

The Quest: A New Look for the FILIPINO SOLDIER



By Alejandro C. Sicat

AMONG the changes that have occurred lately in the Armed Forces of the Philippines are those involving the AFP coat of arms, officers' rank insignia, enlisted men's chevrons, Quartermaster insigne, Dental Service insigne, Finance Service insigne, and General Headquarters service patch. These material appendages of the Filipino soldiers are now radically different from those of the United States Armed Forces personnel which the AFP had in adoption for many years as a hold-out of the period before the independence of the Philippines. All these reformations seem to presage more to come, each of them having been proper under the circumstances. During the Korean War, for example, and even in the early SEATO conference, the AFP personnel were mistaken for U.S. Armed Forces personnel because of the same coat of arms and rank insignia they wore. The changes were evidently designed to make the Filipino soldier distinctive in appearance and the nation's military establishment live up to local history, culture, traditions and demands of statehood, even in their simplest accoutrement.



President Magsaysay looks approvingly at samples of new AFP coat of arms and officers' rank insignia, among accoutrement reformed to make Filipino soldier distinctive in appearance.

Not Complete

While these metamorphoses have been effected, the fact remains that the Filipino soldier is still not completely distinctive in appearance. His uniforms, the standard West Point khaki accompanied by the overseas cap or Pershing cap, and Fatigue apparel with the so-called Van Fleet cap since the Korean War, are also the standard uniforms of the American serviceman.

There is at present no official plan nor indication to change the uniforms of the Filipino soldier. Some civilians, however, have been heard to comment that since the coat of arms and the rank insignia and chevrons have been reformed, the uniforms might as well be modified, too, not only to make the Filipino soldier distinct, but also more suave in appearance, if not more comfortable.

It is a fact that the present uniforms, like the Enfield and the Garand, have been designed for American military personnel whose physical sizes make these suits very becoming. Filipinos are racially shorter and the effect of the uniforms does not compliment either their height or their appearance.

Psychological Effect

Uniforms, impressive uniforms, help make fine soldiers because they influence actions and manners. The whole matter follows the pattern of a person's personal appearance often having a marked effect upon his behavior. To illustrate, an investigation was conducted not long ago in a penitentiary in the U. S. for the purpose of determining what had influenced the inmates into criminality. It was found out that many of them



Present uniforms of Filipino soldier, khaki on top photo, and fatigue on bottom photo, are also the standard uniforms of American soldiers. Filipino soldier is still distinctive in appearance.

were affected by their facial appearances. Nature had endowed them with faces that looked like those of fiction-described criminals. Since they looked like criminals, and were suspected as such, they might as well be, ran their explanations. Some of these inmates were released, but after a time they were back because they wanted to. People outside just had an erroneous impression that they were criminals even when they had committed no crimes. They might as well commit. An enterprising surgeon set to work on their faces by means of plastic surgery, giving them respectable-looking ones. They were glad to be released and the report



World War German soldiers were well-admired for their smartly-designed uniforms. German captive shown above appeared resplendent even in defeat.



Present uniform of AFP cavalryman approximates World War II German uniform.

said they henceforth led respectable lives.

The theory on clothes, and, for that matter, uniforms, is somewhat similar. Demeanor of the wearers is influenced by the appearance of the uniforms. Soldiers are even often told, "Do not dishonor your uniform." A uniform must have honor if it can be dishonored. The service man must have pride in his uniform. Pride in it can spring up from, among others, the fact that it is nice.

What is in an apparel? Much. It was Shakespeare who said, "The apparel oft proclaims the man." Although it may be true that "fine feathers do not always make fine birds",



Winter uniform of Red Chinese soldiers may be distinctive and protective, but give wearers the appearance of being shabby and boggy. Filled with raw cotton, the uniform looks like a tailored mattress.

it is undeniable that the appearance of what one wears has an influence on conduct. Before the war, even the lowly clerk wore a coat with tie. He felt proud of his job. There was glamour. Pride and dignity were in him. He was respected because of the respectable impression he gave, and he showed to people the same measure of respect that he was receiving. One can encounter only difficulty doing otherwise when people in the community expect well of him and respect him much.

We cannot expect casual foreign visitors to have a good impression on our soldiery by merely glancing if our soldiers' uniforms are not impressive. Even a soldier's salute will be more snappy when his uniform does not appear shabby and boggy. Think of the German soldiers of World War

II who, despite their widely known brutality because of their regimented way of life, were much admired by onlookers as far as appearances were concerned because of impressive uniforms.

It is not uncommon today to find street sweepers and other laborers, even prisoners, wearing the same fatigue uniforms that soldiers are wearing. Sometimes the prisoner at hard labor is guarded by a soldier. From a distance an onlooker distinguishes one from the other only because one holds a rifle and the other a spade or pick.

Economics and Propriety

While considering that it may be necessary to change the design of the uniforms to make it more becoming to the Filipino serviceman, one may

also take into account the materials used for the uniforms. It is a fact that the West Point khaki is imported. Local materials, like Ramie, if used in the uniform, will even help solve unemployment, develop the Ramie industry, and conserve dollars.

It is a fact, too, that Ramie is produced in both Khaki and white colors. The white is suitable to the Navy. If it can be produced in gray, it will be fitted for the Air Force.

The present uniforms have been evolved by the U.S. Armed Forces with an eye on convenience for the wearer and suitability for combat. It is possible that there is a design more convenient, more fitted for combat, and more impressive for the Filipino soldier who differs from his American counterpart not only in physical built but also in temperament. The

Pre-war uniform of Philippine Constabulary soldier was complete with protective leggings. It is possible that there is a design of uniform more proper than any that the Filipino soldier has ever had.



Present fatigue uniform looks smarter than this early pre-war fatigue (overall) uniform of the Filipino soldier. Again it is possible that there is something better, local, and more original than the present uniforms.

uniform of personnel of the Philippine Army at the outbreak of the Pacific War, consisting of a short-sleeved shirt and a short pants, was distinctive and convenient in hot weather but did not afford sufficient protection for the knees and the arms in combat, unlike the uniform of pre-war Constabulary men which was complete with protective leggings. It is highly feasible that, through careful study and exploitation, a new set of uniforms to present a new design more proper for the Filipino soldier and to make use entirely of local materials, will be evolved, to make him not only readily distinguishable from soldiers of other nations, but also more military, dignified, and powerful in appearance as well as more comfortable and properly coated for combat.