

Heroes Then: The Collaboration Issues of President Emilio Aguinaldo and Gen. Artemio Ricarte (1942–1945)

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration during *the Japanese occupation of the Philippines* was a thorny issue when World War II ended in 1945 and after the independence a year later. A People's Court was formed in 1945 to try the guilty parties which included Commonwealth government officials and civilians. The amnesty proclamation by President Manuel Roxas in 1948, however, ended the trials of these collaborators with the intention of “healing the nation” after the tragedy of war. But the stigma of being a collaborator

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remained for a time for these officials and civilians. Two of them were considered heroes during the fight for Philippine independence from 1896 to 1898—Emilio Aguinaldo and Artemio Ricarte. This article narrates the circumstances that gave rise to the accusation of collaboration against these two men. It also attempts to show how history dealt with the stigma that as time went by, the memory of cooperating with the Japanese was eventually lost in the biographies of Aguinaldo, yet still remains with Ricarte.

KEYWORDS

collaboration, Emilio Aguinaldo, Artemio Ricarte, Japanese occupation, World War II

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War was an event in Philippine history that totally changed the lives of many Filipinos of that era. It was a period dubbed as “tatlong taong walang Diyos” referring to the total breakdown of morality because of the economic hardship and the struggle to survive during the three years of Japanese occupation.

There was also the political dilemma of the period. Historian Teodoro Agoncillo called the personalities of this period, “heroes and heels,” in two of the chapters of his two-volume work *The Fateful Years*.¹ The “heroes,” of course, were the ones who resisted and fought the Japanese and the “heels” were the collaborators.

The collaboration issue became one of the problems that confronted the last year of the Commonwealth government and the early years of the newly-independent Philippine Republic in 1946. The dilemma was acute for the charges of collaboration and treason were brought against former Commonwealth government officials and private civilians. Arrests and charges were made and a People's Court was convened. But in the end, the collaboration issue was not resolved with certainty, even with the amnesty granted by President Manuel Roxas in 1949.² The stigma of collaboration lingered for several more years on the accused until it finally faded away.

Historians and other writers have tried to explain, justify, and even condemn Filipino collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. There were two plausible explanations for such an action. The first explanation given by the government officials was that their cooperation with the Japanese was based on instructions issued by President Manuel Quezon and Gen. Douglas MacArthur before the two men left Manila and, later, the country. The other explanation, of course, was survival. The first reason was the argument used by officials like President Jose P. Laurel, et al. who served under the Japanese-sponsored Second Republic with the intention of protecting the interests and well-being of the Filipino people. The second reason was the justification of civilians who experienced the hardships of surviving through the occupation years by engaging in blackmarket schemes or cooperating with the enemy in exchange for food and other favors or benefits.

There is, however, another side to the collaboration issue. This concerns two personalities who were already heroes in their own right even before World War II—former President Emilio Aguinaldo and General Artemio Ricarte.

This article examines the roles these two men played during the Japanese occupation. Both collaborated with the enemy—that we are sure of. However, there is a unique characteristic to it. What was the reason for their collaboration? Aguinaldo did not receive any instructions from Quezon as he was not a government official. Ricarte was in Japan and was brought back to the Philippines after living the life of an exile for over 30 years. Both remained anti-American even though Aguinaldo swore allegiance to the U.S. following his capture and imprisonment in 1901.

Both figures became propaganda tools for the Japanese, but for what gains? Was their idea of independence a reason to collaborate? Aguinaldo only had one economic motive but, in the end, he was charged with political collaboration. Ricarte died before he could face trial for his actions but had he lived, he would have surely been charged with the same offense.

These questions remain even though the issue of collaboration would have been downplayed in the post-World War II biographies of these two men. Even Aguinaldo, like many of the collaborators who were amnestied, continued to be honored until his death in 1964. Both men—Aguinaldo and Ricarte—ended up temporarily

disgraced but were eventually honored as historical figures with their reputations intact.³

HEROES OF WAR

EMILIO AGUINALDO

Emilio Aguinaldo was born on 22 March 1869 in Kawit, Cavite (Cavite el Viejo) to a wealthy and influential family. His father, Carlos, was appointed *gobernadorcillo* for several terms. Aguinaldo followed in his father's footsteps and was chosen *capitan municipal* of Kawit in 1894. Months later, he joined the Katipunan choosing the name *Magdalo*, a name also given to the faction of the Katipunan (the other was the *Magdiwang*) which he set up in his province.

When the revolution began in 1896, the Katipuneros in Cavite succeeded in driving away the Spaniards from the province. Aguinaldo was later elected president of a revolutionary government (*pamahalaang panghihimagsik*) on 22 March 1897. After the Spanish forces recaptured Cavite, Aguinaldo and his forces retreated to Biak-na-Bato in San Miguel, Bulacan where a stalemate ensued between the Filipino and the Spanish forces. A truce was agreed upon and, in exchange for an indemnity, amnesty, and promised reforms, Aguinaldo and his officers went into exile in Hong Kong in December 1897.

The Spanish-American War in 1898 brought a dramatic turn of events in the Philippines. After the Americans won the Battle of Manila Bay in 1898, Aguinaldo returned from

Hong Kong and resumed the revolution against Spain. He then declared Philippine independence on 12 June 1898.

But the Filipinos soon realized that the Americans were to become their new colonizers. After the Spanish defeat in 1898, the U.S. began sending fresh troops to the Philippines. In 1899, Aguinaldo convened a Congress in Malolos, Bulacan. The delegates wrote a constitution and established the Philippine Republic with Aguinaldo as president in January 1899.

Three weeks later, the persistent friction with the Americans erupted into a conflict in February 1899. The Philippine-American War lasted for three years, ending with Aguinaldo's capture in 1901 after which he pledged allegiance to the U.S. and returned to private life on the family farm. He was briefly in the limelight again when he ran for the presidency of the Philippine Commonwealth but he lost to Manuel L. Quezon. He was charged with collaboration by the Americans for helping the Japanese during World War II but was later freed in a general amnesty. He retired to private life but continued helping veteran *revolucionarios* until his death at the age of 94 on 6 February 1964.⁴

ARTEMIO RICARTE

Artemio Ricarte was born on 20 October 1866, in Batac, Ilocos Norte. It was during his stint as a schoolteacher that he was assigned to Cavite, specifically in the town of San Francisco de Malabon (now General Trias). He joined the Katipunan and took the *nom de guerre* "Vibora" (Viper).

He became active as a general in the Philippine Revolution and, during the elections for a revolutionary government in Tejeros, was elected captain-general. He fought during the Philippine-American War but was captured and imprisoned in 1900. He was exiled to Guam in 1901 but was given permission to return on condition that he take the oath of allegiance to the U.S. Ricarte refused. He was not allowed to disembark from the ship and was brought by the Americans to Hong Kong instead.

He managed to sneak back into the country in 1903 and tried to get support from former *revolucionarios* to start a revolution against American colonial rule. He managed to elude arrest for over a year before he was captured in 1904. He was tried and was given an 11-year jail sentence at the Bilibid Prisons in Manila.

Ricarte was released for good behavior in 1910 after serving six years. Upon his release, the American authorities brought him at the Custom House and asked him to take his allegiance to the U.S. Ricarte again refused and was immediately deported to Hong Kong. He spent five years in the British crown colony before he relocated to Japan where he settled while regularly keeping abreast of events in the Philippines.

After almost 30 years in exile, Ricarte was sent to the Philippines with his family to help in the Japanese occupation propaganda. In 1945, when the American liberation forces landed in the Philippines, he fled with the Japanese Army to the mountains in the North where he died on July 31 of dysentery.⁵

FAME AND OBSCURITY

If there was one thing that the two revolutionary figures had to deal with, it is obscurity. Following his dismal loss in the Commonwealth elections, Aguinaldo resumed his private life as a farmer and businessman. He still headed the *Asociacion de los Veteranos de la Revolucion*, devoting his time for the welfare of the veterans of the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War in his office in San Nicolas, Manila. Ricarte settled in Yokohama after the war where he remained in contact with Filipinos such as Senator Manuel Roxas and President Manuel Quezon who found time to visit him.

Then World War II came. During the early days of the Japanese occupation, the invaders were already exploiting Aguinaldo and Ricarte. Gen. Masami Maeda met Aguinaldo at his home in Kawit, Cavite in early January 1942. Ricarte and his family returned to the Philippines on January 8. The Japanese used these two men as part of the propaganda machine to pacify the islands and to attract Filipinos to Japanese rule. After all, both men were heroes of the Philippine revolution and fought the Americans. They were also friends of the Japanese since the revolution.

Aguinaldo's active role during the Japanese occupation is well-documented in the collaboration case filed against him in the People's Court.⁶ He was a member of the Council of State led by Jorge Vargas and of the committee that drafted the Constitution creating the Second Republic. The most serious issue leveled against him was his broadcast over radio station KZRH on 1 February 1942 calling on

General Douglas MacArthur to surrender the USAFFE forces in Bataan. This broadcast, more than his other activities, made Aguinaldo an unpopular figure with the American press calling him a “quisling.”⁷ (See Appendix 1 for the text of the Aguinaldo broadcast.)

Although Ricarte was given privileges in his work as a propagandist and (according to him) promised a government position, he was a failed prospect from the start. The sources and materials about Ricarte’s mission are few and by the first half of the first year of the occupation, he was practically useless to the Japanese except as an ubiquitous presence or fixture during important occasions.

Newspaperman Armando Malay, who lived through and witnessed the period, described Ricarte’s role during those times:

Fortunately or unfortunately, the Japanese found enough number of more prestigious Filipinos who were willing to establish a government under their auspices. Ricarte was reduced, at best, to the innocuous role of an elder statesman and, at worse, of a propagandist who exhorted sullen audiences to cooperate with the Japanese “liberators.”⁸

It is known that following the establishment of the Japanese military administration in 1942, Ricarte submitted a proposal to the authorities for the formation of a dictatorial government called a “Pamahalaang Magulang.” This system of governance was probably patterned after the administrative set-up he planned in the

early 1900s. Nothing, however, seemed to have come out of this proposal.

Two activities during the occupation placed Ricarte temporarily back in the limelight: one was the raising of the Filipino flag with Aguinaldo during the ceremonies establishing the Second Philippine Republic. The other was the establishment of the MAKAPILI in 1944 to which he initially declined membership but was eventually persuaded by Benigno Aquino, Sr. to become one of its officials.

Then, news of the coming of the American liberation forces started spreading in 1944. By January 1945, the headquarters of the Japanese Imperial Army evacuated to Baguio along with President Jose P. Laurel's cabinet and other Japanese supporters including Ricarte. The latter was accompanied by his aide Col. Konichiro Ota who became the source for Ricarte's last moments. It was said that Ricarte had the option to be evacuated to Japan with the Laurel group but he refused saying, "I cannot take refuge in Japan at this critical moment when my people are in actual distress. I will stay in my motherland to the last."⁹

His group marched from Bayambang, Nueva Vizcaya to the Mountain Province where Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita's forces were planning a last stand. But Ricarte was already suffering from dysentery which, at his age, proved to be fatal. He died on 31 July 1945. He was buried by his companions under a tree in Kiangnan, Mountain Province where his remains were exhumed nine years later. Ricarte is presently buried at the Libingan ng Mga Bayani.

Aguinaldo, on the other hand, was arrested in February 1945 and was charged with treason a year later. He remained under house arrest until the amnesty granted by the Roxas Administration in 1948. Aguinaldo served briefly in the government as a member of the Council of State under President Quirino and eventually spent his retirement at his home in Cavite. He died on 6 February 1964 at the age of 94, several months after witnessing the change of the date of Independence Day from 4 July to 12 June.

ON COLLABORATION: A DISCUSSION

The collaboration cases of Ricarte and Aguinaldo are, in a sense, unique. They are unique because of the same circumstances that both had: They were not in any way connected to the Commonwealth government thus, they did not receive any instruction from President Quezon to cooperate with with the Japanese. Both were not ordinary civilians who chose to collaborate with the Japanese for material gain or for survival. They were well-known figures in Philippine history. If we were to follow their line of thinking, the two men collaborated for the attainment of independence—Ricarte with his *Pamahalaang Magulang* and Aguinaldo with his membership in the Preparatory Committee for Philippine Independence (PCPI) that formed the Second Republic.

The options of what a civilian or government official could do during the occupation were later spelled out by Aguinaldo in an autobiography written with Vicente

Albano Pacis, Jr.—*A Second Look at America*—which he later disclaimed saying it was “unauthorized.”

Conspicuous Filipinos whose names and prestige the Japanese wanted to exploit had no resort to the safety of anonymity. They had but one of five alternatives: to resist and risk death, to comply to a degree sufficient to buy relative safety, to feign conformity as a cloak for sabotage, to flee to the mountains, or to seek escape in suicide.¹⁰

And for Aguinaldo, it turned out to be the second option:

I was one of those who were helplessly misused by the Japanese. Perhaps banking on my old forgotten feud with the Americans, they expected me to be their natural friend. They ghost-wrote speeches for me to read over the radio and articles to publish in newspapers and magazines. They had me hoist the Philippine flag at the inauguration of the puppet republic. It was one of the penalties of the fame and prominence with which, rightly or wrongly, history has honored me, that I could not, like most of my countrymen, lose myself in the multitude beyond the recognition and reach of the enemy.¹¹

Nevertheless, as shown in the evidence presented during his trial for treason, Aguinaldo was apparently willing to use this prominence to ask the USAFFE to surrender in Bataan and Corregidor and, later, to ask the guerrilla leaders to surrender. His reason? He emphasized

Japan's supremacy during the war and the lives that were being wasted in fighting the enemy.¹² This was during the first half of the occupation period. In the second half, his discourse dwelt on what Ara described as Asianism as Philippine independence and the inauguration of the Second Republic drew near.

Later, his cooperation with the Japanese extended further with business transactions involving his transportation business. But this kind of economic collaboration was limited and apparently was not enough as evidence for him to be charged with it.

Aguinaldo did not deny that he collaborated. But, unlike the government officials of the Japanese-sponsored Republic, he did not collaborate because he was ordered to. He co-opted because he felt he needed to but, at the same time (as he would later write in his defense to the People's Court), he still remained pro-American.

Civilians who fell into the hands of the Japanese had to play some such game too in order to keep their heads. The more conspicuous they were politically and intellectually, the harder they had to play. It was a dirty necessary game.

I was not one of those few who could say that they had received instructions from President Quezon as to how to deal with the Japanese. I did not receive any directive or advice from him or anyone else. But even if I had, it would not have done me or anybody else any good.¹³

Ricarte, on the other hand, collaborated more deeply because of his anti-Americanism and gratitude for the hospitality Japan gave to him for the past 20 years. For him, it was apparently an unconditional duty that was given to him to help the Japanese in their propaganda during the occupation. As Aguinaldo said:

One of the early acts of the Japanese was to bring back from Japan one of my former generals, Artemio Ricarte, to contact me and other former colleagues still living in order to try to rally us behind the Japanese. Ricarte made it brutally plain that the Japanese would not stand for evasions, that it was a do-or-die proposition. He boasted that he himself was to be set up as head of the government and that he would, as such, know how to square accounts. Brandishing a samurai sword which he claimed Premier Tojo himself had given him “with which to cut the American chain off my dear motherland,” he talked in terms of threat and blackmail.

I could not but look upon Ricarte with mixed pity and contempt....¹⁴

Ara pointed out that Ricarte’s nationalism might have been an influence for his idea of independence. This, plus the hardline nationalism of the Japanese ultra-rightists, hardened his stance against the Americans and solidified his relationship with the Japanese and agreed to their idea of expansionism in Asia. He despised the Americanization of the Philippines and found temporary hope in the Commonwealth. But his nationalist desire was also

frustrated with Quezon's machinations with the Americans and the eventual 10-year transition period. Moreover, this might also be the reason why Ricarte refused to return home to the Philippines—a decision Aguinaldo assumed Ricarte may have regretted:

When the Japanese flew him from Tokyo in January 1942, Ricarte saw the Philippines for the first time since 1901. How he must have regretted having lived away from so much economic and cultural progress in his own country under the American flag! For much of it was still evident in spite of the virtual paralyzation of normal activities under the early Japanese rule.¹⁵

But time and exile already made Ricarte a forgotten historical relic to many Filipinos. He was almost of the same age as Aguinaldo and, like his president, a generation away from the Filipinos of the peacetime era. His generation—those who became the politicians of the Commonwealth government—knew of his radical ideas of independence during the early American period and shunned him. He was, for all its worth, a propaganda mouthpiece for the Japanese. One wonders what would have happened to him if he survived the war—surely he would have been arrested and imprisoned. But with his age and health, he, like Aguinaldo, would have been placed under house arrest while waiting for his trial. But then again, he never swore allegiance to the Americans or to the Commonwealth government. He was, at best, still an exile in his own homeland.

There was also the idea of Japan being an ally. This alliance was forged when the Japanese supported the Philippine revolution against Spain. It was still this kind of Japan that Ricarte and Aguinaldo saw occupying the Philippines during World War II. It was this kind of a Japanese ally that gave Filipinos their “independence” in 1943.

So how then should we view these two prominent figures in our history in light of the post-World War II era?

The disease of our modern-day historical amnesia had made many forget the roles Aguinaldo and Ricarte played during the Japanese occupation. It was much like the case of government officials who collaborated and were arrested, tried, and later, amnestied. Many of them later had monuments, shrines, and institutions built or established in their honor. Our history has to be re-examined particularly to place the lives of controversial figures in the proper context in all the periods of our history. This is not to condemn but to properly understand them. It is probably a solution to what Malay said in his introduction to the Ricarte memoirs, to questions “that will vex historians for some time.”

Appropriately, this article ends with bittersweet comments on these men in our country’s history. Ricarte in 1938 was already described in a *Philippines Herald* editorial as a figure “who belongs to history.” Aguinaldo, on the other hand, was a figure who, at his passing in 1964, was described as “someone who had lived too long in our history.”

Both would have achieved glory if they perished on the battlefield. Instead, collaboration made a stain on their biographies.

APPENDIX

Text of the radio broadcast of former President Emilio Aguinaldo to Gen. Douglas MacArthur on Radio KZRH, 1 February 1942 in Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 145–146.

As one of your loyal friends, I wish to open my heart to you and make this appeal at this critical moment confronting our people. It was, and still is my earnest desire to spare the Philippines from the ravages of war and let my countrymen continue enjoying peace and prosperity.

It is to my great regret that the present war broke out between Japan and the United States with the result that the Philippines has become a battleground. Loss has been heavy to both life and property. Numerous families were driven away from their homes, suffering from hunger, misery, and all sorts of untold hardships. Many costly public improvements, including bridges, roads, railroads, shipyards, docks, piers, and airdromes, have been destroyed. In some instances, even private houses have been reduced to ashes. Hundreds and thousands of Filipinos, civilians as well as those in active military services, have paid dearly with their lives, their tribute to the war. My countrymen had to take up arms against the Japanese Army for the simple reason that the Philippines was under the American flag. Now conditions have changed. With most of the

country already occupied by the Japanese Army, the fate of the Philippines is definitely decided. To continue fighting against the Japanese Army is not only futile, it will also bring about more useless sacrifices and disaster on the part of the Filipinos. It will compel American soldiers under your command to continue fighting a hopeless war.

My dear General: You have so often said that you are always desirous of promoting the welfare of the Filipinos; you have so often expressed your affection for my people. You declared Manila an open city in order to avoid the unnecessary loss of the lives and properties of innocent civilians. I am firmly convinced of your affection for the Philippines and your humanitarian attitude to all. Now that most of the Philippines is occupied by Japanese forces, it is beyond my comprehension why resistance should be continued. Such resistance would exact further sacrifice on the Filipinos without any effect to the Americans.

I honestly recommend, as one of your old friends, that you pay due consideration to humanity and stop this useless fighting against the Japanese Army and thereby avoid wanton loss of life and property not only of the Filipinos but the Americans as well, if you really feel, as I believe you do, sincere affection for the soldiers under your command, both Filipino and American. As one of your sincere friends, I honestly urge you to stop this useless resistance against the Japanese Army. Surrender with honor, such as that made by the defenders of Hong Kong, Wake Island, and Guam after heroic resistance. It will not affect your brilliant military record. On the contrary, your humanitarian sentiment, which is not incompatible

with military valor, will stand out and receive the fullest appreciation.

Japan, through her prime minister, has promised us prompt independence with honor, declaring in the Diet of 21 January 1942: “Japan will gladly grant the Philippines its independence so long as it cooperates and recognizes the Japanese program of establishing a great East Asia co-prosperity sphere.”

We Filipinos want independence, it is our earnest desire to restore the peace destroyed by this war. I hope that you will understand that I have no other motive than the well-being of our people and other nationals living in the Philippines. I now appeal to you rankly, from one soldier to another, and express my true sentiments, believing that in your heart of hearts, you share my deep concern for the welfare of our people and the brave men under your command.

Hearty greetings from your sincere friend and comrade.

NOTES

- ¹ See Teodoro A. Agoncillo. *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines*. (Quezon City: UP Press, 2001), II: 607–735.
- ² For a history of Japanese collaboration in the Philippines during World War II, see Augusto de Viana, *Kulaboretor!: The Issue of Political Collaboration During World War II* (Manila: UST Publishing, 2003) and David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine*

Collaboration in World War II (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

- 3 For a well-documented study of the Aguinaldo-Ricarte collaboration issue, see Satoshi Ara, “Emilio Aguinaldo under American and Japanese Rule: Submission for Independence?,” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 63, no. 2 (2015): 161–92.
- 4 For a biography of Emilio Aguinaldo, see Alfredo B. Saulo, *Emilio Aguinaldo: Generalissimo and President of the First Philippine Republic—First Republic in Asia*. (Quezon City: Phoenix, 1995). Another biography was written by Carlos Quirino entitled *The Young Aguinaldo: From Kawit to Biyak na Bato* (Manila: Regal, 1969). The latter, however, only dealt with Aguinaldo’s life from his birth until his exile to Hong Kong in 1897. Quirino would later write another Aguinaldo biography that came out as a series in the *Manila Times* from 8–20 February 1964 entitled “The Aguinaldo Story” (News clippings in the Quirino family collection). Both sources glossed over Aguinaldo’s collaboration issue during World War II.
- 5 Artemio Ricarte, *The Memoirs of General Artemio Ricarte* (Manila: NHCP, 2012).
- 6 *People of the Philippines v. Emilio Aguinaldo: Criminal case 3532*. Folder 1, Box 7. People’s Court Papers, Special Collections, University of the Philippines-Diliman Main Library, Quezon City (PCP).
- 7 Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 145–146. According to MacArthur, he immediately informed Gen. George Marshall about the Aguinaldo message and received this reply:

It appears to the War Department that the only way to combat statements such as that issued by Aguinaldo is to have our propaganda agencies here contrast against the Aguinaldo attitude, the position, example, and

statements of President Quezon with the purpose of exciting admiration for the latter and contempt for the former. This effort will be undertaken immediately all over the world and in appropriate languages, coupled with this will be a program contrasting the proved record of the United States in the Philippines with that of Japan in China and Manchuria. The purpose will be to show that if Aguinaldo is sincere in his statement, he is merely being deceived by insincere and worthless promises. An important part of our publicity will be the glorification of Filipino loyalty and heroism (147).

8 Ricarte, xxiii.

9 Ricarte, xxvi.

10 Emilio Aguinaldo and Vicente Albano Pacis. *A Second Look at America*. (New York: Speller and Sons, 1957), 186.

11 Aguinaldo and Pacis, 182–183.

12 Aguinaldo and Pacis, 183.

13 Aguinaldo and Pacis, 187.

14 Aguinaldo and Pacis, 184.

15 Aguinaldo and Pacis, 185.

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