

The Lucky 13

A History of Class '53

By BENJAMIN D. ALMONTE

Four years ago some fifty young men from different regions of the country enrolled as freshmen in this college without the slightest idea of what forestry meant or of what lay in store for them in the course they decided to pursue. One said that he chose the course to avoid taking up math in whatever form. Another's reason was that he thought ranger students complete with leggings, Sam Browne's, and pistols, U.S.—movie style just roamed about and hunted deer on horse back. There was a dreamy, embryological poet, too, and a neurotic (now it can be told) who hoped to find in the woods and mountain trails the change in environment which would cure him of his complexes and frustrations. Some came for coldly practical economic reasons. There were as many reasons, in fact, as there were students. A few were disillusioned square pegs trying to squirm into round holes, and as fast as their false conceptions of forestry crumbled, as quickly did they evaporate from the campus. One, (he who thought ranger students were pistol-packing horsemen) packed up after the first day of classes and hurried to a Manila school, a wiser and a little poorer young man. Some two or three who thought there was no math followed suit a week later. During the school-year math and dendrology took their toll and discouraged the more faint-hearted so that by the end of the year, only thirty-two, mildly determined young man remained.

That first year was not without pleasant memories. There was the silvicultural and botanical excursion to Baguio where, with the Seniors, they had the pleasure of being

the guests of none other than Rogelio de la Rosa and his wife Lota. There was that dance in Naguilian on the way back and, as they passed the home-towns of their classmates who hailed from the north, cakes flew and hot coffee flowed. And then, there was that dendrological field trip to Calauag where, during their stay, the students waded in swamps all days and again waded all nights in balls, tendered by the hospitable mayor and townspeople. Coffee flowed too, but their brand was much hotter than the Ilocano stuff which had more sugar to it, making the brown liquid's warmth and flavor just right. So much for coffee.

That summer of 1950, hopes for vacation from the rigorous first year of rangers were snuffed out by a requirement of the course—the summer field practice. Together with some upperclassmen, the freshies were taken to the Bicol National Park where, for six weeks, they had a larger bite of real honest to goodness outdoor life. Here, the bonds of comradeship which mark foresters were further strengthened. The young men learned more of the ways of the forest. For the first time perhaps, they began to appreciate the life of the forester.

They all thought then that a ranger's life was all right for them, and really swell. A taste of it encouraged them; but, when the next schoolyear 1950-51 came around, only some 22 of the original members of the class enrolled. They went on two field trips again. One was a silvicultural trip to the Ilocos provinces and the other was for lumbering and logging studies at Tagkawayan. This was a somber, and busy year for the

former freshies who have grown a bit more thoughtful and determined. Midnight candles were burned, for satisfactory completion of that year meant a ranger certificate. However, only six made it. Of sixteen students who were awarded the ranger certificate in 1951, ten were from previous classes who have started earlier.

That summer, the class, having completed two years of basic ROTC instruction, was alerted for possible cadre training at Floridablanca. Fortunately or unfortunately for them, no call came as the government, so it was said, did not have funds. Some who had been lagging behind in the required number of academic units took summer courses to catch up with their classmates. At that time an expedition to the unexplored forests of Isabela was being organized. Many members of the class seized this opportunity for adventure and to gain more experience in timber cruising. They went and for two months nothing was heard of them until they returned — darker, emaciated, some sickly, but rich in valuable though hard experiences they had never undergone before.

The junior year was a tough one for the class. At this time, they were required to tackle the intricacies of soils, chemistry, and pathology in the college of agriculture. They found rough sailing, too, in surveying and in management. But their previous years of hard work were not for nothing. Patience and perseverance paid off at the end. By sheer determination, the class hurdled the requirements and came to within a year of their goal. A year passed away in rigorous monotony brightened only by a glittering Junior Prom which they, though few in number, managed to hold in honor of the Seniors.

The class came to its own in July, 1952. They were Seniors at last. With only one more year to go, some members who had been lagging behind caught up with the rest. Three Belo Boys who joined the class during the previous year and a member of the fa-

culty who was working for the BSF degree swelled their thin ranks to thirteen. For them there was no Christmas vacation that year. They spent the holidays working on their investigations.

In January of the following year, word reached them that one of their old classmates, a native of Los Baños who had just finished the ranger course the previous year, was killed in an accident in Lanao. True to the forestry spirit, the class turned up at the funeral and escorted the body of their former comrade to the grave. A little more than a month later death struck again and claimed one more old member of the class. This time, it was another newly graduated ranger who met his end in Camarines Norte. Thus, even before the class was through with the four-year term, two of their members had already given their lives to the cause of forestry.

Thirteen seniors expect to graduate this year. Of this, nine are from the original freshman class of 1949 — the lucky nine among the lucky thirteen. Their exertions are almost over. Four years of toil will soon bear fruit, but not without leaving a mark on their faces. Their pictures appear elsewhere in this organ. Four years ago, those faces were not so mature as they look now. See that guy with thinning hair? His forehead was not so wide as that when he enrolled here as a freshman.

ANIMAL KINGDOM

Man is a wonderful fellow, learning from the other animals the way he does. He studies the hawk and the vulture and flies through the air with the greatest of ease. He learns from the crab with its shell and the skunk with its tear gas. He considers the ways of the squirrel and becomes a hoarder; the ways of the snake in the grass and goes in for espionage. He observes the caterpillar and the hippopotamus, the shark and the crocodile, the mole and the hedgehog, and makes himself terrible on land and sea and underneath both. . . . About the only creature left in nature for him to learn something useful from is the dove.

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