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'Ochoco knows more than Valerio on Ninoy slay'

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MANILA, Philippines - One of the soldiers convicted of killing former senator Benigno Aquino Jr. and Rolando Galman recently granted clemency by President Arroyo said former Aviation Security Command (Avsecom) deputy chief Col. Romeo Ochoco knows more than Air Force captain Felipe Valerio does about the possible brains behind Aquino's slaying.

Former master sergeant Pablo Martinez said more than Valerio, Ochoco holds the "missing link" that could lead to the mastermind of the Aquino-Galman double murder case.

"Ochoco knows more than what Valerio knows," Martinez told reporters before a thanksgiving Mass the other day, but refused to elaborate.

Ochoco, being the deputy chief of the Aviation Security Command, was reportedly said to have ordered Martinez to get gunman Galman from the tarmac, said Public Attorney's Office (PAO) head Persida Rueda-Acosta.

"Ochoco was never charged and we're not sure why," Acosta told **The STAR**.

She said Ochoco is now in Australia. Aside from Valerio, they also want Ochoco to be extradited.

The 10 ex-convicts recently freed held a Mass and a reunion of

sorts in Quezon City on Wednesday to celebrate their release from prison.

At the Mass held at PAO headquarters, two of the former soldiers spoke on behalf of their fellow convicts and vowed to support moves for Valerio's extradition.

They said Valerio's extradition would pave the way for the reopening of their case and eventually, help in clearing their names.

Valerio was one of the principal accused in the Aquino-Galman double murder case but fled to the United States and disappeared before he could be indicted for the murders.

Former technical sergeant Claro Lat and Martinez voiced the sentiment of their fellow soldiers that they could clear their names if the case is reopened.

The 60-year-old Lat said clearing their names could help them avail of their retirement benefits, especially since they are now too old to work.

The soldiers were also glad that they saw each other again after their release last week.

"This is somehow our reunion," said Lat, who along with another inmate is still staying at PAO headquarters.

Lat, who reportedly has an enlarged heart, would have to get well first before he can go home to his sister in Batangas.

The 10 soldiers were among 16 former members of the defunct Avsecom found guilty of assassinating Aquino and sentenced to two life terms.

Aquino's murder triggered public outrage that culminated in a People Power revolt that toppled the Marcos regime in 1986.

The soldiers were granted executive clemency and released.

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