

The Soldier and Advocate & the Grand Whitewash of 2007 - MabuhayRadio

Written by Romeo P. Marquez

Monday, 04 February 2008 03:34 - Last Updated Monday, 04 February 2008 03:56

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An officer and a gentleman, a true patriot and a devoted advocate passed away last week. While he lived, and bedridden in Las Vegas, he had expressed concern for the Filipino community in San Diego, specially after the seeming fall from decency and probity of so-called community leaders. The stink of the missing \$27,000 fouls the air and resurfaces on its fourth year without resolution.

PREROGATIVE Column

The Soldier and Advocate & the Grand Whitewash of 2007

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

The author is a member of the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) and National Press Club of the Philippines-USA.

Life is a great surprise. I do not see why death should not be an even greater one. --Vladimir

Nabokov

Several weeks ago, Col. Frank B. Quesada, a World War II veteran and former prisoner of war, wrote a brief note decrying the loss of what he had called "hard-earned respect being Filipino Americans who have kept our noses clean";

He also railed against "impostors and pretenders" who to this day take highly-visible roles, ostensibly for the welfare of veterans but who in truth continue to bleed them of what little they have in cash.

"Life," he said, "could be bitter to the bone when one is made a victim of depravity";

Col. Quesada was reacting to my story on the worst scandal to hit San Diego's Filipino community -- the disappearance of \$27,000 from the Council of Philippine American Organizations (COPAO), the organization composed of about 50 associations.

San Diego Congressman Bob Filner, the Filipino veterans' consistent supporter and ardent advocate, felt "extremely sorry" for the demise of Col. Quesada.

In that story, newsman Bobby Reyes, after being invited to investigate, recommended that COPAO bring charges of negligence against Aurora S. Cudal, the COPAO president when the money vanished and 50 checks with her signatures allegedly forged.

On Friday, February 1st, two days after his 84th birthday, Col. Quesada passed away in Las Vegas, Nevada bringing with him the disappointment at the decline of honor and respectability that had been with him since his induction into the United States military in 1941.

I've never met Col. Quesada personally. But he confided to me. In fact, he made it a point to write and share his comments whenever he found an issue to discuss. And now, it seems clear

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that at that time, he was writing from his sickbed as most of December he had been in the hospital.

He never gave any indication that he was bedridden, for he continued to communicate with me on several stories that highlighted the sordid state of affairs in the local community. Even as he lived in Las Vegas, he was concerned with the community in San Diego.

One article I wrote that had so touched him was [The Last Battle of Our Fathers](#); that paid tribute to our veterans.

He, and countless others, had been so moved by it that he had asked it, with my permission, to be reprinted in his columns in newspapers and posted in some webcasts in Canada and the Philippines.

A man of integrity, Col. Quesada's reaction to my COPAO story was to be expected, I suppose, because it involves trust, respect, honesty -- something he had lived up to until his demise.

"I certainly wait for the truthful result of Bobby's findings and recommendations, which you can chronicle fairly for the good of the Fil-Am community," he wrote, still optimistic that COPAO would at least level with the Filipino community and open up with the story behind the missing money and forged checks.

But what Col. Quesada didn't realize, maybe because of his total involvement in the Filipino veterans' issue, was that Bobby was already facing a blank wall the minute he suggested initiating charges against Cudal. Nobody in COPAO has the courage to do it. Simply put, nobody would do it.

On the contrary, the entire organization and its officers appear engaged in an activity analogous to the funeral business, what with the vow of silence, a trait they practice to perfection, coupled with the skill to whitewash. Yes, whitewash as in cover up, gloss over, sugar-coat, extenuate, minimize, down play.

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Cudal has been the unnamed beneficiary of what I might call the Grand Whitewash of 2007. There was another person, Charito Balanag, the COPAO auditor, who also walked away unharmed by the shame and scandal that took place in 2004 when Cudal had lorded it over in COPAO.

When COPAO wants to do something unmentionable, it does the opposite. That's what it exactly did last year when it censured Pastor Romen Rivera (who suffered a stroke weeks later) and Norma De Guzman, the vice president for finance and treasurer, respectively, of COPAO.

To rebuke Cudal as president, Balanag as auditor, Rivera as vice president for finance and DeGuzman as treasurer would have looked and sounded fair and impartial, after all they all had a role in guarding the COPAO treasury and in managing the umbrella organization..

But no, a loyal friend of Cudal, the incumbent COPAO president Rita Andrews, would rather close one eye and open the other and then point an accusing finger on Rivera and DeGuzman. That act was the equivalent of exonerating Cudal and Balanag, a whitewash no less.

Some people might ask why I had to put in COPAO to this brief tribute to Col. Quesada. Well, for one, it is to his eternal credit that even when he was sick, he had worried about another community so far out of his physical reach.

Indeed, the relevance is in what Col. Quesada had died fighting for -- respect, honesty, trust -- the same moral guideposts that had sustained his fervor advocating for his comrades in arms, the Filipino veterans.

All these years, Col. Quesada never tired speaking for Filipino veterans like him, pleading for their cause and arguing for benefits that had been retaken by the United States government in the Rescission Act of 1946.

Unknown to many, he had been spending most of his time helping thousands of Filipino

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veterans in the US immigration office get their US citizenship for their military service as provided for by the Immigration Reform Act of 1990.

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According to Filner, "Col. Quesada has long fought for full equity for Filipino veterans, and I have been honored to work with him. I wish that he could have lived to see the day when equity for all veterans is implemented."

"Now," Filner added, "we must renew our efforts on behalf of Colonel Quesada and all those who fought and sacrificed for freedom and for the United States of America!"

Indeed, at an earlier time, Col. Quesada offered himself to work behind enemy lines in the assault and daring rescue of more than 2,000 American and allied prisoners of war in Los Banos, Laguna. Hollywood celebrated the true-to-life story in a movie in 2006.

But it was General Colin Powell, the former Joint Chief of Staff, who gave the ultimate recognition: "I doubt that any airborne and guerrilla unit in the world will ever be able to rival the Los Banos raid. It is a textbook operation for all ages and all nations."

Col. Quesada was the recipient of at least 19 awards and military decorations spanning a lifetime military career in the Philippines and the United States. First and foremost an officer and a gentleman, a true soldier, patriot and advocate. # # #

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