

EMILIO F. AGUINALDO
(1869-1964)

President of the First Philippine Republic

Emilio, nicknamed *Miong* was born on March 22, 1869 at Cavite El Viejo (now Kawit). The seventh of the eight children of Kapitan Carlos Aguinaldo y Jamir and Kapitana Trinidad Famy y Valero had his primary education at the public school in Kawit. His mother who was widowed when he was nine years old sent him to study at the College of San Juan de Letran. However, Aguinaldo quit college and returned home in Kawit.

At seventeen, Aguinaldo was appointed *cabeza de barangay*, which his mother arranged for him so that he would not be conscripted in the military. He engaged in barter trade in the nearby southern islands and in Manila. During all this time, he became conscious of the growing discontent against the Spanish colonial government. Thus, it was not surprising when he joined the Freemasonry, a fraternity banned by the Church and the government. He was inducted as a neophyte of Pilar Lodge, adopting Colon as his Masonic name, in Imus in the evening of January 1, 1895, hours after he took his oath as Capitan Municipal, a position entrusted to him by the electoral tribunal.

His association with Santiago Alvarez got him involved with the secret society of Andres Bonifacio. He was inducted in March 1895 in San Nicolas, Manila, adopting the symbolic name Magdalo, after Santa Maria Magdalena, patroness of Kawit.

On January 1, 1896, Kapitan Miong married Hilaria del Rosario from Imus. On August 19 that same year, the Spanish authorities discovered the Katipunan. Thus, Bonifacio had no choice but to call all the Katipuneros to rise in arms, an event that was marked in history as the "Cry of Pugad Lawin". Responding to this call, Kapitan Miong led the uprising in Cavite on August 31 and the days that followed. All these attacks were successful that he became popular as combat commander and earned the address of his compatriots as "Heneral".

With most towns in Cavite taken by Aguinaldo's troops, Spanish forces concentrated their campaigns in Cavite, even urging to cease the hostilities to no avail. Because of this, the Spaniards became more determined to have him arrested. It was in early 1897, when the enemy scored against Aguinaldo under the leadership of the new Governor General, Camilo de Polavieja, who ordered the vigorous campaign in Cavite. This resulted to the capture of several towns under the control of the Katipuneros. In the battles that ensued, many of Aguinaldo's men perished including his brother Crispulo and his two other generals, Edilberto Evangelista and Flaviano Yengko.

Unfortunately, the battles that kept the Katipuneros occupied in order to liberate the country from the Spanish colonial government did not spare them from fighting each other. They split into two rival factions – the Magdalo that recognized Aguinaldo's leadership and Magdiwang that gave its support to Bonifacio. This rivalry climaxed at the Tejeros where the two factions met on March 22, 1897. What was supposedly a meeting to settle differences and to change the Katipunan into a revolutionary government turned out to into a deeper conflict and resulted to the execution of Bonifacio near Mount Buntis in Maragondon, Cavite on May 10, 1897, leaving Aguinaldo as the undisputed leader of the Revolution.

Meanwhile, Spain was hard-pressed in facing two wars – war with Cuba and the Revolutionary forces of Aguinaldo. Spain wanted to end the hostilities with the latter. The

Spanish governor general used Pedro Paterno to negotiate with Aguinaldo. This negotiation later resulted in the Truce of Biak-na-Bato in December 1897. As agreed upon in the Truce, Aguinaldo and other leaders of the Revolution would go on a voluntary exile in Hong Kong and the rest of the revolutionaries would surrender their arms to the Spanish Government. The latter on the other hand would provide for general amnesty and indemnity to the revolutionaries and other victims of the war. However, the truce turned out to be as flimsy as the faith of the contracting parties. As Apolinario Mabini, Aguinaldo's adviser admitted later that both parties acted in bad faith. The Spanish Government had not satisfactorily implemented its promised general amnesty, reforms and indemnity as the Filipino forces had not fully surrendered their arms.

In Hong Kong, Aguinaldo and his fellow exiles lived meagerly. He used the indemnity money to purchase firearms and prepared to continue the war against Spain. The brewing Spanish-American War gave him the opportunity to return to the Philippines. It was also during this time that he was led to believe that the words of American Consuls E. Spencer Pratt and Rouseville Wildman, and Commodore George Dewey of not taking the Philippines were the words of the American Government.

On May 1898, Aguinaldo was back in the Philippines and resumed the fight against Spain. Heeding the advice of Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista, he established a provisional dictatorial government in Cavite which he later changed into a Republic. His first two significant acts, as President was the proclamation of Philippine Independence in Kawit on June 12, 1898 and the organization of local political units. However, this dreamed self-government would turn out to be short lived. On February 4, 1899, an American sentry shot a Filipino soldier at the San Juan Bridge. This immediately resulted to an open war. The Philippines was again confronted with another foreign enemy. Faced with a more superior enemy, Aguinaldo had to save his government; he transferred it from one place to the another. On November 12, 1899, he disbanded the Filipino Army and proclaimed guerrilla warfare, which proved to be more beneficial to them. With a high price on his head, he retreated to the rugged mountains of North Luzon with the American soldiers closely trailing behind until Frederick Funston eventually captured him on March 23, 1901 in Palanan, Isabela.

His capture demoralized the Filipino soldiers, although some of his generals like Artemio Ricarte, Miguel Malvar and a few others continued their resistance, the Philippine-American War eventually ended. When peace was restored and American Civil Government was established, Aguinaldo led the life of a gentleman farmer. Concerned with the welfare of his comrades-in-arms, he organized the *Veteranos de la Revolucion* (Veterans of the Revolution), secured pensions for its members and made arrangements for them to buy land on installment from the government.

On March 6, 1921, his wife died, leaving him and their five children – Miguel, Carmen, Emilio Jr., Maria and Cristina. On July 14, 1930, he married at the age of 61 Maria Agoncillo, niece of Felipe Agoncillo, his minister plenipotentiary when he was president of the Republic. He watched closely the unfolding of political events under the American civil government. In 1935, he ran in the election for president of the transitory government (Commonwealth) under the National Socialist party but lost to Manuel L. Quezon, who was then Senate President.

Aguinaldo lived to see another war against yet another foreign enemy, the Japanese. This war finally ended in 1945. When America set the Philippine Independence to July 4, he argued that it was not historically correct, asserting that the true date of independence should be June 12, referring to the day in 1898 when Aguinaldo raised the Flag in Kawit and Ambrosio

Rianzares Bautista read its proclamation. This was finally settled in 1962 when President Diosdado Macapagal affirmed his claim in a proclamation. Aguinaldo regarded Macapagal's move as the greatest victory of the 1896 Revolution.

On February 16, 1964, Aguinaldo died of coronary thrombosis at the Veterans Memorial Hospital in Quezon City. But a year before his death, he had donated his lot and his mansion to the government. This property now serves as a shrine that "perpetuate the spirit of the Revolution of 1896."

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