

EDITORIAL

The Continuing Saga Of Airport Security Glitches: A Wake Up Call For Job Federalization

A disturbing news item from one of the top television networks recently depicted how easily vulnerable our airports can be to possible terrorist attacks. One of its nondescript reporters went undercover to test the security operations of personnel manning major airports around the country. The ruse worked this way: the reporter placed rolls of films inside a shiny, aluminum-covered like pouch and stashed it in his carry on bag. He then went through a number of entry and boarding procedures at thirteen of the busiest airports in the land. His bag was subjected to mechanical screening by baggage screeners in all of the 13 airports. The result: screeners from only three of the 13 requested that his bag be opened. They performed an ocular inspection on the real contents of the pouch after it failed to register on their screening monitors a clear picture on what's inside. While the rest, nine of them, either did not bother to have the bag opened or did not waste time looking further inside the pouch

The expose' puts to shame repeated assurances by authorities that stringent measures have been in place and is currently being observed in all airports nationwide. The revelation, if true, unquestionably would be a tremendous cause for concern once again for the public at large. The great danger that it poses to everyone is like a sword dangling from above, ready to strike. It also renders a heavy blow to an already revenue-strapped, severely weakened airline industry. This serious breach of security has shattered whatever measure of faith the public have had regained in taking to the skies once more. This is but just another addition to a litany of sad tales committed by airport personnel since the nation flexed its muscle and tightened its grip to prevent a repeat of 911.

Not too long ago, we learned of a man who almost made it to his plane with a collection of knives of various sizes hidden in his bag. Had it not been for a case of accidental bag random-checking he would have gone ahead and went unnoticed. Despite the man's claim of being a knife collector and denying having ulterior motives, federal case have been filed against him in court and remains incarcerated. Meanwhile, in the instant incident, the fact that it was just a ruse does not cloak the tremendous risks both travelers, pilots and stewardesses are exposed to daily. The uproar it had caused may give a green light for sleeper terrorists, believed to be roving the country incognito, to exploit the situation and possibly introduce a fresh wave of chaos.

What a scary thought it is that blatant loopholes still exist in the system. More so, it is even despicable to know that a seemingly ordinary task of screening baggage continues to be done capriciously. In spite of the many protocols already in place not to mention the numerous operational controls subsequently implemented, simple mistakes, such as what have been documented, unabatedly exists. Is it a case of going back to our old complacent ways? Or, is it the stark reality these employees have not been seriously doing their jobs for so long that it is difficult for them to get rid of the bad habit? Have we not wisened up enough to become extra vigilant and cautiously deliberate in our actions?

If this expose' is any reflection of the nation's genuine awareness to prevent a recurrence of 911, then it's evident we are in an apparent coma. The customary manner by which the anomaly was exposed smacks of the utter disregard of security workers to perform well and abide by what is expected of them. It is also a manifestation of their continued mockery of the nation's number one priority today: security. Is it high time for a complete overhaul of the system? The recent declaration of a program by President Bush to federalize security screeners and other sensitive airport jobs merit a second look by Congress. A report conducted by a research study group, a copy of which was provided to the government, pointed out the many glaring administrative and operational shortcomings of private agencies providing safety, or a semblance of it, at airports nationwide. It went ahead to suggest the federalization of jobs as the answer to the various security mistakes. Instead of being alarmed, Congress went a head and passed a bill calling for a gradual implementation of the program. Majority of the lawmakers scoffed at immediate program acceleration citing unemployment woes.

Federalization has its advantages and disadvantages. Bringing the workers under the wing of the government would centralize operational matters and bring about a uniform and strict implementation of existing guidelines. More significantly, it will guarantee that only the best-qualified people will work at our airports based on more stringent hiring rules. Much as we share in the belief that unemployment would exacerbate the already shaky economy, we should also be cognizant of the fact that security is foremost in our minds. We need men and women who are dedicated to their jobs and who have genuine concern for the welfare and safety of our nation. Towards this end, Congress must act and act accordingly and swiftly to support the federalization program. In the long analysis, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.



News from the Alma Mater

Divine Word College of Urdaneta Turns 35

The Divine Word College of Urdaneta (DWCU) recently celebrated its 35th founding anniversary with a 4-day long festivities capped by the holding of the Parent, Teachers, Administrators and Staff (PATAS) night.

Different alumni from as far back as 1970, former teacher, and current students graced the affair.

Like prodigal sons and daughter, Mrs. Aurora Sandoval-Manzano, the High School Department Coordinator and Ms Margarita Aguilana, School Registrar, two of the many teachers who are considered byword to old-timer alums welcomed them. The big smile on their faces and the warm reception they got was indicative of their joy to reunite with their former students again. According to Elpidio Angeles, Jr., Class 1973 alumnus, the Class of 1976 had the most number of alumni in attendance and were obviously the ones having the most fun. He said without the class adopting him that night, he would have felt uneasy and out of place. Among those he can identify were his brother, Filomena Marcelo-Bautista's sister, Pinay; Alma Monte's brother, Darwin; and Carlos Liberato's sister, Helen. He added there were also two priests in their batch that night: Fathers Jaucian and Garay.

A batch roll call was held thereafter and no one stood when Classes of 1970, 1971 and 1972 were called out Elpidio felt uneasy when he thought he was the oldest alumni around; however, his apprehension turned into relief when he found out later that three other veteran-alums were present, namely Gene Geronimo of Class 1972 and Adelaida Serafica-Deogracias of Class 1970 who's the sister of Elpidio's former classmate, Lorenza Serafica.

Highlighting the event were entertainment numbers belted out by numerous class batches including the school's administrators. There were singers and dancers galore aided by good-looking dance instructors.

Election of the new set of officers of the local alumni association was put on hold, as there was not enough time to hold one, Elpidio declared. He conferred with the incumbent local Alumni President to establish liaison with his counterpart here in the States Johnny S. Soriano, and look into the feasibility of establishing a formal link-up between the two organizations. (YCD)

The Passing of Friends

From dust you came, to dust you shall become. Everybody on earth is on loan from God. Over time, we will meet Our Maker one way or the other. As like other people, our fellow alumni have gone ahead of us to meet our Lord. We will certainly miss their good company and friendship forever. On behalf of the officers and members of the Divine Word College of Urdaneta Alumni Association; we would like to express our deepest sympathy to the grieving families of the recently departed and those who have long gone. Our prayers are always with you. May they rest in peace. We will always love and miss you.

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Editorial Staff

Yogi Diaz, Class 1974 –
Editorial

Johnny Soriano, Class 1972 –
Contributor

Dody Bautista, PhD, –
Contributor

Lorenzo Suyat, Jr., 1972 -
Contributor

Raffy Bruan, Class 1972 –
Publisher

SIDELINES

By: Igoy Zaid

Of Regular Contributors Not Doing Their Fair Share on the Deal

The Editorial Staff wishes our Alma Mater, the Divine Word College of Urdaneta, happy 35th anniversary. Time flew by so quickly that it seemed like only yesterday, when we were just a part of a fledgling Catholic institution. I myself was bemused back then if it would make it this far. Well, it did and is still going strong! It must have been extra fun for those who made it to the affair. A news article regarding the celebration appeared in the January 8 issue of our Forum. On another note, it was also great to hear from alums back home exchanging notes with our Staff thereby bringing us up to speed with what's happening down there.

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In case you didn't know it yet, but plans are afoot to look into the feasibility of having a 'united' alum group with our local counterparts back home. An exploratory meeting has yet to occur between 'Apo' Johnny and the local chapter president back home. This is a gargantuan project of immense organizational, administrative and logistical proportion. But nothing is impossible, right? I don't mean to sound like a pessimist but if things won't workout in the near future, at least the foundation for a future linkup would have been laid out for succeeding officials to work on. Good luck, Johnny! You have my 100 per cent support.

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Good news for all of you jokesters and frustrated gag writers out there! Now you can have your "obra maestra" read by a wide audience other than those you send them to via email. Our Forum publisher, Gerald B has opened an exclusive section devoted to jokes. Called "Joke of the Day", he picks cut the best one e-mailed to him daily and publishes the same in the said section. Contributors must only abide by the one important rule governing gags to be published: keeping it "clean" With all the jokes that I receive almost daily, we can have a year's worth of it if the writers/contributors do not chicken out.

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The Forum staff was hoping that article contributions would start pouring in once word gets around that an alum newsletter had been launched. We failed miserably in our projections. Two issues afterward, we are still in the dearth for articles to publish. Even the so-called "regular contributors" that appear on the front page have been remiss in their obligation of providing materials for publication. One staff member has been wracking up his brains just to come up with timely stories. I hope they will be jolted into their senses and live up to their billing. No amount of cajoling has so far yielded positive result from this group. An article or two every three months, come on guys, it's not that demanding! As of this writing the Forum is being delivered, through e-mail, to every alumnus with a validly listed e-mail. This, on top of the fact that the newsletter itself could be accessed through the website.

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Many times in our lives, we have experienced the anxiousness and excitement of looking forward to what we are about to embark on for the first time. First kiss, first love, first crush, first car, etc. I can go on and on and I bet you we can draw so many parallels with car experiences. But how about if I tell you that you are about to prepare for your first full running marathon, surprised huh! I bet not many of us have had the experience of running 26 plus miles. And that's exactly what I'm doing right now, preparing for the Nashville Country Music Marathon on April 27, 2002. There's s a supposed to be a band playing on every mile over the entire length of the event. It promises to be fun-filled as the organizers predicted. Don't you all worry; I'll give a full account of my first full marathon experience in the next issue of Forum.

Class 1973 Reunion in 2003

The planned reunion in 2003 by the Class of 1973 is very much alive. Talks are still in progress. So far the event might happen in the summer either July or August. However, December might be chosen eventually. Interested parties must contact Shari Nerza at shari_nerza@hotmail.com, Elpidio Angeles, Jr. at jun.angeles@equitablepcib.com or Nancy Garcia at taray2@hotmail.com.

Requiem For A Lost Love

By: Goyi Dazi

I think that I will never see
A face as lovely as she can be.
Eyes glint like a bright star on a dear, moonless night
Sparkles ever so brightly to my gleeful delight.

Fairest of them all you don't judge her outside look
So simple a beauty one might say, if you play by the book.
Yet stand out she does like a sore thumb sticking out
In the middle of a Manhattan Street packed with a crowd

I think that I will never feel
The joy and happiness my inner soul reveals.
Pent up passion reborn of decades' youth past.
Will it die the same death, thus, doomed not to last?

I think that I will never hear
Sweet sound of her voice music to my ear.
Like a beat of a rhyme waiting to be tuned
A note to a song waiting to be crooned

I think that I will never pass this way again
Never to expect she'd appear like a song refrain.
Ask you may the best thing to do?
More than anything else, I'd say, is lain my eyes on you.

Anguish, torture, misery, distress..
Must I suffer more or do I get a rest
Only thy jovial eyes, saccharine smile and supple drawl
Could sooth my wary nerves and melancholic soul.

BIRTHDAYS

Lets wish the following alumni the best on their birthdays.

1. Mr. Manuel Ridao – April 2
2. Vilma Masadao-Crisologo – April 4
3. Lorna Sarmiento-Gemino – April 6
4. Liza Estantino-Tatad – April 9
5. Evelyn Bascos-Gonzalez – April 13
6. Fr Lino Nicasio, SVD – April 17
7. Elpidio Angeles, Jr. – April 23
8. Alfonso Godoy, Jr. – April 24
9. Elizabeth Sales – April 24

Belated birthday greetings to the following:

1. Jaciel Gianan – February 6
2. Cesar Soriano – February 13
3. Myrna Duzon – February 22
4. Ligaya Orpiano – February 22
5. Dolly Caverro-Regis – February 26
6. Filomena Marcelo-Bautista – March 1
7. Cherry Diaz-Guerrero – March 4
8. Fr. Abe Paz – March 5
9. Jose de Guzman – March 5
10. Danilo Lauder – March 6
11. Lorna Tacla-Poblete – March 7

A SONG FOR VIRGINIA

By: Goyi Dazi

Years unfold in the midst of gleeful teens
Walk upon the scene a gal with a glittering beam.
Soft is her voice, habits refined
Never seem to lose composure even one frantic day.

Bedimpled smile glows like an Angel's face
Even a toughened heart would melt in its craze.
Bashfulness it seems, hide attributes uncompered
Personality, nevertheless, remains bare yet undeclared

For not so long ago her presence felt
An army of suitors and enthusiasts prevailed
Ardent conspicuous, count I may
Never knew she would of the one that never made her way.

Ungallant heart's passion came not unwrapped
Wonder what difference have I had the guts?
Would it have gone my way had I not wilted?
Back then, I'd say; it would've been for grabs for whoever was gifted!

Esteemed beauty evoke many a heart palpitation
Three decades of absence, feelings have gone into oblivion
Alas! Opportunities squandered, flawed many away
Ungallant heart's fate sealed, Smiling Angel never to lay eyes again

Stroke of luck or, better yet, Divine intervention
Paths crossed once more without fanfare, albeit unabated tension
Praises of joy, bliss to the heart's content
Would it last long enough or would it quickly dissipate.

Heart's won over perpetually devoted she
To the man of her choice, 'til death divide her loyalty.
Dreams, imagination, correspondence, only could he
Memories of yester years merely bridged with reality.

Exult he must knowledge of her presence
Morn' 'til evening mind keeps on wishing
Rest in peace not my soul 'til our eyes meet again
For now, I suppose, your promise and comfort is adequate 'til then.

12. Marit Fernandez-Cruz – March 15
13. Zenaida Vera-Roque – March 16
14. Nenita Consolacion-Ildfonso – March 24
15. Elizabeth Mones-Manipon – March 26
16. Jaime Rosales – March 26
17. Abner Fernandez – March 28
18. Charles Barroga – March 29

If you happen to know who's celebrating their birthdays this year, please send an email to Johnny Soriano at SorianoJS@miramar.usmc.mil so that we can publish them.

DIARY OF A TRAVELING GI

Decades ago, when dictator Marshall Broz Tito of Yugoslavia passed away his legacy of communism also died a natural death. What followed was the subsequent secession of most of the States that comprised this once unified Balkan nation. Among them: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and most recently, Kosovo. This leaves Serbia and tiny Montenegro as the only ones that make up what is Yugoslavia today.

This once integrated multi-ethnic nation that remained united for so many years under the late strongman was plunged into chaos. Nationalistic fervor stirred in the hearts of every Serb, Croat, Bosnian, Macedonian, and Albanian. Shortly thereafter, it became the powder keg in Europe raising apprehensions of another World War. Thanks to the United Nations (UN) and the allies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the ugly civil wars that ensued was put to a halt. The peace pact inked by the warring factions is so fragile that, to this day, NATO peacekeepers still patrol the borders of most of these breakaway States as the situation is still volatile.

Of the States that broke away, only the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) managed to dodge a bloody war to win its independence. To avert any adventurous incursions by the dominant Serb-Yugoslav Armed Forces, the country had lobbied the UN into passing a resolution thereby paving the way for the sending of peacekeeping troops into its land.

It is with this backdrop that I was deployed to this Balkan nation in March 1997, as a member of the United Nations Preventive Deployment (UNPREDEP) force under the United States battalion. There were other contingent battalions from other countries as well serving under UNPREDEP like the Norwegian, Finnish, Danes and Indonesians who, like the US, have their own respective commanders and sectors to patrol. The whole operational mission was under the overall command of a UN commander.

Like most central European nations, FYROM is a landlocked country bordered by Kosovo on the north, Greece on the south, Bulgaria on the east and Albania on the west. The capital, Skopje, has been the site of many prestigious international chess competitions. Aside from its famous ruin of ancient temples and castle; the country basically is dotted with steep mountains where the land is mostly rolling. It is biting cold during winter and hot and humid during summer. The country is called FYROM and not plainly Macedonia in deference to her Greek neighbor who has a province bearing the same name. Despite its relatively peaceful transition into a sovereign State, this nation of sparsely over 2 million has its own serious internal problems to deal with. Foremost among which, is the one posed by its minority ethnic Albanian population who like the predominant ethnic Albanian-Kosovars, were demanding absolute autonomy in their educational system and a greater representation in the government bureaucracy. These demand; naturally, were met with antagonism from the Macedonian populace. These same issues would later plunge the country into chaos and a short-lived civil war. UN and NATO-led mediation efforts recently paved the way for the signing of a truce between the warring factions. Like the rest of the secessionist States, NATO peacekeeping forces are the ones keeping the fragile peace hold between the feuding parties.

The hostilities and ethnic unrest that wracked this tiny nation was nowhere evident back in 1997. Being deployed there was like a holiday. During off duty days, we are given weekend passes to enjoy the amenities of downtown Skopje. We got introduced to a potent beer called *Skopsko* whose alcohol content would pale in comparison to what we've been used to drinking. A typical weekend day for us is shopping at the mall, eating exotic foods at restaurants and topping it all off, a swing to a jazz or R&B bar. Oh yes, they play classic as well as modern songs. If you are the romantic or historical-loving type, there's the ruin of an ancient castle that sits right in the middle of the city waiting to be explored. Located atop a hill, you need a 15-20 minute trek uphill to get close to this olden fortress that was once home to Greek and Byzantine kings and warriors. The whole *Skopje* is a sight to behold once you are at the highest peak of the castle. Incredibly, dungeons are preserved and still visible to this day. You see crumbled guard towers or whatever was left of it dot its four corners, all strategically placed enabling guards at that time to see those coming from below as well as beyond. Rumors had it that plans are afoot to restore whatever is left of this historical piece of landmark, which when completed would certainly be a come-on attraction for tourists in years to come.

The population is a mixture of predominant Macedonians who speak Serb, which bears strong resemblance to Russians. The rest are ethnic Albanians, Turks and a handful of gypsies. Most of the adult population does not speak English. Surprisingly enough, big chunks of the younger populace do speak fluent English, which is why we always get to draw friendly crowds among the teens wherever we go. Because we are like magnets to them, numerous nightspots frequented by teenagers of both sexes were declared off limits. But you know how some knuckleheads love going against established guidelines. They always manage to slip by and go to where the majority of the crowd is. I once walked into a disco house and saw a lively crowd milling around two GIs who were treating everyone to rounds of *Skopsko*. It would not hurt them, I thought. The brew cost like 30-40 cents a bottle. Ah, this fellow GIs, they know how to throw a party!

DIARY OF A TRAVELING GI (Continued)

There is not a dull moment when you're in the city. For example, if one loves jewelry and rugs, the place to be is in the Turkish side of the city. Oh yes, folks, what a portion of Turkish population they got! It's like being in the markets of Istanbul: the cobblestones lining the walkway, the clustered shops manned by tea-drinking vendors, and the familiar warm smile that greets every shop visitor. The place is littered with stores with a wide array of dazzling jewelries and beguiling carpets. A few of the shop owners speak broken English, but oddly enough, they speak German fluently. A simple knowledge of basic German is to your advantage as one gets a better deal. But nothing compares if you have a little knowledge of the local language, as this offers you the best deal ever. Additionally paying in Deutchmarks instead of the local currency gives you added purchasing power.

For the adventurous, fun-loving thrill-seeking single individual, a trip to the discotheque house is worth its try. Unlike the ones we've known back at home, disco houses here are relatively small and cramped. You are literally rubbing elbows with the crowd both on the dance floor and the bar as well. Local women are gorgeous and gregarious while the men are uncompromising and possessive. One must be careful in introducing oneself to a gal without first ascertaining if she is unescorted or not lest, you're risking a black eye or two.

If one is not in a shopping mood, you can always pamper your palate by eating. Restaurants offer an array of American, European and local cuisine. Have a little drink of wine or *Skopsko*, whichever is your preference, and enjoy a banter or two with some of the friendly patrons around. It will cost you roughly twenty dollars to enjoy the night out. Hotel? I cannot share any information on this one since we have our own - the Military Post back at the camp. Seriously, you would probably spend in the vicinity of between 15-20 dollars a night on a decent hotel room.

For sun-loving beach-going souls, there is Lake Ohrid about 100 kilometers outside Skopje. Just a 10-minute taxi ride outside the city of Ohrid, the pristine waters of the beach is great for swimming and jet skiing. The fine sand beaches are ideal for sunbathing too. Don't be surprised if you find a number of women with their tops off basking in the glory of the sun. This is a common every day encounter. Beach houses are available for rent at modest prices if one is planning to stay for a couple of days. Makeshift bars line the beach to serve one's need either for thirst or hunger. When not in the beach you can busy yourself visiting the medieval monastery at the top of a hill. Overlooking the city itself, it is said that medieval monks from thousand of years ago flocked this place. Ancient warriors loyal to conquering kings later overran it. You can also troop to the middle of the city square where an ancient tree, said to be dating back to pre-biblical times, stands to this day. The tree splits in the middle and points away in opposite directions. Accordingly, a bolt of lightning caused the split. The inside of both halves of the tree appears burnt yet green leaves still grow from the few branches dangling from it. It's awe in sight to behold.

Six months seem like a longtime to be in an area you haven't known before, especially for a deployed soldier who is away from loved ones and from the comforts of home. Back then, we were the few ones sent downrange that were authorized liberty passes on off duty days due to the relatively peaceful condition pervading at that time. The little fun that we had was more than enough to forget the boredom and stress that comes along with being deployed. Nowadays, peacekeepers still patrol the borders of FYROM but the rules have changed. Liberty passes are no longer issued. The handicap of not being able to go out nevertheless, translates into lots of dollars saved that would otherwise have gone to splurges into local economy. Personally, the wealth of experience gained from knowing the culture of this proud people and meeting new friends, plus the excitement of seeing a lot of beautiful places is more than a trade-off with the few hundreds of dollars that I spent.

For the civilian tourist wanting to experience a touch of medieval Europe, this is one country you must include in your itinerary. If you are the type that wants to see lots of great places but little money to spend, this is the place to be. Before you make any reservations though, check with the U.S. State Department officials first if travel restrictions are in place or not. Happy traveling!

Next stop I'll take you to a glimpse of medieval and modern Germany.