

GREGORIO H. DEL PILAR - THE BOY

By: Jose A. Curino
Phil. Free Press
Vol. 45, No. 45, p. 18-20,
November 13, 1954.

Who would ever think that one of the bravest generals of our revolutions, the man who led 60 men to fight against 300 "merican sharpshooters in the "Battle of the Clouds," learned his marksmanship by practising on a sumpit or a blowgun? Or who could imagine

Gregorio H. del Pilar, the Filipino Leonidas, selling empanadas (pics) in the neighboring barrios of Bulacan, Bulacan, particularly in San Nicolas where Marcelo, his uncle, was residing?

Yet Goyo (Goyong), as he was known to his intimates, did both of the things mentioned above and more - he played practical jokes on his friends and was just as mischievous as any other boy.

Atty. Heraclio H. del Pilar, 63, nephew of the boy general, related hitherto untold stories about "Tio Goyo whom I used to accompany when he went hunting birds with his sumpit."

Heraclio is related to the hero on both his father's and his mother's side. His father, the late Luis H. del Pilar, and Goyo's father, Fernando, were first cousins. On his father's side, therefore, Heraclio's is the hero's second cousin. Heraclio's mother, Maria, was the eldest sister of Gregorio. This makes Atty. Del Pilar the nephew of the youngest of all Philippine revolutionary heroes. It was a common practice among the Filipinos during the Spanish regime to marry their not to close relatives "to keep the wealth within the family fence." Even Marcelo's wife, Marciana, was his relative.

Goyo and His Sumpit

In 1895, Gregorio was taking his Bachelor of Arts degree at the Ateneo de Manila (then called Ateneo Municipal),

He was 20 years old then. Heracleo, who was five years old at the time, recalls that his Tio Goyo every now and then went to his home town, Bulacan, for vacation. Nephew and uncle were neighbors.

"Tio Goyo bought his sumpits from Ka Apan, an old man in sitio Paniqui, San Jose, Bulacan. These blowguns measured from 2.5 to 3 meters long and were very powerful. Although their ammunition consisted of hard clay pellets, they could kill a man if he was hit in the forehead," Atty. Del Pilar stated.

"Tio Goyo could hit a kilawan (oriole) from a distance of 10 yards. He preferred high targets, particularly those directly overhead, to horizontal ones. He seldom missed," Heracleo recalled.

The boys in Bulacan called Goyo tirador or cazador which means "sharpshooter." The hero gave the birds he bagged to the kids. "We used to quarrel as to who should get the birds shot by Tio Goyo," Heracleo disclosed.

Gregorio's mother, Aling Felipa, often chided her son for shooting at birds "when you do not eat them anyway." To which Goyo would invariably reply: "But, nanay, look at the children. Each of them has a bird. They are happy, aren't they?"

But Goyo was not contented with a mere sumpit. One day after he had finished his arts degree at the Ateneo in March, 1896, Goyo took the shotgun (escopeta) of Heracleo's father, Luis (who later acted as the hero's legal adviser), without permission. "My father was angry but what could he do? Tio Goyo was already using his gun," Atty. Del Pilar said.

With the escopeta, Goyo was able to bag more birds. He shot snipe (Kanduro), wild dove (bato-bato), and wild ducks. Snipes can only be shot while they are flying because you cannot see them till they fly. Even present day hunters with their modern gear find it hard to shoot the snipe. But not Goyo. "Handling his gun carefully, Tio Goyo would stand at ease and wait for a snipe to take flight. Whenever we heard a shot, we were assured of another bird for the frying pan," Heracleo related.