



Remembering Dom Menguigo, Avionics Engineer in Laos

Dom (left) with Jeanne in Vientiane, Laos,
November 2011.

When Lao of a certain age, those in their late 70s or early 80s, remember Filipinos who came to their country beginning in the 1950s, they remember people who looked like them. There were more than 900 of them, posted in 12 provinces all over their kingdom. They were mostly doctors and nurses who embedded themselves in the rhythm of their village or town life. At any one time, some 100 were in their midst over a remarkably long time, 18 years, from 1957 to 1975.

There were other Filipinos during that period in the country. Not as visible nor widely dispersed and in fewer numbers. They were engineers advising the Lao armed forces, fighting an anti-government insurgency, on how to operate and maintain the armaments of war. Another set of engineers applied and taught their special skills in aircraft maintenance and communications.

Dominador “Dom” Menguigo belongs to the latter. He learned the craft of radio communications at a vocational institute in Manila. “He topped the certification exams, very talented,” said Art Linchangco, a classmate. They were hired by the Civil Aeronautics Board as Airways Technicians from 1957 to 1960, then earned electrical engineering degrees at the Mapua Institute of Technology in Manila

In 1960, Dom joined Eastern Construction Company, a Manila-based company of former army technicians which was contracted by the United States Department of Defense to help train the South Vietnamese armed forces. There he met and married Jeanne, daughter of a French father and a Vietnamese mother.

In 1972 he was hired as Avionics Supervisor by Continental Air Services Incorporated in Vientiane, a charter airline operating 22 aircraft in Laos, owned

by the U.S.-based Continental Airlines. CASI employed about 350 workers, about 100 of them Filipinos. It and Air America Laos, another charter airline, served the military and economic aid programs of the U.S. government in Laos. While their Filipino health-care counterparts were stationed in the towns near the Mekong River, CASI and Air America Filipino technicians worked inside airfield hangers, attending to a wide assortment of aircraft, from helicopters and single-engine spotter planes to large, twin-engine cargo C-46s and 47s. Their maintenance chores included drop-offs at remote mountain-top monitoring stations to check navigational and communication systems.

Dom, 85, passed away on February 17, 2021 in Manila from pancreatic cancer. He was born November 6, 1936 in Binan, Laguna province. In addition to Jeanne, his surviving kin include sons Dominic and Bobby, daughters Tina and Bing. Upon their return to the Philippines in the late 1980s, after postings in Singapore and Egypt, Dom and Jeanne started supplying vegetables to large restaurant chains in the Philippines. Both were founding officers of Mekong Circle Philippines, officially organized on April 4, 2007 as the Manila-based counterpart to Mekong Circle in the USA. They also own Pho Bac a Trip Advisor highly rated Vietnamese restaurant at Robinson Place mall in Manila. For years, the association held reunions that gathered former Laos-based Filipino and Lao employees of Operation Brotherhood, U.S. Agency For International Development, Eastern Construction Company Laos and Air America Laos.

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