



MUSINGS OF A MORE SENIOR NATURE

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I had the (un)fortunate experience of going through the Citizen's Army Training (CAT) as part of our high school curriculum back then. I must say that it was one of the most challenging parts of my high school years, and the most interesting as well. Once a week—I think it was always on a Thursday—we had to go through drills, line up under the afternoon sun in straightly-formed platoons, with each platoon having a platoon leader, a group of platoons having one battalion commander, and two or three (memory eludes me as to exactly how many) battalions under a single Corps Commander. I attended a Catholic girls' school, you see, so we never really covered the entire school quadrangle as you would expect.

Anyway, on every CAT day, we ordinary Privates were required to salute all our CAT officers from the first hour until the last hour of school. Failure to acknowledge any one officer through a smart, clipped salute guaranteed a demerit. And you couldn't really afford to amass a great number of demerits since they constituted an indirect effect on your PE grade. So we were all really careful not to forget the officers' faces, although doing so was absolutely inexcusable given the fact that we were not that many in our batch—only 4 sections with less than 40 or 50 students in each class.

Majority of us found CAT fun and exciting because we would practically be the stars in school on CAT day, lined up as we were in neat rows under the late afternoon sun, performing marching exercises and all sorts of 'soft' military drills. The great uniform helped, too, although the whole getup was too warm for comfort and chafed the neck because of its coarse material.

What we found a real bother was the perpetual saluting thing, considering that we would practically bump into the officers at every turn. If somebody was extra chummy with an officer, she could either be treated deferentially for demeritable doings or undoings, or get demerits like the rest of the privates do. That time was 1985 to 1986, our senior year in high school and the time when the EDSA revolution was brewing and eventually occurred. We were not really aggressive complaining girls—at least most of us. The injustices on CAT day were just overlooked or simply ignored, no big thing really. We were, after all, only completing our high school requirements.

Merits were also granted for jobs well done, especially when an officer was generous enough to give orders which could range from the most idiosyncratic to the most sublime—like fetching something or other*. Earning them had a very slight effect on one's grade, nevertheless.

Yes, high school was a lot of fun in those days because there were no distractions like computer games, the internet, cellular phones and other thingamajigs to complicate our lives. There was just the CAT, handed-out merits and the much hated demerits.

*something or other – (Idiom) something whose exact nature you do not know or have forgotten. (<http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/something+or+other>)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How do you think the writer feels about her high school days? What made her love and hate them at the same time?
2. Is the merit and demerit system a justifiable system of earning any position? Why or why not?
3. When is the merit system helpful? When is it not?
4. How is meritocracy defined? Do you think meritocracy is the only option we should have? Justify your answer.
5. How has the concept of meritocracy affected the way things are done in the world?