

Bonifacio Gillego dies at 81

AUG. 18, 2002: Boni, former OB executive director from 1962 and 1968, passed away following a stroke at the Kidney Institute in Quezon City on August 1, 2002. During his time in Vientiane, he was known as a voracious reader, finishing off a couple of books overnight, while still finding time to dispense fatherly advice. He had been undergoing kidney dialysis for three years in Arizona, New York as well as in the Philippines.

Returning to Manila in 1969, he won a seat in the Constitutional Convention drafting a new constitution. Alarmed by what he viewed as the increasing militarization of the government under President Marcos, he became an eloquent speaker and writer about "the misuse and abuse" of military funds to compile dossiers on Marcos critics. As a retired (in 1967) army intelligence officer, he was highly regarded as a credible observer.

Consequently when martial law was declared in 1972, he was in a dragnet list that rounded up legislators, journalists, activists and other Marcos political enemies. Warned in time, he fled to his home province of Sorsogon. He was on the run for six years in the Bicol region. During that period, the government accused him of joining the communist New People's Army. The Ministry of National Defense's Intelligence Service dossier said: "subject has written a number of exposes detrimental to national security." His retirement pension was also suspended because "it would be inconsistent for the government to continue supporting an individual who is working for its overthrow."

Escaping to Sabah province in Brunei by "kumpit", a motorized canoe, he contacted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which requested a U.S. visa for him from the American Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. "I boarded a Singapore Airlines flight to Washington, D.C., dressed in a T-shirt," he said.

In the US, he joined in 1974 the Movement For A Free Philippines, founded by Senator Raul Manglapus, himself an exile and branded, like Boni, as a "subversive" under arrest orders if they return home. Boni continued his media exposes of martial law's excesses, notably the fake war hero medals allegedly awarded by the U.S. army to Marcos for his anti-Japanese wartime activities. Angered, Marcos urged President Reagan, a pro-martial law advocate for the sake of the American bases, to harass his critics based in the US. The FBI interrogated Manglapus and Boni several times.

Returning to the Philippines in 1986 after President Cory Aquino took office, Boni was elected to the House of Representatives for two terms representing the Second District of Sorsogon. He served as chairman of the Committee on Civil, Political and Human Rights Committees. He was also the vice-chairman of the Committees on Public Order and Security, Ways & Means and Veterans Affairs.

Boni earned his degrees in English and Philosophy at the Far Eastern University in Manila in 1950 and was an Armed Forces of the Philippines Scholar at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Baltimore, Maryland.

Born on June 9, 1921 in Bulan, Sorsogon, he is survived by his wife Dolores Perez with whom he has seven children.

By [Pete Fuentesilla](#)