

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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## Historical Preface

Introduction

*Philippine Studies* vol. 38, no. 4 (1990) 419–420

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Historical Preface

### Ateneo de Naga, 1940-90

In the late thirties, the Jesuits wanted to establish another Ateneo in the country (in addition to the Ateneo in Manila, Cagayan, and Zamboanga). When efforts to find a place in Bacolod failed, they turned their attention to the Bicol region, exploring possible sites in Tabaco and Legazpi. Then Bishop Pedro P. Santos, Bishop of Caceres, himself an alumnus of the Jesuit-run San Jose Seminary, invited the Superior, Fr. John Hurley, to open a high school in Naga City, in "the heart of Bicol." Thus the Ateneo de Naga began in 1940, occupying a building near the Cathedral formerly used by the Camarines Sur Catholic Academy (now known as the Naga Parochial School). Among the original group of six Jesuits were two priests (Fr. Francis B. Burns, the Director, Fr. Bernard Lochboelher) and four scholastics (Nicholas Kunkel, Richard McSorley, Gregory Horgan, and Al Grau.) The following year new recruits arrived—Fr. Joseph Bittner, Fr. Matthew Reilly, scholastics John Nicholson, Edward Sullivan, and Lucas and Brother Sergio Adriatico.

Fr. Edward Sullivan described the Ateneo in the school year 1941: "As the school year opened we were all living in the Bishop's *palace* as it was called—a huge building across the street from the Cathedral and the Naga seminary. . . . Classes were held in the buildings used by the Catholic Academy, plus any vacant space that could be drafted into service because the enrollment was greatly expanded." Enrollment was heavy, and so space was a problem. Continued Fr. Sullivan: "The pigs became refugees and their pen was cleaned and used for the editorial office of the Naga Ateneo Newsletter."

On a piece of land donated by Bishop Santos about a hundred meters away from the Cathedral a complex of school buildings together with the now familiar and famous "four pillars" was constructed. These were finished and ready for occupancy by December when the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Davao took place. Fr. Sullivan wrote:

"We moved from the Bishop's residence into our own faculty building and were well enough settled to have a house-warming with the Paules (Vincentians) fathers of the Naga seminary on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 1941). It was during this celebration that most of us heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor . . . "

Several days later, the eight American Jesuits (three priests and five scholastics), were brought by Japanese soldiers to the city jail, just recently occupied by Japanese nationals. Fr. Richard McSorley, then a young scholastic, now stationed at the Center for Peace, Georgetown University of Washington, D.C. described the scene: "We were taken in Lateco (Alatco) buses at gunpoint down to the city jail. As we passed many of the houses, students from the Ateneo looked out the windows, and some waved to us. The Japanese soldiers in the back of the bus held guns, ready to shoot us."

Fr. Joseph Bittner, then a young priest of thirty-six and now parish priest at Philipps, Del Monte, Bukidnon, aged eighty-five, described their ordeal: "War was declared on 8 December 1941, the Japanese Imperial Army picked us up on 15 December 1941—one bag only per person—and incarcerated us in the Naga Provincial jail until March 7 Frs. de la Costa and ex-Jesuit Guzman [Rivas] arrived in Naga with a Japanese priest. They got us out of bed and we lived incognito with Archbishop Santos for two weeks. Then one night we were taken to a fishing town, put on a boat, which dropped us somewhere up the coast of Luzon, where we were picked up by an Ateneo bus and escorted with a Japanese soldier to Manila and interned at the Ateneo de Manila, Padre Faura.

Fr. Sullivan reports a slightly different recollection: "After about three months in the Naga jail we were transferred to the Bishop's residence (not our new faculty house). Fr. Mike Bernad and a convoy of Japanese Catholic seminarians and soldiers escorted us to Manila. We traveled by truck from Naga to Pasacao and by motor launch from Pasacao to a port up the coast and from there to Manila by truck."

In 1946, the high school was reopened; in 1947, classes in the college level began and shortly after, the college became coeducational. In time Ateneo de Naga became known as a foremost educational institution in Bicol.

With this commemorative issue, *Philippine Studies* congratulates the Ateneo de Naga for her past successes and wishes her well as she faces the challenges of the future in Bicol.

*John Phelan, S.J.*  
*Ateneo de Naga*