

Aquino slaying witness slams confession



MANILA, March 9 -- A witness to the killing of opposition Senator Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino at a Philippine airport in 1983 on Thursday slammed the latest account by convicted soldiers on how the assassination plot was carried out. Ramon Balang, a witness who testified at the trial of Aquino's military escorts that suspected hitman Rolando Galman was not the one who killed Aquino, reiterated his claim that Galman was unarmed at the time of the killing. 'Like what I said before...I did not see Rolando Galman attempt to kill Aquino,' Balang said. 'I did not see (Galman) with a gun.' Balang made the statement after the Philippine

Daily Inquirer published new accounts of the 15 convicted military men implicated in Aquino's assassination that revealed untold details on the alleged conspiracy. The disclosures, however, stuck by the military account that Galman shot Aquino after the arch-rival of then-president Ferdinand Marcos arrived in the Philippines on board a China Airlines flight from Taipei on August 21, 1983. The newspaper quoted Master Sgt. Pablo Martinez, who claims to have acted as the back-up man in the assassination plot. He said he received his orders from Brig. Gen. Romeo Gatan of the Constabulary, Col. Romeo Ochoco of the Air Force and millionaire contractor Hermilio Gosuico. 'I was instructed to liquidate (Galman) as well as Ninoy' if Galman failed, Martinez said. Martinez added that he was with Galman when Aquino's plane docked at Bay 8 of the Manila International Airport.

He said he prompted Galman to carry out his assignment after the gunman seemed to have doubts if he would survive the mission. 'I looked at Galman and he was really nervous, his face was very pale. It was only when I drew my gun that he ran towards Aquino and shot him at point-blank

range,' Martinez told the Inquirer. Galman was then shot and killed by other military men in the area. But Balang said he was 'positive' that it was not Galman who shot Aquino and that he was only 'three to four meters away' (nine to 12 feet) from where the shooting took place. 'I was under the bridge on Bay 8 where the CAL plane parked,' Balang said. 'I did not really see who shot Aquino but I am positive that it was not Galman.' The Philippine government is considering reopening the 12-year-old mystery, but said those already prosecuted or acquitted cannot be charged again. Gatan and Ochoco were never charged with involvement in the double murder, while Gosuico was acquitted of the charges. Meanwhile, Ninoy's widow and former President Corazon Aquino said she does not think a new investigation into her husband's death needs to be opened unless the 'mastermind' of the assassination can be named. 'People were always sure there was a conspiracy. What has to be determined is who is the mastermind,' Aquino said. She has always blamed the Marcos family for engineering the plot.



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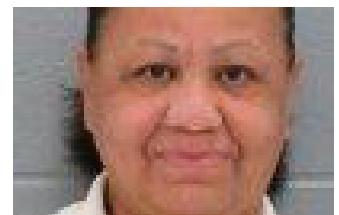
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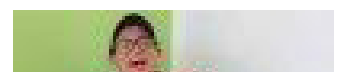
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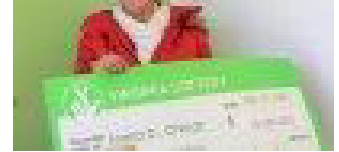
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