

WHILE Bonifacio was languishing in jail, General Mariano Noriel wrote Emilio Aguinaldo narrating the events that led to the capture of the Bonifacio brothers. On April 29, Aguinaldo forwarded Bonifacio's case to the Council of War in order "to conduct the necessary trial." He further instructed the Council to appoint a judge whose rank must be that of colonel. Consequently, Colonel Pedro Lipana was appointed Judge Advocate; Major Lazaro Makapagal, Secretary; Jose Elises, Fiscal; and Placido Martinez and Teodoro Gonzales, counsels of Andres and Procopio Bonifacio, respectively.

THE TRIAL AND DEATH OF BONIFACIO

Teodoro Agoncillo



The investigation of the case commenced in Naik on April 29 and continued in Maragondon up to May 4, 1897. Several men, all belonging to the Bonifacio group, testified. Among them were Major Benito Torres, Pedro Giron, Procopio Bonifacio, and Gregoria de Jesus, Bonifacio's wife. With the exception of the testimonies of Procopio and Gregoria, those of the other soldiers were hostile to Bonifacio. The fatal testimony came from Pedro Giron, who said that Andres Bonifacio tried to bribe him in order to kill Aguinaldo "so that Bonifacio may be declared President." On the other hand, General Pio del Pilar testified that Bonifacio prevailed upon him to join the latter's group.

Andres Bonifacio denied the charges of treason, sedition, and counter-revolution against him, and vehemently declared his innocence. The mob that gathered to witness the trial was hostile to him and called him down. It was obvious that Bonifacio was up against a strong prejudice generated by a sense of regionalism.

Judge Pedro Lipana then wrote an official report in which he assessed the merits of the different testimonies. The report was hostile to Bonifacio. On May 4, General Mariano Noriel, the President of the Council of War, notified the other members of the Council that a meeting would be held the next day. With all the members of the Council present, the actual trial



PANORAMA

of the Bonifacio brothers commenced on May 5. Major Makapagal read aloud the testimonies given during the preliminary investigation. Judge Lipana summarized the findings of the investigating committee and declared that the men at the bar were guilty as charged. In view of these findings, the Judge recommended that "Andres and Procopio Bonifacio be given capital punishment, each of them to be shot in open space, up to five shots for each; that the distance be ten feet according to the gravity of their crimes."

At this juncture, Placido Martinez, Andres's defense counsel, stood up and delivered a speech which was, in essence, an admission of his client's guilt. He said:

The term "defense" is, it seems, difficult in the case of Mr. Andres Bonifacio owing to his bad and abominable actuations and if there is any other punishment more severe than death it should be imposed upon him. x x x

Then he pleaded with the Court to be lenient. He continued:

Did not our Saviour, Jesus Christ, though punished and put to death by the Jews, also ask our Lord God the Father to forgive all those who had sinned against Him? And how could we, who are mere creatures made of dust, deny forgiveness to our fellowmen? In view of all this, I request that Andres Bonifacio be forgiven for



all that he had done, so that in so doing we may fulfill what we say in "Our Father": "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

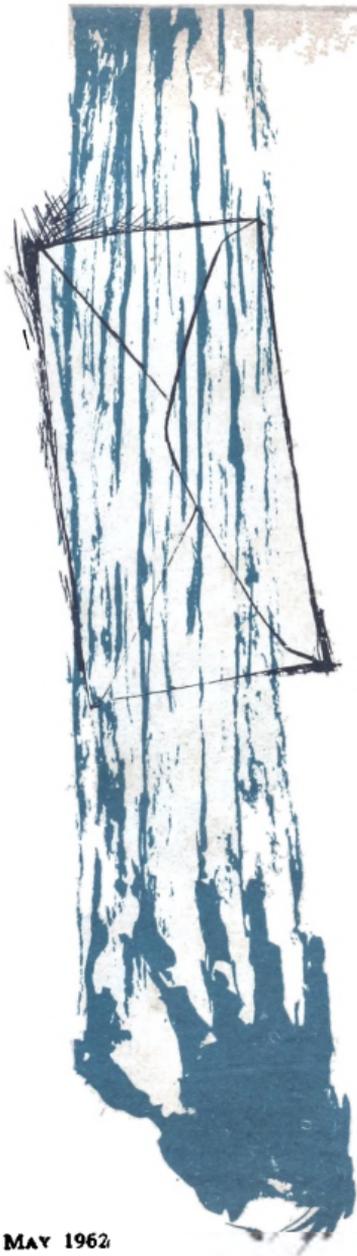
So saying he sat down and allowed Teodoro Gonzales to have his say. Gonzales pleaded mercy for his client, Procopio, saying that since the declarations of the witnesses maintained that Procopio was in no way involved in the alleged conspiracy to overthrow the existing government of the rebels he, Procopio, should not be punished.

The trial was over. The Council of War agreed to meet again the following day to make its decision known. Meanwhile, the Bonifacio brothers were led back behind prison bars.

The Council deliberated on the case and came to the conclusion that the prisoners were guilty as charged and sentenced to be shot to death. The proceedings of the case were sent to General Baldomero Aguinaldo who, on May 8, wrote President Emilio Aguinaldo that the Bonifacio brothers were found guilty and that it was up to the

President to make the final decision. Aguinaldo, after reading the papers, penned his decision, which was to banish the brothers to an isolated place. This decision was supposed to have been shown to the prisoners, but the documents of the trial show that the prisoners never saw the papers.

What actually happened was that when Generals Noriel and Del Pilar learned of President Aguinaldo's decision, they rushed to his headquarters and pleaded with him to withdraw his decision. They reasoned out that the Revolution could not afford to be divided at a time when the Spanish forces were slicing through rebel territory. They made Aguinaldo believe that the prisoners were dangerous and, if allowed to be banished, might lead a counter-revolution. Clemente Jose Zulueta, writer and historian, also pleaded with Aguinaldo not to change the decision of the Council of War. Zulueta hated Bonifacio because the latter allegedly accused him of being a stooge of the friars. Owing to this pressure, Aguinaldo recalled his decision



and allowed the decision of the Council of War to stand. The Bonifacio brothers, then, were to die by musketry.

Early in the morning of May 10, General Noriel called in Major Makapagal and handed him a sealed envelope.

"This is what you will do," Noriel told Makapagal. "Go at once to headquarters and tell Colonel Ritual to give you four soldiers. Then go to Ermita and get the two prisoners, Andres and Procopio Bonifacio. Take them to Mount Tala; open this letter when you arrive there. Read it aloud to the two prisoners so that they may be apprised of its contents. Follow the instructions to the letter."

The morning was bleak; it was raining. On the way to Mount Tala with the prisoners, Andres asked Makapagal whether he would be shot. "No," Makapagal answered. "As far as I am concerned, the order is to take you to Mount Tala, probably to remove you from the scene of battle."

At the foot of Mount Tala, the little group stopped for a moment. Andres took

the opportunity to inquire about the contents of the sealed letter. "Brother," he turned to Makapagal, "since we are now near Mt. Tala, won't you open the letter so we may know where you will leave us?"

The request was reasonable, and Makapagal, not knowing the contents of the letter, opened it. He read aloud:

Major Makapagal:

In accordance with the order of the Council of War



held at Maragondon on May 8 against the brothers Andres and Procopio Bonifacio, who have been sentenced to be shot to death, you and your soldiers under you are ordered to carry out the judgment.

Andres and Procopio were shocked. They did not expect the letter to contain the sentence of death. They embraced each other. Makapagal, with two soldiers, escorted Procopio to a secluded

place and there carried out the sentence. When they returned for Andres, the latter ran through the woods and on to a stream. Makapagal and his soldiers followed in hot pursuit. Then several shots were heard. Andres stopped suddenly, reeled and fell—dead. The soldiers dug a shallow hole and buried Andres. On the grave, Major Makapagal placed a few twigs.

