

Clinton holds 'secret' meet with RP 'brods'

BY VOLT CONTRERAS

EAT your heart out, Erap.

US President Bill Clinton held a "secret" meeting with a handful of men just before he left the country after the Apec summit -- and it's not over trade or other state matters.

The Filipinos were not even high government officials, and they were not pushed around by cocky US Secret Service men, either. They had the US president to themselves.

In a clear breach of protocol, Clinton -- the most watched and tightly guarded man during the summit -- made an unscheduled stop flying in from Subic at the Quirino Grand-

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UNSCHEDULED, on-the-spot meeting Monday night for President Clinton and the Supreme Council of DeMolay Philippines. He received the Maltese Cross Award from Rosendo Herrera, Supreme Council Grand Master; Robert Robbins, Master Mason and chair, Democrats in the Philippines; and Ching Herrera, president, Confederated Masters' Club of the Philippines.

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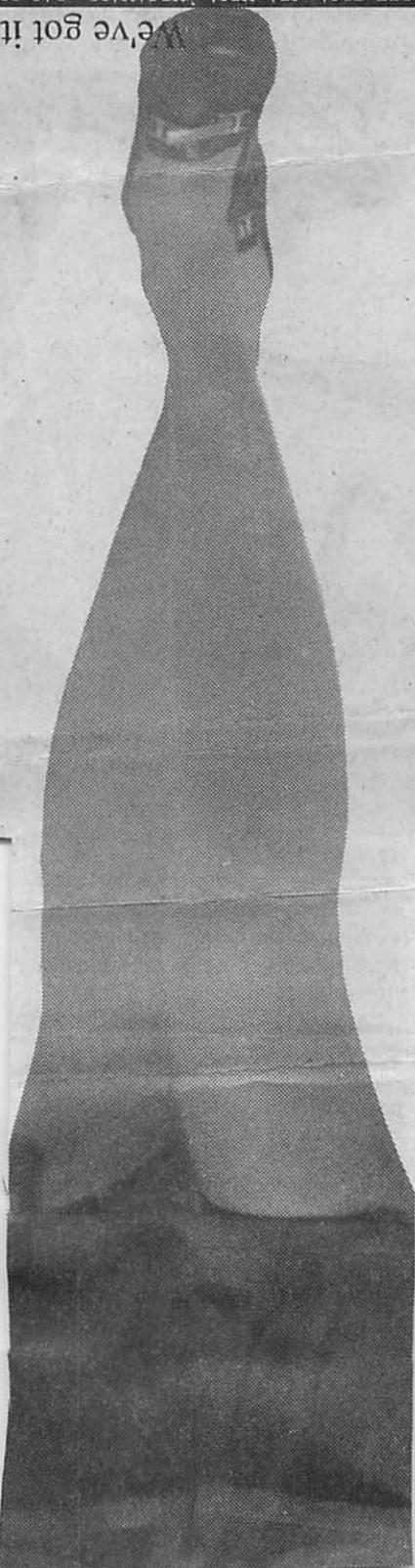
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Clinton . . .

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stand Monday evening to receive an award from the local chapter of a Masonic group of which he was once a member.

Clinton dropped in by helicopter and met a group from the Order of DeMolay of the Philippines to receive the Grand Master's Maltese Cross Award "for his outstanding service and continuing concern for the welfare and development of the youth."

The ceremony lasted 15 minutes, according to Robert Robbins, a Master Mason and chair of the Democrats Abroad, Philippine Chapter.

The Order of DeMolay is a Masonic youth group with an international network. It is open to men aged 15 to 21.

Clinton was a member of the order and rose to the rank of State Master Councilor during his youth in Arkansas, his native state in the United States.

Welcome banner

The meeting was not supposed to happen. Robbins said US Deputy Chief of Mission G. Eugene Martin had formally turned down the Masons' invitation to Clinton sent as early as Oct. 15, citing the president's tight schedule at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference.

But a welcome banner put up by DeMolay along Roxas Boulevard did more than just greet Clinton. It made him, at the last minute, change his itinerary prior to departure.

The steamer, which Clinton saw while passing the Apec friendship lane from his hotel to the Philippine International Convention Center, read: "Welcome Brother Bill Clinton -- from The Order of DeMolay Philippines."

A source said officials from the US Embassy and the US Secret Service on Monday afternoon called up the DeMolay office in Ermita, Manila, saying, in essence: "The President will meet you."

Upon receiving the news, DeMolay officials, who apparently had given up hope of meeting Clinton, had to smash an office door and a cabinet to retrieve the leather-encased citation for the US president.

At the hastily arranged time and place, in the early evening of Nov. 25 at the almost empty Quirino Grandstand at Luneta Park, Clinton alighted from the helicopter he had taken from Subic and went straight to meet the DeMolay group.

His small, privileged audience included Robbins; Rosendo Herrera, Grand Master of the Supreme Council, Order of DeMolay; Albert Tan, Grand Junior Councilor; Antonio S. Herrera, member; and Ching Herrera, president of the Federated Mother's Club of the Philippines.

The award handed over to Clinton by Herrera partly reads:

"For his unselfish and everlasting love; and sincere concern for the welfare and development of the youth, particularly the Order of DeMolay, the Grand Master's Maltese Cross Award is hereby gratefully presented to Bro. William Jefferson Clinton."

After receiving the award, Clinton commended Herrera for his leadership in the order and for his support for young people.

hands and sing "Auld Lang Syne."

He sent Jiang off with the message "Good health, long life."

The problems did not go away, though.

Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon said a garrison-type Chinese structure remained in Mischief Reef, which is part of the Kalayaan Islands claimed by the Philippines.

"It's still a main irritant for us so that we have to resolve it," Siazon said.

He said the two leaders talked about the South China Sea issue, but it was not known if the Mischief Reef was mentioned.

Manila has repeatedly asked Beijing to remove the structure. Siazon admitted that the Philippine government could not do the removing without provoking war with China.

"If you remove that, there will be a war, who wants war?" he said.

"We have been asking China but they insist that is also theirs. Of course, you have to study your moves, we are not equal to them, not even in size," Siazon added.

Small obstacle

In his speech during a state dinner Tuesday night, Mr. Ramos urged Jiang to intensify their countries' efforts to remove the remaining irritants in their friendly relations.

"Mr. President, I regard our differences in the South China Sea as a small obstacle we must work together to remove so that -- undistracted -- we can together seize the opportunities that a regional partnership between China and Southeast Asia can open for all countries in the next century," Mr. Ramos said.

In offering a toast to Jiang, the President urged the Chinese leader to intensify the two countries' efforts to transform the South China sea from "waters of contention to an area of cooperation and mutual benefit."

He thanked China for its continued efforts to consult the Philippines in resolving their differences in a peaceful and friendly manner.

Jiang assured the President that his country will continue its consultations with the Philippines on issues affecting their bilateral relations, specifically on territorial disputes. *With a report from Cynthia D. Balana*



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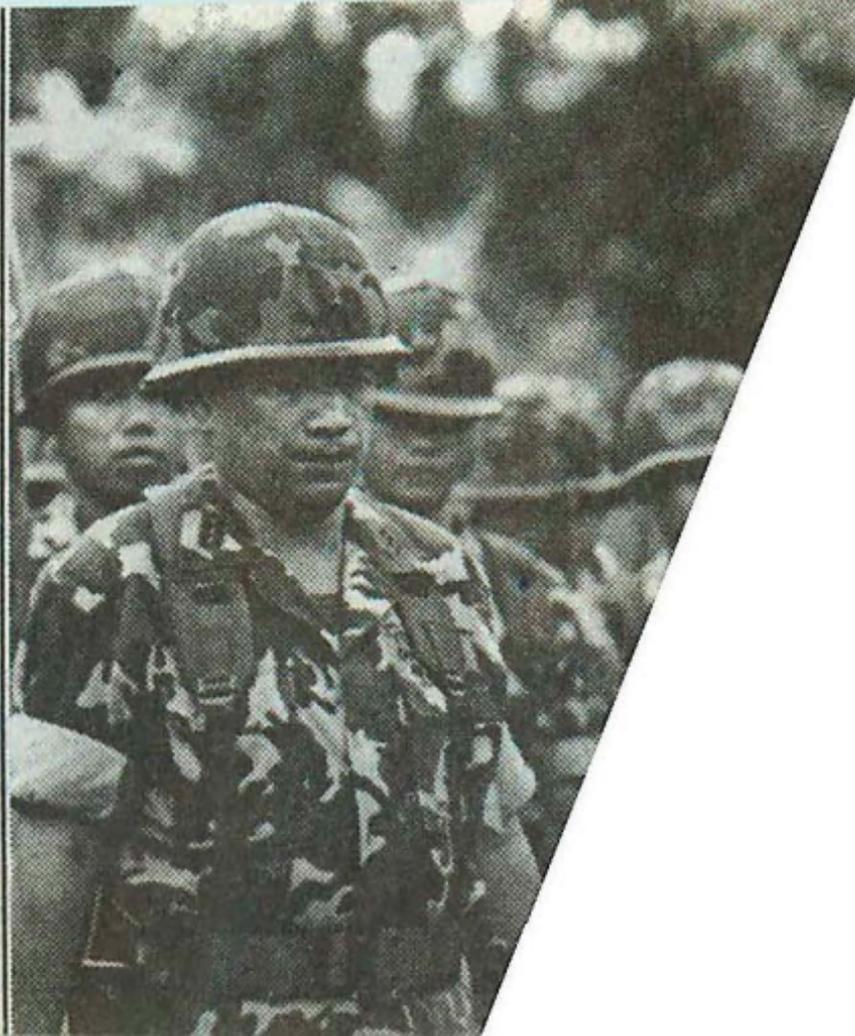
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ities vow toxic sites

Tality also charged that hazardous wastes left by American troops when they abandoned the US air base in 1991 had caused birth defects, including cerebral palsy, brain damage, mental retardation and impaired sensory functions among children living in communities around Clark.

Delegates to the recently concluded, three-day First International Forum on Toxic Waste and Bases Cleanup urged the US government to take full responsibility for the cleanup of



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