

Ret. Maj. Maximo P. Young
10th Battalion Combat Team (BCT)

Good morning! Thank you for coming today, as I narrate my life as a simple Filipino army soldier.

But I am a proud Filipino soldier of the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea, better known as PEFTOK.

I am Major Maximo Purisima Young, Philippine Army, Retired.

I began serving our beloved Philippines as a soldier when the Second World War broke out in 1941.

I was conscripted by the USAFFE for military service after Japan attacked the Philippines on December 8, 1941. USAFFE is acronym for United States Armed Forces in the Far East.

I have served our beloved country and fought for the defense of freedom and democracy in three wars: World War 2, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

I fought her domestic enemies, the communist Hukbalahap and its successor, the New People's Army, from the 1940s to the 1960s.

I have been shot at and shelled. I have seen my friends die in battle and have killed my country's enemies, in turn.

But by the grace of God, I am still here.

I am now 94 years young.

Yes, I, Major Max Young, am 94 years young. And I have a Twitter account. You can tweet me at @maxpyoung.

But I am not the only example of PEFTOK longevity. Some of my other comrades in PEFTOK are also over 90. The oldest, I think, is 100.

There are fewer than 1,353 PEFTOK veterans left alive today; 1,353 out of the 7,420 eager young men that set foot in Korea six decades ago to fight in their country's first foreign war.

Let me first share with you my war experience during the Second World War.

I was never wounded. I was captured once, but escaped from the Japanese camp together with other Filipino patriots.

I faced death against the Japanese forces that sank the MV Legaspi, where I was a crew member, and took me prisoner. MV Legaspi was transporting supplies and Filipino soldiers from the Visayas to Luzon to fight the Japanese when it was sunk off Puerto Galera, Mindoro by two Japanese warships.

After the war, I was awarded the U.S. Silver Star, the United States Armed Forces' third highest military decoration for valor, for my service as crewmember of the MV Legaspi.

And in Korea, my unit, the 10th Battalion Combat Team, was the most bloodied among all five (5) BCTs that served in Korea. The 10th accounted for over half of all Philippine casualties in the Korean War—112 KIA, 229 WIA, 16 MIA and 41 POW.

And in Vietnam, I was designated as Military Adviser of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Group or CORDS. I was invalided home from injuries I suffered after almost being captured by militia men of the North Vietnamese Army.

Now, let me tell you about my beloved PEFTOK.

PEFTOK was born in an era when patriotism was as powerful as many Filipinos then were willing to sacrifice their lives for Inang Bayan.

Over one million Filipinos did just that in World War 2. I would have been one of them but for the grace of God, I survived.

PEFTOK was born in an era when Filipino men were deemed as true warriors. Filipino men of my era were hard men with guts of steel.

The men I fought with, both against the Japanese during the Second World War and the North Koreans and the Chinese communists during the Korean War, were fiercely patriotic men. Their patriotism was a living force that imbued their total being. Love for country was only next to love of God.

That is how they endured particularly the three brutal years of the Japanese occupation which happened before the Korean War.

PEFTOK, to me, is the embodiment of Filipino patriotism.

We fought in Korea because we were proud for the honor to represent our country in the world's first war against godless communism.

And many of you perhaps will be surprised that tens of thousands of Filipino men volunteered to fight in Korea.

Many of these patriots were ordinary civilian men without military experience.

Many others were brave Filipino guerrillas that fought against the Japanese. Many of them were teenagers.

Such was the power of patriotism in the 1950s.

But only 7,420 were chosen. With this, perhaps the challenge unto the youth of today is to muster and display that noble kind of patriotism. Clearly, not through WAR, but for the youth to evince love for country by according respect for authority, our national leaders.

Our commander in the 10th BCT was the late Colonel Mariano Azurin.

The 10th was the only Philippine Army tank battalion. In the Philippines, we had a company of American-made tanks.

We arrived at Busan aboard a U.S. Navy troop transport, the MS Antolak, after a rough four-day voyage.

We set foot on Korean soil on September 19, 1950. There were 1,400 of us in the battalion.

The BCT was met by a loud band playing music which I cannot now recall. We felt like heroes being welcomed home.

When we arrived, Korea then was experiencing its coldest winter. We pitched our tents on an open field and many of us—me included—woke up with water snakes in our tents. The snakes apparently fled the cold and sought warmth beside our bodies.

Busan then was a world away from Busan now. When we arrived, the port was a fortress geared for war.

It was at Busan that we first came face-to-face with frightened and thin Korean refugees, many of them children, begging us for food.

One of my enduring memories of my first month in Korea was the seemingly unending stream of Korean refugees fleeing the fighting. And there seemed to be so many parent-less children among these refugees.

It was heartbreaking.

We had seen such sights here during the brutal Japanese occupation in our country from 1942 to 1945.

Poverty was widespread after the war ended in the Philippines on September 15, 1945. The war devastated our industries, ruined our farms, and made many Filipinos destitute.

And here we were in Korea, a thousand miles from home, witnessing a tragedy many of us hoped we would never see again.

We then moved into North Korea as part of the United Nations counterattack that almost destroyed the North Korean People's Army.

At the outskirts of the town of Miudong in North Korea, the battalion fought its first pitched battle, this against a North Korean battalion. "The Battle of Miudong" was the first battle fought, and won, by Filipino soldiers on foreign soil.

At the time of this victory, I was a First Sergeant and a Tank Platoon Commander of the Reconnaissance Company.

I commanded five M24 Chafee light tanks each armed with a 75 mm gun. Our secondary weapon was a .50 caliber heavy machine gun mounted atop the turret.

The task given our battalion was to clear and secure the town of Singye inside North Korea just above the 38th Parallel.

We moved out towards Singye in a long column early in the morning.

We were then hit by heavy file fire from North Korean soldiers dug on along the forward slopes of hills on our right flank.

I could not see the enemy positions from inside the tank. My gunner was yelling at me to tell him where to aim the tank's 75mm cannon. There was only one thing to do.

I flung open the turret hatch, clambered out of the turret, braced my feet against the metal hull and fired the big .50 caliber machine gun at the enemy positions.

The machine gun had no gun shield and I was fully exposed to enemy fire that continued to strike my tank.

I fired and aimed at the enemy foxholes and watched the big .50 caliber rounds tear up the ground around those positions. I saw some of the enemy fall while others fled their trenches.

The sound of my fire apparently roused our pinned down infantry, who rallied and began to pour heavier fire onto the disorganized North Koreans.

The North Koreans ran. Our men chased the retreating North Koreans into Singye whose defenders, two battalions, fled before our attack.

We counted 42 enemy dead. We estimated some 100 more could have been wounded. We lost one man killed and a few wounded.

I later learned this battle was witnessed by several high ranking officers from atop a hill, of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division and some foreign officers. They later congratulated me.

I also received a “well done” from my battalion commander, Col. Mariano Azurin, and our Executive Officer, Major Delfin Argao. I was awarded a battlefield commendation for my role in the Battle of Miudong.

Over 50 years later, I belatedly was conferred the Philippines’ Gold Cross Medal for this combat. The Gold Cross is awarded only for gallantry in action and is the Philippines’ fourth highest military award.

Back to the Korean War. As the Korean winter set, it was the coldest in 200 years with temperatures well below freezing level.

Then, the Communist Chinese intervened militarily. On November 25, 1950, the People’s Republic of China sent more than 200,000 men in what it termed as the “Chinese People’s Volunteer Army” (the “CPV”) against the United Nations Command (the “UNC”).

The CPV “volunteers” were battle-hardened regular soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army. They quickly defeated both the US Eighth Army and the US Tenth Corps near the border of North Korea and China.

Advancing southward, the CPV re-took Pyongyang and Seoul within the year.

The 10th BCT retreated with the UNC in this harsh winter of defeat, which men of the US Army derisively called “The Big Bug Out”.

The 10th BCT spent its first Christmas in Korea at the town of Suwon south of the Han River during the retreat.

When the UNC launched its counterattack in February 1951, the 10th went on the offensive. In March and April 1951, the battalion was in continuous action, capturing hill after hill from the Communist Chinese.

By April 14, 1951 the 10th was the northernmost of all UNC units. We were exhausted after close to two months of non-stop fighting but were in high morale. The battalion was down to some 900 men.

Then came the great Battle of Yuldong.

The Battle of Yuldong is the greatest Filipino victory in the Korean War.

It was one of many battles fought by the UNC in an effort to repel the biggest offensive of the Korean War: the communist’s “Great Spring Offensive of 1951”.

The CPV and NKPA had massed some 400,000 men for this mammoth counter-attack. Their aim was to end the WAR with a decisive communist victory.

The 10th BCT was ordered to defend a three-mile segment of Line Utah, the northernmost UNC defensive line inside North Korea.

The enemy assault that triggered the Battle of Yuldong came under cover of darkness during the early dawn of April 23, 1951.

An entire Communist Chinese army of 40,000 men struck hasty defensive firing positions, while there were only 900 Filipinos defending that line.

In hours of savage, close-quarter combat, we prevented the Communist Chinese from overrunning our positions, thereby putting a fatal brake on the communist's advance.

By 6:00 a.m. of April 23, 1951, the 10th BCT was only one of only two UNC units on the Western Front not overrun or wiped out by the tremendous Chinese assault.

In standing firm at Yuldong, the grossly outnumbered Filipinos helped prevent the communists from winning the Korean War.

As it turned out, the defeat of their Great Spring Offensive forced the communists to open peace talks with the United Nations Command.

Mine has been a life well lived.

It has been a purposeful and quite an exciting one.

What has sustained my health and vigor for over seven decades has been love of country. And love of family.

I have been blessed with eight loving children who grew up on the war stories of their Daddy Max.

And wonderful grandchildren who love their Lolo Max.

I have been married three times. First, was during the Second World War which ended in divorce as during that time,

divorce was still valid in the Philippines. Then, with the mother of my eight (8) loving children, who passed away in 2001. And now with my third wife, Mercy, to whom I was married in 2003.

I am a proud to be a Filipino soldier. And a Filipino father. And a husband.

I am a proud PEFTOKer.

Once more, I wish to rouse the patriotic spirit in all of you. You are all blessed and lucky as many, if not all of you, have lived through life without experiencing WAR. And I am lured into coming out with a thought-provoking query for the young ones who are here today: “How can I now display my patriotism for my beloved country.”

Finally, I wish to thank the South Korean government as on July 27, 2016, I received the First Taegeuk Order of the Military Merit Medal from the Prime Minister of South Korea, the highest military decoration for valor of South Korea.

Live long and prosper.

Thank you very much. And good day to all!