

The Philippine Army

World War II

The commonwealth of the Philippines was governed on the structure of outmoded strategies of former colonial governments. New goals included the development of an independent military force, was widely scattered and inadequate. The United States government in principal provided token support until the threat of war surfaced. The recruiting and funding of the Philippine Scouts was under the jurisdiction of the United States, resulted in the establishment and foundation of The Philippine Army.

President Delano Roosevelt of the United States commissioned General Douglas MacArthur, to become the mentor of the infant military force. The appointment was withdrawn, caused by internal colonial American petty political dissention and jealousies. MacArthur retired from American military service in 1937 to accept the Baton of Field Marshall, of the Philippines, by an Act of the commonwealth government to retain the General's services.

General MacArthur had envisioned the growing threat of war in the far-east. He addressed his underlying concept which called for the full support of Commonwealth government and instilled upon President Manuel Quezon to guard against the probable menace. The young nation was practically defenseless in 1947 to cope with threat that within five years became a reality. Under MacArthur's expertise and direction were implemented the insurmountable plans for the defense of hundreds of islands in the archipelago.

On July 27, 1941, war clouds were brewing, and the retired General was recalled to active American military service this time to energize and muster the infant Philippine Army. By this act, the United States was concerned in the continued sovereignty of the Philippines. Characterized by his ability, he persuaded the Filipino people to support military conscription, a decisive development of the defense force.

The Orange Defense Plan designated Bataan, as the last stand of defense, and the island fortress of Corregidor was the command center of the Philippine Military forces. The widely scattered islands presented a problem. A system consisting of military districts was established to eliminate confusion and jurisdictional commands. This structure became the base of the resistance forces, while under enemy occupation.

Without warning the Japanese invasion caught what was supposed to be the largest American military force in the Far East in the midst of preparation. Partially prepared to defend against the invaders, MacArthur mustered his forces with all available resources. The Air Corps was paractically demolished and supplies and ammunition was suddenly in demand as a result of Japan's initial attack. The losses sustained were irreplaceable. Outside support by submarine and blockade running ships were unable to supply the dwindling reserves that were so desperately needed.

In the turbulent period of the invasion threatening signs of the deterioration so plagued the Philippine defenders that President Roosevelt directed MacArthur to leave the Philippines and relinquish his command in the hands of Major General Johnathan Wainwright. General MacArthur indoctrinated in the customs and traditions of the Filipino people desperately wanted to remain with his troops. He was aware of the true patriotism of the Filipino people as American and Filipinos fought side by side against a formidable enemy. With the consent of his staff, resolved to abide with the directive of his Commander In Chief, who vowed at his departure to Australia to return with forces to drive out the invaders.

Upon reaching his destination he was appointed Allied Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific

Command. He was amazed to learn of the totally inadequate resources for his return crusade. Australia forces were scattered in Europe as well as throughout the Southwest Pacific. Under the conditions of "Europe first" campaign operations programmed by the War Department, he sought to resolve his dilemma. He required all and every talent he could muster. Skilled officers under his command had to become proficient. Enlisted men who displayed talents of leadership were promoted with field commissions, and likewise those in command with less aptitude were eliminated. Supplies and equipment that was limited in availability were gathered, cannibalized, stored and repaired under adverse conditions.

In the days, and months and years that followed, MacArthur, became a hero to the Filipino people. His operational conduct of his "Leap Frog" campaign in the Southwest Pacific Area Operations bolstered the spirits of the Filipino people with "I Shall Return" campaign messages, to propagate his unwavering crusade to return. In the years that followed, political leaders affirmed the high esteem of his following. It became apparent he was a guiding spirit among them.

The Defenders

On December 7, 1941 the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands, and the Philippines Islands by the Imperial Japanese Forces plunged the United States into the greatest conflict in American military history. A Day of Infamy as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt described in his address to Congress, to declare a state of war against the Empire of Japan. The price of America's entry into the conflict was the surprise attack that destroyed what was once a proud and mighty naval force. This resulted in the cutting off of supply lines to the beleaguered forces in the Far East.

The War Department, charted the course of the war. The priorities of war operations were fixed based on the European theatre over the Pacific. This blundering secret was kept from the defenders of the Philippines. American and Filipino forces fought valiantly, unaware that help from America was not coming. Each agonizing day slowly turned into months. Exhausted defenders fought to hold on at Bataan as they starved with little medical supplies and ammunition. Promises of help could not be kept only to await the pain of the prelude to defeat. In the spring, on April 8, 1942, the gallant defenders fighting a delaying battle on Bataan finally surrendered to the over-powering onslaught of the Imperial Japanese forces.

Thousands of Americans and Filipino surrendered defenders, hungry, diseased and wounded were herded and forced into a "Death March". From Bataan to several hundred miles to Camp O'Donnell, a former military training camp that was converted by the invaders into a prisoner of war camp. The weak and wounded that were unable to endure the march fell by the wayside and faced certain death by the captors. More formidable prisoner of war camps were also created to house more than 76,000 prisoners, included the ill famed Cabanatuan Prison Camp located in Pangasinan, Luzon. The forces on the island of Corregidor were yet to suffer defeat and face similar conditions.

While under occupation, Philippine Commonwealth President Quezon wrote to President Roosevelt with an offer of capitulation. Realizing the futility of the war for his nation and its people, he asked that the Philippines be granted a status of neutrality. It was to allow the Philippines to accept a condition of independence proposed by the enemy. The idea was un-acceptable. The proud leader succumbed to tuberculosis before he could witness freedom for his oppressed people.

The humiliation of defeat was not for everyone. Those who refused to surrender, evaded capture and fled to the protection of the mountains and jungles. Regrouped and form guerrilla bands, throughout the archipelago commanded by escaped American and Filipino officers. Among the escaping troops included the wounded, fleeing under darkness aboard a weather beaten ship. Sneaking past enemy blockades, they reached Australia to join General MacArthur in his crusade. The voyage was a heroic effort. Inspired by the reunion in Australia, the troops vowed to return to continue the fight and recapture the Philippines

Islands. The survivors eventually reached California, to become the motivating factor for the return crusade to the Philippines. Galvanized by the invasion, Filipinos aliens in America, enraged by the rape of their motherland, tried to organize a belligerent volunteer unit. Initially enlistments into the US Armed Services were prohibited. An attempt of this magnitude required huge financing and resources that would involve months to organize and train. This was not to be, as funding and supplying such a venture was prohibitive.

In the effort to keep the campaign alive, Philippine High Commissioner, J. M. Elizalde, wrote letters to President Roosevelt informing him of the growing movement for a volunteer unit. In his reply, Roosevelt had signed Public Law 360 of the 77th Congress on December 20th, 1941, to circumvent the prohibition of Filipino alien status. The Selective Service Act was amended in January 3, 1942 permitting Filipino enlistments. National Headquarters of the Selective Service System issued the following instruction to all local draft boards: "All registrants who are citizens of the Philippine Commonwealth are deemed nationals of the United States and shall be reclassified in the same manner as citizens of the United States. Any citizens of the Philippine Commonwealth in the age group 18-35, both inclusive, who is not registered and desires to volunteer for induction, shall be processed as provided in Paragraphs 334 and 335 of the Regulations". From this circular, it will be noted that, for purposes of national defense, Filipinos were now treated as citizens of the United States. As such, they will be permitted to volunteer for induction in the armed forces of the United States. Any Filipino between the ages of 18-35, both ages inclusive, may now volunteer for induction." After the proclamation period, Filipino enlistees will be subject to draft, and therefore will not enjoy the status of a volunteer.

Under those circumstances, Philippine High Commissioner J. M. Elizalde urged every able-bodied Filipino of military age to volunteer for induction. The call to arms was answered as thousands of displaced Filipinos in America, rallied to the call. Recruits migrated from many parts of the United States. Then, on March 4, 1942, the 1st Filipino Infantry Battalion was constituted at San Luis, Obispo, California. On April 1, 1942, in a matter of months, the rolls of the battalion increased, to become officially a Regiment. Lt. Colonel Robert H. Offley, formerly of the Philippine Army, was commissioned to be the Commanding Officer. A mass ceremony was conducted, swearing thousands of volunteer recruits in the oath of allegiance, affirming officially their citizenship status in the United States, and combatant.

Volunteers were known as 'Manong', a title of respect, meaning older brother. Much older than the typical teens and twenties of draft age men. Regardless of age or status, they were also known as "Pinoy's", a misnomer ethnic designation of ethnic Filipino. The news of the formation of the Regiment, drew hundreds to California. They came from all parts of the United States, including Hawaii and Canada. They represent the migration of Philippine nationals during the period of 1906 through 1941.

The Manongs were wiry and hardy men who worked the fields and farms, or were laborers and cargo handlers, or from canneries and factories, or hotels and restaurant workers. U. S. citizens of Filipino ancestry that volunteered or enlisted following December 7, 1941, were transferred to the newly organized Filipino Infantry. Among them were those who earned degrees of higher learning, to receive commissions along with white officers. Not to be left out were the survivors of Bataan and Corregidor to who earned the prestige of survivor to become a volunteer. Within three months, the overflow of troops warranted the activation of the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment, at Fort Ord, California. Colonel Charles L. Clifford became Commanding Officer.

The Training and Tribulations.

The 77th Infantry of the Sixth Army, based in California, assigned a training cadre at San Louis Obispo, California. Training began in earnest, and the volunteers were enthusiastic in learning the necessary skills

the army had to offer. The training was severe and comprehensive, covering a wide range of warfare. The cadre were astonished, and amazed as the volunteers quickly adapted to the rigors of training. In addition to basic military training, the volunteers learned other skills, such as, technical use and repair of radio equipment, the Morse codes, hand to hand combat, special weapons training from small arms to heavy weapons. Skills also in administrative, medical, supply and specializing in intelligence gathering, to support skills as cooks, truck drivers and mechanics, electricians and plumbers. All of this was new to the former field hands and laborers. The unit was to become a self supporting unit in the roll to return to their homeland. This all became meaningfully important, as the skills would apply to a wide range of assignments and situations, in the liberation and re-occupation of the homeland to eventually to their private lives.

The units earned the title of "The Bolo Regiments". The story was how Californians formed a scrap iron drive to produce Bolo knives. Fashioned from automobile springs the weapon was presented to the men of the regiment to use as the traditional hand to hand combat weapon.

Lt. Colonel Robert H. Offley, a regular army officer, was justly proud of his command. His father like himself served in the Philippines. He saw service in the Philippines under General MacArthur training members of the Philippine Scouts and the Philippine Army. He was adept and familiar with the customs of the Manongs who affection ally called him "Tatay", a tagalog nickname meaning father. Raised as a child in the Philippines, he spoke and understood the various dialects of the Filipino people.

Incidents occurred in towns adjacent their training encampment. They related to off duty excursions of the troops in contact with the township. The towns people took exception to the liberties of the troops. The troops complained of the treatment as second class citizens, limiting the use of public facilities, and especially the dating of local women. The troops endured the prejudicial hostility, until the matter came up with the commanding officer. Colonel Offley, offended by the treatment, met with the city officials. He explained the law, clarifying the citizenship status of the troops. He also warned the city fathers of the consequences of placing the town "Off Limits". This resulted in changes that developed, to the appreciation of the freedom loving troops.

The Special Forces

While training progressed, General MacArthur, aware of the activation of the two units, dispatched Lt. Colonel Courtney Whitney, a former Manila attorney, to hand pick volunteers for his ALAMO FORCES. MacArthur selected the colonel because of his credentials. The Colonel also had prior experiences with Filipinos, who eventually, became the Commander of the Philippine Regional Section (PRS) within the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), under the ALAMO FORCES.

A volunteer's criteria for selection mandated he have the ability to endure intensive combat training, with skills to speak and understand the Filipino dialects, as well being able to survive within topographical areas. Survival and endurance was the key to this type of operation. In fact to live off the land was of the primary requirements and to develop skills in intelligence gathering. Several hundred volunteers were selected which decreased the rolls of both Regiments. Already formed in Australia, the selected volunteers were assigned to the 5217th Reconnaissance Bn (Separate) and 5218th Reconnaissance Company (Separate) consisting of Bataan-Corregidor escaped veterans, or to the 978th Signal Service Company, a regular Army unit which was assigned to the PRS AIB. Trained together with "Manongs", the men gained technical skills in the use and repair of radio sets and portable generators. The unit supplied Gen. MacArthur's AIB with expert telegraphic reports, while participating in field assignments that accompanied clandestine team missions or landings. After training at Camp Tagrabalga, Beaudesert, the PRS was deployed to New Guinea. The "separate" units later were reorganized to form the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion (Special) in Hollandia.

Camp Tagrabalga, Beaudesert, 50 miles away from Brisbane, was the site of MacArthur's Headquarters. At this advance headquarters, Gen. MacArthur focused and intensified the third phase of his "Leap Frog" campaign. It consisted of operations and activities to develop and coordinate with the Guerrilla Forces in early 1943. This was in part, the ALAMO FORCES.

The Mission Operations 1st Regt. & 2nd Battalion (Separate)

While the AIB conducted clandestine missions, the troops of the 1st Regiment in California were preparing for shipment overseas. Assaults around the area of Buna, New Guinea, were settling down. The USS General Pope, from San Francisco, transported the 1st Regiment, to Oro Bay, New Guinea, and deployed to Dobodura on April 28, 1944. The unit was assigned to the 31st Division of the 8th Army, in reserve with the Eighth Army. The mission was to provide security in the area, and continue intensified combat training.

The 2nd Regiment was renamed the 2nd Filipino Infantry Battalion (Separate) commanded by Lt. Col. Edwin L. Sallman. On May 30, 1944 they departed Camp Cooke, California to arrive on July 4, 1944 to encamp 10 miles from the 1st Regiment. Army Regulation 615-363 resulted in it being reduced from regiment size. This called for the removal of men over the age of 38 with dependents by discharge or placement in the reserves. As a result there was a loss of unit effectiveness and it became a "pool" of Filipino specialists, with the assignment of troops to detached service with units of the Sixth and Eighth Armies. However, detached personnel did participate with Counter Intelligence Corps units in the Sixth Army landings on Leyte in 1944, and Luzon in 1945. They also provided support in the formation of 30 or more teams to the Philippine Civil Affairs Unit (PCAU).

The 1st Regiment saw its initial combat action in Leyte and Samar, in early 1945. Units of the 3rd Battalion were attached to the 182nd Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division. It was 8th Army reserves in the mopping up operations following the Sixth Army spearheads. The Sixth Army regrouped in preparation to attack Luzon in January 1945. Reinforced by Company "L" of the 3rd Battalion, the 1st Regiment, landed at Allen on the north western tip of Samar, and then continued with a landing attack on Capul Island. The entire operation took 5 days, with 35 KIA 179 wounded, and 5 MIA. The enemy suffered 1,572 KIA and 57 captured. Later, the combat units included assignments in "mopping up" operations on Leyte and Samar. The 2nd Battalion (Separate), provided Philippine Civil Affairs Units (PCAU) after mopping up operations. Selected individuals were on detached service with the "Alamo Scouts"

The Sixth Army was advancing rapidly against the enemy on Luzon in early January 1945. They feared the Japanese would execute the Prisoners of War at Cabantuan. Hurriedly, the ALAMO FORCES prepared plans to rescue the hundreds of POW's at Cabantuan. The Alamo Scouts and the 6th Ranger Battalion, under the Command of Colonel Henry Mucci were credited in freeing allied Prisoners of War at Cabantuan with the help of detached troops of the 2nd Regiment, and Philippine guerrilla Forces.

The Manongs were assigned to coordinate the rescue operations with Filipino guerrillas. From the town of Guimba, the Alamo Scouts and rangers traveled under darkness to storm the main gate of the prison compound, freed the prisoners, and then lured the enemy away from the prison compound. The heroic guerrillas led by Philippine Army Captain Juan Pajota, fought valiantly in a furious delaying action against enemy tanks at Cabu Bridge. The main force of rescuers and prisoners escaped on the return route back to the town of Guimba 30 miles away. The operation was a complete success, since no prisoners were lost. Over five hundred allied prisoners were freed, with a minimum loss of life among the rescuers. Ranger physician Captain James Fisher was killed, and Alfred Alfonso of Waipahu, Hawaii escaped with injuries. He was awarded the Silver Star, and The Purple Heart in this action. MacArthur was highly pleased with

the operation. He personally visited the rescued prisoners, and the heroic rescuers. The news of the daring operation boosted the morale of the nation.

THE "WILD BUNCH"

The Manongs branded these Pinoys as free-wheeling; unbridled super active, impulsive, devil may care rascals. Their maverick antics were either hilarious or troublesome. This annoyed the "Manong" who expected them to toe the line.

Generally, the Wild Bunch relates to about 350 draftees from Hawaii. They were very responsive to intimidation, and much younger than the older Manongs. The youngsters in their late teens and early twenties joined by those draftees from the mainland composed the "Wild Bunch." Dubbed as "Hawayanos," they spoke with broken English, called "pigeon" whereas the mainlanders spoke with refined English. This distinguished them from mainland Pinoy draftees. Otherwise, it was difficult to tell the difference as they were alike and got along well and respected each other for what they were.

The Wild Bunch were the sons of pioneer Filipino contract labor who emigrated to Hawaii or to the mainland during the years of 1906 to 1941. They developed an independent and self sufficient attitude in multi-racial communities. Some came from inter-racial families and integrated with other racial groups within sugar and pineapple plantations. They had been assigned to a minority class by temperament and sub-standard education. In many cases they found themselves part of the labor force relegated to low paying plantation labors in efforts to help support their families. A few had completed formal education to enter the community and compete for better paying jobs. Both groups got along fine, just that the mavericks or rowdy ones tagged them as the "Wild Bunch" as a whole. To add to their colorful personality, some were sons of former World War 1 veterans. The emigrant fathers had served with the United States Army's 1st Hawaiian Infantry Regiments. In some isolated cases, some fathers served with the Armed Forces later to become a part of the Filipino community.

Ninety-five percent of the Hawaiian Infantry were drafted Filipinos. The regiments eventually became the genesis for the foundation of the Hawaii National Guard. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, some pioneer sons voluntarily enlisted in the National Guard before activation. Consequently, the Hawaii National Guardsmen became the cadre of the "Wild Bunch". The former guardsmen, combat veterans of Guadalcanal in the south-pacific, trained and guided the second generation in basic military training at Schofield Barracks. Their combat experience proved to be valuable lessons for the young soldiers. The correlation may just be a coincidence in military heritage. The men underwent the rigors of combat operations, rather than technological training skills.

From the beginning of the War, those who enlisted were sent to the mainland for training. In many cases, after training with regular army units, they were transferred to the Filipino Infantry. It was not until late 1943 when these young men were retained for training in Hawaii. The reason apparently was obvious, as the war in Europe was reaching its climax, and that the replacements were needed for the Far East. Never in the minds of these young Filipinos was the belief they would they be assigned to the Filipino Infantry until they arrived in the Philippines.

The 1st and 2nd Regiments were sent to New Guinea in April of 1944. Many were assigned to detached service with the Sixth Army Spearhead and Eight Army reserves which seen combat in 1944 to 1945. Towards the end of the war, part of the 1st Filipino Infantry was assigned to detached service with the experienced Americal Division following Sixth Army Spearheads. The mission consisted of combat engagements that consisted of mopping up Japanese stragglers on Leyte, Samar and smaller islands in the Visayan Islands group. Troops of the 2nd Filipino Battalion were employed as support with the Counter Intelligence Corps or to the Philippine Civil Affairs Units (PCAU) throughout the archipelago.

As the war in the Pacific was ending, young pinoy on off duty liberties took a liking to the "dalagas" or young local ladies. Apparently the girls seemed to take a liking to them. Attracted by their manners, the girls went out of their way to attract them. In some instances to launder their uniforms or on special occasion invite them over to meet the family for dinner. The relationships caused antagonistic encounters with local Filipino men. Company First Sergeants, who were usually "Hawa-yanos," administered company punishments by restricting off duty liberties thus suppressing minor confrontations from company commander's involvement. Some of the young men registered for marriage. War brides returned to the United States with their husbands.

The men of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion after being deactivated in August of 1945 were returned to the 1st Regiment stationed at San Antonio, Samar. They were joined by troops of the 2nd Battalion that was disbanded in Luzon, in December of 1945. Recalled troops from detached service with the Sixth and Eighth Armies gathered in Samar, in late March 1946. The troops who earned sufficient service points were returned to California. At Camp Beale, California, the Filipino Infantry was disbanded and its colors were encased on April 9, 1946.

Meanwhile the "Wild Bunch", who did not qualify to return home, was transferred to the 86th Infantry Division at Marakina, Luzon. Some re-enlisted to take advantage of bringing their war brides home. The rest were formed into a special unit called the Filipino-American Detachment of the "Black Hawks Division". The mission was to patrol and guard the fuel lines from Bataan through "Huk" infested communist Pampanga territory to Clark Field. The assignment of the detachment did not incur any major military incidents. Following the tour of duty, the detachment in late 1946, were returned to California and the men discharged from service to return home.

[Source Mil.com Jun 2010 ++]