



*Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit -- the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, Galing Pinoy literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.*

by **BILLY DELA CRUZ**  
AJPress

**U**NITED States Air Force F-16 fighter pilot Monessa Catuncan doesn't just maneuver an aircraft whenever she's on air—she also carries the Philippine flag and the pride of the country it represents and the people in it.

The F-16 Fighting Falcon or most commonly known as the "Viper" is a state-of-the-art fighter aircraft. It has been a high-performance weapon system for the US and allied nations for it has been used in numerous air-to-air combats. This specific aircraft has exceeded all the potential threat fighter aircrafts. Its feature as an offense-defense weapon is very precise that it can perform on any weather condition. This kind of plane is a complicated device meant to be handled by highly qualified pilots. The F-16 or the Viper has played vital roles in most of America's wars with the most recent being in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. An F-16 fighter plane is what Monessa Catuncan navigates.

But before Monessa even set foot to the elite US Air Force, this humble *Pinay*, like almost everybody else earned her way to success.

The twenty-six-year-old Monessa is the youngest daughter of Ramons and Teody Catuncan of Mesquite, Texas. She graduated in 2000 as a Valedictorian in a class of 693 in Mesquite High School. She was then accepted to the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in Colorado Springs, that same year. While at USAFA, Monessa, aside from pursuing her desired career as part of the US Air Force, served as a Squadron Commander, a Division-1 tennis player, a Glider Instructor Pilot, and a member of the Glider Acrobatic Team, among other essential positions. In 2004, Monessa graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Astronautical Engineering from the USAFA.

Like all of her colleagues, Monessa went through an Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) before becoming a fighter pilot. However, she didn't just pass her UPT – she excelled in it.

She then started her pilot career flying a T-6 Texan at the



# Monessa Catuncan

## A Filipina takes flight



Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia. This aircraft is the basic trainer for every Air Force aspiring pilots. After this training, students will then choose whether to fly fighter/bomber aircrafts or cargo/refueling aircrafts. Most of the time, only top students in the class are given the option to fly fighter/bomber aircrafts.

Monessa proved herself, and finished the course as one of the top student-pilots in her class. She was then chosen to fly either a fighter or a bomber aircraft. After her course at Moody Air Force, she went to Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas and Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls to fly the T-38. In her training there, Monessa learned the basics of formation flying, offensive and defensive fighter maneuvering, and surface attack bombing techniques. Monessa went through intense studying and was put in a variety of stressful situations in order to pass this training.

From flying T-38, she had an option of choosing from different aircrafts like the F-15E Strike Eagle, F-15C Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon, B-1B Lancer, A-10 Warthog, B-52 Stratofortress, and F/A-22 Raptor, and T-6 or T-38 are also options. After her T-38 course, Monessa requested to fly an F-16 Falcon, and she got what she wanted.

Monessa went through with her training to hone her skill at maneuvering fighter jets at Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, Arizona where she learned how to con-

just recently came back from Iraq where they served and supported the Army Troops on the ground through a variety of close air support missions.

The US Air Force is an elite organization and to a pilot, an F-16 fighter plane is a prized possession. Monessa, through her perseverance and hard work, has earned not only the fly the F-16, but also the pride and honor of defending the United States, as well as making the Filipinos proud. ■

# WILNER & O'REILLY

## EXPERT IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS

**RICHARD M. WILNER**  
Certified Specialist in  
Immigration Law by  
Bureau of Legal  
Specialization  
(State Bar of California)



**KELLY S. O'REILLY**  
Former INS officer in  
Los Angeles & Orange County  
Chair, Immigration Section  
Riverside Bar  
Association

*“Mga abogadong mapagkakatiwalaan”*

*Obtaining results...  
Bridging cultures...  
Connecting families...  
Making your hopes & dreams realities.*

FREE CONSULTATIONS

Visit us at three locations

ORANGE COUNTY  
Irvine  
8105 Irvine Center Drive  
9th Floor  
Irvine, CA 92618  
949.936.2512

LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
Cerritos  
17777 Center Court Drive  
Suite # 200  
Cerritos, CA 90703  
562.207.6789

INLAND EMPIRE  
Riverside  
3638 University Avenue  
Suite # 238  
Riverside, CA 92501  
951.787.0010

[www.wilneroreilly.com](http://www.wilneroreilly.com)

**TOLL FREE NUMBER 1-888-7MABUHAY**

**INJURED!**  
NO RECOVERY - NO FEE

Over 20 Years Providing  
Quality Service & Representation

- Work Related Injuries
- Serious Auto Accidents
- Slip & Fall
- Dog Bites
- Personal Injury
- Pedestrian
- Wrongful Death

LAW OFFICES OF  
**F. Michael Sabzevar**  
FREE Consultation

**888-799-5529**

Carmen Stone,  
Office Administrator  
Pilipino po. Marunong managalog.