Liwayway: Warrior who wore lipstick in gun battles

By: Tonette Orejas - @ttorejasINQ Inquirer Central Luzon / 12:22 AM May 17, 2014

REMEDIOS Gomez-Paraiso, aka “Commander Liwayway” PHOTO FROM RIZAL LIBRARY OF ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

One of the highest ranking female commanders of the anti-Japanese army Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap) in Luzon has died, her family said.

Remedios Gomez-Paraiso, also known as “Commander Liwayway,” was 95 when she died on Thursday of cardio-pulmonary arrest in her house in Quezon City, her grandson, Dr. Ryan Paraiso, said in a telephone interview.

Her remains will be buried in her birthplace in Barangay Anao in Mexico town, Pampanga province, on Monday, he said.

Described in the book, “Kumander Liwayway,” as a “fearless and intrepid lady commander who led her squadron into many successful battles against the Japanese occupiers,” Paraiso was remembered fondly for wearing bright red lipstick when she led Huk troops into battle.

The 2009 book, which told her life story, said: “At the top of the Camansi plateau, the guerrillas were ready and just waiting for the appearance of the Japanese soldiers. Ka Li (Paraiso) was observed by her group that she looked different at that time because she was fully made up with matching bright red lipstick and her hair was well-combed.”

“Her troops were surprised to see their commander so dressed up, as if she was going to a social function. But in the current situation, her men pictured her as a fearless and courageous leader unafraid to die. Her appearance inspired her men and motivated them to fight harder,” said the book, which was written by her younger brother, Andrew Gomez.

“One of the things I am fighting for in the Huk movement is the right to be myself,” Paraiso was quoted as saying when her comrades confronted her about wearing lipstick and being feminine.
She challenged a comrade named Katapatan to a duel because she felt disrespected by his sexual innuendos. She married Nemencio Paraiso, a member of the Lava clan in Bulacan province.

Paraiso, together with her younger brother, Oscar, joined the Hukbalahap command of Eusebio Aquino in May 1942 at the age of 22 to avenge the murder of their father, Basilio, a vice mayor of Mexico, by the Japanese.

Basilio worked with Pedro Abad Santos, one of the founders of the Socialist Party of the Philippines and older brother of former Chief Justice Jose Abad Santos.

In her brief statement of service, Paraiso said she and her Squadron 3-V “fought many more daring battles [in Pampanga, Tarlac and Zambales provinces] wherein the enemies suffered heavy casualties.”

“I also joined expedition forces to unorganized territories. In 1943, I was designated chief of the military provision division of Regional Command No. 3,” she said.

Her command also rescued many American pilots forced down by enemies.

“I remained chief of the military provision division till we disbanded in December 1945. My group joined mopping-up operations against Japanese stragglers after the liberation,” she said.

She returned to the underground when Huk leaders and members, like her brother, were killed and arrested despite an amnesty.

The Philippine Constabulary caught her twice, first in Arayat town, Pampanga, and second in Iloilo province. In both, she was cleared of murder charges.

“Filipino women played an important role during the war. Like their male counterparts, they held responsible positions in fighting the enemies,” Paraiso said.

“They dedicated their lives to a noble cause not only to drive away the Japanese invaders but [also] to pursue the struggle for genuine freedom, true justice and democracy … I hope that someday, the role of these unsung heroines will find a place in history,” she said.


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