

REPRODUCED FROM
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NEW YORK TIMES
23 January 1986

Marcos's Wartime Role Discredited in U.S. Files

The following article is based on reporting by Jeff Gerth and Joel Brinkley and was written by Mr. Gerth.
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22 — The Army concluded after World War II that official claims by Ferdinand E. Marcos that he headed a guerrilla resistance unit during the Japanese occupation of his country were "fraudulent" and "absurd."

Throughout his political career, Mr. Marcos, now President of the Philippines, has portrayed himself as a heroic guerrilla leader, and the image has been central to his political appeal.

In almost every speech throughout his current re-election campaign, including at least one this week, Mr. Marcos has referred to his war record and guerrilla experiences in part to show that he is better able than his opponent, Corazon C. Aquino, to handle the present Communist insurgency.

But documents that had rested out of public view in United States Government archives for 35 years show that repeated Army investigations found no foundation for Mr. Marcos's official claims to the United States that he led a guerrilla force called Ang Mga Maharlika in military operations against Japanese forces from 1942 to 1944.

Questions Go Unanswered

Mr. Marcos declined today to respond to a list of six written questions about the United States Government records, which came to light only recently. The questions were submitted to Mr. Marcos's office this morning in Manila.

After repeated telephone calls to the Presidential Palace this afternoon, an aide explained that Mr. Marcos was busy with meetings and a campaign appearance and "didn't have the opportunity to look into the question." The aide said the President might have a response later.

In the Army records themselves, Mr. Marcos wrote that he strongly protested the Army's findings, adding that "a grave injustice has been committed



Ferdinand E. Marcos as shown in an official biography. Caption said, "File photo of Marcos as a young officer."

against many officers and men" of the unit.

Since Mr. Marcos became President, the Government-owned broadcasting network, the main north-south highway on the island of Luzon and a hall in the Presidential Palace all have been named Maharlika — the name is variously translated as The Free Men or Noblemen — in honor of the unit. In 1978, the Philippine National Assembly considered renaming the nation Maharlika.

Between 1945 and 1948 various Army officers rejected Mr. Marcos's two requests for official recognition of the unit, calling his claims distorted, exaggerated, fraudulent, contradictory and absurd. Army investigators finally concluded that Maharlika was a fictitious creation and that "no such unit ever existed" as a guerrilla organization during the war.

In addition, the United States Veterans' Administration, helped by the

Philippine Army, found in 1950 that some people who had claimed membership in Mr. Marcos's unit had actually been committing "atrocities" against Filipino civilians rather than fighting the Japanese and had engaged in what the V.A. called "nefarious activity," including selling contraband to the enemy. The records include no direct evidence linking Mr. Marcos to those activities.

Access Denied Filipino

The records, many of which were classified secret until 1958, were on file at the Army records center in St. Louis until they were donated to the National Archives in Washington in November 1984. In 1983, when a Filipino opposition figure asked for access to them a few weeks after the assassination in Manila that August of the opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino Jr., the Army refused to let him see them.

Alfred W. McCoy, a historian, discovered the documents among hundreds of thousands of others several months ago while at the National Archives researching a book on World War II in the Philippines. Dr. McCoy was granted the access normally accorded to scholars, and when he came upon the the Maharlika files he was allowed to review and copy them along with others. Archives officials did not learn what the documents contained until after they were copied.

Richard J. Kessler, a scholar on the Philippines at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, said, "Marcos's military record was one of the central factors in his developing a political power base."

A War Hero at Home

In the Philippines, Mr. Marcos is widely known as the nation's most decorated war hero. The Philippine Government says he won 32 medals for heroism during World War II, including several from the United States Army. Two of the medals were for his activities as a guerrilla leader, but the rest were for exploits before the United States surrender in 1942 or after the return of United States forces to Luzon, the main Philippine island, in 1945.

The validity of those medals has been challenged by Philippine and American journalists as well as others. In response, the Philippine Government has vigorously contended that they were properly earned and said the records validating them were destroyed in a fire. When the Philippine newspaper We Forum published an article in 1982 questioning Mr. Marcos's war record, Government authorities shut the paper down.

The issue of Mr. Marcos's medals is not addressed in the Army records.

Like thousands of other Filipinos, immediately after the war Mr. Marcos asked the Army to recognize his unit so that he and others could receive back pay and benefits. In his petitions, Mr. Marcos certified that his unit had engaged in numerous armed clashes with the Japanese, sabotage and intelligence gathering throughout a vast region of Luzon, the main Philippine island, and had been the pre-eminent guerrilla force on Luzon.

In his submissions to the Army, he offered widely varying accounts of Maharlika's membership, from 300 men at one point to 8,300 at another. In the years since the war, Mr. Marcos has claimed that Maharlika was a force of 8,200 men.

Some Claims Recognized

Shortly after the war, the Army did recognize the claims of 111 men who were listed on the Maharlika roster submitted by Mr. Marcos, but their recognition was only for their services with American forces after the invasion of Luzon in January 1945. One document says the service that Mr. Marcos and 23 other men who were listed as Maharlika members gave to the First Cavalry Division in the spring of 1945 was "of limited military value."

The Army records include conflicting statements on whether the United States intended to recognize the 111 men as individuals or as a Maharlika unit attached to American forces after the invasion. It is clear throughout the records that at no time did the Army recognize that any unit designating itself as Maharlika ever existed as a guerrilla force in the years of the Japanese occupation, 1942 to 1945.

The records are a small part of a voluminous file containing more than one million documents on military activities in the Philippines during and after World War II. Approximately 400 pages deal with matters relating to the Government's investigations of Mr. Marcos and his claims.

Dr. McCoy, an American professor of history at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, said he was "stunned" when he found the records last summer. He said he worked with the records by himself until this month. He brought them to the attention of The New York Times last week.

The records were reviewed at the Archives, where Archives officials confirmed their authenticity to The Times. In addition, several former American military officers who played important roles in the sequence of events described in the records were interviewed.

These officers served in the Philippines during the war, supervising Filipino guerrillas in the areas where Mr. Marcos said his unit had operated. Even though most of them say they are strong supporters of Mr. Marcos today — one, Robert B. Lapham of Sun City, Ariz., said he spent 90 minutes with Mr. Marcos while in Manila last week —

the officers also confirmed the basic findings in the records and said they had not been aware of Maharlika's activities during the war. They also said they had not known of Mr. Marcos as a guerrilla leader until they read his claims later.

'This Is Not True'

Ray C. Hunt Jr., a 66-year-old former Army captain who directed guerrilla activities in Pangasinan Province north of Manila during the war, said: "Marcos was never the leader of a large guerrilla organization, no way. Nothing like that could have happened without my knowledge."

Mr. Hunt, interviewed at his home in Orlando, Fla., said he took no position in the current Philippine election campaign, although he believed Mr. Marcos "may be the lesser of two evils."

Still, as he read through the records for the first time, including Mr. Marcos's own description of Maharlika's wartime activities, he said: "This is not true, no. Holy cow. All of this is a complete fabrication. It's a cock-and-bull story."

The documents, the latest of which are dated in the early 1950's, include no indication that Mr. Marcos appealed the Army's final ruling against him in 1948. The last entry in the Maharlika file was an affirmation of the rejection.

Today Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard L. Armitage, the senior Pentagon official in charge of military relations with the Philippines, said his aides had been unable to find any record that the original Army decision denying benefits to Maharlika had been challenged or investigated after the 1948 ruling.

"Subsequent to '48 I am unaware of any further appeals," he said.

Donna St. John, a spokesman for the Veterans' Administration, said, "We're not paying any benefits to Ferdinand Marcos."

As commanding officer of the unit, Mr. Marcos applied for United States

Government recognition of his guerrilla force in the summer of 1945. To support the application, he included a 29-page typed document titled "Ang Mga Maharlika — Its History in Brief."

It says that the unit was "spawned from the dragging pain and ignominy" of the Bataan death march and in its members "grew such a hatred of the enemy as could be quenched with his blood alone."

Exploits Are Described

Most of the document is written in the third person and describes a variety of exploits by Maharlika and Mr. Marcos. "It seemed as if the Japanese were after him alone and not after anyone else," it says at one point, referring to Mr. Marcos. The author is never identified, but in two places he lapses into the first person in discussing Mr. Marcos's exploits, indicating the writer was Mr. Marcos.

The "history" and other submissions from Mr. Marcos say Maharlika was officially organized in December 1942 but had been operating for several months before that. It carried out guerrilla operations throughout Luzon, the main Philippine Island, and even published an underground guerrilla newspaper three times a day, Mr. Marcos wrote.

Membership rosters submitted with the filings listed the names of more than 300 Maharlika members. But Mr. Marcos included no documents or copies of the Maharlika newspaper to support the claim because, he wrote, all documentary evidence was "lost due to continuous searches by the Japanese." Elsewhere, Mr. Marcos wrote that some of the unit's records were burned and others were buried.

The official records indicate that the Army grew suspicious of Mr. Marcos's claims right away. Mr. Marcos contended that he had been in a northern province "in the first days of Decem-

ber 1944 on an intelligence mission" and was not able to get back to Maharlika headquarters at that time because the American invasion force on Luzon cut him off from Manila.

But in the first recorded response to Mr. Marcos's recognition request, in September 1945, Maj. Harry McKenzie of the Army noted that the American invasion of Luzon had not actually begun until a month later and "could not have influenced his abandoning his outfit."

As a result, Major McKenzie suggested an "inquiry into the veracity" of Mr. Marcos's claims. And almost two years later, the Army wrote Mr. Marcos to notify him of the official finding that his application for recognition "is not favorably considered."

Why the U.S. Said No

The official notice cited these reasons, among others:

¶ Maharlika had not actually been in the field fighting the Japanese and had not "contributed materially to the eventual defeat of the enemy."

¶ Maharlika had no "definite organization" and "adequate records were not maintained."

¶ Maharlika was not controlled adequately "because of the desertion of its commanding officer," Mr. Marcos, who eventually joined an American military unit while in northern Luzon at the time of the American invasion.

¶ Maharlika could not possibly have operated over the wide area it claimed because of problems of terrain, communications and Japanese "antiresistance activities."

¶ "Many members apparently lived at home, supporting their families by means of farming or other civilian pursuits and assisted the guerrilla unit on a part-time basis only."

Although the Army did recognize 111 people listed on Mr. Marcos's Maharlika roster for their service to American forces after January 1945, the na-

Continued

ture of that service is not fully described. But one document, dated May 31, 1945, says 6 officers and 18 men led by Mr. Marcos and indentifying themselves as Maharlika had "been employed by this unit," the Army's First Cavalry Division, "guarding the regimental supply dump and performing warehousing details." Their work, the document added, was "of limited military value."

In his brief history, Mr. Marcos describes his service to the First Cavalry this way: Members of Maharlika "furnished intelligence and were used for patrolling by this unit until the operations in Manila ended. They participated in the crossing of the Pasig River."

Mr. Marcos was just one of thousands of Filipinos who asked the United States Army for recognition as a guerrilla. After the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in 1942, the United States had promised that any Filipinos who continued fighting the Japanese would get back pay and benefits after the war as if they had been members of the American military.

Japan mounted a surprise attack on the islands in December 1941 and quickly conquered them. It was not until 1944 and 1945, that United States and Filipino forces won them back.

Not long afterward, on July 4, 1946, the islands gained their final independence from the United States as the Republic of the Philippines.

At the time of the Japanese invasion in December 1941, Mr. Marcos was a lieutenant in the Philippine armed forces and was part of the contingent driven back into the Bataan Peninsula. Mr. Marcos has said his fighting delayed the surrender at Bataan for several weeks.

After the American surrender, Mr. Marcos was captured and imprisoned by the Japanese, but he escaped. For his efforts during the Bataan campaign of January 1942, Mr. Marcos was awarded numerous medals, including two from the United States, but not until many years later.

It was after the Bataan campaign, Mr. Marcos wrote, that Maharlika was formed.

In 1982 and 1983 journalists in the Philippines and the United States, as well as Representative Lane Evans, Democrat of Illinois, tried to determine the validity of the American awards to Mr. Marcos, including the two Bataan-related medals. The Pentagon, in replying in 1984 to Mr. Evans, noted that no official "citations for these awards" could be found, but "they were both attested to in affidavits by the Assistant Chief of Staff" of the Philippine Army.

Whether or not the American medals are valid, they had nothing to do with Mr. Marcos's activities during the Japanese occupation.

After the war, roughly 500,000 Filipinos were recognized and paid as guerrilla fighters. But uncounted others were turned down.

Mr. Marcos's claim was investigated in the same manner as the others. Affidavits were taken from dozens of American and Filipino military officers, enlisted men and civilians. In addition, investigators studied documentary evidence, including wartime intelligence reports, looking for references to Maharlika's work.

After he was turned down, Mr. Marcos asked for reconsideration. An Army captain, Elbert R. Curtis, inquired further but concluded that "the immensity" of Mr. Marcos's claim that Maharlika served over the entire island of Luzon was "absurd."

After checking intelligence records, Captain Curtis wrote that there was no mention of Maharlika being a source of intelligence information. He wrote that the unit roster was a fabrication, that "no such unit ever existed" and that Mr. Marcos's claims about Maharlika were "fraudulent," "preposterous" and "a malicious criminal act."

Another Army document said Maharlika "possessed no arms prior to the arrival of the Americans" despite Mr. Marcos' claim that the unit had 474 assorted weapons and 3,825 rounds of ammunition. The second investigation concluded that "it is quite obvious that Marcos did not exercise any control over a guerrilla organization prior to liberation" in January 1945.

Another Request Denied

Although there is no record that Mr. Marcos filed any further objections to those 1948 findings, another Filipino, Cipriano S. Allas, who was listed as a senior Maharlika officer, wrote the Army in 1947 asking for reconsideration of the unit. That request was denied, too.

Mr. Allas said he had commanded Maharlika's intelligence section. But numerous American officers and Filipinos who were interviewed by Army, Veterans' Administration and Philippine investigators said Mr. Allas and some of his men had in fact been selling commodities to the Japanese during the war.

In a 1947 Army document titled "Report on Ang Mga Maharlika," Lieut. William D. MacMillan wrote that two American officers, including Mr. Lapham, and one Filipino officer had told investigators that "they had heard" Mr. Marcos's name "in connection with the buy and sell activities of certain people," referring to the black-market sales to the Japanese, but that the three had added that they had no firm information about Mr. Marcos.

In a file titled "Guerrilla Bandits and Black Marketeers," a Philippine Army document concluded that Mr. Allas and several other men listed on the Maharlika roster "engaged themselves in the purchases and sale of steel cables," an important wartime commodity, to the Japanese.

A United States Veterans' Administration investigation concluded that some men who claimed membership in Maharlika and another organization were "hoodlums" who had committed "atrocities" and were "tied together only for nefarious reasons."

One man who said he was a member of Maharlika told investigators that the unit "had committed themselves to trafficking in the sale of critical war materials to the brutal enemy," the report said, "but only to provide means of watching that enemy."

"What a farce!" the V.A. investigator concluded.

None of the former officers interviewed this week said they remembered any involvement by Mr. Marcos in the black-market activities or abuses of civilians.

Mr. Hunt said he met Mr. Marcos only once during the war, sometime in 1944. A Filipino military officer "brought him into my guerrilla headquarters," Mr. Hunt recalled. "He was barefoot, unarmed. We talked for 15 or 20 minutes about this or that. He was never identified to me as a guerrilla, and we didn't talk about guerrilla activities."

"I had no further contact with him," Mr. Hunt added, "and I didn't hear anything more about him."

"ANG MGA MAHARLIKA" - ITS HISTORY IN BRIEF

I. ORGANIZATION

a. Introduction

"Ang Mga Maharlika" was spawned from the dragging pain and ignominy of the "Death March" and the filth and disease of Concentration Camp in Capas. In this interim when the Prisoners-of-War suffered the greater mental pain of half wishing death but still hoping once more "to hold a gun again", grew such hatred for the enemy as could be quenched with his blood alone.

Among those whom the Japanese flogged in the summer sun on the road from Bataan to Pampanga were Major Simson M. Valdez and then Captain Ferdinand E. Marcos. There was not much strength nor opportunity for talk but on these few occasions they met, over and above the look of pain was the fire. These two crawled to the escape hole and there they met. Several days later Lt. Col. Ferdinand E. Marcos went so far as to visit the camp of Capt. Ray Munt unarmed in order to bring about an amicable settlement of the disagreement. But the project of the airfield which had already been started in Matividad, Pangasinan met with his disapproval and suspicion. He could not be convinced that I had orders from General Manuel Roxas and even if he were convinced, that I had such orders, he would not permit the project to be finished as the new arms and equipment coming in might render the Maharlikas such a threat to his command.

Documents relating to Philippine guerrilla activity in World War II, recently discovered in National Archives in Washington. Excerpt, as copy from member of Maharlika guerrilla unit is not signed, but in two places, including bottom excerpt, the author uses the first person when writing about Ferdinand E. Marcos.

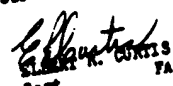
CONCLUSION:

It is concluded that:

1. The Ang Mga Maharlika Unit under the alleged command of Ferdinand Marcos is fraudulent.
2. The insertion of his name on a roster other than the USAFIP, NL roster was a malicious criminal act.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That no further consideration be given the Ang Mga Maharlika Unit for revision or recognition as per the request of Marcos dated 2 December 1947.
2. That no further consideration be given the Alles Intelligence Unit as per request of Alles dated 7 February 1948.


 Elmer N. Curtis
 Capt FA

Conclusion of a 1948 U.S. Army document recommending rejection of request by Ferdinand E. Marcos for recognition of guerrilla unit.