

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

Long before the official creation of the defense department in 1939 by President Manuel Luis Quezon, the country has had a semblance of a defense organization dating back to the pre-Spanish period when our barangays had an organization of able-bodied men of the village charged with the protection of the community from hostile forces. This organization was the forerunner of what we now call our armed forces.

In the early days of the Katipunan, Andres Bonifacio, as Supremo of the revolutionary society, had picked Teodoro Plata, his brother-in-law, as his Secretary of War. When Emilio Aguinaldo was elected President in the Tejeros convention on March 22, 1897, and succeeded Bonifacio as leader of the Katipunan, Emilio Riego de Dios was also elected as Director of War.

The war against Spain demonstrated for the first time the Filipino people's capability to organize an army to fight foreign colonial masters. Aguinaldo's two high-ranking military officers during the Spanish-Filipino war were Artemio Ricarte as Captain-General and Mariano Llanera as Lieutenant-General. Other officers of general rank included Vito Belarmino, Mariano Noriel, Pio del Pilar, Pascual Alvarez, Manuel Tinio, Tomas Mascardo, Jose Salvador and Pantaleon Garcia.

The capture of Aguinaldo on March 23, 1901 at Palanan, Isabela, tolled the death of a struggle by the Filipinos for independence against the powerful United States of America.

Civil Government

Two weeks after the establishment of the American civil government on July 4, 1901, the Philippine Commission adopted a measure, Act No. 175, which called for the creation of an insular police force charged with the function of maintaining peace and order as well as to suppress crime. The Philippine Constabulary was officially constituted on August 1, 1901.

Actually, the national police force, composed of 6,000 men, was led by American officers and former members of the Spanish Guardia Civil. It functioned as a bureau, known as the Bureau of Constabulary under the Department of Commerce and Police, but controlled to certain extent by the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the War Department of the United States of America.

The Philippine revolution continued in the form of guerilla resistance groups organized under different leaders, many of them former officers in the Revolutionary Army. Among them were General Luciano San Miguel, Faustino Guillermo, Macario Sakay, Julian Montalan, Cornelio Felizardo, Simeon Ola, Lazaro Toledo and Roman Manalan.

Some resistance groups had acquired quasi-religious overtone, like the movements led by Ruperto Rios, Felipe Salvador, Dionisio Magbuelas, Quintin and Anatalio Tabal, Pablo Bulan, Antonio Anugar, Pedro dela Cruz and Isidro Ompoc. The Constabulary and the U.S. Army had their hands full organizing military campaigns to track down the guerilla leaders and other remnants of the Revolutionary Army.

Aside from the above military campaigns, the constabulary was kept busy by the Mindanao outlaws which gave military authorities a big headache then as it is now. In addition, the constabulary had to take care of the Oto campaign in Panay in 1916; the Colorums of Surigao in 1925; the Colorums of Tayug, Pangasinan in 1925 and 1931; the Asedillo campaign in Laguna in 1934; the Intrencherrado campaign in Negros; and the Sakdalista uprising in the provinces around Manila in 1935, on the eve of the elections of the Commonwealth government.

Military Mission

On November 19, 1934, Senate President Manuel L. Quezon requested the U.S. Secretary of War to recommend amendment of an Act passed on May 19, 1926 which provided for the detail of U.S. Army, Naval and Marine Corps to assist the other American republics in military and naval matters, to make it equally applicable to the Philippines. The Act was duly amended by the U.S. Congress thereby authorizing a military mission to the Philippines which Quezon immediately requested from the United States after his election as President of the Commonwealth of the Philippines.

The first bill that President Quezon presented to the Assembly of his new Commonwealth government was the National Defense Act which had been formulated by General Douglas MacArthur. The hard core of the land defense rested on a small, professional Philippine regular army of some 350 officers and 5,000 enlisted men, with a permanent army headquarters and staff.

Through Executive Order No. 11 dated January 11, 1936, President Quezon appointed Brig Gen. Jose delos Reyes as acting Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army. In that same order, the Philippine Constabulary consisting of some 6,000 officers and men, was transferred to, and made a part of, the regular force of the Army of the Philippines.

The real defense of the country would ultimately lie in the troops of the reserve divisions, to be drafted and trained at the rate of some 40,000 recruits each year. Half of this number would enter the training camps for 5-1/2 months training each six-month period.

The defense preparations were beset by many difficulties, among them the problems posed by the illiteracy and ignorance of many trainees, the

variety of dialects which hindered communication, the serious of lack everything, from funds to officers to weapons, and even such rudimentary

supplies as shoes and tents. Lack of properly-trained officers, arms and ammunition, equipment, and money for conducting even limited field exercises seriously handicapped MacArthur's effort. It was impossible in the original short 5-1/2 month periods complicated by schooling in hygiene and physical and moral improvement, to give the draftees more than the most rudimentary instruction in soldiering. In most cases, there was no training for units larger than a company.

MacArthur had believed that at the end of the Commonwealth period, the Philippines would have at least 400,000 reserve citizen-soldiers. By 1938, however, only 69,848 had been given intensive military training, as against the projected 120,000 for a three-year period at the rate of 40,000 a year.

Early in 1938, Quezon got the National Assembly to pass an Act separating the Constabulary from the Philippine Army. The seriously depleted the number and quality of training officers since MacArthur had been drawing on the Constabulary experience.

Formal Creation

With the formal creation of the Department of National Defense on November 1, 1939, MacArthur could no longer order munitions, enroll trainees, nor enter into contracts for the construction of military facilities without the approval of Quezon and Teofilo Sison, the Secretary of National Defense. Before this date, MacArthur had a free hand in the formulation of policies for the Philippine defense system.

From the start of his mission to the Philippines, MacArthur's plan had revolved around the theory that his task was to provide manpower capable of assisting in defense during the period of transition from the Commonwealth to a Republican government. Until that date, the main responsibility for the defense of the Islands was definitely American but Washington had failed to honor this obligation, refusing MacArthur real help of any kind.

On August 15, 1941, the small Philippine Army Air Corps (PAAC) was personally inducted into the U.S. service by MacArthur. "Only those are fit to live who are not afraid to die," he told the little group of Filipino pilots and ground crewmen.

Pacific War

On December 7, 1941 (Hawaii time), the Japanese treacherously bombed Pearl Harbor. World War II had begun. The Filipinos were now drawn into a war not of their own making, nevertheless, they fought valiantly at the side of the Americans, only to be abandoned in their hour of

greatest need because of the “Europe First Policy” of the high command in Washington.

The story of the epic Battle of Bataan can never be given full justice in writing for the hallowed voices of those who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of peace and freedom are mute and their lips are sealed forever. Only the living, the survivors, can speak of the agony and suffering of fighting a war which was lost even before the first firing of the gun has started. It was a tribute to the indomitable fighting spirit of the Filipino and American defenders in Bataan and Corregidor that they fought to the last ounce of strength, despite insurmountable odds, and even if they knew beforehand that it was a losing battle, that it was not a question of winning, but how long they could delay the eventual surrender to the enemy forces.

As a consequence of the far-flung deployment of troops required by MacArthur’s beach-defense plan and the last minute return to War Plan Orange, many USAFFE units in Luzon were cut off and were unable to join the retreat to Bataan. Some managed to escape from Bataan prior to its surrender, and others had refused to obey General Wainwright’s surrender order after the fall of Corregidor. These and other units became the nuclei of most guerilla groups.

On September 14, 1944, General MacArthur received a directive from the Joint Chief of Staff instructing him to proceed with the reconquest of Luzon. The campaign for the liberation of the Philippines was concluded on July 5, 1945. On that day, MacArthur officially declared that the War, as far as the Philippines was concerned, was ended.

Early Postwar

MacArthur formally turned over on February 27, 1945 the powers and functions of the government to President Sergio Osmeña. Osmeña set to work investigating collaboration charges with the help of Tomas Confessor, wartime civil governor of Iloilo and a guerilla leader of Panay, who had become his interim Secretary of Defense Eventually, all the accused were granted amnesty.

One of the Osmeña’s first acts was to issued Executive Order No. 21 which stated, among others, that all persons serving with recognized guerilla units are considered on active duty with the Philippine Army. Osmeña also ordered the reestablishment of the Headquarters Philippine Army in Tacloban, Leyte effective October 23, 1944, with Maj. Gen. Basilio J. Valdes, pre-war chief of staff, assuming his old role. When valdes was appointed member of the War Crimes Commission for the trial of Japanese war criminals in the Philippines, Brig. Gen. Rafael Jalandoni was designated as the chief of staff, with Brig. Gen. Macario Peralta, Jr. as his deputy.

Military Police

To promote peace and security throughout the liberated areas of the country, Osmeña issued Executive Order No. 51 which activated the Military Police Command, PA effective June 7, 1945. The MPC’s mission was to

enforce military regulations and assist civil authorities in enforcing the law throughout the Philippines, except in combat areas. It also performed the additional task of supervising police activities and assisting in the reorganization of all civil police forces.

The proliferation of loose firearm in the hands of guerillas and civilians alike immediately after the war had posed a new peace and order problem to the government. In Central Luzon, a strong war-time guerilla force, known as the Hukbalahaps, had held unto its power, and opposed the government. The Huk organization had its beginning in the peasant-landlord feuds of the pre-war days and its leadership was heavily laced with Socialists and Communists. From July 1950 to June 1951, the HMB had increased its regular cadres from 3,600 to 56,000 and reached peak strength of 172,000 from an original ceiling of 10,000 and a mass base of 2,430,000. Because of the rapidly growing strength of the HMB, a Pentagon State Department survey team, the Melba Mission, was sent to the Philippines to look into the military equipment needs of the Philippine Armed Forces and to set up a program for improving its counterinsurgency capability.

The Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) was assigned the task of implementing the Melby Mission's recommendation and it became the agency that coordinate the re-organization of the anti-Huk campaign.

On August 31, 1950, President Elpidio Quirino appointed a new Secretary of Defense, Ramon Magsaysay, to tackle the Huk problem. Magsaysay developed a plan to both attack and attract the Huks.