

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

This publication features the presentations and discussions at the 3rd Ateneo Korean Studies Conference organized by the Korean Studies Program, in partnership with the Department of Political Science and the Department of History, in October 2016 on the theme, “Revisiting the Korean War: History, Memory and its Implications on Contemporary Nation Building.” Now on its third year, the Ateneo Korean Studies Conference series is one of the many initiatives started by the Ateneo de Manila University to develop and promote the status of Korean Studies as a major field of study in Philippine academia.

Organized in memory of and on the occasion of the 66th Anniversary of the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK) landing in Busan, the conference explores how the experience of the Korean War in the 1950s continues to shape the political, economic and socio-cultural facets of nation building in the Korean peninsula in this era of globalization and development.

Oftentimes referred to as “The Forgotten War,” the Korean War broke out on 25th of June 1950 when North Korean troops, led by Kim Il-sung, launched surprise attacks on the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Unknown to many Filipinos, the Philippines was the first Asian country and the third UN member state to send contingent forces to South Korea to restore international peace and suppress the impending communist invasion.

The Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK) was thus formed, and a total of five Battalion Combat Teams (20th, 19th, 14th, 10th and 2nd BCTs) were deployed over a span of five years. Enduring the rough terrain, harsh weather conditions, and homesickness, around 7,500 Filipino soldiers fought bravely in a foreign land in the name of freedom and democracy. The Korean War took the lives of 112 Filipino soldiers, wounded 299, while 16 men remain officially missing-in-action to this day. On August 4, 2000, Presidential Proclamation 535 was signed declaring September 7 as “Korean War Veterans Memorial Day.”

These proceedings feature the narratives and recollections of four PEFTOK veterans, and commentaries and reflections by three Filipino historians. Culled from memory, these stories hope to reintroduce to the younger generation this unfamiliar episode in history. The discussions, on the other hand, highlight the Philippines’ role in Korea’s quest for independence.

The conference opens with a keynote address delivered by Hon. Jose C. de Venecia, Jr., former Speaker of the House of Representatives and Founding Chairman of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties. In his speech, he underscores the importance of “develop(ing) pragmatic and creative methods that will try to rebuild North-South relations in the Korean Peninsula—without hopefully allowing too many of the most difficult ideological differences to get in the way.” According to him, this can be achieved by establishing economic ties between the two nations, and reviving the long-postponed Six-Party Talks to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear program.

The first session begins with a brief overview of PEFTOK and its participation in the Korean War by Ret. Col. Paterno V. Vilorio (20th BCT), President of the PEFTOK Veterans Association, Inc. This is followed by personal stories and accounts of the war by Ret. Maj. Maximo P. Young (10th BCT), Ret. Col. Augusto S. Flores (14th BCT), and Ret. Gen. Miguel M. Villamor (2nd BCT).

The second session begins with Dr. Ricardo T. Jose, faculty at the University of the Philippines, who points out how the Philippines established itself as an “independent nation speaking for other smaller countries which could not be heard at that particular time.” Dr. Arnel E. Joven, faculty at the University of the Asia and the Pacific, talks about the importance of learning history and finding a connection between the past, the present, and the future. Finally, Mr. Neville Jay C. Manaois, faculty at the Ateneo de Manila University, reflects on how “Filipinos were [already] taking an active role in [shaping] another nation’s history” in the post-World War II era.

The speeches presented in this book have been carefully transcribed and edited from the recordings of the conference. The organizers would like to extend their gratitude to all the speakers for their time and generosity, and to the Academy of Korean Studies for their support.

Filipinos fought in the Korean War more than 65 years ago, but their stories of valor, sacrifice, patriotism and devotion to duty remain relevant in these contemporary times. By looking back and remembering the legacy of these brave and valiant soldiers, may the younger generations of today be inspired to

serve the country and consecrate their lives to good governance, the promotion of peace, and nation building. May the painful lessons and heroic legacies of this 'unfinished war' lead everyone to explore effective ways to promote unity among nations, work towards conflict resolution, and rally behind the reunification of the two Koreas in the 21st century.

Dedicated to the heroes of yesteryears and the students of today, may this book serve as a valuable contribution in strengthening the deep, enduring friendship between the Philippines and the Republic of Korea.

Oliver John Quintana

Conference Director