

Commodore Ernesto L. Sacro
FROM COCKPIT TO PULPIT

Joy Campilan

Commodore Ernie L. Sacro first served the Air Force as a Jet Fighter Pilot and later became the Adjutant General of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and the Academic Dean and Deputy Commandant of the AFP Command and Staff College. Aside from graduating from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), he also earned two doctorate degrees: Ph.D. in Business Management and Doctor of Divinity. He is also the founder of the Military Values Education (MILVED) Ministry. Currently, he is the President of the Military Christian Fellowship-Philippines.

The helicopter approached the road quietly nestled between two small hills in the Kalinga – Apayao region. From the cockpit’s view, it seemed quite a picturesque scene – a forest, a ravine, a small road, a calm creek. A moment later, the helicopter touched down and three people began to disembark.

The scene turned into an abrupt nightmare. The air was suddenly thick with gunpowder and the sounds of forty firearms simultaneously shooting the helicopter. Two of the disembarking people screamed and fell from the helicopter. The third one, a man, jumped out of the chopper, waved the pilot to fly away, drew his gun, and did not hesitate to run towards his unconscious friends amidst the rain of bullets. Both of his companions were already dead.

The man was Commodore Ernie Sacro, and he was the Commanding Officer of Task Force Hydra Alfa. Their assignment was to retrieve Father Conrado Balweg, a priest who became a communist rebel and commander. “Balweg sent words through this contact person in mid-May that he would like to come down from the hinterlands of Kalinga and would like to live a normal life.” Commodore Sacro wasted no time in organizing his group and even took the co-pilot seat in the helicopter. Little did he know, that he was being set-up for an ambush.

The Commodore ran for his life as soon as he realized that his comrades were dead. While hiding in the nearest forested terrain, he thought, ““Lord, I need You. Please save me. Do not allow me to die or taken by the enemy.” He realized at the time that no one but God could

help him now. “After a while it rained in the area and because the place was high, there was fog which provided me cover and concealment. The rain erased my footprints. I continued to pray for God’s protection the whole time I was there.”

Wounded, he walked around the forest for two days without food and water, trying to find friendly troops. He had to be careful, because he might contact the rebels instead. Soon enough, he was able to contact his own unit, and was rescued. The experience brought a whole new realization in the Commodore’s life. “As I was recovering from my wounds, mental stress and physical fatigue, I made a firm resolve to serve God the rest of my life.”

This vow of service took its main form through the MILVED, or the Military Value Education Program that the Commodore instituted for the country’s men and women in uniform. In this program, Biblical principles are incorporated in values education. “Because in the Armed Forces, the Military Values Education program is your entry point. You’re not making it look like you’re there to conduct Bible study. You’re there for the values education. We believe that even if we have very capable, well-disciplined Armed Forces, it is not enough. We need leaders and followers who must be righteous in the sight of God.”

The Commodore travels around camps and headquarters with a few select colleagues to teach MILVED. “I do the teaching myself. Although, I’m now teaching others to do the same. I make them go with me because I want them to learn the standard session.” After the sessions, he and his comrades pray for the commander and all the leaders of the military group; “that God will continue to take care of them and also increase their faith.”

Nowadays, Commodore Sacro no longer sits in a jet cockpit to survey the skies. Instead, he stands from behind the pulpit, with both feet planted on the ground. Armed with his favorite verse, John 3:16*, he sets to bring the love of God and the most powerful weapon against darkness – the Bible - to the country’s protectors and defenders.

**For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life, John 3:16, GNT.*