

The Marcos Affair

by Gilbert M. Pieper 1967-1997

Ferdinand Emmanuel Edralin Marcos, Sr., who was born on September 11, 1917 and died on September 28, 1989, was a Filipino politician who served as President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. He ruled under martial law from 1972 until 1981.

At the age of 18, Marcos is thought to have assassinated Julio Nalundasan, a political opponent of his father, Mariano Marcos. Both were arrested and held until they were released by Supreme Court Justice Jose P. Laurel. Marcos served during World War II. As part of his election campaign, he would later claim to have been "the most decorated war hero in the Philippines," although, in fact, he received only three medals. Under Marcos, the Philippine national debt grew from \$2 billion to \$30 billion, but U.S. corporations in the Philippines prospered. The Carter Administration engineered an \$88 million World Bank loan to Marcos, increased military aid to him by 300%, and called him a "soft dictator." In contrast, a 1976 Amnesty International report had alleged that there were 88 government torturers. By 1977, the armed forces had quadrupled and over 60,000 Filipinos had been arrested for political reasons. Public outrage led to the snap elections of 1986 and to the People Power Revolution in February 1986, which removed him from power. Marcos was overthrown in 1986 by followers of Corazon (Cory) Aquino, widow of an assassinated opposition leader, and Marcos was forced to flee.

On February 25, 1986, Marcos talked to United States Senator Paul Laxalt, asking him for advice from the White House. Laxalt advised him to "cut and cut cleanly," to which Marcos expressed his disappointment. In the afternoon, Marcos talked to Juan Ponce Enrile, Sr., a Filipino politician and lawyer, asking for safe passage for him and his family including his close allies like General Ver. Finally, at 9:00 p.m., the Marcos family was transported by four Sikorsky HH-3E helicopters to Clark Air Base in Angeles City, Pampanga, about 83 kilometers north of Manila. They then boarded U.S. Air Force C-130 planes bound for Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, and finally to Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii, where Marcos arrived on February 26. When protestors stormed Malacanang Palace shortly after Marcos' departure, it was famously discovered that Imelda had left behind over 2,700 pairs of shoes in her closet.

The State Department requested that the FBI surveil Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos when they came to live in Honolulu, after he was deposed from the presidency of the Philippines. The State Department was concerned that

Marcos might try to return to the Philippines, and attempt a counter-coup, since we were now supporting the Aquino Government. The Marcos family was not to leave the island of Oahu. The FBI case was opened as Honolulu file number 2-4, a Neutrality Matter, the state of not supporting or helping neither the Marcos' government nor the Aquino government.

Honolulu FBI Agents and Agents throughout the United States were assigned to watch Ferdinand's movements around the clock. Cars going into and out of the Marcos compound on Makiki Heights Road in downtown Honolulu were to be identified and the passengers were to be closely observed.

The neighborhood was a hilly area with only a few ways into and out of the compound, and spots to conduct surveillance were very limited. To compensate, we used aerial support. Within a short time, Marcos was aware of the surveillance, but not by whom. Marcos asked Governor Ariyoshi for some guards at his compound. The Governor provided members of his protective detail to the Marcos compound. These men were mostly retired Honolulu police officers, knowledgeable of surveillances. They cruised around the neighborhood, observing the FBI surveillance vehicles, checking license plates, which were all fictitious. They would also follow vehicles leaving the compound.

The FBI surveillance detail requested live day and night video camera coverage of the driveway of the compound. This would allow us to know when a car arrived or left without our having to be physically present. The neighbor across the street allowed us to install a camera on her fence which was concealed from the compound by thick shrubbery. FBI Agents with a technical background, posing as yardmen, trimmed away enough of the foliage to allow the camera to have a good view of the driveway of the compound. Members of Marcos' protective detail observed the shrubbery trimming, but were not suspicious, until after nightfall, when the headlights of cars leaving the compound made reflections off of the camera lens. The Marcos men disabled the camera during the night, trespassing on the neighbor's property to do so. The neighbor was upset, and a confrontation occurred between the tech Agents and members of Marcos' detail.

Assistant Special Agent In Charge Bill Gore met with Governor Ariyoshi to smooth out the matter, and no further confrontations occurred. Video surveillance was ultimately established from atop a telephone pole. It was not disturbed by Marcos' men, who now knew about the FBI surveillance. The Marcos traveled in a black limousine and many times our surveillance would lead to a safe house in Hawaii Kai, where I would gather the trash for lead purposes. To do this operation required aerial support, a pilot and spotter,

special operations group (SOG), technical assistance, ground surveillances and much more. In addition, it burned a tremendous amount of manpower, and the cost was tremendous. There had been a rumor that Imelda was stopped at the Honolulu International Airport, while trying to board a plane full of military uniforms headed to the Philippines. Usually our surveillances ended at the most expensive restaurants in Honolulu, and then back to the compound. Often I would surveil Doris Duke, the wealthiest woman in the world. Duke was the heir to the American Tobacco Industry. She had befriended Imelda Marcos and often visited Ferdinand in the hospital. Duke lived in Black Point, the most prestigious and expensive neighborhood in Honolulu. Jim Nabors, the actor, was her neighbor.

Marcos died in Honolulu on the morning of September 28, 1989, of kidney, heart and lung ailments. His body was displayed in a refrigerated glass mausoleum, and surveillance would continue round-the-clock at the Byodo-In Temple at the Valley of the Temples cemetery in Kaneohe, Hawaii. The case was called Cold Watch. The surveillances continued for years after he died, and in September 1993, his body was taken back to the Philippines.

His remains are currently interred inside a refrigerated crypt in Ilocos Norte, where his son, Ferdinand, Jr., and eldest daughter, Imee, have since become the local governor and representative, respectively. A large bust of Ferdinand Marcos (resembling Mount Rushmore) was carved into a hillside in Benquet. It was subsequently destroyed. Suspects included left-wing activists, members of a local tribe who had been displaced by construction of the monument, and looters hunting for the Marcos legendary hidden treasure.

Despite Imelda Marcos' complaint that living in exile in Hawaii had resembled a prison sentence, many said she and Ferdinand enjoyed the high life in Hawaii that they had been accustomed to in Manila. They were hosts to weekly Sunday afternoon gatherings and lavishly-catered dinners at their multimillion-dollar Makiki Heights estate, and dinner parties at some of the most expensive restaurants in town. Mrs. Marcos also made occasional shopping trips to Honolulu's designer dress shops, where dresses cost as much as \$900 apiece. Even the indictment of the couple on federal charges of fraud and racketeering had not tempered their flare while in the spotlight. Mrs. Marcos proudly told reporters that a new word, "Imeldific" should be coined to describe her special sort of ostentatiousness. Yet, according to the couple's lawyers, the couple had "been forced to live on borrowed funds" since they had arrived in the United States in February 1986, because the Philippine government had effectively frozen the couple's assets.

Even though the Marcoses did not seek publicity, they would often get it. Both had been accused in a complex case involving charges of embezzling more than \$100 million

from the Philippine government while Mr. Marcos was President and of using the money to buy three buildings in New York City.

Many laws written by Marcos are still in force and in effect. Out of thousands of proclamations, decrees, and executive orders, only a few were repealed, revoked, modified or amended. In the 2004 *Global Transparency Report*, Marcos appeared on the list of the World's Most Corrupt Leaders, listed as second behind Suharto, the former President of Indonesia. Corazon Aquino repealed many of the repressive laws that had been enacted during Marcos' dictatorship. She restored the right of access to habeas corpus, repealed anti-labor laws, and freed hundreds of political prisoners.

Comparisons have been made between Ferdinand Marcos and Lee Kuan Yew's authoritarian style of governance and Singapore's success, but in his autobiography, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, Lee relates: "It is a soft, forgiving culture. Only in the Philippines could a leader like Ferdinand Marcos, who pillaged his country for

over 20 years, still be considered for a national burial. Insignificant amounts of the loot had been recovered, yet his wife and children were allowed to return and engage in politics."

The Marcos family and their cronies looted so much wealth from the country that to this day investigators have difficulty determining precisely

how many billions of dollars were stolen. It is estimated that Marcos alone stole at least \$5 billion from the Philippine treasury.

Human rights groups place the number of victims of extrajudicial killings under martial law at 1,500 and Karapatan, a local human rights group's records show 759 involuntarily disappeared (their bodies never found). Military historian Alfred McCoy, in his book *Closer than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* and in his speech *Dark Legacy* cites 3,257 extrajudicial killings, 35,000 torture victims, and 70,000 incarcerated during the Marcos years. The newspaper *Bulatlat* (lit. "to open carelessly") places the number of victims of arbitrary arrest and detention at 120,000.

When this case was referred to the Honolulu FBI Office, Special Agent in Charge Gene Glenn informed me that I would be the case Agent, but when the State Department got involved, we realized that this was going to be a nightmare, and I had many other duties and cases to handle. As a result, John Fulks and Hank Orzinski would be the case Agents. In no way could I have done the fantastic piece of investigative work that they accomplished, along with the incredible number of Agents in the Honolulu Division and throughout the other FBI field offices that were involved. It was an experience I will never forget. Mahalo and Aloha.

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