



## CAPTAIN GIEMEL O. ESPINO

Squadron Commander  
900<sup>th</sup> Air Force Weather Group  
Philippine Air Force  
Pasay City

*Presidential Lingkod Bayan Awardee, 2007  
Individual Category*

The first thing one notices upon entering Captain Espino's office are the *banderitas*. Asked why he decorated his office like there is a fiesta, Captain Gielmel O. Espino, head of Philippine Air Force's 900th Weather Group, smiles wryly and says, "*Hindi ko kasi alam kung babalik pa ako ng buhay pagkatapos ng isang operation, kaya gusto ko ang opisina ko laging masaya bago ako umalis* (I don't know if I could come back alive when I finish an operation, so I would like my office to look festive every time I leave)."

Meet Captain Espino, head of the only cloud seeding team in the PAF. These men dodge and escape danger deftly just to ensure that rain is produced during dry spells. They make artificial rain by "impregnating" thunder clouds with salt. This process attracts water vapor, which turns into water and falls back on land in the form of rain. This saves farmers from production waste, and ensures a good harvest of agricultural crops for them even during El Niño.

For someone who brushes with death every so often, Captain Espino looks like your average guy who takes on life one day at a time. But behind his unassuming air is a person brimming with discipline and determination. Take for example his everyday routine. "I always start my day by eating any kind of fruit with oat meal, drinking lots of water and having sit-ups," he says.

"Everyday after office hours, I go to the gym and lift weights, then jog. The process activities help me stay fit to perform my work. I don't have any vices. I end my day by going to the chapel and praying to God to protect my life as I serve others."

Prayer may just be what he needs for such a job. Inside a rain cloud, one may experience vertigo, and one cannot determine whether it is the sky, the sea or the land above and below him. Captain Espino recalls his very first mission. "I shouted and cursed, and thought that I could really die doing this job." During one of his missions, he barely escaped hitting a mountain, which he did not see until it was just inches before him. "Being a rainmaker is very dangerous but knowing that I help farmers in the process, and the economy of our country as a whole is worth the risk."

In 2005 alone, the cost of production saved by cloud seeding operations in Regions 2, 6, and 7 amounted to P151,789,250 million. Isabela Governor Grace Padaca, herself an award-winning public servant, commended Captain Espino's efforts. "We consider him as some sort of miracle," she says. "We thank the PAF's 900<sup>th</sup> Air Force Weather Group for the assistance they gave to our farmers in Isabela." Governor Padaca's province is just one of the beneficiaries of these

cloud seeding operations. The risk, however, does not change.

Even if he was expecting this kind of challenge, Captain Espino still expresses the awe of surviving day after day. "You get accustomed with the danger," he says.

Asked if he has always wanted to become a soldier, one could feel the sincerity when Espino solemnly nods and says yes. His inspiration? "I am one of the grandsons of the former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the 1970's, General Romeo C. Espino, who holds the longest record of service and whose reputation was untarnished," he relays. "I wanted to become like him."

Since deciding on his life goal, he became focused in getting what he wanted. He didn't lose hope even if his family suffered a bad financial crisis during his early years. He started his training early by joining the Citizen Army Training and the Reserve Officer Training Course. Having good grades in school earned him a university scholarship grant, which solved his education problems. However, it did not help much in reducing the effects of poverty. "Plain rice served as my lunch at school since I couldn't afford viands," he recalls. "I had to walk 50 kilometers from my home to the school and vice versa for four years just to have a college degree."

His other dream was to become a pilot, which seemed like another daunting goal given his situation. "I didn't know how I could achieve that since my family would not be able to afford the expensive training," he said. However, fate had another way in mind. "I was the only one in my college who passed the qualifying examinations in 1992 for a two-year, four million peso military pilot training course in the Philippine Air Force Flying School. I graduated in 1994 at the top of my class." Now, he is living both his dreams.

But he did not stop there. Not only did he reap numerous awards for his exceptional achievements in the Air Force. He also received recognition for his peculiar inventions.

His most intriguing invention would probably be the Agile Reader Last Existing Neuro Encoder or Arlene, a mind-reading device, which he says took him ten years to develop. "I found out that by using mathematical formulas and combining them with using abstract symbols or colors, I can read the mind of anybody," he explains. He also penned the first ever collection of Bible-based quotes back in 2000, and created "The Greatest Game" which is the first comprehensive Bible-based board game. "I invented a system where anyone can memorize the bible faster and study it more interestingly," he says.

For someone whose mind operates both creatively and logically, Captain Espino remains simply content in serving the Filipino people. He believes in the government despite low morale and endless stories of graft and corruption. He believes in starting change from himself. "All levels of public service are important, whether you are head of an agency or a lowly utility worker," he says. "We all make up government service."

His attendance record would put even the most conscientious public servant to shame. "I haven't applied for passes, leaves and vacations in my 15 years of military service," he reveals. "I even didn't see my parents and siblings ten years straight when I did not going home. I am now still married to public service since I still don't have a wife and children."

Captain Espino has among his many laurels the 2007 *Lingkod Bayan* awardee and 2009 Gawad Geny Lopez, Jr. Bayaning Pilipino National Finalist. His message to his fellow public servants is simple – SELF. "S as in start with a dream; E as in educate yourself; L as in love God, others and yourself; and F as in fly high to reach your dream."

Captain Espino not only flew, he soared to the ultimate heights of excellence and achievement. •