

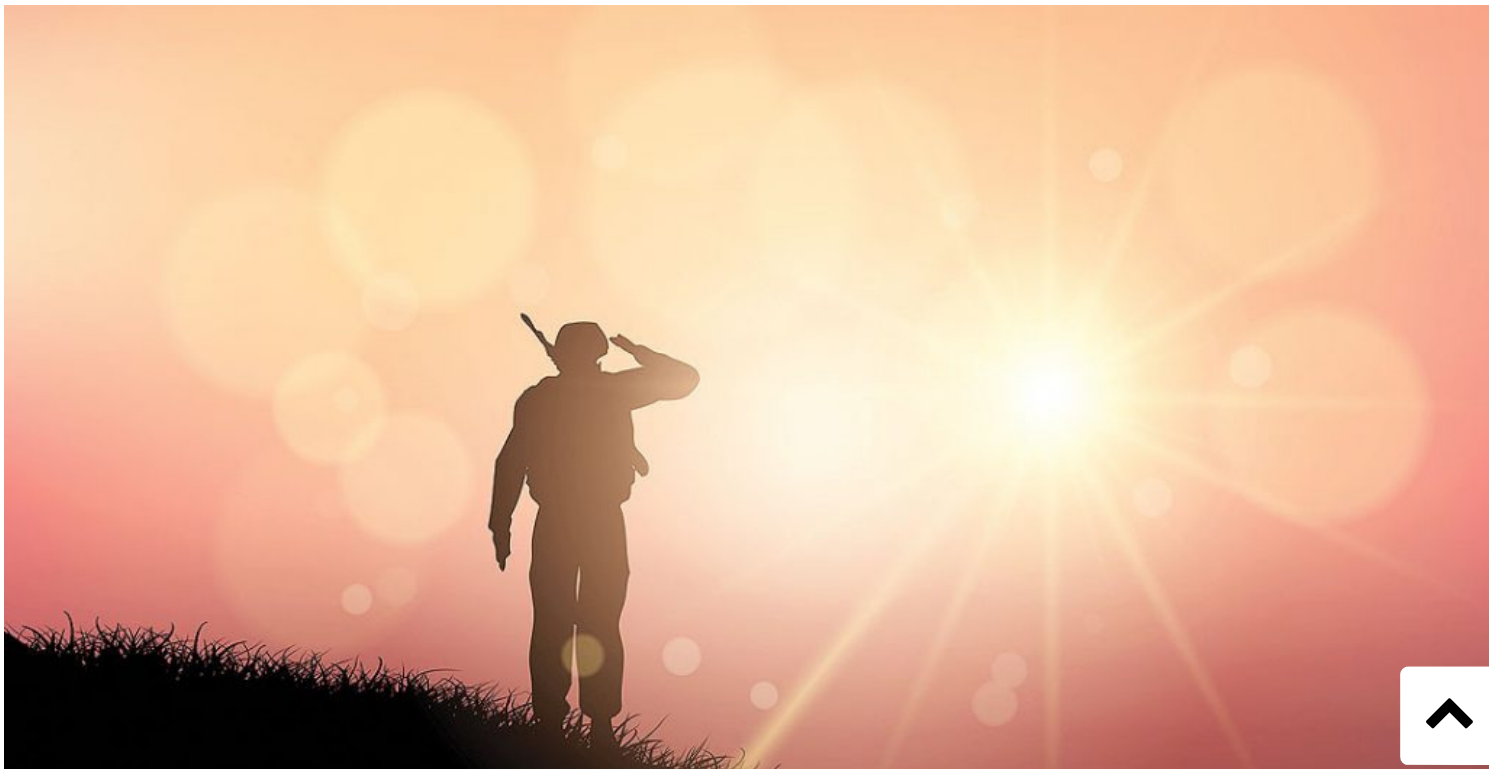
# Memories of sacrifice for the common good

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## Earning Our Tomorrow

By Philip Ella Juico



*KJPARGETER-FREEPIK*

We visited Baguio City recently for the first time since the completion of what is really the extension of the Northern Luzon Expressway (NLEX). The NLEX was designed to shorten travel time from the expressway entrance at Cloverleaf from more than five hours to a little less than four and expedite trade and commerce. But because of the sheer volume of traffic of Christmas holiday tourists headed for Baguio even late at night, and the disabling of Kennon Road lane towards Baguio, the trip took us a bit more than five hours. We were welcomed by Bob Sobrepeña's Manor Hotel staff at John Hay a little past midnight.

The next day, I attended the national championships of the Philippine Athletics Track and Field Association (Patafa) at the Baguio Athletic bowl and the following day administered the oath of office of Baguio city Mayor Benjamin Magalong as Patafa Regional Director for the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

As a 10-year-old, my parents would bring me and my other siblings on regular trips to Baguio to visit an older brother, Sonny, at the Benito Lopez family majority-owned Baguio Military Institute (BMI), nestled on a vast tract of land in Irisan Heights, Naguilian. During those visits, we would meet other families whose names for a 10-year-old did not then ring bells. The family names Pelaez, Tañada, Eugenio Lopez, Antonino, Demetrio, Muñoz, Teodoro Evangelista, Chiongbian, Caruncho, Amang Rodriguez, Sinsuat, Castelo, Rabat, Bagatsing, Quimson, and Bautista (scions of the former Baguio Mayor) were among those I would hear from my brother, parents, and during occasional convocations organized by the school administrators.



I looked forward to those trips basically for two reasons: I would get to see my *kuya* (older brother) and I would have a chance to stay with my parents for several nights at the Baguio Golf and Country Club (BGCC) where the carnivorous me wasted no time in attacking the club's cheeseburgers, hotdog, and ham sandwiches. BGCC was then a one-story wooden structure with lots of fireplaces at different parts of the club. The club manager was an American lady who members simply called Mrs. Reed. I never got to know her first name. For golfers, the "greens" of BGCC's par 61 course in the late 1950s to '60s were then topped with sand which was periodically oiled to maintain the "greens" slickness.

The City of Pines, or the summer capital, was then known for — aside from the cool mountain weather — strawberries, leafy vegetables, Camp John Hay (then an American base), Mines View Park, Wright Park, Burnham Park (with its lagoon and small boats for rent, skating rink, ponies, scooters, mini-cars, scooters and bicycles for rent), Session Road, Rice Bowl, Star Café, Manila Café, Pines Hotel, Vallejo Court, the University of Baguio, St. Louis University, the Baguio Cathedral, and the Philippine Military Academy, among others.

Fast forward to my days as Cabinet Officer for Regional Development (CORD) for the CAR. Aside from the other tasks assigned by then President Corazon Aquino, our other mandate was to help implement the peace accord forged at Mt. Data in 1986 between the Cordillera People's Army (CPLA) of Ka Ambo — popularly known as Fr. Conrado Balweg, the SVD priest from Abra turned communist insurgent after years of advancing the interests of indigenous tribes in the Cordilleras — and the government. One of the main points of agreement was the integration of the renegade priest's CPLA troops into the post-EDSA New Armed Forces of the Philippines (NAFP). Though integration was part of the agreement, there was some discernible resistance from the NAFP as the hurt, pain, and wounds of bloody skirmishes with insurgents remained fresh in the minds of troops at the lowest level where the fighting was most intense.

The idea was for the CPLA and the NAFP to join forces in putting an end to the bloodshed in the Cordilleras. Balweg was, however, viewed by his former CP ▲

comrades as a traitor while the NAFP looked at him with a great suspicion and distrust. At one point, Balweg complained to me that the military was sabotaging his efforts in fighting the insurgents and make good his promise by not providing him with the necessary firepower to fight the rebels who had vowed to kill Balweg, the traitor. He had complained that the NAFP had paid lip service to the Mt. Data talks by providing him mostly with World War II vintage arms like the semi-automatic Garand.

The rest of our memories of Baguio are just too varied to write about. I cannot however help but be amused and frustrated with the national impact of what we were then doing compared with the issues and personalities we now face. The parties we then engaged were, for the most part, sharp-witted, sincere, and loved the country in a non-dramatic and theatrical way. They really had the country's interest at heart and were people of humility: they were willing to put the larger community's and organization's interest first before their own. In a sense, as one veteran journalist put it, "dealing with others in other fields mirrors the dilemma people face in the forthcoming elections" as lies become "true" and the truth becomes lies. And one can assign a large part of that regrettable oddity to social media.

We have to get back to the Garand because of the connection it has with our agrarian history and the continuing struggle for freedom.

The rifle was used in several wars and battles in the late 1940s and early '50s such as the US-backed campaign against the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap), an armed group in Central Luzon that resisted the Japanese invasion but which, after the war, shifted back to its leaders' original advocacy in the 1930s for peasant causes.

The Huk Movement was led by Supremo Luis Taruc and Casto Alejandrino. Taruc (or Ka Luis) had been active in advocating for greater participation by peasants in decisions affecting the countryside as early as the 1930s and thus could be said as creating pressure in the countryside through agrarian unrest. The movement that Taruc headed shifted its attention from agrarian matters to :



more basic objective: fighting a foreign invader.


The Huks principal advocacy after the war was for the Philippine government to implement a draconian land reform program that called for outright confiscation of landlord lands by force, if necessary. The Huks had staged a bloody rebellion in the country's rice granary and it lasted until the administration of President Ramon Magsaysay to officially end the rebellion with the surrender of Taruc. The supremo's surrender was facilitated by the then young presidential assistant of Magsaysay, Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino, Jr. who was assigned by Magsaysay with that specific task.

Sometime in 1987, shortly after I took my oath as Secretary of Agrarian Reform in July, I had the chance to meet with Taruc. President Cory had encouraged me to touch base with the charismatic leader and exchange views with the then 75-year-old former rebel.

The conversation with Taruc is perhaps the type one misses when dealing with people whose ultimate interest, couched in expressions of love of country, is simply to perpetuate themselves in power and to preserve the status quo which has been beneficial to them.

I remember that as we talked, Ka Luis was still longing for the agrarian society which is the take off point of a modern economy. A lot more of his thoughts are in his autobiography aptly titled, *Born of the People*.

Ka Luis and Ambo, whose willingness to sacrifice a great part of their lives for a cause, are worth remembering as we enter a new year.

Philip Ella Juico's areas of interest include the protection and promotion of democracy, free markets, sustainable development, social responsibility and sports as a tool for social development. He obtained his doctorate in business at De La Salle University. Dr. Juico served as secretary of Agrarian Reform duri 

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