

## GENERAL DEL PILAR'S OTHER BATTLES

By: Ernesto C. Hidalgo  
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No other Filipino general in the Philippine Revolution and in the Filipino-American War could compare with General Gregorio H. del Pilar in romantic escapades, gallantry toward the enemy, and intrepid exploits. At 24, he had already reached the pinnacle of his career as a soldier. And at Tirad Pass, some 4,500 feet above sea level, Del Pilar made his supreme sacrifice. This was on December 2, 1899, after his six-hour rear-guard battle with American forces pursuing General Aguinaldo.

So much has been written about Del Pilar's last stand, but how about the many other battles he fought before he became a brigadier general?

The late Teodoro M. Kalaw's book on the hero of Tirad Pass, printed in 1930 by the Bureau of Printing, narrates that Del Pilar's first baptism of fire took place on January 1, 1897, when he participated in the defense of the fortifications in Kakaron de Sili, near San Rafael, Bulacan. He and his brother, Julian, fought bravely but Spanish soldiers from four directions overwhelmed the fortress, killing many of the defenders. In this struggle, the two del Pilar brothers were wounded. The valiant fight earned for Gregorio the rank of lieutenant in the revolutionary forces in Bulacan.

Gregorio once again showed his courage when, single handed, he attacked six Spanish cazadores escorting a curate, a certain Padre Moises of Malolos. This he did while his companions were still discussing the plan to ambush the enemy. "Leave it to me," he told his comrades. He fired at the last of the horse-drawn coaches, killing the soldier on the platform. The other soldiers and the priest jumped off their carriage and ran away to escape. Del Pilar got the slain soldier's Mauser and pursued the fleeing cazadores.

According to the late Teodoro M. Kalaw, Del Pilar's well planned assault on Paombong, Bulacan, gave great prestige to the young leader. The Kalaw book quotes a letter of Del Pilar describing the battle and published in "Notas Katipunescas," a Katipunan organ which was edited by Mariano Ponce in Hong Kong:

"We entered the town of Paombong at night... My nine soldiers were under orders to sleep in two houses; they would tell the house-owners they were benighted in their trip and because of the prevailing dangers on the way, had to pass the night inside the town. I accompanied by one of the loyal soldiers, entered an uninhabited house in front of the convent. . . . One o'clock in the morning. None of the Spanish sentinels perceived our presence. The rest of my men were deployed on the outskirts of the town, ready to rush to our aid. The signal for the attack would be a shot directed at sentinel in the middle of the plaza fronting the church.

"The following day was Sunday. The bells would ring for Mass: it would be the signal that we were ready. At the start of the Mass, my soldiers, wearing fiesta attire, arrived. They walked five paces apart so that they would not be noticed . . . A shot rang out. The nine soldiers charged the cazadores who were still resting near the armory. General panic. The enemy disbanded without getting to their firearms. In the meantime, I, who had posted myself on the plaza in front of the convent, fired continuously to prevent the enemy from making use of the windows. Two of the enemy Spaniards fired from the azotea without effect. The assault lasted for three minutes. We spent a quarter of an hour gathering the firearms and ammunition, which the Spaniards left behind in their flight."

For this gallant raid, President Aguinaldo promoted Del Pilar, already a captain, to the rank of lieutenant colonel. After the signing of the Pact of Biak-na-Bato, Lt. Col. Del Pilar was one of the few trusted officers who accompanied General Aguinaldo to Hong Kong.

Returning to the Philippines to resume the revolution against Spain, Aguinaldo and Del Pilar landed in Cavite in May, 1898, from one of Admiral Dewey's transports. After having installed himself as "dictator," Aguinaldo named Del Pilar "Dictator of Bulakan and Nueva Seija." With 500 rifles, Del Pilar organized the "Del Pilar Battalion."