

HE FOUGHT AT TIRAD PASS

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Somewhere east of Candon, over the jagged peaks of the Cordillera, is a tiny mountain pass which Ilocano mothers point out to their sons as a symbol of Filipino heroism. This is Tirad Pass.

A young general by the name of Gregorio del Pilar, in an attempt to cover the retreat of President Emilio Aguinaldo to the fastness of Lepanto, heroically fell on the spot with sixty brave young revolucionarios. (Actually, according to the Americans, there were 8 survivors of the 60 defenders; American troops numbered over 300.-Ed.)

What actually happened in the Pass on the morning of December 2, 1899, an old man now in his early eighties still recalls, vividly - the bloody engagement between del Pilar's handful of insurgents and the blue uniformed, towering Americanos.

Manuel Abeng, a survivor of the battle, recounted that the Tirad Pass of engagement was indeed a suicidal attempt by the youthful Balakeño general to save General Aguinaldo from being overtaken by the American troops, who were pursuing him.

"It was about midnight of December 1, 1899, when General del Pilar ordered an assembly of his men at his headquarters in sitio Aloling, Concepcion, Ilocos Sur," Abeng recalled. "There were but fifty of them. The group was composed of battle-seasoned Tagalog and Ilocano fighters, the best he could find in the area.

"At about one-thirty in the morning of December 2, the General sent a message to me at the presidencia of Concepcion. I was an argosor tercero then, directly in charge of the police force of the town and second-in-command of the chief of police. Together with nine men,

I proceeded to del Pilar's headquarters, and after rendering him the usual salute I waited for his orders.

"He told me to deploy my men 10 meters to the west of the pass below, while he and his 50 insurgents held the pass itself. By two-thirty that same morning we were in our positions, waiting for the Americanos.

"At day-break, our adversaries appeared, led by an Angaki resident by the name of Nuario. I ordered my men, who were then entrenched behind tall talahib grass, to fire. An American sergeant fell at the first volley.

"Heavy firing ensued. More and more American soldiers appeared at the entrance to the pass. Our ammunition ran short; we had to use our bolos. Americanos are clever soldiers; they parried our bolo thrust with their Krag rifles. Even so, we hacked to death several of them.

"But at last, they successfully climbed the pass to be met by a rain of bullets from General del Pilar and his men. The fighting raged until two o'clock in the afternoon. General del Pilar fell dead from a bullet which pierced his breast. I saw an American officer strip the General of his revolver (Cal. 44), his saber, his insignias, and boots. At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the Americans left the pass.

"One of my men, Corporal Toedad, and I were the only ones left in the pass. We buried the General just a meter away from where he fell.

"The following day, December 3, the Americans summoned Gobernadorcillo Wandali of Concepcion. They asked him where the men of General del Pilar had fled. He referred them to one Sagubat of Barrio Matuwe. This man Sagubat led the Americanos to my bamboo shack at Dapdapig. At midnight, the foreigners surrounded my house and, at the point of rifles, ordered me to give up my gun.

"I told them in broken Spanish that I had none. I was only an argoser tercero; the only weapon I had was a saber - in fact, nonecoms in the municipal police forces were armed with sabers or bolos.

"The Americans hogtied me and subjected me to torture. They poured water into my ears, and burned my knees and elbows with lighted cigarettes.