

SECRETARY ROY:

Wading in into a field far removed from soldiery

Secretary Roy A. Cimatu rose from humble beginnings to become, on May 8, 2017, the choice of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte as the new Secretary of the DENR.

A member of the Philippine Military Academy Class of 1970, he served in the military for 37 years until his retirement as the 30th chief-of-staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2002, after which he was appointed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as special envoy to the Middle East during the Iraq war.

He was born on July 4, 1946 in Bangui, Ilocos Norte, to teacher-war veteran Fidel M. Cimatu, Sr. and public school teacher Clara Agullana. He studied in public schools from elementary up to high school in Bangui. At the PMA, he graduated on top of his class, with a grade of 97.27 in the Infantry Officers Advanced Course – an academic record which still stands.

He went on to graduate from the United States Army Command and Staff College, where he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. He earned a master's degree in business administration from the Ateneo de Manila University's Graduate School of Business, and became a certified helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft pilot. He likewise became a recipient of the PMA Alumni Association's Cavalier Award.

At the turnover ceremony on May 10, 2017 at the DENR Social Hall, Secretary Cimatu humbly acknowledged that stewardship of the environment is a challenge new to him: "Here I am wading in into a field far removed from soldiery. That is why please excuse me if I ask that I be given time to scan and study the terrain in an agency which impacts considerably on our very life as a people and the future of our beloved Philippines."

At the same time, he called for teamwork:

"We will need all hands on deck, first, the men and women of the DENR from the senior officials at the Central Office to the rangers, foresters, geologists even janitors on the ground; then, the various clients of the agency, again from big business to the smallest tinderos and all households using the very resources we have to take care of in a proper and sustainable manner. Even our international partners who care as much as we do about the fate of this one and only planet that we live in will have to be engaged. We have to work together as a Team. With teamwork, we can do so much more in accomplishing the critical responsibilities we carry on our shoulders.

I intend to listen to all the voices out there and make full use of our powers and resources to ensure that these various concerns, some of which oftentimes clash, will be properly and judiciously addressed. For in the end we at the DENR will only be as effective as our various constituents will help us to be."

Secretary Cimatu brings with him to the DENR a track record as an efficient achiever and able negotiator. He was dubbed "General Pacman" for his efficiency in leading the all-out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as commander of the Philippine Army's 4th Infantry Division in 2000. As special envoy to the Middle East, he led negotiations for the release of Filipinos kidnapped in Iraq, including truck driver Angelo de la Cruz. He also negotiated the surrender of 326 AFP officers who joined the Oakwood mutiny in 2003.

