

A REVOLUTIONARIO RECALLS THE BATTLE OF  
TIRAD PASS

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The man who looked up to the pile of checks he was signing was an old man, dark and lean. A wide smile lighted his weather-beaten face. He extended a welcoming hand to the writer. The man was Captain Isidro Wenceslao, the place was his modern and roomy residence in the heart of Quezon City.

Captain Wenceslao, an assistant of General Emilio Aguinaldo, was signing the treasury warrants, the monthly pensions of some 16,000 Philippine revolution veterans.

This man, now 78, was the friend and confidant of Gen. Gregorio del Pilar and, perhaps, today knows more about him than any living person. For this reason the writer called on him to get an authentic account of the "Battle of Tirad Pass." What follows is Captain Wenceslao's account of that historic battle.

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It was late in November in the year 1899 when General Gregorio del Pilar ordered his battle-tested brigade to proceed to Bulacan. He did so for two reasons: first, he wanted to set up another front in that sector in order to confuse the enemy; and second, he wanted to bring along Remedios Nable Jose, a beautiful girl from Dagupan, where the brigade was stationed, so that he could marry her in Bulacan, Bulacan, where he was born and raised.

One the eve of the brigade's departure a courier from General Emilio Aguinaldo's camp, which was then in message to the effect that the brigade's travel plans had been altered. Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan, was to be the new destination. Good soldier that he was, General del Pilar



bade Remedios goodbye with the promise that he would be back very soon and prepared to obey the new order.

General Emilio Aguinaldo was on hand to greet del Pilar and his troops upon their arrival in Sta. Barbara. Aguinaldo's forces and Del Pilar's brigade joined ranks and made their way to Manaog where a brief skirmish ensued. A patrol of American infantrymen was sighted and the Filipinos disposed of them in short order. Aguinaldo placed a number of his men under the command of General Del Pilar. Although young in age, Del Pilar had a brilliant military mind. This did not escape the observant eye of Aguinaldo who reposed great trust in his youthful subordinate.

After a long march of over 100 kilometers through the length of La Union and a part of I. Sur, the foot-weary troops arrived safely at Tirad Pass. Del Pilar proceeded immediately to make an ocular inspection of the place. He assigned 60 men to dig trenches in which they could lie in wait for the American troops which were expected to use Tirad Pass. The rest of his men were ordered to accompany Aguinaldo to the nearby town of Nagaki (now Del Pilar), Ilocos Sur.

When three trenches had been dug, General Del Pilar posted four soldiers in the first trench, three in the second and another three in the third. The 50 remaining soldiers were deployed at the top of the mountain. When everything was in readiness, Aguinaldo was informed of the proposed plan for the ambush.

Reported Del Pilar:

"General Aguinaldo, our men are strategically posted at Tirad. No American can possibly get thru the pass alive; that promise you sir . . .!"

Replied Aguinaldo:

"Well done. We must delay their advance at any cost. The enemy must be held at bay to give time to our scattered and demoralized forces to regroup." With these parting words, Aguinaldo went to his quarters to catch up on his sleep.

That night General Gregorio del Pilar lay tensely in his makeshift bed in Cervantes, where Aguinaldo and his men had moved earlier in the afternoon from Angaki.