

## Baler: Where the Red and Gold Flew Longest in the Philippines: Mission Trail Series



The town of Baler, Tayabas, was formerly the seat of government in the *Distrito del Príncipe* created in 1856 by the Spanish government of the Philippines out of territory theretofore pertaining to Nueva Ecija; and when the district was suppressed, which we suppose was done in the organization of provinces in accordance with McKinley's instructions and the provincial government act, that part of the district embracing Baler was attached to Tayabas. How much Nueva Ecija got back we do not know, for the purpose of these articles it is unimportant. Tayabas was made a contorted stringy province adjoining Laguna and extending up the Pacific coast, for Baler can be reached from Nueva Ecija only by a very hard mountain trail, while with the coast towns of southern Tayabas, and the provincial capital, Lucena, there is coastal communication by sea.

The *Distrito del Príncipe* was bounded on the north by Isabela, on the east by the ocean, on the south by the *Distrito de la Infanta* (Tayabas), and on the west by the Caraballos.

"The first apostle (to this region)," says Father Huerta, "was Fr. Esteban Ortiz, about the year 1578, but because of the scarcity of priests he was soon called elsewhere. In 1609 our venerable martyr Fr. Blas Palomino and some companion priests visited the region and founded the following towns:

"*Baler*.—The founding of this town dates from 1609, at which time Fr. Blas Palomino and six other priests penetrated the difficult country lying eastward of the Caraballos, leaving, in 1610, the first minister at Baler

Fr. Francisco de San Antonio." The Franciscans gave the town over to the Recollects in 1658, who, for the same reason that had actuated the Franciscans, scarcity of priests, abandoned the mission in 1703, the Franciscans taking up the work again in that year. On December 27, 1735, a tidal wave washed away the town and the land on which it stood. Numbers of the inhabitants lost their lives, others swam to safety. The present town is on the bank of the San José river, a league distant from the inlet formed by Encanto and Baja

capas. "The roads con- with neighboring towns and heavy going during th- they offer little security, many wild people dwelling especially toward Casigur nanganon. For this reason defense of the town, in 1' de Esparragosa built two w one up in the mountains a on the river bank opposi near the shore. The cor both of them was directed l with whom the town shared

Enough on that point. gathers that Baler nestles Caraballos and on the east by the sea, that the valle José, a mountain stream, i the surrounding terrain, mountainous, is the habit and Montescos. The C munity settled round th- course peaceful; the clim. and the water supply from good. "The immense field

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are suitable to every sort of production, but they only cultivate a small portion of them—growing rice and corn for their own requirements. Her Esparragosa, already mentioned, overcoming difficulties, opened a canal upward of a league in length large enough to irrigate lands sufficient for the 3000 or 6000 families, yet surely no more than 3000 have taken advantage of it."

at Baler, classically remote, isolated and wholly unimportant to the empire of Spain, that a son of fifty-seven Spaniards and one Filipino priest, and the parish priest, Fr. Candido Gomez, making the number fifty-eight in all, withstood a remarkable duration, lasting from June 30, 1898, to July 1, at the hands of a force of Aguinaldo's revolutionaries commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Aguilar. Thus assisted by quite as heroic a spirit as ever animated in defending her realm, endured 294 days after the protocol of peace between the United States and 293 days after the Red and Gold had given the stars and stripes to the Stars and Stripes!

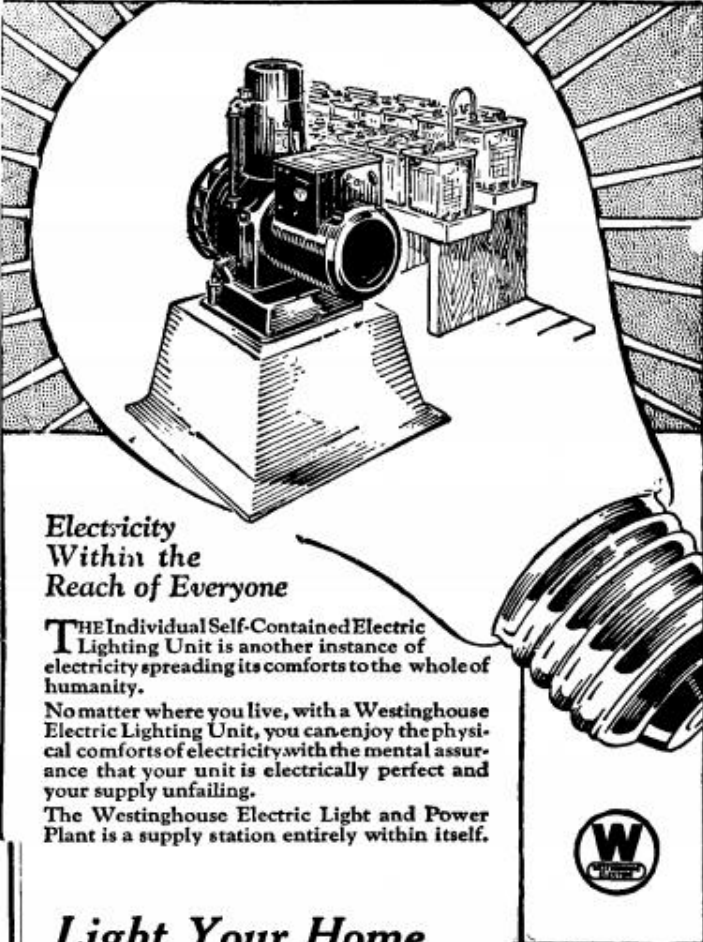
did the besiegers inform the garrison, making them stand in the parish church, that the sovereignty over the islands had ceased: "We replied that the garrison were allowed six months for the evacuation of the island; . . . we were left to be among the last to be left, the captain-general knowing, as he surely must, a large amount of provisions, ammunition, and other supplies that we had at our disposal."

When the garrison was exhausted, the men starving and occasional one deserting. Disease was doing its worst; Second-Lieut. Juan Alonzo Zayas died followed soon by Captain Enrique de las Morenas within two months after the American occupation. Then the command fell to Second-Lieut. Saturno Cerezo. Wounds and illness took off fourteen men, and four deserted. Cerezo remained and repeated stories that he was holding out in behalf of a cause—a cause already lost—and he shared with his men their privations, heartened them and resorted to various devices to prolong their resistance.

wondered why relief did not come from Manila, but doubted but that it would come. Father Carreño

On June 1, 1899, some newspapers from Madrid, Manila, and Aguilar, when the garrison in the church refused to permit it, got the papers into Cerezo's hands and the men eagerly examined these newspapers, which they had been printed by the revolutionaries to encourage the garrison and induce its surrender; so a desperate attempt to reach safety near shore, where a small boat could be flagged, was planned to be effected before dawn next morning. But Cerezo examined the papers, finding in a copy of *El Imparcial* an ordinary account of the transfer of station of a young officer well known to Cerezo. He knew the officer had been seeking the garrison and that in making up a sham newspaper edition he would not have been thought of.

As true after all, that Spain's sovereignty over the islands had ended, and the garrison had been forgotten! Cerezo called a parley of his men, convinced them of the situation that he had convinced himself of, and they left their hands. He soon arranged honorable terms with the garrison, and very shortly the remnant of the beleaguered garrison, under enemy escort and marching over the mountains to Tarlak, then Aguinaldo's headquarters. There they parted with the escort troops, and Cerezo holds himself responsible for annoyances suffered on the march; but how many of them? On July 20 the men who remained in Baler embarked on the *Alicante* and repatriated, reaching Barcelona September 1. The deserters who remained in the brig, and one of them (let us withhold names) felt so reluctant to face his country's flag that he refused food and water and starved




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himself to death.

"There was no affliction that had been wanting to us in this humble spot (the parish church of Baler)," says Cerezo, "designed only for religious supplications; neither the inclemency of the weather, nor the rigor of the siege, nor the blows of treason, nor the pestilence." Before leaving the church, Cerezo had two traitors shot.

Aguinaldo caused Cerezo and his men to be treated with the utmost courtesy; he had established a hospital at Cabanatuan for the care of sick and wounded Spaniards, and Cerezo, who had injured a foot in jumping out of a house in Pantabangan where robbers had attacked him in the night, was

to Major Las Morenas and to Captain Cerezo, each, the cross-laureate of San Fernando, and annual pensions to Cerezo and to the widow of Las Morenas."

Cerezo's home town put a memorial tablet on the house where he was born, and authorized a popular subscription with which the townsfolk bought him a golden sword. "Such is the merit of the defenders of Baler, of that poor church where, for ten months after the loss of our sovereignty in the Philippines, the Spanish flag continued to wave. Nor was it humanly possible to sustain it (the siege) a single day longer." These are Cerezo's words.

We take our brief allusions to the siege from an account originally published

tention of Major F. L. Dodds, who got a copy of the original published in Spain (from which *Mercantil's* series had come), slated it and secured its publication in the United States by the Franklinson Publishing Co., Kansas City, under their copyright of 1909 and title, *Under the Red and Gold: Siege of Baler—Cerezo*.

It is Dodds's text that we have from which too we have taken engraving of the church where the was sustained. Next month the will be privileged to journey away with the Franciscans through nor Tayabas. It is hoped the digress to relate something of the story of siege of Baler will be pardoned.

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treated here. "Aguinaldo . . . furnished them newspapers in which was published a decree of his, declaring them worthy of the admiration of the world 'for the valor, constancy, and heroism which that handful of men, cut off and without hope of any aid, has defended their flag for the space of a year, realizing an epic so glorious and so worthy of the legendary valor of the Cid.'"

With safe conduct into the American lines, the spaniards were at last out of danger and well cared for.

Mascardo gave a banquet for the garrison, at his headquarters in Angeles. In Spain they received the plaudits of the nation, and if you were to visit Cerezo's home town, you would find a principal street there called, in commemoration of Baler, *Calle Martin Cerezo*.

"By royal orders . . . there was granted to each officer, living and dead, increased rank; to Dr. Vigil"—he who had been the garrison surgeon—"was granted the cross of the first class of Maria Cristina; and to each of the thirty-one men of the detachment the silver cross of military merit, with a small monthly pension for the said thirty-one proceedings having been read before the Supreme Council of War and Marine there was conceded

in *El Mercantil*, no doubt a piece of that long and excellent editorial work Don Romero Salas, dean of Manila journalists, has done in the islands during a period of forty years. The series as it appeared attracted the at-

Enterprising missionaries bent on converting the gospel and selling it conducted "The Quiet Corner" at Manila's recent carnival, where on one was a salty vaudeville show and on other an exhibition advertised "for only." Barkers gathered hourly crowds for the shows, but many people in the crowds chose to go into "The Quiet Corner" and join in the hymns listen to the sermons. There was steady patronage all the time, and many of the gospels were sold. Now the same missionaries wish to establish similar place downtown in Manila a more ambitious plan, perhaps medical service and a hygiene station added.

"At the regular annual meeting of the directors of the Christensen Plantation Co., in the office of the company at Padada, February 5, a dividend of 12% was declared, this being their fourth consecutive dividend. At the same meeting it was decided to increase the capital stock of the company by the issue of P200,000 of 10% cumulative preferred stock. The new capital will be used to increase the planting to coconuts on the island, and provide equipment and buildings."

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