

Filipinos Fight for Independence

Emilio Aguinaldo



OVERVIEW

A Native Filipino, Emilio Aguinaldo headed the insurrection against Spain in 1896, and fought with the United States in the Spanish-American War. But when the United States denied independence to the Philippines, Aguinaldo led a rebellion against United States occupying forces from 1899 to 1901. The following are excerpts from the story he wrote of his capture in 1901.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- How was Aguinaldo fooled by the United States forces?
 - How does Aguinaldo seem to regard the United States forces that captured him?
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Palanan is a little village, of houses built of bamboo and thatched with nipa, situated on the banks of the river which bears the same name, and some six miles distant from the seashore. It is one of the most isolated places in the province of Isabela, in northern Luzon. There are no ways of communication with the outside world except rough trails or foot-paths that lead over the mountains to the west, to Ilagan, or south to Casiguran, and its peaceful population of some twelve hundred souls has heard very little of the tide of war which for four years has desolated our country. Nevertheless when I first went there with my companions and our little band of followers, in the month of September, 1900, I was received with enthusiasm by these simple, hospitable people, and everything that they had was placed at my disposal. I was accompanied by Dr. Santiago Barcelona and Colonel Sim[e]on [*sic*] Villa, my chief-of-staff. We had some seventeen soldiers, who had followed us in all our wanderings over the mountains and through the forests of northern Luzon. Barracks were furnished for these soldiers, and a house was set apart for the residence of myself and my companions. . . .

In January of this year 1901 Colonel Villa, who was growing tired of our peaceful and uneventful life, asked me to give him command of forces in the field, in any province of Luzon, and it was decided between us and Dr. Barcelona to make requisition on the commanding officer of our forces in central Luzon for a reinforcement of four hundred men. . . .

Accordingly, with this in view, I sent, on the 15th of January, Private Cecilio Segismundo, a man thoroughly acquainted with the country in central Luzon, to deliver several letters addressed to the officers who were in command of our guerrilla forces in that territory. . . .

We had no news whatever from our messenger until the 20th of March, upon which date I received two sealed packages, which were delivered to me by a man from Casiguran, a town about fifty miles south of Palanan. These packages contained two letters, one from General Urbano Lakuna, and the other from Lieutenant-Colonel Hilario Tal Plácido. General Lakuna said in his letter, which was addressed to me, that, in accordance with my orders of the 12th of January, he was sending me one of his best guerrilla companies under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Hilario Tal Plácido and Captain Lázaro Segovia, both of whom he recommended for immediate promotion in recognition of the valiant and very valuable services which they had rendered. . . .

On the evening of the 22nd of March another communication was received from Colonel Tal Plácido, in which he informed Colonel Villa of his arrival with his forces at a place called Dibacal, distant about six miles from Palanan. He also said that his men were completely worn out with the fatigue and hardships of the march, and that they had not had so much as a grain of rice to eat in the last twenty-four hours. He begged me to send him a supply of rice at once, so that he could continue the march early in the morning of the next day. In accordance with this request I sent him a quantity of rice that same evening by a party of Negritos. . . .

It was my intention to allow Hilario Tal Plácido and his men to rest in the camp in Palanan for a week, and then to send them to Isabela. The men were to be attached to the guerrilla forces already operating in that province, and Colonel Tal Plácido was to assume the military chieftainship of the province, relieving the officer then in command, who was to go to the province of Nueva Viscaya.

The morning of March 23rd was passed in making preparations for the formation of a Red Cross league among the ladies who had come up from Casiguran for my birthday. With this object Dr. Barcelona had sent them an invitation to come to my house at three o'clock in the afternoon.

About two in the afternoon I saw Tal Plácido's men crossing the Palanan River in small boats, and at once directed Colonel Villa to send Captain Tomás Magsaril[i] to salute the newcomers and welcome them in my name. Colonel Villa also arranged that the soldiers of my personal guard who were not on duty should fire the proper military salutes.

It was not long before the new troops, some eighty-five in number, entered the village of Palanan and halted in the plaza in front of my house, where about twenty soldiers of my guard were drawn up waiting to receive them. It was about three o'clock. The newcomers were dressed in the regular uniform of the Filipino army, and were armed with Mausers, Remingtons and one or two Krag. The officers, Colonel Tal Plácido and Captain Segovia -- the latter a Peninsular Spaniard -- then came into my house. After the usual salutations I asked them what sort of a journey they had had. To this Segovia replied that it had been exceedingly hard, and that they had not had twenty four hours' rest since the 24th of February, the date of their departure from Nueva Ecija.

Segovia then told me that he had been at one time the adjutant of the Spanish General Llanera, and had seen me then, but I have no recollection of having seen him before this occasion.

After talking with Tal Plácido and Segovia for fifteen or twenty minutes, I gave orders that the newly arrived men be allowed to fall out and go to rest in the quarters which had been prepared for them. Captain Segovia immediately left the house and returned to the place where his men were drawn up waiting for him. As he came up to them Segovia shouted in a loud voice an order which we did not hear distinctly and did not understand. Instantly his men began to shoot at the soldiers of my guard, taking them completely by surprise.

When the firing began, not suspecting any plan against myself, I thought it was a salute with blank cartridges, and having this in mind, I ran to the window and cried out several times, "Cease firing." But seeing that the firing continued, and that the bullets from the rifles of the attacking party were directed against me as well as against the soldiers of my guard, I for the first time realized that the newcomers were enemies. I hurriedly left the window and ran into another room in the hope of finding some means of escape but saw at once that the house was already surrounded. Then I seized a revolver, intending to defend myself, but Dr. Barcelona threw both arms around me crying out, "Don't sacrifice yourself. The country needs your life." Thus I was prevented from carrying out my intention. Colonel Villa ran from the house in an attempt to break through the lines of the enemy and rally our men, but he was shot three times and finally taken prisoner.

When the firing commenced, Tal Plácido threw himself down on the floor to avoid the bullets, but now he got up and told us that we were prisoners of the Americans, who, he said, were on the other side of the river with four hundred American soldiers, and would soon be here. Just at this time several of Tal Plácido's soldiers came into the house shouting, "Hurrah for the Macabebes!" and surrounded Barcelona and myself. A little later five Americans, all armed with carbines, came into the room where we were. They came up to us, and one of them asked, "Which of you is Aguinaldo?" As soon as I had been identified by the Americans I was placed, with Dr. Barcelona and Colonel Villa, in one of the rooms of the house, and guards were posted at all the windows and doors, under command of one of the Americans. The other four Americans then began to search the house for whatever papers and documents might be there.

We were then informed that our captors were General Funston, Captains Newton and Hazzard, and Lieutenants Hazzard and Mitchell. While the search for documents was going on, Dr. Barcelona took advantage of the opportunity to dress the wounds of Colonel Villa and the others who had been hit. Fortunately the wounds of the colonel were not serious.

It is difficult to give a detailed account of what occurred outside the house during the confusion which arose after the beginning of the attack. The

soldiers of my guard were completely surprised, and did not even have their rifles loaded. One was killed and two others were wounded, the rest making their escape; but whether there were any wounded among those who got away or not I do not know. When the firing began, all the inhabitants of the village fled precipitately in the endeavor to escape; and when the attack was over, there was not a living soul in the place except General Funston's men and ourselves, the prisoners of war. A few scattering shots were fired by my men in their retreat, but to no effect. They had been taken so entirely by surprise that they had no chance to resist.

The next morning, March 24th, I had a conference with General Funston, in which I was told by him that on the next day there would arrive in the bay of Palanan a warship which would take us to Manila. In the course of the day he informed me of the plan which had resulted in our capture -- a fate which I had believed would never befall me. It appears that my messenger, Private Segismundo, fell into the hands of General Funston, and the letters which he carried suggested to the general the plan which was subsequently carried out so brilliantly. The letter which I had received on the 20th, and which I supposed had come from General Lakuna, was a forgery executed with the greatest cleverness. It was complete in all its details, even bearing the seal of Lakuna, and there never occurred to me the least suspicion of its authenticity. I had not the slightest doubt from that time up to the instant of the commencement of the attack which ended in my capture. It was a bold plan, executed with skill and cleverness in the face of difficulties which, to most men, would have seemed insurmountable.