Political Collaboration during the Japanese Occupation of Dumaguete: The Case of Mariano Perdices, Wartime Mayor (1942-1945)

Justin Bulado

ABSTRACT

The study is about Mayor Mariano Perdices’ political collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. It traces back his entry into politics and his roles as wartime mayor. Apropos of his political collaboration, the study aims to answer whether Perdices was an effective protector of the Dumagueteños or merely a puppet of the Japanese. Also, the study makes Henrik Dethlefsen’s definition of collaboration: "to exercise power under the pressure produced by an occupying power", as a basis for finding out if the Mayor indeed collaborated. This study is a work on local history; thus, the researcher invertebately relied on documentary sources and interviews from the family of Perdices and his contemporaries. Based on the corroborating pieces of evidence, it is clear that Perdices worked with the Guerrilla Forces through his connections with Juan Dominado and Lorenzo Cimafranca; he also did not exercise power as wartime mayor, and he was instrumental in saving lives and mitigating the suffering of the Dumagueteños.

Keywords: Mariano Perdices, Japanese occupation of Dumaguete, World War II, political collaboration, collaborators, local history.

INTRODUCTION

Filipino reaction to Japanese rule can clearly be categorized into two. On the one hand were the Filipinos who joined the Resistance Movement, remained loyal to the Americans, fought side-by-side with them, and refused to surrender to the Japanese; on the other hand, were the Japanese collaborators — most of whom belonged to the elite class, were known to have a history of collaborating with their colonial counterparts and purportedly acquiesced to Japanese rule in order to protect their properties, status, and vested interests. The former need not detain us here, as most of them are already remembered today in history as heroes who risked, if not sacrificed, their lives to defend, and later on regained, the Philippines from the Japanese. What concerns us, however, is the latter — the unpopular government officials who collaborated with the Japanese.

In his book, Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China, Timothy Brook (2005: 1-2) stated that collaboration is putatively defined as the “word which denigrates political cooperation with an occupying force.” However, he does not fully agree with this definition. Following Henrik Dethlefsen’s (1990) view on collaboration — that it is, “the continuing exercise of power under the pressure produced by the presence of an occupying power”— Brook inferred that “those who collaborate must exercise power to be said to have collaborated.” The said definition is used or applied in this study. Using Brook’s (2005) inference, political collaboration can, therefore, be defined as acts of a government official, who is still exercising power, and is voluntarily working together with — or providing aid to — an occupying force.
Among the local works on collaboration in the Philippines, Philippine Collaboration in World War II is one of the seminal sources on the issue of collaboration during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines from 1942 to 1945. The book is written by Prof. David Steinberg (1967: vii) of the University of Michigan, and is, to use the author’s words, “an attempt to delineate how this one society on the verge of gaining its independence struggled to determine its standard of values and its identity.” Furthermore, it examines the question whether collaboration had a negative connotation – which was, in the eyes of the Americans and loyal Filipinos, oft-times in consonance with treason – by revisiting or tracing back the actions of Filipino collaborators in the Japanese puppet government.

However, aside from narrating what the collaborators did, Steinberg (1967) also included the ramifications of their actions, which he recounted in chapter seven, called The Trials. In the said chapter, Steinberg narrated the challenges of finding impartial judges who can administer justice, not to mention the reticence of President Manuel Roxas to run after, through the People’s Court, the purported collaborators. As a result, the political collaborators, most of whom belong to the elite oligarchy, were exculpated from their supposed crimes.

Again, being one of the seminal works about Philippine Collaboration with the Japanese in World War II, this book indeed serves as a guide or major reference to the researcher in his study. On one hand, irrespective if Perdices (or any political collaborator from Negros Oriental) were not included in the narrative of Steinberg, the documented experiences of some local political collaborators can most certainly be used as a comparison with regard to their motivation for collaborating. It is not to say, however, that all political collaborators had the same motivation. Nonetheless, there will invariably be unavoidable parallelisms with some cases. On the other hand, the content of Steinberg’s (1967) book, which primarily deals with political collaborators at the national level, will be of significant use in the researcher’s study as it is also the aim of the latter to juxtapose the local and national political collaborators.

Another source about Philippine Collaboration is Augusto De Viana’s Master’s Thesis at the University of Santo Tomas entitled The Collaboration Issue during World War II in the Philippines. In his work, De Viana (1995) discussed that Filipino collaboration with the Japanese took different forms – political, economic, cultural, and military. He further inferred that the Filipino political leaders were clearly unprepared for Japanese occupation. Moreover, since Quezon did not leave any clear instructions before he left for Australia, the Filipino leaders were faced with the conundrum of choosing sides - whether they stand by the Americans and the already established Philippine Commonwealth Government, or shift sides and choose the Japanese forces, or even perhaps choose the Filipinos. De Viana then concluded that “the collaboration issue was caused by a conflict of the orientation of three allegiances” (as hitherto mentioned) and that “the problem was never given a final solution” (Conclusion section, para. 1).

The thesis of De Viana (1995) is indeed useful for this present study since it provides an answer as to why many, if not all, of the surviving Filipino political collaborators, believed that their actions can be justified as acts of patriotism. More importantly, De Viana also asked some questions similar to those being posed in this present study: “what caused the ruling elite to collaborate with the Japanese when their original decision was to oppose them?”, and “how did the political leaders collaborate with the Japanese authorities during their occupation of the country? “. De Viana’s
thesis, together with Steinberg’s (1967) book, so far are the primary sources that explicitly explain the causes, nature, and effects of Filipino Collaboration with the Japanese during World War II.

In relation to the complex issue of determining the motives for collaboration, Renato Constantino delineated and categorized the reasons why most of the Filipino elites collaborated with the Japanese. Firstly, based on the experiences of General Artemio Ricarte and Leon Villafuerte who both fought during the Philippine Revolution, Constantino reckons that one of the motivations of some collaborators was to continue with the previous struggle against the Americans. Secondly, some of the collaborators were driven by political ambition, as was the case with Jorge Vargas and most of the elite oligarchy. Thirdly, there were those who collaborated because of Quezon’s instructions, which was for those who would be left to protect the people by all means and “perform neutral functions pertaining to municipal administration and the administration of justice” (Laurel, 1962: 4-5). These collaborators considered themselves pro-Americans and were just waiting patiently for their return. Fourthly, and on the contrary, some collaborators inexorably worked with the Japanese because they felt that “they had been abandoned by the Americans” (Constantino, 1978: 116). Lastly, according to Constantino, fear seems to have been a cogent reason to a plethora of collaborators during the Japanese occupation. Fear of Japanese brutalities heard from the ubiquitous stories that spread like wildfire, and the concomitant desire for safety not only for themselves but also for their respective families drove some of the ruling elite to collaborate.

More often than not, Filipinos who opted to collaborate with the Japanese get a bad reputation not just in the annals of history but generally among those civilians who experienced World War II. They are frequently branded as unpatriotic, opportunist, and treacherous. In this paper, the researcher tries to argue on the contrary, just like how Teodoro Agoncillo, the notable scholar in Philippine History, averred that President Laurel — who is oft-times, if wrongly considered as a traitor — did nothing wrong when he collaborated with the Japanese. For Agoncillo, the collaborators in their actions had a “heroic touch” as it was the only way to “cushion the shock of the Japanese occupation” (Hila, 2001: 110). But were they really “cushions”? If so, what were the pieces of evidence that would support this claim? How, then, did they mitigate the suffering of the Filipinos? For the nonce, there are still other cases apropos of the Japanese collaborators that are left unanswered or unwritten. Thus, it is the aim of this study to shed some light — and give a clearer perspective — on Perdices’ political collaboration with the Japanese in Dumaguete. Was he effective as a protector of the Dumagueteños, or was he merely a puppet?

The challenge for historians, however, concerning the sensitive issue of collaboration is that it is difficult to make inferences based on morality. As Brook (2005: 5) professed:

For the historian rather than the polemicist, collaboration is a difficult word to use. Its almost inarguable moral force sensationalizes the acts of those who fall under its label and lends the topic an energy that only wartime occupation can excite. The capacity of the word to judge, even before we know upon what basis those judgments are being made interfere with analysis, however. As soon as the word is uttered, it superimposes a moral map over the political landscape it ventures to describe and thus prevents the one from being surveyed except
through the other. Historians must legitimately ask how the moral subject that collaboration presupposes was fashioned, not retrospectively judge the subject’s acts. We cannot accept the superimposed landscape as historical reality but nor can we pretend it does not exist. *Our task is rather to look through the moral landscape towards the political one underneath and figure out what goes on.* [italics are mine]

Brook’s (2005) conundrum, with the national stigma of Japanese occupation still fresh among the Chinese, was on how to “go about telling the story in a way that takes account of suppressed memories?” How do you get rid of the widespread stigma and tendentious views against collaborators? Quite eruditely, though, he was able to find an answer, and that was to focus on the local history of small towns in the Yangtze River Delta. Studying local elites in these areas will change the perspective, thus perhaps also the judgments and societal stigma, as it will “help turn collaboration into a problem to be investigated, not a moral failure to be tagged and condemned”.

Most of the writings on Filipino collaboration are based primarily on the national level. There are a plethora of studies about the experiences of Pres. Jose P. Laurel, Sen. Claro M. Recto, and other national figures but only a few sources about the local politicians who, to varying degrees, played their part in history. There is a lacuna that needs to be filled as far as the issue of collaborationism at the local level is concerned. Moreover, looking specifically at the local history of Dumaguete, the researcher sees the need to fill the gap - political or military - during the Japanese occupation. It is the intent of this study to fill that gap, albeit only a stepping-stone to further studies about the complex issue of collaboration in Negros Oriental.

**Methodology**

This study is historical by nature — thus, the historical method was used. The historical method, as defined by Dr. Florentino H. Hornedo, is an “attempt to account for the past by showing what causes produced what effects or results.” He further postulated that in this method, the researcher discovers the past by “discovering shreds of evidence”, while he “aims to produce a narrative or story of how things or conditions came about” (Hornedo, 1995: 1). The researcher inveretedely relied on archival work (e.g. government documents, personal diaries, and books); but interviews were also done. Admittedly, this historical study focused more on the local level, which is equally as significant as that of the national level — because an assessment of these local experiences is imperative before one can even start writing about national experiences. The readers can better understand the bigger picture or, metaphorically speaking, the plant (national history), if they first know about the roots (local history).

This paper, therefore, deals with history at the local level, and will trace back the experiences and roles of Mariano Perdices as wartime mayor. Much emphasis is given to his political collaboration with the Japanese. What were his roles as wartime mayor? Why did he perforced collaborate with the Japanese? Or did he really collaborate -- that is, to use Dethlefsen’s definition, “exercise power under the pressure produced by an occupying power” (Dethlefsen, 1990: 198-199) — with the Japanese? The answers to these questions are discussed in this study.

**BACKGROUND**

**The Early Years of *Tsila***

Mariano Francisco Perdices was a
quintessential politician – indeed, a product – of his times. He had all the qualities of an ideal politician – honest, ebullient, dedicated, sagacious, and loyal to the public and his party, the Partido Nacionalista. His colleagues/contemporaries often admired his brute honesty and delicadeza, while others detested it since it made him inflexible to anyone, whether it was his friends or even relatives, who wanted to take advantage of his political position. The people who had the chance to know and work with/for Mariano Perdices – or Tsila, as he was fondly and endearingly called – always thought that he was more “Filipino” than “Katsila”. In other words, they look at him as someone that they can easily relate with – even if, in reality, he looked more “Katsila” than “Filipino”. This affection towards Tsilahad something to do with his character, which of course stemmed from his early upbringing.

Born on December 3, 1907, Mariano was the second eldest out of six siblings and the only son of Don Agustin Perdices and Doña Maria Bernad. He was enrolled at St. Paul College during his elementary years; however, after Grade 5, he was transferred to San Carlos College in Cebu City because boys, in St. Paul College, were not allowed to continue and enroll in Grade 6. Nevertheless, Mariano graduated from high school at San Carlos College in 1926 – graduating as the valedictorian of his class. After high school, Mariano then sought for a college degree and enrolled in a two-year commerce course at UP Junior College in Cebu City. Later, he enrolled in UP Manila and earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) degree in 1938.

Six years before he received his BSBA degree in UP Manila, on December 11, 1932, Mariano Perdices, at the age of 25, married Julia Miciano. It seems that they got to know each other when Perdices worked as a manager of Lux Theatre (a movie house, owned by the Pastor family). They were blessed with seven children, six of them were boys and one girl. Their eldest, Eduardo Judas (Bolone), was the secretary to his father during his last years as Governor. He was also a former barangay captain of the Rizal Boulevard area, formally known as Barangay 5. Their second eldest son, Agustin Ramon (Tuting), was the one who followed his father’s footsteps, as he was the former (undefeated) Mayor of Dumaguete City from 1988-1998, 2001-2010, and Governor of Negros Oriental from July 2010-January 2011. Tuting was married to Maria Eugenia Araneta. The rest of the Perdices brothers are Mariano Guillermo (married to Maricar Gonzales), who worked as a manager of Warner Barnes in Cebu; Luis Crispin (married to Maripaz Gallaga), who used to work for the foreign service in Manila; Augusto Manuel (married to Marianela Neri Vamenta), who worked with the local DBP office and is now a barangay councilor; and Victor Douglas (married to Purita Gala), who worked as manager of a private bank in Manila. Their youngest, and the only girl, Maria Antonia (married to Commodore George Templo) who is a medical doctor.

Tsila’s Political Beginnings

The initial entry of Mariano Perdices into politics was not planned; it was rather fortuitous. He became Municipal Councilor of Dumaguete because of the unexpected death of his father-in-law, and incumbent councilor at that time, Dr. Eduardo Miciano – who died on 21 April 1932 (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council, 1932). However, Perdices still had to undergo a selection process before he could assume the position that was left vacant by his father-in-law in the municipal council. The Provincial Board of Negros Oriental was tasked by the Municipal Board to select the replacement. Of course, the task of initially selecting the nominees was given to the President of the locally merged Partido Democrata-Nacionalista Independiente (Democratic Party-
Nationalist Independence) – the political party of Dr. Miciano. They were Mr. Jose Pastor, Luciano Imbo, Hospicio Fortich, and Mariano Perdices (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council, 1932). On 13 May 1932, two weeks after the names were sent to the provincial board, the members, headed by acting Governor Hon. Alberto V. Furbeyre, passed Resolution No. 52 officially putting Mariano Perdices as the replacement to his father-in-law, Dr. Eduardo Miciano (Negros Oriental Provincial Board Minutes, Resolution No. 52, 1932). On 14 May 1932, a day after the provincial board passed Resolution No. 52, the Perdices formally joined his first session as Councilor of Dumaguete. The Mayor (or Municipal President, as he was formally called) at that time was Hon. Jose P. Martinez. The rest of the officials were:

Vice Mayor: H. Noble Amigo  
Councilors:  
  Pedro Larena  
  Benito Alcancia  
  Macario Valencia  
  Fulgencio Magbanua  
  Manuel Gonzales  
  Hugo Merto  
  Maximo Orbeta  
  Mariano Perdices

Thereafter, Perdices served the municipal council in intervals, from 1932-1934, and 1939-1941. It is possible that he took a break from 1935-1938, to finish his studies in UP Manila. Though not his full-time job, Perdices worked as a councilor. Along with the other councilors who met a few times in a month, he was only paid a relatively small amount. A degree in business from UP Manila also proved Perdices suitable to his managerial position at the Lux Theatre. As a politician, it is imperative for him to have ample experience in the private sector so that he can easily relate to the sentiments of the business community, which indubitably plays a vital role in politics.

Perdices took a liking to his job as a municipal councilor, but he thought that he could do more. He had already served as municipal councilor for around six years, so he believed that he was ready for a higher position. Interestingly, considering that he was still a relatively young councilor, the ever confident and determined Perdices decided to skip the position of Vice Mayor. Albeit ambitiously, he decided to run in the 1940 Dumaguete mayoralty race against incumbent Mayor Pedro Teves 3, a seasoned politician who started as mayor of Dumaguete in 1903, and later on from 1934-1940. The fact that Perdices’ foe was a formidable veteran to be reckoned with is already a manifestation that Perdices was a risk-taker, an attribute that he continued to practice as he gradually climbed the political ladder even after the war. His gumption to take on a veteran politician is indeed admirable; back then, he had nothing to lose. It was all or nothing for him in the 1940 local elections.

The 1940 Dumaguete Mayoralty election was a tight race. The candidates, Don Pedro Teves and Don Mariano Perdices, both belonged to well-to-do families and were, in their own right, prominent individuals in Dumaguete. The former was considered as an “old guard”- a seasoned veteran who had the upper hand since he was the incumbent mayor; the latter was a young, dedicated, ambitious municipal councilor who thought that he could do more for his constituents if he were elected as municipal mayor. The feat was Perdices’ first challenge – albeit not the most difficult – in his prosperous political career; but he was not at the receiving end, rather he was the one challenging the incumbent mayor and he had nothing to lose in that race.

On the other hand, being the incumbent mayor, Teves had everything to lose. Perdices emerged as the winner by a slim margin of 78 votes
– receiving 1,393 votes, while Teves got 1,315.
The rest of the results for the other positions were as follows (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council Meeting, 1940):

Vice Mayor: Narciso Infante 1,518 votes
Felipe Pastor 1,025 votes
Councilors:
Lorenzo G. Teves 1,465 votes
Deogracias T. Pinili 1,398 votes
Dr. Eduvigio G. Ruperto 1,261 votes
Dr. Genovevo G. Absin 1,061 votes
Sr. Calixto C. Degamo 947 votes
Sra. Magdalena F. Garcia 865 votes
Sra. Hermenegilda F. Gloria 858 votes
Sr. Buenaventura Zamora 770 votes

Ineluctability of Japanese Invasion

In retrospect, Japan’s military expansionism, or aggression, was clearly evident in Asia even before they attacked Pearl Harbor. For one, Japan had a bitter rivalry with China, which eventually resulted in violent clashes throughout the history of both countries. Both nations fought intermittent wars, famously called as the Sino-Japanese Wars. The first Sino-Japanese War was fought in the latter years of the 19th century, from 1894-1895, while the second one from 1931 up until 1945. These wars, especially the Second Sino-Japanese War, were very violent and also very conspicuous to the international community, and these made the foreign colonizers (U.S., Britain, France, and Netherlands) in Southeast Asia apprehensive. Moreover, their anxiety was further exacerbated when Japan joined a tripartite alliance with Germany and Italy, which was, later on, called the Axis Powers. It was clear that the Americans were cognizant of the possibility that Japan might continue to expand to the other neighboring countries including the Philippines and fulfill their dream of hegemony in Asia. That being said, the Allies felt that it was imperative to obviate Japan’s expansion by cutting the flow of scrap irons and oil shipments (Reischauer, 1981). Consequently, the ramifications of the embargo to Japan proved to have been undeniably distressing, as it became an encumbrance to its economy. However, America and its allies would soon feel its effects, which turned out, albeit unexpectedly, if not calamitously, to be a full-blown Japanese military aggression and expansion to their colonies.

As the eminent historian Teodoro Agoncillo has described, the early months of 1941 in the Philippines was a period full of tension - especially within the Commonwealth Government - as the possibilities of war with Japan seemed likely to happen (Agoncillo, 1965). With America and its allies imposing economic embargos on Japan, it then seemed to the Filipinos that war was indeed ineluctable. In effect, Manuel L. Quezon, the President of the Commonwealth Government, ordered the creation of the Civilian Emergency Administration (CEA), which was tasked to help prepare the Filipino people for a possible invasion. After Quezon appointed the members of the said emergency administration, he then “issued an executive order providing for the organization of provincial, municipal, and city chapters of the CEA whose purpose was to take charge of civilian defense work in their respective jurisdictions” (Agoncillo, 1965: 32). Undoubtedly, the government officials of Dumaguete, headed by the newly elected Mayor Mariano Perdices, learned about the tension that the national leaders of the Commonwealth Government felt. Thus, it was the task of Perdices to coordinate with the national government, in particular with the newly established Civilian Emergency Administration.

Pre-War Preparations in Dumaguete

Looking back, we can interestingly note that Perdices was immediately confronted with
a herculean task after he was elected Mayor of Dumaguete. Nevertheless, he accepted the challenge and indefatigably performed his duty as the chief executive amidst perilous times. According to Prof. Caridad Rodriguez (2001:32), since Dumaguete “became the center of the administration and operation of the CEA” in Negros Oriental, it was then the immediate task of Perdices to coordinate with the administration. Subsequently, the people of Dumaguete took part in “air raid drills” and “practice blackouts” (Rodriguez, 2001: 32). As a sign of his willful coordination with the CEA, Perdices ordered the creation and appointment of “different committees to be headed by members of the municipal council and to compose of civilians, to study problems of food supplies, shelter, excavation and relief” (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council, 1 March 1914). As agreed upon by the municipal council, Perdices was also delegated to “encourage the public to raise more vegetables and root crops through the utilization of vacant spaces in between their homes; and that all the families should be encouraged to store up food supplies to last for at least two weeks” (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council, 1 March 1914).

By and large, however, all these preparations did not necessarily typify the sort of general feeling among the Dumagueteños. For instance, on June 19, 1941, Perdices and the members of the municipal council, still called for a parade to celebrate Jose Rizal’s 80th birthday. The event was joined by the different schools in Dumaguete and the Volunteer Guard Units (Minutes of Dumaguete City Council, Resolution No. 93, 2 June 1941). This birthday celebration for Rizal was a tradition of Dumaguete dating back from 1939. Furthermore, the municipal government was fortunate to be assisted by the Negros Oriental Writers Guild, which willingly sponsored the birthday celebration.

The mirthful mood of the Dumagueteños, however, was only ephemeral. After almost a year, the Japanese arrived and Perdices was faced with the daunting task of maintaining peace, if not normalcy.

**Japanese Invasion of Dumaguete**

On December 8, 1941, the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the dreaded invasion of the Philippines had finally commenced. And since it took them about five months to arrive in Dumaguete, the Dumagueteños also had ample time to continue with their preparations. Nonetheless, this meant that all the preparations conducted by the CEA – air raid drills, practice blackouts, etc. – would now be put to the test. It was only a matter of time.

The reaction of the Dumagueteños to the start of the war varied. Rodriguez (2001: 33) stated that they had “mixed feelings of fear, anxiety, excitement and uncertainty for the future.” Some people were in panic buying essential supplies which eventually depleted the stocks from the various stores in Dumaguete. Nevertheless, the people were always advised to continue with their daily lives, as if there was no invasion. They were encouraged not just to buy food from the stores, but also to plant personally and cultivate. The Silliman community also played a vital role in the wartime preparations, as some professors like Frances Rodgers (Home Economics Teacher) and Alice Fullerton (Head Nurse of the Mission Hospital) helped train the Dumagueteños in camp cookery and first aid (Rodriguez, 2001: 36-37).

After hearing the news about Pearl Harbor, the Mayor immediately went straight to his office to meet the Philippine Constabulary (PC) about the situation. In this briefing, he advised the 50 members of the PC to “remain calm, to have courage, and to keep faith with the United States” (Cleope, nd: 131). Fear and
distress, however, were unequivocally felt by the Dumagueteños, with some of them deciding to leave Dumaguete and settling in the outskirts or the hinterlands, which to them, was safer than the town. Being the Mayor of Dumaguete and as the person who spearheaded and oversaw the wartime preparations, Perdices had already anticipated the coming of the Japanese to his town, with its accompanying inimical effects. Thus, he sought to secure and gather food supplies for his constituents by sending a truck to northern Negros Oriental to get cereals. Similarly, he was able to acquire some foodstuffs from Mindanao. And because it was important to share the provisions equally, he then called for proper rationing. Lastly, he was able to organize or create “warning, first aid, reserve and fire prevention systems” (Cleope, nd: 131).

Before the Japanese arrived in Dumaguete, some Dumagueteños pondered on the notion that the town should be burned, perhaps following the example of Russia during the Napoleonic epoch. After hearing these purported plans, Perdices, who was completely opposed to the idea, met with Silliman President Arthur L. Carson and voiced out his disagreement with the said plan. He requested Carson for a possible postponement of the plan to give time for him and perhaps other municipal officials to warn the people and to bring them to safety, which was his primary concern. He found it futile, if not devastating, to burn the town as he thought: “the only people to suffer from a burning policy would be the Filipinos” (Carson, 1965, p. 134). In the end, Perdices’ request was granted and it proved to have been beneficial to the Dumagueteños, some of them – those who escaped to the hinterlands – gradually returned to their houses during the Japanese occupation. In a way, Perdices – through his request to Carson – practically saved the town from being impractically burned down.

The Japanese finally arrived in Dumaguete in the early morning of 26 May 1942. They were met unopposed, as Dumaguete at that time was “practically deserted” (Rodriguez, 2001: 38). As his house was relatively nearer to the sea port, Perdices saw the Japanese ships coming. Being of Castilian descent (a white man, possibly mistaken for an American), he also thought that maybe the Japanese might shoot him first before asking a question, so he immediately decided to leave the town and return to Ogajong where his family temporarily resided for safety reasons (Cleope, nd: 133). However, on the following day, Perdices returned to Dumaguete and was peremptorily ordered by the Japanese to report to Park Hotel (the Japanese headquarters in Dumaguete at the onset) and was told to continue his duties as municipal mayor; this proved to have been a good thing for the Dumagueteños.

The first action of Perdices was then to ask his constituents who fled to the hinterlands to return to their homes. He was successful in doing so. The Dumagueteños gradually returned to their houses when they knew that he still acted as town mayor. The people’s decision to return was not in vain; in fact, it was the mission of Perdices to help the people of Dumaguete in whatever way he could. It was his responsibility as town mayor to safeguard his people amidst perilous times.

**Life in the Occupied Area**

At the onset, the Japanese forces acted benevolently in Dumaguete, because they wanted the Dumagueteños, who fled to the hinterlands to return to the town and live normally, just like before. The Japanese also wanted to assure or show the Dumagueteños that they came as friends – not as enemies; and that the enemies were the Americans. By and large, this strategy was part of a large-scale Japanese propaganda in Asia, which branded the Americans, and other Western colonizers, as the enemies, while proclaiming
themselves (the Japanese) as the ally – primarily because they were Asians. In brief, they wanted to evince that “Asia should be for the Asians.” Nevertheless, the Japanese, to some degree, were successful in Dumaguete, as people started to return to their homes. Henceforth, according to Rodriguez, the conditions in Dumaguete became fairly good, as the Japanese were able "to maintain order and discipline among the people"; although, it is necessary to note that the number of individuals had relatively decreased by then, which perhaps made it an easier task for the Japanese (Rodriguez, 2001). The benevolence of the Japanese, however, was only short-lived.

Everything changed after the Kempeitai (Secret Police) arrived. As Perdices lamented in his personal war diary, they were “ruthless and feared by the civilians”, and were entirely different from the Keibitani (Regular Army) who consisted of well-behaved soldiers (Cleope, nd: 133). The Kempeitai brought anguish to the Dumagueteños and, just like their Western counterpart – the Gestapo (Nazi Secret Police), were also responsible for conducting pernicious methods of torture. Therefore, one had to be very careful especially if he/she resided in the occupied area, as the Kempeitaiwere always on the lookout for guerrilla informants or even sympathizers. Indeed, Lorenzo Cimafranca, an intelligence operative in Dumaguete during the war, was right when he said that “anything can happen” to anybody in the occupied area, especially when the Kempeitaiwere around (Interview with Lorenzo Cimafranca, 19 January 2012).

Throughout the whole duration of Japanese occupation in Dumaguete, Perdices – being the wartime mayor – was able to know, and somehow casually befriend, the five Japanese commanders, who were stationed in Dumaguete and were in charge of the military forces in the province. They were the following: Captain Tsuda, Lieutenant Shirai (who was the strictest of them all, according to Perdices), Lieutenant Tanaka, Captain Sakamoto, and the last one Colonel Oie. Among these officers was Captain Sakamoto – a Christian – who used to play basketball with Perdices and his team called the Eight O’Clockers. During the war, playing basketball was one of the means of amusement of the Dumagueteños, especially for the mayor who was a sports enthusiast.

Life in the occupied area – that is, Dumaguete – during the Japanese occupation was rather mundane. Most of the people who returned and decided to stay in the occupied area lived normally, although with a few restrictions. According to Julia Perdices, wife of Mariano Perdices, the old routines of the Dumagueteños included stopping over, talking, and mingling with close friends; playing sports like basketball, soccer, baseball; and indulging in leisurely past-times like mah-jong (Cleope, nd). To Mayor Perdices, he thought “life was boring.” He further observed that a majority of the business establishments in the town were either closed or ransacked by the Japanese who supposedly confiscated “refrigerators, cars, and jewelry” which they later on shipped to Japan (Cleope, nd: 134). The Mayor’s typical daily routine was to “go to his office in the morning, see to the distribution of cereals, have lunch, siesta, chat with friends, and probably play basketball” (Cleope, nd: 134).

Apparently, apropos of the collaboration issue, Perdices did not exercise power. As town mayor, his position was merely symbolic. “All final decisions”, as Robert B. Silliman (1980: 52) recalled, “were to rest in the hands of the Japanese commander...” The Japanese merely placed him there to make the Dumagueteños believe in their purported benevolence or good intentions.

As time passed, the Japanese forces in Dumaguete gradually started to be vigilant. Civilians were gratuitously thrown into prison just out of mere suspicion. The Japanese also started to confiscate a lot of things especially those that
they thought can be used against them. One of these is the radio, which the Japanese feared could supply or broadcast information, if not anti-Japanese propagandas, from the Americans. Matter-of-factly, the Mayor’s personal radio was not an exception, as the Japanese also confiscated it (Cleope, nd). Furthermore, the Japanese also organized the Bureau of Constabulary (BoC), which consisted of Filipino volunteers whose responsibility was to maintain peace in the municipality. According to Perdices, the BoC’s had a “reputation for cruelty and collaboration”. He added, “They were generally young men who were veterans of Bataan and Corregidor” (Cleope, nd: 134). This was indeed an effective strategy of the Japanese because it further divided the Filipinos. The guerrilla forces abhorred those who worked for the BoC which was headed by Col. Salvador Abcede; on the other hand, although not entirely, the members of the BoC also despised the guerrillas who persecuted some of their colleagues as traitors.

Lastly, the Japanese were also busy in improving their airpower by “concentrating their warplanes in the Dumaguete airport” (Rodriguez, 2001: 42). Their preparations, however, were very conspicuous, since they even tried to make dummy planes, so as to hoodwink any possible American air raid. In the end, the multitude of warplanes stationed in Dumaguete airport would soon attract the attention of the guerrilla forces in Negros Oriental and would ultimately result in the grand intelligence plan of making a blueprint. The said plan, which would then be sent to the Americans in Australia, was fittingly tasked to the District Engineer, Eduardo J. Blanco, and his assistant Jovenal Somoza. These individuals (i.e. Engr. Blanco, Engr. Somoza, etc.) who played a significant role in this remarkable military intelligence feat are already commemorated and revered (by those who remember) in Dumaguete. However, there are details behind the story that are perhaps treated only as a historical minutia and are not so familiar to the people. An example of such detail is how intelligence operative Lorenzo Cimafranca was able to meet with Engr. Blanco.

Briefly, the person who was responsible for bridging, or introducing, Cimafranca to Blanco was Mayor Mariano Perdices. Trifling as it may sound, this detail proved to have had a significant effect on the story. Without Perdices’ assistance, the plan would not have succeeded, as Cimafranca would not have been introduced to Blanco. Hence, this participation of Perdices in the guerrilla movement is one of the most significant acts that he did throughout his term as wartime mayor. It is thus appropriate to discuss the story behind this and analyze the impact of this supposedly minor, if noteworthy, detail.

Roles of the Wartime Mayor: Traitor or Savior?

The guerrillas in Negros Oriental were incessantly on the move especially in the occupied area of Dumaguete and were looking for any possible loopholes in the Japanese’ defense. However, they lacked in number and military equipment if compared with the Japanese. Nevertheless, their only means of achieving victory was to coordinate with the Americans through the conveyance of military intelligence information. Gathering information that could be used against the Japanese thus became their primary mission in the occupied area – although, at the same time, they still fought the Japanese in the hinterlands. Intelligence gathering was thus delegated to some intelligence operatives stationed or assigned in Dumaguete. One of those intelligence operatives was Lorenzo Cimafranca – a young but audacious boy during the war who volunteered to join the guerrilla movement. His story vividly reveals the heroism of some Dumagueteños, and their temerity to help their country in times
of need. His story needs to be retold for one important reason: Mayor Perdices played a vital role in it. Secondly, the operation proved to have had a significant effect on the subsequent American arrival in Dumaguete. It was indeed a remarkable achievement that was brought about by men – Perdices, the government officials, and the guerrilla fighters – who meticulously and surreptitiously coordinated with each other as they believed that they were bound to serve their country in many ways as they can.

The young Cimafranca was still studying at Silliman University when the war broke out. During the Japanese occupation of Dumaguete, he was able to learn about the guerrilla movement that was particularly active in the hinterlands and was being headed by a certain Maj. Juan Dominado. It was in fact, Maj. Dominado, who convinced Cimafranca to join the guerrilla movement and appointed him as a part of the Intelligence Section stationed in the occupied area (Cleope, nd).

One of the missions of Cimafranca was to send a letter, from Maj. Dominado, to Engr. Eduardo J. Blanco, who was the district engineer of Negros Oriental at that time. This letter was later on known as a form of a request to Engr. Blanco; it was one that would possibly put his life and that of his family, at risk. It was a request to make a blueprint or a map of the Dumaguete Airport, where the Japanese warplanes were conspicuously located. This map was direly needed to help the Americans pinpoint the exact locations of the Japanese military aircraft since the Japanese purposely made dummy planes to deceive the American bombers. Cimafranca, however, had a predicament in hand. He did not know Blanco personally and was quite shy to approach him. As a result, he asked for the help of Mayor Perdices, who was a close friend of Engr. Blanco and whom he (Cimafranca) knew quite well as they were neighbors in San Jose Street (Lorenzo Cimafranca, personal communication, January 19, 2012). As Cimafranca recalled, Mayor Perdices was very willing to help him in his mission and even volunteered to visit Blanco initially to check if he was keen to accept the letter (Cleope, nd). Subsequently, after knowing that Blanco was interested to know the content of the letter, Perdices accompanied Cimafranca to the Blanco household. As the latter recalled, Perdices and Blanco conversed in Spanish; a language he could not understand since he did not speak Spanish nor was he of Spanish descent. After Blanco received the letter, Perdices and Cimafranca then left the household with their mission completed. However, curious of what Perdices and Blanco talked about, Cimafranca innocuously asked about the topic of their conversation. Perdices then told him that, for Blanco, “this was an opportunity for him to do something for our country as many people do not have the chance to do so” (Cleope, nd: 20).

After that, Blanco and his assistant Engr. Somoza started to make the blueprints of the Dumaguete Airport. He finished the map in time (in a week’s time) and accurately pinpointed the locations of “the armory, the oil storage, the ammunition dump, the barracks, as well as, where the airplanes were located” (Cleope, nd: 20). He then gave it to Cimafranca, who was tasked to transport the map that was adroitly hidden in clandestine inside the bar of the handle of a bicycle, back to the hinterlands, and ultimately to the hands of the American military in Australia (Lorenzo Cimafranca, personal communication, January 19, 2012).

Sometime in September of 1944, the Americans were able to hit those positions indicated by the map with pinpoint precision, making the Kempeitai suspicious about the possibility that some Filipino officials in the occupied area might have collaborated with the resistance movement. Consequently, many were
arrested. The Kempeitai specifically targeted government officials including Perdices, Blanco, Somoza, etc. They were interrogated and most probably tortured at the Silliman University’s Davao Cottage. Nevertheless, none of them squealed or revealed some information about the other guerrilla members who took part in the mission. In the end, Perdices was fortunately released by the Kempeitai on the 12th of October 1944, but Blanco, Somoza, and two others were executed (Cleope, nd). According to Cimafranca (2012), had at least one of them squealed, he would have also been imprisoned and possibly executed. The efforts done by Perdices and Blanco and the risks that they made just to help oust the Japanese in Negros Oriental are stories that should be remembered.

Another example of Perdices’ connection with the guerrilla movement was his regular meet-ups with Major Juan Dominado, who was an officer of the guerrilla movement. Dominado would go back and forth to Perdices’ house in San Jose Street to confer and coordinate with the Mayor. Also, Perdices would also send medicines to Dominado to give to his compatriots in the hinterlands. Indeed, it was a difficult task; Perdices had to tread the line and be extra careful with his actions. He was playing a double game.

One way of showing his support for the guerrilla movement was by sharing vital information about the Japanese in the occupied area and, of course as hitherto discussed, assist the intelligence operatives stationed in Dumaguete. As Cimafranca (2012) tersely said, “It was through him that I got all the information [about the Japanese in the occupied area]” (Interview with Cimafranca). On another note, Maj. Juan Dominado also recalled that after hearing his plan of a “blacklist” mission, which encouraged violence against Japanese “collaborators” in Dumaguete, Perdices did not even want the supposed “collaborators” (e.g. informants, members of the BoC, etc.) to be harmed or killed. The Mayor reprobated the so-called plan because insofar as he was concerned, they were still his constituents. Furthermore, although Perdices understood the sentiments of the guerrilla rebels, he still believed that it was not the right way, nor was it the right time, to attain justice. This plea of Perdices indeed saved a lot of lives (Cleope, nd).

There is no doubt that Perdices tried his best to save as many lives as he could. Perdices even succored the wife of Major Juan Dominado whose life was in danger after the Japanese learned that he [Dominado] helped plan the escape of USAFFE officer Lt. Vail and his wife. As the story goes, after Lt. Vail and his wife had escaped, the Japanese looked for Dominado and went to his house. However, they could not find anyone there because Dominado was out in the hinterlands. Perdices helped Dominado’s wife by hiding her “in the closet of another house which belonged to her relatives” (Silliman, 1980: 102; Mills, 2009: 57-58). Mentioned in the case of Fausto Avila, a sergeant of the Provincial Guard Service under the command of Governor Guillermo “Memong” Villanueva and who also worked in the Public Opinion Office, was another instance of Perdices’ efforts to save lives: it was when the Mayor helped free Socorro Cariño, who was arrested by the Kempeitai on March 17, 1943. For the second time, Cariño was arrested because the Japanese thought he had contacts with the guerrilla movement. Suffice it to say that he was fortunate that Perdices was there to help him after eleven days of captivity (The People of the Philippines vs. Fausto Avila, G.R. No. L-944, May 26, 1949).

Some of the people living in Dumaguete during the war saw the magnanimity of Perdices and the risk that he took just to ameliorate the situation in his town. One of these individuals was Arthur Carson, President of Silliman University. In his book, Sa Kabukiran, he recalled that of all the
collaborators, it was Mariano Perdices who “tried to make the best out of the bad situation.” As Carson (nd: 126-127) described the Mayor:

No doubt he tried honestly to carry out reasonable instructions of the conquering power, but his loyalty was to his own people. He resolutely refrained from any unnecessary activities that might have pleased the conquerors. When he was asked, for example, to help round up the Americans, his reply is reported to have been something like this, “Where the Americans went I do not know. Some disappeared in this direction, some in that. Undoubtedly they are somewhere in the mountains, but I am a man of the lowlands. I know nothing about the mountains. You must go there yourselves.” There was no time that we did not respect Mayor Perdices, and we came to have deep admiration for him when he later was found to be risking his life daily to act as a link in the resistance chain of intelligence. At each step he remained true to the people who had elected him and to the duties of the office which he had been chosen to fill. [Italics are mine]

Reoccupation of the Americans

The return of the Americans was inexorable. Feelings were mixed among the Japanese and the Filipinos. On the one hand, the Japanese were somehow perturbed and were becoming too preoccupied with their preparations for the possible re-occupation of the Americans. Unfortunately, this proved to have been detrimental to the Dumagueteños. As a sign of desperation, the Japanese frenetically arrested Filipinos whom they thought collaborated with the guerrilla movement. They became “more indifferent to the people” (Rodriguez, 2001:47). More and more prominent individuals were arrested for mere suspicion of collaboration with the Americans. On the other hand, the Dumagueteños were hopeful, optimistic, and anticipative for the promised return of the Americans.

The Americans arrived in Dumaguete at dawn on April 26, 1945. At that time, Perdices was still hiding from the Japanese who were always hunting him down; this was part of their last desperate attempt to punish those who belonged to or helped the guerrilla movement. According to his son, Luis, his father was just hiding in an “air raid” shelter that was located on the ground floor of their house at San Jose Street (Luis Perdices, personal communication, January 14, 2012). He was never caught by the Japanese because the Americans were able to come just in time to save his life. In fact, the Japanese were planning to execute him (if ever he was captured) on the birthday of Emperor Hirohito on April 29, 1945, just three days after the Americans arrived. Subsequently, after the arrival of the Americans, the Japanese then fled to the hinterlands and established their last stronghold there. However, they were not able to last, and it was most likely because of the diminishing supplies (food, water, and ammunitions). In the end, the Japanese soldiers, headed by Col. Satosi Oie, officially surrendered with his samurai formally handed over on September 22, 1945, at Guinsoan, Zamboanguita (Rodriguez, 1989).

Conclusion

Basing on Henrik Dethlefsen’s (1990:198-199) definition of collaboration, that is, to “exercise power under the pressure produced by an occupying power”, it is indubitably clear that Mayor Mariano Perdices did not really collaborate with the Japanese. He did not have the political power that he used to have as Mayor of Dumaguete (before the Japanese occupation)
nor did he adhere to their beliefs and sentiments. He simply took advantage of his position and used the modicum of influence that he had to safeguard the people.

The role of Perdices, too, as wartime mayor was not only to maintain the health and sanitation, and to keep the people calm but he was also active, if clandestinely, in the guerrilla movement. His bits of advice to Major Juan Dominado saved the town from being burned down to ashes and the lives of some “collaborators” who would have been unjustly executed by the guerrilla forces. His role in serving as the bridge between Lorenzo Cimafranca and Engr. Eduardo J. Blanco proved to have had a significant effect in weakening the Japanese military strength, which helped pave the way for an easier re-occupation of the Americans in Dumaguete. These stories, as hitherto and exhaustively discussed in the content, would clearly point out that Mayor Perdices took a great risk in collaborating or playing a “double-game” with the Japanese for the sake of shielding the Dumagueteños from harm.

His situation was similar to that of President Jose P. Laurel, as both of them used their positions to help save more lives and to mitigate the suffering of their constituents. It is possible and indeed probable that his benevolence during the war was not forgotten by the Dumagueteños and Oriental Negrenses as a whole. Perdices had a long and prosperous political career afterward, serving again as Mayor of Dumaguete from 1954-1959, and Governor of Negros Oriental from 1959 to 1972. Without a doubt, Mayor Perdices was a blessing to the Dumagueteños during the Japanese occupation. His collaboration was of a different kind and is one of the many untold stories left out in the annals of our national history.

Notes:


2. According to Constantino, Vargas, at one point, aspired to become the President of the Puppet Government.

3. In addition, the current City Hall of Dumaguete City was made during Don Pedro Teves’ term as Mayor in 1937.

4. Narciso Infante, who was also a municipal councilor before the elections, defeated the incumbent Vice-Mayor, Felipe Pastor by a relatively large margin. The local election of 1940 also produced very promising winners in the council. They conspicuously held the top two spots in the council – Lorenzo G. Teves, who would later reach the pinnacle of his political career as a Senator, and Deogracias T. Pinili, who would replace Perdices as Mayor after the Japanese occupation. Among the two, it was Lorenzo Teves who turned out to become a close friend and ally of Perdices, as they also belonged to the same party. It is possible that their harmonious political relationship started here. It was a relationship that lasted until Perdices became Governor of Negros Oriental.

5. There are varied stories about how Engr. Eduardo J. Blanco, Engr. Jovenal Somoza, Jesus Chi, and a certain Portuguese by the name of Silva were executed. But according to Cimafranca, it has been said that the aforementioned individuals were placed in a sack and thrown into the sea, a few kilometers off the wharf of Dumaguete.

6. Dominado’s encounter with Perdices happened in December 1942, which was two months
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