

# philippine studies

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 36, no. 3 (1988) 381–386

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## The Spanish Colonial Army: 1878-98

CARLOS QUIRINO

Students of the Philippine revolution of 1896 must know the strength of the Spanish colonial army during that period in order to evaluate the armed clashes between them and the rebels. In 1878, eighteen years before the start of the rebellion, the colonial army consisted of 7 regiments of infantry, with each regiment made up of 6 companies with a total strength of 762 officers and soldiers, 1 brigade of European artillerymen totalling 1,484 officers and men, and 1 squadron of cavalry, called the Luzon Lancers, totalling 242 officers and men, a mixture of native and Spanish soldiers. The grand total was therefore a force of 7,060 officers and soldiers.

In addition, there were three *tercios* or regiments of the famed *Guardia Civil* who wore proudly their three-cornered hats, totalling about one thousand officers and soldiers in each *tercio*. Only one *tercio* was stationed in Manila and nearby provinces. In 1872, the Guardia Civil Veterans was created, totalling about 350 members scattered throughout the islands, for they were in reality policemen rather than military soldiers.

Infantry soldiers were natives from various provinces. The famed seventh regiment was composed of veteran soldiers drawn from the various Tagalog provinces and stationed in Mindanao. It was the practice of the Spaniards from the very beginning to have native troops from one section of the country to fight or police a different part of the archipelago. This was done from the time of the Adelantado Miguel Lopez de Legazpi who brought Visayan allies from Cebu and Panay to subjugate Rajah Sulayman of Maynila in 1572. This system was followed in the various colonies of the Spanish empire. Otherwise the imperialist powers would not have had enough soldiers to make effective their conquest of far-flung colonies.

## THE REVOLUTION

When the revolution broke out in August of 1896, the number of troops under the command of the captain general was less than 7,000 because the military budget had been cut to effect the usual savings that bureaucracy everywhere insists on. Governor General Ramon Blanco attempted to probe the Cavite insurgent territory by sending a column of 100 Fil-hispano troops and a section of cavalry to invade the province by way of Zapote. This move was followed by a thrust against the town of Imus on 3 September 1896. General Aguirre, commandant of the Guardia Civil in the city, led 500 seasoned infantrymen, a company of artillery, sections of civil guards and the cavalry against General Emilio Aguinaldo who had numerically inferior forces, but who had prepared well his defenses to repel the attack of the enemy. A third attempt was made two days later, when a boatload of native troops belonging to the seventy-third regiment arrived from Iligan to march to Biñan, a lake town on Laguna de Bay, with the town of Silang in Cavite as their objective. Again the rebel troops led by Colonel Pio del Pilar, the mestizo *cabeza de barangay* of San Pedro, Makati, repulsed their advance near the Cavite border.

Gov. Blanco and his staff took a realistic view of these reverses, which they trumpeted as successes to Madrid and Manila, until they had enough men and artillery from Spain to overwhelm the insurrectionists. Blanco had available only one of the seven regiments existing at that time, two cavalry squadrons, a battalion of engineers, and one artillery regiment with two mountain batteries. Could these regiments composed of natives from Luzon and the Visayas be relied upon to fight their brethren, as they had for the past three centuries? For by this time the virus of nationalism had infected many of the native troops, and the Spanish commanders were afraid they no longer held allegiance to Spain.

An announcement from Madrid on 21 October 1896, that Lieutenant General Camilo Polavieja had been appointed the *Segundo Cabo* to replace Gen. Echaluce who had dispersed the Bonifacio troops in their attack on the *polvorin* in San Juan del Monte that August, spurred Blanco to make one last attempt to retrieve his eroding military prestige because of his inability to penetrate the Cavite bastion of the insurgents. Blanco had been promised troops armed with the modern Mauser rifles, and a supply of 6,000 of the older '89 model Remingtons, together with the necessary complement of field artillery.

The first batch of troops from the Spanish peninsula arrived at Manila harbor on 1 October, amid great rejoicings of the loyalists in the city. The 22 officers, 13 sergeants and 833 soldiers were feted with a sumptuous lunch and dinner, and regaled with wine, cigars, cigarettes and gifts. That same evening they were hustled off to Cavite. Five days later, another steamer carrying 1,015 infantrymen and marines landed in Manila. In another week, 770 more soldiers arrived. Almost every fortnight new vessels from Barcelona, Cadiz or Cartagena crowded the docks of the city to unload several hundred soldiers. A battalion of Loyal Volunteers was organized in Manila to replace the regulars on guard duty, and the public plazas of Intramuros and nearby districts of Binondo, Quiapo, Santa Cruz, Ermita and Santa Ana were filled with these local recruits who drilled and marched to the orders of grizzled Spanish sergeants.

#### BATTLES OF KAWIT AND NOVELETA

A total of about 1,100 commissioned and noncommissioned officers and 22,000 soldiers had landed in Manila by the last week of October. Blanco's last attempt to conquer the Caviteños took place in the first week of the following month of November. His objectives was simple—the capture of Noveleta and Kawit, the two headquarters of the Katipunan. The Spanish planned to launch an attack from the sea. Several gunboats and cruisers were in the bay, while the land troops had numerous artillery pieces, and the infantrymen, or *cazadores* as they were then called, had firearms superior in both quality and quantity to those of the enemy. Three light columns under Gen. Aguirre attacked Calamba and southeast towards Silang via Talisay as a diversionary movement, while the main thrust was on the two coastal towns of Noveleta and Kawit.

On the evening of 7 November, the Spaniards planned to attack Kawit by landing 1,712 troops on the beach of Binakayan under cover of darkness. They failed, however, to take into account the movement of the tides. It was low tide at evening, and the landing boats had to anchor some 300 meters from the shore to discharge their soldiers who would have had to wade knee-deep in muddy waters, fully exposed to insurgent fire from the shore. The boats, which were armed with Gatling guns designed to cover the landing, could not come within protective distance due to the low water level. The landing, was therefore delayed. On the following morning, the flotilla of gunboats and armed launches in the bay, not

having been notified of the delay, began firing at Kawit to the confusion of the landing troops who had approached the town's outskirts. All operations were thus suspended for one day, losing for the attackers the element of surprise, and allowing the defenders time to concentrate their men at strategic places.

The Spanish plan was to launch a simultaneous assault on Noveleta, the citadel of the Magdiwang faction of the Katipunan in the province. Two heavy field artillery pieces were brought to Cavite from Manila aboard barges and installed behind the Spanish main line of resistance at Porta Vaga in Dalahican, at the neck of the peninsula that leads to Cavite. These siege guns were the German Krupp and the British Wentworth pieces meant to pulverize the rebel lines where the troops of Aguinaldo, Santiago Alvarez and Artemio Ricarte crouched in their trenches. The warships *Cristina*, *Castilla* and *Don Juan de Austria* fired on Bacoar and Noveleta, while the gunboats *Leyte*, *Bulosan*, *Villalobos* and the transport *Cebu* pelted the towns of Rosario and San Francisco de Malabon further south of Manila Bay. The flotilla of launches supported the landing in Binakayan. Fortunately for the insurgents, the fire of these heavy guns was not accurate—probably due to the absence of practice, or perhaps their spotters did not give the correct coordinates. This atrocious gunfire of the warships was the fatal defect that led to the debacle of the Spanish navy eighteen months later against Commodore George Dewey's fleet in the battle of Manila Bay.

A column twice as strong as that of Binakayan sallied forth from Dalahican to capture Noveleta, but the rebels had wisely selected a river defense behind solidly-built trenches which stretched for nearly a kilometer and a half. One flank was securely anchored to an impassable mangrove swamp. The Spaniards were unable either to outflank the rebels or breach their trenches despite support from four artillery pieces and two bronze mortar. By two o'clock that afternoon, after repeated thrusts had failed, the Spanish bugler blew the notes for retreat. The routed Spaniards had lost a minimum of several hundred dead and thousands wounded.

The enemy made some headway on the first day against Kawit, but when Aguinaldo, Candido Tirona and Pio del Pilar launched their counterattack the following day, the Spaniards were forced to retreat to the polvorin of Binakayan where they reembarked on the gunboats.

This battle was the first victory of the rebels and encouraged other insurgents in the adjoining provinces in the belief that the overlords from

the Spanish peninsula were not invincible. Gov. Gen. Blanco quietly steamed back to Manila to wait for his recall to Madrid in disgrace.

### THE LACHAMBRE CAMPAIGN

His successor, Gen. Polavieja, arrived on an army transport three weeks later. He had brought with him a staff of military tacticians headed by Gen. Jose Lachambre, who immediately laid plans for the conquest of Cavite at the onset of the summer or the dry season when the ground would be favorable to troop movements. By the end of January 1897 Polavieja had under his command about 36,000 soldiers. Of these 6,000 were mostly native troops garrisoned in the southern islands, leaving him with 30,000 men in Luzon, of whom 28,000 were peninsulars.

From Calamba, Lachambre attacked Silang and then moved north to Dasmarinas by the end of February. To protect Imus, the town selected by the Magdalo faction as their headquarters instead of Kawit, Aguinaldo decided to make a stand at Salitran. Here the insurgents constructed their strongest defense with trenches protecting its sides to prevent a surprise flank attack by the cazadores. The two Spanish brigades totalling 9,000 men took Salitran after furious battle that lasted for two or three days.

General Aguinaldo at that time was in Tejeros, for he had been elected president of the revolutionary government, leaving his elder brother, Crispulo, to command the rebel defense. To his dying day, Don Emilio could remember the words that his *kuya* told him in Tagalog: "If you will kindly tell your men that I shall temporarily take your place, everything will be settled," said Crispulo. "I assure you that it will be difficult for the enemy to overrun this place without passing over my dead body!"

Two days later, Gen. Crispulo Aguinaldo was dead. There were three other Filipino generals who perished that month in Cavite: the twenty-two-year old student Flaviano Yenko, Candido Tirona and Edilberto Evangelista, an engineering graduate from Ghent, Belgium, and friend of Jose Alejandrino who was to help Gen. Antonio Luna in the defense of Calumpit, Bulacan two years later. These three were all of the *ilustrado* class, and let it not be said that the *ilustrado* class of Filipinos had not helped the cause of Philippine freedom.

The Lachambre juggernaut successively defeated any resistance offered by the Katipuneros of both factions, starting in San Francisco de Malabon, to Naic, Ternate and finally Maragondon where the rebels made their last ineffectual stand.

How did the revolutionary soldier behave during battles with the Spaniards? Lt. Col. Federico Monteverde, aide-de-camp to Lachambre, and an eyewitness to clashes with the rebels, wrote:

Innumerable combats took place in an infinity of places, and in each *bahay* or house and in every room, lower floors and foxholes; bayonet thrusts were exchanged without quarter, and ended only when the last defender had been killed or when the defenders in a fury of madness left it to try and open a path through our lines—also to lose their lives. In all parts the struggle was desperate, viscous blood formed pools on the floor, and there was no knife that was not dyed red, or hollows without corpses of the enemy.

Meanwhile, Polavieja had been bombarding Madrid with cables for more reinforcements. Probably as many men under his command suffered from malaria and dysentery as from rebel bullets during those months of February, March, April and May, making them useless in combat. But the Madrid government said they could no longer send him additional troops, for Spain had been bled white of manpower because of the simultaneous campaign in Cuba. Polavieja therefore asked to be relieved, and with him his brilliant aide Gen. Lachambre.

#### THE END OF THE REVOLUTION

The pact of Biák-na-Bató engineered by Pedro Alejandro Paterno ceased hostilities, although a few local outbreaks were noted in Luzon. It seemed the end of the revolution, and the new Governor General, Fernando Primo de Rivera, began sending back the sick and the wounded to Spain. From about thirty-six thousand *peninsulares* at the beginning of the Cavite campaign, it has been estimated that only half of that number remained by the time Dewey sank Montojo's fleet on 1 May 1898. In January of 1898, the Spaniards never dreamt that the Yankees from north America, in their greed for imperialistic spoils, would annex the islands of Hawaii and Guam, and replace the Spaniards in subduing the Filipinos' fight for freedom. Since the United States controlled the sea lanes from Spain to the archipelago by way of the Suez canal or the Cape of Good Hope, succor to the beleaguered Spanish troops in the islands was impossible. The Spanish forces in Manila and the southern islands were to be overpowered by the combined American and Filipino troops in Manila when it surrendered on 13 August 1898.