

Wartime Memories Of A Simaranhon Foot Soldier

Written by Gilbert F. Fajiculay

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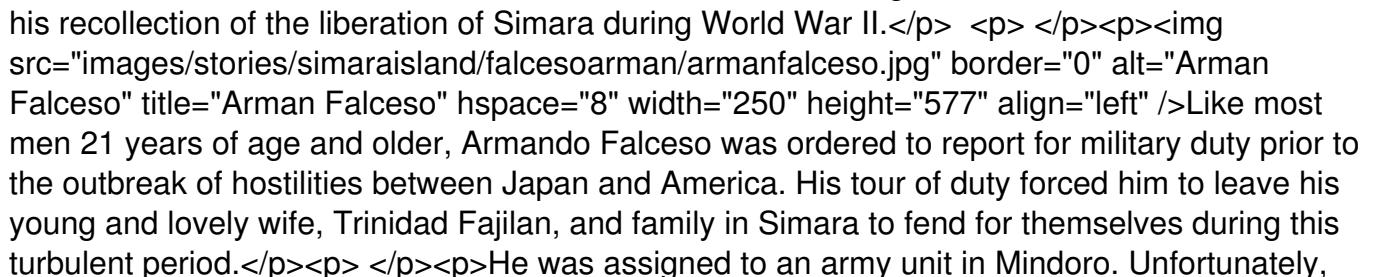
An interview of Armando Falceso by Gilbert Fajiculay, July 2002

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 Gilbert Fajiculay

In the history of human conflicts, we always read or hear about the heroic actions of men and women who put their lives in harm's way in order to protect and defend their homeland and fellowmen. This is true regardless of the size of the conflict. All their actions are necessary as each mission, small or big, is important and significant to the achievement of the ultimate objective. Each action produces a hero and unsung heroes as well.

This is a story of one foot soldier. His name is Armando Fallar Falceso, the eldest among twelve children of Julio Faderagao Falceso and Lucia Faminiano Fallar. He is one of those unsung heroes in World War II. This is his recollection of the liberation of Simara during World War II.

 Arman Falceso

Like most men 21 years of age and older, Armando Falceso was ordered to report for military duty prior to the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and America. His tour of duty forced him to leave his young and lovely wife, Trinidad Fajilan, and family in Simara to fend for themselves during this turbulent period.

He was assigned to an army unit in Mindoro. Unfortunately, his tour of duty did not last long because he contracted malaria while in Bansud, in Mindoro. He was given a military leave in order to recuperate from feverish bouts of malaria. He found himself back in Simara in March, 1945.

In late 1944 to early months of 1945, the occupying Japanese forces in the Philippines were on the defensive. The American Navy annihilated the Japanese fleets in the islands and its carrier-based planes hunted down Japanese supply convoys. The American liberating army/navy units were mounting island-hopping military offensives to recapture the Philippines.

When Armando Falceso was back in Simara's soil in 1945, the island was already under control by the Japanese. He found out that a big motor launch, loaded with many Japanese soldiers, was left stranded at Alegria Beach. This was the launch that left Banton Island in November 25, 1944, part of a Japanese Navy supply ship heading for Leyte Gulf. The supply ship with its four accompanying launches took shelter in Banton Island, hiding from the F-40 planes of the USAF. Except for this launch that ended up in Alegria Beach, the rest of the Japanese supply group was destroyed by the F-40s.

As they could not proceed to their destination, the Japanese soldiers organized into several units to gather provision for the troops. Each team of soldiers was assigned to a barrio to confiscate palay and other farm animals from the local people. While on guard, they have asked the locals to thresh the palay (bado).

They later on ordered the civilians to transfer the rice and other provisions to Tanro-aw where the Japanese planned to put up defensive positions.

Early in March, 1945, some locals heard rumors about the Japanese planning to gather all civilians in Poblacion. Knowing the cruelty of these soldiers, many civilians panicked and feared for their lives. The local people knew that the Americans were already in the Philippines and fighting could take place in Simara anytime and that they maybe used as hostages by the Japanese.

Many civilians left for Banton Island and Tablas Island just as some Simaranhons have already done earlier that year.

On the night of March 3, a special unit attached to the 24th Division, US Eighth Army, landed by patrol boat in a certain place in Suba Bay. The

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Americans were conducting reconnaissance missions in the area. A Filipino soldier, Capt. Miguel Fonte, was with them. Very early in the following morning, Capt. Fonte asked a certain Jose Fallarna who was descending from a hill if there were guerillas in the area. Responding positively, he was then asked if he could lead his unit to the cave where they were hiding.

Armando Falceso was interviewed by the Team Leader, Lt. James Jarritt, 24th Div, 8th Army. Being born locally, he was asked if he could do a reconnaissance mission for the unit. Armando obeyed Lt. Jarritt's request without hesitation. He would go around Simara patrolling with them to locate and pinpoint where the Japanese soldiers in Simara were positioned or entrenched.

The mission was successfully carried out in three days. The US special recon unit, including Armando, was picked up by PT boat at about 7 o'clock on the third night. They passed by Sawang, Romblon, to pick up another reconnaissance patrol there and then proceeded to Mindoro, arriving early following morning in San Jose.

After about a week in Mindoro, Armando returned to Simara with the recon patrol unit. This time they were aboard a Troop Transport Steamer full of American soldiers, led by a destroyer escort and with an airplane providing air cover. In March 12, 1945, the task force landed in Ilijan Beach in Simara. The assault force left Ilijan beach at 5 o'clock pm, walked up the hills of Ilijan, passing barrio Gobon on the way to Mabini where they camped and rested overnight. Early in the morning, Armando and the American soldiers left camp and proceeded towards Tanro-aw hill.

Meanwhile, some American troops landed in the town proper from a landing barge that same morning. They set up mortar batteries in the plaza and then started shelling the Japanese positions in Tanro-aw. The intense fighting lasted for four days. Simara was liberated at last.

After the battle ended, Lt. James Jarritt asked Armando if he wanted to come and stay with the Reconnaissance Unit throughout the duration of the campaign. Armando decided to stay for awhile to pick up his family in Calatrava and settle them safely in Simara. He also wanted to recover fully from the effects brought about by malaria.

Finally in September 1945, Armando reported back to duty at Camp Murphy in Manila for Military Control, and to process his assignment. He was assigned to the 4th Replacement Battalion, APO 707.

In November he was moved and assigned to Recovered Personnel Division (RPD), Armed Forces West Pacific (AFWESPAC). This unit, under Lt. Robert V. Fulkerson, OIC, consisting of many Filipino and American officers and enlisted men, and called Unit D-65, was assigned to Iloilo City in December 1945.

At the beginning of 1946, the American GI's were demobilized. Armando was the only Filipino soldier left in Unit D-65. The RPD was renamed PARPD which stands for Philippine Army Recovered Personnel Division, and headed by a Filipino OIC.

He did not stay long in PARPD. Armando was transferred back to Camp Murphy before 1947. He applied for reversion status and his application was approved on November 25, 1947 (s.-232, Nov. 1947).

This June 2002, Armando celebrated his 86th birthday. This aging veteran soldier of the Second World War is still fighting for recognition of his service under the US Flag. For more than four decades now he has been, and still is, waiting to receive benefits from the US for his service.

Armando Fallar Falceso's story is simple. His memories about the war are still lingering. We could say that he was at the right place at the right time. Or was his being sick with malaria a blessing in disguise. The American assault force in Simara suffered casualties of 10 killed and 20 wounded. Without his contribution in the war effort, who knows how many more American soldiers could have been casualties; or, how many civilians could have died during the assault.

After the war, many of Armando's friends and the local folks praised and thanked him

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for his part in the liberation of Simara and Simaranhons today should feel the same. He put himself in harm's way so that his *mga kababayan* will be saved. Armando Falceso is without doubt one unsung hero of the Battle of Simara.

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