The Second World War came to the Philippines, as it did to Hawaii, Hong Kong and Malaya, on 7 December 1941. Ten hours after they had attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii the Japanese bombed Clark Field, the US Army Air Force base in Pampanga, fifty-odd miles north of Manila. Despite the warning the Americans were caught napping. Of their entire air force in the Far Eastern theatre, over half the bombers and one-third of the fighters were destroyed on the ground at Clark in a matter of minutes.

And yet three years before, none other than the Communist Party of the Philippines had issued a manifesto warning the country that a Japanese invasion was imminent. At a more general level the likelihood of war had been openly gossiped about since 1940. Officially, however, the attitude on the Allies’ part seems to have been one of sublime complacency. As one Manila resident, Marcial Lichauco, put it at the time: ‘The people residing in the Philippines – Americans, British, Dutch, Swiss, Spaniards, Chinese and the Filipinos themselves – [were] not ready for this war. They simply could not conceive that Japan would dare face the combined forces of America and Great Britain.’

Eighteen days later the Japanese flag was flying over the US High Commissioner’s Manila mansion and martial law had been declared.

The fall of Manila in so short a time, preceded as it has been by Hongkong, is a terrible blow to the white man’s prestige in Asia and the Far East. There can be no excuses. Troops, planes, tanks, guns and supplies began pouring into Manila many months before war began. That Japan could occupy Luzon is not exactly a surprise – the island is not a fortress like England is today; but that the Sons of Nippon should have accomplished this feat in twenty-five days while, at the same time, they are engaged in an all-out offensive against British Malaya and China seems unbelievable. It is but another instance of over-confidence and unpreparedness on the part of the democracies.

The diarist was all the more shocked for knowing the United States well. In 1923 he had been the first-ever Filipino to graduate from Harvard. He and his American-born wife were to survive the war in Manila, and he lived to be the Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom at the time when Marcos first became President in the mid-1960s. In those early days of 1942, and from the depths of gloom and bitter surprise at the straits in which it seemed ‘the white man’s’ arrogance had landed them, ordinary Filipinos like Lichauco could only observe the visible evidence of military unpreparedness on the Americans’ part. They were not to know that US secret service agencies such as the Counter Intelligence Corps were much better prepared and had already installed ‘sleeper’ agents against just such a Japanese invasion. Prominent among these were two ‘Nisei’, American citizens from Japanese families, Richard Sakakida and Arthur Komori. Sakakida was destined to have a charmed life, managing after months of the most brutal interrogation to convince the Japanese that he was one of them and had no connection whatsoever with the US military. Thereafter he spent the remainder of the war smuggling out crucial information from the heart of the Japanese High Command in Manila. The particular significance of Sakakida and others like him to this present account of Marcos’s war will become apparent in due course.

Even before they reached Manila the Japanese had bombarded towns and cities throughout Luzon with tons of leaflets that read: ‘In order to advance their imperialistic cause, America seized your country forty years ago and, since then, you have been abused,
exploited, neglected and, what is worse, have been treated as an inferior race. It was the start of an attempt to win Filipinos’ hearts and minds as fellow brown-skinned Asians, an attempt that did have a limited degree of success in certain quarters. Those who seemed most susceptible were petty officials and local politicians as well as members of the rural elite, particularly owners of great agricultural estates and haciendas such as those in Central Luzon. Obviously, these were precisely the kinds of people whose cooperation the Japanese were going to need to run their regime at local level. It would probably not be unduly cynical to attribute a degree of pragmatism and self-interest to the motives of many such converts to the New Asianism, and when after the war the time of reckoning arrived for those seen as having been ‘collaborators’ there was no lack of accusers. Yet for true Filipino nationalists who were only waiting with impatience for the United States to grant full independence, the issue must have presented them with a difficult dilemma in those early days of the war. When the Japanese Propaganda Office in Manila trumpeted the fall of Singapore it must have seemed to many that independence would either have to be postponed indefinitely or else accepted from non-American hands:

‘You, Filipinos, Burmese, Indians, Indonesians and Malaysans,’ reads the proclamation, ‘must stand up and face without fear the sacred duty of grasping without hesitation this God-given opportunity which may never come again. Stand up and cooperate in the creation of a new Asia for the Asians.’

But it was not long before the true nature of the Japanese attitude towards their fellow Asians became painfully apparent, what with the public slappings, beatings and kickings, and the circulated diagrams on the correct way to bow to a Japanese officer. When the Japanese political police, the Kempeitai, began their atrocious interrogations in the old Spanish dungeons of Fort Santiago, most intelligent Filipinos can have been left with few illusions. Any lingering notions of racial solidarity had also gone by the board on the Filipino side, and the physical peculiarities of the invaders were soon noted and parodied. For the duration of the war one of the slang names for a Japanese soldier was komang, which has no English equivalent but by analogy would mean ‘bow-armed’. Outside Manila, especially in the fields and villages of Central Luzon, resistance was already beginning:

Independence for the sake of independence [... ] was not the key issue for most people in the resistance. They wanted the Japanese out because of what the new regime had done to their lives – the fear, death, destruction and repression were worse than anything people had known before. The Japanese and Filipino authorities were their own worst enemy, for they did little to win popular support but did much to turn people against them.

While all this was taking shape in the first few weeks of the occupation, things on the military front were going from bad to desperate from the Fil-American point of view. The Japanese landings had bottled up the entire Philippine Army in the Bataan peninsula on the far side of Manila Bay, with the American and Filipino top brass in still further retreat off the peninsula’s tip on the fortress-island of Corregidor. It was clear from the start that the 95,000 Filipino and American USAFFE (United States Armed Forces in the Far East) troops would wait in vain for the relief they expected daily. The formerly invincible Allies were being routed all over Southeast Asia and were in no position to send help to anyone. General Douglas MacArthur had been obliged by the Japanese destruction of his air and naval forces to fall back on War Plan Orange-3, which originally dated from 1904, the time of the Russo-Japanese War. WPO-3 had envisaged American forces defending only Luzon, as a last resort retiring to Bataan for a protracted defence of Manila Bay and allowing the US fleet in Hawaii a generous six months to come to their rescue. In that sense one could say things were now going according to plan; but the General’s extraordinary failure to ensure the strategy was properly provisioned in advance had led to an almost complete lack of supplies and equipment. By early April USAFFE men were down to an average daily ration of 800 calories if they were lucky. Ninety percent of the Philippine Army was without boots. Three months of bitter and unrelenting combat had left the survivors exhausted and ill. On 9 April Bataan fell in what was then the single greatest mil-
itary defeat in American history, and some 76,000 Filipino and American survivors were force-marched north and east to internment camps in the Death March that killed roughly half their number. Somewhere among these rag-tag columns of defeated men—was the future President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos. They left behind them the beleaguered island of Corregidor from which the current President, MacArthur's friend Manuel Quezon, had been smuggled away to exile in the United States even as the General and his staff were evacuated to Australia. The fort was clearly doomed, and MacArthur had left his deputy, General Jonathan Wainwright, to shift for himself as best he could while uttering his immortal farewell, 'I shall return.' One of those captured when Corregidor fell was the CIC agent, Richard Sakakida, who had been acting as MacArthur's personal interpreter and translator, although of course the General had no idea of his true identity.

How MacArthur had explained to his friend the President the case with which Japan invaded his country is anybody's guess. They had spent some weeks together in close proximity, hunkered down in the command post buried deep in the tunnels of Corregidor Island as worsening news from the Bataan peninsula across the strait came in a steady stream. MacArthur could later claim with some justification that in hanging on for those desperate four months his 'battling bastards of Bataan' had fought a more heroic defense and inflicted more damage on the Japanese invaders than had any comparable Allied army in the Pacific region at the time. That was true; but it rather overlooks the strategic disaster that had put them in such a hopeless position in the first place. For this MacArthur must take the blame, as he also must for issuing a proclamation that help was on the way when it wasn't, thereby falsely raising the men's hopes and causing a slump in morale later on. In fact it was not merely Roosevelt who had doubts about MacArthur's character as a man. It turns out that his generalship and military competence were being privately doubted even as the Japanese were landing in the Philippines. In the cause of Allied solidarity, fellow officers like Dwight D. Eisenhower tended to confine their criticisms to their diaries, which in Eisenhower's case were only published in 1981. In January 1942 Eisenhower, who was about to take command of US troops in Europe on his way to becoming Supreme Commander of Allied Forces and eventually President of the United States, wrote in his diary that MacArthur was 'as big a baby as ever. But we've got to keep him fighting.' Eisenhower was himself a good enough soldier to know that the men's assessments of their officers seldom erred. MacArthur was known to his men as 'Dugout Doug' (during the entire battle for Bataan he visited the front only once!) and a widely circulated couplet went into a little more detail:

*Dugout Doug's not timid, he's just cautious, not afraid; He's protecting carefully the stars that Franklin made.*

Even as the under-supplied USAFFE forces in Bataan were falling to the combined onslaughts of the Japanese, malaria, dysentery and malnutrition, MacArthur had talked President Quezon into reappointing him Field Marshal of the Philippines, with full perks and back pay, once the war was over. Even more extraordinarily, Quezon presented him with a cash honorarium of half a million dollars. Not long afterwards a US submarine was summoned to Corregidor, loaded with twenty tons of gold and despatched to Australia. It seems never to have been established whose gold this was. It presumably belonged to the Philippine Treasury, the remaining contents of which was sunk in Manila Bay to prevent the Japanese from getting their hands on it. On the other hand the gold might have been more in the nature of a private nest-egg sent ahead of MacArthur, who sailed from Corregidor on 11 March for a Del Monte plantation in Mindanao and thence flew to Australia. With him were President Quezon and Vice-President Osmeña, whose joint duty in exile was to represent the Philippines' legitimate government, a stipulation of Roosevelt's. Left on Corregidor with the luckless General Wainwright and the others was Manuel Roxas, the man both MacArthur and Quezon fancied as Quezon's presidential successor. Roxas, though now wearing a brigadier-general's uniform, had been appointed Quezon's Secretary of Finance back in 1938. A lawyer by profession, he was always torn between the twin careers of politics and the law. In the latter capacity he was in practice as the partner of Marcial Lichauco, whose journal entries open this chapter. Before the war ended Quezon died of TB in his American
Marcos wound up at the end of the Death March a PoW in Camp O'Donnell, Tarlac, as ill and exhausted as anybody else. Somehow in the next three years he, too, managed to become a hero of almost MacArthurian proportions with a heroism that, like the number of his medals, went on increasing long after the war had ended. This was likewise due to a skilful sculpting of facts, the tossing of a judicious smoke grenade here and there, and outright lies. An ordinary human level this is not hard to understand. When a fledgeling politician is crafting his public image in a nation about to receive its full independence, it is even less surprising.

Sunday, June 28, 1942:
Out of approximately 40,000 Filipino prisoners in camp O'Donnell, 18,000 have already died and many are so weak that they cannot be moved. The Japanese Military Authorities have, therefore, announced that, to show their friendship to the Filipino people, they will release the sick prisoners who are strong enough to walk. The names of about 3,000 men have been published in the newspapers and they will be allowed to leave a few hundred at a time. One relative or friend of each prisoner will be permitted to go to the camp for that purpose.¹¹

The significance of this announcement was that it enabled Marcos to get out of the PoW camp in which he was languishing. As the sick prisoners were released their names were listed throughout that summer in the Manila Tribune. The name of Ferdinand E. Marcos appeared nowhere, however. Maybe he was not sick but fell instead into a second category of prisoners the Japanese were releasing but which Lichauco does not mention: those whose families had co-operated with the Japanese military authorities. Ferdinand's mother, Josefa, collected him from Tarlac on 4 August and took him at once by train to Manila. On the way, she is supposed to have told him that his father Mariano was under house arrest back home in Batac for refusal to join the Japanese civilian government in Ilocos Norte.¹² However, according to a U.S. Army Intelligence report in the files of MacArthur's command, Mariano Marcos, far from rebuffing the Japanese, had actually taken part in a ceremony welcoming them to the provincial capital, Laoag, early that year. Then on 17 July, barely a fortnight before Ferdinand's
release, Mariano had spoken eloquently at a pro-Japanese rally in Batac. This being so, the conclusion seems unavoidable that the Japanese released the son from the PoW camp because the father was co-operating. From that moment, the story of Ferdinand's war ceases to be a single intelligible, sequential account. Instead, it splits into two versions so different they often barely even touch: that of the myth-makers and that of the debunkers.

Chief among the myth-makers was Ferdinand himself, who, when planning to run for President in 1965, commissioned an American writer named Hartzell Spence to write the sort of biography likely to appeal to the Philippine electorate. Painstakingly brief and endowed with a vivid if predictable imagination, Ferdinand’s post-war Boswell sketched a widescreen canvas of practically non-stop derring-do. This takes place in an anecdotal terrain somewhere between the windy plains of Troy and the Hollywood lots of MGM. We are in the ‘with one bound he was free’ school of adventure, in which our hero single-handedly wipes out nests of Japanese machine-gunners, carries out daring rescue missions though mortally wounded, organizes a resistance of plucky guerrillas in the hills into an elite fighting force he names Ang Maharlika (‘The Aristocrats’), who But you get the picture.

Not a cliché of the genre is overlooked. There is even the obligatory sweetheart (a Filipino-American female guerrilla named Evelyn who saves Ferdinand’s life by stopping a Japanese bullet meant for him) and the obligatory torture scene. The whole thing is more like a ‘B’ movie script than a serious account of one man’s odyssey through three years of brutal and divisive history that brought his country to ruin; and in 1969 he did indeed have it turned into the jungle epic Maharlika, timed to coincide with his bid for re-election that year. The torture scene, in Hartzell Spence’s expert hands, is worth quoting. It follows directly on from Ferdinand’s and Josefa’s arrival by train in Manila after his release, where he was re-arrested by the Kempe Tai and taken to Fort Santiago for interrogation – ostensibly about what he might know of the plans some classmates of his had hatched to form a guerrilla band and escape to join MacArthur in Australia.

His interrogator, who was revealed as a secret-police colonel, lost his affiliability finally. The three soldiers who attended him, at a signal, threw Ferdinand to the pallet that was raised off the floor, and jammed a rubber tube into his mouth. Water was pumped slowly into his body until he thought he must surely burst. Now the colonel jumped on him with both knees. Water, bile, blood, excreta from stomach, kidneys and bowels spurted from every orifice of his body. He knew that he was about to die. Who could survive such torture? Stubbornly he decided to go bravely. He refused to speak.

This exasperated the Kempe Tai colonel, who gave him another round of the water cure. Then another. During the pumping, Ferdinand’s bulging eyes saw the electric light bulb over his head grow larger and hotter, and seemingly come closer until it was in his face. Then the colonel would jump on his stomach, and the light would recede. The pain of the water pressure was too fierce to be borne. After a while Marcos became numb to it, and no longer felt the variations of its intensity. Covered by the filth from his body and the emissions of the torture, he lay in a pool of wileness. He had no idea how many times the ordeal was repeated – over and over, until he lost consciousness at last.

It is hard to guess how much of this was supplied by Ferdinand himself and how much came from Spence embellishing what he was told. What is noticeable in the above account is a complete absence of private detail, some oddity that might have burned itself into the victim’s memory. Instead, for all the blood, sweat and excrement it reads like hearsay. There is nothing here we have not read before somewhere, and which we do not expect. Possibly this was merely a failure of Spence’s inflammatory style. Spence was not just any old hired hack, however. He was originally a United Press man who during the war founded and edited Yank, the US Army weekly. He then went on to edit The US Armed Forces’ journal Stars and Stripes. His credibility in the Pentagon was very high, so his version of Marcos’s war gave a semi-official imprimatur to the story and the book itself was freely distributed to US embassies and government agencies worldwide, as well as to the American press. Spence’s summing-up of Ferdinand’s war was unequivocal: Before he was twenty-five he had won more medals for bravery than anyone else in Philippine history, had suffered the heroic...
Battle of Bataan and its aftermath, the infamous Death March, and the mediaeval tortures of the Japanese secret police\textsuperscript{17}

This was the official version, which from the time of Marcos’s first presidency (it was published in 1964) had the status of gospel both in the Philippines and the United States. A 1966 cover story in \textit{Time} magazine took its cue from Spence:

[ Marcos’s ] idea of intelligence duty was to prowl behind the Japanese lines, often in his personal Oldsmobile sedan, probing for weak spots. He found one on Bataan’s Mount Natib, a Japanese military battery that was lobbing 70mm shells into US General Jonathan Wainwright’s beleaguered defenders. Marcos and three privates scouted the battery, trailing two near-dead Japanese artillerymen to it, then cut loose. They killed more than 50 Japanese, spiked the guns and escaped with only one casualty. Marcos won the first of a brace of Silver Stars for the operation, and a few weeks later was recommended for the US Medal of Honour for his part in the Defence of the Sultane River. But the recommendation was never filed with Washington, and Marcos failed in becoming the only Filipino to win America’s highest military award\textsuperscript{18}

The debunkers’ version of Ferdinand’s war started precisely because this barrage of myth-making left a good few Filipinos quite unconvinced, even outraged. Among these was an association of those who had survived Fort Santiago and the Japanese interrogations. They hotly disputed his claim that he was ever tortured there and refused to accept him as a member of their group. After he had become President of the Philippines in 1965 such voices became judiciously muted in public, at least, if not at reunion dinners. It was only after martial law had become oppressive enough in the late seventies to have driven his opponents exiled in the US into organizing the Movement for a Free Philippines that Marcos’s incredible war record began to be subjected to serious scrutiny. The original work was done by Bonifacio Gillego, who wrote an article about his ‘fake medals’ in the Filipino newspaper \textit{We Forum} in 1982. Boni Gillego is today a Congressman on the verge of retirement, an ex-soldier of the old and most honourable school. His asset was that as a retired military man (with, it must be said, good friends in the CIA) he was in touch with all sorts of men of the same generation who had served in the war. Some came to his attention when they wrote to check a story while busy on their own memoirs of famous engagements such as Mt. Natib, the Sultane River, and Bessang Pass. Others simply met at reunions and swapped stories. Boni Gillego was the first to examine systematically and critically the anomalies in each one of Marcos’s supposed exploits and awards, although much of the credit that was his due went, predictably, to the foreign journalists who developed it.

His \textit{We Forum} article (which earned the news-sheet closure) was widely disseminated in the US by the Movement for a Free Philippines and the information taken up by American investigative journalists such as John Sharkey of the \textit{Washington Post}, whose access to US military archives was perhaps better and more practised than Boni Gillego’s. By now it was 1983, and in the wake of Ninoy Aquino’s assassination that August a kind of open season had been declared on Marcos by the American press. The \textit{Washington Post}’s ‘Outlook’ section led with Sharkey’s demolition of Ferdinand’s claims to war honours:


A Philippine government publicity brochure describes Marcos as ‘his country’s most decorated soldier,’ with more awards (32) than the 27 credited to American World War II hero Audie Murphy. Allegedly included in these decorations are two US Silver Stars and a Distinguished Service Cross.

However, an 18-month effort to verify Marcos’s claims to high American decorations raises serious doubts about whether he actually was awarded them. Nor could any independent.

* Weinberger had himself served on General Douglas MacArthur’s Intelligence staff during the Second World War.
outside corroboration be found to buttress a claim made in Philippine government brochures that he was recommended for the US Medal of Honour because of his bravery on Bataan, as a document in his US military file suggests.

The open season on Marcos continued. The darling of Time magazine, vintage 1966, had quite suddenly become an ogre, being compared with the late President Somoza of Nicaragua. This media campaign was to intensify up to, and even beyond, the moment Ferdinand left office in 1986. Early that year, a bare fortnight before the snap election on 7 February, the Washington Post and the New York Times both ran front-page stories saying US Army investigations had concluded that Marcos’s ‘Maharlika’ guerrilla unit was a fiction and that ‘no such unit ever existed as a guerrilla organization during the war.’ Worse was to come. It was alleged that not only had he never been tortured by the Japanese, but he had, like his father, sided with them.

What was interesting about these revelations (apart from the way they conveniently overlooked that the sole printed source for the tales of Ferdinand’s heroism had been Hartnell’s Spencer’s Time-endorsed version on which the Philippine government brochures had drawn) was their timing. Still more interesting was what that implied about the preceding twenty years’ silence on both sides of the Pacific, when Marcos’s US Army files were ‘mislaid’ Sterling Seagrave (whose chapter on Ferdinand’s war provides a good general, if one-sided, overview of the whole dismal episode) noted that ‘subsequent congressional investigation determined that the Pentagon, after mischievously burying the records for decades in a Midwestern vault, had just as mischievously slipped them back into the archives where they belonged, to await McCoy’s serendipitous discovery.’ (The reference is to the investigative scholar Alfred McCoy, whose research formed the basis of the new revelations about Marcos having collaborated with the Japanese.)

An uneasiness still lingers around most public discourse about the Second World War in the Philippines, and has its origins in an issue of far more general weight than that of one man and his medals—that of collaboration. This collaboration is, of course, primarily that of certain Filipinos with the Japanese. But in Ferdinand’s case it is not just that, although as we shall shortly see it gave him the political base on which he constructed his future career. It is also the connivance of the United States with his myth-making, the endorsement of a story that the US Army had known to be untrue as early as 1948 after he had twice applied to have his ‘Maharlika’ unit officially recognized and his claims had been rejected as ‘distorted, exaggerated, fraudulent, contradictory and absurd.’

This is where the CIA agent mentioned earlier, Richard Sakakida, comes in, together with many others like him. When a war ends in almost unlimited bloodshed, chaos and destruction, as the Second World War did in the Philippines, it is perhaps easy to imagine that nothing remains of what has gone before: no coherent memories, no evidence, nothing but a clean sheet and a fresh start. Certain characters can, as it were, stagger from the smoking ruins believing themselves free to invent a new past, thinking that amid the general anarchy and turmoil their recent activities will have gone unnoticed and therefore unjudged. But of course a great many people did survive, including Richard Sakakida himself, with their memories not only intact but vivid. Once having managed to convince his Japanese captors that he was loyal to Japan, Sakakida had lived for three years on the constant edge of discovery. His very life depended on having an intimate knowledge of the anti-Japanese resistance in general and guerrilla activity in particular. He was, after all, scanning the Japanese Army’s own top secret files on an almost daily basis. It is therefore beyond believing that he would never have encountered the name of Ferdinand Marcos or that of the ‘Maharlika’ unit had even a tenth of the菲律宾 stories been genuine. But this is a consistent theme: Marcos’s name goes practically unmentioned in all contemporary accounts. The man who claimed that General MacArthur had personally told him after the war that but for him Bataan would have fallen three months earlier does not appear even in the General’s own reminiscences.

In 1986 the former USAFFE Army captain who had directed a guerrilla unit in Pangasinan province, Ray C. Hunt, was tracked down and asked his opinion. It turned out that he did remember Marcos since he had once arrested him on suspicion of collaboration with the Japanese, and for engaging in buy-and-sell activities. For this, Marcos had actually faced a death sentence for the second time in his life, and on this occasion was saved only by the personal intervention of
Manuel Roxas, another future Philippine President, as to Ferdinand having led his own band of guerillas, Ray Hunt said: 'Marcos was never the leader of a large guerilla organization, no way. Nothing like that could have happened without my knowledge. . . . This is not true, no. Holy cow! All of this is a complete fabrication. It's a cock-and-bull story.'

It is a very strange thing that successive administrations of the world's most powerful nation should have accepted and publicly praised one man's self-assessment, and with little more authority than that individual's own assurances. The reason can be summed up in one word: Vietnam. Since this word explains so much of the twenty years' relationship between Washington and Marcos it is perhaps not very surprising: yet the sheer effrontery of the cynicism will has the power to shock. Even the radical Filipino historian (and sometime Benedictine monk) Ambeth Ocampo admitted to being astonished when he recently unearthed some further evidence:

While browsing through declassified US State Department documents I read many confidential telegrams exchanged between the US Embassy in Manila and Washington. In one telegram concerning pointers for the [forthcoming] Marcos state visit to Washington in September 1966, Marcos was described as: 'A genuine war hero, a very attractive personality and a great public speaker. We have in this visit a large amount of capital, centering around the image he can project about Vietnam and, as President Johnson has said, about the vitality of the new Asia.'

What I did not realize before was that the US ambassador insisted on the awarding of two medals to Marcos. In a confidential telegram dated September 6, 1966, he said that Marcos: 'Had never received the Distinguished Service Cross. Accordingly, I suggest Washington may wish consider giving decoration to Marcos during visit, perhaps in White House ceremony. Gesture would be much appreciated here and would help point up for American public fact of Marcos' wartime heroism under US flag.' Allied to foregoing, I would hope when Marcos introduced to Congress for joint session speech that mention will be made of his distinguished war record with US forces and decorations awarded him.'

When the State Department brought the matter up with the Defence Department it was discovered that there was no record of Marcos being awarded any medals. The alarm bells should have been ringing, but the US needed Philippine support for the Vietnam War and kept silent. On September 8, 1966 a confidential telegram sent to the US ambassador in Manila said: 'We have determined that Army ready and willing to go ahead with presentation Distinguished Service Cross and Silver medals on basis that Marcos' US Army records do not, repeat, not show he ever received them.'

Washington knew Marcos was sporting medals he had not officially received but they played along. Eventually, Marcos himself was asked about the medals because a Time correspondent said he admitted not having them: ' . . . Marcos told me that Zich of Time magazine had been mistaken and that he, Marcos, had received both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star. There is, therefore, no reason for any presentation in Washington. '

From the documents cited above and many others, the Marcos war records could have been shot down as early as September 1966, but it took 20 years to expose the fraud.

In actual fact it took nearer forty years, since the deception could have been exposed back in 1948 had the military authorities not had their hands full of vastly more important matters. Some time later, of course, the relevant file 'disappeared' at whim of the Pentagon's. In the exchange of telegrams quoted above, therefore, one suspects there may be confusion about the ambiguity of the word 'received'. The 8 September message from Washington to their ambassador in Manila could – and probably should – be read as having meant that according to Army records Marcos had never been physically presented with the DSC, not that he had never been awarded it. Still, since we now know from his Army file that the status of the citation itself was dubious, to say the least, there must have been some fudging going on in Washington. Maybe his file had already been 'misled'. The clear overall impression remains of an official determination to play up the Marcos war record for all it was worth, since 'We have in this visit a large amount of capital, centering around the image he can project about Vietnam . . . .' This
simply confirms what has long been apparent: that Ferdinand Marcos no less than the Filipino people was little more than a hostage to yet another piece of American overseas adventuring. It remains for us to determine how much freedom he actually had.

All this takes us prematurely into the future, far ahead of the years 1942-5 when the issue of collaboration often boiled down to a question of day-to-day survival. Not surprisingly, the Philippine population ran the gamut between the Huk guerrillas' outright opposition to the Japanese and active support for their presence. In between were a hundred agonizing shades of *pakitisama* (that Filipino virtue which sets a high premium on smooth social relations regardless of circumstances), of grudging cohabitation, of resignation, of dumb resistance and surreptitious civil disobedience. Edging towards the 'active support' end of the scale were those who decided to profit from the Japanese and their war needs.

At the extreme of active support, of course, were those Filipino politicians who headed the so-called puppet government while President Quezon and Vice-President Osmeña in the United States represented the legitimate Philippine Government in exile. The Japanese, having abolished all existing political parties, had instituted a single party known as the Kalibapi (*Kapusanan sa Puglitangko sa Bagong Filipinas* — the Association for Service to the New Philippines) in October 1943. The Japanese granted the Philippines its independence and in grand open-air ceremonies the Second Philippine Republic was inaugurated with Jose P. Laurel as President. This was the same Justice Laurel who, a few years earlier, had acquitted Marcos of the Nalundasan murder. Also prominent in the new administration were Jorge Vargas, lately President Quezon's executive secretary, and Benigno Aquino. The Aquino family, in particular, appeared to represent an extreme case of fractured loyalties. As head of this wealthy cacique clan, Benigno's father, General Servillano Aquino, had been a celebrated patriot who in 1899 had opposed the American occupation by choosing 'to continue the strife by individual action'.

Forty-four years later his son Benigno took a different view of a foreign occupation. (And his son, Benigno Jr or 'Ninoy', was of course destined to die on the tarmac of Manila International Airport in 1983 in opposition to the current political status quo.)

After liberation in 1945 no opprobrium was too great to heap on the heads of 'active collaborators' and 'puppets' like Laurel, Aquino and Vargas, whom the Japanese had flown out to Japan to escape capture by MacArthur’s forces. But at the time, thoughtful and informed Filipinos like Marcial Lichaunco saw their behaviour — and especially Laurel's — in a much more complex and sympathetic light. As every page of his diary shows, Lichaunco was no friend of the Japanese occupying forces. But he had been close friends for years with men like Laurel (another lawyer) and Roxas (his own legal partner) and saw them as people of considerable integrity whose conscience and patriotism obliged them to be pragmatic. Laurel had just survived serious wounding in an assassination attempt while playing golf a few months earlier, an attempt that ironically did much to convince the Japanese of his pro-Japanese bona fides, when in September 1943 Lichaunco wrote in occupied Manila:

To his most intimate friends Laurel has explained his attitude. He has no doubt in his mind that the United Allies will win the war but he fears it may take between five to ten years before Japan can be brought to her knees. Meanwhile, the problem facing the Filipino people is that of survival and he therefore considers it his duty to do what he can to appease the Japanese militarists and help alleviate the sufferings of the Filipinos and the further privations which, no doubt, are in store for them in the future. In the second place, Laurel believes that no matter how thoroughly beaten Japan may be at the end of this war, the Japanese nation can never be obliterated and, sooner or later, the Japanese people will rise again and become a power in this corner of the world. Consequently, he does not think it advisable for the Filipino people to permanently incur the hatred of the one hundred million Japanese who are such close neighbours of ours. He realizes that in accepting the Presidency of the puppet Republic, some of his countrymen will get the impression that he is collaborating with the enemy, but Laurel is willing to run that risk because he is convinced that someone must head the government which the Japanese are determined to set up here. One thing he is determined to accomplish, and that is to prevent the Japanese from conscripting Filipino soldiers to fight against the Americans.
'I prefer to be shot,' he said, 'rather than agree to such a proposal and I believe I can stall the Japanese long enough to save our young men from fighting their friends.'

To us at the century's end, Laurel's attitude might appear eminently reasonable and, in the circumstances, morally courageous. He also seems to have been commendably far-sighted in what he has to say about Japan's certain defeat and the equally inevitable resurgence in East Asia. Understandably, the Americans were obliged to take a rather different view. Little more than a week after Laurel's inauguration as unwilling President, Roosevelt replied to his request that the United States recognize the Philippines' independence with a resounding 'No'; on which Lichauco, beleaguered in Manila, comments tartly:

'It is all very well for President Roosevelt to discredit the Filipinos heading the puppet government that has been set up here. It is easy to be brave when the enemy is 10,000 miles away. It is easy to say that the only true officials of the Filipino Government are temporarily in Washington. But how can 18,000,000 Filipinos live in these islands without some form of government? Someone must head the government here unless, of course, it is to be substituted by an organization run entirely by Japanese officials and such irresponsible and discredited Filipinos of the past who would be only too glad to jump at the opportunity to assume positions of power.'

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the moral discomfort of the position in which the majority of Filipinos now find themselves, with old questions of national identity and allegiance again predominant. Once the war was over, of course, and Japan defeated, it was as though nobody had ever really doubted the outcome or where their loyalties had always lain. But at the time things were a good deal more equivocal, not least because of the constant fear of informers, spies, torture and reprisals.

Up in the hills and on the plains of central Luzon, the Huk resistance guerrillas had fought an unrelenting war which would have been quite impossible without massive local support. As it was, they became well enough organized to constitute an independent regional government of sorts with its own elected officials, legal system, communications network and even newspaper. Their engagements with the Japanese tended to be well planned and efficient, employing disciplined strategy rather than the hit-and-run 'freebooting' tactics favoured by other irregular units (such as Marcos's putative 'Mahaliika' group). Indeed, the Huks tended rather to look down on other guerrillas, especially those in the so-called 'USAFFE squadrons'. These were composed chiefly of USAFFE men who had either avoided being captured in Batan or had subsequently escaped from a PoW camp. Some squadrons were commanded by Americans - a handful of the several thousand stray American and other Western stragglers hiding in the hills all over the archipelago. The Huks were often scornful of these units, which they accused of self-interest and shirking. They said the USAFFE men were mainly interested in avoiding contact with the Japanese, being content to skulk and sit out the war in order to receive their back-pay and pensions once it was over, meanwhile subsisting on common thievery from local peasants. They referred to them dismissively (with typical linguistic felicity) as 'tulisaffe', a punning combination of USAFFE and tulisan, the historically loaded word for a common bandit. It should be noted in passing that the Huk guerrillas were confined to central Luzon (Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac and Laguna provinces, to be precise). Outside that area, both northward in the Ilocos and southward through the bulk of the archipelago, there was an array of groups largely operating on a local basis. These ranged from scattered fighting outfits to 'lost commands' of misfits, the disaffected, and the frankly criminal more interested in turning the presence of the Japanese to their private advantage by enriching themselves and settling old scores.

The Huks' main hatred, like that of most resistance groups, was directed less at the Japanese than at those Filipinos they saw as collaborating. These included local politicians and petty officials as well as members of pro-Japanese associations such as the Kalibapi, which gave the Japanese political support, and the Makapili, whose network of informers helped the military. Above all, though, the Huks loathed the newly reconstituted Philippine Constabulary, whom they viewed as nothing more than the puppets' mercenaries. Such people, when they fell into guerrilla hands, seldom made
quick or easy deaths. The claim that Ferdinand Marcos – and therefore Spence – had made about his father Mariano gallantly resisting the Japanese in Ilocos Norte was emblazoned with an account of Mariano’s death as a guerrilla late in the war. ‘Failing to break him, the Japanese bayoneted him and suspended his body from a tree. Two days later, Ferdinand visited the scene, but his father’s remains were gone. They were never found.’ Reality, however, was rather different, as Sterling Seagrave later established by talking to an eye-witness. Mariano, who had publicly sung the Japanese forces’ praises in Batac, had actually fallen into the hands of a guerrilla unit commanded by an American, Major George Barnett. Even more unfortunately for him, Barnett’s unit included several friends and relatives of the late Julio Nakunda, the man who had beaten Mariano in the 1935 election and whom Ferdinand was convicted of having shot. Under interrogation, Mariano confessed that it was Ferdinand who had put his name forward to the Kempe Tai, the secret police. (This probably explains how Ferdinand had obtained his release from Camp O’Donnell.) After a month or two as the unwilling guest of Major Barnett, Mariano was tried for war crimes and sentenced to death for having worked for the Japanese from start to finish (it was now early 1945). The wretched Mariano might well have wished for a simple bayoneting. The man whose custom it had been in his middle twenties at six each evening to put on a tan military uniform with a Sam Browne belt, holstered sidearm, riding breeches and boots, and strut around [Sarrat] village square cracking a riding crop on his thigh, made a very unmilitary death, though a traditional one. He was hitched to four water buffaloes and torn apart, his shredded limbs and torso then being hung, dripping, on a tree. A similar fate would probably have awaited his son had not Roxas intervened in the nick of time.

What did Ferdinand Marcos really do in the war, then? Briefly, once he was out of Camp O’Donnell he took his chances, like many another young Filipino. Much of his autobiographical war record might be fiction but there is little doubt he did move about, his life inevitably structured by the events going on around him to the extent that he was occasionally caught up in guerrilla activity. His character was opportunistic rather than passive. He would never have elected to stay at home either in Ilocos Norte or in Manila, docilely building a legal practice on the foundations of his Bar

examination triumph, unless there had been nothing better in the offering.

But there was something better, in a sense. There was the radical disruption offered by the war and the Japanese occupation, and social disruption makes for social mobility. His Ilocano blood and his family’s political background equally led him to where profit might be made and power found. As regards the first tendency, his overriding need as a rolling stone would have been survival, a way of getting by. Ray Hunt’s accusation that Ferdinand had been condemned to death for his involvement in buy-and-sell rackets not only makes sense in the circumstances, it is borne out by other documentary references. By ‘buy and sell’ Hunt did not mean ordinary wheeler-dealing. After all, anyone in wartime might be reduced to the survival tactic of dabbling in the black market. The accusation specifically meant dealing directly with the Japanese, selling them things which, as the war dragged on, were strategically vital and in increasingly short supply. (One such thing was iron, and towards the war’s end iron bars were treated more like gold. It seems that the need for iron often justified demolishing perfectly good buildings simply to steal the reinforcing rods buried in the walls and ceilings.)

Many Filipinos bitterly resented their fellow countrymen’s buy-and-sell activities with the Japanese, and those involved were prime candidates for charges of collaboration once the war was over. Marcial Lichauco himself refers with scorn to those who dealt with the Japanese; but for oratorical thunder one has to turn to another lawyer, Francisco A. Delgado, who followed up the cessation of hostilities in 1945 with a blistering memorandum to Tomas Clafusor, the new Secretary of the Interior, on how the briefly reinstated Commonwealth government ought to deal with those who had collaborated with the Japanese. For him, these ‘buy and sell tycoons’ merited a special category of their own:

During the three years of Japanese occupation, a number of our countrymen, and many resident aliens, tempted by the ease with which they could sell practically anything to the Japanese Army and dazzled by the numerical enormity of the sums which they amassed, plunged headlong into the ugly racket commonly known as buying and selling. The goods bought by the Japanese
were of course those which they could use in the pursuit of their military campaign. Hundreds became millionaires overnight. Many, on the other hand, were forced into this business because that was the only way whereby they could save their families from starvation.

While a number of Filipinos engaged in this racket, most of the 'big shots' were the alien residents in the Philippines. While the Filipino 'buy and sell' addicts scampered pell mell for pickings, the foreigners conducted their manoeuvres in a more organized, systematic and astute manner: The East Indians, who, before the war, 'saluted' to Britain and the United States, discovered the 'Open Sesame' to fabulous riches. They raised the banner of the 'Assad Hind'; hailed Subhas Chandra Bose as their leader and protector; and shouted 'On to Delhi!' from their princely carriages and their stores overflowing with goods. The Chinese saw their chance, and so they waved the banner Wang Ching Wei* as the Japanese waved back with newly printed military notes. The Jews, who took refuge in this country because they were ostracized and driven out of Germany, suddenly re-assumed their German nationality and struck 'Swastika' banners on their cars while they stuck fat bundles of money into their pockets. 30

From the general tone it can readily be appreciated that Ferdinand would have known his activities could prove fatal if he were ever caught — which, as we have seen, he was. The near-miraculous intervention to save his life by Manuel Roxas who, as soon as the war was over in 1945, became the last President of the Commonwealth and then the first of the Republic, brings us to the second of Ferdinand's natural inclinations: that of gravitating towards political power. Here again his Ilocano inheritance sheds some light. Mention has already been made in the previous chapter of that celebrated son of Batac, the revolutionary General Artemio Ricarte, the stories of whose exploits against the Americans Ferdinand would have heard at Josefa's knee. In 1901 the defeated

Ricarte had categorically refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, so the Americans banished him to Guam and later to Hong Kong. However, he chose finally to live in Yokohama, only returning to the Philippines during the Japanese occupation. Once there, he became a co-founder in 1944 of the Makapil, whose informers guerilla groups like the Huks held in special contempt.

It is not obvious why this aspect of Ferdinand's background is not accorded greater weight by historians. He had grown up in a province a long way from Manila, in an atmosphere whose attitude towards the still-recent American occupation was ambiguous, to say the least. Ricarte was only the most locally celebrated example of many Ilocanos whose inability to square their patriotism with swearing allegiance to the United States had driven them into outright exile, into smouldering acquiescence, or into close alliances with the Chinese and the Japanese — who in any case had always had strong connections with these northern provinces. As a Filipino, Ferdinand would instinctively put family, friends and region before his country, which is what any civilized person does (If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country,' as E. M. Forster rather too piously said.) When Ferdinand's war record came to be critically investigated in the 1980s, though, the task fell largely to Americans, most of whom had conceivably never read E. M. Forster. More to the point, they not only had been on the winning side in the war against the Japanese but, like the British, had the extraordinary good fortune never to have suffered the agonizing moral test of having their own country brutally occupied by the armed forces of a foreign power. The lenses through which they scrutinized this terrible and confusing period of Filipino history, therefore, had an inbuilt polarization. In this clear but slanted light it appeared to them that the majority of Filipinos had felt a deep loyalty to the Americans and had variously fought for, or longed for, their return. Those who hadn't were traitors: puppets and collaborators who cynically chose to side with the enemy for personal gain.

Yet although this was presented as a truism, it was not entirely true. The majority of Filipinos undoubtedly did support the Americans, but not necessarily from any deep sense of loyalty. They wanted the Americans back in order to drive the Japanese out. After
all, life for most Filipinos before 1941 had not been especially rosy. (What Kansulay’s old people remember – without much emotion – is great hardship, agricultural wages held at bare subsistence level, unremitting labour and virtually no medical facilities. To that extent their lives had changed hardly at all since the time of the Spanish.)

Seen in this context, the American regime had not been popular so much as the known devil that is broadly tolerated, much as the British in India were, an assessment that was not invalidated by thousands of personal friendships between individuals on both sides. As the war went on, though, and Japanese rule became more oppressive, the Americans’ lengthening absence undoubtedly made Filipinos’ hearts grow fonder. There was no question but that the Americans had been in all respects more agreeable than the Japanese; but as Quezon had famously said, ‘Better a government run like hell by Filipinos than one run like heaven by Americans.’ In addition to which, the image of the United States had taken a severe beating even before the Fall of Bataan. It was not just that the Americans had been militarily defeated; they also seemed thereafter to have abandoned the Philippines to its fate a little too easily. One day, when President Quezon was impotently holed up on Corregidor, he turned bitterly to Charles Willoughby, one of MacArthur’s aides, and exclaimed: ‘America withes in anguish at the fate of a distant cousin, Europe, while a daughter, the Filipinos, is being raped in the back room.’ This was certainly what he himself felt, but whether he spoke for the entire nation is less sure. A year later, though, Marcial Lichauco recorded a brilliant assessment by a Japanese officer of how things stood – brilliant because it showed an unusual understanding of the Filipino gift for dissembling. The occasion was a parade in Manila on the first anniversary of the Fall of Bataan:

Among those in the grandstand was a fairly well-known [Filipino puppet government underling who had helped organize the show. In his eagerness to court the friendship and favour of the Japanese official who sat beside him he turned to the latter and said: ‘I think there is little doubt now that the great majority of our people are pro-Japanese. I should say that ninety percent of them at least understand Japan’s true objectives in fighting for the unification of Greater East Asia.’

But the officer turned to him rather deprecatingly and replied: ‘You are mistaken. I am afraid that forty-five percent of the population continues to be pro-American, five percent are pro-Japanese, while the remaining fifty percent are comedians.”

By the mid-eighties, with American journalists taking their cue from the State Department and fitting Marcos for a black hat even as President Reagan was stubbornly insisting on his white one, such niceties of history went by the board. By then they all knew what to think about the Pacific War and alleged wartime collaborators like Marcos The effect of their sweeping, though unconscious, judgemenal attitude was to assess Ferdinand’s war as an open and shut case of the most simplistic kind of self-interest, seen against an implied background of heroism and sacrifice on the part of his compatriots. The reality, as we can imagine, had been a good deal less clear-cut and infinitely more painful.

If, as seems likely, Ferdinand did recommend his father to the Japanese as being favourable to their cause, how might we assess his motives? If Mariano had already made his welcoming speech in Batac, surely recommending him would have been superfluous? On the other hand, if Mariano had already made his new allegiance clear, his son was presumably wise to take advantage of a fait accompli and thereby get himself out of the POW camp. This was surely where the politics came in. He was, after all, well connected thanks to the Nalundasan case and his Bar exam triumph. Barely two years earlier President Quezon himself had offered him a pardon in his murder conviction. Now, of course, Quezon was in exile in America. But there was still the judge who had pleaded so eloquently and successfully to the Supreme Court to uphold his appeal, Jose Laurel, his semblable if not his frère, who had also been acquitted of murder when he was eighteen.

Laurel was himself an interesting and complex man, as Lichauco’s assessment indicated. Like Ricarte, he was a convinced nationalist who had always been fundamentally opposed to the American presence in the Philippines. (It should be remembered that theirs was not some local piece of hard-headed intransigence in most of colonized Asia at the time – in India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, China and Indochina – there were strong anti-imperialist movements, all of which would achieve their goal of independence
in the next few decades.) For a Filipino to have been anti-American until 1942 (and even after) was by no means out of the question; American authors saw it in the 1930s. Well before the outbreak of war Laurel, who in 1938 was awarded an honorary doctorate of jurisprudence by Tokyo Imperial University, had been legal consultant to several Japanese industrial companies with large investments in the Philippines. It is known that Ferdinand was hospitalized in Manila in June 1943 with what his brother Paco, a doctor, diagnosed as a gastric ulcer and fever; it is also known that his hospitalization coincided with that of Laurel following the assassination attempt on Wack-Wack golf course. It is too much to suppose that the two cooperating men did not spend time together. Each had something the other wanted. As far as Ferdinand was concerned Laurel—who was about to become puppet President—necessarily had usefully close links with the Kempe Tais as well as friendships with high-ranking Japanese that pre-dated the war. And from Laurel's point of view, Marcos had by then all sorts of contacts with guerrilla groups from Ilocos to Leyte that could provide information about the purely criminal outfits the Japanese (and therefore Laurel himself) had an interest in breaking up. Ferdinand was, additionally, deeply in Laurel's debt for his pre-war acquittal. It was an utang na loob he could not have ignored without dishonor.

When, after the end of the war, Laurel and the others were brought back from their refuge in Tokyo and tried as collaborators, Laurel was acquitted under President Roxas's Proclamation no. 31, which granted a blanket amnesty to most of those accused of collaboration. Many Filipinos have since expressed satirical views about what they saw as a lot of collaborators being exonerated by another collaborator. Ferdinand Marcos, whose reputation as a war hero was by then under intensive construction, was doing his utmost to avoid being publicly lumped in with those who needed amnesty. Yet his wartime dealings with both Laurel and Roxas (who until he pleaded the heart condition that was to kill him a few years later had been the preferred choice of the Japanese as puppet president) must have emmeshed him in a complex web. They had all of them squeaked through into this strange climate of exonation, if not of forgiveness. In the new moral and political status quo it was in their interest to connive at the sanitizing of each other's past. That Ferdinand's powerful wartime friend Roxas was back in political business with a clean slate and running a new Republic undoubtedly gave him a good base from which to operate, for he was already thinking ahead.

In that sense Ferdinand's war was something of a personal triumph even without all the comic-strip heroics he was to add as a topper. In the next four years until he was first elected to Congress there must have been some awkward moments when he was unsure whether the persona he had invented for himself would be exploded. But as time went by and his ties with the men the Americans had anointed as the new regime grew closer, he must have felt himself increasingly safe. What effect his war had had on him at a psychological level is another matter. One would have thought he was surely left with at least two sources of profound guilt, the first of which being a bogus war record. This secret, which of course both he and the Americans shared, would acquire the status of mutual blackmail when he came to be President, a complicity he and Washington could each hold over the other's head. What might have started out as nothing but youthful braggadocio—a little embellishment here, some dramatic details there—slipped out of control and gradually hardened into a fiction that, by the time he was briefing Hartzell Spence for the definitive version, was brazenly bolstered by alleged quotations from MacArthur himself (recently, and safely, dead in 1964). Since their history's sordid betrayals and lies have rendered most Filipinos sublime cynics, all politics in the Philippines are pure palabas, sheer spectacle, into which Ferdinand's fanciful skill with the greasepaint fitted without difficulty as an adroit and original gambit. The people who felt most deeply about the issue were the authentic scarily survivors of Fort Santiago's underground torture chamber, as also the genuine battle heroes. They never forgave him. (What was more, such people never had been deceived. Frank Siomial José, the renowned writer and proprietor of Manila's La Solidaridad bookshop — which throughout the Marcos martial law era was a refuge for dissenting intellectuals—offered the following vignette: "One of Marcos's closest old friends was Commodore Nuval. Each year, at the time of Ferdinand's birthday, Nuval would come to the bookshop to choose three books as gifts for him. One year it happened to coincide with a ceremony commemorating the Battle of Bessang Pass, in which Ferdinand the "war hero" had claimed he was very
much to the fore. Nuval was in my shop and we were gossiping about this and he laughed and said: "Ferdy was never at Bessang Pass." This would have been in 1966 or 1967. It was made doubly absurd because that same September a girl came to the shop, the daughter of Major Conrado B. Rigor, who was the true hero of Bessang Pass, as every Ilocano knew. She was in tears because of the way Marcos had usurped her father’s heroism.”

The other source of guilt, Ferdinand may have had difficulty dealing with was his father’s death. Had Mariano, that perpetually unsuccessful man, brought about his own downfall? Or had his son directly contributed to it by recommending him to the Japanese as a man they could deal with? Either way, Mariano had died for having dealings with the Japanese, while the equally guilty Ferdinand had not. The mere fact of his death, and in so spectacularly unpleasant a manner, might surely have been reason enough for Ferdinand to insist with increasing vehemence on a far more palatable version of events. His father had been a hero; he himself had been a hero. Who was counting? (And by then, who dared count?)

And what, finally, of that other hero, the mighty champion of the free world, General Douglas MacArthur? There was an extraordinary outcome of his return to the Philippines, one that Roosevelt could never have imagined when he had thankfully sent him off to be Quezon’s military adviser in 1935. It depended on the United States, in 1945, being almost entirely preoccupied with Europe in the wake of the Nazi defeat and in the quick resettling of the Western world into fresh alliances. To put it bluntly: Japan had been nuked into submission and the Eastern Pacific would have to take care of itself for a while. The carving up of Europe into Eastern and Western blocs, with ex-allies swiftly turning into Communist enemies, more or less monopolized American attention. Almost by default, therefore, MacArthur was given a free hand to arrange his former fiefdom according to his taste. His personal support was crucial to getting his old friend Roxas approved by Washington and elected. So also was his capricious withholding of US aid for the reconstruction of the Philippines until after the election, thereby making the aid virtually contingent on Roxas becoming President. Thereafter, the $2 billion in aid was fought over by various groups of vultures who had good links with the new ruling elite of MacArthur and Roxas. Only very little of this fabulous sum (at mid-1940s value, too) actually went into rebuilding the Philippines’ shattered infrastructure and economy. To illustrate just how bad things were, it is perhaps better to rely on an American author for a final description, beginning with what happened to the $2 billion:

Instead of revitalizing the economy, much of it ($150 million by one estimate) went to rehabilitate a few privileged American-owned businesses and import-export companies. Six million dollars went to rehabilitate the fabulously rich Benguet gold mines, in which MacArthur held stock. Beer baron Andres Soriano, MacArthur’s wartime aide-de-camp, was a Spanish citizen, but quickly took Philippine citizenship as the war approached. Then, one day after Pearl Harbor, MacArthur made him a colonel in the US Army and arranged to get him instant American citizenship. In 1946, when Soriano’s San Miguel brewery urgently needed bottle caps, MacArthur had the War Department fly 20 tons of caps across the Pacific. So things were.

Everybody was on the make. Millions of dollars’ worth of consumer goods flowed into Manila just for the maintenance of the US Army. One quarter of these goods ended up on the black market. FIs working with civilians sidetracked trucks, powdered milk, pistoles, stockings, typewriters, and cigarettes. Two months after Yamashita’s surrender, over $1 million in US Government-owned goods were seized when police broke up a Manila ring. After that it became serious. ‘It may well be,’ journalist Robert Shaplen observed, ‘that in no other city in the world was there as much graft and conniving after the war.’ The Surplus Property Commission, intended to dispose of excess US military property, became the preserve of Roxas backers Washington industrial lobbyists contrived to make it illegal to bring surplus war goods home. Thousands of jeeps, tanks, planes and munitions went on the market in every former combat zone. President Roxas offered Washington 1 peso for 90,000 tons of surplus ammunition stored on Luzon. The State Department fumed, but turned the munitions over Tons of US Army scrap metal in the Philippines were sold to an American concern through various fronts for a mere $335,000. The deal was
arranged by MacArthur's associate, former High Commissioner Paul McNutt, whom Filipinos called the "Hoofer Hitler.

While politicians and businessmen grew wealthy, Manila's balance of payments deficit with the United States jumped to over $1 billion. "The future of the islands is not bright," commented an American magazine. "The United States is responsible for the situation and should do what it can to rectify it." 12

Today, many Filipinos date the tacit acceptance of theft and corruption at government level from this period, as well as the final demoralization of a people who had suffered so much. From then on, they claim, no public figure was likely to be taken seriously or believed, no official expected to be trustworthy, no politics to be viewed as anything more than the spectacle of a corrupt elite playing musical chairs among itself. It may indeed suit diehard nationalists to view the corruption surrounding the Americans' administering of post-war aid as the root of much subsequent social and political evil in the Philippines, but the truth is less conveniently simplistic.

The fact is that Filipinos themselves needed no lessons from Americans on political intrigue and corruption. In the old days the Spanish had made frequent references to Filipinos' blithe ruthlessness when given petty ascendency over their fellow countrymen, and visiting Americans from the turn of the century onwards had recorded their own amazement at the unashamed corruption and brutality often displayed by local functionaries. It could be argued that these were simply the disdainful observations of foreign colonials with a vested interest in portraying benighted brown people incapable of governing themselves, but the weight of evidence is against such a view. Certainly a writer like Katherine Mayo was acting more as a sceptical journalist than as an American apologist when she visited the Philippines in the early twenties. Her resultant book, *The Isles of Fear - The Truth about the Philippines* (1925), frequently shows her sympathies to have lain with the wretched indios as they laboured not so much beneath the American yoke as beneath that of their own kind: local headmen, small landowners, politicians and bigwigs. If at the end of the Second World War the battered Philippine people were often more sceptical than optimistic about their newly independent country's political future, it was surely because they recognized that an all-Filipino political process was unlikely to be other than corrupt. They would have realized that the opportunities the recent war had offered for unscrupulous self-advantage on the part of so many people with political ambitions could only have made the outlook gloomy. In the event, their cynicism was amply justified.

It may well be that this immediate post-war period did in some way further polarize the electorate into those who ran for office and those who grew the rice (to caricature it somewhat). It was the moment when, in recognition of the way in which the war had weighed equally heavily on all levels of Filipino society, something like a true democratic spirit might have taken shape. But as will be seen in Chapter 7, such attempts as Juan de la Cruz made to vote his own representatives into government (in this case Democratic Alliance candidates in Central Luzon in 1946) were thwarted and crushed with the utmost crudeness. It is hardly surprising that ordinary folk, finding themselves rebuffed by their own newly independent nation's polity, were driven back into taking shelter behind the peasant defences that had always proved so powerful a refuge in the past: all manner of superstitious beliefs and charismatic religious practices, which here and there became allied to grassroots revolutionary movements. It was a liminal world the fledgling politician Ferdinand Marcos would reveal that he understood perfectly.