

# Philippine Movement for Environmental Protection

WASHINGTON DC OFFICE

2721 Connecticut Ave. NW  
Washington D.C. 20008

RECEIVED  
USNRC

January 27, 1980

'80 JAN 31 AM 11:16

James Shea  
Director  
Office of International Programs  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
1717 H St. NW  
Washington D.C. 20555

OFFICE OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
PROGRAMS

Dear Mr. Shea,

As head of the NRC office which is currently processing the license application of Westinghouse to export a nuclear reactor to the Philippines, we want to bring to your attention an unfortunate and alarming development:

1. In 1978, we brought to your attention the presumed death of an energy activist, Ernesto Nazareno, who was picked up by the Philippine military last June 1978 and was never seen again.
2. Recently, Diosdado Dimaano, another energy activist residing in the Bataan site of the Philippine reactor, was killed by the Philippine military. This senseless killing has forced at least five other energy activists in the area to join the New Peoples' Army (NPA), the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

We think that this development affects the nuclear project in many ways like human rights, among others. Of particular interest to the NRC are the ramifications of this incident to the physical security of the nuclear plant.

The southern portion of the Philippines is presently in a state of civil war. Furthermore, the NPA have also grown stronger through the years. They are now found in more than half of the provinces of the Philippines. (For more specific information, kindly see the attached article from Mother Jones, December 1979.) Reports from Manila claim that the NPA is particularly strong in the province of Zambales, which is near the reactor site. I can confirm this from my own experience when I was still working for the Philippine government. People did not want to lease upland areas in Zambales because they knew that these areas are one of the strongholds of the NPA.

The point is that continued repression in the Philippines, including those of energy activists, makes for a highly unstable environment for such a vulnerable and complicated technology like nuclear power plants, among others. One day, people will get fed

POOR ORIGINAL

8004070180

up with all these repressions and take things into their hands.

Now, one can say that the NRC should consider the adequacy of protection of the plant from masses of people who may eventually make the reactor a political target. In this context, the NRC may get an assurance from the Philippine government that they have adequate military forces to safeguard the reactor.

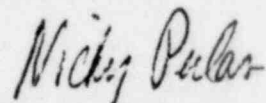
However, what about long-term considerations? Within this longer time frame, short-term criteria which find it convenient to separate human rights problems and direct physical security considerations can become meaningless. What if there is an escalation of civil war in the Philippines and the NPA obtain access to the use of sophisticated artillery? Can the plant still be considered secure?

This is not an academic problem. The recent developments in Iran and Afganistan clearly show the strong interest of the U.S. in the security of its military bases near the site of the reactor. What would happen to these interests if continued repression produces, as a backlash, strong anti-American feelings? What would be NRC's role in trying to prevent this development as well as any direct threats to the plant itself?

From the above discussions, it is clear that the NRC has to consider this recent development not only in terms of its ramifications for the physical security of the plant but should also be actively involved in getting its input about long-term problems derived from repression considered.

Hoping for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely Yours



Nicky Perlas  
Executive Director

*P.S. Kindly make available for the public record. Thank you.*

# Time Bomb In The U.S. Empire

Our Reporter Travels With  
Guerrillas In The Philippines

Text and photos by Lawrence T. Johnson

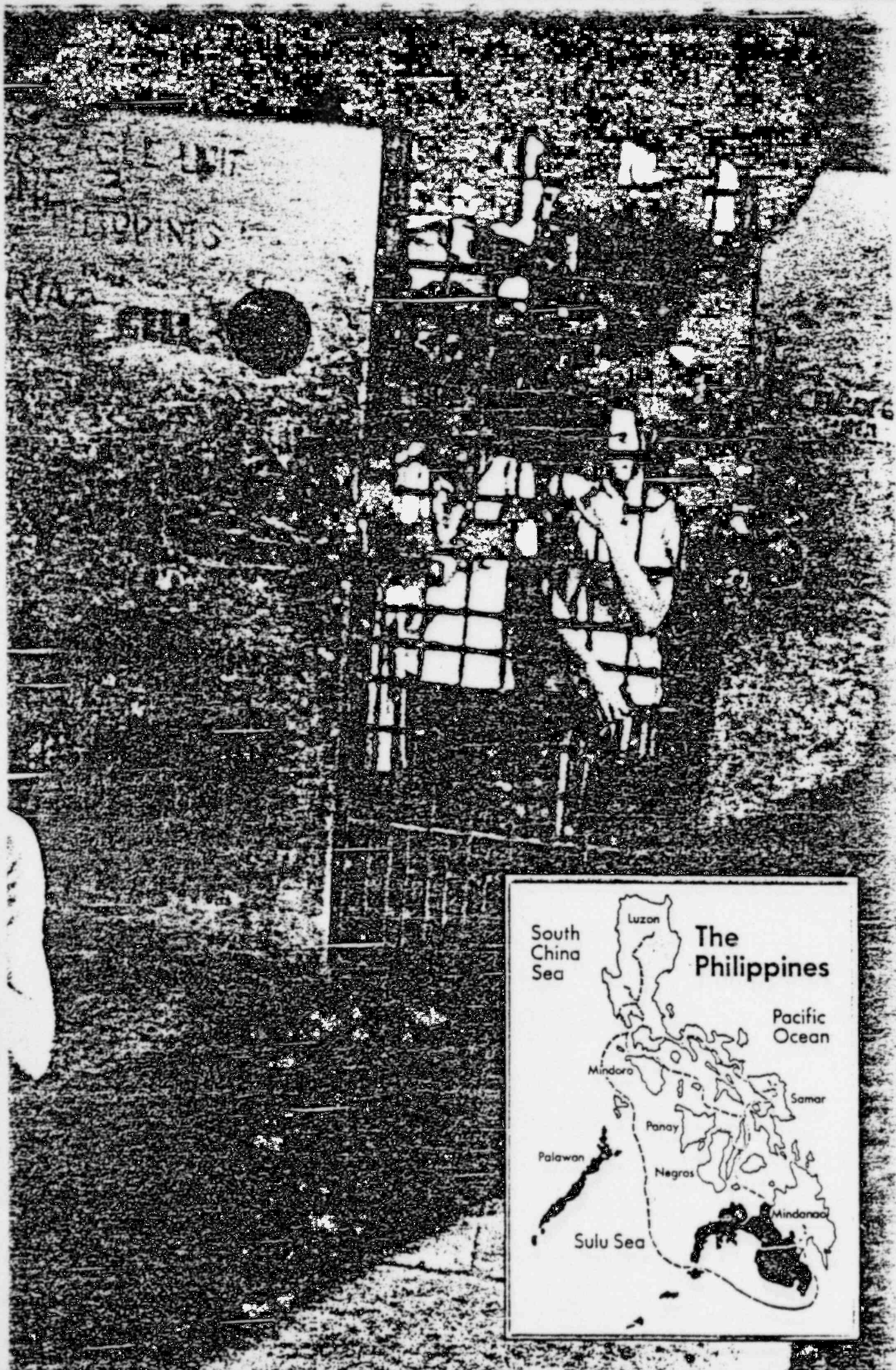
**Editor's Note:** In 1957, Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times* traveled into the rugged forest of Cuba's Sierra Maestra and brought back an interview with an obscure guerrilla leader named Fidel Castro. The story and pictures on the following pages tribute an equally difficult achievement. For, until now no American reporter we know of has spent time in the field with both of the guerrilla armies now battling the U.S.-sponsored dictatorship in the Philippines. One who tried (see pages 42-44) did not make it alive.

Textbooks tell us that the United States' relationship with the Philippines began when we took over the islands after the 1898 war with Spain. In fact, it was really something of an American economic colony from then—and has become even more of one today, since being declared independent in 1946. "Colonies," Disraeli said, "do not cease to be colonies because they are independent." No other large country in the Third World has an

economy so closely tied to a major power on the other side of the globe. U.S. corporations control more than 50 percent of all Philippine manufacturing firms' assets. The Philippines is a source of raw materials for the U.S., a trove of rich tropical farmland where American agribusiness companies, such as Del Monte, can grow pineapples and bananas at a 30 percent annual profit, and a haven for U.S. investors who want low taxes and docile labor—strikes are banned.

This dependence, combined with the corrupt, dictatorial rule of President Ferdinand Marcos, has forged a society where 30 percent of all children are malnourished, real wages of unskilled laborers have declined a shocking 31 percent since 1972 and textile workers earn \$1.76 a day. The whole structure is shored up by American aid: "Only 22 percent of total U.S. economic and financial aid is reaching the needy," reported the *San Francisco Chronicle* recently. "This amounts to less than a penny per person per day. The rest goes for tobacco loans, for insurance for a Con-

**Map:** Political prisoners in the provincial jail in Cotabato City. There are more than 40 per cell; 85 of the 121 male political prisoners at this jail say they have been tortured.  
**Map:** Red lines show route of reporter Johnson's travels. Dark areas are where Muslim rebels are fighting; the New People's Army [NPA] is active in most of the rest of the country.



POOR ORIGINAL

tinental Illinois bank office in Manila, for a nuclear power plant that may never be built [see "Radiation Roulette," *MJ*, August '79], for rural electrification priced out of reach of the rural poor and for balance-of-payments loans conditioned on a reduction of wages for the poor."

The U.S. has an additional stake in the Philippines as well. The islands house a vast complex of American military bases, occupying a half-million acres and staffed by 15,000 U.S. servicemen and -women. Except for Guam and the tiny Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, the Philippine bases are the only major U.S. outposts between Hawaii and the Mediterranean. "Clark Air Base," reports *The New York Times*, "would be of special importance in any future Middle East war. If the United States were denied the use of European airports to move supplies to the Middle East, officials say, the Air Force could ferry equipment through the 'back door' from the Philippines."

**M**AINTEINING AN EMPIRE is rarely ever cheap. "We have bought ten million Malays at two dollars a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them," observed Thomas B. Reed, the crusty Maine isolationist who, as Speaker of the House, opposed annexation of the Philippines in 1898. The first cost to the U.S. came the next year: when islanders realized that their Spanish masters had merely been replaced by American ones, they rose in revolt. The bloody U.S. response—a three-year war involving 126,000 U.S. troops that left some 4,000 Americans and 200,000 Filipinos dead—was America's first experience of fighting guerrillas in Asia.

Today's rebels are well organized and spread

throughout the islands. The U.S. is scheduled to give the Philippines \$300 million worth of military aid over the next five years. The vast bulk of it is targeted toward fighting the guerrillas; even the Pentagon acknowledges that the Philippines faces no external military threat from anyone.

What next? Many observers of the Philippines expect a U.S.-supported coup within the next year or two, replacing the shaky Marcos regime with one that appears more democratic and might do a more efficient job of fighting the rebels. This coup could be either a bloody one (Marcos recently arrested one group of military officers he suspected of plotting) or could be along the lines of the shah's departure from Iran, in which Marcos would be allowed to leave the country and take with him the millions of dollars he has accumulated while in office. Philippine progressives believe the CIA is backing the semiunderground Social Democratic Party and that the preferred U.S. candidate for the presidency is the imprisoned Senator Benigno Aquino. Both the party and Aquino make left-of-center noises but are safely pro-American.

In short, welcome to the next Vietnam. The plot and characters are all too familiar: the corrupt dictator, the talk of replacing him (remember the ouster of Diem?), the increasing U.S. involvement, the spreading popular revolt—even the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel statements: "The NPA [New People's Army] is decimated," President Marcos told an American reporter recently. "If I fielded one or two battalions in that area at any given time, I could clean [them] out." It was with those "decimated" soldiers that *Mother Jones* correspondent Lawrence Johnson spent many weeks recently. Here is his report. —Adam Hochschild

---

Manila, December 16, 1981--A general strike paralyzes the capital. From the Philippine countryside, the guerrilla army of the National Democratic Front advances on the city. In the southern islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Palawan and Tawi-Tawi, the newly formed Muslim autonomous state declares its support of the guerrillas. Government forces put up limited resistance. Many soldiers and officers side openly with the rebels.

President Ferdinand Marcos flees the country with his wife and family. Some American military personnel are captured at isolated radar sites on Mindanao and Cebu islands.

In the United States, the government, the public and the news media are taken completely by surprise. The President blames the CIA for not providing adequate intelligence reports. The public blames the news media for not providing adequate coverage of the Philippines. The news media blame...

**The Philippines** is a country that, as Iran was, is considered one of the United States' closest allies; a country that, as Iran was, is closely bound up with American economic and military interests and a country whose inner conflicts, like those of prerevolution Iran, are largely ignored by the American press.

From December 1978 through March 1979, and again in August and September 1979, armed with tape recorder and camera, I went looking for those inner conflicts. I was also armed with an interest in Asia that began when I was a combat soldier in the Vietnam War. I later came to view that war as wrong. Seeing friends die on the wrong side of a guerrilla war left me with many feelings; one of them was a determination to see if the same pattern was happening elsewhere in Asia. A Filipino friend told me of the struggles taking place in his country. At first I found it hard to believe that such a revolution was not being reported. I wanted to know whether it was really happening, and the only way to find out was to go into the guerrilla zone and see for myself.

Foreign journalists are, to understate the matter, discouraged by the Marcos regime, and I had been warned by Filipino friends in the U.S. that I should travel as a tourist rather than as a journalist. Just before leaving, I learned about another American journalist, a freelancer named Frank Gould, who had attempted in 1974 to cover the war in the Philippines. A Methodist missionary talked with him on September 27 of that year on Mindanao, one of the islands involved in the fierce fighting of the Muslim rebellion. No one has heard from him since.

I had come up with one lead for making contact with the guerrillas: the name and address of a woman in Manila, Lette Guerrero. I had been told only that she might be able to help me.

In my mind the lingering chauvinist baggage was packed for the meeting with Lette Guerrero. She would be slender, dark-skinned, intense, beautiful and slightly mysterious. When we met in her garden, in the bright, open-air sauna that is typical Manila weather, I was surprised to find that she was all I had imagined. She was also, at 73, the mother of ten children and the grandmother of 37.

Lette didn't waste words. She said that friends in the United States had asked her to help me. Like others I was to meet in the Philippines, she wanted me to get the opposition's story for one simple reason: to help convince Americans to stop supplying Marcos with arms.

The Philippines is embroiled in two wars: a war for autonomy in 13 provinces in the southern islands, under the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a predominantly Muslim coalition; and a war to overthrow the government fought throughout the rest of the country by the New People's Army (NPA) under the direction of the National Democratic Front (NDF), a coalition of Communist, labor and Christian groups. But when I asked Lette about establishing contacts with the guerrillas of either the MNLF or the NPA she just laughed and shook her head.

"Do you think I would have lived so long as I have if I were involved with people like that?" she asked. Later, however, after she had asked me questions that took me all



Reporter Lawrence T. Johnson with guerrillas from the Moro National Liberation Front. The tiger on one soldier's shirt is the emblem of the MNLF battalion fighting in the Cotabato area. Pagal [the soldier standing second from left in front row], a three-year veteran, is 15 years old [see p. 44]. Rifles at left with curved 'banana clip' magazines are Soviet AK-47s; rifles at right are Belgian FALs and U.S. M-16s captured from the Philippine army.

\* The names and some identifying features of certain persons in this article have been changed.

POOR ORIGINAL

the way back to the tenant farm in Arkansas where I was born, she became quiet for a long while.

"The people I introduce you to will like a journalist from the working class," she said to me, finally. "Perhaps one of them may be able to put you in touch with either the MNLF or the NPA."

\* \* \*

**Cotabato City, Mindanao**--The provincial jail is near the top of what the local people call P.C. Hill. The Philippine Constabulary (P.C.) for the area is headquartered around the summit. The guard at the sandbagged checkpoint outside the jail eyed my ragged clothes and very bushy beard with suspicion. Two months of low-budget, almost nonstop travel had left me looking like I'd taken a vow of poverty. Which, I decided, might work greatly to my advantage.

"I'm a Franciscan monk," I said to the guard. "I work with prisoners in the United States and I'd like to visit the prisoners here."

I was wearing a small gold cross pinned on my shirt over my heart. The existence of a well-known school in central Mindanao run by another order of monks gave some credence to my story. The Catholic majority in the Philippines has great respect for priests because they are well educated and play such an important role in a Catholic society. I was depending on that respect. The guard, a Catholic, barely glanced at my passport.

"They are divided into two groups here, Brother," he said. "Criminal and political. Which of the groups would you like to see?"

"It really doesn't matter," I told him, trying to sound as casual as possible, "but perhaps the political prisoners would be a rewarding visit."

Without another word or a look at the contents of my bag, he led me to what was virtually a dungeon (see photo, page 38). The cells were approximately 15 by 20 feet. There was very little lighting or ventilation. The guards said that the prisoners were never allowed outside for exercise. The prisoners' skin was generally yellowish and clammy; tuberculosis was rampant. Most of the political prisoners here had been arrested as MNLF members or supporters; a few were NPA suspects. The alliances between the MNLF and the NPA units in the field, in many cases, were first established in prisons like this one.

After learning who the leaders were in each cell, I let them know that I was a journalist and enlisted their aid in distracting the guards while I went into the cells and conducted interviews and took photographs. I repeated these procedures at the Awang Stockade for political prisoners at a nearby military camp and at the city jail with similar success.

Some of the people in these detention centers for political prisoners had been held for as long as three years. None had ever been tried for a crime. The 45 political prisoners at Awang Stockade, all male, said that they had been tortured; many exhibited the scars. The tortures reported included beatings with fists and rifle butts, having a cloth bag tied over the head and a mixture of rum and water poured over the face—the water treatment—and having electric wires held to the tongue, fingers, nipples and genitals—the shock treatment. One man said that they forced his head into a hole in a block of ice and held him there until he passed out.

**Catbalogan, Samar**--In the central Philippines, this island is the nation's most economically depressed. Big business, including the huge Japanese fishing industry, is taking over the livelihood of the small fishing villages that dot its coastline. Logging and mining companies and corporate agribusiness are forcing out the small farmer. The island has become a major stronghold of the NPA.

My contact in Catbalogan was Father Timmy, a 30-year-old Roman Catholic priest. He was about six feet tall, around 240 pounds. If he'd had horns he could have passed for a *carabao*, the Philippines' water buffalo. Lette had said that he would be expecting me, but her message had not gotten through. For two very uncomfortable hours, he and two other young priests grilled me about my reasons for coming to the Philippines.

The priests finally loosened up enough to tell me that 90 percent of the clergy of Samar support, in one way or another, the National Democratic Front. Some have gone so far as to join the NPA as organizers or fighters.

The official position of the church has been tacit approval of Marcos' "legally" instituted government, but there are recent indications that Catholic approval has been forcefully withdrawn. In the six years following September 21, 1972, the date martial law was declared, 125 members of the clergy were arrested. Some are still in prison. This past July, 50-year-old Cardinal Jaime Sin, the architect of church policy in the Philippines, began openly urging Marcos to step down from the presidency.

The letter from Lette, introducing me to Father Timmy, finally arrived with a young priest the next day. The priest had left Manila the same day I had, but had stopped by his parish before coming to Father Timmy. Now they were willing to make arrangements for me to go into the NPA guerrilla zone. But it would take six weeks to set up.

\* \* \*

**The island of Mindanao**--While waiting for the NPA contacts to work out, I headed south. A tourist can travel the Philippines' northern islands unaware of the fighting in the mountains and jungles, but such innocence is impossible in the south. The southern Philippine islands are clearly at war.

The fighting to the west of Davao City—between the army and the MNLF, for the most part—grows more intense. There are government checkpoints at five- or ten-kilometer intervals along the main road crossing the island. The war against the Moro National Liberation Front has become a war against the Muslim population in general. It is a war of genocide. Many villages have been attacked merely *on suspicion* of supporting Moro guerrillas. Some survivors have later proven that no one in their village had been involved in any antigovernment activities.

Whenever I was asked who I was or what I was doing, I replied that I was a priest or a Franciscan monk, observing the work of my coreligionists in the Philippines. My contacts in Davao City had recommended this as the safest course. As a warning, they repeated the story of Frank Gould's disappearance in 1974.

Frank Gould had left his mark on Mindanao. Everywhere I traveled I seemed to be following his trail from years earlier. In Kidapawan, a young priest had introduced Gould to the tribal Filipinos in the nearby mountains.

"You couldn't help but admire him," the priest said. "I don't think he was particularly religious, but he had great courage. He wouldn't accept government accounts of the situation, nor would he rely on opposition propaganda. He had to document everything personally. I can tell you, that kind of journalism isn't very popular with the Philippine government."

In Talunan, a Filipino priest also expressed his admiration for the young journalist: "Frank was very nervous when he visited here. I believe it was in September of 1974. The military had already confiscated his travel papers and notes and had advised him to return to Manila. But Frank wouldn't go. He knew more about the MNLF and the Moro war than anyone else, but he had never been in the Cotabato guerrilla zone. No one had. And he thought it was important to go in there." The priest had heard varying rumors of what happened to Gould after he left Talunan, but had no certain information.

\* \* \*

**Cotabato City, Mindanao**-- One of my contacts led me to a large secluded house on the outskirts of the city. I had been told that we were to meet someone very knowledgeable about the Cotabato area. When the door was opened, I was startled to see a man in the uniform of the Integrated National Police moving quickly into one of the outer rooms. The old woman who opened the door led us without a word to seats around a small table near a window. I was calculating the time necessary to run from the table and leap out the window when the uniformed man returned. On his thigh, he wore a Smith and Wesson .44 magnum revolver in a holster. He was carrying a tray of sliced mangoes and Coca-Colas.

"We've been watching you for days," the high-ranking officer said. "But don't worry. I am anti-Marcos."

As if by signal, my contact left the room and the officer sat down across from me. After some mango with talk of the savage fighting around the city and after glasses of Coke with discussion of the repressive nature of the Marcos government, there was an uncomfortable pause. Through the window I watched a column of deuce-and-a-halves [two-and-a-half-ton army trucks] filled with young Catholic boy/soldiers from Luzon moving slowly out of the Muslim city.

"I work in the intelligence branch," the officer said finally. "I work in the U-5 section. We're an information-gathering unit. The other section is the U-2. Their only function is the secret kidnapping, torture and murder of subversives or troublemakers—what we call 'salvaging.'"

The man was sweating despite the cool breeze from the window. His big hands, resting on the table, clenched and came apart and clenched again like fat brown spiders mating.

"It was a U-2 squad from the Integrated National Police of Cotabato City that did the salvaging of Frank Gould," he said. Gould and his two Muslim guides were killed and buried in a common grave in the jungle, a few miles north of the city, according to the officer. He said he didn't know who had directly ordered Gould's assassination, but, he said, orders to kill an American would have to have come from a high place. His information about the murders came from members of the U-2 squad that had carried them out.

Later, I contacted a priest who was conducting an investi-



A Moro National Liberation Front field commander.

\* \* \*

The Philippine army is fighting the MNLF with many of the tactics the U.S. used in Vietnam: free-fire zones, strategic hamlets, herbicides. Moreover, we foot the bill: the U.S. is scheduled to give dictator Marcos \$300 million in military aid over the next five years.

POOR ORIGINAL



UPI Photo



After me, the deluge: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos presides over an increasingly shaky dictatorship. Marcos closed down the Philippine Congress seven years ago and routinely imprisons or kills political opponents. His powerful wife, Imelda, gives speeches on nutrition, but recently had to be talked out of a plan to build a \$100 million 14-chapel cathedral. Both have made millions on business dealings while in office.

POOR ORIGINAL

gation of Gould's disappearance and the request of the journalist's parents. Though he was unaware of the officer in Cotabato City, their stories matched—that a U-2 squad had killed Gould and his guides. Through other sources I learned that their common grave may also contain the bodies of hundreds of Cotabato-area victims of salvaging, buried there since martial law was declared in 1972.

"We waited and worried about Frank for over four years," said Gould's mother, Jean Gould, of Oak Park, Michigan. "hoping against hope that somehow he would be alive. Now all we want to do is show our country who's responsible for his death and what kind of government it is that we're sending millions of dollars of military aid to. Then, maybe, our son's death won't seem such a waste."

\* \* \*

**A 'free-fire' zone--** When Pagal, a 15-year-old MNLF guerrilla, spoke, his lips trembled and his gold teeth shone dully in the early morning light, like the flecks of color in the eyes of the dead. Other guerrillas had given me very political reasons for joining the rebels; Pagal's reason was very personal.

"When I was 12, the army raided my village, arrested all the men and raped many of the women," he said. After some hesitation, and after some prodding from me, he added that among the men arrested was his uncle, whose battered, lifeless body was found later at the side of the road. Among those raped was his 14-year-old sister, who died of internal hemorrhaging.

He had joined the MNLF immediately. Now, after three years with the guerrillas, he had been through two major campaigns and had been wounded once in the leg by shrapnel.

An artillery spotter plane passed over us, heading for the jungle three kilometers to the north, where other units of the MNLF had been chewing up army units for the past two weeks. The squad of 15 guerrillas who were holding me or protecting me—I was never quite sure which—crowded inside the bamboo hut to avoid being seen. Pagal, taking the opportunity to end our interview, moved to the other side of the hut. He wouldn't talk to me the rest of the time I was in the guerrilla zone.

"He is embarrassed and maybe a little angry," explained Bhen, one of the guerrillas who were acting as my interpreters, "because it is against Muslim custom to speak of personal sufferings and humiliations we have endured at the hands of our enemies."

Later that day, my third day in the guerrilla camp, I was told that a meeting had been set up with the leaders of the MNLF for central Mindanao. Just after dark we crossed the stream that separated our camp from the thick jungle. After walking only a few hundred yards through the tangled foliage, we came to a clearing filled with 400-500 people, their bodies only faintly visible in the glow of kerosene lamps scattered here and there on the ground.

After lengthy introductions, the Kurawato Revolutionary Committee opened the meeting to my questions. The majority of my interviews were conducted in English or interpreted for me. Even though there are more than a hundred Philippine dialects, many people here speak English, primarily because the country was an American colony from 1898 to 1946.

After initial suspicion, the guerrillas accepted me, ironically because of my combat service in Vietnam. They thought of me as a soldier, but more important to them was that after being a U.S. soldier fighting the Vietnamese, I had turned around and was willing to come and cover their story.

Political Affairs Vice Chairman Ghazali Ga-afar supplied most of the answers. Ga-afar, an affable and eloquent politician, apologized for the absence of the political affairs chairman and explained that he was leading the MNLF units that were battling the Philippine army less than three kilometers away. During the meeting howitzer shells shook the jungle, and the rumble and chatter of .50-caliber machine guns, M-16s and AK-47s were constantly in the background.

The MNLF leaders told me that the front is made up of "all sectors of the population, including traditional kinship and both Christian and Muslim religious groups and the Bangsa Moro Army." They said there are "invisible" governments, which closely parallel the existing official governments, operating in each of 13 southern provinces. The MNLF's goal is to establish in these provinces an autonomous region for the Moro people.

The name "Moro" was given to the people of the southern Philippines by the Spanish when they began colonizing the area in the mid-sixteenth century. Their only previous contact with dark-skinned Islamic people had been with the Moors of North Africa. Information Chairman Mohaghan Iqbal, a thin, serious young man, said, "We use 'Moro' rather than 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' to show that this is not a religious war, but is, instead, a war for a homeland for Muslim and non-Muslim alike."

Sources outside the MNLF estimate the number of its guerrillas at 30,000. Al Haj Murad, the tense, dark-skinned military chairman, claims twice that many troops. Murad won't name the countries that are aiding the MNLF militarily, but other sources have named Malaysia, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and, above all, Libya.

It had taken 18 hours of walking and boating through swamps and quicksand, with mud and water and leeches up to our crotches, to reach the guerrilla camp. Going in we had no encounters with government troops. Going out we are not so lucky.

We start for Cotabato City about three in the afternoon of the day following the meeting. We leave in three *bancas*, long dugout canoes—one *banca* of guerrillas in front, one behind. The leader of this squad, Commander Dino; the two guerrillas, Sonny and Bhen, who have been my interpreters; three other guerrillas; and I are in the middle *banca*.

On the way, we take several detours to photograph bombed houses, mosques and schools. I see large tracts of land that are covered with brown, twisted, dried-up vegetation. The commander says that nothing has grown there since the bombing. The people have come down with skin diseases; their hair has fallen out; they've suffered fits of nausea and some have been temporarily paralyzed. At another time, in another country perhaps, the use of chemical warfare—in this case possibly Agent Orange from U.S. stockpiles left over from Vietnam—would have been a shocking revelation. Added to the almost endless accounts of rape, torture and genocide—acts that amount to an accepted method of operation for the Philippine military—the tale becomes merely another dry entry in my journal, another fact catalogued.



This woman, Roni (see p. 47) is a member of the New People's Army, the left-wing group active in 41 of the Philippines' 72 provinces. Unlike the Muslim rebels in the south, the NPA is committed to equality of the sexes. Many of its 4,000 soldiers are former student activists, but the majority are peasants. Catholics and labor also form part of the coalition behind the NPA.

POOR ORIGINAL

After dark, walking through a deserted plantation, we hear voices. On the path coming toward us we see flashlight beams. As we move off the path and take cover behind the palms, Sonny, Bhen and Pagal crowd around me, shielding me until the patrol passes.

Later, while we are crossing a rice paddy, we hear the clatter of metal. Since we are out in the open, there is nothing to do but crouch down in the mud and water. This time Sonny, Bhen, Pagal and two other guerrillas crawl over and huddle around me. When the patrol has gone I become aware of pain in my chest and throat and a tremendous pressure in my head. I realize I have been holding my breath.

In the *bancas* again, we come to a place where the river branches in several directions. From the branch closest to our left comes the sound of paddles splashing in the water—a boat coming toward us. The guerrillas in my *banca* stop rowing and click their weapons off safety. The metallic clicks sound like shots on the quiet river. From the approaching *banca* we can now faintly see comes an answering sound of released safeties. Commander Dino stands up in our *banca*, braces himself and aims his AK-47 at the oncoming *banca*. He shouts a challenge.

The reply is in English and is addressed to me: "Lawrence, what is your coconut?" It's the guerrilla called Tarzan. (He is the soldier sitting cross-legged in the bow of the boat, in the photo on the opposite page.) His command of English consists of the words "your" and "coconut" and the phrase "What is," used as he points to an object.

Within hours, I'm on a Philippine Airlines' flight out of

the war zone, and the stewardess is telling me of her plans to transfer to international flights and to see the United States.

\* \* \*

**Catbalogan, Samar**--Having seen the MNL in action, I now wanted even more to make contact with the NPA—whose soldiers are fighting over a much larger expanse of Philippine territory. I arrived several days early for my meeting with Father Timmy. He arrived several days late. After I waited for ten long, nervous days, he came with word that the NPA would not be able to take me into their guerrilla zone. The fighting was too intense; the government, too suspicious of all foreigners in the area. And, despite my argument that when the fighting was intense was the time for a journalist to be in the area, the New People's Army was adamant. I had to wait until the situation cooled. At least a month, they said, perhaps longer.

\* \* \*

**Manila, Luzon**--Several days after leaving Samar, I dumped my anger and disappointment on Lette Guerrero. My return flight to the U.S. was scheduled to leave in two weeks. My financial condition and what I felt must be the government's growing suspicion of my activities decreed that I be on it. But I still had not yet made the contact that I wanted with the NPA.

Lette finally got me into their guerrilla zone 70 kilometers north of Manila, one week before my scheduled flight. The zone is close to Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. The people in the area are farmers, as are the great

## Homemade Guns -- Nails for Bullets

While the Philippine government has won international praise for its efforts on behalf of the Vietnamese boat people, it has created over 50,000 refugees of its own, on Samar Island alone, in the last few months. Refugee sites have been established by the military, but, despite rampant starvation and disease, local military commanders have turned down offers of aid from the Catholic Church.

The refugees are the result of operations conducted mainly in the northern part of Samar, where the majority of the government's 7,000 troops on the island are centered. Several areas in the north have been designated "free-fire" zones. Hundreds of unarmed civilians have been killed.

Residents are told to evacuate the targeted area, but many are too afraid of the government troops to follow them, as ordered, down to the coastal towns. Instead, they flee farther into the forests and mountains. When the government patrols stumble on them during subsequent sweeps, these people are identified as NPA. Helicopters are called in for strafing; then soldiers rampage through, killing everything that moves. Women are commonly raped before they are put to death. As was the fashion for American troops in Vietnam, government troops cut off the ears of the dead and keep them as souvenirs.

From August 22 to September 6, 1979, I traveled throughout Samar. To avoid detection and surveillance in the coastal areas, I traveled only at night. In the interior, which is considered a liberated zone (approximately three-fifths of the island), I walked from barrio to barrio. After seeing the weapons of the peasants, I realized that only desperation could

have brought them to resist the government troops. Their only weapons, besides their *bolo* knives, are homemade single-round shotguns. The stocks are hand-carved; the barrels, made from simple steel pipes. The powder charge is made from the heads of matches. The bullets, too, are makeshift: nails are cut up or molten lead is hardened in cold water. These weapons' effective range is less than 20 meters. One woman joked that it might be more effective to hit the soldiers over the head with the shotgun instead of shooting at them.

Many sources say that the current government military operations here have more than just a military objective. It is no coincidence, they say, that the lands being evacuated in northern Samar are rich in uranium, bauxite and timber. They say it is also no coincidence that the Australian government and the U.S.-dominated World Bank are loaning over \$75 million to various projects in the east and north of Samar Island. These areas have been the focus of the military's operations since June.

Some 78 years ago, an American general, Brig. Gen. Jacob H. "Hell Roaring Jake" Smith, was made commander of the Sixth Separate Brigade, whose task it was to suppress a revolt on Samar against U.S. colonialization. The orders he gave to his men were explicit: "I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn, the better you will please me. . . . The interior of Samar must be made a howling wilderness."

Today the U.S.-trained and -financed troops of the Marcos government would make "Hell Roaring Jake" very pleased. □

majority of Filipinos. The focus of the NPA organizing is land reform.

First, some history. The NPA began in December 1968, when young militant activists within the Communist Party, which had existed in the Philippines since 1930, repudiated the old leadership for its conciliatory attitude toward the government and established a new party. On March 29, 1969, this new party founded its military arm, the New People's Army, with 60 members and 35 weapons. The year following the declaration of martial law saw the emergence of the National Democratic Front, a coalition similar to that of Nicaragua's Sandinistas. Its primary goal, it says, is to establish a genuine coalition government to replace Marcos and to hold "popular, free and honest elections" within a year of such a takeover.

Since its formation in the central Luzon province of Tarlac, the NPA has expanded to 41 of the Philippines' 72 provinces. It claims a full-time armed strength of 4,000 guerrillas.

With the Moro rebels on Mindanao I had observed and come to appreciate the importance of popular support to a guerrilla movement. On my last day in the NPA zone, two days before I left the Philippines, I realized that such popular support is the difference between life and death.

I was talking quietly with a group of guerrillas in a house in a barrio. A young NPA woman, Roni, suddenly had to interrupt her statement on the equality of the sexes enjoyed within the NPA; she was called for a hurried conference with the commander of her unit. Another guerrilla, Omar, told me to get my things ready to move out.

"Don't let yourself be afraid," he said, "but while we've been talking upstairs, the brother of a known informer visited downstairs; he knows there are comrades here."

The commander told me to wait upstairs, and the unit of eight guerrillas gathered their packs and weapons and took up firing positions by the windows and doors downstairs. One left by the back door. A motorbike with a sidecar arrived, and Omar, armed only with a .45 caliber pistol, hustled me into it. Together with the civilian driver, we went deeper into the guerrilla zone, where supposedly, it would be much safer. The people who live in and farm the area call it a "liberated" zone, but the NPA says it isn't so yet.

As we entered the nearby barrio, the people waved as if they wanted us to stop, and, as we approached the center of the barrio, a young boy Omar knew ran in front of the motorbike, forcing the driver to stop. Omar spoke briefly with the boy, then directed the driver back the way we had come. We stopped at a nearby house, and they told me to run inside; Omar and the boy soon followed. The driver gunned his motorbike away.

The boy had told Omar that there were three jeeps, loaded with soldiers of the Philippine Constabulary, waiting in ambush only 100 meters from where he had stopped the motorbike. Omar sent a warning to the rest of the squad. He sent a message to the barrio captain, asking him to supply the soldiers with beer to divert their attention. He also sent word to the barrio organizing committee, so they could plan our exit from the barrio and my return to Manila.

Later in the afternoon, other members of the guerrilla squad joined us. I spent the rest of the day conducting interviews, holding photo sessions and moving from house to house to keep ahead of the government troops. Thanks to



A platoon of Moro National Liberation Front guerrillas travels through a rice paddy in a banca, or dugout canoe.

\* \* \*

These soldiers are among an estimated 30,000 who are fighting for autonomy for 13 provinces in the Philippines' predominantly Muslim southwestern islands. The war is fierce; the government has obliterated entire villages in this area with napalm or by saturation bombing.

POOR ORIGINAL

# A DECADE OF DECADENCE IS ENOUGH.

After the chic anarchy of punk, the escapism of disco and the cerebral celebrations of jazz fusion, something real.

Twenty five, Armenian-American and queer as a \$3 bill, Sirani Avedis sings straight from the heart with a lotta guts and more than a little bit of soul.

Call it the politics of experience. Her debut album, *Tattoos*, takes healthy doses of blues, jazz, R&B and revolution and combines them into a music that brings to rock & roll some of its original vibrancy... with conviction!

Joining Sirani on *Tattoos* is The Kid Sister Band, an eclectic collection of womyn musicians whose credits range from Laura Nyro and Sister Sledge to the underground movement of womyn's music.

## TATTOOS

The album by Sirani Avedis

Available at record stores and alternative booksellers or by sending \$6.75 (includes postage & handling) to: TERRAPIN RECORDS, Dept. FZ, 721 West Barry, Chicago, 60657. Dealer inquiries welcome.



the support of the barrio, another government ambush attempt had failed.

But, if the NPA is so popular, the question that arises immediately is: Why is the Philippines entering its eighth year of martial law with Marcos still firmly entrenched? The leaders of the anti-Marcos groups are unanimous in their answer: U.S. support.

According to the State Department, from 1972 to 1979 the Philippines received \$846.8 million in military and economic aid from the United States. The Carter administration, despite its talk of human rights, is currently seeking \$95.7 million in military aid and \$59 million in economic aid to the Philippines for fiscal year 1980. If approved, this will be the first time since 1970 that military aid from the U.S. to the Philippines has exceeded economic aid.

Where the Iran-Philippines analogy breaks down is in the type of postrevolutionary government likely to be established. Although it is impossible to say with much certainty what this regime would be like, current statements by revolutionary leaders describe a society less rigid than Iran or, in a different way, Vietnam.

The National Democratic Front says it wants an egalitarian society, to be achieved through a coalition government similar to that of Nicaragua. Throughout their underground organization, including their army, women and men have equal responsibilities. The NDF recognizes the rights of the Moro National Liberation Front in the areas where it is fighting for autonomy; the two guerrilla groups have friendly relations now, although, of course, that is no guarantee the same would continue after they take power.

As for the Moro National Liberation Front: although the MNLF has religion as its base, the kind of government the group says it would establish is "Islamic socialism"—everything would be decided on a democratic basis, not by religious leaders. Women have been given a share of the responsibility in the MNLF, although the organization is not egalitarian; they are not pressed to conform to strict Muslim codes as in Iran.

\* \* \*

**Manila, Luzon**--At least half of the contents of my luggage would have been considered "subversive material" by customs agents at the international airport: underground literature, bomb fragments, photographs of guerrillas, cassette tapes of interviews, my notebooks, my journal. But because of my white skin and American passport, my bags weren't even opened.

As I was checking through customs, a door suddenly opened off to my left, and a disheveled young Filipino man darted out and ran toward the main exit. Just as suddenly, two guards came through the door and overtook the young man. With a guard on either arm, he was dragged back inside the room, and the door was kicked shut. He had fought them every step back to the room, his face contorted, walled from anger and fear.

A few people in the crowded customs area laughed. Most of the people acted as if it had never happened. So did I. It was my last memory of the Philippines.

*Lawrence T. Johnson is a freelance reporter who has written for the Associated Press and for the San Francisco Examiner and other newspapers.*