

RED REVOLUTION

INSIDE THE PHILIPPINE
GUERRILLA MOVEMENT

Gregg R. Jones



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*To my parents,
Bob and Pauline Jones,
and to my wife,
Aleli Nucum-Jones*



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Preface

My fascination with an Asian archipelago beset by a burgeoning communist revolution began in 1983, when I was a 24-year-old reporter in Atlanta. I was drawn to Asia almost by accident, by reading *In Search of History*, Theodore White's account of his youthful reportorial travels through China as the revolution led by Mao Zedong edged toward victory. I started clipping brief wire service articles on the worsening conflict in the Philippines—10 soldiers dead in an ambush along some isolated provincial road, 8 New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas killed in a remote jungle encounter elsewhere, and so on. By late 1983, as the Philippines seemed to totter on the brink of cataclysm in the aftermath of Benigno Aquino's assassination, I had decided to witness firsthand a revolution in the making. Late in the sweltering evening of May 3, 1984, I arrived in Manila to begin a career as a free-lance correspondent. For the next five years, I traveled throughout the Philippines, observing and reporting on the various political and social forces shaping and tearing the nation. I witnessed the decline and fall of the Marcos regime and the first three years of Corazón Aquino's rule. In 1987, my interest in the forces of revolution in the Philippines brought me together with a publisher interested in a book on the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its guerrilla army.

When I began this project, I was unsure how much access I would have to the Communist Party and its political and armed forces in the countryside and the cities. The Party is, after all, an outlawed organization, and the affairs of the revolution have by necessity been shrouded in secrecy. I was told by Party cadres at one point during my research that a lower CPP organ had recommended against cooperating for a book about the revolution written by a foreigner. But high-level Party officials overruled, and I was allowed to proceed. As it turned out, I was surprised and pleased by the extent of the cooperation I received from Party and

guerrilla units. By late 1988, I had been given a rare look inside a clandestine revolutionary movement in the midst of, rather than after, its struggle for power.

I have focused this book as narrowly as possible on the revolutionary underground—that is, on the activities of the CPP and its guerrilla army. A meaningful examination of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and government responses to the communist-led revolution would require another volume. In order to devote more attention to those aspects of the revolution about which little is known, I have treated more briefly some of those recent historical events in the Philippines (the 1986–1987 cease-fire between Corazón Aquino’s government and the guerrillas, for example) that have been exhaustively covered by the international media and by scholars.

The material for this book derives from three principal sources: my interviews and conversations with CPP and NPA leaders, rank-and-file guerrillas and Party members, legal left-wing activists, rebel defectors, and Filipinos living in communist-controlled rural barrios and urban slums; CPP and government documents, both published and unpublished; and my experiences and observations as a reporter covering the Philippines for U.S. and British newspapers between 1984 and 1989, during which time I visited 40 of the country’s 73 provinces. I discovered that many early “official” Party documents written for public consumption were embellished, and so I have treated such sources with caution.

I have relied primarily on the interviews I conducted with men and women who had joined the revolution. The overriding value of basing this book to a large extent on hundreds of interviews with the leaders and members of the CPP and communist army, as well as sympathetic peasants and slum dwellers, lies in the vivid personal accounts that have brought the revolution to life in human terms. I have sought to depict the history and development of this revolutionary movement as seen through the eyes of actual participants. This methodology, of course, has inherent strengths and weaknesses. Memories can be selective and self-serving, and therefore I attempted to corroborate information as much as possible with one or more sources. Sometimes, documents or the historical record helped resolve conflicts. In a few instances, I was unable to resolve discrepancies, and so I have offered the conflicting versions of events.

At the outset of every interview, I took pains to explain the nature of my project, so that it would be clear to my sources that they were speaking for publication. In general, I found lower-ranking Party cadres, guerrillas, and peasants to be the most candid sources, sometimes remarkably so, although some ranking CPP officials with whom I developed relationships during the course of months became more

forthcoming in our discussions. Scores of interviews were impromptu. Whenever I arrived in a guerrilla camp or in a peasant's house in a communist-controlled barrio, I tried to interview as many people as I could. Since I was always escorted by a Party cadre, I was viewed as an "official," and therefore welcome, guest by most of the combatants, political cadres, and peasants I met in the countryside. I was always on the alert for the possibility that interviewees might be telling me what they thought I wanted to hear or what Party cadres expected them to say. Armed with a reporter's skepticism, I had to judge the credibility and candor of a source. The reader must decide how successful I have been in this endeavor.

I conducted a majority of the interviews during eight forays with NPA and Party units in the countryside during 1987 and 1988; on other reporting trips I spoke with Party cadres and relevant military, political, and private figures in different areas of the country. My trips and interviews inside guerrilla zones were geographically dispersed enough, I believe, to have given me an overview and a sense for the revolution as a national movement. I selected a CPP-controlled barrio in southern Quezon for a case study of life under revolutionary rule, and I was allowed to travel freely through the area, although always escorted by a Party cadre.

Some of my most valuable sources were ranking Party and NPA officials who had been imprisoned for years and who had not returned underground upon their release. It took months to locate and arrange interviews with most of the former top Party leaders. Most were quietly going about their lives and never before had spoken to an "outsider" about their experiences in the revolutionary movement. Their candor, however, usually far exceeded that of active CPP officials. No longer bound by strict Party discipline, some of these sources provided invaluable details on the early history and inner workings of the movement. I repeatedly interviewed several sources during the course of many months.

I interviewed five of the eleven founding CPP Central Committee members who are still alive. The founding NPA commander, Bernabe Buscayno, declined to be interviewed, but I was able to speak with several of his closest colleagues who were with him in the countryside from 1969 until his arrest in 1976. In April 1988, I traveled to Europe to conduct extensive interviews with past and present leaders of the revolution, including founding CPP chairman José María Sison and Central Committee member Luís Jalandoni, who is the chief international representative of the revolution's political front, the National Democratic Front (NDF). I spent nine hours in two sessions interviewing former CPP chairman Rodolfo Salas in his cell in the Philippine Constabulary stockade in Camp Crame, Quezon City. During those visits, I met and

talked briefly with several other top leaders of the revolution, including NPA commander in chief Romulo Kintanar.

Whenever possible, I have tried to cite sources by name in the text. Unfortunately, often this was not possible. First, in many cases, I knew my sources only by their underground names. Second, former Party officials and guerrillas who spoke with me, sometimes with astonishing candor, did so at considerable personal risk; it was only because of my guarantee of anonymity that they could talk so freely without fear of retribution from either the military and violent right-wing elements or former colleagues still in the underground. Almost all of the former Party officials with whom I spoke had been captured and imprisoned and were trying to get on with their lives. Several still maintained close contacts with their former colleagues in the revolution. Although in some cases former Party officials spoke without asking for anonymity, in all but a few instances I judged their information to be of such a sensitive or controversial nature that I have not named them in order to spare the sources and their families from possible harassment and even violence from elements on the Right or the Left.

The chapters on Plaza Miranda and the CPP's secret China delegation presented particular difficulties because of their extremely controversial nature. When I began this project, I assumed that the commonly accepted version of history—that Marcos was responsible for the Plaza Miranda bombing—was true. I was astonished when a few former Party officials disclosed that the bombing was planned and carried out by CPP forces. During the course of several months of interviews with former senior Party officials, I was able to piece together details that shed light on the CPP leadership's motivations for carrying out the Plaza Miranda attack, as well as details concerning the plan itself. In separate interviews, my principal sources provided information that dovetailed. Only after having conducted lengthy interviews on the subject, and having become absolutely convinced of the credibility of my sources, did I decide to write the chapter.

That these former CPP officials revealed to an outsider their knowledge of the Plaza Miranda plan could warrant severe punishment—even assassination—at the hands of former colleagues who will undoubtedly view the disclosures of such sensitive Party secrets as an unforgivable betrayal. I have agonized over this knowledge, and as a result I have tried to protect my sources as best I could while trying to clearly establish the historical record on the Plaza Miranda bombing. Similarly, as no details of the CPP's secret mission to China in the 1970s have ever been publicly disclosed, I have tried to protect my sources as much as possible. On this subject, I have relied heavily on one source, a member of the CPP's China delegation known personally to me, whom

I interviewed for more than 15 hours during the course of three sessions. Much of this person's information was corroborated in other interviews with past and present CPP officials and with three other members of the China delegation.

Although CPP officials at the highest levels approved this project, presumably attracted by the international exposure such a book would give the movement, the Party cadres with whom I worked in arranging interviews and visits to guerrilla zones in various regions of the countryside made no attempt to shape the manuscript once I began writing. From the beginning, it was understood that I was undertaking this project not to advocate one side or the other but to record the history and development of the Philippine revolutionary movement and to depict accurately the radical changes the movement has effected in many areas of the country. To the CPP's credit, I was allowed to conduct my research and interviews with few restrictions.

Finally, my objective is not to offer solutions to those in the Philippines and the United States who seek to undermine or defeat the revolutionary movement. I approached this book as a neutral observer, and I have tried to offer the reader a close-up look and analysis of the revolution based on the rare access I gained inside the movement. As far as generalizations are valid, this book may serve as a case study of the inner workings of one of the most successful communist revolutionary movements existing in the world today.

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Manila, Philippines



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I owe an enormous debt to my wife, Aleli Nucum-Jones, who in so many ways was responsible for bringing this book to fruition. I dragged her along with me to spend a Christmas in a communist barrio, and she rose magnificently to the occasion. Her instant rapport with the peasants and guerrillas and her superb translating skills provided the book with its richest and most colorful material from Barangay Rose. She accompanied me to Europe for several important—and sometimes

excruciatingly long—interviews with past and present leaders of the revolution, then spent days performing the tedious task of transcribing hours of tapes. She also performed the even more mundane chores of bringing me meals while I worked at the word processor and managing the affairs of a household. With strength and silence, she suffered my many weeks of absence as I traveled with the guerrillas. I can only offer my deepest love and gratitude.

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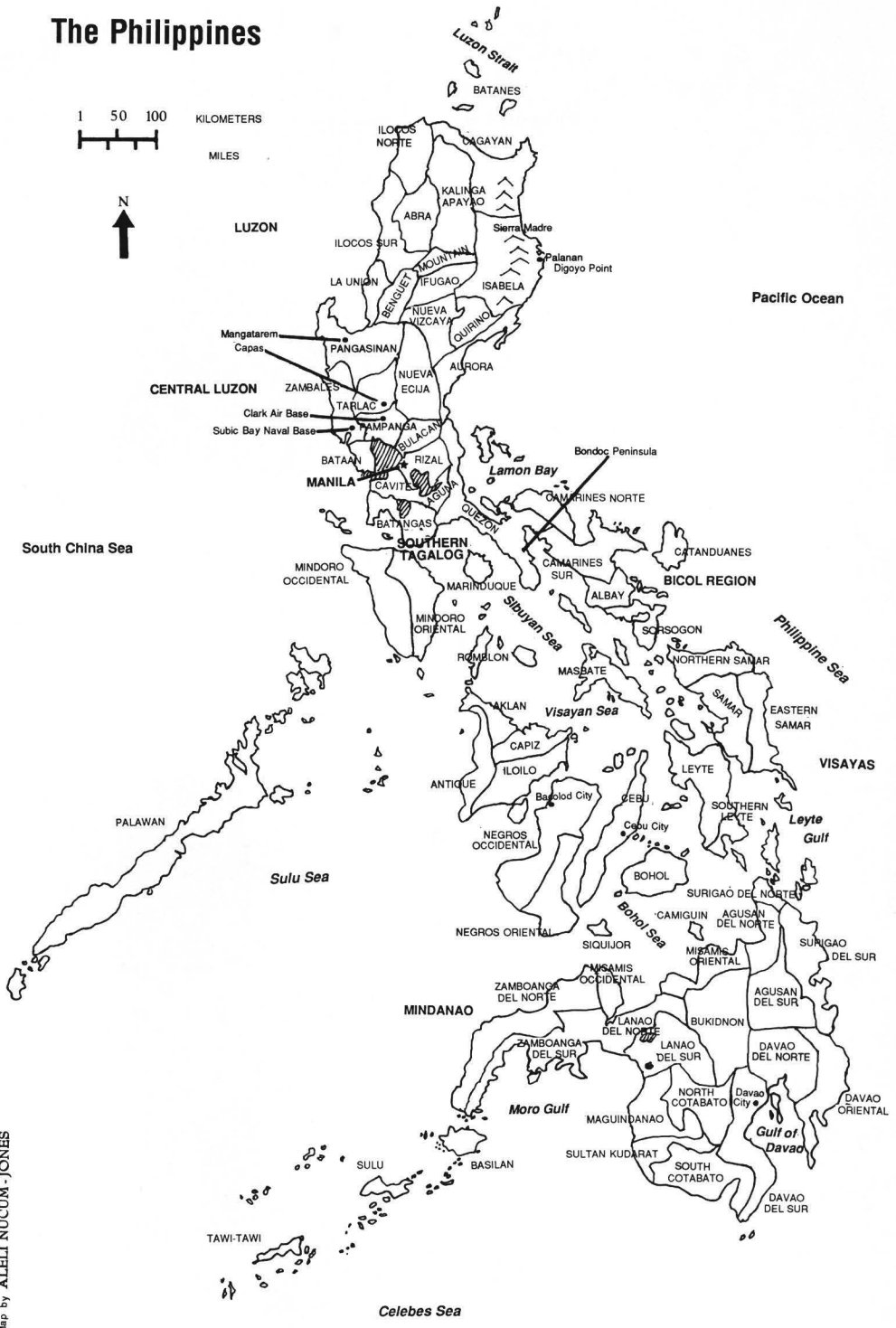
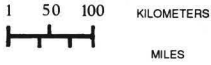
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Acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
BAR	Browning automatic rifle
Bayan	Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Nationalist Alliance)
BCC	Basic Christian Community
CAFGU	Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit
CHDF	Civilian Home Defense Force
CNL	Christians for National Liberation
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
DPA	deep penetration agent
FFF	Federation of Free Farmers
GTU	general trade unionism course
Hukbalahap	Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Anti-Japanese Army)
JAJA	Justice for Aquino, Justice for All
KADENA	Kabataan para sa Demokrasya at Nasyonalismo (Youth for Democracy and Nationalism)
KM	Kabataang Makabayan (Patriotic Youth)
KMU	Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement)
KOMPIL	Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Congress of the Filipino People)
MAN	Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism

MASAKA	Malayang Samahan ng Magsasaka (Democratic Union of Peasants)
MDP	Movement for a Democratic Philippines
NATU	National Association of Trade Unions
NDF	National Democratic Front
NPA	New People's Army
PKM	Pambansang Katipunan ng Magsasaka (National Farmers Movement)
PKP	Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
PMA	Philippine Military Academy
PnB	Partido ng Bayan (People's Party)
PSR	<i>Philippine Society and Revolution</i>
SCAUP	Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines
SDK	Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (Democratic Youth Organization)
SOT	special operations team
TO	tactical offensive
UP	University of the Philippines

The Philippines



Map by ALELI NUCUM-JONES



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Introduction

“Please, God, let them be NPA.”

That was my silent prayer when our aging Volkswagen sedan rounded a sharp curve deep in the rugged countryside of the Philippines’ southern Quezon province and I saw that the way was blocked by fatigue-clad men cradling automatic rifles. I prayed that the armed men were New People’s Army (NPA) guerrillas because a military roadblock could mean arrest or death for the men in the car with me. At my side was a former university physics professor, now Comrade Mike, the Communist Party secretary running the war in the southern Quezon sector against Corazón Aquino’s government. In the front passenger seat was a sinewy, 19-year-old peasant guerrilla named Bel who was to guide us to an NPA camp deep in the interior of the Bondoc peninsula.

Panicking at the sight of the armed men, our driver slammed his fist against the horn—as though that would make the terrifying sight disappear. The armed men, soldiers of the Philippine Army’s Thirty-first Infantry Battalion, merely scowled and waved us to a stop. My hands were shaking as I fumbled for my wallet and the government press pass inside. “I’m a journalist,” I explained to a soldier who was standing outside my window.

The soldiers crowded around our car, peering inside at me, a foreigner venturing so far into a countryside that was for them so dangerous. One of the soldiers, as young and fresh-faced as the peasant guerrilla in the front seat, spotted my military-issue knapsack on the floor. The communist commander and I stepped out of the car and as we watched anxiously, the soldiers emptied my pack, item by item, onto the car hood. They pointed suspiciously at my camouflage poncho and mosquito net. I hurriedly explained that I had bought the gear at Manila’s Quiapo

flea market, and the soldiers laughed, breaking the tension. They crammed my gear haphazardly back into the canvas pack, and it seemed that we were free to go. Our driver had begun easing the car through the roadblock when a stern-looking sergeant suddenly shouted at us to stop. The battalion commander would like to see me.

Mike and other communist rebels I had met in Manila had spoken fearfully of Captain Juanito Laudiangco, an unusually aggressive opponent of the NPA. A few days earlier, two guerrillas had been arrested at the checkpoint. They had been forced to lead an army patrol into the jungle, and afterward, Mike said, the two had been found with bullets in their heads. I wondered what the captain would do to my companions, and to me, if he discovered that his chief adversary, the communist front commander, was sitting in the car stopped at his checkpoint.

The short, dark-complexioned captain looked rather comical as he swaggered down the hillside wearing shorts, an olive-green T-shirt, and knee-high black rubber boots. He brushed aside my greeting. "What are you doing here? This is a critical area. You should not be here. You might be kidnapped by the rebels," he scolded. "You must get permission from brigade headquarters before you can go any further."

Two soldiers ordered my companions—the rebels Mike and Bel, our driver, and his nephew—out of the car and led them before the glowering captain. My heart was pounding as I introduced Mike as my translator, which was true, and Bel, the peasant guerrilla, as our guide. The captain's eyes darted from one man to the next, sizing up each of them.

"What's your name? Where do you live?" he demanded of Mike, who coolly offered Laudiangco an alias and false address. One by one, the captain interrogated the others. In a stroke of luck, he focused his attention on the driver's nephew—a fellow who knew nothing of Mike's identity or of our destination. After several minutes, Laudiangco seemed to lose interest. "You may proceed," he said with a touch of self-importance. Then as an afterthought, the captain leveled a menacing glare at the men standing before him. "I hope you're not NPAs," he muttered and then turned away.

Once safely beyond the checkpoint, we giddily celebrated our escape. Bel giggled and slapped himself in the face. "That was Captain Laudiangco!" he shouted, amazed that he had come eye to eye with the dreaded enemy and was still alive to talk about it. Mike was reserved, although he allowed himself a wan smile and a sigh of relief. "I was trying to hold myself together," he said quietly. "I thought it was all over."

From the outside, the bamboo hut was indistinguishable from the others that lined the rough gravel road that wound for miles through the forest. Mike, Bel, and I slipped out of the car and hurried inside. The old man and woman who greeted us were staunch supporters of the revolution, and their house was the final way station on the route from Manila to this communist "consolidated zone." After hurriedly exchanging whispered farewells with the old peasant couple, we plunged into the damp, black forest.

Bel led the way along the muddy track, walking quickly despite the weight of my bulging pack, which he had insisted on carrying. The trail had been churned into a yellowish glue by the hooves of *carabaos* (water buffalos) and by the steady passage of peasants and NPA guerrillas. We moved silently past darkened bamboo huts, arousing sleeping dogs whose furious barking quickened our pace. Sometimes, through the frail bamboo walls of a peasant's house, we could see the glow of an oil lamp or hear the murmur of quiet conversation. Bel knew these hills intimately, and he paused only momentarily before plunging right or left along the many forks that led deeper into the forest.

After an hour, we struggled up an especially difficult hill and emerged onto the crest of a ridge. To the west, perhaps 10 miles away, we could see the lights of fishing boats flickering like fireflies on the Ragay Gulf. Bel pointed south toward a jumble of hills that rose ominously in the darkness. Our destination, he declared, was one hour in that direction.

We cut across a field of sickly corn that sprawled down the steep hillside, and then we were engulfed again by the palm forest. As the terrain became more rugged, the forest gave way to a dripping, tangled jungle. Our shoes became encased in thick mud, which made each step a laborious effort. I was already drenched in sweat, and my breathing became more and more ragged. Mike was a few pounds overweight, and I could hear him panting heavily behind me. I took heart when even Bel began to labor.

The trail led up steep hills and then plunged quickly into deep ravines, only to cut up another hill and down, on and on. Our supposed two-hour journey had become nearly three when we arrived at a wood-frame, palm-roofed farmhouse set into a steep hillside. Fifteen guerrillas, their U.S.-designed M-16 rifles beside them, were sleeping inside, stretched out on wooden benches downstairs or lying in rows on the bamboo-slat floor upstairs, which they shared with the peasant family. They slept soundly without fear, for it was rare that soldiers ventured this far into the interior of the Bondoc peninsula, and never at night.

Although we were not even 20 miles from Captain Laudiangco's army battalion, we might as well have been 2,000 miles away. The distance

we had traveled was not physical as much as it was spiritual, metaphorical. We had crossed the invisible boundary that sometimes cleaved urban communities and adjacent barrios, the boundary that separated the communist revolution from the old Philippine society it sought to transform.

1

A Resilient Revolution

The revolution began in the fertile mind of a college English literature teacher fond of poetry and philosophy, but ultimately drawn to the writings of Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, and Mao Zedong. Indeed, the latter's works provided José María Sison with the framework for an armed revolution, a "protracted people's war" in which, he envisioned, historically oppressed Philippine peasants would form the nucleus of a communist army. From the countryside, the rebel army would gradually "encircle the cities" and advance "wave upon wave," as he put it, at the vanguard of a social and political revolution that would sweep to power.

The Philippine revolution was a product of the classical Third World fusion of peasant unrest and nationalism, and it was shaped by a convergence of forces at work in the 1960s: the war in Vietnam, humiliating inequities in the relationship between the Philippines and the United States, the political radicalism that was sweeping college campuses from Michigan to Manila, and the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China.

Sison began in Manila in the early 1960s by organizing small groups of students and workers around nationalist political and economic issues. While most leading Filipino intellectuals of the day dismissed him as a harmless crackpot, Sison was training a fanatically loyal and dedicated cadre of followers. By coopting a succession of nationalist issues, Sison and his protégés gradually built a radical student movement that gained thousands of adherents amid the social and political decay of the Philippines in the late 1960s. The exhortations of Mao and the Cultural Revolution attracted and inspired the newly converted Filipino radicals, thereby providing the fledgling movement with its ideological cement.

By early 1969, Sison had secretly formed a tiny revolutionary party from among his most trusted followers. Within a few weeks, the students forged an alliance with a few dozen peasant rebels who were remnants of previously failed communist-led rebellions in Central Luzon (the country's rice bowl), and a guerrilla war was launched.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of radical students by then had come to accept Sison's argument that an armed revolution was necessary to "liberate" the Philippines from the forces of imperialism and feudalism. By the time Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and moved to crush dissent in September 1972, Sison's Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) had grown to nearly 2,000 members, and poorly armed New People's Army (NPA) squads were launching hit-and-run ambushes in Central Luzon, the Sierra Madre of northeast Luzon, and a few other pockets of the 1,000-mile-long archipelago.

In their zeal to emulate Mao's Red Guards, the student revolutionaries were given to excesses. They forbade the use of English, banned all music except for revolutionary songs, and even executed members who violated the movement's strict code of discipline. "When we joined, our strength and inspiration were what Mao told us," one veteran Party leader recalled years later, able now to laugh at the early movement's rigidity. "We were like kids, but we were able to survive."

Martial law marked the first critical test of survival for the struggling revolutionary movement. Hundreds of activists and Party members were arrested in Manila and other cities. In the countryside, coordinated assaults by government troops nearly wiped out the rebel armed forces. A misguided attempt in the northern Luzon province of Isabela to replicate Mao's self-contained Shensi province stronghold resulted in heavy losses and the dispersal of the few hundred guerrillas and supporters who survived. Similarly amateurish attempts to adopt Chinese and Vietnamese communist tactics ended in demoralizing failures. The key to survival, however, was the scattering of remaining Party cadres and guerrillas across several islands. By the late 1970s, military abuses against peasants in the countryside, worsening poverty, and unprecedented levels of official corruption had resulted in the steady growth of the CPP and its army.

For years, Marcos as well as the U.S. State Department and Pentagon had dismissed the NPA as little more than a nuisance. But by 1984 U.S. officials had been jolted from their lethargy by the spectacular expansion of guerrilla operations in the countryside and communist political activities in the cities. Dire assessments from Washington raised the specter of the CPP seizing power or forging a coalition government with moderate opposition forces. At the same time, government forces were spread dangerously thin by small, mobile rebel units scattered throughout 60

of the country's 73 provinces. Marcos and his political allies were discredited; the nonviolent political opposition was fragmented and lacked an alternative vision for governing.

In contrast, the revolutionary forces were well organized and well disciplined. The rebel movement offered a clear vision of the future, and its leaders were some of the brightest and most dedicated Filipinos who had come of age since the 1960s. By the eve of the February 1986 presidential election pitting Marcos against a political neophyte named Corazón Aquino—who offered herself as “the complete opposite of Marcos”—the forces of the Party-led National Democratic Front (NDF) seemed to be close to victory.

The communists had always smugly described Marcos as their best recruiter, and his sudden exit in 1986—and the rise of the popular Aquino—threw the movement into disarray. Recriminations about the Party's decision to boycott the 1986 presidential election resounded through the ranks of the CPP and the rebel army. A significant number of Party leaders and cadres argued that the revolutionary movement should cooperate with the new government and try its hand at legal politics. Yielding to pressure from the public and within the movement, the CPP leadership entered into cease-fire negotiations with the Aquino government. Four months of contentious talks led to a 60-day cease-fire, and when that lapsed in February 1987, the war resumed. By that time, the CPP leadership had dropped its conciliatory stance and had adopted a new, critical posture toward the Aquino government. Aquino's movement to the Right, brought about by her attempt to placate a restive military, made it easier for Party leaders to convince their forces of the correctness of the tougher line.

By 1989, as the guerrilla war entered its twentieth year, the revolution had reached a crossroads. CPP officials conceded that victory, either military or political, was at best years distant. Aquino's popularity and the CPP's unresolved internal debates about ideology and strategy stood as formidable challenges to the movement. Military-backed anticommunist vigilantes posed new problems for communist forces attempting to expand in the countryside, and in some areas the NPA had even been rolled back from former strongholds. Buoyed by the arrests of several top communist leaders and persistent rumors of wrangling over revolutionary strategy and tactics, Aquino boasted that 1988 would be remembered as the year the insurgency was broken. Armed forces strategists suddenly began talking of defeating the rebels by 1992, the end of Aquino's term.

For all the optimistic talk emanating from the government, the CPP and its armed and political forces were far from beaten and in fact remained a formidable long-term challenge to the government. By the military's estimates, in early 1989 the NPA had about 24,000 guerrillas, with an arsenal of more than 10,000 high-powered rifles, grenade launchers, and a few mortars—virtually all captured from government forces. The rebels controlled or influenced more than 8,000 of the country's 41,000 *barangays*, according to the military.¹ In Manila and other cities the communists had succeeded in gaining varying degrees of control over hundreds of labor unions and in establishing slum bases for urban guerrillas. The movement had succeeded in integrating a significant number of Catholic Church elements—priests, nuns, lay-workers, and even one or two bishops—into the National Democratic Front, a crucial development in a nation that is 85 percent Catholic. The participation of Church elements in the revolution had helped the movement overcome to some extent strong anticommunist sentiments imbedded in the psyche of most Filipinos. More practically, radical Church elements were providing support services to the guerrilla army in the countryside, while building links with middle-class, business, and professional elements in the cities.

From the beginning, the CPP had stressed political organizing over military action, and that still held true in early 1989. Lacking heavy weapons, the NPA remained incapable of challenging the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in a conventional sense. After 20 years of war, the movement had to be content with ambushing army convoys and patrols and overrunning isolated town halls, police stations, and small military detachments. The total number of deaths attributed to the guerrilla war in 1988 was approximately 5,000 soldiers, civilians, and rebels, which was modest when compared to other modern conflicts.

For years, the Philippine communists had proudly waged an indigenous revolution and had relied primarily on arms and materiel captured or bought from the AFP. In the early days of slavish Maoism, the revolution received token aid from China. But the aid pipeline was cut in 1975–1976 with the opening of diplomatic relations between Manila and Beijing and the death of Mao, leaving the NPA to survive by its own devices. The rebels pioneered a campaign called *agaw armas* (literally, grab guns), which relied on small unit attacks and assassinations to painstakingly build the communist arsenal gun by gun.

Building the revolution without foreign aid became a point of pride with the rebels, and it also gave the movement the flexibility to make its own decisions without having to worry about how a foreign benefactor would react. The indigenous nature of the revolution also had a soothing effect on many middle- and upper-class Filipinos, who argued that the

absence of foreign involvement was proof that the movement was “uniquely Filipino” and not really a classic Marxist-Leninist revolution.

But communist leaders had mapped out a strategy that called for an escalation of the war in 1989–1990, with the hope of forcing a military stalemate by 1992. Virtually every Communist Party official and guerrilla commander with whom I spoke emphasized that the NPA would have difficulty attacking larger military camps and advancing the war to a stalemate without mortars, bazookas, and even surface-to-air missiles. But without heavier weapons, the guerrilla war could stagnate, and as a result the NPA would find it difficult to convince more peasants to support a movement that did not seem to have a chance of winning. So for the first time in the movement’s history, CPP leaders were appealing openly to communist countries and radical movements to aid the Philippine revolution. There were hints by some rebel officials that a source of heavy weapons had already been arranged and that NPA officers were abroad being trained to use the weapons.

North Korea, rather than China or the Soviet Union, loomed as the most likely source of aid for the rebels. The CPP had developed cordial ties with the communist regime in Pyongyang. (The Soviet Union and China, on the other hand, had worked hard to improve relations with the Philippines and appeared as of early 1989 to have little to gain by aiding the NPA.) The rebel movement had also developed close relations with Nicaragua and to a lesser extent with Cuba, Libya, and elements of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The acquisition of heavy weapons by the NPA would dramatically change the complexion of the war and rapidly bring the guerrillas close to parity with government forces. As of early 1989, the AFP had only an estimated 70,000 combat-effective troops with which to oppose the NPA and the Muslim insurgents in the south—far less than the 10 to 1 ratio deemed necessary to wage a successful campaign against a guerrilla army. The infusion of heavier military hardware into the conflict would also raise the stakes for the United States, and with two prized military bases on the line, the Pentagon would likely respond by supplying the Philippines with even more sophisticated U.S. weaponry and other forms of support.

The talk of heavy weapons drew attention away from the realm in which the rebels were most dangerous and had advanced the farthest in 20 years of struggle—the political front. The broad extent of the communist political network became apparent to me as I journeyed inside the revolution, in urban areas and the countryside. The CPP

cadres I met represented a cross-section of Philippine society: government bureaucrats, parish priests, labor organizers, human rights workers, journalists, teachers, lawyers, farmers, fishermen, and students. Even more astonishing in its breadth was the revolution's support network of allies—some of them reluctant—and sympathizers, which included members of congress, provincial governors, Catholic bishops, mayors, wealthy businesspeople, and powerful landowners.

Aquino had frustrated the rebel movement's inroads with the urban middle-class, students, labor, and other key groups in Manila and other major urban centers. But in one of the most striking and little-noticed developments I observed, in the smaller cities and towns of the countryside—where NPA influence was far more pronounced, yet hardly noted by the Manila press—communist forces were enjoying remarkable success in weaving a web of alliances with the middle and upper echelons of power. That point was driven home to me during a bizarre encounter in March 1987.

Escorted by four or five Party cadres and peasant guerrillas, I arrived one day at noon in a small town only 60 miles from Manila. At a busy restaurant within sight of the town hall and police station, we were joined by an elderly woman with fair Spanish features who was clearly a member of the local aristocracy. Waving a silk fan to ward off flies and the sultry noonday heat, the old woman chatted gaily with my guerrilla guide, a woman named Damit, and the young communist in turn affectionately addressed the matron as "grandmother." Later, Damit explained that the woman was matriarch of the town's wealthiest and most politically powerful family. The family owned all the prime agricultural land for miles around, the town's only pharmacy, and the only bus company traveling the only road linking the town to the outside world. Indeed, this family represented everything the NPA guerrillas had been fighting to destroy, and yet, Damit told me, the family was providing food, money, medicine, and other assistance to the rebels. As the encounter in the restaurant illustrated, neither side was making any effort to hide the fact. "How had this 'feudal ruler' been persuaded to support her sworn enemies?" I asked Damit.

"We talked to her," the young guerrilla replied with a knowing smile. "We explained the movement to her."

Damit and her companions never had to threaten the family. By then, everyone in the Philippines knew that the rebels were capable of killing their enemies. Everyone also knew it was far easier, far safer, and certainly far more profitable—at least in the short term—to make peace with the rebels and give them what they wanted, up to a point.

By the late 1980s, such arrangements were hardly isolated, as I was reminded repeatedly. Politicians, landlords, businesspeople, even Catholic

bishops, were reaching accommodations with the rebels and supplying them with money, shelter, and weapons in exchange for protection from criminals, guarantees against assassination, support on election day, the right to travel through communist-dominated areas, and unhampered business activities. In much of the countryside and even in some major cities, those Filipinos who would have the most to lose after a triumphant revolution had come to view support of the rebels as a price of doing business.

Through a skillful blend of coercion and persuasion, the rebels are weaving themselves into the fabric of Philippine society, stitching together thousands of relationships and arrangements that are slowly neutralizing members of the traditional economic and political elite. The scenes of cooperation between the communist underground and the nation's elite, as represented most vividly to me in the person of the fastidious provincial matriarch with her silk fan, raise the possibility of a time, perhaps years in the future, when the revolutionary movement will have consolidated a position of influence over large portions of the establishment in areas of the countryside. Spanish, U.S., and Japanese conquerors all used the cooptation of the Philippine elite to maintain power, and the NPA in its drive to seize power appears to be applying with some success the same strategy from below. The extent to which such cooptations could be a factor in the revolution's success or failure was not clear by the late 1980s, but the phenomenon seemed potentially disturbing for those who viewed the revolution as an isolated rural movement estranged from the establishment. How have the Communist Party of the Philippines and its NPA guerrillas reached the point where some of the Philippines' richest and most powerful figures are paying homage? The answer lies in the history and inner workings of this independent and innovative revolutionary movement.

Having demonstrated considerable resiliency and prowess throughout two decades of guerrilla warfare and political struggle, the CPP and New People's Army have established a position as long-term players for political power in the Philippines. The movement has weathered many crises since 1969—periods of intense doctrinal debates and internal disputes among the leadership, arrests, political blunders, and military failures—and has emerged each time to flourish. Although the 1988 arrests of several rebel leaders hurt morale within the ranks of the revolutionary movement to some extent, the loss of national Party leaders had little or no effect on the ability of the regional communist commands to continue the revolution. The period of rapid expansion that the CPP

and its army had enjoyed from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s had been stalled, but there was little evidence the movement was in strategic decline. Rebel losses—in personnel, weapons, and territory—in many cases were offset by corresponding gains in other areas. The stunning rollback of the communists on the island of Mindanao in 1986 and 1987, for example, was answered by dramatic NPA expansion on the main island of Luzon.

From what I witnessed in the countryside, the NPA has become a significant national movement not so much by terror and killing—although these tactics are selectively employed—but by the painstaking forging of bonds with an impoverished, landless peasantry that has been ignored by a succession of governments. The rebel movement has expanded its base by addressing a number of key issues that the government has either been unwilling or unable to resolve. Agrarian reform, social services, rudimentary health care, law enforcement, justice, and other local services are being provided in an effective, if sometimes brutal, fashion by the rebels. To the average peasant who has never known a government to do much more than collect taxes, these are all dramatic developments. By early 1989, the revolutionary movement had succeeded in sinking deep roots throughout the archipelago, and it had altered, perhaps irreversibly, Philippine politics and society.

The revolution was in its tenth year when it reached the rugged hills of southern Quezon province in 1979, and like most of his neighbors, Dante vividly remembered the day. It was nearing nightfall when eight weary looking young men and women armed with pistols and one-shot derringers walked into the hilltop clearing Dante had carved from the coconut palm forest and approached the peasant's bamboo-and-palm hut.

"I'm Comrade Boy," one of the men announced, holding out his hand in greeting. "We are from the New People's Army."

Since the early 1970s, Dante had heard occasional rumors about the rebel army and its activities in other provinces. The guerrillas were said to be helping poor farmers in Central Luzon and Bicol by punishing robbers and thieves. Dante invited the NPA squad into his hut to share a dinner of rice and dried fish, and by the light of a small homemade lamp, he and his wife listened as the young rebels explained their reasons for taking up arms against the government. They were fighting to improve the lives of poor farmers like Dante, Boy said. The revolution was against the big landlords, the "oppressors" and "exploiters" who, he said, got rich from the labor of peasants such as Dante. Later, the

rebels encouraged Dante to tell them about his problems and the difficulties of other local farmers. Dante mentioned that the barrio was plagued by a gang of *carabao* rustlers, who operated with the knowledge, if not collusion, of the military.

The rebels returned, occasionally at first, then more and more frequently as time passed. Within a few months, they won the gratitude of the peasants by catching and executing the leaders of the *carabao* rustling gang. If some in the village were uncertain about supporting the guerrillas, the killings served as a reminder that it was prudent to stay in their good graces.

Soon, the regular political sessions conducted by the visiting Communist Party cadres moved beyond discussion of local grievances. They began to teach Dante and his neighbors that "U.S. imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism" were the three great evils responsible for their poverty. Gradually, to deepen the process of politicization, the cadres organized entire families into separate clandestine organizations for farmers, women, and youths.

In three years, Barangay Rose—as the rebels had code-named Dante's barrio—had become one of the most organized villages in southern Quezon's Bondoc peninsula. Virtually all of the farmers and their families were members of Party organizations and attended regular political classes as well as fed and sheltered guerrillas and CPP cadres. That same year, the rebels helped the peasants establish a barrio revolutionary council, a Party shadow government, that provided everything from health services to political education to marriage counseling. With armed guerrillas frequenting the barrio, the legal *barangay* council was persuaded to defer its most important functions to the communist government.

To continue the process of political indoctrination among the peasants, an armed propaganda unit of a half dozen men and women with rifles and pistols was assigned full-time to Barangay Rose. Increasingly, the peasants were mobilized to aid the communist war effort. They contributed portions of their rice and banana harvests to local rebel units, acted as couriers, and reported military movements to the closest NPA camp.

By 1985, the barrio revolutionary council—which by now included some members of the legal *barangay* council—was openly governing Barangay Rose. The communists organized Dante and a few other trusted farmers into a village militia. Armed with shotguns and a few antiquated Springfield and Garand rifles, the peasants patrolled the barrio, arresting and sometimes executing lawbreakers and adjudicating minor disputes, including domestic quarrels. Occasionally, the militia would even join guerrilla units in ambushing army patrols and raiding government outposts. In guerrilla parlance, Barangay Rose was now a consolidated zone, a secure base from which the revolution was spreading to neigh-

boring towns and villages. The communists counted the barrio as a measure of the revolution's success, a place where 80 out of 85 families had at least one member working in the rebel movement. That success was anchored on people such as Dante.

A humid tropical dusk was settling on the jungled hills of southern Quezon one day in October 1987 as a 20-year-old Party cadre named Joy led me for the first time along a twisting, muddy trail to the clearing where Dante lived with his wife and four children. Dante was standing outside his hut, burning brush in the twilight as filthy pigs and scrawny chickens shuffled about his feet. He greeted Joy with a smile, shook my hand, then studied me carefully. For years, the Party had taught him that U.S. imperialism was one of the root causes of his poverty and the number one enemy of the revolution. Now, face to face with a visitor from the United States, he seemed uncertain whether to be curious or suspicious.

At 38, Dante stood barely five feet but looked as stout and strong as a *carabao*. His chest was broad, and his arms and legs rippled with well-developed muscles. His bearded face, darkened by years in the sun, was remarkable for its gentleness and after a few minutes of sizing me up, he began to smile easily.

Dante was by now deeply involved in the communist revolution that had swept Barangay Rose, and his dedication had not gone unrewarded by Party officials. In 1980, he had been selected to head the communist barrio peasants' association. Five years later, when the village militia was formed, Dante was named deputy commander. He was one of 20 peasants in Barangay Rose to be given membership in the exclusive Communist Party, even though he had never attended school beyond the elementary level.

Cursed by poor soil, primitive farming techniques, and lack of education, most Philippine peasants are reduced to a life of subsistence and struggle. Like his father before him, Dante toiled to support his family by slash-and-burn farming on plots cleared from the steep hillsides and by gathering coconuts to sell for a few centavos in the nearest town.

By all indications, the war between Aquino's government and the guerrillas had reached a stalemate here as in other areas of the Philippines. After army units abandoned small, vulnerable outposts in villages such as Barangay Rose, they concentrated in fortified camps along the National Highway on the peninsula's northern fringe or along secondary roads that hugged the coast. Even along these roads, the soldiers traveled at great peril. Every few months, in an increasingly familiar pattern, NPA units would ambush an army convoy or patrol, usually destroying an armored car or troop truck with a homemade land mine and capturing 10 or 15 rifles. The army would announce it was in hot pursuit of the

guerrillas, step up patrols, and increase its checkpoints; then after a few days of fruitless activity the army would settle back into its fortified camps to await the next NPA ambush or raid. Meanwhile, Communist Party cadres continued their organizing work among the peasants.

After nearly a decade of political organizing and guerrilla warfare in southern Quezon, the communists claimed to have developed a support network of 30,000 men, women, and children in an underground network of Party organizations. From a single propaganda unit armed with pistols and derringers in 1979, the NPA's Southern Quezon Front had built 2 combat-savvy guerrilla companies numbering more than 120 local peasant fighters armed with captured U.S.-designed M-16 automatic rifles and M-79 grenade launchers. Each of the 3 district CPP committees of the front had established 15-member guerrilla units, which conducted small local attacks on militia squads or anticommunist vigilantes and joined the companies for major operations. Another 100 farmers were organized into a front militia, which performed police functions in communist-dominated barrios and supplemented the companies and district units in larger operations.

In sufficient force, the Philippine armed forces could travel to any barrio in southern Quezon, including Barangay Rose. Sometimes the military succeeded in disrupting NPA activities and forced the guerrillas to move to other villages. But, surrounded by an often hostile populace, the troops would rarely remain for more than a few tense days. Even if some peasants preferred to support the government, the military could not guarantee their safety. As soon as the army left an area, the Party cadres and guerrillas returned, and anyone who had shared with the military information about communist activities was summarily executed.

After years of relative peace and prosperity under communist rule, the war unexpectedly brushed Barangay Rose one day in mid-February 1988. Early that morning, the army airlifted 58 soldiers to a village a few miles away. Throughout the day, the NPA peasant network tracked the soldiers and warned the guerrillas and their supporters of the approaching danger. In the past, the occasional patrols had turned back toward the coastal road before reaching Barangay Rose, but this time they pushed onward. Dusk was settling when the soldiers arrived in the "barrio center," a collection of several shopping stalls, bamboo houses, and a wooden schoolhouse. Brusquely, the soldiers ordered the frightened villagers to remain in their houses, and they obliged.

At about the same time, a Party cadre arrived at Dante's house and asked the peasant to guide him to an NPA camp hidden in the jungle

a few miles away. Unaware of the presence of soldiers nearby, they set out after dinner for the barrio center, a 15-minute walk, Dante in the lead with his old Springfield rifle in one hand and a palm-frond torch in the other.

Dante may not have seen the army sentry outside the schoolhouse before he opened fire with his M-16 automatic rifle at a distance of 20 feet. One slug ripped through Dante's jaw, but he managed to run a few hundred yards to a nearby creek before collapsing. Finding him there, the soldiers sprayed him with automatic rifle fire. The next day, the troops displayed Dante's bullet-riddled corpse on the lawn outside the school as a warning to the residents of Barangay Rose. Summoning villagers to the school, the soldiers forced them to sign an affidavit attesting that Dante was an NPA guerrilla.

The NPA immediately sought to avenge Dante's death, and they took up ambush positions along the road that the army patrol would have to take upon exiting Barangay Rose. But the troops were wary, and they waited in a schoolhouse in the next barrio, shielded by villagers. After two days, the guerrillas withdrew. On the third day, the soldiers passed without incident along the road where the rebels had lain in ambush.

One of the first to greet the communist organizers when they arrived in the coconut palm forest of southern Quezon a decade earlier, Dante was the first of their supporters to be killed. After 10 years of quiet rebellion, war had come to Barangay Rose.