all praises for the wonderful assistance they are receiving from the Government.

The land-for-the-landless program of the President has been implemented since he became Secretary of National Defense. He decided that it was high time Mindanao ceased to be merely a land of promise and started to be a land of fulfillment. He found Cotabato an ideal place.



AFP officers, among them the writer (extreme right in foreground) inspect the cotton plantation in Cotabato where soldiers are intensively engaged in the economic and rural development program of the administration.

Today, two years after his assumption to the Presidency, he has settled about 10,000 families from almost all important regions of the Philippines to the town of Didiangas and other settlement projects in Mindanao. Renamed Gen. Santos, after former PA Chief of Staff Major General Paulino Santos, the town is fast becoming the melting pot of the nation, sweeled by the influx of people who have been liberated from areas of agrarian unrest. Today, the town sprawls with 3,000 hectares planted to cotton by the settlers, already a third of the 15,000 hectares intended for the cotton industry. Scene of a horrowing anti-rat drive just a year ago, for which almost all agencies of the government, particularly the Armed Forces were mobilized, Cotabato is fast becoming an agricultural haven.

Each head of a family is granted from 6 to 12 hectares. Averaging a harvest of 500 kilos of cotton per hectare, he realizes a net amount of P400 per hectare. There are two planting seasons yearly, the first in September which is harvested in February, and the second in February which is harvested in May.

The Farmers' Cooperative Marketing Association (FACOMA) buys the cotton direct from the farmers. No middleman is allowed to stand on the way of insuring for the planter a fair return of his produce. Agricultural technicians help the farmers fight the insects.

Averaging 2 wells a day, the platoon headed by First Lieutenant Alfredo M. Quilban and 26 enlisted

men drilled the desired number of wells within less than a month. But it did not stop there. It continued its magnificent job by building roads and bridges in the province and by installing pre-fabricated schoolhouses for the settlers' children. Of the latter, the Engineers have built three. It will continue its building program in order to help the common man produce more and more for the nation and live more and more happily every passing of day.

Brigadier General Arellano, impressed by the work of the Army in Cotabato, took time out to decorate Master Sergeant Celerino Sumang as best soldier of the Engineer Construction Group, 1956.

The Cotabato settlers have found land all their own to till. They find the place quickly undergoing a transformation from mere land of promise to one of fulfillment.



The Author