

From Tarlac to Iraq

US Air Force Captain Cristina Miranda comes a long way

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO / AJPress

It was two days before Thanksgiving in 2007 and United States Air Force Captain Cristina Miranda was busy preparing for the coming holidays. Christmas is always the happiest time of the year ever since she was a little girl among her family in Tarlac. Though she has immigrated to the US in 1992 where the Yuletide season is not celebrated as long and as festive as in the Philippines, still it is the best time in the year for the young Air Force captain and her husband, Richard, and two sons, Derek and Joshua.



Then, the unexpected came. Cristina received a notice that day that she is being deployed to the war-torn country of Iraq.

"I was notified two days before Thanksgiving that I was being deployed to leave on December 13. I never envisioned myself going to Iraq. I was sad," Miranda recalled. "But I made friends with many people who were also serving. It was a good career move," she admitted.

Though her family and friends feared for her safety, Cristina was able to finish her deployment without any problems. "I went to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, where I got to visit Saddam Hussein's palace as often as I want. I stayed in Iraq for a year and got to travel to different sites through helicopters and C130s. I've heard mortar attacks but was not harmed," said Miranda.

The brave and courageous Pinay has truly come a long way from her native province of Tarlac. Born on May 3, 1971 in Tarlac, Tarlac, Cristina attended elementary and high school in the College of the Holy Spirit in Tarlac. She then moved to Manila for her college education, taking up BS Mathematics, Major in Actuarial Science at the University of Santo Tomas, graduating cum laude.

In April 1992, Cristina immigrated to California with her mother and brother. "My mother was sponsored by her sister, my aunt. We waited 13 years before the petition was



approved. I arrived in California with my mother and younger brother, just two months before my 21st birthday. The next year, I came back to the Philippines to marry Richard," said Cristina who shuttled back and forth from California to the Philippines over the next few years. She had a son named Derek, now 16 years old. "I could not take my husband and son with me right away, so they had to stay behind in the Philippines. I did different kinds of jobs in California, from working two days in Sbarro, to other agency-supplied temporary work," she added.

It was love for her family that challenged Miranda to join the Air Force. She told her story to *Asian Journal*. "While I was on vacation in the Philippines, my husband's uncle suggested that I apply in the US military so I can get my husband and son faster than just waiting for me to become a citizen. So, the main reason why I joined the Air Force in 1994 was the hope of getting my husband to the US in the quickest possible time. However, it took the same amount of time to petition him—5 years.

You see, I've been here in the US two years before I joined the Air Force. To apply for citizenship, you need to be active 3 years. So, it's not true that joining the Air Force would be quicker. Recruiters will tell you whatever you want to hear. It wasn't true, but everything was all a blessing. I was fooled that being in the service, you have special preferences. But, it was a good decision to join the military anyway," shared Cristina.

One of the many benefits of her military career is education. The military encourages its personnel to further their education—for free. "I got paid going to school," Miranda said happily. She got a BS Human Resource Management degree in 1999 from Troy State University and her Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California in 2002. "I did night and weekend school to finish my degree. And I went to school full time for 18 months to get my MBA," Cristina said.

Cristina spoke very positively

about her military career. "I enlisted in 1994 but I've been in the Air Force for almost 8 years before I crossed over to officership through the Officer Training School. I've been a captain since 2006. There were many challenges such as moving bases and locations every two to three years. I would say the biggest challenge is the stress that I put on my husband and my two children, Derek and Joshua. My husband had to quit his job and not establish a career because we want to keep the family together. When Derek was younger, he was not affected as much as when he became a teenager. Then, he began to complain about not having steady friends and school," she admitted.

While there are still far fewer women serving in the military, Cristina said that the population of women who have joined is currently 63,633. They make up around 33 percent with the 67 percent being males. "I can't tell you how many Filipino women there are now in the Air Force but it's a good number," said Miranda.

Asked if she endured discrimination in the air force, Cristina said, "Race and sex discrimination are inevitable anywhere you go." Cristina is six years away to retirement if she desires. It has been a good career and she encourages men and women, especially fellow *Pinoy*s, to "join the Air Force or any service for that matter. There are numerous benefits and if you're hardworking, it's easy to go up the ranks."

The main reason for Cristina's joining the military is also the major reason why she has stayed—love for family. "There are many benefits, but the most important for me and my family is the medical benefit. I have a son, Joshua, who has all sorts of medical needs due to a genetic disorder, known as EEC—Electrodactyly Ectodermal Dysplasia with Clefting Syndrome. He was born with a cleft palate, he got blind in the right eye and almost lost sight from his left eye as well. He had a tube inserted in him so he can eat. Since birth, he



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.



has had over 20 surgeries. But, the military insurance has never asked me to pay anything for all his care and surgeries," said Captain Miranda.

During her deployment in Iraq, Captain Cristina was given great news, which more than compensated from the difficulty of being away from her family. She narrated, "A few weeks into deployment, my husband gave me the news that The Make-A-Wish Foundation (America's largest wish-granting organization which grants wishes of children undergoing difficult medical treatments) was considering Joshua. They interviewed him at our home, where he wished for only one thing—a Disney cruise. We thank God for this unexpected blessing. My husband and I were overwhelmed with joy because Josh has been through so much physical hardship. I went back home for an R&R in time for Joshua's dream to come true. On May 10, 2008, the day before Mother's Day, a white limousine parked in front of our unit in Moffett Field military housing. When Derek, my older child, was younger, he wanted a limo ride. In a way, his wish also came true in this vacation package. Everything was set up by Make-A-Wish. All we had to do was enjoy the family time we were deprived of (during her deployment to Iraq). Because it's Disney, the song *When you wish upon a Star* was consistently played at every show. That song has more meaning to me now more than ever."

Yes, Captain Cristina Miranda may have had her share of trials, but she has also seen God's loving hand in granting her wishes. Though there is a strong possibility that she will be deployed again soon, she is able to face life courageously with the positive attitude that "this too shall pass."

Your *kababayans* salute you, Captain Cristina Miranda. You are truly *Galing Pinoy!*

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FDA says to avoid pistachios amid salmonella scare

FRESNO, CA—Federal food officials are warning people not to eat any food containing pistachios because of possible contamination by salmonella, in another food scare sure to rattle consumers already upset by the contamination of peanuts with the same bacteria.

The Food and Drug Administration said central California-based Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella Inc., the nation's second-largest pistachio processor, was voluntarily recalling more than 2 million pounds of its roasted nuts shipped since last fall.

"Our advice to consumers is that they avoid eating pistachio products, and that they hold onto those products," said Dr. David Acheson, assistant commissioner for food safety. "The number of products that are going to be recalled over the coming days will grow, simply because these pistachio nuts have then been repackaged into consumer-level containers."

Two people called the FDA complaining of gastrointestinal illness that could be associated with the nuts, but the link hasn't been confirmed, Acheson said. Still, the plant decided to shut down late last week, officials said.

The recalled nuts are a small fraction of the 55 million pounds of pistachios that the company's plant processed last year and an even smaller portion of the 278 million pounds produced in the state in the 2008 season, according to the Fresno-based Administrative Committee for Pistachios.

According to the company's Web site, Setton Pistachio is in the corporate family of Commack, NY-based Setton International Foods Inc. The company sells nuts, dried fruit, edible seeds, chocolate and yogurt-coated candies.

The FDA learned about the problem when Kraft Foods Inc. notified the agency that routine product testing had detected salmonella in roasted pistachios. Kraft and the Georgia Nut Co. recalled their Back to Nature Nantucket Blend trail mix.

The FDA contacted Setton Pistachio and California health officials shortly afterward, in what Acheson called a "proactive move."

Cincinnati-based grocery operator Kroger Co. recalled one of its lines of bagged pistachios because of possible salmonella contamination, saying the California plant also supplied its nuts. Those nuts were sold in 31 states.

Because Setton Pistachio shipped bags of nuts weighing up to 2,000 pounds to 36 wholesalers across the country, it will take weeks to figure out how many products could be affected, said Jeff Farrar, chief of the Food and Drug Branch of the California Department of Public Health.

"It will be safe to assume based on the volume that this will be an ingredient in a lot of different products, and that may possibly include things like ice cream and cake mixes," Farrar said. "The firm is already turning around trucks in transit to bring those back to the facility."

Salmonella, the most common cause of food-borne illness, causes diarrhea, fever and cramping. Most people recover, but the infection can be life-threatening for children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Roasting is supposed to kill the bacteria in nuts. But problems can occur if the roasting is not done correctly or if roasted nuts are re-contaminated. That can happen if mice, rats or birds get into the facility.

The national peanut salmonella outbreak was blamed on a Georgia company under federal investigation for flouting safety procedures and knowingly shipping contaminated peanuts.

That outbreak is still ongoing. More than 690 people in 46 states have gotten sick. Nearly 3,900 products made with peanut ingredients from Peanut Corp. of America have been recalled.

California public health authorities have taken hundreds of samples at Setton's processing facility, but lab results have not yet determined whether salmonella was found at the plant, Farrar said. The food companies' own tests of the contaminated products isolated four different types of salmonella, but none were the same strain as the one found in the peanuts, Acheson said. (AP)