Angels of the Underground

The American Women who Resisted the Japanese in the Philippines in World War II

THERESA KAMINSKI

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For Charles

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Without my agent, Jacqueline Flynn, this book would not exist. Over the last twenty years, I researched, wrote, and published two academic books about American women, war, and imperialism in the Philippines. I was fascinated with this topic and couldn't imagine why everyone else wasn't as well. Still, it was with some surprise that I received a query from Jacquie, asking if I'd ever thought about writing a book about Margaret Utinsky. Jacquie had seen the movie *The Great Raid*, was intrigued by the portrayal of Peggy, and thought there was a great story there. I agreed. She found the book a home at Oxford, where Tim Bent and Keely Boeving helped turn a rough manuscript into something better. Alyssa O'Connell was a whiz with images and permissions.

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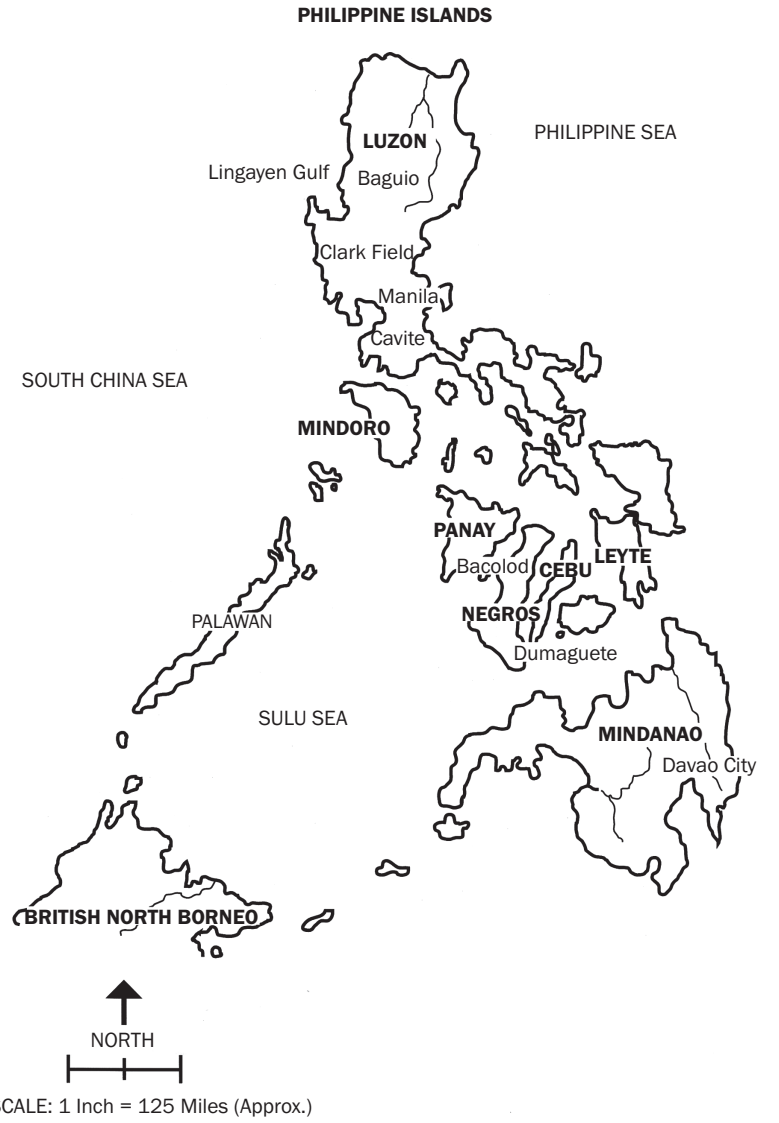
This is the first book I've written while my son, Sam Clark, lived away from home. He graduated from college in four years and is now out there in the great wide world. My parenting duties are over, but I'm still a mother.



Courtesy of Michael C.J. Kaminski.

Peggy Utinsky (right) standing next to Nell Yard (left), Jack Utinsky's sister, with Nell's daughter, Carol, in New York, August 1940. Courtesy of Carol Guazzo.

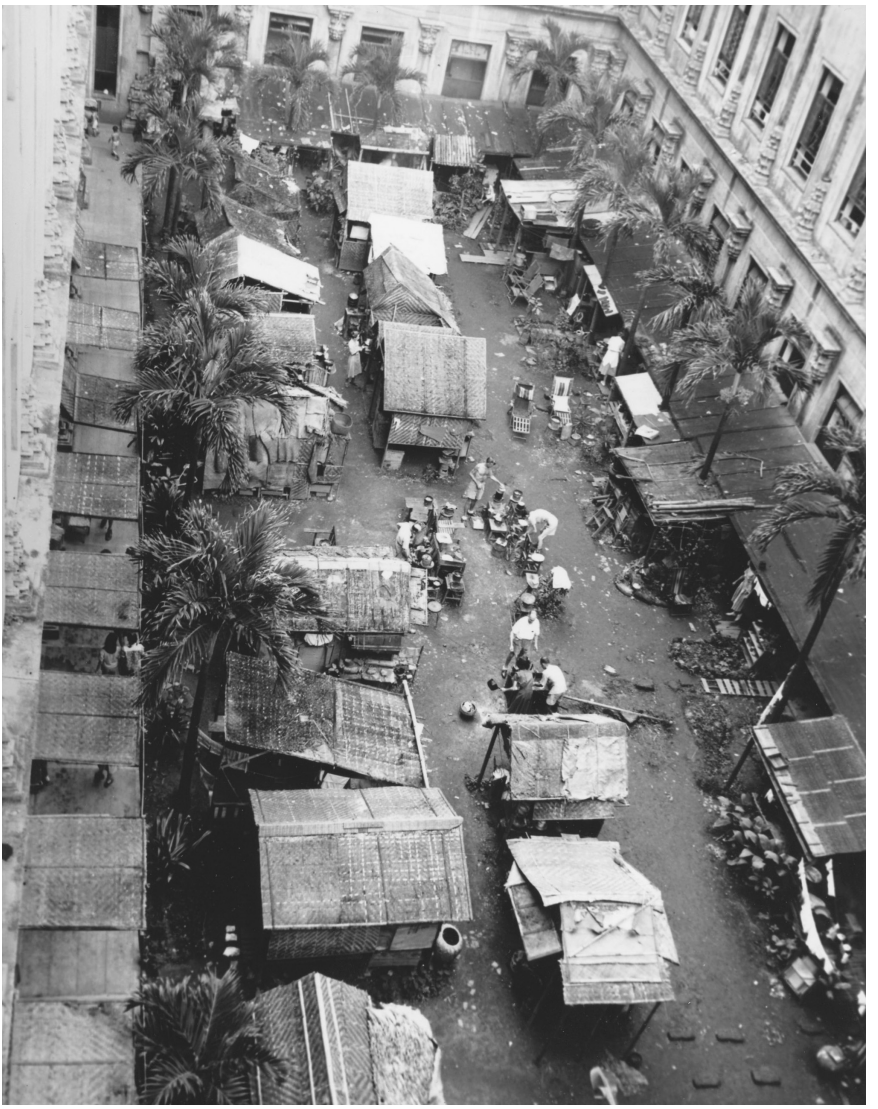
Jack Utinsky, circa 1917. Courtesy of Carol Guazzo.

Claire Phillips is greeted by Major Kenneth Boggs and a WAC honor guard at La Guardia Airport, April 1951. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

Yay Panlilio and her children in Los Angeles, CA, May 1945. Credit must be given to Los Angeles Times Staff. Copyright © 1945. Reprinted with Permission.

Members of the Japanese "Bicycle Division" head into Manila on January 2, 1942. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

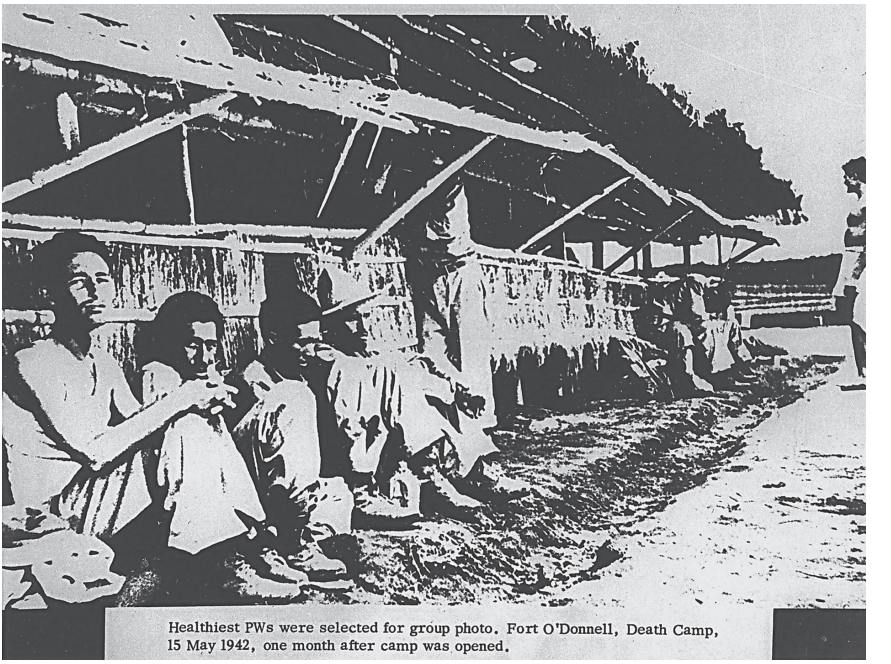
Santo Tomas University in Manila. Gladys Savary aided the civilian internees incarcerated here. Fred Hill Collection, Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution.



The grounds of the Santo Tomas internment camp, where internees were allowed to construct shanties for family use. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

American prisoners at rest along the Bataan Death March, April 1942. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

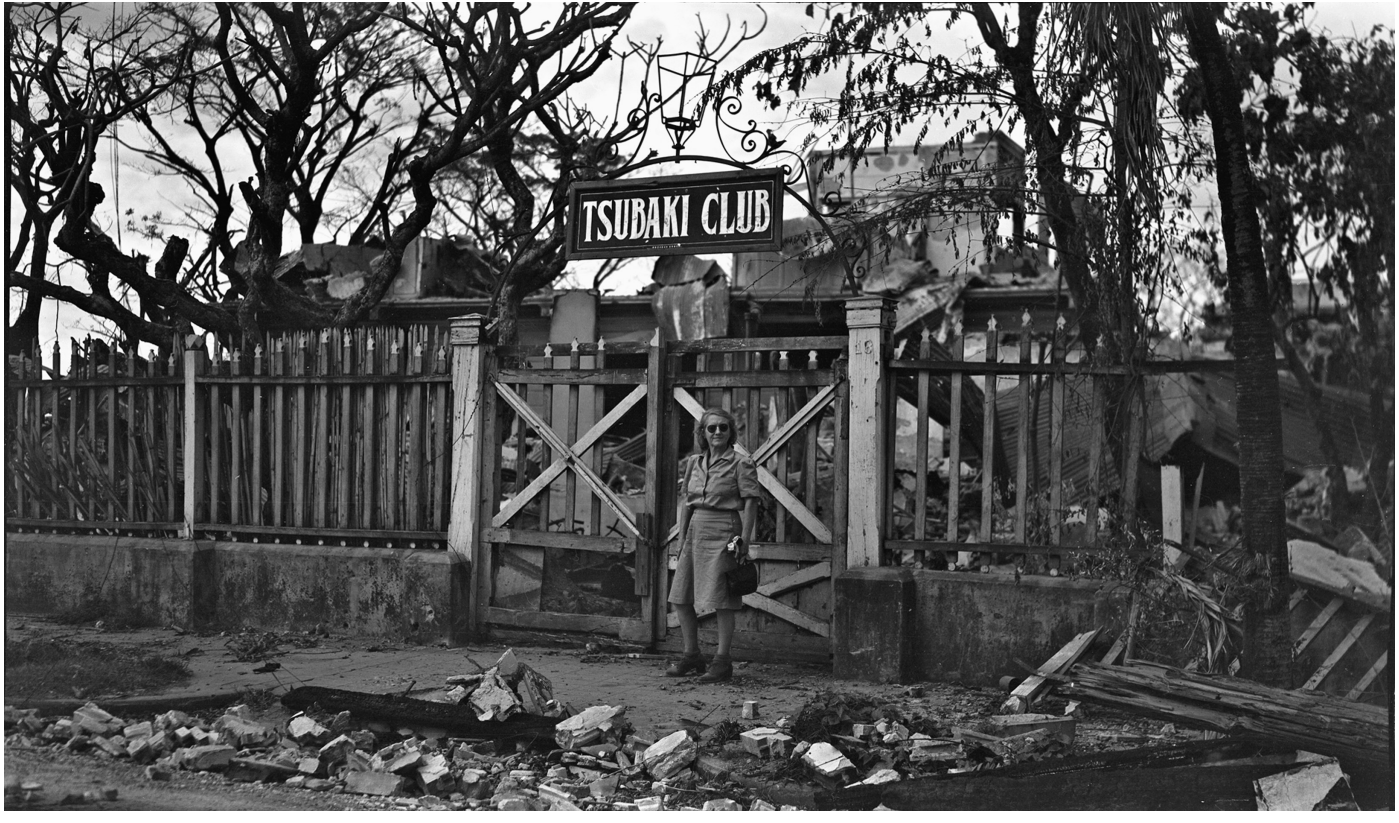
American and Filipino troops surrender to the Japanese at Corregidor, May 1942. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.



Prisoners at Camp O'Donnell, May 1942. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Burial detail at the Cabanatuan prisoner of war camp, May 1942. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

The ruins of Fort Santiago, Manila, 1945. Claire Phillips and Peggy Utinsky were imprisoned and tortured here. Fred Hill Collection, Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution.

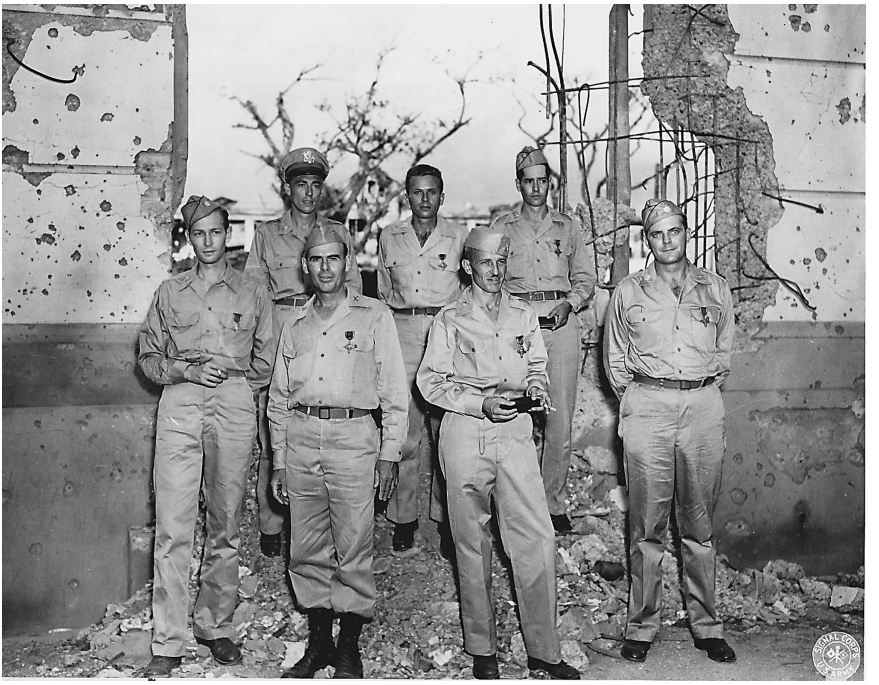


An unidentified woman posed outside of Claire Phillips's Club Tsubaki, Manila, 1945. Fred Hill Collection, Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution.

Claire Phillips with her daughter Dian, Manila, March 1945. Fred Hill Collection, Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution.

Peggy Utinsky, still armed, with Dian Phillips in Manila, March 1945. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Luzon guerrilla leaders in Manila, 1945. John Boone is seated second right. In the center is Manuel Roxas, soon to be the fifth president of the Philippines. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.



Luzon guerrilla leaders, April 1945. John Boone is standing forward center, cigarette in hand. Bernard Anderson is on the right. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Margaret Utinsky, awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1946 for her work in the Philippines. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

INTRODUCTION

On the late afternoon of April 2, 1945, the SS *JOHN LYKES* maneuvered out of the Port of Manila on the island of Luzon in the Philippines, skirting the remains of dozens of vessels the Japanese had sunk during the Battle of Manila, which had ended only weeks earlier. Here in the Pacific theater, World War II was still in its protracted final stage, with the United States military fighting enemy forces island to island on the way to an invasion of Japan. The battle for the Philippine Islands, a vast archipelago in the western Pacific Ocean that the Japanese occupied back in 1942, had been underway since October 1944.

It took over three months for the Americans to reach the capital city of Manila, the big prize of this fight. From early February to early March 1945, US forces and their Filipino allies squared off against the Japanese—who were determined to either hold the city or destroy it. By the beginning of April, when the *Lykes* left port, Manila was securely in American and Filipino hands, but the Japanese had left the city a smoldering ruin as they moved north to continue the fight.

Designed as a cargo ship, the *Lykes* had been converted to an American troop transport at the beginning of the war, its modest 418-foot length capable of carrying as many as 1,300 military personnel. But on this day, the first of a month-long voyage to Los Angeles, the *Lykes* bore a split manifest: some five hundred American soldiers and sailors and about an equal number of civilians returning to their stateside homes.[1]

Most of the civilians were American men, women, and children recently liberated from the internment camp at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, where Japanese occupation forces had confined them in early 1942. After three years of captivity, these Americans welcomed their berths on the *Lykes*, anxious and relieved to depart the war-ravaged Philippines. Not everyone took advantage of it. For example, Gladys Savary, a tall, white-haired woman in her early fifties who had owned a popular Manila restaurant before the war , declined passage home. Gladys had also not been interned in Santo Tomas with the other Americans, and now that the war was winding down, some tension and hard feelings developed among a once close-knit and amiable community. Questions surfaced about exactly how Gladys had managed to remain free, how she had managed to negotiate the occupation.

Despite—or perhaps because of—what she had been through during the war, Gladys decided to stay in Manila and open another restaurant. She intended it to serve as a kind of way station for any American military prisoners of war who might have survived the labor camps in Japan and would soon be passing through Manila on their way home from the Pacific theater. Gladys had known some of these young men at the beginning of the war when they were stationed in and around Manila. She made sure to set aside extra food and booze for the soldiers trying to defend the capital. After the surrender to the Japanese in 1942 and the occupation that followed, she devised ways to help them while they were incarcerated on the island of Luzon before they were shipped off to Japan.

To Gladys, that clandestine assistance, along with similar aid she provided to some of the very same Santo Tomas internees who now seemed to resent her, represented resistance to the Japanese occupation. She had defied the enemy's rules against helping POWs and civilian detainees, and

believed that this proved she had not had an easy war—that she had sacrificed and had taken risks. Above all, it proved she had not collaborated with occupation officials.

As the SS *John Lykes* picked its way out of the Manila harbor that day in April, it carried three other American women who, like Gladys Savary, had also managed to avoid internment in Santo Tomas. And like Gladys, all three used their freedom during the occupation to engage in resistance work in and around Manila. One was Claire Phillips, a striking, gregarious brunette in her late thirties, traveling with her young daughter, Dian. Once she found herself on the ship and surrounded by her own countrymen, Claire could not stop talking about her wartime activities. The more she gabbed, however, the more the other Americans on board avoided her. They found her bragging distasteful and her stories outlandish.

Desperate for a sympathetic ear and hoping to find someone who could lend credence to her tales, Claire tried to befriend one passenger in particular, an American woman a few years her junior—slender, dark-haired, of Filipino heritage—traveling with her three children. Yay (rhymes with "why") Panlilio, Claire assumed, would understand better than anyone else what she had been through. After all, both of them had been involved with the guerrillas on Luzon and both knew how the underground worked.

A journalist in Manila before the war, Yay developed a web of political and military contacts throughout Luzon. During the Japanese occupation, Yay chafed at the regulations that prevented her from aiding what remained of the American and Filipino forces. So she deposited her children with trusted friends and fled to the hills east of the capital city where she joined a band of Filipino guerrillas. She became indispensable to the organization and training of the unit. Yay talked with Claire Phillips a few times on board the *Lykes*, even sympathized with her at least a little, but shied away from further involvement in this particular drama. Yay had had plenty of her own during the war and did not feel strong enough to deal with someone else's.

Unable to win Yay's support, Claire told a couple more stories in an attempt to bolster her reputation. She spread the word that she had been engaged in undercover work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This

backfired as actual FBI agents were on the ship, and denied Claire had any connection to their organization. Claire also spun a grand romantic tale about her relationship with an American soldier named John V. (Phil) Phillips. Asserting that she had been widowed by the war, she hinted she would file a claim for Phil's army insurance policy and for reimbursement from the US government for her prisoner relief efforts. Claire assured anyone who still listened to her that she had documents to prove all of this.[2]

Four days before the *Lykes* made its port-of-call in Honolulu, Claire claimed someone had rifled through her belongings. Her personal papers, along with promissory notes worth about 100,000 pesos ($50,000 in 1945, equal to about $660,000 in 2015) had vanished—stolen, she was certain, by people who wanted to discredit her. The ship's transport commander, Major Gilbert, did not believe a theft had occurred and refused to investigate. Claire's near hysteria over the missing items attracted the further attention of an FBI agent on board, who interviewed her at length and turned up disturbing discrepancies in her stories.

Despite the alleged robbery, Claire still had in her possession over $1,000 in US currency and 565 pesos in Philippine National Bank notes, rarities for anyone who lived through Japanese-occupied Manila. The FBI agent rejected Claire's explanation that before departing on the *Lykes*, friends helped her exchange the Philippine money she managed to hide earlier in the war. Why would anyone steal IOUs and personal papers yet leave hard cash untouched? Did she fabricate the robbery because the documents she claimed would prove her involvement with the guerrillas and the POWs did not, in fact, exist?[3]

The G-man also grew curious about the mangled condition of Claire's passport—which lacked a photograph—and when she could not provide a clear explanation he became suspicious about her actual nationality. First Claire told him she had buried the passport along with other important documents near the beginning of the occupation, and three years in damp soil had caused significant deterioration. Then, to account for the missing photograph, Claire blamed her daughter, Dian, claiming the little girl ripped it off—either while playing or during a temper tantrum—after they boarded the ship. These stories, combined with the revelation that

Claire held two life insurance policies made out in different names, prompted the agent to take her fingerprints to verify her identity.[4]

Conversations with other passengers led the agent to Margaret (Peggy) Utinsky, a petite redheaded American nurse in her mid-forties. Curiously—and what further heightened the agent's suspicions—was that Claire had not directed the FBI to Peggy to verify her stories, though the two women knew each other. Peggy had run a Manila-based underground organization that coordinated the smuggling of food and other necessities into POW camps on Luzon, and her relief efforts therefore would have often overlapped with Claire's.

Peggy did indeed know Claire, quite well, but refused to vouch for her character. She did, however, confirm to the FBI agent that Claire intended to collect John Phillips's insurance. Moreover, as far as the documents that Claire claimed had been stolen from her bunk, during the war Peggy had—for safekeeping—buried Claire's papers along with her own. Peggy dug them up after the Battle of Manila and examined the documents before returning them to Claire. She maintained there were no promissory notes from any guerrillas or POWs. As far as Peggy was concerned, Claire may have destroyed them simply to create some drama and gain sympathy.

Later, some of the ship's passengers overheard Peggy and Claire arguing about money and IOUs. When the *Lykes* finally docked in Los Angeles in May 1945, the two women were no longer speaking to each other. They went their separate ways.[5]

AS THE WAR CORRESPONDENT MARTHA GELLHORN observed, "War happens to people, one by one." This is the story of a restaurateur, an entertainer, a reporter, and a nurse—four American women who found themselves trapped in a city occupied by an enemy army and thousands of miles from home. Though caught up in the same extraordinary and perilous situation, and responding to it in remarkably similar and courageous ways, these women barely knew each other. They did not forge a sisterhood of anti-Japanese resistance and, as evidenced by their interaction above, even denigrated one another. Yet each contributed in her own way to networks of people committed to thwarting the occupiers.

One by one, as the enemy occupation unfolded, Gladys, Claire, Yay, and Peggy each determined how the war would happen to them, and to them alone.[6]

Their independence from—even suspicion of—each other reveals how the experience shaped them. Survival meant keeping to oneself, even within the networks in which they worked. Otherwise everyone would be compromised. The four women spent three grueling years engaged in a desperate, and often lonely, solitary fight for survival that stemmed from their resistance to the occupation. Each in her own way felt a duty to resist the Japanese by helping the American military prisoners of war survive and assisting the guerrilla forces operating on Luzon. Both these actions carried stiff penalties; the penalty for the latter would have been summary execution.

Though they could not, or would not, corroborate each other's stories, those stories can still be told. "Angel of the underground" reads the caption on the back of a photo taken of Peggy Utinsky in 1945. It briefly describes how she spent her own money and raised additional funds so she could smuggle food, vitamins, medicine, and cash to American POWs. This book reveals the full extent of Peggy's wartime activities, as well as those of Claire, Gladys, and Yay. Their experiences illustrate how their lives were stretched to, and beyond, the breaking point. They were forced to dissemble to the degree that they had not only to deny who others were, but who they were themselves. To merit the designation of angel, they had to be anything but.

CHAPTER 1

THE COLONIAL PHILIPPINES

The war that happened to Gladys Savary, Claire Phillips, Yay Panlilio, and Peggy Utinsky had its roots in a conflict that took place at the end of the nineteenth century over the fate of two Spanish colonies, Cuba and the Philippine Islands. That war, the Spanish–American War of 1898, secured independence for Cuba. But it resulted in a new colonial master for the Philippines and launched an imperialist struggle between the United States and Japan for supremacy in the Pacific.

Confrontation over territory was not unfamiliar to Americans. From its own colonial beginnings, the United States has been an expansionist country, assimilating land on the North American continent by conquering and relocating indigenous people, and negotiating with or going to war against rival imperialist European powers. Land meant security, power, and wealth, but Americans justified their actions with the softer language of manifest destiny—the divinely sanctioned spread of democracy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had secured vast national borders, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific.[1]

With those continental successes, Americans began looking toward the Pacific for new opportunities, attracted to the economic possibilities presented by the vast China market. The United States acquired the Midway Islands in 1867, challenged Germany in Samoa in 1885, and established settlements in Hawaii during the 1880s. Then, when the indigenous populations of Cuba and the Philippine Islands began agitating against their Spanish colonizers, the United States, seeing its role as a savior, inserted itself into that imperialist drama.[2]

The Philippine Islands, located about 7,000 miles from the west coast of the United States, is a vast southeast Asian archipelago of about 7,100 islands stretching over 115,000 square miles in the western Pacific Ocean. By the late 1800s, its indigenous population, made up of a variety of Southeast Asian and Oceania ancestry, numbered around seven million. These inhabitants had already set up trade networks with China, Malaysia, and other neighboring countries before Spanish explorers arrived in 1521. The first Spanish settlement was established about forty years later, launching some three hundred years of colonial rule there. One of the most visible signs of Spanish power in the Philippines was Fort Santiago, built on the island of Luzon at the mouth of the Pasig River to protect the newly-established city of Manila, now designated the capital of the Philippines.[3]

During the early nineteenth century, Spain began to lose its grip on the islands, challenged from the outside by rival European powers and from the inside by both religious and civil agitation that grew into an independence movement. By the mid-1890s, revolutionary change was in the wind, and the United States proved willing to use it to push the Spanish out.[4]

A similar situation developed in Cuba, located just ninety miles off the coast of Florida, which the Spanish explored in the 1490s and followed with permanent settlements in the early 1500s. About the size of the state of Pennsylvania, by the early 1800s the island contained a population of more than 631,000, both free and enslaved, European, African, and indigenous. Resistance to Spanish rule developed into a fledgling independence movement in the late 1860s and surged during the 1890s.

The political stability of Cuba concerned Americans who had millions of dollars worth of business investments there, especially in sugar. The idea of a colony intent on overthrowing its oppressor struck a chord with Americans because of their own history. The chance to bestow the benefits of the American way of life on a "lesser" but deserving group of people was impossible to resist.

As President William McKinley tried to convince Spain to give up its colony, he gambled that a show of force would underscore his determination. So he sent the USS *Maine* to Havana to demonstrate American intentions to protect US citizens there. In February 1898, the ship blew up in the harbor, killing more than 260 American sailors. A hasty investigation revealed that a mine caused the explosion, and the United States held Spain responsible. In April, at McKinley's request, Congress declared war. American troops were dispatched to Cuba, while Admiral George Dewey, then commanding the Asiatic Squadron in the Pacific, was ordered to Manila to confront the Spanish there. By mid-August, the American flag flew over Fort Santiago. The war on both fronts ended with an American victory before the year was out.

Cuban independence—along with the sinking of the *Maine*—had been the justification for the war, and the United States Congress passed the Teller Amendment in 1898 to guarantee it. But the US government viewed the Philippine Islands as too valuable to give up, not only for their proximity to China and its lucrative trade, but because of the Philippines' natural resources and thriving hemp, sugar, and tobacco plantations. The contentious issue of race complicated relations between the United States and the Philippines; Americans debated the ability of Filipinos to rule themselves. Some believed that if the United States retained control of the islands it could properly guide Filipinos in establishing a functioning democracy, but those who went on to form the American Anti-Imperialist League saw these actions as condescending and contrary to their country's own revolutionary heritage.[5]

While the United States negotiated the Treaty of Paris with Spain during the fall of 1898, President McKinley sent thousands of American troops to the Philippines in case the impending US occupation required

enforcement. Proponents on both sides of the annexation question pushed their respective agendas so strongly that the final Senate vote in February 1899 was close, swinging narrowly in favor of the treaty. The United States agreed to pay Spain $20 million (worth around a half billion dollars in 2015) for the Philippines.

The treaty confirmed the worst fears of the Filipinos: Americans were not liberators, but occupiers. When it became clear the United States had no intention of recognizing Filipino nationalist Emilio Aguinaldo's new republic, he launched a revolt against the American forces in the islands that lasted until 1902.[6]

Of the 126,468 American troops sent to the Philippines to quell the "insurrection," over 4,200 died. No one knows the exact number of Filipino casualties, but estimates suggest 220,000 civilians and soldiers perished. The fighting was vicious on both sides, intensified by racial hostility. Because Filipinos engaged in guerrilla warfare, a tactic the US military dismissed as "uncivilized," American soldiers used it as justification to torture and/or kill any Filipino they considered a threat. Civilians were rounded up into "reconcentration" camps to prevent them from joining the insurgency, and some were subjected to the "water cure," a form of modern day water-boarding, to extract information about the rebellion. Thus did the Americans begin their mission of establishing democracy in the Philippine Islands.[7]

The velvet glove that surrounded this military iron fist came in the form of the first Philippine Commission, designed to win over the Filipino elites (known as *ilustrados*) by drawing them into a political and economic collaboration of mutual benefit. The five-man commission, including Admiral Dewey and General Elwell Otis, the newly-designated US military governor of the islands, arrived in Manila in March 1899, soon after the outbreak of hostilities. The commission was charged with studying the current situation in the Philippines and recommending a course of action for American rule. President McKinley expected the *ilustrados* and all Filipinos would quickly understand the benefits of the American policy of "benevolent assimilation."[8]

In 1900 the commission issued the unsurprising recommendation that the United States needed to remain in the Philippines to put the

country on the path to full independence. That year the second Philippine Commission arrived, tasked with setting up a functioning civilian government. Its head, William Howard Taft, a federal circuit judge from Cincinnati, Ohio, had initially opposed the acquisition of the Philippines. But soon Taft—the man who referred to Filipinos as "little brown brothers"—saw this appointment as a way of making his mark and of bringing democracy to the Filipinos.[9]

In addition to the creation of an American-controlled civilian government, the United States retained its military grip on the islands. In 1901 Elihu Root, US Secretary of War, appropriated some land six miles southeast of Manila, just south of the Pasig River, to house the American forces tasked with pacifying the remnants of the Filipino "insurrection." Named Fort William McKinley, it gave birth to the 31st Infantry in 1916, a rarity of US Army units for its primary location on foreign soil. Still, during the early 1900s, the Philippines constituted the biggest overseas posting for the army.[10]

Official transfer of military power to civilian rule occurred on July 4, 1901, when Taft was sworn in as the islands' first American civilian governor-general. Three months earlier, Emilio Aguinaldo had been captured, dealing a huge blow to the nationalist movement, especially when he subsequently swore allegiance to the United States. In the meantime, Taft had been working with the *ilustrados* as they established the Federal Party in December 1900 to encourage all Filipinos to accept American sovereignty and guidance toward self-rule. Taft believed self-rule would not be possible until Filipinos attained a quality education rooted in the English language. He coordinated the establishment of local and provincial governments, the writing of municipal codes, and the implementation of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools throughout the Philippines.[11]

Such large-scale collaboration required subterfuge and force, which was provided by intelligence-gathering, a loyal Filipino police force and military, and the continued presence of US soldiers. In late 1900, prior to the establishment of civilian rule in the Philippines, General Arthur MacArthur implemented martial law and created the Military

Information Division (MID) within the adjutant general's office. MID's commander, Ralph Van Deman, created a network capable of vast data collection, which he employed to root out anti-American elements in the Philippines, arresting anyone who defied American rule, court-martialing civilians, and curbing the press. When the active phase of the guerrilla war ended in 1902, MID continued to not only neutralize Filipino nationalism but to identify and keep track of Japanese spies and sympathizers.[12]

Order—American-style, supported by the Filipino elite—slowly returned to the islands, though it was not buttressed by the large-scale presence of American citizens. An influx of immigrants from the United States might have reinforced its authority over the islands and muted further calls for Philippine independence. In 1903, the first year of peace following the "insurrection," only about 8,000 Americans lived in the Philippines, a number that would remain fairly constant over the next decades. Some were colonial officials, others were entrepreneurs, and still others were former American soldiers who had been stationed in the islands and did not want to leave.[13]

By 1907, Filipino voters had been prepared to participate in the election for the first Philippine Assembly, which would share legislative power with the American commission. Cebu native Sergio Osmeña, a member of the Nacionalista (Nationalist) Party and a strong advocate for self-rule, was elected Speaker of the Philippine Assembly. During the first decade of the twentieth century, American rule allowed Filipinos to establish their own national assembly but made sure that the road to full independence would be a long one. Many Filipino politicians did not disapprove. They willingly collaborated with the Americans as long as the Philippines somehow profited, and as long as independence was still on the table.[14]

Philippine independence appeared within reach when Woodrow Wilson won the presidential election in 1912, and Democrats, many of whom were anti-imperialist, took control of Congress. A progressive Democratic congressman from New York, Francis Burton Harrison, was named governor-general of the Philippines. Upon his arrival in the Philippines on October 6, 1913, the tall and mustachioed Harrison told a crowd of thousands at Luneta Park, "We regard ourselves as trustees

acting not for the advantage of the United States but for the benefit of the people of the Philippines Islands. Every step we take will be taken with a view to the ultimate independence of the islands. . . ."[15]

During Harrison's eight-year tenure, he became one of the Filipinos' favorite Americans, mostly because of his plan for "Filipinization" of the country. Harrison also appointed as many Filipinos as possible to government administrative posts, unseating Americans who had held them for years. This action prompted the resignations of those who refused to work as subordinates to Filipinos. While these changes clearly illustrated a commitment to independence, many Americans involved with the Philippines still predicted disaster, arguing that Filipinos were not ready for home rule.

Harrison's Filipinization plan was supported by William Atkinson Jones, an anti-imperialist congressman from Virginia who served on the Insular Affairs Committee that directed Philippine matters. During the summer of 1914, Jones introduced a bill to Congress that called for replacing the commission portion of the Philippine government with an elected Senate and renaming the Assembly the House of Representatives. The Jones bill passed the House of Representatives in October 1914, mostly along partisan lines, but failed in the Senate and died in March 1915.

The bill was introduced again in December, and President Wilson signed it into law in the summer of 1916. The position of American governor-general was retained, appointed by the president and still wielding veto power. Free trade would continue between the United States and the Philippines. However, the preamble of the Jones Act prevaricated over independence, stating that "it is, as it has always been, the purpose of the people of the United States to withdraw their sovereignty over the Philippine Islands and to recognize their independence as soon as a stable government can be established therein." The preamble further clarified the need for "the speedy accomplishment of such purpose" but without "impairing the exercise of the rights of sovereignty by the people of the United States. . . ." The Jones Act paved the way for the creation of the Philippine Commonwealth, the final step to independence.[16]

As important as the act was to US–Philippines relations, many Americans did not pay much attention to it. During the debates over the legislation, Manuel Quezon observed that "the people at large are not interested enough in this subject to write to their congressmen." The attention of most Americans was focused on the war that had broken out in Europe in the summer of 1914.[17]

The United States stayed out of that conflict until 1917. Japan, however, used it to increase its power in the Pacific by seizing Germany's colonial possessions in the region. Although Japan joined the Allies in the war, the Germans tried to convince Japan that an alliance with the Central Powers would allow the Japanese to fight against the three countries (England, Russia, and the United States) that were hampering their Asian expansion, especially in the Philippines. Despite its determination to dominate in the Pacific, Japan declined Germany's overture.[18]

Fed up with unrestricted submarine warfare and worried about the stability of its Mexican border region, the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, making Japan and the United States allies. The War Department's interest in military intelligence revived, and over the next year and a half, the government created an extensive intelligence setup, including what would become the US Counter Intelligence Corps, plus the staffing designation "2" for all intelligence and security units in the military. In the summer of 1918, just months before the Allied victory, the US Army made military intelligence a discrete division of the general staff. This would all prove instrumental in fighting the next world war.[19]

Though the United States retreated into isolationism after the Great War, this did not spur it to grant independence to the Philippines. During the 1920s and 1930s, Americans continued to travel there, but by the end of the 1930s the American-born population in the Philippines still fluctuated between 8,000 and 9,000. These numbers paled in comparison to those of Japanese and Chinese immigrants (about 16,000 and 100,000, respectively), though the Americans and the Spanish wielded considerably more economic and social power.[20]

Before leaving office in 1921, Woodrow Wilson declared that "the moment had come to move on to independence" for the Philippines, but he did not mean immediately. Warren Harding, Wilson's Republican successor, did not consider repealing the Jones Act, though he also had no intention of granting Philippine independence anytime soon. The reciprocal trade relationship was too lucrative, and Harding and other Republicans worried that an independent Philippines would not be strong enough to withstand expansionist threats from nearby Japan. Harding dispatched an investigative commission to the islands in 1921, headed by Cameron Forbes and General Leonard Wood. Its conclusions reinforced Harding's view that the Philippines were not ready for independence.[21]

Harding then appointed Wood as the new governor-general of the islands. At the time Wood was in his sixties and already had a distinguished career as a soldier, participating in the capture of Geronimo, commanding the First Volunteer Cavalry regiment (known as the Rough Riders) in Cuba, and orchestrating attacks against the Moros in the Philippines. After heading the US military in those islands from 1906 to 1910, Wood returned to the United States to serve as Army Chief of Staff. Described as a "good man [who] found himself in the wrong job," Wood often behaved in an imperious manner as governor-general, doing little to give the Filipinos the impression that he believed they were capable of self-rule, frequently clashing with native politicians.[22]

Wood's successor, Henry Stimson, offered up a new approach. Both Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña, political rivals who set aside their differences in a common opposition to Wood, supported Stimson's appointment in 1928. They took it as a step toward independence when Stimson reinstituted the council of state to get Filipino politicians' input on matters of government and economics. Stimson's governorship did much to smooth over the hostilities left by Wood, but it was a short tenure. He returned to the United States in early 1929 to serve as President Herbert Hoover's secretary of state.[23]

Another governor-general, Dwight Davis, arrived as Filipinos continued to push for independence. Two thousand delegates converged on Manila in February 1930 to discuss and pass a resolution supporting independence. The Philippine legislature sent a new delegation, led by Osmeña and the Speaker of the Philippine House Manuel Roxas, to Washington, D.C., where they spent two years lobbying Congress. The authority of the delegation was diminished by the continuing political feud between Osmeña and Quezon. Quezon, already suffering from tuberculosis, followed the original delegation to the States, attempting to undercut Osmeña's growing power. Quezon ultimately won out.[24]

More important than this political infighting, however, was the question of when, not if, Philippine independence would occur. Congress responded to lobbying efforts by passing the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act in December 1932. The act provided for a ten-year commonwealth period, during which the United States would continue to militarily protect the islands, ending with complete independence. Hare-Hawes-Cutting did not reflect a sudden revelation that Filipinos were capable of self-rule; rather it was based on the growing economic hardships of the Depression. An independent Philippines would not likely receive special consideration with trade or with immigration, and with current conditions, most Americans willingly promoted protectionism and nativism.

Finally, the Commonwealth lay just ahead. It would be formed under a new American presidential administration, that of Democrat Franklin Roosevelt, who took the oath of office in March 1933. That same year, Adolf Hitler assumed power in Germany and the Japanese renewed their attacks in northern China. Stung by the economic reverses of the Great Depression, the Japanese had embarked on a plan to dominate Asia to seize the raw materials and the laborers it needed to revive prosperity. In 1931, Japanese troops occupied Manchuria, setting up the puppet regime of Manchukuo. The following year they staged an unsuccessful attack on the rich, bustling port city of Shanghai. When the League of Nations criticized these actions in 1933, the Japanese withdrew from the international

body rather than end their attacks on China. The Japanese intended to take as much of Asia as possible.

Despite the dominance of isolationist sentiment in the United States and Japanese intentions to expand and conquer, during the 1920s and 1930s, most Americans viewed the Philippine Islands as a safe place—it was, after all, under American protection. That was what drew Gladys Savary, Claire Phillips, Yay Panlilio, and Peggy Utinsky.

CHAPTER 2

FOUR WOMEN

Peggy, Gladys, Yay, and Claire—each woman was an adventurer, willing to travel halfway around the world to Manila, the capital city of the Philippine Islands, in search of a better life. Manila exuded glamour and romance. Its country clubs hosted dances and sporting events, nightclubs offered the coolest drinks and the hottest music, American films played at local movie theaters, and shoppers indulged in the current fashions, courtesy of modern American-style department stores. As expatriates in this colonial location, Americans enjoyed a privileged position. Even those who worked for a living typically earned enough to live in nice villas or in smart apartments in good neighborhoods, perhaps hire a servant or two. For them, this Pearl of the Orient, as Manila was called, was a paradise.

Peggy Utinsky was the first of the four to head to Manila, arriving in 1926 or 1927 for an extended vacation. Born Margaret Doolin in 1900 in St. Louis, Missouri, probably to Irish immigrant parents who may have left her an orphan, Peggy grew up on a Canadian wheat farm. Around the

age of sixteen she married a man named John Rowley, and they had one child together, Charles. John may have fallen victim to one of the rounds of Spanish influenza so lethal at the time, because by 1919 Peggy was a widow.[1]

Scarcely twenty years old, alone, and with a small child to care for, Peggy's situation was not unique among American women in the World War I era. Thousands had been left on their own in the late 1910s, either because of the Spanish influenza or the Great War, both of which succeeded in carrying off large numbers of young men. So Peggy needed steady, respectable, well-paid employment, and for a white middle-class woman that typically meant teaching, secretarial work, social work, or nursing. Peggy decided on the last. After completing her training as a registered nurse in 1924, she could have chosen a hospital position, something in a doctor's office, or even contracted with private patients, any of which would have been enough to provide food, shelter, and clothing for her son Charley and herself.[2]

Yet Peggy probably had not abandoned the hope that her years as a working woman would be temporary. She was young and attractive—with arresting blue eyes and head-turning red hair—smart, funny, loyal, always in the mood for a glass of beer and a good game of poker. She could fall in love again, get married again, have the life most young women dreamed about. But a couple of years passed and the still-widowed Peggy was wearing herself out with work. She longed for a change, an extended vacation in a faraway place tinged with the exotic, so she booked passage to go as far west as possible.[3]

As the ship made its way into the harbor, Peggy and Charley would have caught their first view of Manila, a discordant jumble of the Philippines' colonial past and present: Intramuros, the old Walled City of the Spanish occupation; Luneta Park, the site of the execution of Dr. José Rizal, hero of the Philippine Revolution; stylish marble and concrete buildings along the very modern American Dewey Boulevard; bamboo and nipa palm shacks in the native, or Tondo, section of the city. The ship would have docked, as did all on international voyages, at Pier 7, a massive double-decker concrete structure built in the 1920s at the cost of millions of pesos.

The planned six-month visit stretched into a year, then two, until there seemed no point in returning stateside, because, as Peggy later wrote, "I loved the Islands." She probably worked in Manila, too, picking up nursing jobs and scrambling a little to earn money. Still, life in the Philippines was likely more pleasant than it had been in the States. Manila had warm weather, beautiful scenery, a low cost of living with affordable domestic help, and a close-knit, sociable American community.[4]

Then, finally, came romance. John (Jack) Paul Utinsky cut an imposing figure: six feet tall with curly dark brown hair, inviting emerald eyes, and an Errol Flynn pencil moustache. Jack had been born in 1897 in West Virginia and raised in Springfield, Illinois, the eldest of four children of Russian-Lithuanian immigrant parents. At seventeen, he joined the US Army and was stationed in the Philippines. By the end of November 1917, the year the Americans joined the Great War, he had been promoted to first lieutenant in the army infantry, and he may have been with US troops in Siberia. After separating from the service, he took a job as a civil engineer for the American government in the Philippines, settling on the small island of Corregidor, just off the southern tip of the Bataan peninsula.[5]

Corregidor, the island referred to as "the Rock"—as in Gibraltar—a nod to its defensive capabilities, was all about fortification. Located at the entrance of Manila Bay, the island was four miles long and just over a mile across at its widest. Everyone's livelihood there, including Jack Utinsky's, stemmed from its strategic location. It would protect Manila in the event of an enemy attack. In 1907, Corregidor was designated a US Military Reserve, and Fort Mills, an army post, was constructed there. During 1909, the Corps of Engineers began to strengthen the seaward approach area of the island with a variety of weapons batteries.

Engineers started blasting into Malinta Hill during the 1920s and 1930s to construct the Malinta Tunnel, a massive military complex over eight hundred feet long. In addition to this main east–west passage, thirteen laterals were built on the north and another eleven on the south. Between the batteries and the tunnel, the US military believed it could protect Corregidor as well as Manila. By the mid-1930s, the island contained an underground city, complete with military headquarters, radio

and decoding rooms, repair and storage facilities, and a hospital large enough to accommodate a thousand patients. An efficient tram system zipped workers to and from their jobs.[6]

Peggy met Jack sometime during the early 1930s, either when he had gone to Manila to indulge in some big-city nightlife, or she had come to Corregidor to visit friends—Americans in the Philippines routinely indulged in that kind of socializing. However they met, an immediate attraction pulled them together. Jack captivated Peggy with his stories, witty tales about his experiences all over the Philippines. A born raconteur, fluent in Spanish and several Philippine dialects, he seemed to know everything about the islands. When Jack proposed, presenting Peggy with a stunning three-carat diamond ring, she did not have to think twice. They married in 1934.[7]

Corregidor became Peggy Utinsky's new home. Although the island was small, its amenities were vast. During the latter half of the 1930s, luncheons and bridge games filled Peggy's long afternoons and cocktail parties enlivened the evenings. "Easy warmth and gay companionship," she observed of those years. It was simple enough to ignore the fact that Corregidor had been developed for its defensive capabilities. Nothing in Peggy's immediate vicinity seemed remotely threatening—signs of American power were visible everywhere on the island that the United States had been militarizing over the previous decades. Jack earned a comfortable living from his work as an engineer, they had dozens of friends, Charley seemed happy, and they all had a lot of time to enjoy the privileges of the American colonial lifestyle.[8]

THE YEAR AFTER THE UTINSKYS MARRIED, the Philippines took another step closer to independence. The United States established a Commonwealth government in the Philippines designed to last for ten years, at the end of which the islands would receive independence. The Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act, which outlined this arrangement, had passed the US Congress in late 1932, but to become effective, the act also had to pass the Philippine legislature. The two most powerful political leaders of the time, Sergio Osmeña and Manuel Quezon, both members of

the Nacionalista Party yet already at odds with each other, sharply disagreed about the act, with Osmeña for it and Quezon against. Quezon and his faction, who opposed the act out of concern for the harm it would do to Philippine trade and immigration, ultimately won out. A new governor-general arrived in Manila during the Osmeña-Quezon debate: Frank Murphy, the former mayor of Detroit, a bachelor, and a Catholic. Murphy's contribution to the controversy was to remain neutral and let the Filipino politicians hash it out.[9]

The Philippine legislature ultimately rejected Hare-Hawes-Cutting, and Manuel Quezon went back to Washington in 1934 to renegotiate terms of independence. The resulting Tydings-McDuffie Act was, as Sergio Osmeña complained, "merely Hare warmed over." It was, however, Quezon's creation and proved popular in both the United States and the Philippines. The legislation provided for a Commonwealth government largely concerned with domestic issues, independence in ten years, and Philippine imports subjected to American tariffs—with no promises that the United States could maintain army bases in the islands. The Philippines now had a firm commitment to independence, with the Commonwealth period as the final transition phase. In early 1935 a constitutional convention created the structure of the new Philippine government. Quezon and Osmeña devised a coalition ticket to foster political unity, with Quezon elected president and Osmeña vice president.[10]

The passage of Tydings-McDuffie in the United States was entangled in economic fears, xenophobia, racism, and isolationism. President Franklin Roosevelt, like many of his predecessors, had no clear idea on the question of Philippine independence. In 1934, during the debates over the legislation, Roosevelt remarked in private, "Let's get rid of the Philippines—that's the most important thing. Let's be frank about it." Severing the colonial relationship would benefit the United States by eliminating free trade and by removing the costly military obligation to protect the islands.[11]

The Commonwealth setup proved popular with most Filipinos, though not all. Frank Murphy had to guard against actual uprisings as well as threats of them. In May 1935, just before the plebiscite for the new Constitution, Sakdalistas—rebels who wanted immediate independence—attacked

fourteen municipalities near Manila, seizing government buildings and constabulary garrisons, then hoisting their own flag. The constabulary quelled the uprising but in the process killed fifty-nine Sakdals. After the election of Commonwealth officials, hundreds of people met almost every night in the Cavite backyard of aging insurrectionist and losing candidate Emilio Aguinaldo to listen to speakers denounce Manuel Quezon as an enemy of independence. Some called for his assassination. Rumors abounded that Aguinaldo planned a massive protest parade on inauguration day, but neither the assassination nor the protest occurred.[12]

In addition to concerns over these kinds of threats, plans for the inauguration ceremony became complicated by a protocol dispute that revealed continuing tensions over Philippine autonomy. Manuel Quezon believed that his inauguration as president of the Commonwealth should be marked with a twenty-one gun salute and Frank Murphy's inauguration as American High Commissioner with a nineteen-gun salute. A twenty-one gun salute was normally reserved for the head of a sovereign state, which the Philippines would not become until after the Commonwealth period. The US Secretary of War, George Dern, told Murphy, "There can be no question as to the status of the High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands as the representative of the President of the United States as long as the sovereignty of the United States continues." A subsequent telegram from the War Department made President Roosevelt's position clear: "It is proper that the High Commissioner be regarded as the senior official and, therefore, that as between the two he take precedence over the President of the Commonwealth." In the end it was decided that Quezon and Murphy would each receive a nineteen-gun salute, with the High Commissioner's going off first.[13]

When he was inaugurated in 1935 as the first president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon implemented the National Defense Act to create a strong national army. Quezon planned to spend a quarter of his budget to raise and train 10,000 regular troops by 1945, with an additional 400,000 in reserve. To boost the strength of the fledgling force, he merged the Constabulary, created in 1901 as the civil government's police force, into the army as its First Regular Division.

He chose the most experienced officer he knew to head his armed forces: Douglas MacArthur.[14]

MacArthur was born with connections to the Philippine Islands and to the American military: his father, Arthur MacArthur, had been a military governor there in the early twentieth century. After graduating from West Point, Douglas took a posting for a short time in the islands until malaria prompted reassignment. He then served with distinction during the First World War, and in 1922 took command of a US infantry brigade in the Philippines. Over the next dozen years, a series of promotions bounced him back and forth between the islands and the States. In 1930 he became the US Army's Chief of Staff in Washington.

Manuel Quezon had known since at least 1934 that he wanted MacArthur at the head of a new Philippine military. While in Washington that year trying to both negotiate independence and lay the groundwork for a new government, Quezon asked him, "Can the Philippines be defended?" The general replied, "I *know* that the islands can be protected, provided of course you have the money which will be required." MacArthur proposed that 11,000 Filipino soldiers be readied to train 400,000 reservists. Their job would be to harass the Japanese if they attacked and to hold the islands until American reinforcements arrived. Quezon offered MacArthur the position of military adviser.[15]

Tired of his position in Washington, MacArthur accepted and negotiated a sweet deal: the rank of field marshal (the first American to wear five stars), an $18,000 annual salary with a $15,000 personal allowance, and accommodations in the top-floor suite of the Manila Hotel (which enjoyed the ultimate luxury of air-conditioning). Despite the perks, the military adviser position was a kind of consolation prize for MacArthur, who coveted the post of American High Commissioner for the Philippines, which he was never given. President Roosevelt endorsed MacArthur's retirement from the US Army and subsequent acceptance of the field marshal position in the Philippines.[16]

Although the United States maintained a steady military presence in the Philippines during the Commonwealth period, absolute defense of the islands was not a top American priority. In fact, military experts agreed