WORLD METEOROLOGICAL DAY

The Weather Bureau: 97 Years Of Service Under 4 Governments

(This article is published on the occasion of World Meteorological Day today.)

By GREGG ARMEA

Today, the all too familiar weather forecast is one of those things we take for granted, at least where there are regular newspaper and radio services. Yet, 50 years ago, weather forecasting was often a matter of personal lore, superstition, tradition, or plain guesswork.

Now, we are so accustomed to the day-to-day reports of the local weatherman that very few people think twice about it. Fewer indeed have any idea of what goes behind the forecasts on which they rely so much for a satisfying conduct of their affairs, whether for business or for pleasure.

The Philippine Weather Bureau as now constituted, has nine divisions, namely: administrative, forecasting center, geophysical, astronomical, synopic, climatological, research and training, technical services, and accounting.

Its incumbent director, Roman L. Kintanar, 33, is eminently qualified for his job having finished his doctorate in physics at University of Texas. He joined the service in 1948 as a seismic observer and rose from the ranks to the directorship in 1958.

The local weather service actually began on Jan. 1, 1865, as a private venture through the efforts of Rev. Juan Vidal, a Jesuit superior. It was then known as the "Observatorio del Ateneo Municipal."

Its first director was Rev. Francisco Colina. In 1867, Rev. Federico Faura replaced Father Colina.

By Royal Decree in 1884, the observatory became, for the first time, a government institution and sported the new name of "Observatorio Meteorologico de Manila."

Along with its work on meteorology at the time, those of seismology, terrestial magnetism, and astronomy were also developed. Its first typhoon warning bulletin was released by Father Faura on July 1, 1879. Work on terrestrial

SOLAR RADIATION. Variations in the intensity of solar radiation is another phenomenon of solar activity that influences our weather. Measurements of such variations is important in predicting long-range fluctuations of weather. Photo shows Weather Bureau technician Edgardo Morante taking down readings of the intensity of radiation from an electronic recorder.

world.

Father Faura's successor in 1897, Rev. Jose Algue, was at the helm when the institution was taken over by the Americans. On May 22, 1901, by virtue of Act No. 131 of the Philippine Commission, it was reorganized and renamed "Weather Bureau" by which it is known to this day. Under the new dispensation, the bureau was placed under the administrative control of the now defund department of interior.

The succeeding years were marked by rapid growth and development. The bureau participated in various international expositions and scientific expeditions. It also attended several Pan-Pacific Science congresses.

Its published works, the result of many years of research, were well received. These later proved to be of inestimable value to the American liberation forces during World War II.

In 1917, the bureau was placed under the control of the newly created department of agriculture and natural resources. During the Commonwealth regime, and until 1947, it remained under the same department except for a brief span during the fast war when, by order of the Japanese, it was controlled by the department of public works and communications.

In 1926, Father Miguel Selga, the last of the bureau's priest-directors, succeeded Father Algue. It was under the former's term, that a uniform code of storm warnings was worked out with the heads of other weather services in the Far East.

Up to the Commonwealth period, during which time it functioned under the Jesuit Fathers, very little changes took place.

As with other government units, the bureau was isolated from the outside world except with other captive states of the so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a condition that impaired its prime function as member of a world-wide team of weather services gathering data for world-wide dissemination. Initiative and resourcefulness among individual weathermen, however, enabled the Allied forces of liberation to make use of accurate weather information over occupied enemy territory.

In February, 1944, the battle for Manila reduced the Manila observatory to shambles. All its instruments, records, and a mass of other scientific wealth accumulated through 80 years were destroyed.

With Edilberto Parulan as officer in charge over six other men, a borrowed table, two empty gasoline cans, and plenty of guts and imagination, the bureau began its difficult climb from scratch. The date was July 24, 1945, and it marked the beginning of an entirely new organization.

The following November, Prof. Casimiro del Rosario, head of the Physics department of the University of the Philippines, succeeded Parulan as officer in charge. Normal business was resumed at the former Japanese temple at No. 136 Lipa street, Sampaloc. At first, only four units—meteorological, astronomical, seismic and magnetic, and administrative — were able to resume operations. Valuable support durin those trying days came from the U.S. Army which donated much-needed instruments.

After World War II, the Philippine Rehabilitation Act of 1946 authorized the sending of a U.S. weather bureau mission to Manila which resulted in the acquisition by the badly battered local weather service of ₱2 million worth of meteorological equipment, pensionado training program in the U.S. and orientation training for Weather Bureau personnel.

The Philippine Weather Bureau is still lagging in many respects in comparison with counterpart services in more progressive countries around the world but it cannot be denied that today it is a far cry from the modest "Observatorio del Ateneo Municipal" started by Rev. Juan Vidal 97 years ago.