

WHAT WENT BEFORE: Oakwood Mutiny

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Early on July 27, 2003, some 300 soldiers took over the Oakwood Premiere serviced apartments in Ayala Center, Makati City, to demand the resignation of certain officials and air their grievances against the military establishment.

Calling themselves the Magdalo group, the soldiers railed against alleged anomalies in the Armed Forces of the Philippines Retirement and Separation Benefits System, the military procurement system (including the purchase of substandard equipment for soldiers) and the construction and repair of various facilities at Marine Base, Cavite, as well as the alleged transfer of arms and ammunition to unauthorized parties.

They also called for the resignation of then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, then Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes, then Philippine National Police Director Gen. Hermogenes Ebdane, and Victor Corpus, then chief of the AFP Intelligence Service.

The soldiers occupied Oakwood for at least 20 hours before emerging from negotiations with the government and ending their mutiny. They were later charged with coup d'etat.

Among those charged was Magdalo spokesperson Navy Lt. Antonio Trillanes IV. A commission chaired by retired Supreme Court Justice Florentino Feliciano was later formed to investigate the mutiny.

In its report issued in October 2003, the Feliciano Commission said the mutiny was a "well-planned" power grab, and not a spontaneous protest.

Quoting facts it had gathered, the commission said the soldiers plotted to take over the government and establish a 15-member council, but that the plot was discovered, leading to an arrest order by then President Arroyo on the evening of July 26.

But the commission conceded that some of the soldiers' grievances were legitimate, and that they were rooted in corruption in the military. The report also underscored the need for modernization in the military establishment.

The report warned that the AFP "could implode and collapse with unpredictable consequences" if the issues were not addressed.

The commission's report identified the leaders of the Magdalo group as Trillanes, Army Capt. Gerardo Gambala, Army Capt. Milo Maestrecampo, Navy Lt. James Layug and Marine Capt. Gary Alejano.

Trillanes ran for senator in 2007 as guest candidate under the Genuine Opposition ticket (which was, incidentally, not registered with the Commission on Elections) and won while in detention. He was released in December 2010 after more than seven years in detention, following President Aquino's issuance of Proclamation Order No. 75. The order granted amnesty to those who joined

the 2003 Oakwood mutiny, the 2006 failed coup and Marine standoff, and the 2007 Peninsula hotel siege. In January 2011, Trillanes led 94 other former junior military officers and enlisted personnel in retaking their oath of allegiance to seal the amnesty granted them.

Trillanes ran for a second term in the May 2013 elections and won, garnering more than 13.9 million votes.

In May 2008, Gambala and Maestrecampo were among the nine former Magdalo rebel officers who were pardoned by President Arroyo and freed after nearly five years in detention, following their admission of guilt. They were discharged from military service by a military tribunal after pleading guilty to violating the Articles of War.

Layug ran for congressman in the second district of Taguig City in the 2010 elections, but lost.

The party-list Magdalo Para sa Pilipino, composed of former mutineers, won in the 2013 elections with its representatives Alejano and Francisco Ashley Acedillo.

In March this year, former Army officers First Lieutenants Lawrence San Juan and Rex Bolo were sentenced to long prison terms after spurning President Aquino's offer of pardon. They were found "guilty as participants of the coup," and were ordered to serve a maximum of 12 years in jail by Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 148 Judge Andres Soriano. *Inquirer Research*

Sources: Inquirer Archives, Feliciano Commission Report, Magdalo.org

Ref.: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/453525/what-went-before-oakwood-mutiny>

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