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Sergeant who linked Danding to Ninoy assassination dies

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MANILA – One of the soldiers implicated in the 1983 assassination of former Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. died in a vehicular accident earlier this week.

Former Air Force M/Sgt. Pablo Martinez was hit by a car while riding a bike near SM Mall of Asia last Monday, according to his son Diomedez.

Martinez, 78, was rushed to nearby San Juan de Dios Hospital but died on Wednesday morning due to multiple organ failure.

The driver of the car that hit the former sergeant was arrested. The driver, however, reached a settlement with the Martinez family.

Martinez is one of the 16 soldiers convicted in the assassination of the former senator and Rolando Galman on the tarmac of the Manila International Airport on Aug. 21, 1983.

The senator was stepping off the tarmac while under heavy guard when he was shot on the head. Seconds after, aviation security men shot dead Galman, who was accused of assassinating Aquino.

Martinez was granted pardon by former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2007. Mrs. Arroyo pardoned Martinez based on her declaration that convicts aged 70 are eligible for pardon.

In an interview with ABS-CBN News on November 22, 2007, Martinez insisted that it was Marcos crony, Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr., who masterminded the assassination.

Martinez was also firm on his claim that it was Galman who shot the former senator, father of incumbent president Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III.

"Nagsasabi lang ako ng totoo. Dahil ang sinasabi ng pamilya Aquino, hindi raw si Galman kundi isa raw sa mga sundalo ang pumatay. Hindi po. Hindi po," Martinez said.

"Ang nakita ko talaga si Galman. At siya ang kasama ko eh. Ako ang nagpasok sa kanya sa tarmac. At ang kasalanan ko dun kung hindi sa akin na ako ay sumusunod lang naman sa kautusan, hindi papasukin si Galman dahil wala siyang authority. Wala siyang access doon sa lugar na 'yun. Kung kaya't may pasok kami dahil kasama ko siya at ang sinakyan pa namin sasakyan eh sasakyan ng vice-commander dati, si Col. Ochoco, Romeo Ochoco."

Asked how Galman carried out the assassination, Martinez said: "Nagbunot siya ng revolver nya pagkatapos binaril niya ng kwan talaga, sa left side ng aide ni ex-senator Aquino. Binaril nya. Malapitan kaya hindi mimintis."

Martinez's remains are set to be brought to the Philippine Air Force Mortuary in Taguig City today. – **with a report from Zhander Cayabyab, dzMM**

