

THE PHILIPPINES' FIRST NEWSPAPER

AUGUST 8 is a forgotten date.

Few of us know that on this date in 1811, the first Philippine newspaper, *Del Superior Gobierno*, (Of the High Government) came out in Manila, marking the birth of journalism in this country.

Many historians considered this event highly significant since the 19th century was regarded as the most decadent period of the Spanish regime in the Philippines.

Although an accurate account of how the newspaper got started is unknown, a major event in Europe which had a relative proximity to the Spaniards in the Islands, as well as the Filipinos, seemed to have motivated the eventual publication of the paper.

This major event was the invasion of Spain by the French army of Napoleon in 1809. The Spaniards in the Mother Country fought for

their homes and their independence. Hence the event had a close consequence to the colony.

To satisfy the Spaniards' and Filipinos' solicitude and quench their thirst for news about the invasion, the colonial government put out *Del Superior Gobierno* with Governor-General Manuel Fernandez de Folgueras as editor.

"The High Government is desirous," the editor wrote on its front page, "that all the inhabitants of the Philippines, who have been loyal and patriotic, should also hear the good news in the English gazettes that were received from Bengal. For this reason, the High Government has procured them in order to extend to all who made possible their victory over the French Army. Because of this victory both Andalucia and the Island of De Leon have been recovered."

The maiden issue contained 15 printed pages with a blank last page, and measured 138 by 232 millimeters in size.

After the first three numbers, the editor announced that the newspaper would appear once a week; but the schedule was never followed. Only when European news was available did it come out.

Besides the irregular date of its publication, the premier newspaper had no definite number of pages. Each issue contained seven 15 pages with the last page always blank.

The embryo of Philippine newspapers lasted only six months with 15 issues published. On Feb. 7, 1812, the last number came out with the notice: "If new and interesting materials are received, this newspaper will be continued weekly. In the meantime it will be suspended until some correspondence is received."

The "meantime" suspension proved to be forever, for the paper never appeared again. But its end did not mean the demise of Philippine journalism.

In less than a decade, five other newspapers came out. They were *La Filantropica*, *El Filipino Agraviado*, *Noticioso Filipino*, *Ramillete Patriotico* and *Ramillete Patriotico Manilense*. Years, later, still more newspapers came into being but disappeared like ghosts.

Today, the difference between *Del Superior Gobierno* and a modern metropolitan daily is big. In the status quo of contemporary society, the principles and techniques of news gathering and presentation, and in physical appearance, the differences are conspicuous.

But like blooming flowers, modern newspapers started from a sprouting seed. — *By Alexander R. Rebusora in The Weekly Nation, Aug. 7, 1968.*