

# He Vows Military Will Be Subservient to Aquino : Enrile's Revolt Sparked by His Children - Los Angeles Times

*MARK FINEMAN*

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MANILA —

Three days before Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile declared war on his president, a letter from his son arrived.

“Dear Dad,” began the handwritten message from 27-year-old Juan (Jackie) Ponce Enrile Jr., who campaigned heavily and loyally for President Ferdinand E. Marcos in the recent presidential election. The letter said:

“I will never be able to fathom how such a great man can stoop to such lowness as to cheat all of us out of our right to choose.

“I’m afraid we are reaching a point wherein future generations of Filipinos may emulate such despicable acts and feel justified, simply because we, when we had the chance, did not stand up for the truth.”

As Enrile was reading the letter, his daughter, Kristina, came home from school at Manila’s Ateneo University. She was crying. Once again, she told her father, the other students had jeered her on her way home because her father was Marcos’ loyal defense minister.

“I guess that really was it,” Enrile said in an interview Saturday with The Times. “If my son and daughter feel like this and see no future for their country, then I thought I had better do something about it.”

Enrile threw his Uzi submachine gun over his shoulder and three books on war, revolution and law into a bag. He went down to his ministry office and led 400 men in a rebellion that in just three days toppled Marcos’ 20-year regime.

Sitting in his still-fortified office Saturday night, reflecting on the rare revolution that has made him a national hero, the 62-year-old Enrile said that he launched the revolution both for his children’s generation and for himself. He also said that Marcos

had personally threatened his life the week before, and that Marcos had made him experience the same frustrated terror that he felt while a prisoner of the Japanese in World War II.

Noting that five tanks and armored personnel carriers are still deployed outside his ministry building and that he still sleeps every night on a couch in his office, surrounded by armed guards, Enrile added that it will take two to three weeks more before the revolution is complete.

But in the wake of the coup led by Enrile and Gen. Fidel V. Ramos, now the armed forces chief of staff, Enrile vowed that he is not seeking a share of the political power, that he and his military organization will remain “absolutely subservient” to the civilian government of President Corazon Aquino and that he hopes to retire from the government entirely when Aquino’s government stabilizes--“probably in one or two years.”

### Brief Aquino Meeting

Enrile said that he met Aquino at her presidential swearing-in ceremony Tuesday for the first time since the late 1970s, when she came to him pleading for rights to visit her husband, Benigno S. Aquino Jr., whom Enrile helped jail for nearly eight

years on charges of trying to overthrow Marcos' government.

He said that he believes Corazon Aquino is competent to govern the Philippines and pledged "to obey each and every order of my commander in chief."

"You can call me to account if I ever renege on this: I will always place this ministry and the military under Mrs. Aquino," Enrile said. "These are my ideals as a person."

Enrile, who has made his ambition for the presidency known to the ruling party's inner circle for several years, added, "I would probably have tried for it if the president did not run. . . , but having gone into this kind of experience, all I want to do is help put the country back together and then leave.

### A Place in History

"If I wanted the power or the presidency, it was being handed to me on a silver platter. We had control of 85% of the military (at the peak of the uprising against Marcos). Marcos asked me to take over through some sort of junta and forget about Mrs. Aquino. But I think history would have been very harsh on me if I had started such a tradition in the Philippines."

Asked whether history mattered to him, Enrile said: “Yes, yes, very much. I am a student of political theories.”

And Enrile is also very much a product of his past--six decades of learning about war, religion and survival.

At one point in the wide-ranging interview, Enrile said: “I learned how to defend myself. I learned how to survive. Survival. That is something President Marcos never knew.”

### Some Early Lessons

The lessons started early for Enrile, the impoverished, illegitimate son of a village woman in the northern province of Cagayan. His father was a prominent attorney, Alfonso Ponce Enrile, but the elder Enrile already had a wife and family in Manila, and his illegitimate son grew up walking barefoot to school.

One day in high school, when Enrile was 17, four wealthy students attacked him in an argument over a girl. They stabbed him three times in the arm, stomach and throat. “I nearly died,” Enrile recalled. His family decided to press charges, but, when the case came to court, the four boys had high-priced lawyers who paid off the judge and got off, he said.

“Not only that, but I was the one who got expelled from school . . . ” for the incident.

## Physical, Moral Scars

The incident, according to family and friends, scarred Enrile for life--both physically and morally. “I guess he vowed then never to tolerate that kind of injustice,” Jackie Enrile said Saturday. “And when he was forced to tolerate it, he vowed to atone for it.”

Enrile’s second lesson in survival, he said, came Oct. 10, 1944, when he was captured while fighting for the Philippine resistance against Japanese occupation in World War II. Enrile spent the next three months in a prison camp, where, he said, “I learned to cope with danger.

“I heard the cries of the other prisoners being tortured, and I had to kneel before my captors and feel the blade of that samurai (sword) against my neck and listen to the Japanese officers bluffing me that they’d kill me if I didn’t tell them what they wanted to know.

“That was the same thing I experienced here Saturday night”--the night more than a week ago that Enrile and Ramos seized two Manila military camps and launched their coup against the dying regime of a man Enrile had served faithfully for two decades.

“I did not have any medals,” Enrile said in a comment aimed directly at Marcos’ disputed claims about his own war record, “but I went to war.

## Beatings and Torture

“I was beaten up by the Japanese and tortured for almost a month, and they never got anything out of me. That’s why when I came here I said, ‘Mr. Marcos is going to get it. He’ll either kill me or he is going to get it.’ ”

Still, it was not an easy decision for Enrile, who had been at Marcos’ side since the toppled president’s first campaign in 1964. Marcos picked Enrile out of a crowd of young lawyers that year, after Enrile had persuaded his father to finance his law studies at two Philippine universities and Harvard University in the United States.

In the early years, Enrile was part of a dynamic new government, then likened to that of President John F. Kennedy. But when Marcos declared martial law in 1972 to crack down on a Communist insurgency, rural private armies and rampant street crime, he named Enrile his martial-law administrator.

## Linked to Martial Law

Like most Filipinos, Enrile said the strict doctrine was good for the first two years. “It was planned as a

noble effort to correct the societal ills and to stabilize the country,” he said.

“But it became something else after a time. I could not leave. I became a prisoner of it. I wanted to leave for a long, long time, but there was always something.

“I kept getting threats every now and then.”

Enrile recalled that shortly after the 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino, a man Enrile believes was sent by Marcos visited his barber and asked if the barber wanted to make a lot of money.

“You are the minister’s barber,” Enrile quoted the man as saying. “Why don’t you just slit his throat for us.”

### Threat Recalled

Then, at Marcos’ last Cabinet meeting the week before Enrile and Ramos staged their coup, Enrile said that Marcos warned all his Cabinet ministers that their lives might be in danger if they withdrew their support from him.

“I was sitting beside the president, and he leaned over and whispered to me, ‘Johnny, you are the prime target.’ ”

An intelligence report in a similar vein reached Enrile



from a meeting that Marcos held with Ramos and other top generals 10 days ago. The report, saying that Enrile and others would be arrested and perhaps killed, forced him to act when he did. While his children's reaction to Marcos' tainted victory in the recent election gave Enrile the cause to act, it was the the death threat that gave him the urgency.

Yet Enrile was insistent throughout the historic, three-day drama, which brought Marcos down, that the president and his family not be harmed physically.

### Marcos Isolated

On the final day of the coup, several hours before Marcos asked Enrile to help arrange his departure from the Philippines, Enrile and the thousands of defecting troops had totally isolated Marcos in his presidential palace. The previous day, Enrile had sent a helicopter gunship to strafe the palace, but stressed that no residential areas be targeted.

“If I wanted to hit the president--you know, some of the men under me asked permission to hit the palace and I said ‘No, don't hit the palace.’ ”

The tactics of the coup, he said, were purely psychological warfare, hitting at what Enrile learned through the years were Marcos' most sensitive

points. From the very first day, Enrile worked on Marcos' mind, trying to make him feel more and more isolated.

## Message to Marcos

Last Sunday, when Marcos still held the upper hand in the battle for control of the 200,000-member armed forces, he tried to get Enrile on the telephone, but Enrile refused to talk to him. Instead, he sent the president a note telling him to beware, that the men he had around him to protect him might simply imprison him and hold him hostage.

“As far back as July, 1983, before the Aquino assassination, I told the president, ‘In the end, you will become a prisoner in your own palace,’ ” Enrile said. “I played on his isolation.”

That was the reason, Enrile said, that Marcos, rather than ask his own aides to contact U.S. Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth to arrange for his hasty departure Tuesday, asked Enrile to do it.

“I tried to use everything I learned about the president in those 21 years against him,” Enrile said, adding that he had brought three books with him when he left home to set up his command headquarters last weekend.

Enrile said he took “Revolutionary Change” by

Chalmers Johnson, “because it tells why a society breaks up.” He took “The Idea of Law” because “it tells what is the fabric that brings a country back together,” and quote “The Art of War” by Sun-Tzu, the Chinese general and military theorist, “because it says what is the art of doing something about it.”

But Enrile, who has two pictures of Jesus Christ in his office, also relied heavily on religion to pull off what many Filipinos still regard as a miracle.

He and Ramos did not even launch their revolt until they had the blessing--and political assistance of Cardinal Jaime Sin, archbishop of Manila and Roman Catholic primate of the Philippines. Sin mobilized the Church and Radio Veritas, the church-operated radio station, to get tens of thousands of civilians into the streets to act as a buffers for the initially rag-tag rebel band.

Sitting outside his father’s office in full combat gear on Saturday, Enrile’s son Jackie summed up his father’s change of heart:

“I guess his conscience was really bothering him--all the lying and all the deception. . . . I look back on this whole thing, and, really, I think it was all an act of God.”

