A WEEK before the flight to the highlands, Speaker Aquino already knew that the government was to decamp. His family was then staying near the Palace, on Arlegui Street, in the white-pillared mansion (formerly the German embassy) designated as the official residence of the Speaker. It was decided that Doña Aurora would remain there, with Don Benigno’s four elder children and her own seven children: María Aurora, Ninoy (then eleven years old), Gerarda, Lupita, Agapito, Pablo and Teresita. The eldest Aquino boy, Antonio, was to be in charge of the family while their father was away.

Tony Aquino remembers what his father said then:

“It was a week before the government left for Baguio. So we all gathered together and he told us they were to be evacuated and we should stay behind with Mother; most of us were so young. He told us they were going to Baguio and eventually, maybe, to Tokyo. He said: ‘If you think I have died, act accordingly.’ He said: ‘You know the fortunes of war. We have to be realistic. If I come back, it will be like coming back from the grave. I leave no will: share and share alike.’

“But even before the Japanese times he had already given us, the children of the first marriage, what belonged to us. And he had already divided among Mother and the young ones everything else. So actually there was nothing more to subdivide. His entire property had already been given to us. And during the Japanese times we had become quite poor. But he could have been rich, with all his influence. One time the Japanese government told Mother: ‘Here are vouchers amounting to such-and-such a sum representing your husband’s salary during the time of his sojourn in Japan.’ He had never collected them.

“Mother is very religious and she resigned herself to suffering. Daddy said: ‘Consider when I leave that I may never return; you will have
that much more time to adjust yourselves." And Mother said: 'What else can we do? It is the will of God.' She said to him: 'Let us know where you are.' But we his children said: 'Oh, Daddy will always come back. Nothing will happen to him. He has survived many crises in life. This is nothing new.'"

The actual parting, early in January 1945, was at dawn, for the convoy was moving out at seven in the morning. At Arlegui to see the Speaker off was his sister Fortunata:

"Aurora was trying not to cry until he had left; then she hid behind a door and sobbed. Soon after that the house filled up with refugees: Justice and Mrs. Morán, the Avancenas, the Kalaws. Ninoy in short pants went around with a cousin looking for food."

The Laurel government had left Manila on December 21, 1944 — three years almost to the day after Quezon and Osmeña had fled the city. Now Quezon was dead, but Osmeña was back in the country, reestablishing the Commonwealth in the south even as the Second Republic abandoned the capital and set out for the north. Two weeks later, Speaker Aquino followed, accompanied by his youngest brother, Amando, the one who, in happier days, had gone to America to study and had wound up in the ring. In Tarlac the two Aquinos darted off to Murcia, where they had grown up, for a few minutes with their brother Gonzalo. There was no time to say goodbye to their father the general, who was in Concepción. Gonzalo pleaded, for the old man's sake, that Amando be left behind, but Amando was determined to go with Benigno.

In Baguio, where they occupied the Mansion House and the Pines Hotel, the evacuees stayed three bleak months, under constant air raids, while the Americans landed in Lingayen, sped across the heartland and recaptured Manila. His mountain refuge had been crunched to rubble when, in March 1945, Laurel was hidden to prepare for another hegira. This time he offered to go alone but the Japanese insisted that he be accompanied by even a token court. In the retinue finally agreed on were Minister and Mrs. Osias, General Mateo Capinpin and Speaker Aquino. Leaving behind in Baguio his brother Amando, the Speaker joined the flight from Baguio to Amanao to flight to the Second Republic. At midnight of March 30, while white and yellow airmen battled in the skies, a fleet of Japanese bombers flew the Laurel party from Tuguegarao to Taiwan.

The next refuge was another mountain city, Sozan in Taiwan, where the Japanese were cold to the Filipinos and kept them like prisoners: closely guarded, meagerly fed. The Formosan larder was not stricken; there was an abundance of rice, greens and poultry; but the exiles were dieted on gruel. Whenever they asked for anything the answer was always: "Arimasen (there is none)." Sighed Speaker Aquino: "For-

mosa is the land of Arimasen." The arimasen lasted two months, until the first week of June, when the Filipinos were finally flown to Japan.

They were received by the emperor, and spent the duration of the war in the shrine city of Nara, in whose green quiet they heard the death rattle of empire: the fall of the Ryukyus, the fire dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and at last the surrender. But not till August 17, or two days after Japan had yielded, did Laurel decree the end of the Second Republic.

Ambassador Vargas had hurried at once to Nara to suggest such a declaration: "But Laurel temporized. Vargas was returning to Tokyo from Nara when he dropped off at a station of the Tokyo-Nara line, went back to the ancient city, and urged Laurel once more to dissolve the Republic. Laurel relented and issued a statement to that effect. In the welter of the dramatic news of Japan's surrender and MacArthur's appointment as supreme commander of the Allied Powers, the news of the Republic's dissolution hardly got a space in Manila's small newspapers."

A month later, hearing that MacArthur was looking for them, the exiles went to Tokyo to present themselves to the Caesar. They never saw MacArthur. They were arrested by the American military and sent to Tokyo's Sugamo Prison, which had been cleared of native convicts and turned into a concentration camp for the Axis. There, in mid-September 1945, Laurel and his son Junior, Aquino, Osias and Capinpin joined the first prisoner of war to be sent to Sugamo: Ambassador Vargas. The rest of the population were mostly German and Italian diplomats or Asian envoys of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. The guards were American GIs.

Vargas recalls Sugamo as being very much like Bilibid:

"Laurel and his son were together in one room, nine by eighteen feet. It was a regular prison cell, with bars, and a privy inside; you could not go out. I was given a cell of the same size, across from Laurel. But Aquino and Osias each got a smaller room, six by nine feet, only half the size of my cell. During meal time and exercise time we were released from our cells and we could talk to each other. We were given army rations, good food, and everything we needed, even cigarettes.

"One thing I remember very distinctly about my compadre Don Benigno (we always called each other compadre). The first day we were taken out for exercise we were strolling about in the courtyard and the American guard told us to do fatigue duty: pick up cigarette butts, that sort of thing. And Aquino retorted: 'What the hell, we are not convicts, we are political prisoners. We will not do anything of the sort.' So we all refused to obey. 'Let the guards do that themselves,' said Aquino.

1Malay, p. 134-5.
We held on to our position and dignity. After all, in our group were the President of the Philippines and the Speaker of the Assembly, Osfas was minister of education and I was ambassador. We said, ‘What the hell, why should we do fatigue duty?’ I don’t know if they were able to make the other prisoners do it; but the Filipinos, no. And I remember it was Don Benigno who was most vocal about this.”

When the wintry weather set in, Speaker Aquino became sickly. He developed a heart condition and twice collapsed from a stroke while in Sugamo. Still a deputy of his father’s generation, he was repeating his father’s history, with this sojourn behind bars as a prisoner of the Americans. He was 51 when he entered Sugamo and the experience would age him.

Because Vargas was allowed to keep a radio, the Filipinos knew what was happening in their country: the break between Osmeña and Roxas, the formation of a new party called the Liberal, and the frenzies of the 1946 election campaign, when collaboration was pushed as an issue against Roxas. Just before the polls, the minister of justice and home affairs of the Second Republic, Teofilo Sison, had been convicted of treason by the People’s Court and it had looked as if the old oligarchy were doomed: the guerrilla and loyalist faction would take over in politics. But the Roxas triumph at the polls indicated, as Roxas argued, that the collaboration issue had been repudiated by “the Filipino people who were here and in the best position to know the significance” of the collaborators’ actions. An American historian, D. J. Steinberg, thinks that an American decision to prosecute the collaborators might have altered the outcome of the election, but: “For whatever reasons, the nation voted for the men who had stayed in Manila rather than for those who had taken to the hills or to Washington.” It’s more probable that American pressure to have the infidel hanged would have made the nation not more anti-Quislings but more anti-American. The euphoria of the Liberation had been quickly followed by friction between “Flips” and GIs — and the reaction expressed a national resentment: “Why should we feel grateful to them for liberating us from a plight they were to blame for in the first place?” The show of resentment explains why the GIs took to sneering at the ungrateful as “Flips.” It was not a climate in which American prosecution of Filipino “traitors” would have prospered, even should the Americans threaten to withhold aid. Anyway, Washington had realized that hanging the Philippine oligarchy would deprive Mother America of her only best collaborators, at the time when, as in Empire Days, the Yanqui empire was in danger from the “second wind” of revolution. The old resistance to benevolent assimilation, so long seething underground, had, during the war, boiled over to the surface with the Huk.

“The new policy [of Washington on the Philippines] advocated massive support of the traditional oligarchy to enable it to restore order, to lead the fight against communism, and to assure stable leadership in independence. This required that the collaboration question — a divisive issue within the oligarchy — be allowed to fade. As in the early American era, when the United States backed the traditional order rather than the radical reformers, once again the United States supported the establishment against the radical reformers of Philippine society. Washington, considering the Hukbalahap to be the international conspiracy of communism, ignored the noncommunist, indigenous, albeit radical quality, of peasant unrest.”

The Americans ignored another possibility: that a portion of the oligarchy might have been so embittered by the war and what came after that, instead of resuming their job of serving the empire, they would defy it. The “divisive issue within the oligarchy” was to be not collaboration but parity rights, opposition to which would wed in strange bedfellowship the alienated oligarchs and the Huk. That they led the fight not against Communism but against the neo-imperialists would rehabilitate in patriot eyes such “traitors” and apparent discs as Laurel and Recto. Though the Americans could always count on their loyalists, from Roxas to Magsaysay, it was the rebel oligarchs who set the tone of the future. From the 1950s on, the Mother America thing became absurd, and to be progressive began to mean a return (however unknowingly) to the anti-sajonismo of the 1900s. Our underground history had surfaced for good and would increasingly be recognized as mainstream.

But on July 4, 1946, when the Third Republic was inaugurated (hobbled by the same conditions that had frustrated the First and the Second, the rift in the ruling class was not yet serious; the fallen oligarchs looked expendable; Roxas and the new guerrilla aristocracy could obviously be relied on to ensure the continuance of the American empire in the Philippines, despite the supposed independence.

The exiles in Sugamo celebrated Independence Day with a program: speeches, poems, a prayer, a flag ceremony, the singing of the anthem. They had been writing Roxas, asking to be brought home (the Philippine government had had jurisdiction over them since September of the previous year, when MacArthur had turned over internees held by his army to the Commonwealth), but the appeals for repatriation went unheeded until the Republic was proclaimed and Roxas was in Malacañang. Only then, it seems, was it thought advisable to bring home Laurel, Aquino, Vargas and Osfas. On August 25, 1946, after almost a year at the Sugamo, they were flown home by a U.S. army...

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1 Philippine Collaboration in World War II, p. 145.

2 Steinberg, pp. 143-4.
plane. They landed at Nichols Field at half-past five in the afternoon and found nobody to welcome them except a daughter of Osias. They were taken to the prison in Muntinlupa — and there, waiting anxiously, were their families.

His family was shocked to see how changed Benigno Aquino was.

"He was very haggard," recalls Tony Aquino. "He had suffered heart attacks in Sugamo; he already had a slight heart condition. He said it was so cold there. He was very thin. He had lost about thirty pounds, and he used to weigh 165. But he was happy to be back, even if in Muntinlupa."

Muntinlupa was then, as Recto quipped, a "VIP hotel," lodging senators and justices and cabinet members and department heads and governors and mayors — the elite that had ruled before the war and during the war and that would continue to rule after the war would later just about being "alumni of Muntinlupa." The arrivals from Sugamo were back in the circle of (now literally) insiders. "The four men were assigned special rooms in Muntinlupa which were fairly commodious. However, instead of beds with mattresses they were given canvas cots. Vargas was reminded of the camping expeditions which he used to attend as a Boy Scout official. Unlike the days in Sugamo, the next few days were busy ones for the four expatriates. There was the People's Court trial ahead of them for which they had to prepare their defense."

They were permitted to go out under guard and saw for the first time: the unfamiliar postwar Manila: the intact downtown north of the Pasig, the ruined south side. Intramuros, which had given Manila a sense of place, was now rubble and weed; parts of the old walls still stood, but gone were the halls of Letrán, where the young Benigno Aquino had started as orator, and Santo Tomás, where he had read for the law, and the Ayuntamiento, which stood for Government in the days when Osmeña was there resuming a people's quest of free will, and the Intendencia, where Quezon had plotted his ascension, and the law courts beside the Cathedral, where so many of the elite had passed their apprentice youth, and the old Cathedral square, where the fountains had moved to bright light and the leaves to jazz music on the evenings when the Government danced. A few days after the Sugamo exiles arrived, another refugee came home at last; and at dawn of the first day of August, Laurel, Aquino and Vargas were taken in secret to the university chapel of Santo Tomás in Sulucan, to pray over Quezon's bier. In mid-August they were arraigned before the People's Court, entered a plea of innocent to the charges of treason, petitioned for bail and, after quite a fuss, were finally granted bail. On September 11 they were released from prison. Aquino went straight to Concepción, where Doña Aurora had moved the family.

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The big house in which he recuperated had been built at the peak of his career. The spacious lot is just off the town plaza of Concepción, on the main street; and when his father the general had retired from farming, Don Benigno had built the old man a framehouse on one side of the lot and himself a bamboo-and-nipa bungalow on the other side, because he loved nipa houses. In that "glorified nipa hut" Ninoy Aquino was born. In 1938 Don Benigno had decided to replace the bungalow with a two-story mansion.

"That house was an architect's nightmare," groans Tony Aquino. "My father would take a look at what had been done and say: 'I don't like it. Take it off. Put another facade on.' And the poor architect would have to start all over again. First they built it one way, then Daddy wanted it changed another way. Then they added this porch, then they added those columns. It's a termite's nemesis. There's no wood in that house but narra. No termite could survive in it; it's all narra."

The house, still in perfect condition today, does have a rich panelled look. In the dining room the table is long enough to sit two dozen on high backed carved chairs; the sala is ornate with chandeliers and statuary; upstairs are half a dozen bedrooms and two baths with tubs. The porches look out on gardens and a swimming pool with cabanas. But the family has not lived in the house for a long time. When Ninoy stayed there as town mayor he put in stables. They are empty now but still smell of the vanished horses.

"When my husband built that house," says Doña Aurora Aquino, "Roxas told him it was impractical. 'Your children are all studying in Manila,' Roxas said, 'and afterwards they wouldn't be staying here. They will be in Manila making a living.' And my husband answered: 'When all my children are married, I'm sure that my widow will come back to live in Concepción because her roots are here.' And I think that time is coming. I have been mulling over the idea of staying in Concepción. After all, my husband planned it that way. The only thing is, I would be alone in that big house... My husband was always more at home in the province."

Through the rest of 1946, Don Benigno stayed in Concepción, got back his health, and prepared for his trial. By 1947 he was ready for a comeback; and it was soon well known in Manila that Aquino had become a member of Roxas's poker cabinet. The Sugamo exiles had got over an initial umbrage with Roxas. "In the beginning, I think," says Vargas, "Laurel and all of us, including Aquino, were bitter with Roxas. I shouldn't say bitter perhaps but disappointed — because Roxas did not want to receive us openly. Every time Laurel went to Malacañang he had to go in through the back door. But Aquino and Roxas had been so close to each other that Aquino felt he should be received openly by the President." Roxas had, however, good reason..."
to be discreet. "U.S. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes had warned
against 'soft treatment' of the so-called collaborators and barefacedly
said that, if these men were set free or allowed to regain their influence
in the Philippine government, the Filipinos could not expect material
aid from America. Roxas needed rehabilitation money very badly."6
Nevertheless, Solicitor General Tanada of the People's Court was pre-
sently complaining about the "alleged weekly visits" of Roxas's execu-
tive secretary "to Dr. Laurel during the latter's detention in Muntin-
lupa" and about the "frequent attendance of Malacañang's official or
social functions of Messrs. Reeto, Aquino and others whose cases have
yet to be heard."7 Inevitably the elite were gravitating back to the core
of power and cohering again into a kin group; until amnesty was pro-
claimed, there could be no rocking of the boat, no new rivalries or
intramurals — not even over Parity yet. In February 1947, a Manila
newspaper editorially commented on Reeto's silence on the "burning
issue of parity" and declared that he had disappointed his admirers by
not taking a stand; but those under indictment for treason could not,
at a time when the pro-American faction was still supreme, further
blacken themselves by questioning the Constitution. Besides, for the
oligarchy, no issue is worth picking up unless it's usable as armament
in a political contest — and none of those under indictment could yet
run for public office.

Still, the elections of 1947 could be used to test the chances for a
comeback; and many of the fallen oligarchs returned to their bailiwick
and put up a candidate for governor, to verify the state of their political
health. Laurel, for instance, pitted his man Feliciano Leviste against
the incumbent governor in Batangas. Though the Laurel faction won, it
made a poor showing: Leviste just managed to scrape by. What those
under a shadow wanted to prove was: since they could make a candidate
win, they themselves must still be acceptable to the electorate and
could run again for office — maybe in the 1949 polls.

In Tarlac, Congressman Josè Roy of the Roxas party had replaced
Aquino as political kingpin; the Nacionalista strength was nil. After
the Liberation the landowners had had to band together and form a private
army, the Civilian Guards, to dislodge the Huk's from the municipal
governments; and in the process the Liberal Party became identified
with this war of the landlords against peasant insurgency, while the
Nacionalistas became suspect as pro-Huk and anti-American, not to
mention anti-Parity. Despite his closeness to Roxas and despite the
Nacionalista stand against collaborators, Aquino had not switched over
to the new party. However, most of his leaders in Tarlac had turned

Liberal and those of them willing to return to his command would back
only a Liberal candidate. "All these years," said Aquino to them, "you
have been following me. This time I will follow you." They put up a
Liberal candidate, Alejandro Galang, against the Roy man, incumbent
Governor Antonio López. The Liberals declared Tarlac a free zone —
no official candidate — and decreed that the election inspectors were
to be evenly divided between the Aquino and Roy factions. But it seems
that Roy, disregarding the party's orders, went ahead and held a conven-
tion that declared López the official LP candidate. The fight was to be
rough. Once again Aquino went on the stump, but never so desperately;
the polls rather than the People's Court (where his case was still pend-
ing) would decide his fate. When the count was in, it was a heart-
breaker: Roy's candidate had won with some 24,000 votes; Aquino's
man was not far behind with 20,000. It was the first time Aquino had
lost an election; the incredible thing was that he had lost in his own
bailiwick of Tarlac.

"That was his first political defeat there," says Ninoy Aquino. "I
don't think he ever fought so hard. He and Laurel were trying to prove
a point. I used to go to Tarlac every Saturday — this was in 1947 — just
to be with him. I would go campaigning with him and I developed a
very close relationship with him. During the Japanese times I shined
his shoes for him; I was his valet, his muchacho, and I loved it. And in
1947, I would join him in Tarlac and tell him about what was happening
in Manila and he would tell me about the campaign. He felt he was
being crossed by people who thought he had gone back on his old
chronies. So Avelino and Pérez and the rest torpedoed him. A week to
go before the election, they removed all his inspectors. Then the elec-
tions came and he lost. After the defeat I didn't really feel it was that
bad — until he came home. My mother had stayed with him, kept close
to him, tried to cheer him up. And after a while he seemed his old self
again: smiling, laughing. But it would have been different if his governor
had won; then I suppose the next step would have been the Senate again
or the House again."

However, there was 1949 to look forward to; in two years he could
be ready for another try. Thus did family and friend keep up his spirits.
He returned to Concepción and rested there until December, when he
sent word that he was coming to the city for the sports event of the
year: the title fight between Manuel Ortiz of Mexico, world bantam
champion, and Turso del Rosario, the Filipino challenger. Only twice
before had a world title bout been staged in the Philippines,8 and the
fight was of tribal interest to Don Benigno because Turso was a Tar-

6Malay, p. 144.
7Ibid.
8Pancho Villa vs. Clever Sencio in the mid-1920s (Villa kept the flyweight title); and
Ceferino Garcia of the bolo puncher vs. Glen Lee the "Nebraska Wildcat," in 1939 (the bolo
puncher retained the middleweight title).
Lakeño. His father promised Ninoy Aquino, then 15, that the two of them would be together at ringside as guest of his compadre Jorge Vargas.

The fight was to be on Saturday night, December 20, 1947. Morning of that day, Don Benigno contacted his son Antonio, who was farming the Tinang Hacienda on a lease:

"Tony, why don't you hunt some wild duck and have them cooked at some restaurant near the Rizal Memorial Stadium? I want to pull a joke on George Vargas and his friends. After the fight I'll say to them: 'Why don't we all have a wild-duck dinner?' And they'll say: 'But where would you get the wild duck?' And we'll be at that restaurant and in you'll bring the wild duck to the table. I'll see you at the fight, Tony, but be sure to deliver the duck first and have them prepared."

So, Tony Aquino went hunting that morning, out in the marshes of Tinang, where the wild duck still flocked, and he shot down twenty of the game:

"I went to the Centrál and gave four of them to friends; then I went to Tarlac town and gave four more to other friends. I still had a dozen. I put them in the back of the car and started for Manila. It was about five in the afternoon. Just outside Tarlac I had a flat, on a brand-new tire too. And then just outside San Fernando I had another flat. I had to go back to San Fernando for new tires. I got into Manila at half-past nine, took the duck to the night club on Dewey beside the Bayside and told them what to do with the duck. When I got to the Rizal Memorial some people I know met me at the gate. 'Your father had an attack,' they said, 'he has been taken to the hospital.' I rushed to the Philippine General and saw my brother Billy on the front steps. 'Daddy died five minutes ago,' he said. As I went upstairs all I could think of was: 'What am I going to do with all that duck?' I was lost. Talk about lost weekends!"

Don Benigno had, as he promised, taken Ninoy along to the fight, and they sat at ringside with Vargas, then PAAF president. Some 10,000 fans packed the stadium; among the ringsters were Vice-President Quirino Justice Secretary Ozaeta, Senator José Vera, businessman Chick Parsons, and the Quezon girls, Baby and Nini, who were with Nini's husband Philip Buenacamo. The betting in the gallery was on Tirso but at ringside Ortiz was favored, three to two. Though the Mexican was much the older of the match, as 33 years old. At half-past nine the boxers entered the ring: Tirso in green, Ortiz in blue.

The first round was mostly caution and misses on both sides; a few blows were exchanged in the second, the most notable being a jab at the head by Tirso that loosened the Mexican's hair down over his eyes; more active was the third round, with the aggressive Tirso absorbing some heavy body blows. Then, in the fourth and, as the sportswriters called it, "fatal" round, Ortiz landed two lefts to the head and a stiff right to the body, all of which he meant to hurt and did. A moment later he shot a right to the belly and Tirso's knees buckled. Another right to the midriff and poor Tirso wobbled, sank, and sat down on the floor, in the lotus position, looking contemplative.

At that moment, as the referee began counting eight and the shrieking crowd bunched on their toes, Benigno Aquino also jumped up. Suddenly he sat down again, stunned by a tearing in his chest. Tirso del Rosario had regained his legs, Ortiz returned to the attack. "Run, Tirso!" came the cry from his corner. Tirso ran, the bell rang. Aquino told Vargas about the pain in his side, but still wanted to stay out the fight. During the fifth round, which Ortiz dominated, Don Benigno was fast losing consciousness. Suddenly he slumped to one side.

Recalls Ninoy Aquino: "When Tirso got hit in the fourth round and dropped, Papa jumped up — and that was the last. He had suffered his heart attack. When he suddenly slumped I panicked. I grabbed him and tried to lift him up."

The Vargas party, which included Dr. Guillermo Rustia, carried the stricken man out to the parking area but no car could be extricated from the jam there and a taxi had to be hailed. At the Philippine General Hospital, Dr. Rustia applied first aid. Ninoy telephoned his mother, was sent to notify his uncle Amando. "On my way back to the hospital, somewhere on Plaza Lawton, in front of the Metropolitan, I felt as if something were trying to stop the car. At that precise moment Papa died. When I got back to the hospital he was gone." Don Benigno was 53. Tirso del Rosario lost the fight; he failed to recover from the fourth round, which had been fatal to more than his dream of championship.

The next day Benigno Aquino lay in state at the Funeraria Nacional; among the first visitors was President Roxas, who was met by General Servillano Aquino, dressed in the rayadillo of the Revolution.

Tony Aquino recounts the scene:

"The President told the General that the dead man would be given all the honors due him: necrological services and a funeral under the auspices of the State. The General looked at the President as though they were face to face on a battlefield. 'Mr. President,' said my grandfather, 'nobody thought of giving Benigno any honors when he was alive. In fact, some people suspected him of being a traitor. I don't see how, now that he is dead, he is less of a traitor. I will take my son back to Tarlac and bury him in my own way. Thank you very much for your offer.'"

"President Roxas approached me and said: 'Tony, talk to your grandfather. I know how he feels.' So I talked to Lolo. You know, you'd think Daddy would be bitter about all those accusations against him; but he was not. He just said: 'History will vindicate me.' But my grandfather was different; he was very hurt. So he said again: 'Thank you, Mr. Roxas.
I will bury my son with the honors I think he deserves. Why should he now be a patriot because he is dead?' And he said to me: 'Tony, we were taking your father back to Concepción. Hire a special train.' But we were able to prevail on him to accept the President's arrangements."

An anomalous typhoon, "the worst to hit Manila in years," was raging on Christmas Eve, when the body was transferred to the university of Santo Tomás, where, on December 29, the Congress of the Philippines paid tribute to the late solon. He was lauded as "instrumental in the success of the people's fight for independence."

Among the speakers was Claro M. Recto, who would provoke controversy with his oration over the bier. While Aquino, said Recto, was languishing in Sugamo Prison, the allied powers were exculpating Emperor Hirohito from all responsibility for a war of aggression, because Hirohito was valuable to the great powers as a factor in international politics and Aquino was not.

"You were worthless to them," said Recto to the bier, "in this game of power politics where they have always wanted to use Filipinos as lackeys, fieldhands and cannon fodder. That is why Hirohito continues on the throne of his glorious ancestors while you were thrown into a prison cell where you got the disease that would take you to the grave.

"Benigno Aquino! Divine Providence, in claiming jurisdiction over you, has denied human tribunals the right to judge you. The government, in paying you this homage, has cleared you of the calumny heaped upon you without due process of law. And the nation, in associating herself with this demonstration of grief, proclaims that you have served her well.

"Rest in peace, faithful servant of your people! When minds have recovered their serenity and intellects their discernment, when your countrymen have learned to live, work and think only for one nation and one flag, without a lackey's servility or a courtier's fawning before any foreign power, then they will remember your splendid achievements and the noble example of your nationalism, virile and blameless, and they will call you a true patriot because you were always a true Filipino."

Four days after he died, the case of treason against Aquino was dismissed by the People's Court. It was the nation's Christmas gift to his family.

On the last day of 1947, he was buried in Concepción. So mammoth was the funeral procession that the head of it was already in the cemetery outside town while the tail of it was still in the church.

Benigno Aquino differs from his contemporaries in that, culturally and spiritually, he was never of the American era. Even Osmeña and Recto finally yielded and learned to speak American, but Aquino stayed unassimilated to the last; and his baffled funeral orators tried to define this difference in quality as "Latin." Thus to the alienated appeared the culture of their fathers, which to Aquino was pure authentic Filipino. It has been said of Ricarte that he was no traitor because he had never sworn allegiance to the American flag and, when he came back with the Japanese invader, thought himself to be merely fulfilling an old dream of the Propaganda and continuing the Revolution. In a kindred manner, Aquino owed no allegiance to the American empire because, without having to go into exile, he was an outsider to it, still living in the world of the Revolution and all his life intent on pushing its interests. He was its deputy to the end.

He whose piety carried the past forward would have the blessing of being himself carried forward, for Benigno Aquino's odysseys were to have a happy continuation. The Ulysses who raged because the alien were on his turf, squatting in his hall and eating up his substance, has had, to the health of his name, a Telemachus to pick up the odyssean bow.
Third Generation

When Ninoy Aquino was growing up his father and grandfather seemed remote figures of great antiquity. When he was five his father was 43 and his grandfather 63 years old. These two big men spoke another language to each other and were stern with noisy little brats. Both stood tall and straight and carried themselves with a dignity that had become legend. For a long time in Tarlac if you said Representante you could only mean Don Benigno and when you said General you were referring to Don Servillano. Childhood was thinking it natural to have a father and a grandfather who were household names.

Their bigness had made it natural that Ninoy's birth should involve a political crisis: the transoceanic battle between Quezon in Manila and the Osmena-Roxas Mission in Washington. When his mother was near her time of confinement, his father was persuaded by Quezon to sail for America to stop Osrox; and it was in mid-Pacific that, on November 27, 1932, Senator Aquino got a cable from the governor-general of the Philippines announcing that Ninoy had been born. When the senator came back and the baby was christened Benigno Aquino, Jr., it was again in a time of crisis: the war of pro and anti over the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act. His father lost that fight and this had brought on a third crisis, a family one, because Don Benigno had spent all his money campaigning for the independence law. He had mortgaged his hacienda in Tinang and the mortgage was foreclosed, although the Aquinos would be allowed to continue farming Tinang on lease. So, when Ninoy was growing up in Concepción, in the nipa-thatched bungalow where he was born, his father was at a crux of his career. Growing up was realizing which things that had seemed natural were really rather extraordinary.

In 1935 his father was elected to the National Assembly, the Commonwealth era had begun, and the Aquino fortunes were on the upturn

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again. The family moved to Manila; first they lived on Mabini Street in Ermita, then in a house on Colorado opposite the old Gucco mansion. In 1936 they bought a property in the lonely subdivision called New Manila. In those days, beyond the Santo Tomás campus and Calle Trabaho was urban frontier: swampland, woods and pastoral countryside. Then you came to the Santolan Sanitarium (and covered your mouth for fear of TB germs in the air). Across a bridge was the Japanese bicycle factory. Farther on in these solitudes was a convent school: St. Joseph's Academy. Just past it the wilderness suddenly turned into elegant settlement: a gridiron of streets that had numbers for names. This was New Manila, and it was fast becoming a collection of country estates. On Broadway and 14th Street, where the Aquinos went to live, their neighbors were Don Augusto Cortez and his lovely wife Amparo; Doña Sisang de Leon, who owned a movie studio; and Bishop Felix Manalo of the Iglesia ni Kristo. Off this neighborhood, in the wilds of what's now Balete Drive was a secret haunt of politicians: the Union Club, which was to the '30s what the Hotel Miglion had been to the '20s: the scene behind the scenes of government.

The Aquinos lived in a large house with gardens on a tree-lined street, but they could hear the rustic frogs croaking in the fields at the end of Broadway. When he was six, Ninoy was placed in kindergarten at St. Joseph's, where he stayed until the second grade. “All my classmates were girls.” At home, too, he was surrounded by girls: his four sisters. His father's two elder sons were living away from home and the next boy in the family was not to come till 1939, when Ninoy was already eight. “What I did, I would take my bicycle and ride down to the end of Broadway and play with the shanty boys and farm boys there until seven in the evening. Then I would go home, take a shower, join the family rosary before dinner. Life was like that until 1941. Uneventful.” From third grade on he was at the Ateneo, then still in Intramuros, and thus spent school hours with boys who might have a father in the cabinet like himself and off-school hours with his shanty and farm playmates on Broadway. “I won't say we were affluent; we were around middle middle-class. There were three or four cars in the garage.” He and his sisters, who were studying at Holy Ghost, were driven to school in a Chrysler seven-passenger limousine, an eye-popper in those days before the station wagon. Summers were spent in the family cottage in Baguio or in the new-built big house in Concepción, but many of Ninoy's vacations were spent with his maternal grandfather, who kept a lot of horses on his farm outside town. “I often stayed with him; he had a son only five or six years older than I and we had horses. Those were the happiest days. I had boots on and a horse of my own: that was my glory.”

His other grandfather, the general, sometimes came to stay a weekend in New Manila. “My father loved him so much that when he was there the entire household walked on tiptoe. They talked together in Spanish, and like old friends. I remember the old general in his white americana cerrada: high-neck collar, Nehru style. He was very tall and erect but he had slightly crossed eyes. He was supposed to be a sharpshooter, and I couldn't imagine how he could shoot straight with eyes like that. I would ask him: 'Lolo, why are your eyes like that? How did you become a general with those eyes?' My mother would be a nervous wreck trying to stop me from asking. You were not supposed to ask that.”

Doña Aurora remembers that as a boy Ninoy was always out in the streets:

"From age seven he had no yaya; so he was free to roam around. And he knew everybody in the neighborhood, and who had beautiful horses or fine dogs. One day he was peering into the grounds of Bishop Manalo and the bishop called to him: 'You boy, I see you there every day looking at my horses. Do you like horses?' Ninoy said he loved horses and Bishop Manalo told him: 'Okay, come and ride with me in my calesín.' So, any afternoon, if you saw a little boy riding with the bishop in his calesín, that was Ninoy. The bishop exercised his horses every afternoon on Broadway and he developed a liking for Ninoy, who was often at his house. Bishop Manalo was not yet a force in politics then. Later, when Catholics wondered about Ninoy's closeness to the Iglesia, I would explain that we were neighbors of old man Manalo when Ninoy was a boy and that they often went riding together in the bishop's calebura.”

The chief newspaper chain then was the T-V-T (Tribune, Vanguardia, Taliba) and the family's nickname for Ninoy was T-V-T, because he was always full of news. He kept them informed on neighborhood happenings; and whenever they went to Concepción, within an hour of their arrival Ninoy would have learned everything that was going on in town. "That boy," observed his father after one such news round-up, "is going to be a reporter." During the war Tony Aquino changed Ninoy's nickname to Domei News: "Because he would run in shouting, 'Hey, have you heard the latest?' And he'd tell us. And Daddy would ask: 'Where did you get that?' And Ninoy would say he had his sources. He was always news-conscious. And he would even argue with Daddy.”

A precocity of tongue was early evident in Ninoy. Political visitors would arrive and, if Don Benigno was in the bath, he would tell Ninoy to attend to the callers. When Don Benigno came down he would find the boy sitting with the company and carrying on a conversation with them as cool as you please. "And when we had parties," laughs Doña Aurora, "where would you find Ninoy? Out among the parked cars, surrounded by drivers, and talking with them. So, any assembly on the street, we could be sure Ninoy was in there." His father's law partner, Marcial Lichauco, once teased Ninoy about his slit eyes. "Whose eyes
are those?” taunted Lichauco. “Those are not your father’s.” Gesturing to eyes and head, the boy answered: “The eyes are the eyes of Osmena — but the brain is Quezon’s.”

As Ninoy remembers it, childhood was a time of distance between him and his father. “There was hardly any father-and-son relationship; he was already forty when we were kids and I was number six in the family. He was secretary of agriculture then and we did not see much of him; he came home late in the evening, around seven in the evening, with pánama hat and cane. Papa was a strict disciplinarian. Papa knew best. And we were a disciplined family, we were a big family. We were disciplined into making no noise from the time we were eight. Say grace and eat what’s on the table and no questions asked.” But during the war Ninoy grew closer to his father, shining his shoes, always at his beck and call, hero-worshiping him. And when Don Benigno came back from prison after the war, Ninoy’s hero-worship became intenser, as though to assure his father that, whatever the world might think of him, he was still a great man to his son. His uncle Gonzalo remembers Ninoy then as always tagging alongside his father, carrying his father’s portfolio, waiting patiently while his father conferred with political leaders, and jumping up to grab the portfolio the moment his father rose to leave. This was during Don Benigno’s last political stump, and every weekend Ninoy, then 15, would rush to Tarlac to be with his father.

Says Ninoy’s eldest brother Tony: “I’m afraid that Ninoy grew old too soon. I wish he had enjoyed part of his youth. He was never young. (His youth was cut off at that time when, as a growing young man, he needed a father.)

“The wound was the stigma on the father’s name and the result has been the effort to vindicate that name. When war broke out, the family had evacuated to Concepción. Ninoy was ten years old. One afternoon that December, he was playing in the garden when overhead, guns a-chatter, streaked a B-17 bomber, trailing smoke and pursued by two smaller planes. The B-17 made it to Clark Field but its pilot, Captain Kelly, was killed. He had just bombed and sunk the Haruna, a big Japanese battleship, off Taiwan and had been chased all the way back to Luzón by two Japanese fighter planes. The incident alarmed the Aquinos by dramatizing their nearness to Taiwan, where the foe was massing, and to Lingayén, where enemy landings were expected. Back to Manila fled the entire Aquino clan, in a long caravan of over a dozen cars. They reached the city just before Christmas and spent the holidays at the house on 14th Street. Like most people in New Manila, they sought refuge in the seminary of the Divine Word fathers when the Japanese entered Manila but went home after the panic had subsided.

By June of 1942, Ninoy was back in school, at La Salle (the Americans’ Ateneo was closed), and this time with no limousine to take him there. He had to wake up early, catch the bus (which would soon be “charcoal-fed”) to downtown Manila and there transfer to the streetcar that ran to the end of the line on Vito Cruz. Classes at La Salle were from half-past seven to one o’clock. After classes Ninoy walked to a Pampango restaurant on Tennessee Street, where his mother had arranged for him to have lunch on school days; and after lunch he walked to downtown Manila. “I saved my transportation money so I could go to the movies or a stage show. It was the heyday of the big stage shows. There were two performances every day, at two and at five in the afternoon. And I would save my money to go and hear Baby Jane singing and the Kolynos Girl, or to see a play put on by Bert Avellana or the Dramatic Philippines.” After movie or stage show he usually had only a few centavos left and would have to walk all the way from Quiapo to New Manila. “I’d stop on Calle Trabajo and buy a piece of sugar cane and chew on it as I walked home.”

During the Second Republic the Aquinos occupied the official residence of the Speaker on Arlegui Street. Beside it was the Fernando Ocampo house, which Doña Aurora found so charming she simply had to have it. She sold the New Manila property and her jewels and bought the house next door, though it was then occupied by the Japanese administrators of the San Miguel Brewery. The Aquinos could not move in till after the Liberation. Through the latter part of the war Ninoy mostly stayed in Malacañang. “I moved to Malacañang because the youngest Laurel boy, Dodjie, was my classmate in La Salle and we could be taken to school together. Doy Laurel was three years our senior. It was walking distance from our house on Arlegui to Malacañang, where the Laurel boys were. So I practically lived there.” Salvador “Doy” Laurel remembers Ninoy then as a small boy beginning to shoot up, cute-looking, with a wide grin usually from ear to ear, and hair parted in the middle of his head:

“Ninoy was the contemporary of my kid brother Dodjie but he gravitated to the older boys, maybe because he found our group more interesting. He felt more at home with our group, three or four years older, than with boys his own age; he was ahead of his years. He was the youngest in our group, which included Nene Leuterio, who would become vice-president of the Asia Bank, and Clarito Recto Junior, who would become one of the best test pilots in the country and would die in an accident, and Serge Montinola, and Tito Eduque, our best basketball player, and Goyito Abreu, who became our class valedictorian at La Salle. During the Japanese occupation Ninoy stayed with us in Malacañang. We slept together, got along very well together. I’d invite Elvira Ledesma (she would later become Elvira Manahan) and Inday
Vargas to Malacañang because Ninoy had a crush on Elvira, although she was around sixteen then and he was only eleven or twelve. We’d swim in the pool and Ninoy would pretend he didn’t know how and hold on to Elvira and shout, ‘Help, help, I can’t swim!’ Ninoy was easy to get along with, though he was very sensitive and observant. He always had something new to say, a story to tell. So we became very close and we were together in Malacañang until December of 1944, when my Papa took all of us and his cabinet to Baguio. Ninoy was left behind.”

Says Ninoy:

“We were supposed to go to Baguio with the Laurel family. Why we were left behind, I don’t know. My brother Billy got married early in January, 1945. My father just waited for Billy’s wedding, then he left to join Laurel in Baguio. That was a very tearful goodbye. After Papa had passed through Tarlac on his way to Baguio, the Americans landed in Lingayen, on January 9.”

A month later the Americans were in Manila; Malacañang and its vicinity were among the first places liberated. The Japanese there left behind barrels and barrels of soy sauce; one swimming pool in the neighborhood was found brimming with toyo. The Aquinos moved to the house on San Rafael that Doña Aurora had bought. They were cleaning it when tragic news arrived. Billy Aquino, who had married a Cojuangco girl, had been trapped south of the Pasig, where the Japanese were on a rampage; he was one of the few survivors of the massacre in La Salle College. When his family finally located him, at the Chinese General Hospital, it looked as if he would die from those ghastly bayonet wounds in his body. Billy Aquino lived, but he had lost his bride of a month.

Doña Aurora stayed in Manila waiting for her husband until she learned it was no use waiting; the Speaker was not in Baguio, he had been flown out of the country, but where to, no one could tell. Leaving the house on San Rafael to Tony and Billy, Doña Aurora took the younger children to Concepción. “When we got there,” recalls Ninoy, “the Hukos were running the town; we had a Huk mayor. Huk troops were called squadron then: Squadron 47, Squadron 49; and that Maytime there was a santacruzan every night, each one sponsored by a Huk troop. And every night, doggone it, every single night those Hukos would take me and make me the Constantino. One night I was the Constantino to a Huk amazon, Commander Liwayway. So, at twelve years old, I was a professional Constantino.” One reason Doña Aurora had moved to Concepción was to earn some money; she went into a business partnership with an old school chum, Belén Sánchez, who would later marry General Servillano Aquino. “I used to accompany her,” says Ninoy, “I didn’t know my grandfather was courting her. Our business was buy-and-sell; we would buy chickens and eggs and sell them to the GI camps. There was this old dilapidated Ford we used and we’d wake up at three in the morning and go to Paniqui and buy everything we could buy from the farmers and then drive to Angeles and sell the stuff there. It was a profitable business, money was flowing, there was inflation. And so, till June or July, there I was going around lugging baskets of eggs.”

When schools reopened, the Aquinos returned to Manila and Ninoy was placed in San Beda. This was the period when his childhood ended and he “grew old too soon.” The rapturous Liberation days when everybody was swilling tap beer and Coke, feasting on K-rations, joy-riding on jeeps with GI buddies, and chanting Paper Doll and You Are My Sunshine, were for Ninoy Aquino a time of distress. He had grown up feeling like “a little prince” but now found himself a pariah. The Constantino was mocked as a traitor’s son.

“I had grown up in a political atmosphere. Before the war, people started arriving in our house at six in the morning. Since I got up at half-past five to play with my dogs — I have always loved animals — I was already awake when visitors began coming in. My job was to offer them cigars; we always had a box of cigars ready. We were not wealthy, money was not running out of our ears; but because Papa was a cabinet member and our car was No. 6, people sort of deferred to us, there was some kind of status. Then he became Speaker during the war and one felt even more like a little prince. And in those days I lived in the Palace.

“When the Americans came back, Papa was all of a sudden a ‘ collaborator.’ My friends, or those who I thought were my friends, began to shun me. Nobody wanted to talk to me in school, the boys there didn’t like me. Those were my first traumatic experiences. I had known the heights and now I was nobody. That was why I developed a closeness to the Laurel boys, I suppose, because misery loves company. They had come back and we clung to each other — Doy, Dodjie and myself — because here we were, once upon a time little princes, and now nobody wanted to talk to us.

“That was a turning point. I was twelve going on thirteen and I had learned about the insecurity of life. Up now, down tomorrow. That was when I began to distinguish between night and day, sorrow and laughter, and to develop inner attitudes. I shunned people. At a very young age, I got this idea that if I laughed for one hour I would cry for one hour. So I restrained myself from laughing too much.”

When his father returned from Japan the boy could dare to have confidence again. “He looked so old when he came back but he was still a big hero figure to me.” And the hero could be expected to prevail, to triumph and be justified in the eyes of the world; and the world would be trustworthy again, no longer a nightmare where one dared not laugh
for fear of crying. Never did Ninoy feel so close to his father as during that time when Don Benigno was attempting a comeback, the days of his last political campaign. All the time he was not in school Ninoy was at his father’s side. The defeat was as great a blow to the son as to the father. The false world had prevailed. The hero had fallen even before that night at the stadium when the father collapsed into the son’s panic-stricken arms. When the dead man lay in state and the eminent extolled his labors, Ninoy sat tight and thought his own thoughts.

“There was this series of necrological services. I thought it was all baloney, all a sham. The guy was dead; they were all praising him—now that he was dead. I was bitter, bitter at the world. I could not believe that the world could still go on, talking and laughing, and the society pages still be loaded with parties, when my father lay dead. Wrong notion, of course. But it was my first time to learn bitterness; I was fifteen. That would make me a real loner.”

His father had died in December of 1947; in March of 1948, Ninoy graduated from high school.

“I had finished high school in two and a half years by summering at FEU and NU, just to get it over with. I was in the middle bracket: 80-85. I was never brilliant, never among the 95s. But I was never in the 75s either. Just coasting along. I was not serious in my studies, I got bored with classes. What the hell. I was really bored. I was more interested in going to the movies. And I was a loner. I had no friends. I'd take in the movies instead.”

In mid-teens he was a melancholy striping, pale and shy and thin, with the smoldering good looks that could have him mistaken for a poet. The escapist mood (hiding out at the movies) was a phase; actually he was grimly practical and worried over the family finances.

“At this point we had only Mother’s lands. What was left of my father’s lands had been sold during the war to feed us. Most of them were already mortgaged before the war: Murcia and Lawang and Tinang. Murcia was 400 hectares, Lawang was 400 hectares, Tinang was a thousand hectares. And they all went, the whole shebang. That part of Lawang in northern Tarlac was sold to buy a little more land to expand my mother’s property in Concepcion and then she bought her brothers’ lands. When Papa died, that was all we had; and the house on San Rafael, plus the house in Concepcion. From Mother’s property — rice-lands, no sugar — some 14,000 cavans were harvested yearly and our share of that was five or six thousand cavans.”

This meant a net income of about P60,000 a year, or P5000 a month; but it was a large family, and mostly children going to school. His father had planned to send Ninoy to an aggie school in California, he had not thought of a political career for his junior. He had told Ninoy: “Son, when you finish high school I’ll send you to Kellogg in Pomona. That’s where they have a good farm school. You love animals; you take up animal husbandry.” After his father’s death: “No more Kellogg. I didn’t want to farm. But I was confused. When Father died I thought my world had ended. I was studying, eating, just existing. Except for Doy Laurel, I don’t recall any friends then.”

The summer after his father died Ninoy went to work. His brother Billy ran a truck-body building plant and Ninoy started out there as blacksmith. “I wanted to be self-supporting. I vowed I wouldn’t ask money from my mother. I would send myself to school. So I worked all that summer. First as blacksmith, then as latherman, then as carpenter. I learned the ropes of truck-body building. I worked with the laborers.”

During the schoolyear 1948-49 he was at the Ateneo, enrolled in the AB course. He began to meet girls at the campus socials, neophyte beauties from the Assumption and St. Theresa’s. “But I was still not interested in schooling. I wanted to finish early, just to get it over with. I was in a hurry.” He started cross-enrolling at the UP, then also at Padre Faura, and commuted between the classrooms of the two schools. “I was jumping from AB to Philosophy to History, so long as I could take on more loads — and I was taking on 23 units.” One reason he cross-registered at the state university was that Doy Laurel was there; another reason was that he had tangled with a Jesuit professor who seemed to have it in for him, always ripping up his essays and giving him black looks and bad marks. The Jesuit, an American, had spent the war at the concentration camp in Los Banos. “I don’t know whether he was bitter at me because I was the son of a ‘collaborator.’”

The 1949 presidential campaign was the second time Ninoy went stumping; but the first time, with his father in 1947, was a ball compared with 1949, when Dr. Laurel ran for President against Quirino. Ninoy was, of course, in the Laurel camp. “I was just out of high school, in my first year at the Ateneo, and I’d cut classes to join Laurel on the road. I became his ‘wonder boy.’ We were ambushed in Sipocot, machine-gunned in Cebu.” Bullets were ballots in 1949; and the Hucks, who were backing their old enemy Laurel, surmised that because of widespread disgust over the polls a revolutionary situation had developed in the Philippines. The young Ninoy almost went moutaineering. “After the cheating of Laurel, I was running guns. It was up to the mountains for us, we were set for rebellion. Medrano would take to the hills; we had arms buried at Peñafrancia. We were boiling mad over the worst fraud in Philippine politics, the darkest polls in our history. But the night we were to take off, Laurel aborted the whole plan. It was the revolution-that-never-was of 1949.” Instead of to the hills, Ninoy went to the new campus of the state university and to the desk of the Manila Times.
When the UP transferred to Diliman, Ninoy had had to make a decision; he chose to leave the Ateneo and shift to the UP. "This led to a big quarrel with my mother. She is such a religious woman and she wanted me to have a good Catholic education, she wanted me to finish at the Ateneo. But I said I had had enough of it. I wanted to go to the UP. I wanted to go to law school. I really don’t know how I decided on law. I was directionless at that time."

Then, later in 1949, he ran into an old chum from wartime Malacañang days, Benjie Osias, who had become a newspaperman. Listening to Benjie on his life as a reporter whetted Ninoy’s appetite for that kind of work and he persuaded Benjie to take him to the Manila Times and introduce him to Dave Boguslav and Joe Bautista, then the Times editors. Ninoy applied for a job, was tested on writing skill. "I couldn’t write a legitimate sentence." Actually, as Joe Bautista recalls, Ninoy’s grammar was usable but he looked too young — and Ninoy could see them thinking that. "They looked me over. I was bare seventeen. I was a kid." However, the editors sent Ninoy to Times publisher Joaquín "Chino" Roces, knowing that Chino and the boy’s father had been friends. Chino Roces decided to try Ninoy out as copy boy, at P150 a month. "I guess I was hired because I was Benigno Aquino Junior — for old times’ sake and sentimental reasons. Anyway, now I was really self-supporting."

His job was to fetch the reporters’ copy and, after it was edited, deliver it to the composing room; he turned the job into self-instruction, studying the copy after the editors had corrected it, taking note of what they had altered or cut out or asked to be clarified. Soon he had a feel of the shape of a news story. From copy boy he rose to assignments: first the obituary section, then the stories that came in by telephone or telegraph. He took down the data and based short items on them. The senior Times reporters then were Maning Salak, Lufs Serrano, Anatolio Litonjua, Joe Guevara, Benjie Osias and crack newshim Jim Austria. Jim was a big help to Ninoy. "She would look at what I had written and say, 'That’s not the way to do it, Ninoy.' And she’d teach me. She was very patient. The other Times girls — Cita Trinidad, Estrella Alfons — were also showing me the ropes. All along Joe Bautista was babying me in the organization. I had nothing going for me but industry. I slaved." The Times office had become his home. From eight in the morning to three in the afternoon he was at the UP; from four in the afternoon till the small hours he was at his desk at the Times. "When all the reporters were gone I was still there, keeping Joe Bautista company. So, when late news arrived, I’d transcribe it, he’d copyedit it. Then: Aquino! And I’d run to him. Afterwards we’d sleep at the desk." He slept at the Times, had his shower and breakfast there, and daily commuted from there to Diliman. In the days when he had rushed feverishly through his schooling “just to get it over with,” the energy was unrelated to what it was spent on, being mostly a reaction to unhappiness; but now the energy had found focus, had been organized for a use that gave him pleasure and pride — “even though I had no beat yet, was a no-beat boy, and low man on the Times totem pole.”

The first break was a jailbreak: a horde of prisoners had tried to bolt Muntinlupa and were gunned down. With nothing to do after seeing a Sunday-noon movie, Ninoy had gone to the Times office for a nap, but, as the only available member of the staff, found himself being rushed to Muntinlupa to cover the jailbreak. "Gosh, I never saw so many dead, machine-gunned." Because the director of prisons was an old acquaintance from the days when his father was in Muntinlupa, Ninoy was allowed access to the prison records. "I got the complete files on the killed prisoners and ran back with them to the Times. So, we were the only newspaper to come out with complete pictures and data on those prisoners." The story he did appeared with his by-line. "That was a feather in my cap: my first by-line. I was floating on air."

His next by-liner was gruesome again. He was sent to cover the electrocution of Julio Guillén, the barber who had tried to assassinate President Roxas. Ninoy watched the execution, returned to the office in a daze, sat down before his typewriter, and just sat there for four hours, unable to put down a word. "I couldn’t write. I had seen a guy fry before my eyes. I was seventeen years old; I was stunned." Finally, because it was almost deadline, he turned to Maning Salak for help. Salak told the boy to sit down, then asked him to describe what he had seen in the death chamber. As the boy talked, Salak took down what he was saying. The story earned Ninoy his second by-line. "But for two weeks I couldn’t sleep. Every time I closed my eyes I saw that guy on the electric chair."

Ninoy was now a reporter and was given a beat: auxiliary to Anatolio Litonjua, who was covering national defense. "Litonjua was a godson of my father and he took me under his wing, made me do all the legwork. The defense beat was very large — this was during the Huk campaigns — and he would cover the army, I’d cover the PC." Aside from that, the eager cub was always ready to fill in for any reporter on holiday. "Labor, Congress, Malacañang, City Hall — I’d pick up any beat. I was always around, I didn’t go home. I lived at the Times. Supper was fifty centavos’ worth of noodles, good enough for me. Or I’d go with the police reporter, Tevy Sto. Domingo, and roam the precincts with him. That way, I learned the tricks of the trade. When I wrote my stories the tenses would be all mixed up. Dave Boguslav would correct my copy and I’d retype it with two fingers. Afterwards I’d compare what I had written with the story that came out; I was going to improve myself through that kind of self-study."
When the Korean War broke out in mid-1950, President Quirino was committed to sending a battalion — and Ninoy heard that the Times wanted to send a correspondent along but was hesitating to send any of its star reporters because they were all family men. “So I went to Mr. Roces and volunteered. ‘Would your mother let you?’” he asked. I said yes. Then I talked to Mommy. She nearly blew her stack. ‘Ninoy, you’re not going to any war, you’re going to finish your studies.’ I told her I wanted to go. I wasn’t too hot on my law studies. She went into the crying routine, but I was able to convince Dave Boguslav to send me.” Next thing Ninoy knew, he was getting a passport, buying a plane ticket, ordering a khaki uniform. “Adventure propelled me more than anything else. I had never been out of the country. I wanted to see the world, see other people, see what war was like, and play soldier.

In September 1950, still two months to go before he turned eighteen, Ninoy flew to his war assignment, ahead of the Philippine expeditionary force.

FIRST STOP was Tokyo, where all correspondents had to be accredited by the MacArthur headquarters. So, Ninoy Aquino presented himself at the Dai Ichi, a high-rise in front of the imperial palace. MacArthur was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers and Commander of the United Nations Command in Korea; and in Japan he was the god of the god. “Hirohito was god,” as Ninoy says, “but MacArthur was the god of the god.” And his archangels were a praetorian guard of six-footers with blue scarfs who didn’t look as if they served a god for whom Korea would be both peak and downfall.

Having gotten his ID and travel orders, Ninoy was flown to Pusan, where the Korean War was. Divided after World War II into a “red” North and a “democratic” South, Korea had known no peace really but rather a warring over the split, until finally, in June of 1950, in much the same way that, during the American Civil War, the Yankees of the North had crossed the Mason-Dixon Line to impose their kind of government on the Confederacy of the South and thus enforce the unity of the nation, the North Koreans crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea and advanced as far south as Pusan. When Ninoy Aquino got there, the Northerners were being pushed back by an army that was supposed to be of the United Nations but was really mostly American with British support.

It didn’t take Ninoy long to learn that this was actually another American war, sanctioned by the UN. “I arrived on a lumbering C-54. I was looking forward to my first war. We landed in a mountainous area. When the doors were swung open, God almighty, what a stink!” In the classic Chinese manner, Koreans use latrine hoardings for