

PING, HENERAL NG BAYAN

After graduating from the PMA, Lt. Panfilo Lacson was assigned to the Metrocom Intelligence and Security Group from 1971 to 1986, and the PC-INP Anti-Carnapping Task Force from 1986 to 1988.

From 1989 to 1992, he served as Metropolitan District Command (Metrodiscom) commander of Cebu City, and became an adopted son of the city due to his work. City officials even initially objected to his transfer and sought to retain him.

In late 1992, then Vice President Joseph Estrada entrusted him with the sensitive job of heading the Presidential Anti-Crime Commission's Task Force Habagat until 1995. From 1996 to 1997, Lacson served as Project Officer of Special Project Alpha.

Lacson served as Chief of the Philippine National Police from Nov. 16, 1999 to Jan. 20, 2001. During this time, the PNP achieved its highest trust and satisfaction rating.

SOLVED BOMBINGS

Lacson was instrumental in solving the series of bombings that started at the Philippine Plaza Hotel in 1982, where the fatalities included a singer. After the 1986 EDSA Revolution, he was asked to help in curbing carnapping in Metro Manila. He recovered the carnapped vehicles a year later at Tanza, Cavite.

ENCOUNTER WITH NPA

As Provincial Commander of Isabela, Lacson sought to get rid of the Communist insurgency there with offensive operations. He and his team managed to accomplish more than the Philippine Army there.

In one encounter, Lacson led his team into the NPA heartland, and called for reinforcements from Ilagan. NPAs ambushed the reinforcements, with Lacson and his men rushing to join the firefight. At the end, one of Lacson's lieutenants died in his arms, and Lacson knew that he could have been that person.

FOE OF LOGGING MAGNATES

From 1988 to 1989, Lacson was assigned as Provincial Commander of Isabela where he became highly detested by logging “magnates.”

ARRESTED A MAYOR

Lacson’s first major case after being assigned as commander of Cebu Metrodiscom in 1989 was a violent bank robbery incident. The robbery was perpetrated by masked armed men. Ping visited the wakes of those killed during the robbery. He promised the mother, “I would get those robbers who killed your sons/husbands.” Then, he raided a building and killed the robber/mastermind.

At the Bantayan Municipal Hall at the office of the mayor, he arrested no less than the mayor for robbery. This along with his earlier achievements earned him the much-coveted PC Officer of the Year award.

UNCOMPROMISING STAND VS JUETENG, ILLEGAL GAMBLING

From February to July 1992, Lacson headed the police in Laguna, and earned a reputation for his uncompromising stand against illegal gambling.

Barely had he warmed his seat at his office when he issued a challenge to his men: “Pagka ako, nabalitaan nyo na tumanggap sa jueteng, nariyan yung flagpole. Itali nyo ako riyan, barilin nyo ako (If you hear that I am receiving protection money in exchange for allowing jueteng, there’s the flagpole - tie me up there and shoot me).”

Yet these jueteng lords sent emissaries to Lacson, with promises of millions of pesos a month, to be deposited in his bank account, in exchange for a blind eye. But Lacson always refused.

As provincial commander of Laguna, he raided gambling dens and jueteng operations. He was offered P1.2 million to look the other way, but he refused. Because of this, he became a target of threats on more than a few occasions.

It was also Lacson’s tough stance against illegal gambling that led to a falling-out with then President Estrada.

SURVIVED ASSASSINATION TRY

One time, Lacson was at a restaurant in Laguna with his men when somebody attempted to assassinate him. His response was quick. He was able to arrest the mastermind in a cockpit.

It is not an easy life for a crimefighter. "Aside from reprisal from the criminals themselves, my opponents used the incidents to call me names designed to malign my reputation," Ping commented.

ERADICATED KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM SYNDICATES

Lacson was responsible for the successful resolution of several kidnap-for-ransom cases, including that of Robina Gokongwei in September 1981. He led the team that rescued Robina, and declined her offer of a reward.

Gokongwei, eldest daughter of retail magnate John Gokongwei Jr., was kidnapped while she was on her way to the University of the Philippines' School of Economics. Her abductors demanded P7 million in ransom money. The mastermind later turned out to be the son of a judge from Cebu.

She credited then Lt. Col. Panfilo Lacson, who was then assigned at PC Metrocom, for her rescue after seven days of captivity. "He [Ping] literally kicked and broke down the door just like you see in the movie."

Another kidnap victim rescued by Lacson was a nine-year old boy of a prominent Cebu family. Ping returned their son wrapped in a bedsheet, safe from harm. As the parents and relatives were sobbing, they tried to give Ping reward money for his efforts. As always, Ping refused, and said, "we were just doing our job."

Anti-crime crusader Teresita Ang-See had kind words for him. "Ping had unequivocal support from the Chinese-Filipino businessmen in Metro Manila. He has integrity. He returned ransom money intact. Even if the kidnap victims volunteer to give him money, he refuses."

When Joseph Estrada became President in 1998, Lacson served as chief of the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, which brought down a high number of kidnap-for-ransom cases to zero in less than a year, while fighting drug trafficking, smuggling activities, carnapping, illegal possession of firearms and other nefarious activities.

CHIEF PNP: INTERNAL CLEANSING

NO-TAKE POLICY

As PNP chief, Lacson enforced a “No-Take Policy” on protection money from illegal gambling, dismissing more than 2,000 police officers in the process.

Teresita Ang-See, anti-crime crusader, said this no-take policy earned Lacson “unequivocal support from the Chinese-Filipino businessmen in Metro Manila.” She said: “He has integrity. He returned ransom money intact. Even if the kidnap victims volunteer to give him money, he refuses.”

BIDDING PROCESS

Lacson’s no-take policy extended to the bidding process, where he warned suppliers against giving to those who approved the bids, such as free cars and cash. Even when the suppliers guaranteed Lacson P10 million a month straight to his bank account, he refused.

RETURNING RECOVERED CARNAPPED VEHICLES

When he formally took the reins of the PNP on Nov. 16, 1999, Lacson sought to restore the old glory of the policemen. He instilled discipline while raising the morale of police personnel by getting rid of what he called ICUs: *Inept, Corrupt, Undisciplined cops*.

One of his first directives as Chief PNP was to have police personnel immediately return the recovered carnapped vehicles they were using – whether personally or incognito. In less than two weeks, Camp Crame and the nearby flyover became a virtual parking lot for 600 of such vehicles, which were returned to their rightful owners.

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

During his term as PNP Chief, Lacson led by example as he instituted a no-take policy and a fitness program, while cleansing the police force of “scalawags in uniform” (a.k.a. kotong cops) – initiatives that earned the PNP the highest public approval ratings in its history.

He personally led exercises and jogged around Camp Crame, during which he personally inspected each of the offices there. He banned golf during work hours.

34-INCH WAISTLINE

Lacson cracked down on PNP personnel abusing the institution’s sports days, barring police officers from golf courses during duty hours. He then reestablished in-camp sports activities to reinforce comradeship among officers.

He also gave pot-bellied police officers a deadline to bring down their waistlines to 34 inches.

This earned Lacson the gratitude of many a policeman’s wife, as their husbands looked better and stopped drinking.

DOWNLOADING FUNDS

Lacson downloaded 85% of the PNP's budget to the operating units to improve the overall management, and removed the excess privileges of top police officials.

He also made sure a P100-million "reserve" fund for the PNP Chief went to the funds of the policemen, especially for their healthcare. Those who were wounded during duty received aid from the PNP.

ERADICATED KOTONG CULTURE

Most importantly, Lacson stopped the practice of "kotong" (extortion) by many policemen victimizing public utility drivers, vegetable and rice dealers, and vendors. The so-called "kotong cops" disappeared under his watch.

RESTORED TRUST IN THE PNP

With his actions, Lacson achieved what no PNP head has ever done: earn a whopping 64% approval rating for the institution in July and October 2000, the highest ever recorded from the Filipino people. Lacson himself got an approval rating of 73% as Chief PNP in July 2000, thus regaining the PNP's glory years by restoring public trust in the police force. [Source: Pulse Asia, May 1999 to October 2000]
