

AIR RESCUE



The Story
of the
31st Air Rescue Squadron
Clark Air Base

"The President's plane is overdue."

When this message flashed across the Republic of the Philippines, a network of air rescue services was alerted which resulted, at its height, in 53 planes being assigned to specific search areas.

The search for the missing aircraft of the late President Magsaysay on March 18, 1957, the day after the ill-fated plane took off from Cebu, became a joint massive effort of the Philippine Air Force and Navy and the United States Navy, Air Force and Marines.

Those tense and saddened days will be remembered, in part, because of the caliber of the men who conducted the search. The air-sea rescue action of these men dramatized, possibly more than anything had before, America's unique 31st Air Rescue Squadron stationed at Clark Air Base in the Philippines—an arm of the Air Rescue Service under Brig. Gen. Thomas J. DuBose at Orlando Air Base in Florida.

Though organized primarily to serve U.S. military needs in the Far East, the squadron has flown to Filipinos in distress about as often as it has gone to the aid of Americans. Many persons in the Philippines first became aware of this as a result of the search for Magsaysay.

The President's plane crash stimulated interest in the other Philippine-based rescue units which, together with the one at Clark, undertake major operations in close coordination.

The sea-air rescue teams of the U.S. Navy at Sangley Point also respond to calls for help within a huge radius including the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Hongkong and Taiwan.

Patrol boats of the Philippine Navy, aside from salvage operations for vessels in distress, bring relief to areas stricken by flood, fire, earthquake, famine, typhoon or disease. Typical was the mercy mission on behalf of inhabitants of Camiguin Island when Mount

Hibok-Hibok erupted.

A rescue squadron has been organized in the Philippine Air Force with the help of the Clark-based unit and JUSMAG, the Joint United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of the Philippines. Known as the 505th Rescue Squadron, it will eventually take over some of the functions now performed by its American counterpart.

The other important rescue organization is, of course, the Philippine Government's Civil Aeronautics Rescue Coordination Center located at the Manila International Airport. It is the hub of the nation's search and rescue operations, an alerting center to which reports on aircraft in distress are transmitted. It coordinates, as necessary for search and rescue purposes, other agencies, both government and private, military and civilian, Filipino and American.

The experience of a crippled commercial airliner a year ago underlines this crucial role of the Rescue Coordination Center.

The aircraft was bound from Manila for Saigon. Encountering engine trouble, it feathered two engines and flashed a distress call. Immediately the RCC alerted planes from Clark Air Base and Sangley Point which started racing toward the stricken aircraft minutes after the signal was received. Four planes escorted the crippled airliner back to safety. Through the RCC's accurate and speedy handling of the airline's request for assistance, the limping plane and its 23 passengers were saved.

All of these units, Filipino and American, play critical life-or-death roles in the overall rescue drama in the Philippines. It is difficult to say which unit is more or most important. They are all, in a way, indispensable. However, this is the story of Clark's 31st Air Rescue Squadron.

It is, for example, the story of the many Filipinos airlifted from remote barrios to Manila, Cebu, Davao and other centers for ad-

vanced medical care.

There was the elderly father of Senator Pelaez rushed to a hospital in Manila; the Filipino laborer on Tablas Island; the fisherman in Samar; the Chief of Police at Palanan, Luzon; the two school teachers in Malaybalay; the pregnant woman in Baganga, Mindanao; the Philippine Constabulary private in Casiguran; a polio-stricken girl from Puerto Princesa, Palawan—a typical cross-section of Filipinos who have felt the impact of the 31st.

The American rescue unit does not only, of course, evacuate the critically ill. In October 1956, amphibians located eleven survivors of the S. S. Lepus, a Philippine freighter that sank off northern Luzon during a typhoon. MA-1 kits, a new rescue development, were dropped to the survivors, providing flotation, food and medicine until the men were lifted from the tossing seas by the crew of the USS Castor. But this did not end the mission, for 25 others were still unaccounted for. Rescue planes searched for several days, but in vain.

Sometimes it is the Filipinos who rescue the Americans. The most dramatic instance of this occurred in November 1956, when two U.S. fliers parachuted from their burning T-33 jet training near Lubang Island, northwest of Mindoro. Leaping into a heavy sea that heralded the approach of a tropical storm, they soon noticed that the current was carrying them out of Looc Bay into the South China Sea.

But Filipino fishermen had seen them bail out. The fishermen pushed their bancas through the rough waters to the airmen and took them back to land. On the following day a rescue plane, spotting the men safe on the beach, returned them to Clark Air Base.



MAGSAYSAY PLANE CRASH—A USAF helicopter (above) combs Mount Manungal wilderness during the search operations on the missing President's plane.

COORDINATION—Officials from the Philippine Air Force, U.S. Navy and Air Force (below) discuss progress reports relayed to Nichols Air Base control tower by the various search-rescue parties.

The Filipino fishermen earned the gratitude of U.S. airmen everywhere. For their courageous action they were honored in a ceremony at the American Embassy in Manila by Maj. Gen. John B. Ackerman, 13th Air Force Commander, and U.S. Minister Horace H. Smith.

When a Philippine Air Force plane, an F-51 crashed in January of this year, Filipinos and Americans were once again drawn together in a rescue action. An H-19A helicopter from Nichols Air Base and an SH-19B helicopter from Clark were immediately dispatched to the scene of the accident. The "choppers" were not long in arriving, but unfortunately the pilot had been killed on impact.

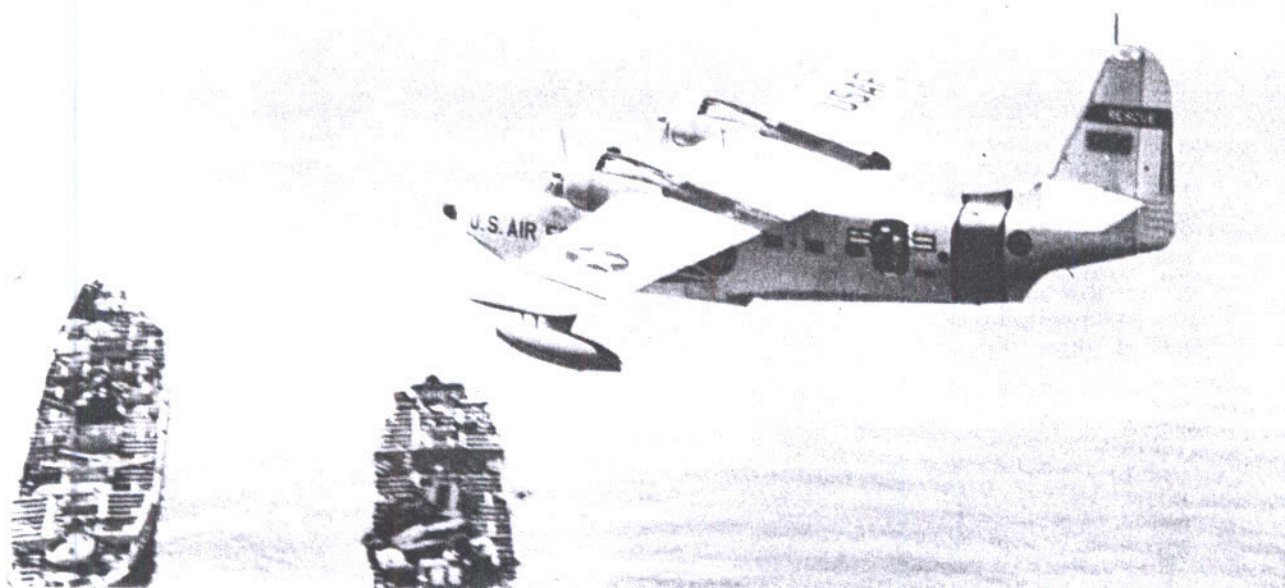
The latest air tragedy occurred in August 1957, immediately after typhoon Agnes left its destructive toll in the Philippines.

A formation of F-100 Super Sabre jet fighters from the 12th Fighter-Bomber Squadron took off from Kadina airport in Okinawa. On the last leg of the 865-mile flight to Clark Air Base, two jet fighters on a "radar let-down" collided about 30 miles north of the landing base.

Because of the well-coordinated communication between control tower and aircraft, it took only a few seconds for the 31st Air Rescue Squadron helicopter teams to launch another emergency mission.

One team, sighting burning wreckage in Barrio Texas, Tarlac, initiated a search on the estimated route of the ill-fated jet plane to locate possible survivors. Meanwhile, another search party had succeeded in locating the injured pilot, who had bailed out while his plane plunged earthward.





LIFE SAVERS—Clark-based SA-16 amphibious rescue planes (above) perform practice drop of live-saving MA-kits consisting of flotation devices, medicine, food and clothing.

LEGION OF HONOR—31st Air Rescue Squadron officers receive high honors from the Philippine Government for the heroic rescue the SS Lepus sea disaster survivors.

On August 20, 1956, JUSMAG placed 27 PAF men, three officers and 24 airmen on duty with the 31st Air Rescue Squadron at Clark Air Base. The purpose of this move was to give the PAF personnel on-the-job training in all phases of the operation and administration of a rescue squadron. Each Filipino trainee was teamed with an American "buddy" for a period of 90 days. On December 5, 1956 the last of the trainees

departed for Nichols Air Base in Manila where they became the nucleus of the PAF's 505th Air Rescue Squadron.

As the Philippine squadron gains in skill and "know-how", the U.S. units at Clark Air Base and the Naval Station at Sangley Point will find the calls to aid their Filipino friends less frequent. But the ties that bound American and Filipino rescue crews in those days of trial and training will grow stronger.

COOPERATION—Filipinos and Americans join hands in rendering medical and transportation facilities to the sick and injured. Right, Maria Apostol, critically-ill patient, is airlifted from Palawan to Manila.



RUBBER LIFE RAFT—Another Filipino patient, Gregorio Pelaez of Medina, Mindanao, boards rubber life raft which would take him into a waiting SA-16 air rescue squadron plane for evacuation to a Manila hospital.

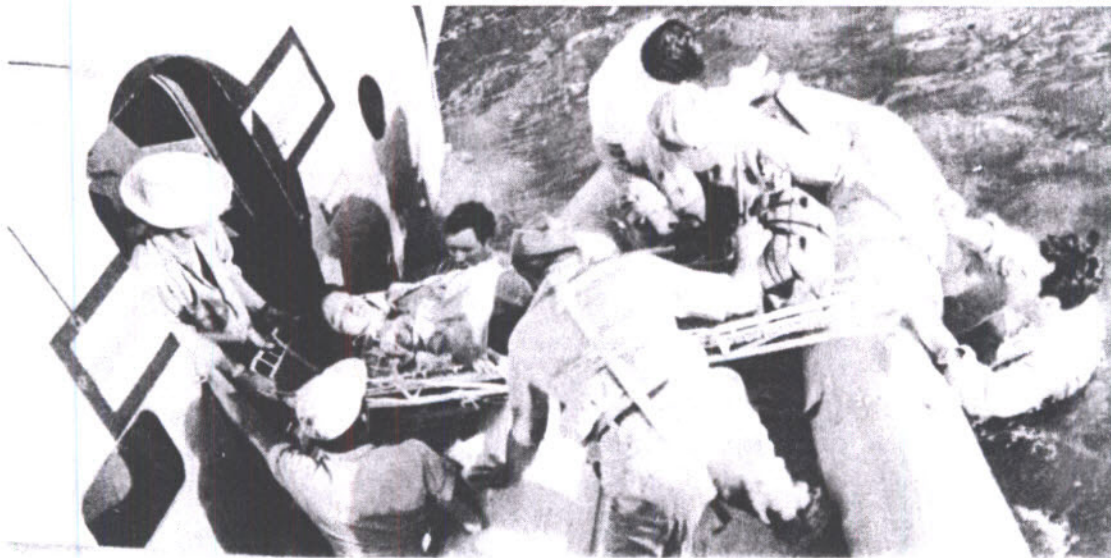


Last February, Capt. Robert F. Brown, an aircraft commander in the 31st Air Rescue Squadron, was assigned to temporary duty with JUSMAG to help "check out" the pilots of four SA-16A rescue amphibians transferred from the United States to the new Philippine rescue unit.

These Filipino pilots have learned how to fly the rescue planes, how to bring them down on land and on the sea, how to use

their JATO (Jet Assisted Takeoff) "bottles" when taking off from water, how to search for disabled planes and lost or injured pilots, how to transport sick or wounded patients from isolated regions, and how to use the aircraft's rescue and survival gear in all its myriad detail.

And myriad it is, for the SA-16's load of rescue and survival equipment includes two MA-1 kits, each containing two 20-man in-



PATIENT AIRLIFT—A Clark Air Base rescue amphibian renders "air ambulance" service to emergency patients living in remote barrios.



HOSPITAL-BOUND—An injured patient flown from Polillo Island is transferred from a USAF rescue plane to waiting ambulance at the airport.

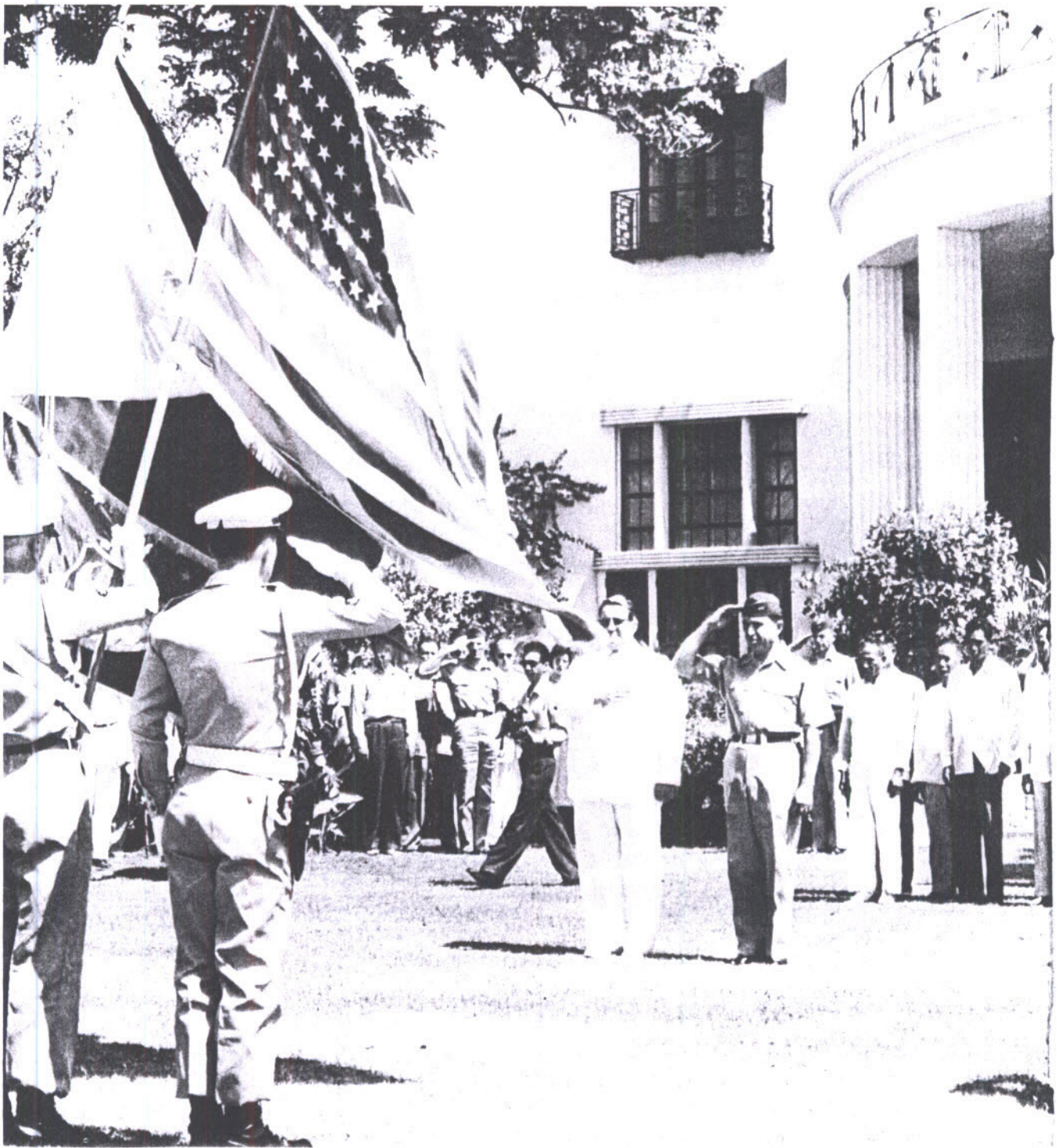
flatable rubber life rafts with food, drugs, fishing gear, water, hats, radio transmitters, signal apparatus, sea dyes and smoke bombs for marking wreckage and survivors, and a one-million candle power parachute flare that can light up a small city.

There are also water bags, blankets, batteries, an anchor, rope, a bailing bucket, water distillation and desalter kits, and a bright crimson canopy that has a three-way

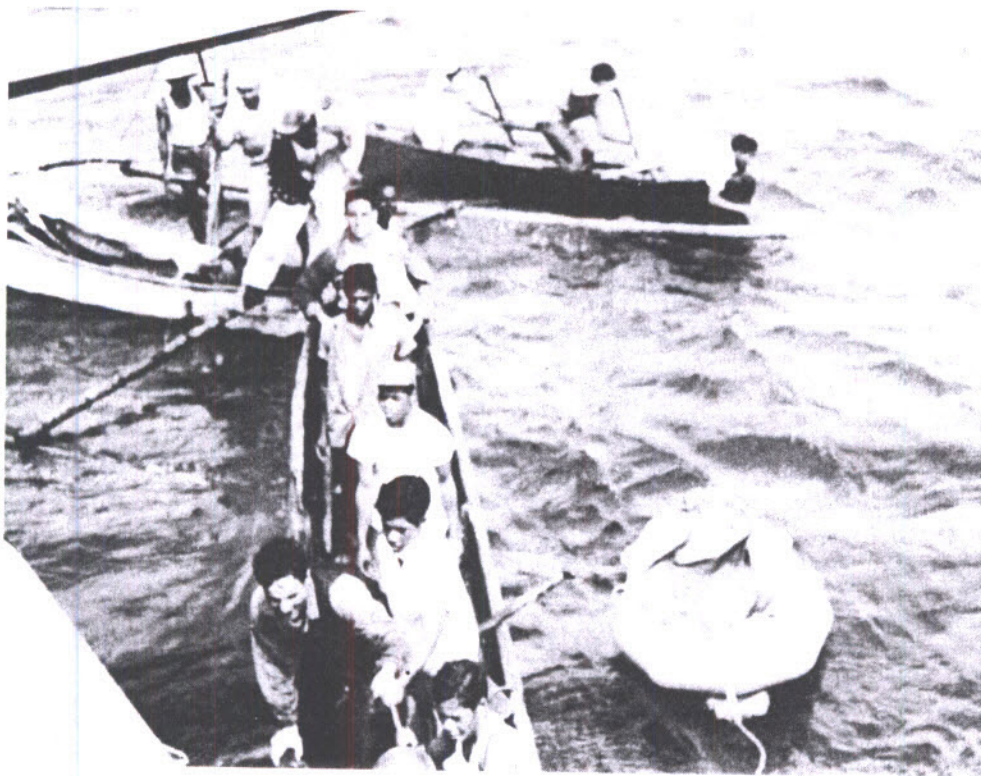
use as sun-shade, rain catcher, and signal for ships and planes.

Each craft carries an ample supply of "Mae Wests", self-inflating life jackets equipped with various survival items. One of these is a shark repellent.

The list is not complete. But it shows the technical thoroughness, based on long and often bitter experience, that must be added to human courage and compassion before an



HEROES—Filipino fishermen who braved the storm-tossed sea near Lubang Island, northwest of Mindoro, in rescuing two American pilots who parachuted from their disabled jet plane, receive high honors from the American government. Above, U.S. Minister Horace H. Smith and Maj. Gen. John B. Ackerman, 13th Air Force Commander, salute Philippine and American flags before giving the awards.



SAVED—American flyer is assisted by Filipino fishermen who rescued jet plane survivors in Lubang Island.

air rescue mission can become truly effective.

The 31st Air Rescue Squadron appears to have accomplished this fusion of qualities. It is due in no small measure to the leadership of its commander, Lt. Col. George P. Bahler. But Col. Bahler is quick to single out the hard work and devotion of the men under him as the priceless ingredients of his operation.

In this connection the young and growing rescue unit of the Philippine Air Force bids fair to do as well or better than its American parent. Perhaps this is as it should be. In any case, the crews of each—Filipino and American—face the future in confidence and together.

