

Daniel Smith may still be in RP, on board USS Essex'

by BEBOT SISON
Inquirer.com

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—US Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, who has reportedly left the country last April 24 following his acquittal by the Court of Appeals (CA), may still be in the country aboard USS Essex (LHD2), his mother ship which remains docked at Alava Pier in this free port for the annual US-RP Balikatan exercises.

confirmed that there was no US military aircraft that took off from Subic or Villamor Air Base after Smith was ordered released from US custody.

"This leaves a big possibility that Smith might actually be leaving with his mother ship," a source at the Port of Subic told *The Star*. "Most likely, Smith was flown out of the US embassy by helicopter and then brought to USS Essex," the source added.

The Essex, which deployed US marine contingents based at the US military facilities in Okinawa, Japan, first docked here on April 14 to bring Marines participating in this year's Balikatan exercises.

It then left Subic on April 18, but returned to this port on April 24, a day after Smith was acquitted in Manila.

Other sources in the Subic seaport department said they have observed "unusually heightened security measures" at the Essex, as well as its escort ships, after its

return here on Friday.

The sources also noted that unlike in the past several years of the military exercise, this time sailors from the Essex were not allowed to go out of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

"Iba ang higpit ngayon (The security precautions are more strictly enforced now)," a source said, adding that sometimes two or three military helicopters could be seen patrolling the area.

Sources theorized that the US embassy may have announced Smith's departure to cover up the fact that he is still on the Essex, whose scheduled departure remains unannounced.

Seaport sources clarified that the schedule of arrival and departure for US military ships is not announced for security reasons.

Smith first arrived at Subic Bay via USS Essex (LHD) in October 2005 for a similar Balikatan exercise. (*Inquirer.net*)

History stroll thru postal stamps

Walking tours of city's rich heritage

IT could be a magical mystery tour with a slight twist and a different setting.

The postal heritage walking tour around Manila hopes to resurrect the dying art of stamp collecting in an age of e-mail and instant messaging through leisurely strolls around historic sites around the country's capital.

What's magical about the tour is the Filipinas Stamp Collectors' Club's (FSCC) ability to uncover hidden gems of history around Manila using postage stamps as its guide.

Lawrence Chan, FSCC vice president and tour guide, conceded: "Stamp collection is a dying art. Let's face it, people would rather send an e-mail rather than send snail mail."

Chan told the *Inquirer* that the primary aim of the postal heritage walking tour is "to promote through philately our rich cultural heritage."

Philately is defined by the Philippine Postal Service in its

website as "the world's most fascinating hobby. Through philately, you can learn of a country's history, art, culture, and industry as depicted in special commemorative stamps." Chan said his group has organized the walking tours to "show participants how diverse and rich our culture is." The tours are usually scheduled every third Sunday of the month but can be held on other days depending on requests made by students or other interested groups.

He pointed out that sometimes, they even spend for the participants just so they could join a tour.

The FSCC officers and members usually meet weekly on Sundays at the Postal Museum and Philatelic Library to trade or sell stamps.

Josie Cura, FSCC president, told the *Inquirer* that her group accommodates people who want to start their own stamp collections.

Cura, who has been collecting stamps since 1966, said that people can write them through snail mail and ask for free stamps to start the hobby. "As long as they enclose self-stamped envelopes, we can give them stamps."

The FSCC was first organized by stamp collectors in October 1994 as the Manila Stamp Collectors' Club aimed at catering to beginners and intermediates at the hobby.

It was later renamed as the FSCC in January 2000 and has some 70 active members to date.

The Philippine postal heritage walking tour kicked off at the Aduana or the Customs House, where goods including mails were brought from overseas and declared.

What could be seen now of the then "Intendencia" is its ruins at the heart of Intramuros. The building was built from 1823 to 1829, was demolished in 1872, and a new one replaced it four years after to house the customs offices, the Intendencia General de Hacienda (Central Administration), the treasury, as well as the casa moneda (mint).

It was destroyed by American artillery in 1945 and was restored and used by the Central Bank of the Philippines, the national treasury, and the Commission on Elections until it was completely ravaged by a fire in 1979.

The Puerta Isabel II monument and gate is marked by the bronze statue of the Spanish queen which was first erected near the Teatro Alfonso XII (now the Metropolitan Theater) in Arroceros (now Plaza Lawton) on July 14, 1860.

Moves to dismantle the statue after the queen's downfall was thwarted by a sympathizer who hid the monument in his home.

In 1896, the statue resurfaced and was erected in front of the Malate Church for some 70 years until Typhoon "Yoling"

(international code name Patsy) toppled the statue. It was only in 1975 during the visit of then Prince and now King Juan Carlos of Spain that the monument was erected on its present site.

Liwasang Bonifacio was also part of the itinerary. The park which is known as the venue for most rallies used to be known as Plaza Lawton until it was renamed in the 1960s after the Plebeian hero Andres Bonifacio.

The Manila Cathedral inside the walled Intramuros was also part of the tour as it was also previously featured in stamp when its bell tower has not yet been constructed.

The final leg of the tour showed a virtual trove of philately in the form of the Postal Museum and Philatelic Library which is located within the Manila Central Post Office compound.

The postal museum is hidden at the third floor of the building of the Security Inspection Services Division and Postal Police Force that any Manilaño would scratch his head in wonder at not knowing that it exists and is in fact the oldest museum in southeast Asia.

It was organized in 1992 to enable the public to view the country's rich repository of stamps and items used by the post office through the years including: Old mail boxes, typewriters, awards, paintings, stamps, philatelic magazines, as well as books and catalogues.

Chan revealed that the Philippines is the first country in Asia to issue stamps, printing and releasing them on Feb. 1, 1854.

He disclosed that the first stamp is highly collectible because of the error in printing where "correos" was misspelled as "corros" and could fetch a price ranging from P5,000 to as much as P25,000 a piece.

Another collectible stamp is the June 30, 1981 Philippine issued stamp and souvenir sheet without any indication of the country of origin and carried "new republic" on its face.

A Sept. 25, 1995 issuance honoring Cesar Bengson bore the picture of his brother instead.

When the error was discovered, 2,070 stamps had already been sold while the rest were recalled and replaced.

Chan pointed out that errors and mistakes in printing of stamps make them precious to stamp collectors.

He lamented that the hobby is no longer as thriving as it was during the snail mail era and the museum is not being promoted when other countries take pride in their culture.

"We have a very rich history. We should just take time, take it slow to enjoy what we have," Chan stressed.

The FSCC can be reached by prospective hobbyists through Manila P.O. box 2986 or through 7355001. (*Inquirer.net*)

RP tourism explores new...

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and the environmental conditions are given greater weight and importance in the development of their respective tourist attractions.

The challenge is to manage the growth and defend the environment from deterioration.

4. What new tourism spots in the country are gaining popularity?

Destinations breaking into the mainstream tourism circuit of the country are Bicol, Bohol and Palawan. These destinations provide a fresh new model for tourism development with greater weight on local

livelihood generation and environmental protection and restoration.

5. What other programs are we embarking on this year for the tourism sector to contribute to total GDP growth?

A major program of the Department is GREET or Grassroots Entrepreneurship in Eco-Tourism. Through this program, we maximize the role of the country's tourism growth for poverty alleviation. One of the fastest growing market segments in global travel is eco-tourism.

This is an opportunity for us to harness the various idle natural and cultural assets throughout the archipelago to economically and socially empower the host communities. ■

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More Pinoys see life improving

by HELEN FLORES
Philstar.com

MANILA—More adult Filipinos are expecting their personal quality of life to improve in the next 12 months, the latest survey by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed.

The non-commissioned First Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey taken from Feb. 20 to 23 showed 32 percent of adult Filipinos expecting their personal quality of life to improve—or "personal optimists"—in the next 12 months. Nineteen percent—"personal pessimists"—expect it to get worse, bringing the Net Personal Optimism to +14, which SWS termed "fair."

However, nearly half of adult Filipinos said their lives have worsened in the last 12 months.

The 47 percent of 1,200 respondents, called "losers" in the survey, was an increase of four points from the fourth quarter of 2008, SWS said.

Those saying their lives had improved, or "gainers," remained at 19 percent, according to the First Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey.

SWS said compared to the Fourth Quarter of 2008, personal optimism rose by two points, but personal pessimism rose by four points. "Thus Net Personal Optimism was more or less unchanged," it said.

"This brings the gainers-losers gap to a low -28, or worse by four points from the previous quarter," the SWS said.

Optimism that the Philippine economy would get better (economic optimists) rose by one point to 19 percent in February, while pessimism stayed at 38 percent. The Net Economic Optimism score was a mediocre -19.

SWS said Net Economic Optimism has been at low to very low levels over the past six quarters, ranging from -19 to -39.

SWS said personal optimism rose in Luzon outside Metro Manila but dropped in the Visayas.

Compared to the previous quarter, Net Personal Optimism in balance Luzon rose by six points, to a high +23 in February.

It fell by 15 points in the Visayas, to a low -4; by six points in Mindanao, to a fair +11; and by one point in Metro Manila, to a fair +14.

Net Personal Optimism rose by two points in class D, to a fair +16 in February. It fell by 13 points in class E, down to a mediocre +5, and by four points in class ABC, to a fair +15.

SWS said the gainers-losers gap has narrowed in Mindanao but