

MELCHOR FAMORCA DELA CRUZ was born on January 6, 1931 at Pagpartian, Vigan, Ilocos Sur. He is the third among the six (Felipa, Faustino Jr., Bernardo and two others who died at their young ages) offspring of Faustino, Sr. and Eustaquia. His father earned a salary as a School Teacher at Bantay Elementary School while his mother took care of the brood. She also had to accept made-to-order homemade *Longganisa*, *dinuguan* and at times, had to sell meat to cover some expenses of the family.

He didn't have a typical life of a boy who spends eternity playing with childhood friends. He always needs to adjust to a new home and new friends as his family kept evacuating every time his father needs to move from one place to another for his commitment to the government being one among the many Filipino Guerillas who fought against the Japanese invaders in the Philippines during the World War II (WWII). When the war ended in 1945, his family settled in Bantay, Ilocos Sur and lived a typical rural life. In a two-storey house where he was taught discipline and accountability in his actions is where he started to build his dreams to secure his future. Ms. Juvi Puzon Dela Cruz, Melchor's first-degree cousin recalls that catch-up days and family bonding were spent at the compound beside the school where his father used to teach. Melchor's father would regale them with firsthand accounts of the heroes' deeds during the war. Melchor was more likely to follow his father's path compared to his siblings. Tales of heroism were to instill in the young mind of Melchor a patriotic heart for the country and an incipient ambition to become a part of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

When his education obliged him to fulfill his dreams, he decisively chased his own place in the military by pursuing and eventually landing on the first pit stop in the race of the true patriots when he earned his 2nd Lieutenant rank after graduating from the Philippine Military Academy on March 16, 1953.

In 1954, Melchor Dela Cruz dared to join and undergo rigorous training in the Scout Ranger Course. He belonged to Class 10. Here, he gained prominence when his team captured a Japanese straggler in Mindoro Island during a Test Mission.

Scout Ranger Course consists of three phases: the individual phase, the team phase, and then the maneuver and test mission phase. Test mission is a live combat operation conducted as a final exam. Soldiers must engage their enemy in combat in order to graduate from the course. The test mission consists of a month and a half deployment to a combat zone. If a trainee doesn't have a firefight within that timeframe, then the test mission is extended until he does.

During his junior officer years, he is seen with a strong determination to keep performing his public duty at its best. He occupied various positions and responsibilities. Some of the significant assignments he led well were: Commanding Officer, "C" Company, 10th Battalion Combat Team; Battery Commander, "B" Battery, 1st Infantry Division (1ID); S2/S3, Division Artillery, 1ID; Psy-war and Civic Officer, PhilCon 1, Vietnam; and Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, 1ID.

At the peak of his military career, he was tasked to command the Elite Special Forces Group (Airborne). During this period of his military life, the alleged massacre of Muslim military recruits or the Jabidah Commando Forces nearly caused the disbandment of the Special Forces Group (Abn). But records and revelations state that the Army Special Forces (SF) was tasked by the higher authorities to "clean up

the mess” by handling the integration of surviving Jabidah Trainees into the regular Philippine Army. It was then Col. Del Cruz who made a significant twist by “embracing” and adopting the disgruntled Jabidah Trainees to the Army Special Forces and became a “father” to them that prevented the “would-have-been” disastrous rebellion and national shame.

According to his retired comrade, Gen. Jose P Magno, Col. Dela Cruz remarkably saved the name of the AFP. When everything was settled, “the Jabidahs found a new father and future with Col. Dela Cruz” until they were eventually enlisted in the regular force of the Philippine Army. Some of them even fought and died in Isabela fighting against insurgency.

After his stint at SF Group (Abn), he assumed the position as Commander of 10th Infantry Battalion of the 1st Infantry Division. When the communist insurgency broke out in Luzon, he was given the task of confronting the insurgents in the stronghold of Isabela as the Deputy Commander of the Task Force “Lawin” in a concurrent capacity with a mission to eliminate the presence of the New People’s Army (NPA) and HUKBALAHAP in the area where the first NPA Guerilla Base was established after its founding in Pangasinan.

His efforts collectively created notable accomplishments both in the field of operations and in administration to which all were exemplary. His various awards and decorations were: Anti-dissidence Campaign Ribbon; Military Merit Medal; Military Merit Medal with 1 BAL; Military Merit Medal with 2 BAL; Military Merit Medal with 3 BAL; Basic Parachutist Badge; Senior Parachutist Badge; Master Parachutist Badge; US Master Parachutist Badge; Vietnam Parachutists Badge; and Rifle Marksmanship Badge (Sharpshooter). The most prominent was the Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star medal that was awarded to him in Vietnam.

On Dec. 1, 1982, NorthCom was renamed into Camp Melchor F Dela Cruz. November 11, 1993, the Department of National Defense Republic of the Philippines issued General Orders Number 1007 renaming Camp Upi into Camp Melchor F Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela, making the camp in Echague as the annex and the main in Gamu.