



The Igorots

Gentlemen, when you tell that story, stand in tribute to those gallant Igorots.

—MACARTHUR

These Igorots are nameless, but singly, or as a body, the exploit for which they are remembered will rank among the most valiant acts of heroism performed by men whose military feats have glorified them to the stature of deathless heroes.

In a Japanese offensive in Bataan, the 20th Japanese Infantry Regiment attacked a position held by a single Igorot company. The Igorots preferred to die in their foxholes rather than retreat; and they died to a man, fighting, exacting a terrible toll from the enemy.

The American High Command ordered a counter-attack. This assault was to be carried out by a tank unit supported by Igorot infantry.

The terrain, bristling with thick bamboo underbrush, and irregular undulations, would have been impenetrable but for the limitless resourcefulness which was characteristic of General MacArthur's troops.

Led by an Igorot commander who "hoisted" his men to the top of the tanks, the tank unit rolled into the jungle, the exposed Igorot soldiers guiding the tanks through the matted morass, by beating on the turret of the tanks with sticks while in their other hands they held automatic pistols with which they shot at the enemy.

"Bataan," General MacArthur is reported to have said, "has seen many wild mornings, but nothing equal to this. No quarter was asked and none was given. Always above the din of the battle rose the fierce shouts of the Igorots as they rode the tanks and fired their pistols."

Losses were heavy on both sides, but when the battle was over, "the remnants" of the tanks and Igorots were still there, but the 20th Japanese Infantry Regiment was nowhere in sight. It had been completely annihilated.

In recounting the story of this exploit to a group of his officers, General MacArthur is quoted as having said that although he knew of many acts of heroism in battlefields all over the world, "for sheer, breath-taking and heart-stopping desperation, I have never known the equal of those Igorots riding the tanks."

"Gentlemen," he continued, "when you tell that story, stand in tribute to those gallant Igorots."

Buenaventura J. Bello

... the Filipino school teacher who preferred to die rather than obey the Japanese order to lower the American flag and fly the Philippine colors above the "Rising Sun" over his little village schoolhouse.

--QUEZON

For refusing to haul down the American flag which flew side by side the Philippine flag in front of the village schoolhouse, as it did in all school buildings all over the archipelago, Buenaventura J. Bello was shot down in cold blood. He fell dead at the foot of the thin bamboo pole which yet flew the American flag.

Bello could have obeyed the Japanese officer who ordered him to haul down the American flag. The Filipino flag was to remain flying in the breeze. It was but a simple matter of untying a knot and letting down the Stars and Stripes. His students were not there to witness the ignominious act. The classrooms were empty. All the children had remained in their homes at the news of the coming enemy. The rooms were littered with tinsel and bunnings and silver stars—hastily abandoned Christmas decorations for the Christmas trees that stood in corners, shorn of gifts, and withered now. (Philippine schools celebrated Christmas about two weeks before Christmas time.) But even if they were there, those young people would have understood that their teacher was defenseless in the face of the armed aggressors. Yet Bello refused, and he was shot down like a dog.

"We have no quarrel with you. All I ask is that you pull down the American flag and you can keep your own still flying. I will give you two minutes to make up your mind. If you disobey my orders my soldiers will shoot," said the Japanese officer who now turned to his men, ordering them to load and take aim.

This was death. These many years he had been teaching his children the ways of democracy, instilling in them love for freedom, love for all the cherished ideals for which the American flag stood. Every Monday morning he had stood on those front steps of this little school house and sung with his pupils the *Star Spangled Banner* and the *Philippine National Anthem*, as two little boys hoisted up the thin bamboo pole the American and Philippine flags.

Bello answered, "I don't need two minutes. Tell your men to shoot me now, because I shall never tear down either of the flags."

The Japanese officer made a swift angry motion with his