

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



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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—Ectrodactyly Ectodermal Dysplasia with Clefing 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 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 for 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

ed 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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