

Ret. Col. Paterno V. Vilorio, Ph.D.
20th Battalion Combat Team (BCT)
President, PEFTOK Veterans Association, Inc.

Mga Kapamilya, Kapuso, at Kapatid,
Umagang kay ganda po sa inyong lahat.

It was a different time. A little more than a century has passed and yet, men of that time were different from today. Promises were kept and men came to the aid of their friends. Men, back then, did not go into war for convenience or vested interests – they did for honor and for democracy.

Being a fledging independent country, the Philippines was barely out of its infantile stage when it entered the Korean War. Its youth not a hindrance in its desire to fulfill its obligation as co-signer of the United Nations Charter and its moral duty to come to the aid of a country it had recently established diplomatic relations with.

Like most countries at that time, the Philippines was still recovering from the damages of the Second World War. Despite the government being almost bankrupt, and despite its own insurrection problems, the country came to Korea's aid. When the UN issued the call, the Philippines was one of the first three to answer, the first country in Asia to heed the call.

Even though the country's military was in the midst of rebuilding - at that time, the Philippine Military had only 10 battalions - the government saw it fit to send one of its finest

Battalion Combat Teams, its only armored battalion, the 10th BCT.

Without much of a backward glance, Filipino soldiers and officers of the 10th BCT landed in the port of Pusan in Southeastern Korea barely three months after North Korea invaded the South, the first of five battalions to fight in the Korean War.

Experienced in anti-guerrilla warfare, the Philippine contingent, known as the PEFTOK or the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea, was mainly used in anti-guerrilla campaigns for the first six months of its tour of duty in Korea.

With the United Nations Command (UNC) successful in decimating and driving back the North Koreans, it was decided that the Allied Forces push on to North Korea to eliminate the remnants of the North Korean Army.

This action led to the involvement of the Chinese and as the Allied forces were pulling back to South Korea, the Philippine contingent was one of those who were tasked to hold the defensive line during the Chinese Spring Offensive. The stretch assigned to the 10th BCT was near the Village of Yuldong and was the only part of the defensive line that was not overrun by the Chinese.

THE BATTLE OF YULDONG

The battle of Yuldong showed the world the true grit and prowess of the Filipino soldier in the battlefield. The 10th BCT, with only 900 officers and men were able to push back a

regiment of the Chinese People's Volunteer (CPV) Army and were successful in holding their part of the line.

But success was not achieved without great loss: 50 men gave their lives, including Lt. Jose Artiaga, Jr, who valiantly stood his ground and encouraged his men amidst the wave upon wave of Chinese soldiers. After his company was overrun, his friend, Capt. Conrado Yap staged a counterattack to retrieve the wounded and the dead. Capt. Yap himself lost his life in this brave and selfless act.

The battle of Yuldong is one of several battles, and probably the most important battle PEFTOK was part of. The Filipinos were the only ones who held their ground during the battle and were instrumental in stopping the Chinese Spring Offensive. Considered one of the bloodiest battles in the war, the Philippine Contingent emerged victorious.

THE BATTLE FOR HILL EERIE

By the time the other BCTs came to Korea, the war had turned into a stalemate brought about by the Armistice negotiation to end the conflict. The open warfare that the 10th BCT took part in gave way to a series of patrols, raids, and small-scale but nevertheless, vicious clashes between both sides who wanted to “improve” their position and territories.

One of these clashes was for the infamous hill that changed hands several times – Hill Eerie. The battle for this hill was one of the many battles the 20th BCT, who had taken over the banner of the PEFTOK from the 10th BCT, took part in. Having gained a reputation as “machine gun artillery” because of its accuracy and high volume of fire, the 20th BCT was just as fierce in the battlefield as the BCT it replaced.

THE BATTLE FOR COMBAT OUTPOST NO. 8

The 19th BCT was the third contingent of the Philippine Expeditionary Forces in Korea. It distinguished itself with victorious battles for hills dominating the Chorwon-Sibyon-ni corridor, which was considered the most vulnerable sector of the UNC's front line.

In the battle for Combat Outpost No. 8, despite being bombarded by massive artillery fire and attacked by a massive force, the battalion stood its ground. After four days of fighting, the Filipino soldiers sent the Chinese retreating, leaving behind over 500 dead. The Filipinos then ascended Hill 191 and in full view of the Chinese, planted the Filipino flag in the summit, an act of defiance, declaring victory in this important battle.

THE BATTLE OF CHRISTMAS HILL

As the war was winding down, the succeeding BCTs did not see as much action as the previous ones. The 14th BCT was tasked to deny the enemy use of the valley floor in the Satae-ri Valley, one of the main invasion routes in the west central front.

Aggressive patrols into enemy territory sparked short but vicious close quarter combats. The unit also took part in the rescue of the ROK 20th Division attacked by the Chinese; after which two infantry companies from the 14th BCT attacked Christmas Hill to rescue an overrun American infantry company. The assault was a success and Christmas Hill was regained by the Allied Forces.

PEACE AND REBUILDING

An Armistice ending fighting in the Korean War between the UNC and its communist foes was signed and implemented on July 27, 1953.

Immediately thereafter, the 14th BCT was pulled from the front line and moved to the Yangyu Valley where the battalion helped in the rebuilding of shattered Korean villages.

The last BCT to be sent to Korea was the 2nd BCT who picked up where the 14th BCT left off. This BCT never saw action but mostly helped in the rebuilding of the villages near its station and after an eventful 13 months, on May 13, 1955, the 2nd BCT returned home.

LEGACY OF THE PEFTOK

Although the PEFTOK was first and foremost a war machine, its later incarnations also helped in rebuilding Korea. All in all 7,420 Filipinos fought to keep democracy and freedom alive in Korea. Out of these, 112 lost their lives, 299 were wounded, 41 were POWS who were later repatriated during POW exchange and 16 are missing up to this day.

Whenever we see Korea today, we cannot help but feel proud that we have been a part of your country's history because in our own little way, we have contributed to the building of this country. Seeing how progressive and how developed Korea is right now makes us feel that our sacrifices were not for naught. We and our fellow soldiers have not shed blood in vain.

We, the PEFTOK Veterans, may be in the sunsets of our lives but we know that the friendship and brotherhood

between the Korean and Filipino people will live on as we share a common past and together we have shed blood. We have fought tyranny and oppression and we have emerged victorious. Such bond can never be broken.

Let me leave you with the quote from Shakespeare's Henry V which, for me, sums up the relationship between Koreans and Filipinos:

“From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered-
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me,
Shall be my brother.”

Thank you and good day!