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Maj. Gen. Basilio J. Valdes Traces History Of Philippine-American Relationship

IN A recent talk given before the members of the faculty and student body of the Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, Maj. Gen. Basilio J. Valdes, Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army and Secretary of National Defense, gave a comprehensive resumé of Philippine-American relations, going as far back as the history of the Philippines, its native civilization and culture as influenced by Spanish and American occupations.

Philippine history, which the General calls "replete with uprisings and revolts to throw off the foreign yoke" was reviewed briefly to show that Filipinos have always loved freedom. He called attention to "the greatest Filipino patriot of all, Dr. José Rizal" who, incidentally, was born 82 years ago in Calamba, Laguna on June 19.

IN HIS description of the role of the Philippines in this war, General Valdes paid tribute to the strength of Philippine-American cooperation which is founded on more than forty years of fruitful teamwork.

"With the improvement of mutual understanding between the Americans and Filipinos," Gen. Valdes said, "There began an adventure in cooperation which was to last for forty years and which has been hailed as the ideal relationship between a large nation and a smaller one—the sort of relationship which was later to become the key-stone of the Atlantic Charter."

In explaining why the Filipinos fought as they did in Bataan and on Corregidor, the General remarked:

"OUR Filipino soldiers willingly made their sacrifice for liberty—for they were the youth of a people who had tasted freedom and were determined never to give it up. Forty years ago America came to the Philippines with promises of freedom and independence. She had kept those promises by her laws and by her acts. When the Japanese attacked our land in 1941 we Filipinos were one of the few truly free nations in all the Far East, and we were advancing rapidly toward the day when the Philippine Republic would be established.

"As America had kept faith with us, so we too were determined to keep faith with America. The heroes of Bataan, and their brothers in the United States and Hawaii, are

redeeming in their daily acts the pledge of our beloved President which he expressed in these words: 'We stand with the United States in life and in death!'

Gen. Valdes closed his speech with a hopeful note of eventual Allied victory. He concluded:

"In one year we have answered the challenge of Bataan with more guns, more tanks, more planes, and a more determined pledge to carry on until final victory is achieved.

"In one year we can truthfully say that indeed Bataan was not the end, that it was only the beginning, the prelude to ultimate victory—our victory."

Pertinent portions of the General's speech follows:

NOT SO long ago, Americans were not very keenly interested in the Philippines. At the turn of the century, it is true, every American spoke much of the beautiful islands south of Japan, which America had wrested from the control of Spain. The glamorous word "Philippines" was then on every tongue, and throughout the United States there was unbounded interest in the new land which had just come under the American flag.

But the years passed, and America turned her eyes away from the Philippines. True, there were teachers and business men and administrators and technicians who came among us. But they were only a handful compared to the great mass of Americans who had nearly forgotten that far-off country over which the United States still held sovereignty.

But if only a comparative handful of Americans knew very much about the Philippines, there was a greater American force at work than mere numbers alone. That was the living, vibrant American force of democracy, of fair play, of liberty and justice for all.

And so, in December, 1941, the American people rediscovered their friends across the sea. They watched the bloody story of heroism written across the foxholes of Bataan and in the tunnels of Corregidor. There, when the Japanese attacked, the world saw how well democracy had worked. It was no accident that twenty thousand Filipino soldiers were willing to lay down their lives in defense of American sovereignty over their islands.

TONIGHT I want to refresh your understanding of the Filipino people and of the historic accomplishment in colonial administration which must be credited to the United States on its record in the Philippines through forty-odd years. I have lived through that period. I saw what America did in the Philippines and, during the past two years, I saw the result of America's policy, rising above the stench and bloodstains of furious battle. Later I will tell you in detail about some of the military operations against the Japanese.

But first, let us glance back briefly into the past, for a fuller understanding of the historical development of the Filipino nation. With this background clearly in mind, you will be much better able to appreciate the significance of the history-making campaign which the Filipino people waged against the Japanese under that gallant commander, General Douglas MacArthur.

Our original civilization in the Philippines was the Malayan, extending over a land area approximately the size of the British Isles. We had our own culture, our own books and literature, our own alphabet. We had our Rajahs, who governed their more or less limited communities. From them we inherited the courage to fight for those principles of freedom which we learned to cherish.

In 1521 Ferdinand Magellan brought the flag of Spain to the Philippines, and the Spaniards under Legaspi began to take control in earnest in 1565. The Philippines remained under Spanish rule until 1898—a period of about three hundred and seventy years.

PHILIPPINE history is replete with uprisings and revolts to throw off the foreign yoke. Spain brought a colonial policy which aroused the hostility of the Filipino people and culminated in the Philippine Revolution of 1896; but she also brought many benefits of European civilization to the Philippines. Spain gave us a codified system of European law. She brought the Filipino people a language which opened up to them—even if only to a few—the intellectual vistas of the western world. Finally, Spain brought Christianity to the Philippines, and today more than 80 per cent of the Filipinos are Roman Catholic.

Throughout the years, a long line of Filipino patriots raised their voices on behalf of reform. In 1861, there was born the greatest Filipino patriot of all, Dr. Jose Rizal. From the age of 17 onward, Rizal steadfastly trained himself to lead his people to freedom. He studied and worked in Madrid, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London, Dresden, and Rome, visiting other places and mastering all the major languages of Europe and Asia. His scientific abilities won him world-wide recognition as a physician, biologist, and engineer. His travels took him to China, Japan, and the United States. His ideas on freedom for the Filipino people found expression in a prolific flow of pamphlets and books—particularly in his novels *Noli me Tangere* (The Social Cancer) and *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed). These novels spread like wildfire throughout the Philippines, uniting the people in their common aspiration for freedom. Rizal's thesis was simple: his studies had convinced him that Filipino culture, industry, and general wel-

fare had not been measurably improved by three centuries of Spanish rule. He felt the great need for reforms.

BY THE 1890's the people had come to look upon Rizal as their great leader and champion. But Rizal himself was not in favor of an immediate armed revolution. That was left for Andres Bonifacio, father of the *Katipunan*, the secret society under whose banner the revolution finally broke out. It was Rizal and his teachings, however, that inspired the revolutionists in their supreme sacrifice. The Spanish governor, in fear and desperation, lured Rizal to Manila with false promises of safety, and then treacherously flung the young patriot into prison. At dawn, on December 30, 1896, the crack of rifles echoed in Bagumbayan Field, and Jose Rizal was dead—a martyr to the cause of liberty.

But the spirit of Filipino freedom was not so easily killed. With the news of Rizal's death, the ground-swell of hostility against the Spanish regime became a tidal wave. Armed bands sprang into existence throughout the Philippines, and Spanish power tottered perilously beneath the onslaught.

Small wonder that, when Commodore George Dewey and his American fleet arrived in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, they found the defeat of the Spanish forces an easy accomplishment. For the truth was that Spain was fighting, not the Americans alone, but the people of the Philippines themselves, a people determined once and for all to be rid of foreign rule and to govern themselves. In helping to overthrow the Spanish regime, the Filipinos looked upon the American forces as allies and liberators, and they were sure that the day of their deliverance was at hand.

However, the overthrow of the Spanish regime was not destined to result in immediate independence for the Philippines.

THE Filipinos immediately concluded that their struggles and sacrifices had been in vain, and that they had simply delivered themselves from one foreign oppressor only to find themselves burdened with another. Disillusioned by years of Spanish mistreatment and betrayal, the Filipinos were skeptical of American assurances of friendly intentions at the start. Four bitter years of bloodshed followed before the American armed forces, consisting of over 125,000 well-armed soldiers, finally succeeded in subduing the last remnants of the Filipino forces, but only after the friendly intentions of the United States were amply demonstrated to the Filipino people.

The American administration of the Philippines marked the beginning of a new era for the Filipino people—an era of hope, of progress, and of self-realization. For, when the Americans came, they brought along with them the basic symbol of democracy—the schoolbook. No longer was the Filipino nation to thirst in vain for knowledge. At last to them were given such democratic rights as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, universal education, the right to vote, and freedom of religion. The attitude of the Filipino people and of such leaders as Manuel L. Quezon (who had fought as a major against the American occupa-

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tion forces), underwent a profound change as they realized more and more that America truly intended to give independence to the Philippines as soon as feasible. The spirit of Filipino hostility and scepticism was gradually replaced by a spirit of cooperation and mutual goodwill.

THE policy pursued by the United States is dramatically illustrated in a story told by Luther Parker, an American educator sent to the Philippines in the early years of the American administration. Parker landed at Manila on a transport bearing six hundred American school teachers, all of whom had been sent for the purpose of bringing enlightenment to the great mass of the people among whom ignorance had been encouraged by the Spanish regime as an instrument of subservience. Parker arrived at a small village on the island of Luzon, where the children crowded about him crying in their native language: "Teach us English! Teach us English!" Parker took one of the children on his knee, and the first English words he taught that child were: "I am a Filipino." Here is the epitome of the policy which America set out to accomplish in the Philippines. Parker did not teach the child to say: "I am an American subject." Instead, he began at once to create in the child's mind the awareness of his own importance as a Filipino and of his own responsibility to prepare himself for citizenship in a free and independent country.

With the improvement of mutual understanding between the Americans and the Filipinos, there began an adventure in cooperation which was to last for forty years and which has been hailed as the ideal relationship between a large nation and a smaller one—the sort of relationship which was later to become the keystone of the Atlantic Charter.

WITH American educators like Luther Parker came also American doctors, engineers, and administrators. There was much to be done. Centuries of oppression and unrest had left their mark on the country. The health of the people was poor. Epidemics were taking their toll by the hundreds of thousands. Education was a luxury, available only to the privileged few. Philippine economy was disrupted, and the people were impoverished. Medieval means of communication hampered political unification.

Through widespread education, the American administration set out to reverse the usual colonial policy of "divide and conquer." Many institutions of higher learning, like the University of the Philippines were founded. The literacy of the Filipinos increased by leaps and bounds. The circulation of newspapers and magazines rapidly multiplied, with the raising of the educational level.

The political development of the Islands was equally remarkable.

President McKinley keynoted the policy which America was to follow faithfully for forty years, when he said: "The Philippines are ours, not to exploit but to develop, to civilize, to educate, to train in the science of self-government. This is the path of duty which we must follow or be recreant to a mighty trust committed to us."

Everyone in the Philippines was subject to Filipino-made laws. The Americans maintained no special courts of their own—when they broke Philippine law, they were prosecuted by Filipinos and tried by Philippine courts presided over by Filipino judges.

The altruistic attitude expressed by President McKinley was reiterated by successive American presidents. More and more Filipinos came to participate in the administration of the government. Finally, in 1916, Manuel L. Quezon—then Resident Commissioner—brought back to the Philippines the Jones Law, signed by Woodrow Wilson, granting increased autonomy to the Philippines.

A PHILIPPINE Senate was now elected, with Mr. Quezon as the head. At this stage, most of the members of the Governor General's Cabinet and of the Supreme Court were also Filipinos.

Still later, in 1934, the American Congress passed, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed, the Philippine

Independence Act known as the Tydings-McDuffie Act. This Act, the last step toward fulfilling every promise made by the United States regarding Philippine independence, provided that the people of the Philippines should draft a

constitution and set up a democratic government capable of assuming all of the functions of an independent republic at the end of a ten-year transition period.

Under the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the Filipino people proceeded at once to draft a constitution and to establish the transitional Commonwealth Government.

On November 15, 1935, the Commonwealth of the Philippines was inaugurated, with two longtime leaders of Filipino participation in the American regime, Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmeña, as President and vice-president respectively. In the second Commonwealth national election, on November 11, 1941, President Quezon and Vice President Osmeña were re-elected by an overwhelming majority.

Then came December 7, 1941. Without warning—at Pearl Harbor, Midway and in the Philippines—Japan attacked. The Japanese expected the conquest of the Philippines would be an easy task. They counted upon resistance only by the 14,000 American troops stationed in the Islands under the command of General MacArthur. But to the eternal surprise of the Japanese, the 17,000,000 Filipinos instantly sprang to the defense of their country and of the American flag. Under the leadership of President Quezon, 92,000 Filipino soldiers took their place beside their American comrades, ready to fight and die as allies.

Text of the address delivered by Maj. Gen. Basilio J. Valdes at Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, on May 10, 1943.

They knew from the record of the American administration of their country that the destiny of the Filipino people lay with democratic America—not with the Japanese empire. In the battles that followed, 20,000 of them sacrificed their lives.

EVEN now, though much of the territory of the Philippine Commonwealth is occupied by the enemy, in the mountains of Luzon and Mindanao, elements of the Philippine Army which evaded capture are resisting and harassing the invaders, by Japan's own admission. Among the civilian population of the Commonwealth, Japanese efforts to win support are met with defiance. In the United States, thousands of Filipino soldiers—such as the U. S. Army's First and Second Filipino Regiments in California—train in preparation for the orders which will launch them into combat with the enemy. And in Washington, President Quezon—undaunted by the ordeals through which he and his nation have passed—tirelessly directs the continuing struggle of the Commonwealth against the invader.

The Japanese, meanwhile, outdo themselves—though unsuccessfully—to persuade the people of the Philippines that Japan has no designs on their country and will give the Filipinos "independence" as a partner in "Greater East Asia" (Japan's phrase for "Japanese-dominated slave-states"). The reason for the failure of the Japanese to make any real impression upon the Filipino people with the "independence" argument is clear enough. The Filipinos, schooled in the democratic tradition, know how to apply common sense to the dissection of propaganda.

THE Philippine Army, though barely five years old and composed almost exclusively of young men in their twenties, proved its worth against Japanese soldiers many of whom were veterans of former battles in China. The magnificent showing of our boys proved that our program of National Defense, planned by General MacArthur, approved by President Quezon, and successfully carried out by the United States Military Mission and the General Staff of the Philippine Army, has been sound.

The gallantry of the Filipino soldiers in Luzon, Bataan, and Corregidor has earned for the Commonwealth of the Philippines the priceless right to be recognized on its own merit as an equal in the brotherhood of arms in the nations of the world.

Today as our thoughts go back a year ago to that blood-stained bit of land on the other side of the Pacific, we see in perspective, long strides that have been taken since, toward keeping faith with those who fought and died in the Philippines.

The young Filipinos and Americans who fought and died in Bataan and elsewhere were brothers-in-arms in a battle that will live forever in the annals of gallantry. Their courage and their sacrifice will shine the brighter in the course of the years as we realize more and more how much they meant to us who have been left behind to carry on; especially when we think that they were fighting for such things as democracy, peace, and tranquility of existence—things which, in their desperate plight, they could never hope to enjoy again.

I saw those men fight. I was with them through their terrible ordeal. I saw untrained Filipino soldiers, hardly out of their teens, turn into veteran soldiers overnight. I saw your American boys, most of whom had never been under fire, fighting like heroes. I saw the wounded suffering quietly, and the Japanese bombs dropping viciously on the field hospitals clearly marked with the red cross of mercy. I saw the Japanese planes roaring continuously overhead, and the shells from the Japanese artillery crashing everywhere, and the snipers' bullets whipping through the underbrush.

TWENTY THOUSAND Filipinos and three thousand Americans died for freedom on Bataan and other Philippine battlefields. One does not speak often of abstract ideals under fire, but I know that in their hearts burned the living memory of their homes and their kinfolk and their love of freedom.

Our Filipino soldiers willingly made their sacrifice for liberty—for they were the youth of a people who had tasted freedom and were determined never to give it up. Forty years ago, America came to the Philippines with promises of freedom and independence. She had kept those promises, by her laws and by her acts. When the Japanese attacked our land, in 1941, we Filipinos were one of the few truly free nations in all the Far East, and we were advancing rapidly toward the day when the Philippine Republic would be established.

As America had kept faith with us, so we too were determined to keep faith with America. The heroes of Bataan, and their brothers in the United States and Hawaii, are redeeming in their daily acts the pledge of our beloved President which he expressed in these words: "We stand with the United States in life and in death."

About a year ago, I had occasion to say that Bataan should not get lost in the mists of legends. For Bataan belongs to history. It belongs to us, Filipinos and Americans alike. Then Bataan had just fallen—and many were the words of praise lavished on the heroes of the Philippines. And I said, "Words become feeble in the needs of the moment, in the crying challenge for action." For Bataan was not only a symbol: It was a challenge.

IN ONE YEAR, I am happy to say, that challenge has been answered wherever democracy is still a living symbol—out in the factories that run full blast twenty-four hours a day; on the fields where busy hands toil all day long producing the foods that the allied nations at war need; in the seas where our boys keep constant vigil, fighting, suffering, and dying; in the sheltered quiet of many a home where, daily, prayers are lifted for those of their youth who are now on the many battle fronts of the world, or are reported missing or dead.

In one year we have answered the challenge of Bataan with more guns, more tanks, more planes, and a more determined pledge to carry on until final victory is achieved.

In one year, we can truthfully say that indeed Bataan was not the end, that it was only the beginning, the prelude to ultimate victory—Our Victory.